

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CROWLEY BOOKS

by Frater Julianus

The author would like to dedicate this Guide to his three Cats, in recognition of their constant Efforts to distract him from his Work.

This is a work in progress. The author welcomes comments and suggestions at julianus@kiva.net.

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Aleister Crowley (1875 - 1947) is certainly the single most influential occult practitioner of the last century, as well as being the most controversial. His literary output is astonishing in both volume and variety, including poetry, drama, and fiction in addition to his core Magical writings. Since his writings have been drawn upon, often without acknowledgement, by nearly every occultist in the English-speaking world it behooves any person interested in Magick or occultism to have some direct acquaintance with Crowley's work. The problem is that so many of his more famous books are notoriously difficult for the reader, often despite Crowley's own attempts to clarify his ideas for the general public. Another problem is that in the course of one book he often makes reference to several others, which leads to the impression that you can't understand one Crowley book until you've read them all. Considering how much stuff is currently in print this is pretty daunting, to say the least!

I am more than familiar with the frustrations involved in exploring Crowley's writings. The first Crowley book I ever got—indeed one of my first books on Magick of any kind—was the old Dover edition of **Magick in Theory and Practice** and almost nothing in it made sense to me at the time. It wasn't until about four or five years later, around the time I joined the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.) in fact, that I was able to get much out of the book. Now, nearly two decades after buying it, I find it to be the single best book on Magick ever written and a constant source of inspiration.

One of the main reasons for my initial difficulty was simply the lack of basic information about the book. Even today most people still don't know that **Magick in Theory and Practice** (MTP for short) was *never intended to be a stand-alone work*. It is in fact the third part of a four-part *magnum opus* simply titled **Book Four**. Had I known that simple fact I could have started with the earlier sections and saved myself a lot of puzzlement. It was my new brothers and sisters in the Order who provided this and many other useful pieces of information, which illustrates one of the principal obstacles for the beginner in many esoteric schools: the written tradition is of limited use without the oral tradition that explains it.

But not everyone interested in reading Crowley is part of a Thelemic order, or wants to be, and this **Guide** is intended to partly eliminate that difficulty. This is by no means a primer on Thelema (authors such as Lon Milo duQuette, Rodney Orpheus, and Gerald del Campo have all written fine books in that category) nor does it cover the whole of Crowley's writings. My intention is merely to suggest a handful of books that will be most useful to someone approaching Crowley for the first time, to clear up some of the complexity of his publishing schemes, and to

address the matter of multiple editions of the same book. This is especially vital since the O.T.O. has been issuing new and improved editions of many texts under the editorship of Hymenaeus Beta, the present Frater Superior of the order. Improvements range from useful Introductions and better proofreading to substantial restorations of material ‘misaid’ by Crowley’s printers. Many texts have also been expanded with additional material not included in the original publications. The new **Book Four** is the most extreme example of this: not only does it have all four parts in one volume for the first time but the restored passages make it far closer to the Crowley’s original intentions than his own editions ever were.

So whether your intention is to ally yourself with the Master Therion or simply to have a better understanding of his books than you do at present, read on!

MAGICK WITHOUT TEARS

Crowley was well aware of his tendency to write over the heads of his readers and he tried out several different stratagems for correcting this fault. His last and, to many people, most successful tactic was simply to make a book out of correspondence with his students. This format actually is one of considerable antiquity: for example, **On the Mysteries** by the fourth century adept Iamblichus is ostensibly a letter from an Egyptian priest. The essential idea is similar to a ‘FAQ’ on the internet, except that Iamblichus and Crowley both run on for several hundred pages!

Magick Without Tears (the title seems to derive from a popular schoolbook called **Reading Without Tears** from Crowley’s youth) was begun in 1943 and consists of Crowley’s answers to questions from an unnamed female pupil. The primary correspondent was Anne Macky of Hertfordshire, England, whose A.: A.: motto was Fiat Yod. Additional topics were proposed by others from the old Agape Lodge of O.T.O. to help make the book as broadly comprehensive as possible. The resulting collection ranges from profound philosophical issues, such as sex morality or the existence of the gods, to a comparatively trivial account of what might have been Gnomes on a Swiss glacier. A glance through the table of contents will give a fuller idea of the breadth of subjects addressed. Here I will only note that the tone of this book is not just informal but downright *chatty*: the reader sees Crowley at his most concerned, helpful, and on occasion brutally honest about himself and his own failings. This alone is reason enough to interest the student, but in addition the book is full of practical advice on everything from improvising your magical Temple to astral travel— indeed it was originally going to be called **Aleister Explains Everything!** Even if the Old Boy doesn’t quite do *that* he still comes about as close as he ever did.

The book did not actually see print until the 1950s, years after Crowley’s death. The current edition, which first appeared in 1973, was edited by Israel Regardie, who made some substantial cuts in the text. On the other hand, he gives us an index. There are plans to publish a fully-restored edition in the future but, as usual in Thelemic publishing, there is no firm date.

So **Magick Without Tears**, Crowley’s last book, is by itself sufficient to show that his mind was as sharp in his last years as it had ever been, despite the popular image of him as a ‘drug-ravaged wreck’. Even in the somewhat abbreviated form we presently have it is probably the best place for the beginner to start investigating Crowley’s work.

THE BOOK OF THE LAW

Technically called **Liber AL vel Legis** or **Liber Legis**, this short book is the fundamental Holy Book of Thelema, the religious/philosophical/magical system for which Aleister Crowley is the Prophet. Whether you believe that he took it down from the direct voice dictation of a superhuman intelligence named Aiwass in 1904 (and interestingly enough many serious

Thelemes don't) is immaterial. All Crowley's later work is dependent on the three chapters in this book and therefore you need at least some acquaintance with it if you want to understand his ideas.

There are any number of stand-alone editions of **Liber AL** by itself. Most of them are fairly small if not actually pocket-size, making them convenient to carry about with you. Actually, there is no urgent reason to pick it up separately since it is also included in several of Crowley's other books, such as the complete **Book Four** and several numbers of **The Equinox**. You can also find it in some of the recent 'primers' on Thelema by other authors, such as Lon duQuette's **Magick of Thelema**. Ideally, according to instructions in the text itself, any proper edition of **Liber AL** should include a facsimile of the original manuscript in Crowley's not-terribly-legible handwriting. Beyond any possible esoteric meanings embedded in Crowley's scribbles, you can think of this as a way of preventing later editors from altering the text to suit their own agendas.

THE LAW IS FOR ALL

Any work as perplexing as the **Book of the Law** simply cries out for some sort of learned commentary and Crowley attempted several over the course of his life. The only one he regarded as completely successful is a one-page 'inspired' **Comment**, now included in most editions of **Liber AL**, whose primary injunction is that people should interpret the book for themselves.

This still leaves Crowley's more extensive commentaries, with which he was never satisfied to the end of his life. Some thirty years after he died no less than *three* separate editions of these long commentaries appeared in print from three different editors each making different cuts in Crowley's text so that all were different and *none* were complete. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant teamed up to produce **Magical and Philosophical Commentaries on The Book of the Law** (1974) while Marcelo Motta published **The Commentaries of AL** (1976) and Israel Regardie called his version **The Law is for All** (1975). Motta and Grant were motivated largely by a need to legitimate their respective 'pseudo-O.T.O.s' which they were promoting at the time and added their own commentaries to Crowley's. In Motta's case at least this probably did more harm than good, since his commentary displayed his notable paranoia, intolerance, ignorance and vicious diatribes against his supposed 'enemies' for all to see. The Symonds and Grant version is the most complete of the three, although Regardie's was the only one to remain in print for any length of time.

Lost in all this was the fact that, far from being hostile to any abridgement of this work, Crowley had actually *commissioned one himself*. While not a Magician in any formal sense, Louis Umfraville Wilkinson (1881 - 1966) was a talented writer and close friend for many years. His lack of formal occult training made him the ideal person to edit Crowley's own commentaries down to something both manageable and accessible to the average person. Crowley's instructions were essentially to 'cut out anything that doesn't make sense to you on the first reading,' and Wilkinson set to work. The result, which was never quite finished after Crowley's death in 1947, languished in typescript until 1996 when Hymenaeus Beta completed the project and issued it as... **The Law is for All**.

Now there is a certain inherent confusion in having two very different versions of the same book out by the same author with the same title... and from the same publisher to boot! It was felt that the title was appropriate to a commentary designed for the newcomer, so essentially the Regardie edition was allowed to go out of print and the Wilkinson edition just replaced it. This does leave the potential buyer with the problem of determining which version is being offered for sale at any given time, especially if you're buying through a catalogue or on-line. Naturally the full bibliographic data will settle the matter seeing as the editors are different and, if all else fails, you just need to ask on which side of 1996 the particular copy is copyrighted. Thankfully, those so

old-fashioned as to do their shopping in a store have an even simpler option: the Regardie edition has a white cover while the Wilkinson version is clad in dark purple. It is thus easy to distinguish between them even across a crowded room.

Incidentally, there *are* plans to publish Crowley's *complete* commentaries on **The Book of the Law**. However, considering the agonising process that is Thelemic publishing, there's no telling how long it will take before *that* happy tome will reach store shelves. So, on the whole, I recommend you get the Wilkinson version. Aside from being the abridgement Crowley actually *wanted* to publish, it features a full photographic reproduction of the manuscript of **Liber AL**, an up-to-date bibliography of Crowley's works, and a good index. Naturally you also get the full printed text of **Liber AL** itself. It is also, by design, the best suited to the beginner.

THE EQUINOX

The Equinox represents the largest and most involved publishing scheme Aleister Crowley ever devised: the series now includes over twenty large books and is still growing! Some of these books (which are technically called 'issues'— we'll get to that in a minute) are rare and expensive, one has never actually been printed, and then there are a number of unauthorised 'pirate' additions to the whole thing. Before you panic, let me assure you that I am definitely NOT suggesting that you run out and buy the lot— I still don't own the whole thing myself for that matter. The reason I am covering it in a guide for the beginner is that there is a substantial amount of confusion over just what **The Equinox** is, and I felt that this *Guide* is a good place to clear things up. This is especially needed because Crowley often cites material from this series in his other works. Another reason is that *some* of the books in the series may very well be useful to you depending on your individual needs and interests. So bearing those caveats in mind we will proceed.

So just what *is* **The Equinox** anyway? It really begins in 1904 when Crowley received **The Book of the Law** and was charged, so he said, by the Secret Chiefs with beginning a New Æon in human history *and* with preserving the wisdom of the old. This second goal was due to Crowley's belief that the change of Æon would involve the collapse of civilisation followed by a chaotic 'dark age' and he wanted to be sure that important knowledge would survive. (Don't discount that idea; considering how young the Æon still is, we can't say that he won't be right.) Crowley's solution was to publish a journal, beginning in 1909, which would also serve as the official organ for his new order, the A.: A.:. Later on, around 1912, it also became the official organ for the British section of the O.T.O. Many occult groups, before and since, have published their own periodicals of course, but Crowley determined that *his* would be the best ever. Being independently wealthy and having published a good deal of his poetry himself, he could do exactly that: each 'issue' of **The Equinox** is itself a hardback *book* of at least a few hundred pages on excellent paper. Accordingly they look more like separate volumes of a distinguished encyclopaedia than individual issues of a magazine. In this context, *Volume* refers not to the individual books but to the sets of ten into which the whole series is divided. If you find this is confusing now, so did booksellers back then. Many wouldn't stock the thing, not because of the content, but because they couldn't decide if it belonged with the magazines or the books! Dilbertian logic is nothing new it seems. Anyway, I will now cover the different books making up **The Equinox**, going Volume by Volume.

Volume I, Issues 1 - 10 (published 1909 - 1913)

This is the original series published under the title **The Equinox** and, as the title suggests, they appeared every six months on the Vernal and Autumnal Equinox. In many cases when people refer to that name they mean *only* these ten books, though sometimes

they include the first issue of **Volume III** as well. Despite the lavish production these do follow a magazine format to some extent, including a good deal of fiction, verse, and very pointed book reviews by Crowley and his friends in addition to the purely occult material. There are even advertisements. He included these things in an attempt to broaden the series' appeal and thus ensure better distribution: remember the idea was to provide for the long-term survival of esoteric knowledge. The amazing thing is that Crowley did indeed write the majority of the contents himself even while writing several *other* books not part of this series. Add in some extended trips around Europe and North Africa, continued Magical workings, some experimental theatre, and several love affairs and you start to wonder if he ever slept. These five years certainly mark the most sustained productive period of his life.

I won't discuss the contents of each individual issue here. Suffice it to say that they include much instructional material for the A.: A.:, Crowley's 'inspired' writings, **The Book of the Law**, a serialised biography of Crowley called **The Temple of Solomon the King**, the first publication of the Golden Dawn rituals, excerpts from his Magical diaries, many original rituals, and some O.T.O. material. Some of these items are book-length in their own right. Thus **Volume I** contains a tremendous amount of valuable material, but is it worth getting?

The original edition of **Volume I** is naturally quite rare and valuable by now and is worth several thousand dollars for a complete set. Samuel Weiser has occasionally printed limited facsimile editions (which also include **Volume III, Number 1**) that sell for upwards of \$400. There are a few condensed paperback editions that are cheaper if more fragile. Fortunately in 1974 Israel Regardie edited a one-volume anthology titled **Gems from The Equinox** that remains in print and includes most of the important Magical texts. Finally, you can find the whole thing for free on the internet.

While it is useful to have all this material in one place—and it sure looks good on the shelf—you should be aware that much of it has been reprinted elsewhere by Crowley himself. For example many of the rituals and instructions form appendices to **Magick in Theory and Practice**. Many of the individual items which can fill a book by themselves have been reprinted as such, while the new **Volume IV** includes many items in a revised or expanded form that makes them superior to their original publications. For these reasons, **Volume I** proper is more the province of the serious student or collector rather than the beginner.

Volume II (1914 - 1918)

Crowley dubbed this a 'volume of Silence' and the joke is simply that there is no **Volume II**. By this time Crowley was basically broke: not only had he published all his books at his own expense but, so that he could not be accused of making money from Magick, he deliberately priced them so he took a loss! Besides there was the small matter of a World War going on at the time and, quite honestly, you can't blame Crowley for wanting some sort of break after those last five years. All things considered, it's somewhat surprising that no enterprising swindler has come out with a fake 'secret' **Volume II**. Certainly recent years have seen some spurious **Equinox** volumes V and VII. Crowley did a good deal of writing and Magick during the War (which he spent mostly in America) but there would be no new **Equinox** until 1919.

Volume III (1919 - 1986)

After the War, Crowley tried to start a new series of **The Equinox**, a project which was only partly successful. While the first issue retained the same format as the original **Volume I** lack of funds scuttled the second issue before it could be printed and the old semi-annual schedule with an anthology format became impossible. For the next 67

years **The Equinox** would be a series of monographs, single books on a specific topic, and they would be published only as funds allowed. Crowley himself only made it half-way through the ten 'issues' of **Volume III** before he died and the whole volume was not completed until almost forty years after that. While it remains primarily devoted to A.: A.: material, the actual work of producing **The Equinox** has devolved mostly onto O.T.O. since the latter organisation, with its fraternal and worldly aspects (like bank accounts), is more suited to managing such tasks. Additionally the O.T.O. is by his Will the owner of Crowley's literary estate. Such are the vagaries of publishing that some issues have in fact appeared out of their 'official' sequence. For these reasons I will now address each issue separately.

Volume III, Number 1, 'The Blue Equinox' (Spring 1919)

Commonly called 'the **Blue Equinox**' for its binding— **Volume I** was cream-coloured— this kept the anthology format but has less in the way of extraneous material. A good deal of it is devoted to the O.T.O., including Crowley's Gnostic Mass, among other things. Crowley published this one while still in the States and financed it through the sale of his house in Scotland. Just about everything in here has been reprinted elsewhere over the years, in Regardie's **Gems from The Equinox** for example, and the whole book has been reprinted several times by Weiser. Only completists really need bother with buying it whole.

Volume III, Number 2 (Fall 1919)

This one made it as far as printer's proofs before the money ran out and was thus never published. The main contents were apparently Crowley's *Jesus (Liber 888)* and some papers on astrology. The proofs survive and there has been continual talk of publishing a reconstruction, but as most of the proposed contents were later published elsewhere (*Jesus* is available from New Falcon as **The Gospel According to St. Bernard Shaw** for example) it's not an urgent project.

Volume III, Number 3, The Equinox of the Gods (1936)

The next seven issues of **Volume III** consist of occasional monographs, some of them quite short, and while the earlier issues are usually referred to by their numbers in the series, later issues are commonly known by their individual titles. **The Equinox of the Gods** was to be Crowley's definitive edition of **The Book of the Law** including his account of its reception. It was reprinted with corrections in 1991. To further complicate matters, as if *that* were needed, this book also forms Part IV of **Book Four**, which means the two projects overlap! Since **Book Four** has now been published in complete form there really is not much reason beyond collector's complete-itis to buy the thing separately.

Volume III, Number 4, Eight Lectures on Yoga (1939)

This little book is exactly what the title says it is and it is well worth buying if you have any interest in Yoga at all. In many ways it forms an essential companion to Part I of **Book Four** which is devoted to that subject. **Eight Lectures** has been reprinted more than once, and is now available in a corrected and annotated edition.

Volume III, Number 5, The Book of Thoth (1944)

Crowley's classic book-length study of the Tarot, this was written to accompany the deck he designed with Lady Freida Harris. Apparently it became an 'issue' of **The Equinox** partly to get around paper rationing in wartime Britain, periodicals

being exempt from certain limitations in production somehow. The deck itself did not see print outside of the plates in this book until decades later. **The Book of Thoth** is now kept continually in print and is sometimes sold in a set with the cards. Easy to find, this is essential if you are serious about the Tarot.

Volume III, Number 6, Liber Aleph (1962)

This was actually written by Crowley in the closing days of World War I as a 'letter' to his 'Magical son' Charles Stansfeld Jones (1886 - 1950), better known as Frater Achad. In this book, subtitled **The Book of Wisdom or Folly**, Crowley set himself the task of imparting his profoundest wisdom on a wide range of topics in the space of one page each. In addition to such an impossible limitation he attempted to write this in an 'exalted' style that most people find annoying. Jones himself found the whole thing annoying for that matter, and the various attempts to publish the book fell through until some time after both men died. Despite its flaws this is a good place to find out what things Crowley thought were important. There have been a couple of other editions of the text but the current edition was put together in 1991 by Hymenaeus Beta and includes a detailed account of the Magical and personal relations between Crowley and Jones that is worth reading. In terms of typography and layout this current edition is also, by far, the most beautifully-designed book in the whole **Equinox** series.

Volume III, Number 7, The Shih Yi (1971)

This is Crowley's own 'translation' of the **I Ching**. While he did not actually know Chinese he was very familiar with the James Legge translation and, more to the point, had probably *used* this classic divination system more than any other European of his day. (In fact there were times he probably relied too much on it for his own good, performing frequent divinations on trivial matters.) Of course Crowley also had as much practical experience of mysticism as anyone, so this book is actually his 'initiated' modification of the Legge translation. Until Hymenaeus Beta can give this one his usual 'definitive edition' treatment the best place to get it will be on-line.

Volume III, Number 8, Tao Te Ching (1971)

Produced in the same manner as the above, here we have Crowley's 'initiated translation' of the fundamental Taoist scripture. Crowley had the deepest respect for Lao Tzu and felt that his own experience of high mystic states gave him a special insight that academic Sinologists lack. Some might argue that point, but Crowley at least has the honesty to say flat out that his **Tao Te Ching** represents his own views as much as anything else. As usual there have been several reprints and, also as usual, the 1995 edition edited by Hymenaeus Beta is definitive. If nothing else, the photograph of Crowley as the Chinese god of laughter is enough to put most people into an altered state! I would not usually recommend either this or the previous issue of **The Equinox** for beginners, however if you have a background in Chinese philosophy these might well be your best introductions to Thelema.

Volume III, Number 9, ΘΕΛΗΜΑ: The Holy Books of Thelema (1983)

Aside from **The Book of the Law** itself, Crowley received a number of texts he regarded as 'divinely inspired' in some way. In his summary of official A.: A.: texts he terms these as 'Class A,' texts which are not to be changed in any way. Nearly all of these were published in various issues of **Volume I** and are here

gathered together in one place for convenience. The main omission is **The Vision and the Voice** which would have doubled the size of the book. You can think of this as a compendium of Thelemic scripture and it's a very good one indeed, though I would recommend this one as being more for the committed Thelemite than for the beginner. Unfortunately it was impossible to check the printed texts against the manuscripts since nearly all of these have all disappeared. The main exception is **Liber AL** itself, and *that* manuscript has been lost and rediscovered at least twice! It now lives quietly in a bank vault and hopefully won't go wandering off again. Look for a revised edition if any of those lost documents ever do turn up.

Volume III, Number 10 (1986)

The final issue of **Volume III** marks a triumphant return to the original format of **The Equinox**. Once again we have an anthology of diverse material, much of it new, including some original verse. In another return to tradition, this issue does not have an overall title and is simply known by its numbers: it is commonly referred to as '**Three-Ten**' in conversation. If it *did* have an overall title, a good one would be **Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About O.T.O.** since it forms the biggest collection of material from or about the order in print. This includes a good deal of history and primary sources (including some embarrassingly-pompous manifestos from the turn of the century) from former issues of **The Equinox** and other sources. As this book was partly published to celebrate the successful legal battle with Marcello Motta and S.O.T.O. that settled the whole 'who's the real O.T.O.?' controversy, it also includes the actual texts of the court's judgement. Finally there is an essay on the work of Kenneth Anger, the underground filmmaker who has been notably influenced by Crowley. New research over the past fifteen years has rendered some of the material in this book out of date, but there is still no better introduction to O.T.O. in print. It is thus a necessity for anyone interested in joining the order, though others probably will not need it.

Volume IV (1996 - present)

As mentioned above, **Volume II** was skipped largely due to financial issues, and so it was decided that the 'Volume of Silence' was a one-time occurrence. (Those groups publishing spurious volumes of the series take a different view and will be discussed later on.) So when circumstances finally permitted it was decided to start up a new **Volume IV**. This has so far been devoted to critical editions of various Crowley works, some of which were originally published in **Volume I** or elsewhere; other items have never previously been published at all. The goal here is not just to reprint old pieces, but to restore missing passages, incorporate Crowley's own revisions and corrections, and add extensive explanatory material in the form of editorial notes and introductions so as to make these new editions definitive and far more useful to the reader than ever before. The results have been brilliant and worth the price even for people who already had the material in other forms, a point I cannot emphasise enough. The format is more like **Volume I** than was most of **Volume III**, though each book does have an overall title and so far there has been no use of purely literary content. So far we have:

Volume IV, Number 1, Commentaries on the Holy Books (1996)

As **III-10** was devoted to the O.T.O. so this issue is devoted to the A.: A.:.. It includes classic texts about that order along with the current information. The main contents are Crowley's surviving commentaries on the various Class A texts,

making it a sort of companion book to **III-9**. Most of these commentaries are quite short, except for the book-length commentary on *Liber Cordis Cinti Serpente* (*LXV*). Interestingly enough it also includes Crowley's long commentary, again revised for this edition, on **The Voice of the Silence** by H.P. Blavatsky (1831 - 1891), founder of the Theosophical Society. This text, for which she claimed a Tibetan origin, is important in Theosophical literature and shows considerable Buddhist influence. While Crowley had great respect for Blavatsky, regarding her as a fellow Adept, he does offer some scathing criticisms of her work here. Much of this is simply because Blavatsky was influenced by Mahayana Buddhism while Crowley had studied the Theravada form, which is believed to be closer to the original teachings of Gautama. Of course Crowley also had the advantage of several decades more scholarship to draw upon than Blavatsky ever did. Also included, though not listed in the contents, is a full-colour facsimile of one manuscript of the self-initiation ritual, *Liber Pyramidos*. This is an important book for those on the A.: A.: path, be they formally affiliated or not.

Volume IV, Number 2, The Vision and the Voice (1998)

This book collects the records of a number of Magical Workings that Crowley performed with various others over the course of several years. *The Vision and the Voice* itself, Crowley's major Working in the Enochian system, comprises about half of this book. It was first published as part of **Equinox I-5** back in 1911, but here it has been vastly improved with extensive commentary and notes, including Crowley's own, and some never-before-seen additional material. The same remarks apply to *The Bartzabel Working*, an evocation of Mars of which only the script has been published before. Not only do we now get annotations and illustrations, we get the record of what Bartzabel actually said when he showed up! Then there is the first publication of the *Ab-Ul-Diz Working*, which inspired **Book Four**, and finally *The Paris Working*, an operation of homoerotic Magick which Crowley performed with the poet Victor Neuburg (1883 - 1940). As examples of Magical Records this book is excellent, and it is especially useful if you're interested in Enochian Magick.

Volume IV, Number 3, The Urn and Other Papers (in preparation)

It has long been believed that only a few fragments remain of the diaries Crowley kept of his initiation to the Grade of Magus. It was originally planned to publish these fragments in **Equinox IV-2**, but at the last minute the whole thing turned up! This has been happening with other 'lost' Crowley manuscripts of late, so **IV-2** was rounded out with other material rather than delay it by another year or more. I don't know at this time how complete these Magus diaries really are, but the plan now is to publish them as the basis for the next issue of **The Equinox**. As usual, the publication date is still undetermined, but I'll be watching for it.

Spurious Volumes

As I mentioned above, there are those who take the concept of the 'Volume of Silence' Very Seriously Indeed and some of these people have issued their own **Equinox** series over the years. Some of them apparently didn't realise that the O.T.O. had title to the name, others knew but didn't realise the order still existed. Then there are the people who *did* know and issued books under the title to support their claim to representing the order. Marcello Motta definitely falls into this last category and he issued several numbers of a spurious '**Volume V**' in the 1970s and early 1980s to support his 'Society Ordo Templi Orientis.' I've also heard of a group in England who

issued several numbers of a ‘**Volume VII**’ before changing the title to **The British Journal of Thelema**.

All these various projects are technically unauthorised and fall in the category of ‘pirate publishing.’ The main thing these spurious Volumes have in common seems to be that they always skip the even numbers. The contents of all these books are highly variable and sometimes display a comic ignorance of Crowley’s work; however there is sometimes valuable original material to be found therein. The important thing to bear in mind is that many came out in the days when you were lucky to find *anything* by Crowley in print at all. For that reason alone they performed a valuable service to the Thelemic community at large, so I cannot denigrate them altogether. Now that there is more accurate information on the matter we don’t see any more of these spurious Volumes, though it would be a fine idea for someone to make a collection of the good original material from these sources.

You can sometimes find these for sale used, often at high prices. They are really the province of collectors and, depending on the specific contents, may or may not be much use for study.

BOOK FOUR: MAGICK: LIBER ABA

This book has about the most convoluted history of anything Crowley ever wrote. To begin the story, late in 1911 Crowley began an affair with Mary d’Este Sturges (1871 - 1931). She is also known as Mary Desti and an account of their first meeting, only slightly fictionalised, forms the first chapter of Crowley’s novel, **Moonchild**. They were disporting themselves in Switzerland when she turned suddenly oracular on him and claimed to be in contact with an Adept called Ab-Ul-Diz— you can read the record of their dealings with that entity in **Equinox IV-2**. As a result of this communication they went to Italy, rented a villa outside Naples, and sat down to write what became the basis of **Book Four**.

This was intended to be a complete manual for Crowley’s system of Magick, and in keeping with the title was to consist of four parts:

I: Mysticism

II: Magick (Elementary Theory)

III: Magick in Theory and Practice

IV: Thelema— The Law

Crowley even took the theme of ‘fourness’ to the extent of printing the earlier parts in a square format. To ensure that this work would be accessible to the average person, for Crowley already knew he had problems in that area, he and Sturges adopted an interesting method of composition. Crowley would dictate to Sturges, she would stop him whenever he said something she couldn’t follow, and he would then rephrase or elaborate the passage in question until she was satisfied. This method worked admirably, at least in the earlier sections, and Crowley would use it continually throughout the remainder of his life.

Before their relationship foundered, Crowley and Sturges had completed Parts I and II as well as the core of Part III. When the first two parts were published as separate volumes in 1911 and 1912 Crowley credited Sturges as co-author under her A.: A.: motto of Soror Virakam. Crowley continued on with the aid of other assistants, but still Part III took a good deal longer to complete, partly because all this was going on while he was writing and publishing **Volume I of The Equinox** and partly because he and his associates kept thinking of more stuff to put in. In fact the section that would become the famous **Magick in Theory and Practice** took another fourteen years to complete! It did not actually see print until 1929, by which time the delay had obscured the fact that it was *not* a stand-alone work. This still left the final section which was to cover the Law of Thelema, and Crowley finally decided that **The Equinox of the Gods**

(1936), which was also **The Equinox III-3**, could do double-duty in this respect. Having discussed the genesis of the project, it is now time to give some attention to the actual contents.

Part I: Mysticism (1911)

This is essentially a practical handbook on Raja Yoga and is probably one of the best ever written. Crowley was one of the first Europeans to learn these practices and here he gives detailed instructions shorn of vagueness or superstition. In fact the style here, which owes a great deal to Swami Vivekananda (1863 - 1902), is astonishingly ‘modern’ and he even manages to describe the higher results of Yoga, such as Dhyana and Samadhi, with considerable clarity. Crowley included some instructions for other forms of Yoga in the Appendices to Part III, and his separate work **Eight Lectures on Yoga (Equinox III-4)** forms a useful companion to this section.

Part II: Magick (Elementary Theory) (1912)

Crowley regarded Eastern Yoga and European Magick as complementary methods of attainment that could and should be pursued together. Therefore in this section he discusses the standard paraphernalia of Western occultism, from the Magician’s Vestments and Magical Weapons to the furnishings of the Temple. He not only describes the ‘ideal’ forms these things should take but goes into their symbolism and the various concepts they embody.

Part III: Magick in Theory and Practice (1929)

When published separately this became Crowley’s most famous book. In here he covers pretty much everything you can think of in Ritual Magick and then some. This section is organised into twenty-two chapters whose subject matter relates to the Tarot Trumps, as well as a huge collection of Appendices. Many of these are actually rituals and instructions taken from the first eleven issues of **The Equinox**, long out of print by the time this was published. As I mentioned above, Crowley spent some fourteen years writing and rewriting **MTP**, and this means that it is littered with any number of digressions and lengthy footnotes that can make it slow going. This may also help account for the fact that, no matter how many times you’ve read **MTP** before, you *always* find something new the next time you go through it. There are many books that share that quality of course, but I have yet to find *any* book holding as many surprises as this one. There are times when you wonder if the book itself is Magical and revises itself when you aren’t looking! I therefore recommend you make a point of going through it completely at least every few years, or after a new initiation. (Crowley often relates his remarks to this Grade of A.: A.: or that Degree of O.T.O. and it’s generally only after you’ve taken them that you fully ‘get’ what he says.)

Part IV: Thelema— The Law (1936)

As mentioned above, this is the same thing as **Equinox III-3**, so please refer to my remarks there.

The history of the various editions of **Book Four**, in whole or in part, gets ridiculously complex so I’ll just give you the highlights here. Parts I and II are pretty short and thus easily combined into one volume. Just such a volume was most recently issued by Samuel Weiser in 1992 under the title **Book 4**. It’s not the whole of **Book Four**, but that’s not really made very clear. Therefore if you see that title listed for an exceptionally low price it’s probably just the first two parts rather than all four.

Part IV has been reprinted separately, in a corrected edition, as **The Equinox of the**

Gods by Weiser in 1991.

Part III: Magick in Theory and Practice, by far the largest section of the whole project, was originally printed privately by Crowley in France. This caused a great deal of damage since the French printers made innumerable errors and omissions in the text, some of which seem to be deliberate. It did get good reviews but people have always tended to treat it as a separate book in its own right, thus making even more difficulties for themselves in understanding it. There have been several facsimile reprints over the years. Dover Books had a sturdy little black paperback edition they kept in print for many years and many of us remember it fondly. The Magickal Child bookstore in New York City did a somewhat larger paperback reprint and Castle Books published a nice hardback edition. However none of these made any attempt to fix any of the many problems with the original text.

In 1973 John Symonds and Kenneth Grant collected Parts I through III in hardback as **Magick** which was most recently reprinted by Weiser in 1991. Symonds was Crowley's literary executor and Grant had been Crowley's secretary for a short time in 1944. They added an Introduction of their own and many footnotes, some of which are helpful, others of which are misleading, but they made little attempt at fixing the many textual problems in Part III.

Finally in 1994 the first complete one-volume edition of **Book Four** was published by Samuel Weiser under the editorship of Hymenaeus Beta, Frater Superior of the O.T.O. That sentence does not begin to convey the work involved; you see, Hymenaeus Beta didn't just want to *complete Book Four*, he wanted to *fix* it.

While Parts I and II turned out to need little work and a corrected edition of Part IV was already 'in the can' so to speak, Part III was a mess. To create his corrected, definitive edition of **Magick in Theory and Practice** Beta had to collate a number of Crowley's surviving manuscripts and typescripts as well as notes Crowley himself had made towards a second edition. This not only fixed numerous typos but restored a great deal of text that had been thought lost, thus vastly improving the book. Beta wrote a detailed introduction to the whole thing and added many illustrations, a bibliography, and multiple indices, not to mention a huge number of editor's endnotes clarifying Crowley's text. On no less than three occasions they were ready to go to press when new Crowley material would surface and send the whole project back for further revision. By the time it finally hit the shelves in 1994 the revised, restored, corrected, and *complete* **Magick: Book Four: Liber ABA** was at last the definitive textbook on Magick that Crowley (and presumably Ab-UI-Diz) had intended it to be. Because of its great size and nice blue binding I affectionately refer to this tome as 'The Big Blue Brick'. In 1998 the whole thing was reprinted with additional material that had surfaced over the previous few years. This revised second edition also corrected a large number of typos introduced in the 1994 edition, and the whole thing was printed in a larger format with larger type that is significantly easier to read. One might call this one 'The Bigger, Better Blue Brick'!

Therefore I recommend that everyone interested in Magick, even if not the Thelemic variety, should buy the revised second edition of **Book Four** (Samuel Weiser, 1998.) It is true that the cover price is rather high, but remember that it has the complete contents of three other recent books with corrections and lots of extras to boot. Finally, if you're at all serious about *doing* Magick, there is plenty in this book alone to keep you busy for many years.

THE CONFESSIONS OF ALEISTER CROWLEY

One obstacle people encounter when reading Crowley is a lack of context: many of his ideas and attitudes make little sense unless you know some essential details of his life. Unfortunately as of this writing there is simply no first-class biography of Aleister Crowley available in print anywhere. Most accounts of his life simply perpetuate the tabloid image of him as 'The Wickedest Man in the World'. (Crowley's own literary executor, John Symonds, has been

the worst offender in this regard with no less than *three* hatchet-jobs to his credit.) On the other hand, those authors who have attempted sympathetic biography have lacked either the necessary occult background— with the exception of Israel Regardie, who had been Crowley’s secretary in the 1920s, but his **Eye in the Triangle** is rather limited in scope.

For these reasons if you want a decent account of his life you have to go to Crowley’s own autobiography. Crowley called it his *auto-hagiography*, ‘the Hag’ for short, seeing as he’d made himself a saint! Obviously an autobiography can’t help but be biased and, yes, Crowley does tend to be somewhat self-congratulatory and self-indulgent, but it’s still the best thing out there right now. Its main limitation is that it only goes up to about 1922 and therefore omits the later years of his life, not that there isn’t enough material as it is! The extended account of his childhood at the mercy of his fanatically religious family is more than sufficient to explain any number of idiosyncrasies. All his important Magical initiations are covered along with his experiences in the Golden Dawn and of course the writing of **The Book of the Law**. Aside from his Magick he also talks about his artistic endeavours, his travels around the world and his mountaineering expeditions. This includes details of his attempts to climb K2 and Kanchenjunga in the Himalyas. Crowley also spends what most people consider to be way too much space on his poetry. The last section covers his experimental Abbey of Thelema in Cefalu, Sicily, which is where most of ‘The Hag’ was written.

The Confessions of Aleister Crowley was first published by Mandrake Press in 1929, however only the first two out of the projected six volumes were actually issued. I suspect sales suffered when the early volumes just didn’t offer the lurid thrills the public craved. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant edited the whole text into an abridged, but still massive, edition in 1969. While they did cut many passages, some of them important, they do supply many useful endnotes, so their edition is not to be despised. It is still the only edition of **The Confessions** in print, now being available in paperback from Arkana.

As a final note, I will mention that Dr. Richard Kaczynsky has been working for years on a new biography of Crowley. All reports I have heard from those who have read the manuscript say it is by far the best work of its kind and will probably become the definitive life of Aleister Crowley when it finally sees print. We can only hope that will be soon.

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