

# Aleister Crowley

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*By Julius Evola*

*From Chapter IX, "Il Satanismo" ("Satanism") of Maschera e volto dello spiritualismo contemporaneo ("Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism")*

Crowley was a character whose personality overpowers certain of the figures already considered. If we associate him with Satanism, it is because he himself invites us to do so. In fact, he gave himself the title of "Great Beast 666" who is the Antichrist of the Apocalypse, while he gave to the women whom he selected and used, the title "Scarlet Woman" who, in John's Apocalypse, is the Great Whore associated with the "Beast". The judgment as the "Wickedest man in England", given him by a judge in England in relation to a certain judicial proceeding, must have greatly pleased him, so much was his predilection for scandal, not fleeing from masks and mystifications of every type just for this purpose.

Invocations used in ceremonies, that Crowley presided over, were such as the following:

*Thou spiritual Sun! Satan! Thou eye, thou lust. Cry aloud! Cry aloud! Whirl the wheel, O my Father, O Satan, O Sun! (Liber Samekh)*

By itself, it would seem to confirm Satanism, even if not without some admixture (reference to the "spiritual Sun"). It is however necessary to see that Crowley did not put Satan in the place of God, given the high regard in which he held traditions, like the Kabbalah, which venerated a divinity, even if conceived metaphysically and not religiously. Finally, as in the other cases considered, the ostentatious Satanism of Crowley is explained only in terms of an antithesis to Christianity whose doctrine condemned the senses and the integral achievement of man, however, in his case, with an initiatic and "magical" basis rather than naturalistic. If dangerous forces were evoked, it seems that in the specific case of Crowley, the previously mentioned conditions to cope with experiences of the type would be present, in the first place because Crowley had an exceptional personality and was predisposed in a natural way to contact with the supersensible (beyond possessing a particular "magnetism"), and in the second place through his ties with organizations to some extent successors to those of an initiatic character. These are, initially, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, in which Crowley took part, although afterward he broke away from it and founded the *Ordo Templi Orientis* (OTO, reminiscent of the Templars, even reviving the Templar Baphomet). However this Order used many of the magical rituals of the Golden Dawn, meant to communicate with the so called "Secret Masters" and with given entities or "intelligences". To this end Crowley also used it, so as to attribute the genesis of the *Liber Legis*, the compendium of his doctrines, to an entity he evoked in Cairo, Aiwaz, who would have been a manifestation of the Egyptian Hoor-Paar-Kraat, the "Lord of Silence". It is to be considered that, in general, not everything should be reduced to a daydream, and that some contacts of Crowley with a mysterious supersensible world were real.

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Here it is not the point to linger on Crowley's life, which was rather eventful and influential, because beyond cultivating magic (he had this to say: "I rehabilitated magic and I determined it in the course of my life"), he was a poet, a painter, a mountain climber who tried to climb the highest peaks of the Himalayas (K2 and Kanchenjunga), a drug experimenter (he even wrote the Diary of a Drug Fiend, published in 1922). Here we will limit ourselves instead to briefly indicate his doctrines and techniques. In *Liber Legis* we can disregard the obligatory anti-Christian and pagan polemics. There we read, among other things "Be strong, o man! Lust, enjoy all things of sense and rapture: fear not that any God shall deny thee for this." (II, 22) But, in reality, a doctrine that encompasses three principals is pointed out. The first is: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law" But it is not necessary to get locked into the letter of this precept almost as if it prescribes doing everything that you like (as in Rabelais' "Fay ce que voudras"), because Crowley refers to the *true* will to be discovered in oneself and then to be realized. This discovery and this realization would be the essence of the Work (the disciple must have vowed beforehand to the "Great Beast 666" to dedicate himself to it), as the sign that – Crowley asserted – only those who reached to such a level are truly men and masters, the others are "slaves" (seemingly from the interior point of view). For the rest, Crowley spoke also of a self-discipline at least in its own regard, of a "rigorous morality of more than any other in spite of the absolute freedom in respect to every conventional code of conduct." In the same perspective, there follows the corollary "The only sin is restriction", evidently in regards to the true will.

The second principle is the "every man and every woman is a star", in the sense that in them a transcendent principle would be manifested or incarnated in a certain way, that leads, in general, beyond a mere "pagan" naturalism. One could think back to the theory of the "Self" distinct from the simple "I". Consequently, the connection with the special concept of the will which we just indicated, also appears evident. Among other things, Crowley brings back the ancient theory of the "two demons", he speaks of a way of life meant to evoke the "good demon", not yielding to the temptations that instead would subject one to the mercies of the other demon, leading to ruin and damnation, while from the first, one would be inspired around the right use of magical techniques. In dramatized form, it would seem here to be about, once again, the deep principal postulated by the conceptions of the human being as a "star" (or as a "god"), whose presence constitutes the basis to face the perilous experiences of this life.

Finally, the third principle is "Love is the Law, Love under will", where "love" means essentially sexual love. This leads from the domain of doctrine to that of the techniques where the aspects of Crowleyanism are presented that can alarm more the profane granting to it a problematic orgiastic coloration (even so far as one can still speak of "satanic" in the proper sense).

In the way proclaimed by Crowley, the use of sex, as well as drugs, takes center stage. However, one must recognize that, at least in intention, it was about the "sacred" and magical use of sex and drugs that was also considered in various ancient traditions. The goal, consciously pursued, is to obtain experiences of the supersensible and contacts with "entities". Equally, things are presented in a way somewhat different from what happens at the edge of the contemporary world, in simple key of evasions, sensations and "artificial paradises". Crowley writes, "There exist drugs that open up the thresholds of the hidden world behind the veil of matter", this formulation being, however, imperfect

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because by way of principle one should not speak of drugs *sic et simpliciter* (whatever they may be) but rather of one of their very special uses tied to precise and not easily realizable conditions.

The same applies to sex as technique, beyond the generality of “orgiastic religion” announced in *Liber Legis*, with an allusion to the “great God Pan”. For Crowley, the sexual act had the meaning of a sacrament, of a sacred and magical operation; in intercourse, one aimed, at the limit, to a type of “rupture of level” through which one finds himself “face to face with the gods”, that is, it ensures an opening to the supersensible. It is important that, in this and in other contexts, Crowley had spoken of things “that for you are poisons, if fact poisons of the greatest degree to be transformed into food” and that the deleterious outcome that the way he pointed out had in some of his disciples was explained with reference to “doses of poison too large to be transformed into food”. Again, he adds the condition found in an exceptional personality, referring to drugs, that they were a food only for the “royal man”. As to sex magic, the technique often indicated was that of excess: in orgasm and intoxication one should reach a state of exhaustion leading up to the extreme limits “compatible with survival”. Even in the area of evocational ceremonies the “magical dagger” used together with all the traditional implements of signs, formulas, robes, pentacles, etc, counted as “a symbol of the being ready to sacrifice all”. In the secret ritual of the Crowleyan *Ordo Templi Orientis* called *De arte magica*, in c. XV, one speaks of a death in the orgasm called *mors justa*. The extreme limit of exhaustion and orgiastic ecstasy were pointed out also as the moment of a possible magical lucidity of the clairvoyant trance attained by the man or the woman. So in the *Magical Record of the Beast 666* he speaks of passionate and unrestrained young women that at a tug “unpredicted by anyone, will pass into a state of calm depth distinguishable only with difficulty from a prophetic trance, through which they will begin to describe what they were seeing.”

As is natural, what really happened in experiences of the sort, with those contacted planes of the invisible, cannot be established. It is certain that in Crowleyism the inoculation of precise magico-initiatic applications is precise, and the references to rites or orientations of ancient traditions are evident. From the level of chaotic, disorderly, and reckless experiments with wild sex and drugs characteristic of the circles of youths at the margins of the contemporary world, one passes to something more serious but, just for this reason, also more dangerous. Crowley had some disciples who, also in the cadre of the announced “Law of Thelema”, were put through tests and disciplines of every type (in 1920 he created also in Cefalu, Sicily a “Magical Abbey” — with the coming of Fascism he then was immediately deported from Italy because of what was said about the goings-on in the Abbey). But their destinies did not seem to have been the same. Those who were strong enough to hold firm, to not veer, said they came out renewed and integrated by these experiments done with the Great Beast 666; however, one speaks equally of other persons, kinds of women, who disintegrated, who even ended up in hospitals; it seems even that there were some suicides. In such a case, Crowley said that he was not able to work the magical transformation of the evoked forces either to which he was given a free way or that the doses of poison had been too high to be transformed into food; for this reason, those persons were broken. As for Crowley himself, he knew how to keep himself on his feet up until the end, dying in 1947 at the age of 72 with all his faculties lucid and normal. Apart from his disciples, different personalities, even of a certain rank (for example, Filler, the noted general of the armored corps), had

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contact with him and given the general climate of our days, it is natural that his character continued to exercise a strong fascination and that his ideas were often cited.

If the Crowleyian view would seem troublesome and obscure to many, even objectively the “satanic” element, in spite of everything that the Great Beast 666 displayed almost theatrically, does not seem to us very relevant. The corresponding coloration does not have as much prominence as that which, fundamentally, possesses a magical, and in part initiatic, character.