

Sex Magic as Sacramental Sexology: Aleister Crowley's Queer Masculinity*

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Abstract

A number of scholars have noted the distinctively modern form taken by late-nineteenth-century sexual magic. This paper demonstrates the ways that Aleister Crowley's (1875–1947) ritual sexual magic reworked contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality and engaged with contemporary literature on religion and sexuality, making use of new sexological understandings of the interchangeability of the religious and sexual impulses to develop a new form of queer masculine spiritual authority. Works like *White Stains* (1898) and *The Scented Garden* (1910) provide striking illustrations of Crowley's serio-parodic engagement with both sexology and theology. That engagement produced a carnivalesque deflation of both scientific and spiritual authority and cleared a space for Crowley's claims about the magical and sacramental qualities of sex. This sacramentality was closely linked to what Crowley described as “justification by sin,” according to which the whole body—not just the sexual body but the defecating, urinating, sweating body—participated in this sexuo-spiritual life. This form of sexual magic both depended on and destabilized the gender binary and provided a basis for a new kind of queer masculine spiritual authority in which the gendered and sexual body had a key role even as the modern sexual and gender regime was itself called into question.

Keywords: Masculinity; sexuality; gender; religion; Magick

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Introduction

Late-nineteenth-century sexual magic is often characterized as a distinctively modern phenomenon. As Hugh B. Urban puts it, “The literature on sexual magic that emerged from the mid-nineteenth century onward is *distinctly, even intensely* ‘modern’ in form, and it expresses in an unusually acute way some of the most important themes that we typically associate with ‘modernity’ in the West.”¹ Urban also notes in passing that it is not a coincidence that “the same period that saw the proliferation of medical manuals on deviant sexuality, such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, also saw the proliferation of a growing body of occult works on ‘affectional alchemy’ and the mysteries of sexual intercourse as a profound source of spiritual and magical power.”² The case of Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) provides an opportunity to develop that claim in more precise detail, demonstrating the ways that ritual sexual magic engaged with and reworked modern understandings of both gender and sexuality. In Crowley’s “sacramental sexology,” the spiritual and physical were intimately linked, making specifically “modern” forms of gender and sexuality available for spiritual work. At the same time, these linkages in turn destabilized the very basis of their own possibility; Crowley’s contributions to contemporary debates about spiritual authority, masculinity, and sexuality were therefore not only crucially enabled by but also challenged this modern context.

Three elements of this gendered and sexual modernity are particularly relevant here: an increasing emphasis on the gender binary, the proliferation of new taxonomies of sexuality which by the 1890s tended to reify dimorphic understandings of sexual identity as “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” and a new emphasis on the interchangeability of the sexual and religious impulses. These distinct but connected discursive shifts created a kind of contextual triangle within which the specifically modern sexual vocabulary of the *fin de siècle*

1. Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 5. Alex Owen characterizes it as “Enchantment à la mode.” Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 1–16.

2. Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 1.

occult took shape. The emergence over the course of the nineteenth century of the modern gender binary is well known.³ In the latter half of that century, Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) theories of "sexual selection" underscored its biological basis; works like Patrick Geddes' (1854-1932) and J. Arthur Thomson's (1861-1933) *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) inscribed the binary at the cellular level.⁴ Alongside those developments in the biological sciences was the invention and proliferation of new sexual types and typologies, new sexual "identities" given biological, physiological, and psychological underpinnings. While the taxonomies and typologies employed varied widely, most authors agreed that it was possible to describe and classify sexual types: most famously we have the emergence of the "homosexual" (first appearing in Hungarian in 1869, and popularized in English by the sexologist H. Havelock Ellis [1859-1939] in the 1890s)⁵ and of the "heterosexual," which emerged slightly later.⁶

What linked these ideas about sex and gender to ideas about religion (and ultimately to new forms of *fin de siècle* occultism) was the notion that there was a close relationship between the domains of religion and sexuality. In 1902 the American psychologist of religion, William James (1842-1910), characterized this as one of the "many ideas that float in the air of one's time." James argued, in contrast, that "few conceptions are less instructive than this re-interpretation of religion as perverted sexuality" but his was a minority voice; many sexologists and psychologists took the view that supposedly "spiritual" experience was itself a form of sexual mania.⁷ In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, for example, which was first translated into English in the 1890s, the German

3. For influential early studies, see (in the history of science and medicine) Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet," and Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology" (both of which appeared in a special issue of *Representations* in 1986) and (in social and cultural history) Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*. Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* was an influential elaboration of the argument in the history of anatomy and physiology.

4. See, for example, Russett, *Sexual Science*, 78-79, 89-90.

5. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 3.

6. See Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*.

7. James, *Varieties*, 28n1.

sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902) suggested that the spiritual and the erotic were interchangeable: “Religious and sexual hyperaesthesia at the zenith of development show the same volume of intensity and the same quality of excitement, and may therefore, under given circumstances, interchange.”⁸ In 1899, Havelock Ellis published the first edition of his study of “auto-erotism” (or masturbation), in which he included an exploration of “The Auto-Erotic Factor in Religion.” Ellis endorsed Krafft-Ebing’s findings, and cited countless more recent studies which had reached similar conclusions:

There is certainly . . . good reason to think that the action and interaction between the spheres of sexual and religious emotion are very intimate. The obscure promptings of the organism at puberty frequently assume on the psychic side a wholly religious character; the activity of the religious emotions sometimes tends to pass over into the sexual region; the suppression of the sexual emotions often furnishes a powerful reservoir of energy to the religious emotions; occasionally the suppressed sexual emotions break through all obstacles.⁹

Throughout Ellis’s work—and the work of other early sexologists—numerous case studies illustrated this “intimacy” of sexual and religious complexes.

These were the building blocks out of which Aleister Crowley created his interventions into the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century contest between competing models of spiritual and scientific masculine authority.¹⁰ In his recent review of the literature on the history of masculinity—“the qualities associated with being a man”—Ben Griffin asks, “How then are we to study historically the dynamics of power between competing models of masculinity in any given society?” Griffin’s answer is that “*historians of masculinity ought to direct their attentions towards the historically specific opportunities, mechanisms or techniques that enabled individuals to identify themselves with those normative models.*” Griffin goes on to ask “what historically

8. von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 6.

9. Ellis, “Appendix C: The Auto-Erotic Factor in Religion,” 324–25.

10. See Frank M. Turner’s discussion of the “shift of authority and prestige . . . from one part of the intellectual nation to another” that underpinned “the Victorian conflict between religious and scientific spokesmen” (as opposed to between “religion” and “science”). Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, 175.

specific solutions were available to men that allowed them to close the gap between the cultural ideal and the practice of masculinity?”¹¹ In Crowley’s case we can see a complex process in which he simultaneously opened and closed that gap, skewering the norms of sexually respectable masculine authority even as he created his own idiosyncratic forms of spiritual authority and power.

Crowley’s spiritual authority was also “queer” in Lee Edelman’s sense, which emphasizes that “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.”¹² Crowley not only refused the settled sexual identities taxonomized by sexologists; he also in many ways refused even the category of “sexuality” itself. Crowley’s sexual magic was also, therefore, “culturally queer” in the sense that Frederick Roden characterized Victorian Roman and Anglo-Catholicism: “queers as cultural dissidents, deviant or non-standard in some way.”¹³

Aleister Crowley: Background and Biography

Aleister Crowley was born in 1875 into a wealthy British family. The family belonged to the Exclusive Brethren wing of the Plymouth Brethren, a conservative evangelical movement claiming to restore Christianity to the practices of the early church. As Henrik Bogdan notes, the Brethren’s premillennial dispensationalist theology understood history as a series of “dispensations” in which God made new covenants with his people, a process that would end with the return of Christ and his 1000-year reign on earth. “For Crowley,” Bogdan argues, “there was little doubt that the comfortable world into which he was born was destined to be overthrown by a messiah.”¹⁴ Crowley was a “charismatic prophet of a new dispensation for humankind that proclaimed the absolute liberty of the individual to self-actualize

11. Griffin, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 378, 388.

12. I am indebted here to Laura Doan’s discussion of Edelman. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004), 17, cited in Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices. History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience of Modern War* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), Kindle.

13. Roden, *Same-Sex*, 2.

14. Bogdan, “Aleister Crowley: A Prophet for the Modern Age,” 294.

without regard for the moral codes and religious strictures of prior ages.” Sex was central to Crowley’s magic, which drew on an eclectic collection of teachings and practices from both western magical traditions and South Asian yogic disciplines.¹⁵

Crowley was introduced to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1898, and initiated as *Frater Perdurabo* [I will endure] in the Neophyte grade of the Order on 18 November that year.¹⁶ In January 1900, MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918)—against the wishes of the London leadership—initiated Crowley into its Second Order in January 1900. Crowley went on to break with both the Golden Dawn and MacGregor Mathers, and, after some time spent exploring yoga and Buddhism in India and Burma, later founded his own Magical Order, the A.:A.:, with its journal *The Equinox*.¹⁷ In 1912 he was initiated into and eventually became the Outer Head of the O.T.O., the *Ordo Templi Orientis* or Order of Oriental Templars, an unorthodox form of freemasonry which admitted both men and women, and which had developed a kind of synthesis of western sexual magic and Tantric-influenced practices.¹⁸ In 1904, however, he had experienced a critical revelation, which ultimately transformed both his teaching and his magical work. While in Cairo in 1904, he received a text which he described as “literally inspired” and delivered by Aiwass, “a messenger of the Lord of the Universe”: *The Book of the Lam*. In his *Confessions*, Crowley described this

15. Bogdan and Starr, “Introduction” to *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, 3.

16. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 191.

17. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 19; Bogdan, “Aleister Crowley: A Prophet for the Modern Age,” 295. Greer notes that Florence Farr was chief among those opposed to Crowley, particularly, she suggests, because of disapproval of his sexual behaviour. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 232. As Richard Kaczynski notes, Crowley’s early ritual work was heavily influenced by the Golden Dawn, but over time he experimented with an increasingly looser and less structured approach. Kaczynski, “Continuing Knowledge,” 147–48.

18. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 217–18; Bogdan, “Challenging the Morals,” 215; Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 16; Kaczynski, “Continuing Knowledge,” 147–48. Scholars disagree over the precise relationship between Tantra and the O.T.O.’s (or Crowley’s) use of it. According to Hugh Urban, “these Western appropriations of Tantra are not so much the product of any actual Indian tradition as they are reflections of the Orientalist fantasies and sexual obsessions of modern Western society itself” (Urban, “The Yoga of Sex,” 405); Gordon Djurdjevic argues that Urban overstates the case here, and (in his discussion of Crowley in particular) emphasizes Crowley’s familiarity with important Tantric texts and practices (115–17).

as the “climax” of his autobiography; it claimed, he said, “to answer all possible religious problems” and taught “the emancipation of mankind from all limitations whatever.”¹⁹ This was the “Advent of the Aeon of Horus,” which was to supersede the previous Aeons—of Isis and Osiris, each lasting roughly two thousand years—and which would itself eventually be superseded by the “Aeon of Maat” or Justice.²⁰ This was also the revelation of a new religion, Thelema (Greek for “will”), the central tenet of which was encapsulated in the injunction “Do what thou wilt.” In 1920 Crowley founded the Abbey of Thelema in Cefalù, Sicily, where he lived and worked until he was expelled by Mussolini in 1923.²¹

Masculinity and the Reimagining of Spiritual Authority

In the domain of religion, the shifts described above—the consolidation of the gender binary and of a dimorphic understanding of sexuality, and the supposed interchangeability of religious and sexual impulses—tended to render problematic the relationships between masculinity, spiritual authority, and the sexual self.²² As Callum Brown has reminded us, over the course of the nineteenth century in Britain, “piety was conceived as an overwhelmingly feminine trait.”²³ While it is important not to overstate the case, or to take Victorian formulations at face value, it remains clear that many religious institutions were seen as dominated by women and preoccupied with women’s concerns, and that there

19. Crowley, *Confessions*, 393, 396–98.

20. As Henrik Bogdan notes the idea of “aeons” was indebted both to James Frazer’s theory of religion evolution and to the dispensationalist theology of John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. Bogdan, “Envisioning the Birth of a New Aeon,” 89–92.

21. Bogdan, “Aleister Crowley: A Prophet for the Modern Age,” 295–96. As Bogdan explains, this “seemingly antinomian dictum” identified the “True Will” with the higher self or “Holy Guardian Angel.”

22. Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan caution against the tendency to identify “recurrent ‘moments of crisis’ as an insufficiently precise schema to capture the richness of the historical landscape of religious and social change in twentieth-century Britain.” My emphasis here is not on the late nineteenth/ early twentieth century as a moment of crisis, but as part of an ongoing series of negotiations around these issues. Delap and Morgan, “Introduction,” 13.

23. Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 9.

was widespread concern that religious leaders “fail[ed] to exude an identifiable and attractive form of masculinity.”²⁴ Particularly but not exclusively within the Anglo-Catholic tradition, priests were sometimes seen as effeminate and sexually suspect;²⁵ sexologists like Havelock Ellis provided what some saw as lurid evidence that sexual “inverts” were particularly “drawn to religion.”²⁶ Outside of Christianity we find similar patterns: within the Theosophical Society, for example, Indian Theosophists like Mohini Chatterji occupied “multiple and contradictory positions . . . as a salvific Christ-like figure, a sexualized archetype of Indian beauty to both men and women, and an embodied confirmation of ‘Oriental’ religion.”²⁷ Esoteric authority, in this case, was also sexualized and exoticized in complicated ways. In general, while men remained institutionally powerful, their relationship with an increasingly feminized religiosity could call their masculinity into question.

Earlier versions of mid-nineteenth-century “muscular Christianity” were still available to those who wanted to update it for the twentieth century, and many Christian men—clerical and lay—took up that task.²⁸ During the interwar years, Hindu Indians like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Shri Purohit Swami and Swami Yogananda effectively masculinized the image of Hinduism by emphasizing their “citizenship, charismatic presence and authority” and “control over the philosophy, knowledge and dissemination of their religion and culture.”²⁹ Buddhists in the same period emphasized the scientific and rational discourse of self-help,

24. See, for example, Delap, “Be Strong and Play the Man,” and Morgan, “Iron Strength and Infinite Tenderness,” The quote is from Morgan, 178.

25. See Hilliard, “Unenglish and Unmanly.” For a more recent study of the “stained glass closet,” see Jones, *Sexual Politics in the Church of England*, esp. 162–82.

26. Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love*, 15.

27. Judge, “Dusky Countenances,” 267. On the association of occultism with sexual deviance more broadly, see Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, esp. chap. 4, “‘Buggery and Humbugger’: Sex, Magic, and Occult Authority,” 94–118.

28. Delap, “Be Strong and Play the Man” and Morgan, “Iron Strength and Infinite Tenderness,” both provide examples of this process.

29. Mukherjee, “The Emergence of a British Hindu Identity between 1936 and 1937,” 163–64.

“offer[ing] British men alternative sources of religiosity and identity.”³⁰ Crowley’s approach was extreme, and more deliberately transgressive than that of many of his contemporaries, but it was worked up out of similar materials and in the same context, deploying (as well as undermining) peculiarly modern understandings of masculinity, sexuality, and religion in the service of his own spiritual authority.

Against that backdrop, the priapic clerics who appear in Crowley’s early work can be seen as efforts variously to invert, transvalue, or transgress contemporary expectations around masculinity, sexuality, and spiritual authority. Crowley’s 1904 *Snowdrops from a Curate’s Garden*, for example, set up a deliberate juxtaposition between the (apparently) anodyne and inoffensive clerical pastoralism of the title and the obscene, violent, and scatological stories and poems within. The precocious and excessive sexuality of the “Archbishop” in “The Nameless Novel” (the first piece in the collection) repeatedly brought the sexual and the religious together in ways that were both fantastical and grotesque, deliberately calculated to disgust and outrage.³¹ In the preamble to the verse drama *The World’s Tragedy* (1910), Crowley noted that “all I wish to do is to justify my agreement with Shelley and Nietzsche in defining Christianity as the religious expression of the slave-spirit in man.” The drama itself was a parodic restaging of the Christian story in which Pan ultimately triumphs, ending Christianity’s “age of sordid strife” and bringing “the aeon of love and life,” to be presided over by Crowley himself as a new and apparently more virile kind of spiritual authority.³²

Crowley’s attitude to Christianity was self-consciously paradoxical.³³ As a young man he initially rejected, not the theology of the Brethren, but only the

30. Falby, “Buddhist Psychologies and Masculinity in Early Twentieth-Century Britain,” 46.

31. [Crowley], *Snowdrops from a Curate’s Garden*. To give only one example, the journalist taking down the Archbishop’s story notes that when he left the Archbishop “made the sign of the Cross, spat in my left eye and spunked in my right” (77). The book bears the imprint of “Cosmopoli” and a false date of 1881. Publication information taken from https://www.100thmonkeypress.com/biblio/acrowley/books/snowdrops_1903/snowdrops_1903.htm.

32. Crowley, *The World’s Tragedy*, xxix–xxx, 120.

33. For an excellent overview of Crowley’s attitude to Christianity and its relationship to other (and often conflicting) approaches to “God” in Crowley’s work, see Bogdan, “Deus est Homo,” 13–42.

value placed on it: as he put it in his *Confessions*, “My falling away from grace was not occasioned by any intellectual qualms; I accepted the theology of the Plymouth Brethren. In fact, I could hardly conceive of the existence of people who might doubt it. I simply went over to Satan’s side; and to this hour I cannot tell why.”³⁴ His delivery from the “nightmare world of Christianity” with its “obsession of sin” came via the discovery of a “sane, clean, jolly world” of sexual freedom. But this was not a conversion to sexual secularism. Crowley’s “obsession of sin” was a preoccupation with ensuring (not avoiding) his own damnation; he was delivered into that “sane, clean, jolly world” not by giving up the idea of damnation but by accepting a world “full of delightful damned souls” who were also “normal, healthy human being[s].”³⁵ “Justification by sin” replaced justification by faith; “degradation” and “damnation” were closely linked but while sex was a “sin” the sin was “love,” which was then repositioned as a challenge to rather than an emblem of Christianity:

My sexual life was very intense. My relations with women were entirely satisfactory. They gave me the maximum of bodily enjoyment and at the same time symbolized my theological notions of sin. Love was a challenge to Christianity. It was a degradation and a damnation. Swinburne had taught me the doctrine of justification by sin. Every woman that I met enabled me to affirm magically that I had defied the tyranny of the Plymouth Brethren and the Evangelicals.³⁶

The deliberate imbrication of Christian vices with sinful virtues was not a simple reversal or rejection of Christianity but a complicated dialogue with it, in which sexual excess displaced sexual restraint as the marker of masculine spiritual authority.

Crowley’s Thelema was also in a complicated dialogue with the whole range of scientific stances on religion, out of which he claimed to have produced a

34. Crowley, *Confessions*, 66-67.

35. *Ibid.*, 75.

36. *Ibid.*, 142. This passage comes in the context of his account of his “intimate friendship” with Herbert Charles James Pollitt, and women functioned here as simultaneously a source of sexual relief and the objects of both contempt and desire. On this use of “magical” see below for a discussion that links Crowley’s definition of “Magick” to his use of the language of “sacraments.”

new, more modern and rational, and more highly evolved spirituality, one which incorporated and transcended what he characterized as the earlier feminine (the “worship of the Mother”) and masculine (the “worship of the Father”) phases of religion.³⁷ His study of yoga and of mystical states led him to conclude (at least in the earlier phases of his work) that mysticism was a “physiological phenomenon.” He summarized his approach in his *Confessions*: “I have thus been able to simplify the process of spiritual development by eliminating all dogmatic accretions. To get into a trance is of the same order of phenomena as to get drunk. It does not depend on creed.”³⁸ Egil Asprem argues that “according to Crowley, Thelema joins the spontaneity of nature worship with the metaphysical depth of the great monotheistic religions” and therefore achieves greater psychological complexity and sophistication than any of the others.³⁹ Crowley’s evolutionary framework is reflected in his account of the “historical basis of *The Book of the Law*”: “evolution (within human memory) shows three great steps: 1. the worship of the Mother, when the universe was conceived as simple nourishment drawn directly from her; 2. the worship of the Father, when the universe was imagined as catastrophic; 3. the worship of the Child, in which we come to perceive events as a continual growth partaking in its elements of both of these methods.”⁴⁰ The Aeon of Horus—“the worship of the Child”—contained within itself both of the earlier phases. Reconciling all religions with each other and even the most

37. *Ibid.*, 399. See below for a fuller discussion.

38. *Ibid.*, 240. Marco Pasi stresses the links between Crowley’s interest in new psychological theories and his experimentation with psychoactive drugs. Pasi quotes a long passage from Crowley’s *Confessions* in which he recounts his conversation with the psychiatrist Henry Maudsley on board ship from Colombo to Egypt during his honeymoon: “We already know that certain spiritual or mental conditions can be induced by acting on physico- and chemico-physiological conditions.” Pasi notes both Crowley’s familiarity with these psychological theories of religion and his sympathy (at that stage of his career) with them. Pasi, “Varieties of Magical Experience,” 138–40. The passage from Crowley is *Confessions*, 386. Pasi’s overall argument is that Crowley moves away from these more materialist and psychological positions over the course of his career. See 161.

39. Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*, 517. Asprem relies here on Marco Pasi, “Varieties of Magical Experience,” 131.

40. Crowley, *Confessions*, 399.

mystical religions with scientific materialism, Crowley concluded that “all roads lead to Rome.” By pursuing “all possible Ways to Wisdom” the aspirant “insures against the obsession that the goat-track of his own success is the One Highway for all men, and thus he discounts the disappointment of discovering that he is not the Utter, the Unique, when it becomes plain that Magick, mysticism, and mathematics are triplets, and that the Himalayan Brotherhood is to be found in Brixton.”⁴¹ Crowley not only emphasized the fundamental unity of all religions but did so within a framework that allowed him to claim both the spiritual power of the feminine/ the Mother and the spiritual authority of the masculine/ the Father and to synthesize both in his own spiritual persona (presiding over the “aeon of the Child”).

Crowley, Masculinity, and Scientific Authority

Crowley also entered into a complex dialogue with a range of psychological and sexological claims, establishing a persona for himself as a rational “man of science” via that dialogue. As Heather Ellis has argued, “the [scientific] discourse shapers—the, presumably heterosexual, white, upper-class male scientists—fashioned their own identities through the languages and practices of science.”⁴² Ellis’ account reveals the masculinity of the Victorian “man of science” to be much more ambivalent and ambiguous than earlier accounts have suggested, and suggests that scientists only achieved “secure masculine status” in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴³ Crowley exploited these instabilities in order both to deflate scientific versions of masculinity and to make his own claims to the role of the “man of science,” emphasizing his (masculine) rationality, self-discipline, and scholarly rigour.

41. *Ibid.*, 232. The spelling of “Magick” with a capital “M” and a “k” had a specific magical (and sexual) meaning for Crowley and referred specifically to the system taught within the A.:A.:. My thanks to the comments from the anonymous reviewer for *Correspondences* on this point.

42. Heather Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain*, 1.

43. Heather Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain*, 6–12.

As Egil Asprem notes, Crowley made repeated claims for the scientific nature of his method and the experimental character of his approach, which emphasized the replicability of his experiments.⁴⁴ Equally important were his multiple engagements with the scientific literature on sexuality, through which he established his own (parodic) masculine scientific persona. James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* is an important sub-text here, and Crowley exploited the linkages that Frazer made between the magical and scientific understandings of the universe.⁴⁵ In his exchanges with Theodore Schroeder—freethinker, psychoanalyst, and theorist of the “erotogenesis” of religion—we can trace the complicated overlaps and exchanges between the two domains, as what served for Schroeder as evidence for the dismissal of religion on the basis of its sexual origins served for Crowley as evidence for the reality of magical power.⁴⁶ Crowley claimed to have a “thorough instinctive understanding of the theory of psychoanalysis,” and it was “to this fact I attribute my extraordinary success in all my spiritual undertakings.”⁴⁷ He drew strategically on sexological and psychoanalytic claims, acknowledging their usefulness insofar as they confirmed and supported his own claims. His own nature, for example, which he presented as a blend of male and female, made sense “only in the light of Weininger and Freud”: “That is,” he added in a footnote, “for those not initiated into the Magical Tradition and the Holy Cabbala—the Children’[s] table from which Freud and Weininger

44. Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*, 518–19. See for example the parallels Asprem draws between Crowley’s “Scientific Illuminism” and the ways that academic psychology approaches the problem of introspection (522).

45. See Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 61. Pasi notes that Frazer was teaching at Trinity College, Cambridge while Crowley was a student there, but there appears to be no evidence that the two met. See 182n229.

46. “Crowley tried to entice Schroeder into purchasing a rare copy of his *Scented Garden*, while Schroeder introduced Crowley to his book on sexual mystic Ida Craddock. . . . Schroeder was also interested in the OTO’s upper-degree papers, which Crowley was unwilling to release unless Schroeder affiliated to the VII° and took the appropriate oaths of secrecy.” Kaczynski, “Continuing Knowledge,” 156. On Schroeder see Rabban, *Free Speech in its Forgotten Years*, 48–55.

47. Crowley, *Confessions*, 147.

ate of a few crumbs that fell.”⁴⁸ Weininger and Freud were able to see only in part what the occultist knew in whole (see below for further discussion of Crowley’s blending of masculine and feminine).

White Stains (1898) provided an early and striking illustration of Crowley’s serio-parodic engagement with sexology, one that simultaneously punctured the authority of scientific men like Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, while claiming both spiritual and scientific authority for himself. According to his *Confessions*, *White Stains* was a collection of poems that gave an account of a “poet who went wrong, who began with normal and innocent enthusiasms, and gradually developed various vices. He ends by being stricken with disease and madness, culminating in murder.” Crowley insisted, ironically, that “the conclusions of the book might therefore be approved in any Sunday School, and its metaphysics is orthodox from the point of view of the theologian.” Crowley described the text as a direct response to his reading of von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and argued that what Krafft-Ebing characterised as diseased “sexual aberrations” were “merely magical affirmations of perfectly intelligible points of view.”⁴⁹ The text simultaneously embraces, inverts, and upends racist and anti-Semitic tropes in the service of an erotic vision that was both scatological and blasphemous, as in this passage from “Go Into the Highways and Hedges, and Compel Them to Come In,” which took as its text the parable of the banquet from Luke’s gospel: “Let my fond lips but drink thy golden wine,/ My bright-eyed Arab, only let me eat/ The rich brown globes of sacramental meat/ Steaming and firm, hot from their home divine.”⁵⁰ Where the original parable emphasized the duty to accept God’s invitation to the heavenly banquet, Crowley’s homo-erotic and exoticized reworking celebrated uro- and coprophagia, turning the imagery of the banquet to very different ends.

48. *Ibid.*, 45. See also his claim in “An Improvement on Psycho-Analysis,” 137 (from *Vanity Fair* in 1916) that Jungian psychology “has paved the way for a revival of the old magical idea of the will as the dynamic aspect of the self.” For further discussion of Crowley’s relationship to psychoanalysis, see Owen, “Sorcerer and His Apprentice,” 33.

49. Crowley, *Confessions*, 139.

50. [Crowley], *White Stains*, 84. See below for a fuller discussion of the use of sacramental imagery.

The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz (1910) was an even more complex text (and one which drew on the tropes of imperial⁵¹ as well as scientific and clerical masculinity). It claimed on the title page to have been “Translated from a Rare Indian MS. by the Late Major Luty and Another.” The text is a satire—the “Bagh-i-muattar” (“The Scented Garden”)—by a fictional seventeenth-century Persian satirist (Abdullah el Haji), whose poems and prose are presented as though by an anonymous editor working from a manuscript provided to him by a “Major” who is in turn given a pseudonym. “Luty’s” Introduction ranges from ethnographic travelogue to the philosophy and physiology of mysticism to anthropology and comparative religion. That is followed by an extraordinary essay by “the Reverend P. D. Carey” which provides a complex engagement with the whole range of sexological literature mixed with biblical and liturgical references.⁵² Carey’s “Essay” opens with an invocation to Pan and laments the fact that the new science of sexuality has displaced the old (pagan) faith:

Yes! we must not sing hymns to Pan to-day: we must pretend to be German professors, with a keen scientific interest in these very remarkable phenomena which look so much like madness, and which our own perfect sanity and the effulgence (possibly a shade alto) of our discreet and legal passion for our Limburger-tainted hausfrau hide from our fuller comprehension.

As is right, therefore:

In nomine v. Krafft-Ebing, v. Schrenk-Notzing,
et. Havelock Ellis, Amen.

The Holy Trinity (invoked above) have brought within the knowledge of the English-speaking races all those facts connected with ‘sexual perversion’ (in its infinite variety) which occur in the diseased.⁵³

51. There are significant overlaps between Crowley’s deployment of imperial masculinity here and that of “Lawrence of Arabia,” particularly in terms of the “narrative play with cultural difference” and “the spectacle of that most masculine of men, the soldier, elaborately arrayed in flowing skirts, in transgression of gender fixities.” See Dawson, “The Blond Bedouin,” 113.

52. [Crowley], *The Scented Garden*. For Crowley’s account of the text, see *Confessions*, 451. Owen notes that the text also contains coded references to Pollitt, Crowley’s “intimate friend” at Cambridge. See above. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 190.

53. [Crowley], “Essay,” *The Scented Garden*, 23.

Scattered throughout the text are passages of pastiche and parody, evoking a range of writers and texts, from James Frazer’s *Golden Bough* to Edward Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy* and H. P. Blavatsky’s “Stanzas of Dyzan.” At the centre of the text is the *Bagh-i-Muattar*, a collection of Crowley’s satirical “*ghazals*,” based on a medieval Persian form of verse marked by both religious and erotic themes; the verses themselves are surrounded and complicated by editorial notes that are marked by abrupt shifts of register, from colloquial to scholarly to crude, and that routinely comment on themselves via the introduction of different editorial voices, a strategy which continually de-stabilizes the paratextual material. So the first reference to the euphemistic *podex* (the buttocks, rump, or anus) prompts an erudite multi-lingual note: “It must be noted that kun (Be!) is the Arab Fiat or λογος [Logos]; hence ‘podex’ is a just symbol of the Noumenon or Essence, the knowledge of identity with which is the goal of all genuine religion.”⁵⁴ A footnote discussing “irrumation” (the vigorous or violent insertion of the penis into another’s mouth) leads to a lengthy catalogue of the techniques of fellatio attributed to “a well-known English peeress of American origin.”⁵⁵ The net effect is to produce a carnivalesque deflation of masculine scientific as well as spiritual authority, and at the same time to clear a space for Crowley’s very serious claims about the magical and sacramental qualities of sex.

Sacramentalism, Sexual Magic, and the Refusal of “Sexuality”

The Law of Thelema insisted “on the absolute sovereignty of the individual within the limits of his proper function.” Sex should be treated in such a way as “to enable one to do one’s will.”⁵⁶ What Freud described as the “libido of the unconscious” was for Crowley “the true will of the inmost self”; where there is inner division and conflict “morbid sexual symptoms” appear, but “when any complex (duality) in the self is

54. [Crowley], “Bagh-i-muattar,” *The Scented Garden*, 37.

55. *Ibid.*, 110.

56. Crowley, *Confessions*, 851.

resolved (unity) the initiate becomes whole” and “the complete man, harmonized, flows freely towards his natural goal.”⁵⁷ Crowley’s goal was to form a community on this basis—the Abbey of Thelema was the most obvious example—where the sexual instinct could be released and encouraged. The result, he claimed, was that sex actually receded from view once it was no longer continually irritated by social and moral strictures: “We almost forgot its existence. It began to surprise us when the sexual symbols which we had exhibited in the abbey, so that familiarity might breed forgetfulness, excited strangers.”⁵⁸ *The Book of the Law*, Crowley argued, thus “solves the sexual problem completely.” That solution drew on both the scientific-sexological and the spiritual-sacramental: “Each individual has an absolute right to satisfy his sexual instinct as is physiologically proper for him. The one injunction is to treat all such acts as sacraments.”⁵⁹

The language of the sacramental—the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace—is a Christian formulation which dates back to St. Augustine (354–430) and the fifth century CE. It surfaces repeatedly in Crowley’s discussions not just of sexual magic but of magic in general. He described, for example, his initiation into the Golden Dawn in 1898 as a “sacrament.”⁶⁰ “Life is a sacrament,” he argued at another point in his *Confessions*, and therefore “all our acts are magical acts”:

Our spiritual consciousness acts through the will and its instruments upon material objects, in order to produce changes which will result in the establishment of the new conditions of consciousness which we wish. That is the definition of Magick. . . . [In the Mass] the will of the priest transmutes a wafer in such wise that it becomes charged with the divine substance in so active a form that its physical injection gives spiritual nourishment to the communicant. But all our actions fit this equation.⁶¹

57. *Ibid.*, 72

58. *Ibid.*, 848–49. The passage quoted is on 852.

59. *Ibid.*, 851.

60. *Ibid.*, 176.

61. *Ibid.*, 125.

This sacramental aspect was linked to a sense that the whole body—not just the sexual body but the defecating, urinating, sweating body—participated in the sacramental life:

every act is a sacrament and . . . the most repulsive rituals might be in some ways the most effective. The only adequate way of overcoming evil was to utilize it fully as a means of grace. . . . There could be no merit in abstention from vice. Vice indeed is *vitium*, a flaw or defect.

This attitude is not antinomianism, as the word is usually understood. . . . One ought to leave no form of energy to rust. Every particle of one's personality is a necessary factor in the equation and every impulse must be turned to account in the Great Work.⁶²

The sexual, like every other impulse and “particle of personality” was to be turned to that “Great Work.” Love was “the sacrament by which man enters into communion with God.”⁶³ Crowley directly exploited the anthropological claim that “all religious rites are celebrations of the reproductive energy of nature” to insist that, nonetheless, “these rites are wholly spiritual,” not because they were not sexual but because sexual intercourse was the most readily available symbol of communion with the divine. It was, in effect, a sacrament—a visible sign of spiritual grace: “I have insisted that sexual excitement is merely a degraded form of divine ecstasy. I have thus harnessed the wild horses of human passion to the chariot of the Spiritual Sun.”⁶⁴ Spirit was therefore primary; matter was “in its nature secondary and symbolic.”⁶⁵

In 1913 *The Equinox* published an extended discussion of this sexual sacramentalism: “Energized Enthusiasm: A Note on Theurgy.” The article made explicit the parallels between the sacrament of transubstantiation and the transmutation of the sexual into the spiritual via ritual magic. If, as some writers speculated, the public copulation of the High Priest and Priestess was a part of the “ancient rites of Eleusis” (or, one infers, of Crowley's own versions of those rites) that “would be no more ‘indecent’ than it is ‘blasphemous’ for the priest to make

62. *Ibid.*, 147.

63. *Ibid.*, 556.

64. *Ibid.*, 554.

65. *Ibid.*, 125.

bread and wine into the body and blood of God.” The Protestant argument that this was, indeed, blasphemy, Crowley dismissed on the grounds that “a Protestant is one to whom all things sacred are profane, whose mind being all filth can see nothing in the sexual act but a crime or jest, whose only facial gestures are the sneer and the leer.” The sacramental and ceremonial use of the sexual act meant that it was in an important sense no longer sexual in the commonly understood sense, because it was to be disconnected from physical pleasure: “As it would be blasphemy to enjoy the gross taste of the wine of the sacrament, so must the celebrant suppress even the minutest manifestation of animal pleasure.” “The sexual excitement,” he continued, “must be suppressed and transformed into its religious equivalent.” Once the sexual organs become “holy” then it becomes crucial that the “act must not be profaned” but (if it is “to be the sacrament in a religious ceremony”) it “must be accomplished solely for the love of God.” Through the “sacramental and ceremonial use of the sexual act, the divine consciousness may be attained.” This was Crowley’s direct riposte to the claim (quoted above, via William James) that religion could be re-interpreted as “perverted sexuality”:

There are some people so simple as to think that, when they have proved the religious instinct to be a mere efflorescence of the sex-instinct, they have destroyed religion.

We should rather consider that the sailor’s tavern gives him his only glimpse of heaven, just as the destructive criticism of the phallicists has only proved sex to be a sacrament. Consciousness, says the materialist, axe in hand, is a function of the brain. He has only re-formulated the old saying, “Your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁶⁶

Far from degrading religion, the result was instead to elevate the sexual to the status of the divine; it was also to refuse the “sexual” in its conventional sense, reframing it as a sacrament—a visible sign of a spiritual state.

66. [Crowley], “Energized Enthusiasm: A Note on Theurgy,” 24–27. Gordan Djurdjevic also notes Crowley’s reliance on the notion of sacramentality, although Djurdjevic’s emphasis is on Crowley’s use of Tantra. He illustrates Crowley’s commitment to the sacramental qualities of all things via a discussion of Crowley’s consumption of an excremental Eucharist. Djurdjevic, “The Great Beast as a Tantric Hero,” 126. For an extended discussion of “Energized Enthusiasm” see Matthew D. Rogers, “Frenzies of the Beast: The Phaedran *Furores* in the Rites and Writings of Aleister Crowley,” 209–25.

Crowley repeated the point a few years later: “When you have proved that God is merely a name for the sex instinct,” he wrote in a review (of Ida Craddock’s *Heavenly Bridegrooms*) which appeared in the *Equinox* in 1919, “it appears to me not far to the perception that the sex instinct is God.”⁶⁷ But to say that “the sex instinct is God” was, for Crowley, to say that sex was sacred, and a way to approach the divine. The result was not so much to liberate sexuality as to impose on it a new and rigid discipline.⁶⁸ A magical technique such as “Eroto-comatose Lucidity,” which promised “spiritual ecstasy by sexual means” illustrates the intensely disciplined nature of these sexuo-spiritual rituals. In this case the candidate is repeatedly brought to an almost comatose state, roused “by stimulation of a definitely and exclusively sexual type” then allowed to fall back to sleep at which point sexual stimulation was resumed and the process was repeated until the Candidate reached “a state which is neither sleep nor waking, and in which his Spirit, set free by perfect exhaustion of the body, and yet prevented from entering the City of Sleep, communes with the Most High and most Holy Lord God of its being.”⁶⁹ (Henrik Bogdan has argued that once Crowley began the practice of sexual magic, he appears virtually to have abandoned sexual activity outside of that context: “Crowley’s sexual liberation can thus be seen as a new form of regulation, which prevented him from performing sex for mere pleasure.”)⁷⁰

67. Crowley, quoted in Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: An Interpretation of Aleister Crowley* [St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1970], 417, quoted in Kaczynski, “Continuing Generation,” 164. I rely here on Kaczynski’s identification of Craddock’s book as the subject of Crowley’s review. The review appeared in the *Equinox* in 1919 (Kaczynski’s previous note references the full review at *The Equinox* III (1) (1919), 280).

68. Contrast Urban, “The Beast with Two Backs,” 14–15. Urban suggests that Crowley’s call for “the radical liberation of sexual desire as the essence of human nature” exemplifies Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis.” Urban references Foucault’s claim that the sexual “now defines and determines our very existence” and is therefore not in that sense a “liberation.” I would agree but suggest that the idea of “liberation” itself actually fails to capture this dimension of Crowley’s position in the first instance.

69. Crowley, “De Arte Magica,” 163–65.

70. Bogdan, “Aleister Crowley: A Prophet for the Modern Age,” 300–301.

Crowley's specific teachings on sex magic often appear cryptic and elliptical.⁷¹ The sexual magic that Crowley practiced was based on an elaboration of the teachings of the O.T.O, which included the use of masturbatory techniques in the Eighth degree (Perfect Pontiff of the Illuminati) and heterosexual sex in the Ninth degree (Initiate of the Sanctuary of the Gnosis). Crowley added to this an Eleventh degree which involved anal sex, performed with both men and women. These rites included the "charg[ing]" of mental images with sexual energy, the production and consumption of an "Elixir," (as Bogdan notes, "in the Ninth degree the elixir consists of a mixture of male and female sexual fluids, gathered from the vagina") which could also be used to anoint and empower magical objects.⁷² Marco Pasi has suggested that "the kind of sexual magic developed by Crowley ... was based on the idea of the ingestion of a *mixture* composed of both male and female bodily fluids, which then had to be 'energized' by means of mental concentration and other psycho-physical techniques." Pasi argues that this was a break with earlier traditions of sexual magic, which placed less emphasis on the materiality of the sexual fluids and their literal physical ingestion.⁷³ To describe these acts as "hetero-" or "homosexual" seems beside the point; efforts to explain these teachings in terms of Crowley's bisexuality similarly fail to capture their complex sacramental dynamics.⁷⁴

71. According to Scott Michaelsen, the editor of *Portable Darkness: An Aleister Crowley Reader*, "Crowley's ultimate paper on sex, 'The Book of the Unveiling of Sangraal' (or 'Liber Agape'), was ... so muddled and riddled that he wrote a second paper, 'De Arte Magica,' in order to at least mention his topic. But while the first lies buried in a treasure house of symbol, the second still insists on hinting around." Michaelsen, *Portable Darkness*, 142.

72. Bogdan, "Challenging the Morals," 218–19.

73. Marco Pasi, "The Knight of Spermatophagy," 394–95. The full text of this passage in Pasi reads "developed by Crowley in the context of the O.T.O. out of Reuss' original system," and Pasi goes on to note that the "secret of sexual magic transmitted by Reuss to Crowley" may also have been "of a homosexual nature."

74. Pasi gives John Symonds, *The King of the Shadow Realm: Aleister Crowley: His Life and Magic* (London: Duckworth, 1989), 166 as an example of this kind of interpretation. Pasi, "The Knight of Spermatophagy," 396.

Crowley, the Gender Binary, and Magical Masculinity

Many of Crowley's magical operations were dependent on and exploited the possibilities of a gender binary (even as they also undermined that binary). As Manon Hedenborg White puts it in her study of gender in modern western esotericism, *The Eloquent Blood*, Crowley's is in many ways a "heteronormative cosmogyny":

Several of Crowley's most important texts put forth a gender polar cosmology and theory of magic, in which masculine and feminine constitute ontological, complementary opposites. Core Thelemic theology as expressed in *Liber AL* posits the gendered dialectic of Nuit and Hadit as the driving force of the cosmos, the Aeon of Horus as the synthesis of previous masculine and feminine aeons, and the Beast and the Scarlet Woman as embodying complementary solar and lunar forces. The notion of gender polarity as central to magical work is reflected in several of Crowley's most important sex magical texts.⁷⁵

In his "Gnostic Mass" ("Liber XV, Ecclesiæ Gnosticæ Catholicæ Canon Missæ") from 1913, for example, the priest and priestess are "ritually identified with the divine masculine and feminine principles," and "an act of symbolic heterosexual intercourse" is central to the rite.⁷⁶ "De Arte Magica" dedicated an entire section (section IX, "On the Course of the Moon, and her Influence") to the magical use of menstrual blood.⁷⁷ Certain kinds of sexual magic could only be completed with women's involvement, as in the production of the Elixir: "The second party must be consenting enthusiastically to co-operate physically with the Priest, so that the Lion [semen] be perfectly dissolved in a full portion of the Gluten [vaginal arousal fluid]. And whether this preparation be truly and duly done is known by the appearance of the Matter of the Sacrament, and also by its taste."⁷⁸ Crowley's characterization of male and female bodies, and of their sexual fluids, replicated familiar gendered dichotomies: active/ passive, divine/ material, creative/ receptive.⁷⁹

75. Hedenborg White, *Eloquent Blood*, 110.

76. *Ibid.*, 88.

77. Crowley, "De Arte Magica," 160.

78. *Ibid.*, 162-63.

79. Hedenborg White, *Eloquent Blood*, 89.

Crowley's attitude to women was complex and contradictory: he described himself as "the fiercest of feminists,"⁸⁰ but also suggested that "a man who is strong enough to use women as slaves and playthings is all right."⁸¹ His work has been interpreted, with good reason, as "reinforc[ing] the misogynist devaluation of the feminine."⁸² There were, however, also many ways in which he celebrated a freer female sexuality, and developed a critique of normative masculinity. Manon Hedenborg White traces this facet of Crowley's work in his teachings on the Thelemic goddess "Babalon" or her human embodiment the "Scarlet Woman": "The Babalon discourse destabilizes the ideal of bounded, rational, and implicitly masculine subjectivity by linking sex and death, ecstasy and annihilation, in ways that suggest a feminized, erotically undone self as soteriological ideal."⁸³ As Hedenborg White concludes, to emphasize only gender polarity over-simplifies Crowley's position; it is critical to recognize "the strong emphasis on themes of gender inversion or blurring in Crowley's writings" as well as women's agency in Thelema and "the specific importance of Babalon as alternative femininity in Crowley's system, symbolic of both a mystical receptivity linked to the initiatory ordeal of ego annihilation and the feminized other threatening or promising the erotic destruction of the self."⁸⁴

Crowley's use of same-sex sexual magic similarly both depended on and destabilized the gender binary. In the section "Of certain Rites analogous to that of the IX^o" in "De Arte Magica," for example, he noted that "we hold that in this rite is great efficacy; it may be that for certain operations it is equal or superior to that explained to Initiates of the IX^o" precisely because "in this case the Matter of the Sacrament cannot exist," without a female participant to "generate the Gluten."⁸⁵

80. This was, admittedly, in the context of his argument that feminism was a threat to Masonry. Crowley, *Confessions*, 696.

81. *Ibid.*, 96.

82. Wallraven, *Women Writers and the Occult*, 99.

83. Hedenborg White, *Eloquent Blood*, 5.

84. *Ibid.*, 112.

85. Crowley, "De Arte Magica," 161.

Crowley’s account of his own experience of a same-sex magical experience—his “cross[ing] the Abyss” with the assistance of his pupil Victor Neuberg in 1909 and acceptance of the grade of Magister Templi—was construed as a self-sacrifice in which “every particle of [his] personality” was utterly consumed.⁸⁶ Hedenborg White glosses the passage as follows: “In more prosaic terms, Crowley and Neuberg had anal sex on the stone altar, with Crowley acting as the receptive party.” The ritual ceremonial work accomplished here was also, she argues, “one of the most important magical transformations of Crowley’s life.”⁸⁷

As much as some forms of sexual magic depended on gender polarity for their efficacy, Crowley himself was also intent on undermining or undoing that polarity. As he put it in his *Confessions*, “The human consciousness is primarily distinguishable from the divine by the fact of its dependence on duality.”⁸⁸ This emphasis on unity in duality was repeated, for example, throughout a “Secret Instruction” of the Ninth degree of the O.T.O., “AGAPE vel Liber C vel AZOTH,” which illustrates the ways that such rituals simultaneously depended on and undid a binary conception of gender. The “divided sacrament is mortal”:

Ye must partake of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in His Resurrection; and the Substance of the Sacrament will be the Elixir of Life itself.

It will be One and not Two; neither male nor female, neither solid nor liquid. It will contain all possibilities and without it no possibility could be.⁸⁹

The same dynamic appears in the account that Crowley offered of himself in his *Confessions* (speaking here of himself in the third person): “While his masculinity is

86. Crowley, *Confessions*, 621.

87. Hedenborg White, *Eloquent Blood*, 50–51, 54. Compare Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 198–99. Owen and Hedenborg White read this incident in very different ways, but both agree on its importance for Crowley and his magical work.

88. Crowley, *Confessions*, 512.

89. “AGAPE vel Liber C vel AZOTH,” in King, ed., *Secret Rituals*, np. Henrik Bogdan gives 1914 as the date for this text which he describes as one of a few short documents detailing Crowley’s “systematic experimentation with sexual magic.” Henrik Bogdan, “Aleister Crowley: A Prophet for the Modern Age,” 300.

above the normal . . . he has certain well-marked feminine characteristics. . . . There is . . . a sort of hermaphroditism in his physical structure; and this is naturally expressed in his mind.” As a “complete human being” he claimed to be able to understand things that were “unintelligible to men as such” or to “women as such.” Both man and woman at once, he claimed that he had “been able to formulate a view of existence which combines the positive and the negative, the active and the passive, in a single identical equation.”⁹⁰

Conclusion

What I have characterized as Crowley’s “queer masculinity” functioned on two inter-related levels. On one level, it was articulated in relationship to the ongoing contest for cultural authority; Crowley established himself as a man among men, playing off of and positioning himself between clerical and scientific models of masculine authority even while puncturing and parodying the gendered regime of authority-making itself in a way that “queered” it, unsettling it in an explicitly sexual and scatological way. His claims depended in part on the valorization of a particular version of magical masculinity—the active, self-disciplined, and potent Priest. At the same time, exploiting the possibilities of the third element of the contextual triangle—the interchangeability of the religious and sexual domains—his sexological sacramentalism also functioned not only as a rejection of the master categories of the modern gender and sexual regimes (“man” and “woman”; “heterosexual” and “homosexual”) but also even of those very regimes themselves.⁹¹ The result was actually to point outside of the “modern” sexual and gender regimes which had made the articulation of these claims possible in the first instance, simultaneously developing a critique of the context which had enabled the emergence of this distinctively modern version of sexual magic.⁹²

90. Crowley, *Confessions*, 45.

91. I am indebted for this formulation to Seidman, “Postmodern Anxiety,” 180-90.

92. My conclusion here parallels Urban’s argument—captured in the subtitle to “The Beast with Two Backs”—that this is also “the Exhaustion of Modernity.” Urban, “Beast with Two Backs,” esp. 8-9.

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