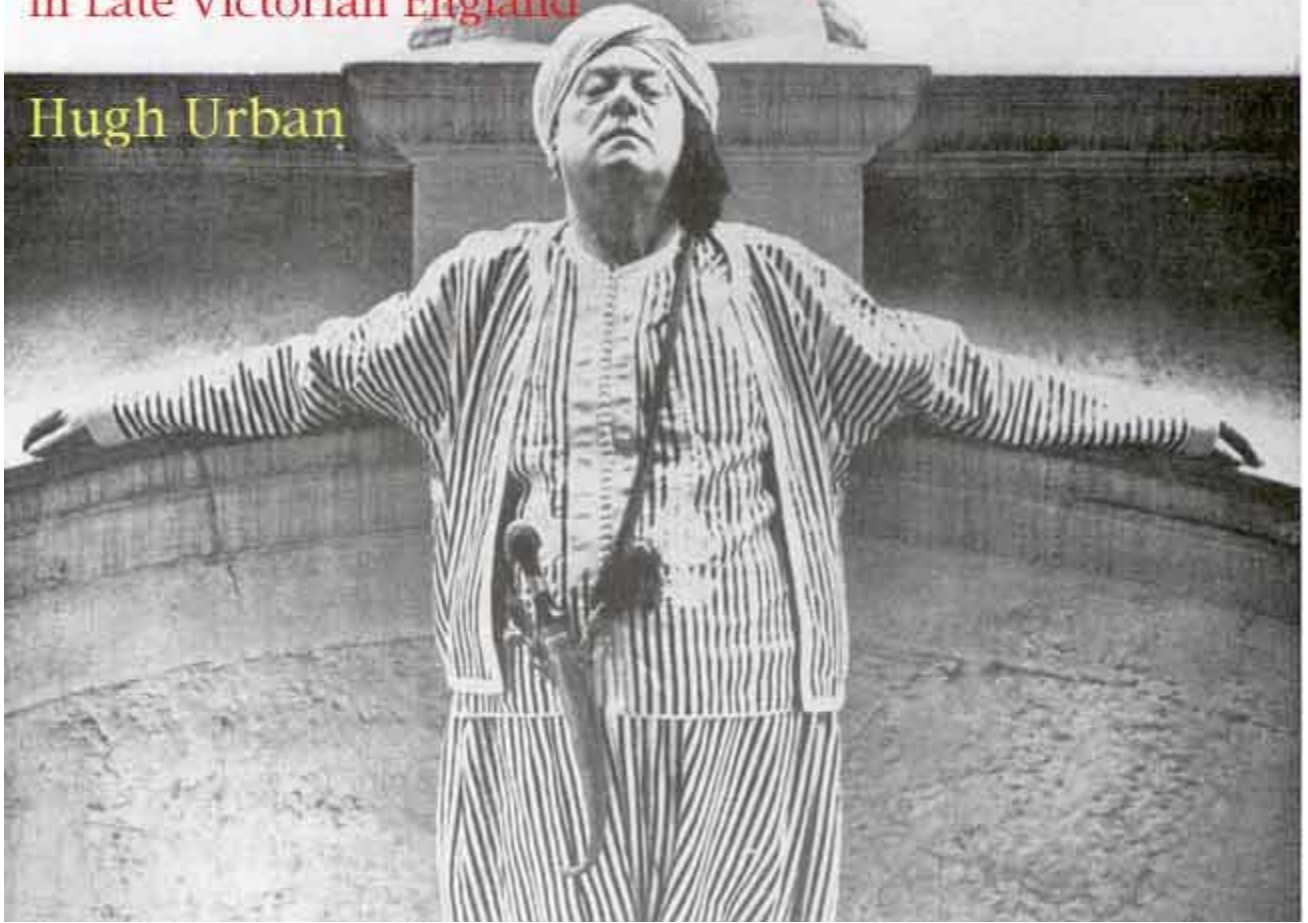


UNLEASHING THE BEAST
Aleister Crowley, Tantra and Sex Magic
in Late Victorian England

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If this secret [of sexual magic], which is a scientific secret, were perfectly understood, as it is not by me after more than twelve years' almost constant study and experiment, there would be nothing which the human imagination can conceive that could not be realized in practice.

-- Aleister Crowleyi

What is peculiar to modern societies is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret.

-- Michel Foucaultii

Aleister Crowley stands out as one of those remarkably enigmatic characters who has had a tremendous impact on contemporary new religious movements, esotericism and occultism, even as he has been almost entirely ignored by academic scholarship. Known in the popular press of as "the wickedest man in the world," and proclaiming himself the "Great Beast 666," Crowley was the object of intense media scandal, moral outrage and titillating allure throughout his life. In the years since his death, he has become perhaps even more well-known as one of the most important influences on the modern revival of paganism, magic and witchcraft. Yet despite his importance, Crowley has been largely ignored by historians of religions. In most cases he has been dismissed as, at best, a pathetic charlatan, and, at worst, a sadistic pervert and a ridiculous crank. Most scholars of Western esotericism, such as Antoine Faivre, make only passing reference to Crowley, while leading scholars of new age religions, such as Wouter Hanegraaff, give him only briefest mention.iii

Perhaps the primary reason for this neglect of Crowley -- and also for the intense scandal and titillation that surrounded him during his life -- was his practice of sexual magic (or Magick, to use Crowley's spelling).iv Rejecting the prudish hypocrisy of the Victorian Christian world in which he was raised, Crowley identified sex as the most powerful force in life and the supreme source of magical power. Taking an apparent delight in outraging the British society of his time, Crowley made explicit use of the most "deviant" sexual acts -- such as masturbation and homosexuality -- as central components in his magical practice. At the same time, Crowley was also one of the first Western authors to taken an interest in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions of Tantra -- a highly esoteric body of teachings and that center, in part, around the use of sexual energy as a source of spiritual power -- which had long been criticized by European Orientalist scholars and Christian missionaries as the very worst and most perverse confusion of sexuality and religion.v In fact, for most American readers today, Tantra is typically associated with Crowley-ian sex magick. One need now only browse the shelves of any Barnes and Noble bookstore or surf the endlessly proliferating web-sites on the Internet to discover the secrets of *Tantra*, *Sex Magick and Tarot*, practice *Tantra without Tears* or even engage in *Wicca for Lovers*. As his early biographer, John Symonds, remarks,

"His greatest merit was to make the bridge between Tantrism and the Western esoteric tradition and thus bring together Western and Eastern magical techniques."vi

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But the question remains: how much did Crowley actually know either first hand or second hand about Indian Tantra? And what connection, if any, did his system of sexual magic have with traditional Indian Tantric practices?

This article will continue and expand upon some of the arguments made in a previous essay, in which I examined the impact of Indian Tantra on Western esoteric traditions at the turn of the twentieth century, through figures like Dr. Pierre Arnold Bernard, known in the popular press as "the Omnipotent Oom."vii Here I will trace the increasing impact of Tantra on Western spirituality in the later twentieth century through the work of Crowley and his later disciples.

Crowley, I will argue, is not only a fascinating figure worthy of attention by scholars of religion, but he is also of profound importance for the understanding of modern Western spirituality and culture as a whole. This importance is at least threefold. First, with his radical rejection of Victorian morality and his central emphasis on sex as the supreme magical power, Crowley is a remarkable reflection of his era and of the sexual attitudes of late and post-Victorian England.viii Second, with his study of Hinduism and Buddhism, he was also a key figure in the transmission of Indian religious traditions to the West, including the controversial traditions of Indian Tantra. But as I hope to show, although Crowley did know a fair amount about Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga and other Indian religious practices, he does not appear to have known much about Tantra. What he did know seems to have come through secondary, superficial and often highly distorted sources that are deeply colored by the Victorian Orientalist biases of the 19th century. Nonetheless, not long after Crowley's death, Tantra would soon become largely confused in the Western popular imagination with Crowleyian-style sex magic. Ironically, despite his general ignorance about the subject, and arguably without ever intending to do so, Crowley would become a key figure in the transformation and often gross mis-interpretation of Tantra in the West, where it would become increasingly detached from its cultural context and increasingly identified with sex. Finally, in part because of this equation of Tantra and sexual magic, Crowley has also been one of the most influential figures in the revival of magic and a variety of alternative religions at the turn of the new millennium. Much of the literature now being sold under the titles of "Tantra" and "sex magic", I would argue, is largely the fusion (and perhaps hopeless confusion) of Indian Tantra with Crowleyian magic. ix

In my discussion of Crowley, I will adapt some of the insights of Michel Foucault, Georges Bataille, and others who have examined the role of sexuality and transgression in modern Western society. As Foucault argues, the Victorian era has often mistakenly been characterized as a period of prudish repression and denial of sexuality. In fact, the late 19th century witnessed an unprecedented explosion of discourse about sex, which was now categorized, classified, debated and discussed in endless detail.x

Crowley's writings on sexuality and magic, I will suggest, were a key part of this larger fascination with sexuality during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Yet Crowley would also push this discourse about sexuality a good deal further than most of his contemporaries would have dared; indeed, Crowley would make acts such as masturbation and homosexual intercourse keys to magical power. In Bataille's terms, we might say that much of Crowley's sexual practices centered around calculated acts of *transgression* -- that is, deliberate violations and systematic inversions of the moral laws and sexual codes of the larger social order.xi

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After briefly recounting Crowley's early life and background (**part I**), I will place him in the context of late Victorian society and its larger attitudes toward sexuality (**II**). I will then look specifically at Crowley's sexual magical practices (**III**) and his adaptation of Indian Tantric techniques (**IV**). Finally (**V**) I will examine the role of transgression in Crowley's life and magical work; Crowley, I will argue, found in deliberate acts of transgression a radical form of super-human power that promised to explode the narrow boundaries of Western Christian society and open the way for a whole new era of human history. To conclude, I will suggest that Crowley not only reflected his own era and the sexual anxieties of the late Victorian era, but also foreshadowed much of our own era and our own sexual obsessions at the dawn of the new millennium.

I. THE NEW AEON: Crowley and the End of the Victorian Age

The nightmare world of Christianity vanished at the dawn...[T]he detestable mysteries of sex were transformed into joy and beauty. The obsession of sin fell from my shoulders into the sea of oblivion.

-- *The Confessions of Aleister*

*Crowley*xii

The point about Crowley is that he seems to contain all these sorts of ideas and identities – indeed most of the vices of the twentieth century – and he was dead at the end of 1947.

-- Snoo Wilson, author of the play “The Beast”xiii

Born in 1875, the son of a member of the highly puritanical Plymouth Brethren sect, Edward Alexander (Aleister) Crowley embodied some of the deepest tensions in late Victorian society as a whole. A child raised in a strict Christian home, he would later turn to the occult arts and extremes of sexual excess. A prolific poet as well as an accomplished mountain-climber, Crowley would also become one of the most reviled characters of the 20th century. He has been described variously as "the King of Depravity, arch-traitor, debauchee and drug-fiend"xiv and "a perverse idealist, Master of the occult and slave to the demons he liberated."xv Yet, as his most recent biographer Lawrence Sutin argues, Crowley was far more than a mere sadistic master of the black arts; not only was he a gifted poet, painter and "master modernist" in his prose style, but he was also one of the first Western students of Buddhism and yoga, and "one of the rare human beings ...to dare to prophesy a distinctive new creed and to devote himself...to the promulgation of that creed."xvi

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The details of Crowley's life are fairly well-known, based on his own autobiography and numerous popular biographies, so I won't reiterate all of them here. I will simply provide a brief sketch of his background and context. Educated at Trinity College in Cambridge, Crowley was from an early age fascinated with poetry and pagan religion and was a prolific author of both verse and prose. While still a student at Cambridge he had published his first collection of poetry, *Aceldama*, and his notorious erotic collection, *White Stains* (1898). Having inherited a large amount of money while still young, he was financially independent for many years and spent much of his time pursuing his passions of writing and mountain climbing. During his Cambridge years, he would also adopt the name "Aleister," a Gaelic form of his middle name, Alexander, and an homage to the hero of Shelley's poem, "Alastor, the Spirit of solitude."

His first real initiation into the world of esotericism and magic occurred until 1898, when he was introduced to group known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Founded by William Westcott and MacGregor Mathers in 1887, the Golden Dawn was an eclectic blending of a number of older Western esoteric traditions, including Hermeticism, Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism and theurgic arts derived from Jewish Kabbalah. An affluent and elite group, the Golden Dawn attracted a number of prominent artists, poets and intellectuals, including W.B. Yeats. Eventually Crowley and Mathers would part ways, and finally become mired in a lawsuit when Crowley published a full description of the secret rites of the Golden Dawn in his journal, *Equinox*.xvii Revealing secrets and sparking controversy, we will see, was something of an obsession throughout Crowley's life.

Beginning in 1899, Crowley also began to explore a variety of eastern spiritual traditions. After studying yoga in Mexico, he traveled to Ceylon and India in 1901-2, during which time he studied various forms of Buddhism and Hinduism. As we will see below, it seems possible that he also learned something of the esoteric techniques of Indian Tantra --- though perhaps not as much as most contemporary adepts generally suppose.

However, it was in 1904 that Crowley would receive his first great revelation and the knowledge that he was to be the herald of a new era in human history. According to his own account, Crowley's guardian Angel, Aiwass, appeared to him and dictated *The Book of the Law* (*Liber AL vel Legis*).^{xviii} His most famous work, *The Book of the Law* announces the dawn of the third Aeon of mankind: the first aeon was that of the Goddess Isis, centered around matriarchy and the worship of the Great Mother; the second aeon was that of Osiris, during which the patriarchal religions of suffering and death -- i.e., Judaism and Christianity -- rose to power. Finally, with the revelation of the *Book of the Law*, a new Aeon of the son, Horus, was born: "In this aeon the emphasis is on the self or will, not on anything external such as gods and priests."^{xix}

The peak of his magical career-- and also of his infamy as the wickedest man alive -- was in the period after 1920, when he founded his own ideal spiritual community called the Abbey of Thelema at a farmhouse in Cefalu, Sicily. The original inspiration derived from Rabelais' classic work of 1534, *Gargantua*, which describes an ideal spiritual community that would transcend the hypocritical corruption of the Christian monasteries. Called "Theleme" (from the Greek, meaning "will"), the government of the community was "do what you will," in a joyous blending of Stoic virtues with Christian spirituality.^{xx} Crowley took Rabelais' ideal a good deal further, however, by creating a utopian community in which every desire could be gratified and every impulse expressed, through free experimentation in drugs, sex and physical excess.

Perhaps the most infamous product of this period was Crowley's semi-autobiographical novel, *Diary of a Drug Fiend*, published in 1922. Written at top speed to fund his growing drug habit, the *Diary* is one of Crowley's most outrageous works, but also one that provides the most insight into his character and historical context. A thinly disguised image of Crowley himself, the central character, Peter Pendragon, describes his rapid descent into cocaine and heroin addiction, as he careens through the affluent, excessive and wildly hedonistic life of the roaring twenties, exploring every possible sensual pleasure and moral vice. As Leslie Shepard observes,

This book...comes from another world -- an age of contrasts like a layer cake, with a thick wedge of orthodoxy, a thin covering of daring literary cream, and a certain amount of exotic jam. It was the world of censorship of taste and also the Jazz Age of petting parties, wild automobile rides, speak-easies, silent films... Puritanism and interwar permissiveness lived side by side and made faces at each other.^{xxi}

Ironically, the character is finally redeemed by a mysterious figure named King Lamus, who runs a spiritual center called the Abbey of Thelema in far-off town called "Telepylus." In other words, the drug-addicted Crowley has portrayed himself as the character's own final savior and redemption.



By the 1940s, however, Crowley seems to have exhausted not only his money (already largely spent by 1915) but also his once infinite will to power. Though he continued to believe that his *Book of the Law* might have a decisive role to play in the unfolding of global events during and after World War II, most people who saw him in those years described him as "a bored old man who found the lonely evenings frightening."^{xxii} He would spend his last years in small guest house in London, increasingly addicted to heroin (taking as much as 11 grams a day, enough to kill most men), until his death in 1947. There are many conflicting accounts of his final days: according to some hagiographic accounts, he slipped blissfully into the Buddhist state of final liberation, passing from "Samadhi to Super-Samadhi to Nirvana to Super Nirvana, expiring in the boundless bliss of the Infinite."^{xxiii} According to more cynical accounts, he died alone in misery and self-loathing, uttering the final words, "sometimes I hate myself."^{xxiv} Still others say that he died quietly in bed, followed by a gust of wind and a peal of thunder -- a sign that "the gods were greeting him."^{xxv}

In sum, Crowley might be said to be a remarkable reflection of the era in which he was born. While deliberately setting out to overthrow all established values, he was perhaps only expressing the darker underside or "secret life" of the Victorian world in which he was raised:

Crowley was a contemporary of Freud; he grew out of the matrix of Victorianism...He was one of many who helped to tear down the false, hypocritical, self-righteous attitudes of the time. What is peculiar in Crowley's case it not that he chose evil but that in his revolt against his parents and God he set himself up in God's place.xxvi

And perhaps nowhere was Crowley's simultaneous reflection of and revolt against the world in which he lived more apparent than in his volatile sexual life.

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II. THE BEAST WITH TWO BACKS: Crowley in the Context of Late and Post-Victorian England

It is sex. How wonderful sex can be, when men keep it powerful and sacred, and it fills the world! like sunshine through and through one!

-- D.H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent*xxvii

The society that emerged in the nineteenth century -- the bourgeois capitalist or industrial society...-- did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex. As if it suspected sex of harboring a fundamental secret.

-- Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*,
*volume I*xxviii

In order to understand Crowley and his controversial work, we need to place them against the backdrop of British attitudes toward sexuality in the late nineteenth century.xxix Indeed, one of the many reasons for the shocking, sordid and deliciously scandalous reputation that followed Crowley was his practice of sexual magic and his deliberate transgression of the sexual mores of the world in which he was raised. Rejecting the effete morality of his Christian youth, Crowley deliberately set out to overturn what he saw as the oppressive, hypocritical attitudes of Victorian England, by identifying sex as the most central aspect of the human being and the most profound source of magical power (in fact, in his *Book of Lies*, he points out that the English word

for the pronoun "I" is itself a phallic shape).xxx The popular press, of course, took no end of delight in sensationalizing Crowley's sexual promiscuity, which was described in vivid, exaggerated and often hilarious detail throughout the newspapers of the day. Thus he and his degenerate band of followers were described in the most scandalous terms as "a blasphemous sect whose proceedings lend themselves to immorality of the most revolting character," whose main goal is "to fill their money-bags by encouraging others to gratify their depraved tastes."xxx

Crowley did little to deny this popular image. As he wrote in his *Confessions*, the main reason for the violence and turmoil of the modern world lies in the repression of the sexual instinct; and conversely, the surest way to solve our contemporary problems lies in its liberation:

The battle will rage most fiercely around the question of sex....Mankind must learn that the sexual instinct is...ennobling. The shocking evils which we all deplore are principally due to the perversions produced by suppressions. The feeling that it is shameful and the sense of sin cause concealment, which is ignoble and internal conflict which creates distortion, neurosis, and ends in explosion. We deliberately produce an abscess and wonder why it is full of pus, why it hurts, why it bursts in stench and corruption.

The Book of the Law solves the sexual problem completely. Each individual has an absolute right to satisfy his sexual instinct as is physiologically proper for him.xxxii

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Thus we might say that Crowley really epitomizes what Foucault calls the "repressive hypothesis" -- that is, the belief that the modern Western world has painfully repressed and denied sexuality, and that what is most needed now is the fullest affirmation and liberation of the sexual instinct. As Crowley himself put it in his *Confessions*, "My sexual life was very intense...Love was a challenge to Christianity. It was a degradation and damnation."xxxiii Yet as Foucault points out, it is really inaccurate to say that the Victorian era was one of repression and silence about sex. On the contrary, Western culture was in fact saturated with a kind of "hyper-development of discourse about sexuality," which was now classified and categorized in endless detail. "Paradoxically, it was during the nineteenth century that the debate about sexuality exploded. Far from the age of silence and suppression, sexuality became a major issue in Victorian social and political practice."xxxiv The categorization, classification and control over sexuality was a critical element in the regulation of society as a whole: "The array of sexual discourses... exploited sexuality's secrets. Sex began to be managed....perversion became codified...Sexuality proliferated as power over it was extended."xxxv

However, as Peter Gay points out, discussions of sexuality had to take place in the proper contexts, either privately, in the closed realms of secrecy or, publicly, through scientific discourse.^{xxxvi} The Victorian era, in fact, witnessed a tremendous proliferation of medical treatises on sexuality, in both its proper and perverse forms. Viewing any deviation from "normal" sex as morally suspect, the Victorian imagination was obsessed with the identification, enumeration and scientific classification of every imaginable sexual aberration. Among the most popular works in late nineteenth century England was Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) which became the most influential catalogue of deviations. Under the protective cover of "medical nomenclature" and with the "posture of moral outrage," Victorian readers "could indulge in this 'medicoforensic' peep-show of sexual hyperaesthesia, paresthesia, aspermia, polyspermia, spermatorrhea, sadism, masochism, fetishism, exhibitionism, psychic hermaphroditism, satyriasis and nymphomania."^{xxxvii}

Among the most sinister perversions, in the eyes of many Victorian authors, were those that confused the religious and sensual spheres. British middle and upper class sensibilities of the late 19th century insisted on the proper separation of religion and sexuality: excessive religious celibacy and sexual licentiousness were both considered destructive perversions. Only the married life offered the *via media* between celibacy and licentiousness, which "repairs the Fall and leads from earth to heaven."^{xxxviii} In an era that valued economic productivity, generation of capital and restraint in consumption, healthy sexuality had to be useful, productive and efficient: "normal heterosexuality appeared in one guise ...attraction between men and women that led to marriage and family. Normal sex was consistent with the values of Victorian industrial society--it was another mode of production."^{xxxix} Thus the most physically and morally dangerous of all acts were the "non-productive" acts such as masturbation and homosexual intercourse. As Lesley Hall observes, masturbation was "reprobated universally throughout Victorian society," and considered a possible source not just of moral decay but even of epilepsy and insanity. So too, homosexuality was foremost among those acts seen to violate the "borders of masculinity" defined by middle class society, and thus among the greatest threats to a productive, efficient and healthy social body.^{xl}

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However, as Michael Mason suggests, the first two decades of the 20th century also gave birth to a powerful reaction against the sexual values of the Victorian era.^{xli} As we see in a wide array of authors like Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter and D.H. Lawrence, there was a growing critique of the prudery of the Victorian age, and an increasing call for social and sexual liberation. As Carpenter put it, "the strange period of human evolution, the Victorian Age...marked the lowest ebb of modern civilized society: a period in which...cant in religion, the impure hush on matters of sex...the cruel barring of women from every natural and useful expression of their lives, were carried to an extremity of folly difficult for us now to realise."^{xlii} Increasingly, as the character Kate remarked in D.H. Lawrence *Plumed Serpent*, quoted above, sex was believed to harbor some deep, mysterious secret, the liberation of which was of tremendous, even sacred,

power. It was precisely this awesome power that Crowley would seek to tap into through his magical practices.

It is in this sense that Crowley, "the Great Beast," might be said to have had two backs, as it were, turned both backward and forward. For he was, on the one hand, deeply rooted in the late Victorian Christian world, reflecting the obsessive concern with sexuality and sexual deviance in the late nineteenth century. Yet like others of the post-Victorian era, he would struggle heroically to break free of that world, setting out deliberately to destroy that useful, productive Victorian social order through the most extreme acts of consumption and excess.

III. SEX IS A SACRAMENT: Crowley and the Origins of Western Sexual Magic

[T]he science of the sexual magic is the key to the development and the underlying secret of all Masonic symbols....[I]t is certain that the sexual question has become the most burning question of our time.

-- Theodor Reuss, "Mysteria Mystica Maxima"xlili

The sexual act is a sacrament of Will. To profane it is the great offense. All true expression of it is lawful; all suppression or distortion of it is contrary to the Law of liberty.

-- Crowley, *The Law is for All*xliv

Sex, magic and secrecy had, of course, long been associated in the Western religious imagination. From the early Gnostics to the Knights Templar to the Cathars of medieval Europe, esoteric orders had long been accused of using sexual rituals as part of their secret magical arts. xlv However, perhaps the first sophisticated and well-developed system of sexual magic was that of Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-75). The son of a wealthy Virginian father and a slave from Madagascar, Randolph was raised a poor, self-taught free black in New York city. After running away from home at age sixteen, he traveled the world and later emerged as one of the leading figures in 19th century Spiritualism and America's foremost exponent of magical eroticism or Affectional Alchemy. In sexual love, "he saw the greatest hope for the regeneration of the world, the key to personal fulfillment as well as social transformation and the basis of a non-repressive civilization."xlvi



Paschal Beverly Randolph

In the course of his wanderings in the Middle East, Randolph claimed to have been initiated by a group of Fakirs in the area of Jerusalem, which may have been a branch of the mystical order of the Nusa'iri -- a group long persecuted by orthodox Islam because of their alleged Gnostic sexual rituals. Upon his return to the United States, Randolph began to teach a form of sexual magic that would have a profound impact on much of later Western esotericism. For Randolph, the experience of sexual orgasm is the critical moment in human consciousness and the key to magical power: "true Sex-power is God-power," as he put it. As the moment when new life is infused from the spiritual realm into the material, it is crucial moment one the soul is suddenly opened up to the spiritual energies of the cosmos: "at the instant of intense mutual orgasm the souls of the partners are opened to the powers of the cosmos and anything truly willed is accomplished."xlvi The power of sex, then, can be deployed for a wide range of both spiritual and material ends. Not only can one achieve the spiritual aims of divine insight, but he can also attain the mundane goals of physical health, financial success or regaining the passions of a straying lover.xlviii

Once Randolph's teachings on sexual magic took root in the late 19th century, they would quickly flower and give birth to a wide array of occult movements throughout America, England and Europe. At the same time, they would also be reinterpreted in ways that might have been quite horrifying to Randolph himself, as they were now

mingled with the most transgressive acts of homosexual intercourse, auto-eroticism and even bestiality as a form of sexual magic.

Perhaps the most important vehicle for the transmission of Randolph's teachings on sexual magic was the highly esoteric movement known as the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.). Inspired by Karl Kellner (d. 1905) and later founded by Theodor Reuss (d. 1923), the O.T.O. became the main conduit through which Western sexual magic began to merge with a (somewhat deformed) version of Indian Tantric practices. A wealthy Austrian chemist and industrialist, Kellner claims to have been initiated into Indian sexual techniques in the course of his Oriental travels, citing a Sufi and two Indian yogis as his masters.^{xlix} Reuss, too, had a general working knowledge of Indian yogic practices and apparently some rudimentary understanding of Tantra (though, like Crowley, as I will argue below, his knowledge of Tantra was probably simplistic and inaccurate).^l

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Karl Kellner

Others, however, believe that Kellner and Reuss' true inspiration was in fact P.B. Randolph, whose sexual-magical teachings had been spread to Europe by a group of disciples in the late nineteenth century. Many of Randolph's ideas were transmitted to Germany through a little known but extremely influential group known as the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (H.B. of L.), begun by Max Theon (d. 1927) and Peter Davidson (d. 1916) probably sometime in the 1880's. Following Randolph, the H.B. of L. made sex central to its metaphysical system and spiritual practice: it is the polarity of male and female energies that creates the universe, and it is sexual union of males and females that leads to the "reunion of the divine Ego and to angelhood."^{li} At the same time, however, the H.B. of L. was even more emphatic about the dangers that arise from the abuse of sexual magic. Indeed, they warn that Randolph himself was led to ruin by his sexual excesses.^{lii} Nonetheless, the teachings of the H.B. of L. would be one of the most important means by which Randolph's work was transmitted and had a formative impact

on most later esoteric traditions in the West: "Once the secret was out of linking occultism with sex, it was impossible to ignore...practically every occult order after the 1880s had some debt to the H.B. of L."liii

Once these sexual techniques were transmitted to new movements like the Ordo Templi Orientis, however, they would also undergo some profound transformations. Much of the O.T.O.'s ritual centered around this "inner kernel" of sexual magic – though one already quite different from the more conservative system of Randolph. As the O.T.O. proclaimed in the journal *Oriflamme* in 1904, "Our Order possesses the Key which unlocks all Masonic and Hermetic secrets, it is the teaching of sexual magic and this teaching explains all the riddles of nature, all Masonic symbolism and all religious systems."liv The O.T.O. developed a system of nine degrees, the first six of which were more conventional Masonic initiations. The seventh, eighth and ninth degrees, however, focused respectively upon the theory of sex magic and on the techniques of auto- and hetero-sexual magic.lv Through the magical act of intercourse, by focusing all one's will and imagination upon a desired goal in the moment of orgasm, one can achieve success in any occult operation, from the invocation of a god to the finding of hidden treasure. One may, for example, use these techniques to magically empower a talisman or other magical object: by focusing one's entire will upon the desired object during orgasm, and then afterwards anointing that object with the semen, one can use that empowered object to achieve virtually any desired end.lvi Yet although the sex magic of the O.T.O. may have found some of its inspiration in the techniques of Randolph, there were also fundamental differences between the two. As Godwin points out, the auto-erotic and homosexual techniques developed by Kellner and Reuss would have horrified the more reserved Randolph, for whom sex was a sacrament between married couples, guarded by ritual sanctity and moral injunctions.lvii



Crowley as Head of OTO

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Crowley became involved with the O.T.O. in 1910 and would soon become its most infamous member. According to Crowley's account, he was approached by Reuss, who had read a cryptic chapter of Crowley's *Book of Lies* and accused him of revealing the innermost secret of the O.T.O.: the secret of sexual magic. Though Crowley had apparently done so unintentionally, the story goes, he was named the Sovereign Grand Master General of Ireland, Ioana and all the Britains. As Crowley suggests, this secret is so powerful and "of such tremendous import," that it "cannot be used indiscriminately" or revealed to the unworthy.^{lviii} As he described it in his *Confessions*, "if this secret which is a scientific secret were perfectly understood...there would be nothing which the human imagination can conceive that could not be realized in practice...If it were desired

to have an element of atomic weight six times that of uranium that element could be produced."lix

In Crowley's revised system, however, the O.T.O.'s nine degrees were expanded to eleven. The eighth, ninth and eleventh of these focused on more explicitly transgressive sexual rites of auto-erotic and homosexual intercourse. As Peter Koenig summarizes the upper degrees,

Crowley's VIIIth degree unveiled... that masturbating on a sigil of a demon or meditating upon the image of a phallus would bring power or communication with a divine being...The IXth degree was labeled heterosexual intercourse where the sexual secrets were sucked out of the vagina and when not consumed...put on a sigil to attract this or that demon to fulfill the pertinent wish...In the XIth degree, the mostly homosexual degree, one identifies oneself with an ejaculating penis. The blood (or excrements) from anal intercourse attract the spirits/demons while the sperm keeps them alive.lx

In many ways, this secret of sexual magic was really the key to his entire vision of a new Aeon based on the full affirmation of the Will and the complete liberation from the repressive, oppressive religions of the past. Indeed, Crowley takes the "repressive hypothesis" and the urge to sexual freedom to its furthest extreme: for he not only proclaims the liberation of sexuality from the prudish bonds of his Victorian childhood, but he also makes the most deviant and anti-social of sexual acts -- namely, masturbation, oral consumption of sexual fluids and homosexual intercourse-- the ultimate keys to magical power. In other words, he set out to usher in his own new Aeon by smashing and tearing down the entire social-moral structure of the world in which he was raised.lxi



Theodor Reuss

IV. THE YOGA OF SEX: Tantra and other Exotic Imports from the Mysterious Orient

Shiva, the Destroyer, is asleep, and when he opens his eye the universe is destroyed...But the "eye" of Shiva is also his Lingam [phallus]. Shiva is himself the Mahalingam, which unites these symbolisms. The opening of the eye, the ejaculation of the Lingam, the destruction of the universe, the accomplishment of the Great Work --all these are different ways of saying the same thing.

--Crowley, *The Book of Lies*lxii

[P]aradoxical as it may sound, the Tantrics are in reality the most advanced of the Hindus.

-- Crowleylxiii

Already in the work of Kellner, Reuss and the early O.T.O, Western sexual magic had begun to be mingled with the recently discovered traditions of Hindu and Buddhist Tantra. But it is Crowley and Crowley's form of sexual magic that most Westerners readers now think of when they hear the word Tantra. As we will see, however, this association of Crowley and Tantra may turn out to be a good deal more spurious and unfounded than most authors have generally assumed.

As it is used by most historians of religions today, Tantra refers to a vast and extremely diverse body of texts, practices and traditions that spread throughout the Hindu, Buddhist and even Jain communities since at least the 3rd or 4th century CE. There is in fact intense disagreement, not only as to how it is best defined, but even as to whether Tantra really "exists" at all. Is it really an indigenous Asian category, or is it instead -- like the generic category of "Hinduism" itself -- the product of western Orientalist scholars imposing their own fantasies and obsessions onto the exotic mirror of the Oriental Other?lxiv Although it has been defined in many different ways, Tantra centers in large part around the concept of *shakti* -- power or energy, in all its many forms. *Shakti* is the power that creates, sustains and destroys the entire universe, but it is also the power that flows through the social and political world, as well. Tantric ritual seeks to harness and exploit this power, both as a means to spiritual liberation and as a means to this-worldly benefits, such as wealth, fame and supernatural abilities. As Douglas Brooks summarizes, "The Tantrika conceives of the world as power. The world is nothing but power to be harnessed."lxv Sexual union (*maithuna*) is indeed used in some traditions as one method to awaken and harness this power; but it is by no means the only, or even usually the most important, technique employed in Tantric ritual. And even when it is used, it is typically restricted to very closely guarded, highly esoteric ritual settings and surrounded with the most severe injunctions warning of the dangers of

its abuse. In the words of one of the most famous and influential medieval texts, the *Kularnava Tantra*,

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What I tell you must be kept with great secrecy. This must not be given to just anyone. It must only be given to a devoted disciple. It will be death to any others.

If liberation could be attained simply by having intercourse with a [female partner], then all living beings in the world would be liberated just by having intercourse with women.lxvi

Many forms of Tantric practice do involve explicit forms of ritual transgression. The ritual consumption of meat and wine, and in some cases sexual intercourse in violation of class laws, can be employed as a means of awakening and harnessing the awesome power or *shakti* that flows through all things. Yet at the same time, as Brooks, Sanjukta Gupta and many others have argued, Tantra is really by no means the subversive, anti-social force that many Western readers imagine it to be. On the contrary, it is in most cases a highly *conservative* tradition, which ultimately re-asserts the ritual authority and social status of male brahmins. Social relations and sexual taboos are typically only violated in highly controlled ritual contexts and are generally re-asserted -- indeed, reinforced -- outside the boundaries of esoteric ritual: "Anti-caste statements should never be read outside their ritual context. Returned to ordinary life, no high caste Tantric would think of breaking social taboos. ..The ritual egalitarianism of Tantrism in practice acted as a caste-confirming ...force."lxvii

Since its first discovery by European Orientalist scholars and Christian missionaries in the 18th century, Tantra has held a place of profound ambivalence in the Western imagination. To most European scholars of the colonial era, Tantra was identified as the very worst and most depraved aspect of the Indian mind, the source of all the polytheism, idolatry and licentiousness that had led to the apparent degeneration of Hinduism in modern times. Above all, Tantra was attacked because of its use of sensual pleasure and even sexual union as a means of spiritual experience. Ironically, although physical intercourse plays a very limited role in most Indian Tantric traditions, the sexual aspect was quickly singled out as the most infamous and most shocking aspect of this terrible perversion of true religion. As the great Sanskritist, Sir Monier Williams, put it, Tantra is "Hinduism arrived in last and worst age of medieval development," in which the noble philosophy of the Vedas had been replaced by the obscene sexual perversions and black magic of the left-hand (*vamacara*) Tantras: "The rites, or rather, orgies, of the left hand worshippers presuppose the meeting of men and woman of all castes in the most unrestrained manner."lxviii

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This identification of Tantra with sexual licentiousness was only further complicated in the late 19th century, as Tantra became increasingly confused with various pornographic and sexological literature proliferating in Victorian England. One of the most widely-read authors on Tantra (though also one of the least original) was Edward Sellon, who was best known as an author of cheap pornographic books, such as *The New Epicurean or the Delights of Sex Facetiously and Philosophically Considered in Graphic Letters Addressed to Young Ladies of Quality*.^{lxix} Having served as an Ensign in the Madras infantry as a young man, Sellon also knew something of Hindu belief and practice, which he published in his *Annotations upon the Sacred Writings of the Hindus*. His vivid and titillating description of Tantric worship -- in which "natural restraints are wholly disregarded" and which "terminates with orgies amongst the votaries of a very licentious description" -- would become one of the most influential accounts in the late Victorian popular imagination.^{lxx} Finally, this equation of Tantra with its sexual aspects would be rendered hopelessly confused with the publication of various Sanskrit erotic texts such as the *Ananga Ranga* and the *Kama Sutra* by Sir Richard Francis Burton and his cohorts in the *Kama Shastra Society*.^{lxxi} Although the *Kama Sutra* in fact had little if anything to do with Tantra, it would soon become largely confused and often completely identified with Tantra in the Western popular imagination. Crowley, too, seems to have inherited this Orientalist identification of Tantra with sex, and he would soon become infamous as one of the first Western authors to wed sexual magic with the esoteric rites of Tantra. As his disciple Kenneth Grant put it, "The revival of Tantric elements in the *Book of the Law* may be evidence of a positive move on the part of [Crowley] to forge a link between Western and Oriental systems of magick."^{lxxii} But the question is, how much did Crowley really know about Indian Tantric traditions -- that is, beyond the second-hand comments and bursts of moral outrage about Tantric licentiousness that were common in Orientalist scholarship?

It is true that he did have a reasonably good knowledge of Indian yoga, including both the *raja* (royal) or *ashtanga* (eight-limbed) yoga of Patanjali and the more physical practice focused on bodily postures known as *hatha yoga*. His *Eight Lectures on Yoga* -- or "Yoga for Yahoos," as he described it -- displays a competent grasp of the classical yoga system and would become one of the first vehicles through which yoga was transmitted to the West.^{lxxiii} And it is also true that he made frequent use of key Sanskrit terms, such as *lingam* and *yoni*, the male and female sexual organs, to explain his own magical practice. In fact, he records in his *Confessions* that it was the Indian worship of the *lingam* that helped change his attitudes toward sex and to see that the sexual organ can be a source of spiritual power and an object of veneration. Unlike repressed and neurotic modern Western society, India had long known the inherent divinity of sexuality and the human body:

One of the great insights of South India is the great Temple of the Shiva lingam. I spent a good deal of time in its courts meditating on the mystery of Phallic worship...My instinct told me that Blake was right in saying: "The lust of the goat is the glory of God." But I lacked the courage to admit it. The result of my training had

been to obsess me with the hideously foul idea that inflicts such misery on Western minds and curses life with civil war. Europeans cannot face the facts frankly, they cannot escape from their animal appetite, yet suffer the tortures of fear and shame even while gratifying it. As Freud has now shown, this devastating complex is not merely responsible for most of the social and domestic misery of Europe and America, but exposes the individual to neurosis ...We resort to suppression, and the germs create an abscess. lxxiv

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It also seems that Crowley eventually came to have a certain respect for Indian Tantric traditions. Unlike most of the Orientalist scholars of his day, who denounced Tantra as a horrible perversion, Crowley described Tantra not only a valid form of religion, but in fact the "most advanced" of all forms of Indian spirituality. For unlike other forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, Tantra does not deny the physical body or the natural world, but affirms and makes use of the flesh and the senses:

The essence of the Tantric cults is that by performance of certain rites of Magick, one does not only escape disaster, but obtains positive benediction. The Tantric is not obsessed by the will-to-die. It is a difficult business, no doubt, to get any fun out of existence, but at least it is not impossible...[H]e implicitly denies the proposition that existence is sorrow and he form-ulates the postulate...that means exist by which the universal sorrow...may be unmasked.lxxv

One of the most explicit references to Tantric sexual practices in Crowley's work is found in his key text for the O.T.O. IX degree rite, *De Arte Magicka*. Here specifically compares the Tantric view of the semen and the rite of *maithuna* with the IX degree rite, and also demonstrates that he is familiar with at least one Tantric text:

Like the Jews, the wise men of India have a belief that a certain particular Prana, or force, resides in the Bindu, or semen....

Therefore they stimulate to the maximum its generation by causing a consecrated prostitute to excite the organs, and at the same time vigorously withhold by will. After some little exercise they claim that they can deflower as many as eighty virgins in a night without losing a single drop of the Bindu. Nor is this ever to be lost, but reabsorbed through the tissues of the body. The organs thus act as a siphon to draw constantly fresh supplies of life from the cosmic reservoir, and flood the body with their fructifying virtue....

Initiates will notice also that these heathen philosophers have made one further march towards the truth when they say that the Sun and Moon must be united before the reabsorption (see almost any Tantra, in particular Shiva Sanhita).lxxvi

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For these reasons, many authors have speculated that Crowley did in fact have some extensive knowledge of Tantra. Thus Lawrence Sutin makes the argument that Crowley may have first been introduced to the more radical left-hand (*vamacara*) form of Tantra in Ceylon as early 1901. Infamous for its use of normally forbidden substances, such as meat, wine and sexual intercourse, *vamacara* Tantra is considered the most rapid and dangerous path to liberation.lxxvii Initially, Crowley seems to have been repulsed by such practices, for example when he wrote with disdain about "these follies of... Vamacharya ("debauchery," i.e., normal life)."lxxviii In this negative view of left-hand Tantra, however, Crowley was by no means alone among occultists and religious leaders of the day. Many leading Indian religious figures, such as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) -- one of the first to bring Hindu philosophy to the West -- had a singular disdain for Tantra, particular in its left-hand forms.lxxix Even many Western occultists such as Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891)-- who had a great admiration for Indian philosophy and eventually re-located the Theosophical Society to South India -- identified Tantra with black magic of the most foul and depraved variety: "[T]he *Tantras*...are the embodiment of ceremonial *black magic* of the darkest dye...[T]hose Kabbalists who dabble in the ceremonial magic described...by Eliphas Levi are as full blown Tantrikas as those of Bengal."lxxx It seems probable that Crowley was influenced by these views of Tantra, which were widely circulated in both India and England from the late 19th century onward.

However, Sutin goes on to argue that Crowley's attitudes toward Tantra became a good deal more positive in years after 1901, and that he began to experiment in Tantric-influenced sexual rites of his own. Already by 1902, Sutin suggests, Crowley and his partner Rose had begun to engage in a series of "secret rites, of a sexual nature (and related to Tantric practices, such as the emulation of the passive Shiva in cosmic coupling with the mounted energetic Shakti)."lxxxi Unfortunately, Sutin provides no evidence that Crowley and Rose were engaging in any sort of actual Tantric practices or that their sexual relations were in any way influenced by Tantra.

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Others have speculated that Crowley was even more deeply involved in left-hand Tantric rituals during his travels in India. In 1936, for example, Elizabeth Sharpe published a semi-autobiographical account entitled *Secrets of the Kaula Circle*, which describes a mysterious Englishman calling himself by the number "666," who engages in the most esoteric Tantric rites: "I met a European who...called himself by a number. In the beginning he was extremely handsome, afterwards he grew gross...He had many women at his disposal... He learnt many magical processes by which he drew into his circle great phantoms...666 wore a ceremonial robe, had a pentacle, a wand a sword and a

cup."lxxxii At least one author has taken this to be positive proof that Crowley had intimate knowledge of and experience in Tantric practice.lxxxiii However, given the fact that Sharpe's novel was published at a time when Crowley's reputation as a pervert, black magician and drug fiend was quite widespread, it seems equally (if not more) likely that Sharpe appropriated the figure of the infamous "Beast 666," mingled him with some widespread fantasies about Tantric licentiousness and incorporated him as a purely fictional character into her novel.

But apart from these general references, it would seem that Crowley's actual knowledge of Tantra was fairly rudimentary and largely colored by the Orientalist biases of his era. It is indeed striking, for example, that Crowley does not once mention the work of Sir John Woodroffe (a.k.a. Arthur Avalon, 1865-1936),lxxxiv whose work pioneered the modern study of Tantra and helped introduce Tantra as a serious religious practice and philosophical system to the western world. A judge on the British High Court in Calcutta and secret student of the Tantras, Woodroffe was a contemporary of Crowley whose major works on Tantra were published in England from around 1913 on.lxxxv One would think that Crowley would have welcomed the publication of a large body of ancient literature that allows for a positive role for sexual experience and this-worldly pleasure, and one cannot help but wonder why he completely ignored it in his own writings on sexual magic.

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Moreover, in the few places where he does discuss Tantric practices, Crowley frequently either misunderstands or simply reinterprets them for his own purposes. For example, most Tantric traditions use a form of physical discipline known as *kundalini yoga*. According to the *kundalini* system, there are a series of seven energy centers (*chakras*) located along the axis of the spinal column. At the base of these lies the Great Goddess as power (*shakti*) hidden in the human body, which is imagined in the form of a coiled serpent (*kundalini*). The aim of *kundalini yoga* is to awaken this serpent power and to raise it through the seven energy centers where it will ultimately be united with the supreme masculine principle, the God, Shiva, who is imagined as dwelling in a thousand-petalled lotus at the top of the head. Crowley more or less accepts this basic system of seven *chakras* and the serpent power; yet, quite remarkably, he also adds a special set of *lower chakras* located *beneath* the lowest energy center (the *muladhara* or root), in the regions of the anus, the prostate gland (or urethra-cervix region in the female) and the base of the penis (or clitoris in the female). In other words, he has added a series of sub-*chakras* that are explicitly associated with the sexual organs and orifices. As he explains in a letter in 1916,

It appears that a special set of nadis [nerves] fed the Muladhara lotus as if it had three roots. The source of these roots is in the three centres...Buy they are not lotuses of the same order as the sacred Seven...

The anal lotus is of eight petals, deep crimson, glowing to rich poppy color when excited...

The prostatic lotus is like a peridot, extremely translucent and limpid...The petals are numerous, I think thirty-two.

The third lotus is in the *glans penis*, close to the base...It is of a startlingly rich purple...The centre is gold like the sun...

In the female... these three lotuses also exist, but in a very different form...[T]he second of the chakras is situated between the urethra and the *cervix uteri*...[I]ts color is neutral grey but in pregnancy it becomes a brilliant orange and flowerlike...

The third lotus is at the base of the clitoris... The petals are forty-nine in number...The basic color is a rich olive green, sometimes kindling to emerald
lxxxvi

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This passage is a telling example of Crowley's appropriation and reinterpretation of Tantra as a whole. Not only does he identify Tantra primarily with its sexual aspects, but, going still further, he also introduces his own series of sub-*chakras* identified specifically with the sexual organs. However, perhaps the greatest difference between the Crowleyian and Hindu Tantric systems is the role of sexual intercourse in ritual practice. But here again there is some confusion. Some authors have suggested that the primary difference lies in the way in which the sexual acts are carried out and the manner in which sexual union occurs. Thus Sutin argues that the key difference is that the Hindu and Buddhist Tantrics call for a retention and sublimation of the male semen during union, while Crowley calls for the ejaculation and consumption of the sexual fluids (in fact, Crowley himself pointed this out in *De Arte Magicka*, chapters XIV and XVI):

Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism...call for retention of semen by the male, even in the heights of mystical sexual union. Crowley followed that alchemical tradition which regarded the fluidic commingling as an 'elixir' which, when imbibed, could heighten both one's physical and spiritual state.lxxxvii

Actually, this is not quite correct. It is true that many later Tantric texts emphasize retention of semen during union; but there are in fact many Hindu Tantric traditions -- and arguably, the *older* traditions -- that call for ejaculation of the semen and consumption of the combined male and female sexual fluids. According to the *Brhat Tantrasara* -- one of the largest compendia of Tantric ritual and iconography composed by the great 16th century author, Krishnananda Agamavagisha -- the shedding of semen into the womb of the female partner is the ultimate "sacrificial act." For "sexual union is

the libation; the sacred precept is the shedding of semen."lxxxviii The mingled sexual fluids are then consecrated and consumed as the supreme sacrificial offering -- called the *kula dravya* or "lineage substance" -- which has the power to fulfill all worldly and otherworldly desires.lxxxix As David Gordon White has argued, this practice of orally consuming the sexual fluids can be found in many of the oldest Tantras and probably pre-dates the practice of seminal retention. xc

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Instead, I would suggest that the key difference between traditional forms of Tantra and Crowley's system lies not in the details of sexual union, but rather in *the emphasis that is placed on sex in the first place*. In most Hindu and Buddhist Tantras, sexual union is a fairly minor part of spiritual practice; when mentioned at all, it is often taken in purely symbolic terms, and, when practiced literally, is but one of many ways of awakening the divine power or *shakti*. As Georg Feuerstein observes, "There is nothing glamorous about Tantric sexual intercourse."xci But in most contemporary Western interpretations -- and above all, in the wake of Crowley -- Tantra has been re-defined primarily by its sexual element, and often simply equated with "spiritual sex," the goal of which is not spiritual development but heightened orgasm and optimal physical pleasure.xcii

In the end, it seems there is little concrete evidence that Crowley had any extensive knowledge of Indian Tantra, apart from the common association of Tantra and sex in the Western imagination. So how, then, did Crowley's work come to be so widely identified with Tantra in later literature? The answer lies primarily, I think, in the work of Crowley's earliest biographers, such as John Symonds and, above all, Kenneth Grant. In fact, Grant himself claimed to have received "full initiation into a highly recondite formula of the Tantric *vama marg*," at the hands of one David Curwen, who in turn claimed to have been initiated by a Tantric Guru in South India. Having met Crowley in 1944 and studying with him in 1945, Grant would go on to write a series of books on Crowley and magic, which repeatedly emphasize the "Tantric" nature of Crowley's work. Thus, *The Book of the Law* is even praised as "the New Gnosis, the latest Tantra," and Crowley is credited with having penetrated the innermost secrets of Tantric sexual practices (which Grant also compares with the Orgasm theory of Wilhelm Reich): "Crowley knew that the crux of tantric ritual lay in its connection with the magically induced ecstasies of sexual orgasm." xciii Ultimately, Grant also finds in the Tantras a confirmation of the central tenet of Crowley's law of Thelema -- the fundamental belief in the divinity of the human will. Just as Tantra, in Crowley's new interpretation, asserted the divinity of the human body and the sexual instinct, so too did it affirm the godhood of Man above all the old false dying gods of the past: "Another point of contact between Tantra and Thelema is contained in the Thelemic aphorism: There is no god but man!"xciv

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But ironically, despite his attempts to read Crowley through a Tantric lens, even Grant admits that Crowley's actual knowledge of Tantric practice was limited. Thus he recounts Crowley's correspondence with David Curwen, who alleged to have studied left-hand Tantra in South India. According to Grant's own account, Crowley was rather annoyed that Curwen seemed to possess much greater knowledge about Tantra and sexual magick; as Crowley himself admitted, "Curwen knows 100 times as much as I do about Tantra. But I do not advise it."^{xv} For Curwen claimed to have a recipe for preparing the prized "Elixir of Life" that was far superior to that of the O.T.O.:

There exists a document...compiled by Curwen's erstwhile guru, a South Indian tantric....In it appeared an adverse criticism of Crowley's attempts at preparing the Elixir of Life...In the instructions which accompany the higher degrees of the O.T.O. there is no comprehensive account of the critical role of the *kalas* or psycho-sexual emanations of the woman chosen for the magical rites...The O.T.O. lacked some vital keys to the real secret of magick which Crowley claimed to have incorporated into the higher degrees. Curwen undoubtedly knew more about these matters than did Crowley.^{xvi}

But regardless of Crowley's actual knowledge of Tantra, virtually everyone writing on the subject since the time of Grant and Symonds seems to have accepted this basic identity of Crowleyian magic and Tantra.^{xvii} Crowley's version of the tradition and, above all, his identification of Tantra primarily with its sexual component, would have a formative impact on virtually all later forms of sex magic in the West.

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V. Leashing and Unleashing the Beast: Taboo, Transgression and Power

I loathe law. It seems to me as if it were merely an elaborate series of obstacles to doing things sensibly.

-- Crowley, *Diary of a Drug*

Fiend^{xviii}

Transgression contains nothing negative but affirms limited being-- affirms the limitlessness into it which leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time.

So what are we to make of Crowley's seemingly scandalous and deliberately shocking sexual practices? Were they merely the expression of a perverse and hedonistic character who hoped to satiate every carnal desire? Or were they simply a crude form of sympathetic magic designed to bring him material gain, wealth and power? And how do they compare to the forms of sexual practice that one finds in the Indian traditions of Tantra?

Here I would suggest that Crowley's sexual magick is a striking illustration of what Georges Bataille calls the power of transgression, which is a central aspect of eroticism, religious ritual and mystical experience alike. Transgression, Bataille argues, is not simple hedonism or unrestrained sexual license; rather, its power lies in the dialectic or "play" (*le jeu*) between taboo and transgression, through which one systematically constructs and then oversteps all laws. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of eroticism. Not a matter of simple nudity, eroticism arises in the dialectic of veiling and revealing, clothing and striptease, between the creation of sexual taboos and the exhilarating experience of overstepping them. So too, in ecstatic mystical experience or religious rites (such as blood sacrifices, carnivals, etc.), one must first create an aura of purity and sanctity before one can defile it with violence, transgression or the overturning of law. "The prohibition is there to be violated;" rules are made to be broken, for it is the experience of over-stepping limits that brings the blissful sense of continuity and communion with the Other:

[T]aboos...are not only there to be obeyed...It is always a temptation to knock down a barrier...Fear invests [the forbidden act] with an aura of excitement. "There is nothing," writes de Sade, "that can set bounds to licentiousness...The best way of enlarging and multiplying one's desires is to try to limit them."c

The ultimate aim of transgression, however, is not mere sensual pleasure; rather, it is the transgression of the very boundaries of the self, the expenditure (*depense*) without hope of any return, which shatters the limits of finite, isolated human consciousness in order to experience the boundless continuity of the Infinite. It is this experience of transgression and expenditure that links eroticism intimately to the ultimate experience of infinite continuity, that of death itself:

Eroticism...is assenting to life up to the point of death...Although erotic activity is in the first place an exuberance of life, the object of this psychological quest...is not alien to death.

Erotic activity, by dissolving the separate beings that participate in it, reveals their fundamental continuity, like the waves of a stormy sea.ci

Nowhere is this fundamental dialectic between taboo and transgression more apparent than in the case of Crowley. Quite self-consciously overthrowing the sexual restraints of the Victorian world in which he was raised, Crowley made it his mission to shatter the boundaries of conventional morality in order to liberate the supreme freedom of the individual self. Thus, "The qualities which have made a man, a race, a city, a caste, must be thrown off... All moral codes are worthless in themselves."cii In place of the emasculated morality of Christ, he celebrated the higher morality of the Will, a virile, phallic power that bursts through the narrow boundaries of conventional morality: "The Love of Liber Legis is always bold, virile, ecstatic, even orgiastic... Mighty and terrible and glorious as it is, however, it is but the pennon upon the sacred lance of Will."ciii As we see in the vow to be taken by his partners in sexual rites, Crowley's magical work demanded the explicit violation of the moral boundaries that confine ordinary human beings:

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I will work the work of wickedness

I will kill my heart

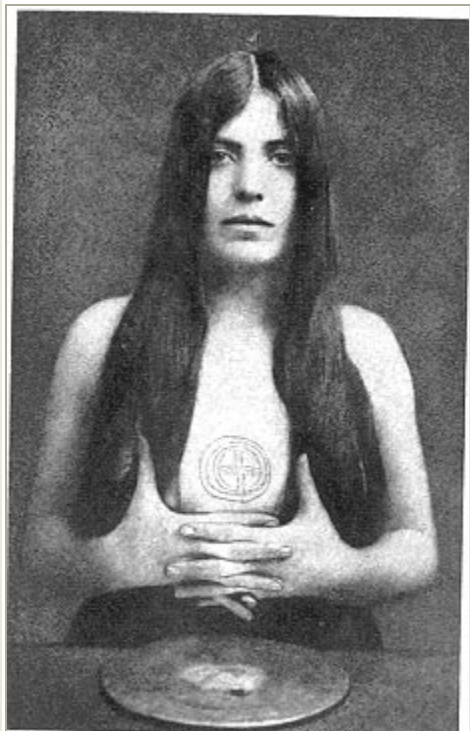
I will be loud and adulterous

I will be covered with jewels and rich garments.

I will be shameless before all men

I will, for token thereof, will freely prostitute my body to the lusts of each and every living creature that shall desire it

I claim the Mystery of Mysteries, BABALON the Great, and the Number 156, and the robe of the Woman of Whoredomes and the Cup of Abominations.civ



Branded with the Beast's Mark

As we have seen above, many of Crowley's higher-level rituals centered around acts that were considered extremely transgressive in late Victorian society. Sodomy and masturbation were foremost among the acts considered both physically and morally dangerous in Victorian society, and they would therefore become among the most powerful tools in Crowley's magical practice. The original preface to his *The World's Tragedy* was, in fact, sub-titled "Sodomy," in which he vowed "to fight openly for that which no living Englishman dared defend, even in secret -- sodomy!cv

However, even Crowley's heterosexual rites would have been considered somewhat against the grain of Victorian sexual values. As we have already seen, many of his magical practices involved deliberate inversions of "normal" sexual intercourse, such as the consumption of the male and female sexual fluids, which were regarded as the powerful "elixir" employed in many of the IX degree operations.cvi In some cases, however, Crowley seems to have truly exulted in his own depravity, going to great lengths to describe his descent into licentious transgression. As he described his relations with his partner, Ronnie Minor, in 1918, "I now do all those things which voluptuaries do, with equal or greater enthusiasm and power; but always for an Ulterior End. In this matter I am reproached by that whore of niggers and dogs, with whom I am now living in much worse than adultery."cvii Similarly, as he described his relations with a young American, Cecil Frederick Russell, who come to study with him in 1921 and became a partner in his sexual magic,

Now I'll shave and make up my face like the lowest kind of whore and rub on perfume and go after Genesthai [Russell] like a drunken two-bit prick-pit in old New Orleans. He disgusts me sexually, as I him, as I suspect...[T]he dirtier my deed, the dearer my darling will hold me; the grosser the act the greedier my arse to engulf him!cviii

Crowley would go to even further extremes of transgression during his years at the Abbey of Thelema. In his diaries, he claims to have transcended all material distinctions, shattering the boundary between pure and impure, such that even the most defiling substances -- including human excrement -- became for him the pure Body of God. Thus the shit of his Scarlet Woman, Leah Hirsig, became the "Thelemic Host" in his Gnostic Mass:

My mouth burned; my throat choked, my belly wretched; my blood fled wither who knows ...She stood above in hideous contempt...She ate all the body of God and with Her soul's compulsion made me eat...My teeth grew rotten, my tongue ulcered, raw was my throat, spasm-torn my belly, and all my Doubt of that which to Her teeth was moonlight and to her tongue ambrosia; to her throat nectar, in her belly the One God.cix

Much like Bataille, Crowley finds in sexual magick the most powerful means to shattering the limited rational mind and finite human ego. Sexual transgression is also a transgression of the boundaries of ordinary consciousness itself. Following Nietzsche, Crowley sees the rational, logical thinking mind as a kind of epi-phenomenon and aberration of the true human self, which is bodily, instinctive and sensual. "Consciousness is a symptom of disease;" but in the moment of sexual union and orgasm -- called here "the Charioting" -- the thinking mind is temporarily blotted out, allowing a fleeting glimmer of "universal consciousness:"

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Mind is a disease of semen. All that a man is or may be is hidden therein....Therefore is man only himself when lost to himself in The Charioting.

Therefore, except in the case of an Adept, man only rises to a glimmer of the universal consciousness, while, in the orgasm, the mind is blotted out. cx

As Julius Evola suggests, Crowley saw in orgasm (as in drug experience) a means to create "breakages of consciousness" by pushing the mind to a point of extreme exhaustion and so opening it to the "supersensual:" "The technique...was that of excess;

through pain or pleasure, sex or intoxication, it was necessary to attain a condition of exhaustion taken to the extreme limit."cxi Ultimately, in this moment of sexual excess, the self dissolves into the abyss of the Infinite, beyond all limitations:

As man loses his personality in physical love, so does the magician annihilate his divine personality in that which is beyond.

In love the individuality is slain...Love death therefore, and long eagerly for it.

Love destroyeth self...Love breedeth All and None in One.cxii

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Like Bataille, then, Crowley found in this radical transgression and shattering of rational thought the source of a tremendous, even superhuman power. The magus who dares to break the boundaries between pure and impure, the rational and the irrational, self and nothingness, can unleash the ultimate magical energy and subdue all of reality to his own will:

A Sorcerer by the power of his magick had subdued all things to himself...He could fly through space more swiftly than the stars. Would he eat, drink, and take his pleasure? There was none that did not obey his bidding. In the whole system of ten million times ten million spheres upon the two and twenty million planes he had his desire. cxiii

However, the ultimate goal that Crowley sought through his sexual magic seems went far beyond the mundane desire for material wealth or mortal power. In his most exalted moments, Crowley appears to have believed that he could achieve a supreme spiritual power -- the power to conceive a divine child, a godlike being, who would transcend the moral failings of the body born of mere woman. This goal of creating a divine fetus, Crowley suggests, lies at the heart of many esoteric traditions, from ancient Mesopotamia to India to the Arab world:

This is the great idea of magicians in all times—To obtain a Messiah by some adaptation of the sexual process. In Assyria they tried incest...Greeks and Syrians mostly bestiality. ...The Mohammedans tried homosexuality; medieval philosophers tried to produce homunculi by making chemical experiments with semen. But the root idea is that any form of procreation other than normal is likely to produce results of a magical character.cxiv

Sex magic, particularly in its transgressive, non-reproductive forms, can thus unleash the supreme creative power: the power to create not an ordinary fetus, but a magical child of messianic potential.

At this point, we might now ask an important comparative question: Given the fact that so many modern authors have equated Crowley's sex magic with Indian Tantric practice, and given the fact both Crowleyian magic and Tantra involve explicit violations of social taboos, how should we compare the role of transgression in these two traditions? Does transgression work in basically the same way, with similar religious and social consequences? Or are they in fact quite different?

On the one hand, there are indeed striking similarities. Both Hindu Shakta Tantra and Crowley's magic do center in large part around the acquisition of power (*shakti* in the Indian case), a power that flow lies within both the natural cosmos and the human self, a power that has both spritual and socio-political dimensions. And both employed explicit acts of transgression -- the deliberate violation of accepted social, moral and sexual codes -- as one very potent means of awakening and harnessing that power. Yet at the same time, on the other hand, the ends to which that power was directed seems to be quite different in Shakta Tantra and in Crowley's magic. As we saw above, most forms of Hindu Shakta Tantra have historically been quite conservative in orientation, tending to reinforce rather than subvert the existing social order. Tantric ritual does often involve deliberate inversions and transgressions of normal social laws and sexual taboos; but these are closely guarded by ritual secrecy and generally tend, in the end, to re-assert the power of the elite, male, well-educated Brahmins as the ritual experts who alone have the authority to overstep conventional social boundaries.cxv Crowley, conversely, set out deliberately to overthrow, tear down and supplant the entire religious, social and moral world in which he was raised. From the revelation of his *Book of the Law* and continuing throughout his life, he set out to deconstruct an entire worldview and social order -- what he regarded as the effete, corrupt and bankrupt world dominated by Christianity -- and to set up in its place a new order based on the law of the Thelema. In other words, both the Sakta Tantrikas and Crowley made use of explicit inversions of conventional morality and sexual taboos, but they did so for very different, even opposite reasons -- the one to reinforce the existing social order and status quo, and the other to destroy it.

CONCLUSIONS: "After the Orgy" -- Sex and Liberation in a Post-Victorian Era

I say today: to hell with Christianity, Rationalism, Buddhism all the lumber of the centuries. I bring you a positive and primaevial fact, Magic by name: and with this I will build me a new Heaven and a new Earth. I want none of your faint approval or faint dispraise; I want blasphemy, murder, rape, revolution, anything, bad or good but strong

-- Crowley, Letter to brother in law, Gerald Kelly,cxvi

If it were necessary to characterize the state of things I would say that it is after the orgy. The orgy is...the explosive moment of modernity, that of liberation in all domains. Political liberation, sexual liberation, liberation of productive forces, liberation of destructive forces...Today everything is liberated. ..we find ourselves before the question: WHAT ARE WE TO DO AFTER THE ORGY?

-- Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*cxvii

To conclude, I would like to suggest that Crowley is not only a fascinating and often neglected figure who gives us an unusual insight into the history of modern religious movements in the West; still more importantly, he also reflects in bold relief some of the most central issues, conflicts and tensions surrounding sexuality and sexual liberation in late and post-Victorian society. Like many other controversial figures of his day, such as D.H. Lawrence and Oscar Wilde, Crowley set out to burst the oppressive values and constricting morality of the Christian world in which he was raised. Yet Crowley would also take the ideal of transgression to its furthest possible extremes, by deliberately overthrowing virtually every imaginable social, moral and sexual taboo in order to achieve a kind of radical superhuman freedom, self-affirmation and even self-deification.

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At the same time, despite his apparent lack of knowledge of Tantra, Crowley is also a key figure in the transmission of Tantra to the West, and also in its increasing fusion (perhaps hopeless confusion) with Western varieties of sexual magic. In the course of its complex journey to the West, Tantra has been progressively transformed from a highly esoteric tradition centering around secrecy and power to an increasingly popular form of spirituality centering around healthy sexuality and liberated openness. In spite of -- or perhaps because of -- his superficial understanding of Tantra, Crowley would become Crowley was a seminal figure in this transformation and is still today widely cited as the modern pioneer of "Tantric Sex Magick" and one of the first Western adepts of Tantra. Not only can we now uncover the *Secrets of Western Tantra* or dabble in *Celtic Sex Magic*, but there is even a organization dedicated to the synthesis of Western and Eastern sexual techniques calling itself "NAMASTE" -- the "New Association of Magical, Sexual and Tantric Explorers."cxviii

As such, Crowley was also somewhat ahead of his time also foreshadowed in a very striking way much of the obsession with sexuality and transgression in our own generation at the turn of the millennium. For Crowley is surely no less relevant for our own generation. Perhaps most importantly, he provides some telling insights into the contemporary preoccupation with sexuality, which now saturates society through media, television and advertising. As Angus McLaren "Today's media, while claiming to be shocked by the subversiveness of carnal desires, deluge the public with explicit sexual imagery to sell everything from Calvin Klein jeans to Black and Decker power drills."cxix Thus, as Foucault argues, it may not be the case that we in the modern West have liberated sex in any radical way; but what we *have* done is to intensify our discourse about sex, arguing and fantasizing about it as an endless source of titillation. At the same time, we have also taken sex to the furthest possible extremes -- to extremes of transgression and excess, not resting until we have violated every taboo: "The 20th century will undoubtedly have discovered the related categories of exhaustion, excess, the limit and transgression -- the strange and unyielding form of these irrevocable movements which consume and consummate us."cxx

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Thus, one might well argue that we are now living in a kind of "post-orgy world," after all the great social and sexual revolutions have broken every imaginable taboo. Yet this has left us in a strange "undefined state," in which we are left questioning our very being. As Jean Baudrillard observes, "The orgy is over, liberation is over...After a culture based on prohibition...this is a culture based on the questioning of one's own definition: 'Am I sexed? What sex am I?'...Liberation has left everyone in an undefined state...This is why there's so much love-making."cxxi After all, as Crowley seems to have asked himself in the end, what is there left to do after every forbidden desire has been indulged and every taboo transgressed?

ENDNOTES

i Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, ed. John Symonds (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), 767.

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iii Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman's volume *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) makes no reference to Crowley; Faivre makes very brief reference to Crowley in his *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), 91, 94, 97, 106. Wouter Hanegraaff's, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: SUNY, 1998) makes only brief passing reference to Crowley. Among the few serious treatments of Crowley are Martin Booth, *Aleister Crowley: Selected Poems* (London: Crucible, 1986), Stoddard Martin, *Orthodox Heresy: The Rise of "Magic" as Religion and its Relation to Literature* (Hampshire: MacMillan Press, 1989), Ronald Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), chapter 10; and more recently Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

iv Crowley uses the spelling "Magick" to distinguish his art -- the art of changing nature in accordance with one's Will -- from most vulgar understandings of the term. See *The Law is for All: The Authorized Popular Commentary on Liber AL sub figura CCXX, The Book of the Law* (Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Publications, 1996), 39, and *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Paris: Lecram, 1929).

v On this point, see Hugh B. Urban, "The Extreme Orient: The Construction of 'Tantrism' as a Category in the Orientalist Imagination," *Religion* 29 (1999): 123-146; and Urban, *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy and Power in Colonial Bengali* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

vii Urban, "The Omnipotent Oom: Tantra and its Impact on Modern Western Esotericism," *Esoterica: The Journal of Esoteric Studies* 3 (2001): 218-259.

viii Here I am using the phrase "Victorian era" to refer primarily to the period of Victoria's rule, ending in 1901. However, as Michael Mason and others argue, many of the cultural and moral attitudes that we associate with the Victorian era would persist well into the early 20th century. See Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

ix See Hugh B. Urban, "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism." *History of Religions* 39 (2000): 268-304, and Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming), ch. VII.

x Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*; cf. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longon, 1981); Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*.

xii Crowley, *Confessions*, 75.

xiii xiii Quoted in Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 422.

xiv "The King of Depravity," *John Bull* (March 10, 1923).

xv Leslie Shepard, Introduction to Aleister Crowley, *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* (Hyde Park: University Books, 1970), v.

xvi Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, pp. 4-5. Martin similarly describes Crowley as an expression of the late and post-Victorian Zeitgeist (*Orthodox Heresy*, 188)

xvii Colin Wilson, *The Occult* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 362.

xix Symonds, Introduction to *The Confessions*, p. xxii. See Crowley, *The Law is for All*, 47ff.

xx Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 126.

xxi Shepard, Foreword to *Diary of a Drug Fiend*, i-ii.

xxii Wilson, *The Occult*, p. 373; cf. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 405ff.

xxiii Gerald Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast: the Life, Work and Influence of Aleister Crowley* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1989), 75.

xxiv Symonds, *The Beast 666* (London: Pindar, 1997), 585.

xxv Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 418.

xxvii Quoted in Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, volume I*, 157.

xxviii Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. volume I*, 69.

xxix As Pamela Thurschwell observes in her study of magic and science in the late nineteenth century, "anxieties about the permeability and suggestibility of bodies and minds erupt in crises around sexuality. Sexual and gender panic manifests itself in representative figures such as the New Woman and the dandy, in public scandals such as Oscar Wilde's trials and in the reification of medicalizing, pathologizing and criminalizing discourses around homosexuality. Deep and far-reaching anxieties about the stability of the traditional grounds of gender and sexuality pervade *fin-de-siecle* culture" (*Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 2).

xxx Crowley, *The Book of Lies, which is also falsely called Breaks* (New York: Weiser, 1952), 12. "Sex is the main expression of the Nature of a person; great natures are sexually strong; and the health of any person will depend upon the freedom of that function" (*The Law is for All*, 44).

xxxi "An Amazing Sect," *The Looking Glass* (October 29, 1910).

xxxiii Crowley, *Confessions*, 350. On the "repressive hypothesis" see Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, v.I.

xxxiv Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longon, 1981), 6-7; cf. Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 117. The classic medical-sex manual is Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to Antipathic Sexual Instinct: a Medico-forensic Study* (London: Rebman, 1899 [1886]).

xxxv Robert Wuthnow et al, eds., *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas* (Boston: Routledge, 1993), pp.171-2. "The medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report ...function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power. The pleasure that

comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpitates, brings to light" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, volume I, 45).

xxxvi Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud, Volume I: Education of the Senses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 326-27.

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xxxviii John Maynard, "Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion," *University of Hartford Studies in Literature* 19 (1987): 61.

xxxix "For all that the Victorians were not the prudes...of modern myth, their sexual world was not a place where biology went unrestricted...What helped to make sex a potent force...was the Victorians' ability both to express and to contain sexuality...Those limits were set by the prevailing idea of 'normal sex:' that is, heterosexuality...With growing insistence society...demanded the childbearing marital union" (Patricia Anderson, *When Passion Reigns: Sex and the Victorians* [New York: Basic Books, 1995], 17-18).

xl Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain*, p. 26. See also Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, p. 210; Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 13

xli Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, 9-12.

xlii Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1916), 321-22.

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xliv Crowley, *The Law is for All*, p. 42. "When you have proved that God is merely a name for the sex instinct, it appears to me not far to the perception that the sex instinct is

God" (Crowley, quoted in Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: An Interpretation of Aleister Crowley* [St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1970], 417).

xlvi On the charges of sex magic brought against the Cathars and later the Templars, see Francis King, *Sexuality, Magic and Perversion* (Secacus: Citadel, 1971), 170-71.

xlvi Franklin Rosemont, Foreward to John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth Century American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian and Sex Magician* (Albany: SUNY, 1997), xv. As Deveney observes, "Largely through Randolph's influence the genie had been released from the bottle... A multitude of sexual mysticism flourished" (*Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 252).

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lviii Randolph, *The Mysteries of Eulis*, 337. Randolph lists over 100 uses for sexual magic, which include everything from acquiring money to the secret of domestic happiness. One of the most striking features of Randolph's sexual magic is his insistence that both partners must have an active role and that both must achieve orgasm in order for the magic to be successful: "For the prayer to be effective the paroxysm of both is necessary...[T]he woman's orgasms should coincide with man's emission, for only in this way will the magic be fulfilled" (*Magia Sexualis*, 76-8).

lxix John Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley* (London: Frederick Muller, 1958), 95; cf. Peter R. Koenig, "The O.T.O. Phenomenon," *Theosophical History* 4, no.3 (1992): 92-8, and "Theodor Reuss as Founder of Esoteric Orders." *Theosophical History* 4, nos.6-7 (1993): 187-93. Kellner claims to have been initiated by the Arab fakir, Soliman ben Aifha and the Indian yogis Bhima Sen Pratap and Sri Mahatma Agamya Guru Paramahansa, from whom he learned "the mysteries of yoga and the philosophy of the left hand path which he called sexual magic" (Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, 95). Koenig argues that the O.T.O. was not founded by Kellner but formed after his death under Reuss.

l See for example, Reuss, "Mysteria Maxima Mystica," where he discusses the yogic system of the ten *vayus* or winds and the transformation of sexual energy through yogic practice. There is no evidence that either Reuss or Kellner had serious knowledge of

actual Tantric texts or initiation into the more esoteric Tantric practices (reproduced in Koenig, *Der Kleine Theodor Reuss Reader*).

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liiAccording to a text called "The Mysteries of Eros: Expressly arranged for the Exterior Circle of the H.B. L of L. by T.H . Burgyon," "especially must all sexual relations be carefully guarded and only participated in after due thought...It is this fatal mistake of sex that has ruined thousands of...aspirants for occult initiation" (Godwin et al, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 273).

liiiGodwin et al, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 67.

livQuoted in R. Swinburne Clymer, *The Rosicrucian Fraternity in America: Authentic and Spurious Organizations* (Quakertown: The Rosicrucian Foundation, n.d), 541; this text is also reproduced in Koenig, *Der Kleine Theodor Reuss Reader*.

lv See Koenig, "The O.T.O. Phenomenon" and "Theodor Reuss as Founder of Esoteric Orders."

lviFrancis King, *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), 79-80.

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lviiiCrowley, *The Book of Lies*, 5-6. "Shortly after publication, the O.H.O. (Outer Head of the O.T.O.) came to me....He said that since I was acquainted with the supreme secret of the Order, I must be allowed the IX {degree} and obligated in regard to it. I protested that I knew no such secret. He said 'But you have printed it in the plainest language'. I said that I could not have done so because I did not know it. He went to the bookshelves; taking out a copy of THE BOOK OF LIES, he pointed to a passage in the despised chapter. It instantly flashed upon me. The entire symbolism not only of Free Masonry but of many other traditions blazed upon my spiritual vision. From that moment

the O.T.O. assumed its proper importance in my mind. I understood that I held in my hands the key to the future progress of humanity...." (ibid.).

lixCrowley, *The Confessions*, 767. See also Peter R. Koenig, "Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O." Available on-line at <http://www.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/spermo.htm>. Viewed December, 18, 2002.

lx Koenig, "Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O." See also Crowley, *Magick: Liber ABA, Book Four Parts I-IV* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1997). Two of the most important texts for the IX degree rituals are *Liber Agape* and *De Arte Magicka*, republished as *Liber Agape, De Arte Magica* (Kadath Press 1986), and the magical diaries based on his sexual operations: John Symonds and Kenneth Grant, eds. *The Magical Record of the Beast 666: The Diaries of Aleister Crowley* (London: Durckworth, 1972).

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lxiiCrowley, *The Book of Lies*, 132.

lxiiiQuoted in Grant, *The Magical Revival*, 36-7.

lxiv On this question, see Urban, *Tantra*, chapter I. Andre Padoux, for example, has argued that "Tantrism" is largely the creation of 19th century Orientalist authors who lumped a wide array of diverse traditions under this singular abstract "ism." See Padoux, "Tantrism: An Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1986), v.14.

lxvDouglas Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Srividya Sakta Tantrism in South India* (Albany: SUNY 1992), xix. See Urban, *Tantra*, chapter I. As David Gordon White suggests, Tantra may be defined as "that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the

human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways" (*Tantra in Practice* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000], 9).

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Ixvii Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, Teun Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 32. On this point, see Hugh B. Urban, "The Conservative Character of Tantra: Secrecy, Sacrifice and This-Worldly Power in Bengali Sakta Tantra," *The International Journal of Tantric Studies* 6, no.1 (2002), on line at: <http://www.asiatica.org/ijts/>; and Douglas Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Sakta Tantra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 70.

Ixviii Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Hinduism* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1894), 116, 130. On Orientalist views of Tantra, see also Urban, "The Extreme Orient," 123-46.

Ixix Sellon, *The New Epicurean or the Delights of Sex Facetiously and Philosophically Considered in Graphic Letters Addressed to Young Ladies of Quality* (London: J.C. Houten, 1870).

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Ixxi See Burton, trans. *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* (London: Kama Shastra Society, 1883); F.F. Arbuthnot and Richard Francis Burton, trans. *Ananga ranga: stage of the bodiless one; The Hindu art of love, by Kalayana Malla* (New York: Medical Press of New York, 1964).

Ixxii Grant, *The Magical Revival*, 126.

Ixxiii Crowley, *Eight Lectures on Yoga* (New Falcon Publications, 1992). He claimed to have achieved the highest yogic state of *samadhi* while meditating in Ceylon in 1901. See his *Writings of Truth*, republished in "The Temple of Solomon the King," *Equinox* I, 4 (London, 1910): 166-7.

lxxiv Crowley, quoted in Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle*, 63

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lxxvi *De Arte Magicka*, chapter XVI.

lxxvii On sexual ritual and transgression in Tantra, see Urban "The Path of Power: Impurity, Kingship and Sacrifice in Assamese Tantra," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no.4 (2001): 597-637. On Crowley's possible Tantric influences, see Urban, "The Omnipotent Oom;" Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 92, 127, 141, 188. As Symonds suggests, "His greatest merit was to make the bridge between Tantrism and the Western esoteric tradition and thus bring together Western and Eastern magical techniques" (Introduction to *The Confessions*, xxv).

lxxviii Crowley, "The Temple of Solomon the King," in *Equinox I* (4) (London, 1910): 161. Crowley's main texts on sex magic include: *Of the Nature of the Gods*; *Liber Agape – the Book of the Unveiling of the Sangraal de Arte Magica*; and *Of the Homunculus*, many of which are included in Francis King, ed. , *The Secret Rituals of the O.T.O.* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1973).

lxxx Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, ed. Boris De Zirkoff (Madras: Theosophical Pub. House, 1950-73), v.11, p.29; cf. *Collected Writings*, v.2, 238.

lxxxi Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 141. Sutin quotes the following as evidence for this: "But for private work the Beast is Hadit, the Scarlet Woman Nuit, and she is ever above him. ..Let him ever look to her! Amen" (Gerald Yorke, "Notes from G.Y. Regarding Book of the Law," O.T.O. Archives).

lxxxii Elizabeth Sharpe, *The Secrets of the Kaula Circle* (London: Luzac & Co., 1936), 48-9.

lxxxiii See Nik Douglas, *Spiritual Sex: From the Ice Age to the New Millennium* (New York: Pocket Books, 1997), 208.

lxxxv See Arthur Avalon, trans. *Tantra of the Great Liberation: Mahanirvana Tantra* (London: Luzac & Co., 1913); Avalon, ed. *Principles of Tantra: the Tantratattva of Shriyukta Shiva Chandra Vidyarnava Bhattacharyya Mahodaya* (London: Luzac & Co., 1914-16); Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta: Essays and Addresses on the Shakta Tantrashastra* (London : Luzac & Co., 1918).

lxxxvi Grant, *The Magical Revival*, 82-3. One of the anonymous readers for this article very graciously gave me the original source for this quotation, which is contained in a notebook in the Yorke Collection, Warburg Institute. The press-mark is YC I, 20(b). The date is roughly June 1916.

lxxxvii Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 243-44.

lxxxviii Krishananda Agamavagisha, *Brhat-Tantrasara*, ed. Rasikamohana Cattopadhyaya (Calcutta: Navabharata Publishers, 1996), 703. "As he releases his semen, he should say the great *mantra*, "Drunken, and clinging to the two hands of the Light and the Sky, *Shruca!* I make the offering of *dharma* and *adharm*a into the blazing fire of the Self, *svaham!*"...With the sacrificial elements, the semen, unbroken grains of rice, perfume, flowers, O Deveshi, he should worship the Goddess in the vagina...With incense, lamps and various food offerings, the Kula adept should honor her in various ways, and then he should [consume] the remnants [*ucchishta*] himself" (ibid.).

xc See David Gordon White, "Tantric Sects and Tantric Sex: The Flow of Secret Tantric Gnosis," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, edited by Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 1999), and Urban, "The Conservative Character of Tantra."

xcii Feuerstein, *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 243. As N.N. Bhattacharyya observes, "Most modern writers... insist solely on its sexual elements, minimal though they are compared to the vastness of the subject, and purport to popularize certain modern ideas pertaining to sex problems in the name of Tantra" (*History of the Tantric Religion: A Historical, Ritualistic and Philosophical Study* [Delhi: Manohar, 1982], v).

xciii A good example of this contemporary interpretation of Tantra is Margo Anand, *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy: The Path of Sacred Sexuality for Western Lovers* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989): "Because the science of Tantra was developed thousands of year ago...many of the techniques are not relevant to the needs of the contemporary Western lover. .. So while I have retained the Tantric goal of sexual ecstasy, I've developed new approaches to make this experience accessible to people today " (7).

xciv Grant, *The Magical Revival*, 127.

xcv Letter to Kenneth Grant, Spring Equinox, 1946; cited in Grant, *Remembering Aleister Crowley* (London: Skoon Publishing, 1991).

xcvi Grant, *Remembering Aleister Crowley*, 49.

xcvii Even very fine historians of modern witchcraft such as Ronald Hutton accept the belief that Crowley was indebted to Tantra: "Crowley had in turn drawn upon oriental traditions of tantra..." (*Triumph of the Moon*, 231).

xcviii Crowley, *Diary of a Drug Fiend*, 6.

c Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 64, 48. For Bataille's views on transgression, see also *The Accursed Share*, volume 2, 89-111; *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), and *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 26-75.

ci Bataille, *Erotism*, 11, 21-22.

cii Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 129. "The word of Sin is Restriction" (*The Law is For All*, 41).

ciii "Message from Master Thirion (Aleister Crowley), *Constitution of the Ancient Order of Oriental Templars (O.T.O)* (1917), in R. Swinburne Clymer, *The Rosicrucian Fraternity in America: Authentic and Spurious Organizations* (Quakertown: The Rosicrucian Foundation, n.d), v.II, 600.

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cv Crowley, *The World's Tragedy* (Private edition of 1910), xxvii. One of Crowley's most intense periods of experimentation in sex magic began in 1914, during his "Paris Workings," conducted with the help of his lover, Victor Neuberg, Crowley engaged in a variety of sexual rites intended to achieve both the primary goal of "invoking the gods Jupiter and Mercury and the secondary one of getting these gods to supply Crowley and Neuberg with money." In the course of these operations, Crowley became possessed by an evil spirit posing as the god Mercury. This being informed them that the ultimate act of magic would require the "rape, ritual murder and dissection of the body of a young girl. The resulting chunks of flesh were to be offered as sacrifice of the gods." However, even the Beast 666 recoiled from this act (King, *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley*, 85).

cvi On the consumption of the "elixir" see especially *De Arte Magicka*, chapters XIV-XVI, and his *Rex de Arte Regia*, which is a written record of his experimentation with sexual magic. Many entries discuss preparation of the "elixir", the commingled male and female fluids integral to the O.T.O. IX degree ritual: *The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, 45ff.

cvii Crowley, 1918 Diary (OTO Archives), cited in Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 265.

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cix *The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, 235.

cx Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 72, 25, 26. "The most favourable death is that occurring during the orgasm, and is called Mors Justi" (*De Arte Magicka*, Chapter XV).

cxii Evola, *The Metaphysics of Sex* (New York: Inner Traditions, 1983), 264, 266.

cxiii Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 40, 41, 65.

cxiiii Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 63.

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cxv "Tantrism...does not intend to be revolutionary in the sense of establishing a new structure of social egalitarianism...It opens its doors only to a few who...seek to empower themselves" (Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Sakta Tantra* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990], p.70); cf. Urban, "The Conservative Character of Tantra."

cxvi Crowley, quoted in Suster, *The Legacy if the Beast*, 44.

cxvii Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (New York: Verso, 1993), 3.

cxviii Donald Michael Kraig, *Modern Sex Magick; Secrets of Erotic Spirituality* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998) xvii.

cxix McLaren, *Twentieth Century Sexuality: A History* (London: Blackwell 1999), 1.

cxx Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 69.

cxxi Baudrillard, *America* (New York: Verso, 1988), 46.