

Aleister Crowley

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Aleister Crowley



Aleister Crowley in ceremonial garb.

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| Born | Edward Alexander Crowley 12 October 1875 Royal Leamington Spa , Warwickshire, England |
| Died | 1 December 1947 (aged 72) Hastings , East Sussex, England |
| Occupation | Occultist, poet, novelist. |
| Spouse | Rose Edith Kelly |
| Parents | Edward Crowley, Emily Bertha Crowley (née Bishop) |

Aleister Crowley (/ˈkroʊli/ ***KROH**-lee*; 12 October 1875–1 December 1947), born **Edward Alexander Crowley**, and also known as both **Frater Perdurabo** and **The Great Beast 666**, was an English [occultist](#), [mystic](#), [ceremonial magician](#), poet and [mountaineer](#), who was responsible for founding the religious philosophy of [Thelema](#). In his role as the founder of the Thelemite philosophy, he came to see himself as the prophet who was entrusted with informing humanity that it was entering the new [Aeon of Horus](#) in the early 20th century.

Born into a wealthy upper-class family, as a young man he became an influential member of the esoteric [Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn](#) after befriending the order's leader, [Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers](#). Subsequently believing that he was being contacted by his Holy Guardian Angel, an entity known as [Aiwass](#), while staying in Egypt in 1904, he "received" a text known as [The Book of the Law](#) from what he believed was a divine source, and around which he would

come to develop his new philosophy of Thelema. He would go on to found his own occult society, the [A∴A∴](#) and eventually rose to become a leader of [Ordo Templi Orientis](#) (O.T.O.), before founding a religious commune in [Cefalù](#) known as the [Abbey of Thelema](#), which he led from 1920 through till 1923. After abandoning the Abbey amid widespread opposition, Crowley returned to Britain, where he continued to promote Thelema until his death.

Crowley was also [pansexual](#), a [recreational drug experimenter](#) and a [social critic](#). In many of these roles he "was in revolt against the moral and religious values of his time", espousing a form of [libertinism](#) based upon the rule of "Do What Thou Wilt".^[1] Because of this, he gained widespread notoriety during his lifetime, and was denounced in the popular press of the day as "the wickedest man in the world".

Crowley has remained an influential figure and is widely thought of as the most influential occultist of all time. In 2002, a [BBC](#) poll described him as being the seventy-third [greatest Briton of all time](#).^[2] References to him can be found in the works of numerous writers, musicians and filmmakers,^[3] and he has also been cited as a key influence on many later esoteric groups and individuals, including [Kenneth Grant](#), [Kenneth Anger](#), [Jack Parsons](#), [Gerald Gardner](#), [Robert Anton Wilson](#) and, to some degree, [Austin Osman Spare](#).^[4]

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Early life

Childhood: 1875–1894

Aleister was born as Edward Alexander Crowley at 30 Clarendon Square in [Royal Leamington Spa](#), Warwickshire, England, between 11 pm and midnight on 12 October 1875.^{[5][6]} His father, Edward Crowley (c.1830–1887), was trained as an engineer but, according to Aleister, never worked as one, instead owning shares in a lucrative family brewing business, Crowley's Alton Ales, which allowed him to retire before Aleister was born.^{[7][8]} His mother, Emily Bertha Bishop (1848–1917), drew roots from a Devonshire-Somerset family and was despised by her son, whom she described as "the Beast", a name that he revelled in.^{[9][10]} The couple had been married at Kensington Registry Office in London during November 1874.^[11]

The Crowley family were Christian; Aleister's father had been born a [Quaker](#), but had converted to the [Exclusive Brethren](#), a more conservative faction of a denomination known as the [Plymouth Brethren](#). Upon marriage, Emily had also converted to the Exclusive Brethren. Aleister's father was particularly devout, spending his time as a travelling preacher for the sect and reading a chapter from the Bible to his wife and son after breakfast every day.^{[12][13]} Aged 8, Aleister was sent to H.T. Habershon's evangelical Christian boarding school in [Hastings](#), and then to a preparatory school in [Cambridge](#) run by the Reverend Hendry d'Arcy Champney, whom Aleister considered a sadist.^[14]

On 5 March 1887, when Crowley was 11, his father died of [tongue cancer](#). Aleister would describe this as a turning point in his life,^{[15][16]} and he always maintained some admiration for his father, describing him as "his hero and his friend".^[17] Inheriting his father's wealth, he was subsequently sent to Ebor School in Cambridge, a [private](#) Plymouth Brethren school, but was expelled for misbehaviour.^[18] Following this he attended [Malvern College](#) and then [Tonbridge School](#), both of which he despised and soon left after only a few terms, instead beginning studies at [Eastbourne College](#).^{[19][20][21]} He became increasingly sceptical about Christianity, pointing out logical [inconsistencies](#) in the Bible to his religious teachers,^{[22][23]} and went against the Christian morality of his upbringing, for instance embracing sex both with girls whom he met and by visiting female prostitutes, including one from whom he contracted [gonorrhoea](#).^{[24][25]}

Cambridge University: 1895–1897

"For many years I had loathed being called Alick, partly because of the unpleasant sound and sight of the word, partly because it was the name by which my mother called me. Edward did not seem to suit me and the diminutives Ted or Ned were even less appropriate. Alexander was too long and Sandy suggested tow hair and freckles. I had read in some book or other that the most favourable name for becoming famous was one consisting of a [dactyl](#) followed by a [spondee](#), as at the end of a [hexameter](#): like *Jeremy Taylor*. Aleister Crowley fulfilled these conditions and Aleister is the [Gaelic](#) form of Alexander. To adopt it would satisfy my romantic ideals."

Aleister Crowley, on his name change.^[26]

In 1895 Crowley, who soon adopted the new name of Aleister over his birth name of Edward, began a three year course at [Trinity College, Cambridge](#), where he was entered for the [Moral Science Tripos](#) studying philosophy, but with approval from his personal tutor he switched to English literature, which was not then a part of the curriculum offered.^{[27][28][29]} Crowley largely spent his time at university engaged in his pastimes, one of which was mountaineering; he went on holiday to the Alps to do so every year from 1894 to 1898, and various other mountaineers who knew him at this time recognised him as "a promising climber, although somewhat erratic".^[30] Another of his hobbies was writing poetry, which he had been doing since the age of 10, and in 1898 he privately published one hundred copies of one of his poems, *Aceldama*, but it was not a particular success.^[31]

That same year he published a string of other poems, the most notable of which was *White Stains*, a piece of erotica that had to be printed abroad as a safety measure in case it caused trouble with the British authorities.^[32] Part of this work, according to biographer Lawrence Sutin, "deserves a place in any wide-ranging anthology of gay poetry".^[33] A third hobby of his was the game of [chess](#), and he joined the university's chess club, where, he later stated, he beat the president in his first year and practised two hours a day towards becoming a champion, but he eventually gave this idea up.^[34]

It was while on a winter holiday in Sweden in December 1896 that he had his first significant [mystical experience](#).^{[35][36]} Several later biographers, including [Lawrence Sutin](#) and [Tobias Churton](#), believed that this was the result of Crowley's first homosexual experience.^{[36][37]} Following this experience, Crowley began to read up on the subject of [occultism](#) and [mysticism](#), and by the next year he had begun reading books by [alchemists](#) and [magicians](#).^[38]

At university, he also maintained a vigorous sex life, which was largely conducted with prostitutes and girls he picked up at local pubs and cigar shops, but eventually he took part in same-sex activities including receptive anal sex.^[39] This was despite the fact that homosexual acts were illegal and punishable with imprisonment at that time. In 1897, Crowley met a man named Herbert Charles Pollitt, the president of the [Cambridge University Footlights Dramatic Club](#), and the two entered into a relationship but broke up because Pollitt did not share Crowley's increasing interest in the esoteric.^{[40][41]} Crowley himself later stated that "I told him frankly that I had given my life to religion and that he did not fit into the scheme. I see now how imbecile I was, how hideously wrong and weak it is to reject any part of one's personality."^[42] In October a brief illness triggered considerations of mortality and "the futility of all human endeavour", or at least the futility of the diplomatic career that Crowley had previously considered,^[43] and instead, he decided to devote his life to the occult. In 1897 he left Cambridge, not having taken any

degree at all despite a ["first class"](#) showing in his spring 1897 exams and consistent "second class honours" results before that.^[44] That summer, he then travelled to [St Petersburg](#) in Russia; later biographers Richard Spence and Tobias Churton suggested that Crowley had done so under the employ of the British secret service, but this remains inconclusive.^{[45][46]}

The Golden Dawn: 1898–1899



 Aleister Crowley, in Golden Dawn uniform



 The [Rosy Cross](#) of the Golden Dawn, the organisation that first introduced Crowley to the world of ceremonial magic.

In 1898, Crowley was staying in [Zermatt](#), Switzerland, where he met the chemist Julian L. Baker, and the two began talking about their common interest in alchemy. Upon their return to England, Baker introduced Crowley to [George Cecil Jones](#), a member of the occult society known as the [Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn](#), which had been founded in 1888. Crowley was subsequently initiated into the Outer Order of the Golden Dawn on 18 November 1898 by

the group's leader, [Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers](#) (1854–1918). The ceremony itself took place at Mark Masons Hall in London, where Crowley accepted his motto and magical name of "Fratres Perdurabo", a Latin term meaning "I shall endure to the end".^{[47][48]}

Crowley moved from the elegant accommodation at the Hotel Cecil to his own luxury flat at 67–69 Chancery Lane. He soon invited a Golden Dawn associate, [Allan Bennett](#) (1872–1923), to live with him, and Bennett became his personal tutor, teaching him more about ceremonial magic and the ritual usage of drugs.^[49] In 1900, Bennett left London for Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka) to study [Buddhism](#),^[50] while in 1899 Crowley acquired [Boleskine House](#) in [Foyers](#) on the shore of [Loch Ness](#) in Scotland. He subsequently developed a love of Scottish culture, describing himself as the "Laird of Boleskine" and took to wearing traditional highland dress, even during visits back to London.^[51]

However, a schism had developed in the Golden Dawn, with MacGregor Mathers, the organisation's leader, being ousted by a group of members who were unhappy with his autocratic rule. Crowley had previously approached this group of rebels, asking to be initiated into the further orders of the Golden Dawn, but they had declined him. Unfazed, he went directly to Mathers, who still held the post of chief and who agreed to initiate him into the Second Order.^[52] Now loyal to Mathers, Crowley (with the help of his then mistress and fellow initiate Elaine Simpson) attempted to help crush the rebellion and unsuccessfully tried to seize a London temple space known as the Vault of [Rosenkreutz](#) from the rebels.^[53]

Crowley had also developed personal feuds with some of the Golden Dawn's members; he disliked the poet [W.B. Yeats](#), who had been one of the rebels, because Yeats had not been particularly favourable towards one of his own poems, *Jephthah*.^[54] He also disliked [Arthur Edward Waite](#), who would rouse the anger of his fellows at the Golden Dawn with his [pedantry](#).^[55] Crowley voiced the view that Waite was a pretentious bore through searing critiques of Waite's writings and editorials of other authors' writings. In his periodical *The Equinox*, Crowley titled one diatribe, "Wisdom While You Waite", and his mock-obituary on the passing of Waite bore the title "Dead Waite".^[56]



Aleister Crowley, Ceylon 1901

Mexico, India and Paris: 1900–1903

In 1900, Crowley travelled to Mexico via the United States on a whim, taking a local woman as his mistress, and with his good friend [Oscar Eckenstein](#) (1859–1921) proceeded to climb several mountains, including [Iztaccihuatl](#), [Popocatepetl](#) and even [Colima](#), the latter of which they had to abandon owing to a volcanic eruption.^[57] During this period, Eckenstein revealed mystical leanings of his own and told Crowley that he needed to improve the control of his mind, recommending the Indian practice of [raja yoga](#) in order to do so. Crowley had continued his magical experimentation on his own after leaving Mathers and the Golden Dawn, and his writings suggest that he developed the magical word [Abrahadabra](#) during this time.^[58]

Leaving Mexico, a country that he would always remain fond of, Crowley visited San Francisco, Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong and Ceylon, where he met up with Allan Bennett and devoted himself further to yoga, from which he claimed to have achieved the spiritual state of [dhyana](#). It was during this visit that Bennett decided to become a Buddhist monk in the [Theravada](#) tradition, travelling to Burma, while Crowley went on to India, studying various [Hindu](#) practices.^[59] In 1902, he was joined in India by Eckenstein and several other mountaineers; Guy Knowles, H. Pfannl, V. Wesseley, and Dr Jules Jacot-Guillarmod. Together the Eckenstein-Crowley expedition attempted to climb [K2](#). On the journey, Crowley was afflicted with [influenza](#), [malaria](#), and [snow blindness](#), while other expedition members were similarly struck with illness. They reached an altitude of 20,000 feet (6,100 m) before deciding to turn back.^[60]

In 1903 Crowley wed [Rose Edith Kelly](#), the sister of his friend, the painter [Gerald Festus Kelly](#), in a "marriage of convenience". However, soon after their marriage, Crowley actually fell in love with her and set about to successfully prove his affections.^[61] Gerald Kelly was a good friend of [W. Somerset Maugham](#), who after briefly meeting Crowley would later use him as a model for the protagonist of his novel [The Magician](#), published 1908.^{[62][63]}

Developing Thelema

Egypt and *The Book of the Law*: 1904



 Aleister Crowley, Magus of the New Aeon

In 1904, Crowley and his new wife Rose travelled to [Egypt](#) using the pseudonym of Prince and Princess Chioa Khan, titles which Crowley claimed had been bestowed upon him by an eastern [potentate](#).^[64] According to Crowley's own account, Rose, who was pregnant, began to experience visions while in the country, regularly informing him that "they are waiting for you", but not providing him with any further information as to who "they" were. It was on 18 March, after Crowley sought the aid of the Egyptian god [Thoth](#) in a magical rite, that she actually revealed who "they" were – the ancient Egyptian god [Horus](#) and his alleged messenger. She then led him to a nearby museum in [Cairo](#) where she showed him a seventh century BCE mortuary [stele](#) known as the [Stele of Ankh-ef-en-Khonsu](#) (it later came to be revered in Thelema as the "[Stele of Revealing](#)"); Crowley was astounded for the exhibit's number was 666, the [number of the beast](#) in Christian belief.^[65] Crowley took this all to be a sign from a divine entity and on 20 March began performing ritual invocations of the god Horus in his rented room. It was after this invocation that Rose, or as he now referred to her, Ouarda the Seeress, informed him that "the Equinox of the Gods had come".^[66]

"Had! The manifestation of [Nuit](#).
The unveiling of the company of heaven.
Every man and woman is a star.
Every number is infinite; there is no difference.
Help me, o warrior lord of Thebes, in my unveiling before the Children of men!"

The opening lines of *The Book of the Law*.

It was on 8 April, when the couple were still staying in Cairo, that Crowley first heard a disembodied voice talking to him, claiming that it was coming from a being known as [Aiwass](#), the true nature of whom Crowley never understood. Crowley's disciple and later secretary [Israel Regardie](#) believed that this voice came from Crowley's [subconscious](#), but opinions among Thelemites differ widely.^[67] Aiwass claimed to be a messenger from the god Horus, who was also referred to by him as Hoor-Paar-Kraat. Crowley wrote down everything the voice told him

over the course of the next three days, and subsequently titled it *Liber AL vel Legis* or [The Book of the Law](#).^{[68][69]} The god's commands explained that a new [Aeon](#) for mankind had begun, and that Crowley would serve as its [prophet](#). As a supreme moral law, it declared "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law", and that people should learn to live in tune with their "[True Will](#)". Although this event would prove to be a cornerstone in Crowley's life, being the origin of the philosophy of [Thelema](#), at the time he was unsure what to think about the whole situation. He was "dumbfounded about what to do with *The Book of the Law*" and eventually decided to ignore the instructions that it commanded him to perform, which included taking the Stele of Revealing from the museum, fortifying his own island and translating the Book into all the world's languages. Instead he simply sent typescripts of the work to several occultists whom he knew, and then "put aside the book with relief".^[70]

Kangchenjunga and China: 1905–1906

Returning to [Boleskine](#), Crowley came to believe, for reasons that are documented in Crowley's diaries, that his former friend [Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers](#) had become so jealous of his progression as a ceremonial magician that he had begun using magic against him, and the relationship between the two broke down.^[71] On 28 July 1905, Rose gave birth to Crowley's first child, a daughter, whom he named Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith, although she would commonly be referred to simply by her last name.^[72] He also founded a publishing company, naming it the Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth in parody of the [Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge](#), and through this released more of his own poetry, including *The Sword of Song*.^[73] While his poetry often received strong reviews (either positive or negative), it never sold well, and attempting to gain more publicity, he issued a reward of £100 for whomever could write the best essay on the topic of his work. The winner of this would prove to be [J.F.C. Fuller](#) (1878–1966), a British Army officer and military historian, whose essay, *The Star in the West*, heralded Crowley's poetry as some of the greatest ever written.^[74]



The mountain of Kangchenjunga, as seen from Darjeeling.

Crowley decided to climb another of the world's greatest mountains, and for this chose [Kangchenjunga](#) in the [Himalayas](#), widely thought of as "the most treacherous mountain in the world" by climbers at the time. Assembling a team consisting of Dr Jacot-Guillarmod, a veteran of the K2 climb, as well as several other continental Europeans including Charles Adolphe

Reymond, Alexis Pache and Alcesti C. Rigo de Righi, the group travelled to British India to undertake the task. Throughout [the expedition](#), there was much argument between Crowley and the others who felt that he was reckless. They eventually mutinied against Crowley's control, with the other climbers heading back down the mountain as nightfall approached despite Crowley's warnings that it was too dangerous. Crowley was proved right as Pache and several porters were subsequently killed in an accident.^[75]

Returning from this expedition, he met up with Rose and Lilith in [Kolkata](#) before being forced to leave India after shooting dead a native who had tried to mug him.^[76] Travelling to China, Crowley soon fell down a forty foot cliff; finding himself unscathed, he believed that he was being protected for some prophetic purpose, and underwent a religious experience that he felt bestowed on him the rank of Exempt Adept, the highest grade of the Second Order of the Golden Dawn. Devoting himself fully to spiritual and magical work, he began studying the [Goetia](#), and recited the [grimoire](#)'s preliminary invocation daily in order to try to get in contact with his [Holy Guardian Angel](#). The Crowleys spent the next few months travelling around China, but it was decided that in March 1906, they would return to Britain.^[77]

Rose took Lilith with her and set off for Europe via India, while Crowley himself decided to travel back via the United States, where he hoped he would be able to get support for a second expedition to Kangchenjunga. Before departing, Crowley visited his friend [Elaine Simpson](#) in Shanghai, a fellow occultist who had been his colleague in the Golden Dawn. She was fascinated by *The Book of the Law* and the prophetic message that it contained, something he had been ignoring, and together they performed a ritual to invoke Aiwass once more. The ritual proved successful, and Aiwass provided Crowley with the message that he should "Return to Egypt, with same surroundings. There I will give thee signs." Nonetheless, Crowley ignored the advice of Aiwass, instead heading off to America. Stopping off at the Japanese port of [Kobe](#) along the way, Crowley had a vision which he interpreted as meaning that the great spiritual beings known as the [Secret Chiefs](#) had admitted him into the Third Order of the Golden Dawn. Subsequently arriving in America, he found no support for his proposed mountaineering expedition, and so set sail to return to Britain, arriving there in June 1906.^[78]

The A.:A.: and the Holy Books of Thelema: 1907–1909



The seal of the A.:A.:

Upon arrival at Britain, Crowley learned that his daughter Lilith had died of [typhoid](#) in [Rangoon](#) and that his wife had begun suffering from alcoholism. Heartbroken, his health began to suffer, and he underwent a series of surgical operations. He began having a short-lived sexual affair

with Vera "Lola" Stepp, an actress to whom he would devote some of his poetry, while Rose gave birth to his second daughter, Lola Zaza,^[79] for whom Crowley devised a special ritual of thanksgiving.^[80]

"Into my loneliness comes --
The sound of a flute in dim groves that haunt the uttermost hills.
Even from the brave river they reach to the edge of the wilderness.
And I behold Pan."

The opening lines of of Liber VII (1907), the first of the Holy Books of Thelema to be revealed to Crowley after *The Book of the Law*.^[81]

Believing that he was now amongst the highest level of spiritual adepts, Crowley began to think about founding his own magical society. In this he was supported by his friend and fellow occultist [George Cecil Jones](#). The pair began to practice rituals together at Jones' home in [Coulson](#), and for the [autumn equinox](#) on 22 September 1907 developed a new ceremony based upon the Golden Dawn initiatory rite, for which Crowley composed a verse liturgy entitled "Liber 671", and later dubbed "Liber Pyramidos". The pair repeated this ritual again on 9 October, when they had made some alterations to it. In Crowley's eyes, this ritual would prove to be one of the "greatest events of his career" during which he "attained the knowledge and conversation of his holy guardian angel" and "entered the trance of [samadhi](#), union with godhead". He therefore finally succeeded with the aim of his [Abramelin](#) operation – as set out in the grimoire known as [The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage](#) – which he had been working on for months.^{[82][83]} Because of his spiritual attainment Crowley came to believe that he could finally enter into conversation with his Holy Guardian Angel, the entity known as [Aiwass](#), and as a result of this, on 30 October 1907 penned "Liber VII", a text that he believed to have been dictated to him by Aiwass through [automatic writing](#). Following *The Book of the Law*, which had been received in 1904, "Liber VII" would prove to be the second book in a series of [Holy Books of Thelema](#). Over the next few days, he also received a further Holy Book, "Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente".^[84]

Soon, Crowley, Jones and [J.F.C. Fuller](#) decided to found a new magical order as a successor to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which would be known as the [A∴A∴](#), the Argenteum Astrum or the Silver Star.^[85] Following the order's foundation, Crowley continued to write down more received Thelemic Holy Books during the last two months of the year, including "Liber LXVI", "Liber Arcanorum", "Liber Porta Lucis, Sub Figura X", "Liber Tau", "Liber Trigrammaton" and "Liber DCCCXIII vel Ararita".^[86] Meanwhile, effectively separated from his wife Rose by this point, Crowley entered into a romantic and sexual affair with [Ada Leverson](#) (1862–1933), an author and friend of [Oscar Wilde](#).^[87] This affair was brief, and in February 1908, Crowley was reunited with his wife as she had overcome her alcoholism, and together the couple travelled to [Eastbourne](#) for a holiday. Rose however relapsed and Crowley, who disliked her when drunk, fled to Paris.^[88] In 1909, when doctors stated that Rose required institutionalisation for her alcoholism, Crowley finally decided that it was time to get a divorce, but because he didn't want the proceedings to reflect badly upon her, he agreed that she could divorce him for infidelity, thereby meaning that any bad appearances would instead be reflected upon him, and he remained her friend following the proceedings.^[89]

Trying to gain more members for his [A∴A∴](#), Crowley decided to begin publishing a biannual journal, *The Equinox*, which was billed as "The Review of Scientific Illuminism". Starting with a first issue in 1909, *The Equinox* contained pieces by Crowley, Fuller and a young poet Crowley had met in 1907 named [Victor Neuburg](#).^[90] Soon other occultists had joined the order, including solicitor Richard Noel Warren, artist [Austin Osman Spare](#), Horace Sheridan-Bickers, author George Raffalovich, Francis Henry Everard Joseph Fielding, engineer Herbert Edward Inman, Kenneth Ward and [Charles Stansfeld Jones](#).^[91]

Victor Neuburg and Algeria: 1910–1911

In 1907, Crowley had been introduced to a Jewish Londoner named [Victor Neuburg](#), a poet who was interested in the esoteric.^[92]

In Paris during October 1908, he again produced Samadhi by the use of ritual and this time did so without hashish. He published an account of this success in order to show that his method worked and that one could achieve great mystical results without living as a hermit. On 30 December 1908, Aleister Crowley using the pseudonym Oliver Haddo made accusations of plagiarism against [Somerset Maugham](#), author of the novel *The Magician*. Crowley's article appeared in *Vanity Fair*, edited then by [Frank Harris](#) who admired Crowley and who would later write the famous work *My Life and Loves*. Admittedly, Maugham did model the character of his magician Oliver Haddo after Crowley himself and Crowley stated that Maugham acquiesced privately on the question of plagiarism.^[93]

In 1909, Crowley and Rose divorced, largely due to her alcoholism. She was subsequently admitted to an [asylum](#) suffering from alcoholic dementia. Meanwhile, Crowley soon moved on and took a woman named [Leila Waddell](#) as his lover or "[Scarlet Woman](#)".^[94] In 1910, Crowley performed his series of dramatic rites, the [Rites of Eleusis](#), with [A∴A∴](#) members [Leila Waddell \(Laylah\)](#) and [Victor Benjamin Neuburg](#).

Ordo Templi Orientis: 1912–1913

Main article: [Ordo Templi Orientis](#)

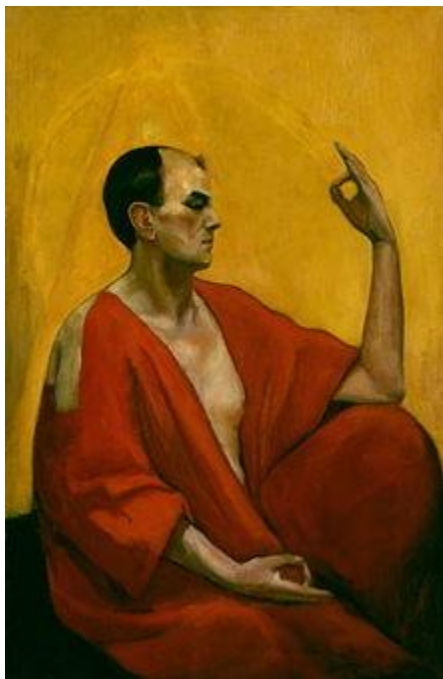
According to Crowley, [Theodor Reuss](#) called on him in 1912 to accuse him of publishing [O.T.O.](#) secrets, which Crowley dismissed on the grounds of having never attained the grade in which these secrets were given (IXth Degree). Reuss opened up Crowley's latest book, *The Book of Lies*, and showed Crowley the passage. This sparked a long conversation which led to Crowley assuming the Xth Degree of O.T.O. and becoming Grand Master of the English-speaking section of O.T.O. called *Mysteria Mystica Maxima*.^[95]

Crowley would eventually introduce the practice of male homosexual [sex magick](#) into O.T.O. as one of the highest degrees of the Order for he believed it to be the most powerful formula.^[96] Crowley placed the new degree above the Tenth Degree – not to be confused with any title [in his own Order](#) – and numbered it the Eleventh Degree.^[97] There was a protest from some members of O.T.O. in Germany and the rest of continental Europe that occasioned a persistent rift with Crowley.^[98]

In March 1913, producer Crowley introduced Leila Waddell in *The Ragged Ragtime Girls* [follies](#) review at the Old Tivoli in London where it enjoyed a brief run. In July 1913, the production enjoyed a six-week run in Moscow where Crowley met a young Hungarian girl named Anny Ringler. Crowley went on to practice sado-masochistic sex with Ringler. According to Crowley, "... She had passed beyond the region where pleasure had meaning for her. She could only feel through pain, and my own means of making her happy was to inflict physical cruelties as she directed. The kind of relation was altogether new to me; and it was because of this, intensified as it was by the environment of the self-torturing soul of Russia, that I became inspired to create by the next six weeks." While in Moscow, Crowley would see Anny for an hour and then he would write poetry. During this summer in Moscow, Crowley would write two of his most memorable works, the *Hymn to Pan* and the [Gnostic Mass](#) or *Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae*. The *Hymn to Pan* would be read at his funeral thirty four years later. Certain Thelemites regularly perform the Gnostic Mass to this day. It symbolises the act of sex as a magical or religious ritual.^[99]

Upon returning to London in the autumn of 1913, Crowley published the tenth and final number of volume one of *The Equinox*. In December 1913 in Paris, Crowley would engage [Victor Benjamin Neuburg](#) in *The Paris Working*. The first ritual took place on New Year's Eve 1914. In a period of seven weeks, Crowley and Neuburg performed a total of twenty four rituals which they recorded in the 'holy' or partially holy book formally entitled *Opus Lutetianum*.^[100] Around eight months later Neuburg had a nervous breakdown. Afterward, Crowley and Neuburg would never see each other again.^[101]

United States: 1914–1918



 Crowley as "Master Therion", oil painting by Leon Engers Kennedy, 1917-1918

During his time in the U.S., Crowley practised the task of [a Magister Templi in the A∴A∴](#) as he conceived it, namely interpreting every phenomenon as a particular dealing of "God" with his soul.^[102] He began to see various women he met as officers in his ongoing initiation, associating them with priests wearing animal masks in Egyptian ritual.^[103] A meditation during his relationship with one of these women, the poet [Jeanne Robert Foster](#), led him to claim the title of [Magus](#), also referring to the system of the A∴A∴.

In June 1915, Crowley met Jeanne Robert Foster in the company of her friend Hellen Hollis, a journalist; Crowley would have affairs with both women. Foster was a famous New York fashion model, journalist, editor, poet and married. Crowley's plan with Foster was to produce his first son; but in spite of a series of magical operations she did not get pregnant. By the end of 1915, the affair would be over.^[104] During a trip to Vancouver in 1915, Crowley met Wilfred Smith, Frater 132 of the Vancouver Lodge of O.T.O., and in 1930 granted him permission to establish Agape Lodge in Southern California.^[105] During the same trip in 1915, Crowley stopped over at [Parke Davis](#) in Detroit for some [mescaline](#).^[106]

In early 1916, Crowley had an illicit liaison with Alice Richardson, the wife of [Ananda Coomaraswamy](#), one of the greatest art historians of the day. On the stage, Richardson was known as Ratan Devi, mezzo-soprano interpreter of East Indian music. Richardson became pregnant but on a voyage back to England, in mid-1916, she had a miscarriage. Just before his affair with Ratan Devi, Crowley was practising sex magick with Gerda Maria von Kotheck, a German prostitute.^[107]

Two periods of magical experimentation followed. In June 1916, he began the first of these at the [New Hampshire](#) cottage of [Evangeline Adams](#), having ghostwritten most of her two books on astrology.^[108] His diaries at first show discontent at the gap between his view of the grade of Magus and his view of himself: "It is no good making up my mind to do anything material; for I have no means. But this would vanish if I could make up my mind." Despite his objections to sacrificing a living animal, he resolved to crucify a frog as part of a rehearsal of the life of Jesus in the Gospels (afterward declaring it his willing familiar), "with the idea ... that some supreme violation of all the laws of my being would break down my Karma or dissolve the spell that seems to bind me".^[109] Slightly more than a month later, having taken ether ([ethyl oxide](#)), he had a vision of the universe from a modern scientific cosmology that he frequently referred to in later writings.^[110]

Crowley began another period of magical work on an island in the [Hudson River](#) after buying large amounts of red paint instead of food. Having painted "Do what thou wilt" on the cliffs at both sides of the island, he received gifts from curious visitors. Here at the island he had visions of seeming past lives, though he refused to endorse any theory of what they meant beyond linking them to his unconscious. Towards the end of his stay, he had a shocking experience he linked to "the Chinese wisdom" which made even Thelema appear insignificant.^[111] Nevertheless, he continued in his work. Before leaving the country he formed a sexual and magical relationship with [Leah Hirsig](#), whom he had met earlier, and with her help began painting canvases with more creativity and passion.^[112]

Richard B. Spence writes in his 2008 book *Secret Agent 666: Aleister Crowley, British Intelligence and the Occult* that Crowley could have been a lifelong agent for [British Intelligence](#). While this may have already been the case during his many travels to [Tsarist Russia](#), Switzerland, Asia, Mexico and North Africa that had started in his student days, he could have been involved with this line of work during his life in America during the [First World War](#), under a cover of being a German propaganda agent and a supporter of [Irish independence](#). Crowley's mission might have been to gather information about the German intelligence network, the Irish independent activists and produce aberrant propaganda, aiming at compromising the German and Irish ideals. As an [agent provocateur](#) he could have played some role in provoking the sinking of the [RMS Lusitania](#), thereby bringing the United States closer to active involvement in the war alongside the [Allies](#).^[113] He also used German magazines *The Fatherland* and *The International* as outlets for his other writings. The question of whether Crowley was a spy has always been subject to debate, but Spence uncovered a document from the [US Army's](#) old [Military Intelligence Division](#) supporting Crowley's own claim to having been a spy:

Aleister Crowley was an employee of the British Government ... in this country on official business of which the British Consul, New York City has full cognizance.^[114]

Abbey of Thelema: 1920–1923



[Abbey of Thelema](#)





Crowley in meditation

Main article: [Abbey of Thelema](#)

Soon after moving from West 9th St. in [Greenwich Village](#), New York City, to [Palermo](#), Sicily with their newborn daughter Anne Leah (nicknamed Poupée, born February 1920, died in a hospital in Palermo 14 October 1920), Crowley, along with [Leah Hirsig](#), founded the [Abbey of Thelema](#) in [Cefalù \(Palermo\)](#) on 14 April 1920, the day the lease for the villa Santa Barbara was signed by Sir Alastor de Kerval (Crowley) and Contessa Lea Harcourt (Leah Hirsig). The Crowleys arrived in Cefalu on 1 April 1920.^[115] During their stay at the abbey Hirsig was known as Soror Alostrael, Crowley's Scarlet Woman, the name Crowley used for his female [sex magick](#) practitioners in reference to the consort of the Beast of the Apocalypse whose number is 666.^[116] The name of the abbey was borrowed from [Rabelais](#)'s epic [Gargantua](#),^[117] where the "[Abbey of Thélème](#)" is described as a sort of anti-monastery where the lives of the inhabitants were "spent not in laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure".^[118] This idealistic [utopia](#) was to be the model of Crowley's [commune](#), while also being a type of magical school, giving it the designation "Collegium ad Spiritum Sanctum", The College of the Holy Spirit. The general programme was in line with the A∴A∴ course of training, and included daily adorations to the Sun, a study of Crowley's writings, regular yogic and ritual practices (which were to be recorded), as well as general domestic labour. The object, naturally, was for students to devote themselves to the [Great Work](#) of discovering and manifesting their [True Wills](#). Two women, Hirsig and Shumway (her magical name was Sister Cypris after Aphrodite), were both carrying Crowley's seed. Hirsig had a two-year old son named Hansi and Shumway had a three-year old boy named Howard; they were not Crowley's but he nicknamed them Dionysus and Hermes respectively. After Poupée died, Hirsig had a miscarriage but Shumway gave birth to a daughter, Astarte Lulu Panthea. Hirsig suspected Shumway's Black Magic foul play and what Crowley found when reading Shumway's magical diary (everybody had to keep one while at the abbey for reasons explained in Liber E) appalled him. Shumway was banished from the abbey and the Beast lamented the death of his children. However, Shumway was soon back in the abbey again to take care of her offspring.^[119]

[Mussolini](#)'s Fascist government expelled Crowley from the country at the end of April 1923.

Later life



Aleister Crowley, Wickedest man in the World

After the abbey: 1923–1947

In February 1924, Crowley visited [Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man](#). He did not meet the founder on that occasion, but called Gurdjieff a "tip-top man" in his diary.^[120] Crowley privately criticised some of the Institute's practices and teachings, but doubted that what he heard from disciple Pindar reflected the master's true position. Some claim that on a later visit he met Gurdjieff—who firmly repudiated Crowley.^[121] Biographer Sutin expresses scepticism,^[122] and Gurdjieff's student C.S. Nott tells a different version. Nott perceives Crowley as a black or at least ignorant magician and says his teacher "kept a sharp watch" on the visitor, but mentions no open confrontation.^[123]

On 16 August 1929, Crowley married Maria de Miramar, a [Nicaraguan](#), while in [Leipzig](#). They separated by 1930, but were never divorced.^[124] In July 1931, de Miramar was admitted to the Colney Hatch Mental Hospital in [New Southgate](#) where she remained until her death thirty years later.^[125]



Aleister Crowley: magus, poet, philosopher, mountaineer, sexual athlete, drug fiend, and Prophet of a New Aeon

In September 1930, Crowley was in [Lisbon](#) to meet the poet [Fernando Pessoa](#), who translated his poem "Hymn To Pan" into [Portuguese](#). With the assistance of [Pessoa](#) Crowley faked his own death at a notorious rock formation on the shore called [Boca do Inferno](#) (Mouth of Hell). Crowley then left the country and enjoyed the newspaper reports of his death, and reappeared three weeks later at an exhibition in Berlin.^[126]

In 1934, Crowley was declared bankrupt after losing a court case in which he sued the artist [Nina Hamnett](#) for calling him a black magician in her 1932 book, *Laughing Torso*. In addressing the jury, Mr. Justice Swift said:

I have been over forty years engaged in the administration of the law in one capacity or another. I thought that I knew of every conceivable form of wickedness. I thought that everything which was vicious and bad had been produced at one time or another before me. I have learnt in this case that we can always learn something more if we live long enough. I have never heard such dreadful, horrible, blasphemous and abominable stuff as that which has been produced by the man (Crowley) who describes himself to you as the greatest living poet.
—Mr. Justice Swift

Patricia "Deirdre" MacAlpine approached Crowley on the day of the verdict and offered to bear him a child, whom he named Aleister Atatürk. She sought no mystical or religious role in Crowley's life and rarely saw him after the birth, "an arrangement that suited them both".^[127]

In March 1939, [Dion Fortune](#) and Aleister Crowley met publicly for the first time. Fortune had already used Crowley as a model for the black magician Hugo Astley in her 1935 novel *The Winged Bull*.^[128]

During the [Second World War](#), future [James Bond](#) author [Ian Fleming](#) (then a Navy intelligence officer) along with other colleagues proposed a disinformation plot in which Crowley would have helped an [MI5](#) agent supply [Nazi](#) official [Rudolf Hess](#) with faked horoscopes. They could then pass along false information about an alleged pro-German circle in Britain. The government abandoned this plan when Hess flew to Scotland, crashing his plane on the moors near [Eaglesham](#), and was captured. Fleming then suggested using Crowley as an interrogator to determine the influence of astrology on other Nazi leaders, but his superiors rejected this plan. At some point, Fleming also suggested that Britain could use [Enochian](#) as a code in order to plant evidence. ^[129]

On 21 March 1944, Crowley undertook what he considered his crowning achievement, the publication of [The Book of Thoth](#), "strictly limited to 200 numbered and signed copies bound in Morocco leather and printed on pre-wartime paper". Crowley sold £1,500 worth of the edition in less than three months. ^[130]

In April 1944, Crowley moved from 93 Jermyn St. to Bell Inn at Aston Clinton, Bucks. Daphne Harris was the landlady. ^[131]

Death



Crowley shortly before his death

In January 1945, Crowley moved to Netherwood, a [Hastings](#) boarding house where in the first three months he was visited twice by Dion Fortune; she died of [leukaemia](#) in January 1946. On 14 March 1945, in a letter Fortune wrote to Crowley, she declares: "... The acknowledgement I made in the introduction of *The Mystical Qabalah* of my indebtedness to your work, which seemed to me to be no more than common literary honesty, has been used as a rod for my back by people who look on you as Antichrist". ^[132]

Crowley died at Netherwood on 1 December 1947 at the age of 72. According to one biographer the cause of death was a [respiratory infection](#).^[133] He had become addicted to heroin after being prescribed morphine for his [asthma](#) and [bronchitis](#) many years earlier.^[134] He and his last doctor died within 24 hours of each other; newspapers would claim, in differing accounts, that Dr. Thomson had refused to continue his [opiate](#) prescription and that Crowley had put a curse on him.^[135]

Biographer Lawrence Sutin passes on various stories about Crowley's death and last words. [Frieda Harris](#) supposedly reported him saying, "I am perplexed", though she did not see him at the very end. According to [John Symonds](#), a Mr. Rowe witnessed Crowley's death along with a nurse, and reported his last words as "Sometimes I hate myself". Biographer [Gerald Suster](#) accepted the version of events he received from a "Mr W.H." who worked at the house, in which Crowley dies pacing in his living room.^[133] Supposedly Mr W.H. heard a crash while polishing furniture on the floor below, and entered Crowley's rooms to find him dead on the floor.

Patricia "Deirdre" MacAlpine, who visited Crowley with their son and her three other children, denied all this and reports a sudden gust of wind and peal of thunder at the (otherwise quiet) moment of his death. According to MacAlpine, Crowley remained bedridden for the last few days of his life, but was in light spirits and conversational. Readings at the cremation service in nearby [Brighton](#) included excerpts from Crowley's works, among them his poem *Hymn to Pan*, and newspapers referred to the service as a [Black Mass](#). The Brighton council subsequently resolved to take all the necessary steps to prevent such an incident from occurring again.^[133]

Beliefs

Thelema



Aleister Crowley's rendition of the [Unicursal Hexagram](#), the symbol of Thelema
Main articles: [Thelema](#) and [Thelemic mysticism](#)



This section **does not** [cite](#) any [references or sources](#). (January 2012)

[Thelema](#)

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Thelema is the mystical [cosmology](#) Crowley announced in 1904 and expanded upon for the remainder of his life. The diversity of his writings illustrate his difficulty in classifying Thelema from any one vantage. It can be considered a form of magical philosophy, religious traditionalism, [humanistic positivism](#), and/or an elitist [meritocracy](#).

The chief [precept](#) of Thelema, derived from the works of [François Rabelais](#), is the sovereignty of Will: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law". Crowley's idea of *will*, however, is not simply the individual's desires or wishes, but also incorporates a sense of the person's destiny or greater purpose: what he termed "[True Will](#)".

The second precept of Thelema is "Love is the law, love under will"—and Crowley's meaning of "Love" is as complex as that of "Will". It is frequently sexual: Crowley's system, like elements of the [Golden Dawn](#) before him, sees the dichotomy and tension between the male and female as

fundamental to existence, and sexual "magick" and metaphor form a significant part of Thelemic ritual. However, Love is also discussed as the Union of Opposites, which Crowley thought was the key to [enlightenment](#).

Freemasonry

He had also claimed to be a [Freemason](#),^[136] but the organisations he joined are not considered [regular](#) by Masonic bodies in the Anglo-American tradition.^[137]

Crowley claimed the following Masonic degrees:

- 33° of the Scottish Rite in Mexico from Don Jesus Medina.

“Don Jesus Medina, a descendant of the great duke of Armada fame, and one of the highest chiefs of Scottish Rite free-masonry. My cabbalistic knowledge being already profound by current standards, he thought me worthy of the highest initiation in his power to confer; special powers were obtained in view of my limited sojourn, and I was pushed rapidly through and admitted to the thirty-third and last degree before I left the country.” *[The Confessions of Aleister Crowley](#)* pp. 202–203.

- 3° In France by the Anglo-Saxon Lodge No. 343, a Lodge chartered in 1899 by the Grande Loge de France, a body not at the time recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England, on 29 June 1904.
- 33° of the irregular 'Cerneau' Scottish Rite from John Yarker
- 90°/95° of the Rite of Memphis/Misraim from John Yarker.

The [United Grand Lodge of England](#), whose recognition is generally considered the standard for Masonic validity, did not recognise any of the above bodies as being true Freemasonry, thus Crowley never was an “official” Freemason within the common understanding of the term.

Crowley quickly realized that the post-Yarker era meant change. He was not rebellious by reflex, at least where old British institutions were concerned. He undoubtedly believed [O.T.O.](#) had authority from Yarker to work the Ancient and Primitive Rite's equivalent to the Craft degrees in England, but once made aware of the issue of regularity when having his own French Masonic credentials declined, he was not defiant and on his own made changes to the [O.T.O.](#) to avoid conflict. He inserted notices into the last number of *The Equinox* to the effect that the [O.T.O.](#) did not infringe upon the just privileges of the [Grand Lodge Of England](#)

During WWI Crowley worked slightly revised English Craft rituals in America, but despite the absence of a central Grand Lodge, he met with objections from masonic authorities. He then rewrote the [O.T.O.](#) rituals for I° – III° so that they no longer resembled Craft masonry degrees in language, theme or intent.^[138]

Science and magic

Crowley endeavoured to use the [scientific method](#) to study what people at the time called spiritual experiences, making "The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion" the catchphrase of his magazine *The Equinox*. By this he meant that religious experiences should not be taken at [face value](#), but critiqued and experimented with in order to arrive at their underlying mystical or neurological meaning.

In this connection there was also the point that I was anxious to prove that spiritual progress did not depend on religious or moral codes, but was like any other science. Magick would yield its secrets to the infidel and the [libertine](#), just as one does not have to be a churchwarden in order to discover a new kind of orchid. There are, of course, certain virtues necessary to the Magician; but they are of the same order as those which make a successful chemist.^[139]

He frequently expressed views about sex that were radical for his time, and published numerous poems and tracts combining religious themes with sexual imagery both heterosexual and homosexual, as well as [pederastic](#). One of his most notorious poetry collections, titled "[White Stains](#)" (1898), was published in [Amsterdam](#) in 1898 and dealt specifically with sexually explicit subject matter. However, most of the hundred copies printed for the initial release were later seized and destroyed by British customs.^[140]

Crowley's magical and initiatory system has amongst its innermost reaches a set of teachings on sex magick. [Sex magick](#) is the use of the sex act—or the energies, passions or arousal states it evokes—as a point upon which to focus the will or magical desire for effects in the non-sexual world. In the view of [Allen Greenfield](#),^[141] Crowley was inspired by [Paschal Beverly Randolph](#), an American [Abolitionist](#), [Spiritualist](#) medium, and author of the mid-19th century who wrote (in *Eulis!*, 1874) of using the "nuptive moment" ([orgasm](#)) as the time to make a "[prayer](#)" for events to occur.

Crowley often introduced new terminology for spiritual and magickal practices and theory. In *The Book of the Law* and *The Vision and the Voice*, the Aramaic magickal formula [Abracadabra](#) was changed to [Abrahadabra](#), which he called the new formula of the [Aeon](#). He also famously spelled [magic](#) in the archaic manner, as [magick](#), to differentiate "the true science of the Magi from all its counterfeits".^[142]


He urged his students to learn to control their own mental and behavioural habits, to the point of switching political views and personalities at will. For control of speech (symbolised as the [unicorn](#)) he recommended to choose a commonly used word, letter, or pronouns and adjectives of the first person (such as the word "I"), and avoid using it for a week or more. Should they say the word he instructed them to cut themselves with a blade on each occasion to serve as warning or reminder. Later the student could move on to the "Horse" of action and the "Ox" of thought.^[143] (These symbols derive from the cabala of Crowley's book 777.) Crowley has also been labelled by some [anthropologists](#) as a practitioner of [neoshamanism](#) and revivalist of [shamanistic](#) philosophies in the early 20th century.^[144]

Controversy

Crowley enjoyed being a figure of controversy and frequently deliberately provoked it among his peers and in the media. Author and Crowley expert [Lon Milo Duquette](#) wrote in his 1993 work *The Magick of Aleister Crowley* that:

"Crowley clothed many of his teachings in the thin veil of sensational titillation. By doing so he assured himself that one, his works would only be appreciated by the few individuals capable of doing so, and two, his works would continue to generate interest and be published by and for the benefit of both his admirers and his enemies long after death. He did not—I repeat not—perform or advocate [human sacrifice](#). He was often guilty, however, of the crime of poor judgment. Like all of us, Crowley had many flaws and shortcomings. The greatest of those, in my opinion, was his inability to understand that everyone else in the world was not as educated and clever as he. It is clear, even in his earliest works, he often took fiendish delight in terrifying those who were either too lazy, too bigoted, or too slow-witted to understand him."^[145]



 [Leila Waddell \(Laylah\)](#), Crowley's muse during the writing of [The Book of Lies](#)

In this vein many of Crowley's more audacious and outright shocking writings were often thinly veiled attempts to communicate methods of [sexual magick](#), often using words like "blood", "death" and "kill" to replace "[semen](#)", "ecstasy" and "[ejaculation](#)" in the yet puritanical sexual environment of late 19th/early 20th century England. Take for instance the highly repeated quote from his thickly veiled [Book Four](#): "It would be unwise to condemn as irrational the practice of devouring the heart and liver of an adversary while yet warm. For the highest [spiritual](#) working one must choose that victim which contains the greatest and purest force; a male child of perfect innocence and high intelligence is the most satisfactory."^[146] Author [Robert Anton Wilson](#), in his 1977 *The Final Secret of the Illuminati* (aka [Cosmic Trigger Volume One](#)), interpreted the child as a reference to genes in sperm. Crowley added in a footnote to the text on sacrifice, "the intelligence and innocence of that male child are the perfect understanding of the Magician, his one aim, without lust of result".

In the "New Comment" to [The Book of the Law](#), "the Beast 666 adviseth that all children shall be accustomed from infancy to witness every type of sexual act, as also the process of birth, lest falsehood fog, and mystery stupefy, their minds ... Politeness has forbidden any direct reference to the subject of sex to secure no happier result than to allow [Sigmund Freud](#) and others to prove that our every thought, speech, and gesture, conscious or unconscious, is an indirect reference!"

Spiritual and recreational use of drugs

Crowley was a habitual drug user and also maintained a meticulous record of his drug-induced experiences with [opium](#), [cocaine](#), [hashish](#), [cannabis](#), alcohol, [ether](#), [mescaline](#), morphine, and heroin.^[147] [Allan Bennett](#), Crowley's mentor, was said to have "instructed Crowley in the magical use of drugs".^[148]

The Cairo revelation from Aiwass/Aiwaz specifically recommended indulgence in "strange drugs". While in Paris during the 1920s, Crowley experimented with psychedelic substances, specifically [Anhalonium lewinii](#), an obsolete scientific name for the [mescaline](#)-bearing cactus [peyote](#) and initiated the writers [Katherine Mansfield](#) and [Theodore Dreiser](#) in its use.^[149] In October 1930, Crowley dined with [Aldous Huxley](#) in Berlin, and to this day rumours persist that he introduced Huxley to peyote on that occasion.^[150]

Other drug use

Crowley developed a [drug addiction](#) after a London doctor prescribed heroin for his asthma and bronchitis.^[151] His life as an addict influenced his 1922 novel, *Diary of a Drug Fiend*, but the fiction presented a hopeful outcome of rehabilitation and recovery by means of magical techniques and the exercise of True Will. He overcame his addiction to heroin during this period (chronicled in *Liber XVIII – The Fountain of Hyacinth*) but began taking it once more late in his life, again on doctor's prescription for his respiratory difficulties.^[152]

Racism

Biographer Lawrence Sutin stated that "blatant bigotry is a persistent minor element in Crowley's writings".^[153] He also calls Crowley "a spoiled scion of a wealthy Victorian family who embodied many of the worst [John Bull](#) racial and social prejudices of his upper-class contemporaries",^[154] noting that, "Crowley embodied the contradiction that writhed within many Western intellectuals of the time: deeply held racist viewpoints courtesy of their culture, coupled with a fascination with people of colour".^[155]

Crowley's published expressions of [anti-semitism](#) were disturbing enough to later editors of his works that one of them, [Israel Regardie](#), who had also been a student of Crowley, attempted to suppress them. In *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings of Aleister Crowley* (Samuel Weiser, 1975), Regardie, who was Jewish, explained his complete removal of Crowley's anti-semitic commentary on the [Kabbalah](#) in the sixth unnumbered page of his editorial introduction: "I am ... omitting Crowley's Preface to the book. It is a nasty, malicious piece of writing, and does not do justice to the system with which he is dealing."^[156] What Regardie had removed was Crowley's "Preface to Sepher Sephiroth", originally published in *Equinox 1:8*. Written in 1911,^[157] which contained a statement of Crowley's belief in the [blood libel against the Jews](#):^[158]

[Human sacrifices](#) are today still practised by the Jews of Eastern Europe, as is set forth at length by [Sir Richard Burton](#) in the MS which the wealthy Jews of England have compassed heaven and earth to suppress,^[159] and evidenced by the ever-recurring [Pogroms](#) against which so

senseless an outcry is made by those who live among those degenerate Jews who are at least not cannibals.

Crowley rhetorically asked how a system of value such as Qabalah could come from what "the general position of the ethnologist" called "an entirely barbarous race, devoid of any spiritual pursuit", and "polytheists" to boot.^[158] As Crowley himself practised polytheism, some read these remarks as deliberate irony.^[160]

Crowley studied and promoted the mystical and magical teachings of some of the same ethnic groups he attacked, in particular Indian [yoga](#), Jewish [Kabbalah](#) and [goetia](#), and the Chinese [I Ching](#). Also, in [Confessions](#) Chapter 86,^[161] as well as a private diary which Lawrence Sutin quotes in *Do What Thou Wilt* chapter 7, Crowley recorded a memory of a "past life" as the Chinese Taoist writer Ko Hsuan. In another remembered life, Crowley said, he took part in a "Council of Masters" that included many from Asia. He has this to say about the virtues of "Eurasians" and then Jews:

I do not believe that their universally admitted baseness is due to a mixture of blood or the presumable peculiarity of their parents; but that they are forced into vileness by the attitude of both their white and coloured neighbours. A similar case is presented by the Jew, who really does only too often possess the bad qualities for which he is disliked; but they are not proper to his race. No people can show finer specimens of humanity. The Hebrew poets and prophets are sublime. The Jewish soldier is courageous, the Jewish rich man generous. The race possesses imagination, romance, loyalty, probity and humanity in an exceptional degree. But the Jew has been persecuted so relentlessly that his survival has depended on the development of his worst qualities; avarice, servility, falseness, cunning and the rest. Even the highest-class Eurasians such as [Ananda Koomaraswamy](#) suffer acutely from the shame of being considered outcast. The irrationality and injustice of their neighbours heightens the feeling and it breeds the very abominations which the snobbish inhumanity of their fellow-men expects of them.^[162]

All these remarks must necessarily be contrasted with Crowley's explicit philosophical instructions in his last book *Magick Without Tears*. Chapter 73, which is titled "'Monsters', Niggers, Jews, etc," and which states his essentially individualistic and anti-racist views:

... you say, "Every man and every woman is a star." does need some attention to the definition of "man" and "woman." What is the position, you say, of "monsters"? And men of "inferior" races, like the [Veddah](#), [Hottentot](#) and the Australian [Blackfellow](#)? There must be a line somewhere, and will I please draw it? ... Not only does it seem to me the only conceivable way of reconciling this and similar passages with "Every man and every woman is a star." to assert the sovereignty of the individual, and to deny the right-to-exist to "class-consciousness," "crowd-psychology," and so to mob-rule and Lynch-Law, but also the only practicable plan whereby we may each one of us settle down peaceably to mind his own business, to pursue his True Will, and to accomplish the Great Work.

The "Thelemic" philosophical position which he taught in this volume (which is a series of letters of direct personal instruction to a student of Magick) is clearly an anti-racist one. Even in

private comments on [Mein Kampf](#), Crowley said that his own preferred "master class" was above all distinctions of race.^[163]

Views on women

Biographer [Lawrence Sutin](#) stated that Crowley "largely accepted the notion, implicitly embodied in Victorian sexology, of women as secondary social beings in terms of intellect and sensibility".^[164] Occult scholar Tim Maroney compared him to other figures and movements of the time and suggests that some others might have shown more respect for women.^[165] Another biographer, Martin Booth, while describing Crowley's misogyny, asserts that in other ways he was pro-feminist who thought women were badly served by the law. He considered abortion to be tantamount to murder and thought little of a society that condoned it, believing that women, when left to choose outside of prevailing social influences, would never want to end a pregnancy.^[166]

Crowley stated that women, except "a few rare individuals", care most about having children and will conspire against their husbands if they lack children to whom to devote themselves.^[167] In *Confessions*, Crowley says he learned this from his first marriage.^[168] He claimed that their intentions were to force a man to abandon his life's work for their interests. He found women "tolerable", he wrote, only when they served the sole role of helping a man in his life's work. However, he said that they were incapable of actually understanding the nature of this work itself.^[169] He also claimed that women did not have individuality and were solely guided by their habits or [impulses](#).^[170]

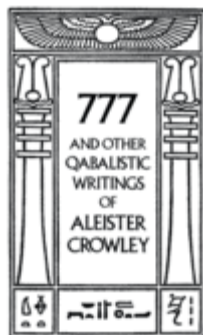
Nevertheless, when he sought what he called the supreme magical-mystical attainment, Crowley asked [Leah Hirsig](#) to direct his ordeals, marking the first time since the schism in the Golden Dawn that another person verifiably took charge of his initiation.^[171] In the [Hierophant](#) section of *The Book of Thoth*, Crowley interprets a verse from [The Book of the Law](#) that speaks of "the woman girt with a sword; she represents the Scarlet Woman in the hierarchy of the new Aeon. [...] This woman represents [Venus](#) as she now is in this new aeon; no longer the mere vehicle of her male counterpart, but armed and militant."

In his Commentaries on *The Book of the Law* Crowley stated what he considered to be the correct Thelemic position towards women:

We of Thelema say that "Every man and every woman is a star." We do not fool and flatter women; we do not despise and abuse them. To us, a woman is herself, absolute, original, independent, free, self-justified, exactly as a man is.^[172]

Writings

Main article: [List of works by Aleister Crowley](#)



Crowley wrote in a wide variety of genres: here are images from the covers of his novel [Moonchild](#) (1917) and his list of magical correspondences, [777](#) (1909).

Aleister Crowley was a highly prolific writer, who published works on a wide variety of topics, including his philosophy of Thelema, mysticism, ceremonial magic, as well as non-occult topics like politics, philosophy and culture. Widely seen as his most important work was [The Book of the Law](#) (1904), the central text of the philosophy of Thelema, although he claimed that he himself was not its writer, but merely its scribe for the angelic being [Aiwass](#). This was just one of many books that he believed that he had channelled from a spiritual being, which collectively came to be termed [The Holy Books of Thelema](#).^[173]

He also wrote books on ceremonial magick, namely [Magick \(Book 4\)](#) (1912), [The Vision and the Voice](#) and [777 and other Qabalistic writings](#), and edited a copy of the [grimoire](#) known as [The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King](#). Another of his important works was a book on [mysticism](#), [The Book of Lies](#) (1912), while another was a collection of different essays entitled [Little Essays Toward Truth](#) (1938). He also penned an autobiography, entitled [The Confessions of Aleister Crowley](#) (1929). Throughout his lifetime he wrote many letters and meticulously kept diaries, some of which were posthumously published as [Magick Without Tears](#). During his lifetime he also edited and produced a series of publications in book form called [The Equinox](#) (subtitled "The Review of Scientific Illuminism"), which served as the voice of his magical order, the [A∴A∴](#). Although the entire set is influential and remains one of the definitive works on [occultism](#), some of the more notable issues are "[The Blue Equinox](#)", "[The Equinox of the Gods](#)", "[Eight Lectures on Yoga](#)", "[The Book of Thoth](#)" and "[Liber Aleph](#)".

Crowley also wrote fiction, including plays and later novels, most of which have not received significant notice outside of occult circles. His most notable fictional works include [Moonchild](#) (1917), [Diary of a Drug Fiend](#) (1922) and [The Stratagem and other Stories](#) (1929). He also self-published much of his poetry, including the erotic [White Stains](#) (1898) and [Clouds without Water](#) (1909), although perhaps his best known poem was his ode to the ancient god [Pan](#), [Hymn to Pan](#) (1929).^[174] The influence of Crowley's poetry can be seen through the fact that three of his compositions, "The Quest",^[175] "The Neophyte",^[176] and "The Rose and the Cross",^[177] were included in the 1917 collection [The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse](#), however [The Oxford Companion to English Literature](#) entry on him describes him as a "bad but prolific poet".^[178]

Legacy and influence

Crowley has remained an influential figure, both amongst occultists and in [popular culture](#), particularly that of Britain, but also of other parts of the world.

Occult

After Crowley's death, various of his colleagues and fellow Thelemites continued with his work. One of his British disciples, [Kenneth Grant](#), subsequently founded the [Typhonian O.T.O.](#) in the 1950s. In America, his followers also continued, one of the most prominent of whom was [Jack Parsons](#), the influential rocket scientist. Parsons performed what he described as the [Babalon Working](#) in 1946, and subsequently claimed to have been taught the fourth part of the *Book of the Law*. Parsons would also later work with and influence [L. Ron Hubbard](#), the later founder of [Scientology](#).

Crowley inspired and influenced a number of later [Malvernians](#) including Major-General [John Fuller](#), the inventor of artificial moonlight, and [Cecil Williamson](#), the neo-pagan witch.

One of Crowley's acquaintances in the last months of his life was Gerald Gardner, who was initiated into O.T.O. by Crowley and subsequently went on to found the [Neopagan](#) religion of [Wicca](#). Various scholars on early Wiccan history, such as [Ronald Hutton](#), [Philip Heselton](#) and [Leo Ruickbie](#) concur that witchcraft's early rituals, as devised by Gardner, contained much from Crowley's writings such as the [Gnostic Mass](#). The third degree initiation ceremony in Gardnerian Wicca (including the [Great Rite](#)) is derived almost completely from the Gnostic Mass.^[179] Indeed, Gardner liked Crowley's writings because he believed that they "breathed the very spirit of [paganism](#)".^[*citation needed*]

Crowley was also an influence on both the late [1960's counterculture](#) and the [New Age](#) movement.^[*citation needed*]

Popular culture

Fictionalised accounts of Crowley or characters based upon him have been included in a number of literary works, published both during his life and after. The writer [W. Somerset Maugham](#) used him as the model for the character in his novel *The Magician*, published in 1908.^[62] Crowley was flattered by Maugham's fictionalised depiction of himself, stating that "he had done more than justice to the qualities of which I was proud... *The Magician* was, in fact, an appreciation of my genius such as I had never dreamed of inspiring."^[180] Similarly, in [Dennis Wheatley](#)'s popular thriller *The Devil Rides Out*, the Satanic cult leader Mocata is inspired by Crowley, and in turn the deceased [Satanist](#) Adrian Marcato referred to in [Ira Levin](#)'s *Rosemary's Baby* is likewise a Crowley-like figure. Long after his death Crowley is still being used for similar purposes, appearing as a main character in [Robert Anton Wilson](#)'s 1981 novel *Masks of the Illuminati* and [Jake Arnott](#)'s 2009 novel *The Devil's Paintbrush*.

The association of Crowley's name with various Satanic or dark individuals occurs widely in published works, especially those oriented toward a younger but technologically literate

[demographic target audience](#). In the [cyberpunk](#) novel *Hammerjack* (2005), author Marc D. Giller introduces the "Crowleys" on the second page of that [sci-fi](#) thriller, as one of the groups of "street species" inhabiting the cities. The long-running American [TV series "Supernatural"](#) also includes a major character named Crowley, who plays key roles in dealings with evil forces.

The acclaimed comic book author [Alan Moore](#), himself a practitioner of [ceremonial magic](#), has also included Crowley in several of his works. In Moore's *From Hell*, he appears in a cameo as a young boy declaring that magic is real, while in the series *Promethea* he appears several times existing in a realm of the imagination called the Immateria. Moore has also discussed Crowley's associations with the [Highbury](#) area of London in his recorded magical working, *The Highbury Working*.^[181] Other comic book writers have also made use of him, with [Pat Mills](#) and [Olivier Ledroit](#) portraying him as a reincarnated [vampire](#) in their series *Requiem Chevalier Vampire*. Crowley also is referenced in the [Batman](#) comic *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* where the character [Amadeus Arkham](#) meets with him, discuss the symbolism of Egyptian tarot, and they play chess. He has also appeared in Japanese media, such as *D.Gray-Man* and *Toaru Majutsu no Index*, as well as the [hentai](#) series *Bible Black*, where he has a fictional daughter named Jody Crowley who continues her father's search for the [Scarlet Woman](#). He is also depicted in the Original PlayStation game *Nightmare Creatures* as a powerful demonic resurrection of himself.^[182] [Ian Fleming](#) used Crowley as a model for [Le Chiffre](#), villain in the first James Bond novel [Casino Royale](#).

Crowley has been an influence for a string of popular musicians throughout the 20th century. The hugely popular band [The Beatles](#) included him as one of [the many figures](#) on the cover sleeve of their 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, where he is situated between [Sri Yukteswar Giri](#) and [Mae West](#). A more intent interest in Crowley was held by [Jimmy Page](#), the guitarist and co-founder of 1970s rock band [Led Zeppelin](#). Despite not describing himself as a Thelemite or being a member of the Ordo Templi Orientis, Page was still fascinated by Crowley, and owned some of his clothing, manuscripts and ritual objects, and during the 1970s bought [Boleskine House](#), which also appears in the band's movie *The Song Remains the Same*. On the back cover of the Doors 13 album, Jim Morrison and the other members of the Doors are shown posing with a bust of Aleister Crowley. Author Paulo Coelho introduced the writings of Aleister Crowley to Brazilian rocker [Raul Seixas](#), who went on to write and perform songs (most notably, "[Viva a Sociedade Alternativa](#)" and "Novo Aeon") that were strongly influenced by Crowley.^[183] The later rock musician [Ozzy Osbourne](#) released a song titled "[Mr. Crowley](#)" on his solo album *Blizzard of Ozz*, while a comparison of Crowley and Osbourne in the context of their media portrayals can be found in the *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*.^[184] Crowley has also been a favourite of Swiss Avant-Garde metal band [Celtic Frost](#). In fact, the song Os Abysmi Vel Daath from [Monotheist](#) is based partially on some of his writings. In the early 1990s, British Indie band [Five Thirty](#) carried with them on tour a front door which they alleged had belonged to Crowley. The door was placed prominently on stage during their gigs.^[185]

Crowley has also had an influence in cinema; in particular, he was a major influence and inspiration to the work on the radical [avant garde](#) underground film-maker [Kenneth Anger](#), especially his Magick Lantern Cycle series of works. One of Anger's works is a film of Crowley's paintings,^[186] and in 2009 he gave a lecture on the subject of Crowley.^[187] [Bruce Dickinson](#), singer with [Iron Maiden](#), wrote the screenplay of *Chemical Wedding* (released in

America on DVD as *Crowley*),^[188] which features [Simon Callow](#) as Oliver Haddo, the name taken from the Magician-villain character in the [Somerset Maugham](#) book "The Magician", who was in turn inspired by Maugham's meeting with Crowley^[189] He also appeared as himself in the animated television show *The Venture Bros* in the season three episode entitled "Orb."

The Italian historian of esotericism [Giordano Berti](#), in his book *Tarocchi di Aleister Crowley* (1998) quotes a number of literary works and films inspired by Crowley's life and legends. Some of the films are *The Magician* (1926) by [Rex Ingram](#), based upon the eponymous book written by [William Somerset Maugham](#) (1908); *Night of the Demon* (1957) by [Jacques Tourneur](#), based on the story "Casting the Runes" by [M. R. James](#); and *The Devils Rides Out* (1968) by [Terence Fisher](#), from the eponymous thriller by [Dennis Wheatley](#). Also: "Dance To The Music of Time" by [Anthony Powell](#), "Black Easter" by [James Blish](#), and "The Winged Bull" by [Dion Fortune](#).^[190]