CHAPTER SIX

Aleister Crowley in the Desert

In late 1909, two Englishmen, scions of the comfortable middle classes, undertook a journey to Algiers. Aleister Crowley, later to be dubbed "the wickedest man in the world," was in his early thirties; his companion, Victor Neuburg, had only recently graduated from Cambridge. The stated purpose of the trip was pleasure. Crowley, widely traveled and an experienced mountaineer and big-game hunter, loved North Africa and had personal reasons for wanting to be out of England. Neuburg probably had little say in the matter. Junior in years, dreamy and mystical by nature, and in awe of a man whom he both loved and admired, Neuburg was inclined to acquiesce without demur in Crowley's various projects. There was, however, another highly significant factor in Neuburg's quiescence. He was Crowley's chela, a novice initiate of the Magical Order of the Silver Star, which Crowley had founded two years earlier. As such, Neuburg had taken a vow of obedience to Crowley as his Master and affectionately dubbed "holy guru," and had already learned that in much that related to his life, Crowley's word was now law.

It was at Crowley's instigation that the two men began to make their way, first by tram and then by foot, into the North African desert to the southwest of Algiers; and it was Crowley's decision to perform there a series of magical ceremonies that prefigured his elaboration of the techniques of sex magic, or, as he was later to call it, Magick. In this case, the ceremonies combined the performance of advanced ritual magic with homosexual acts. It is this episode in the desert—sublime and terrifying as an experience, profound in its effects, and illuminating in what it reveals of the engagement of advanced magical practice with personal selfhood—that constitutes the focus of this chapter.

The Crowley life story is almost the stuff of Victorian melodrama: the

good man gone bad, betrayer of women and men alike, corrupter of innocence, dark angel and self-proclaimed Antichrist. Viewed differently, Crowley assumes tragic-heroic status. This was a gifted man born into privilege who scorned convention and ultimately destroyed himself in his relentless search for impossible truths. In the magical world that he made his own, the name Aleister Crowley evokes admiration, even reverence. Offshoots of Crowley's Magical Order and practitioners of his Magick are to be found throughout the Western world. Just the same—from his early days in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn to the present day—Crowley has been denounced by magicians as everything ranging from an evil genius to a magical fraud. His contemporaries excoriated him as rumors of his escapades reached a wider public through reported court cases and salacious articles in the general press.

Nevertheless, however Crowley is viewed, his magical odyssey is deeply instructive of the potentialities of the psychologized magic of the fin de siècle, and illustrative of its dangers. Not least, Crowley's magical practice epitomized the ease with which the high aspirations of an Order such as the Golden Dawn could metamorphose into those so-called black arts against which occultists such as Madame Blavatsky railed. At an individual level, as seems to have happened with Crowley, undisciplined psychologized magic in the hands of the ill-prepared could lead to personal disintegration. At all events, what happened in the desert might be said to have destroyed the lives of two men. It certainly crystallized the moment at which Crowley let go of what was known and could be anticipated magically, and for good or ill embraced both a lived and a magical modus operandi in which there are no safeguards and no guarantees.

The episode that forms the focus of this chapter marks the point at which Crowley crossed the Rubicon in a number of senses, but the experiment was not straightforwardly self-serving, as much of his magical work was to become. Nor did it represent simply the indulgence of an exoticized and outlawed sexuality. What happened in the desert was the result of a serious, if misguided, attempt to access and explore a centuries-old magical system, and it represented an intense personal investment in the pursuit of magical knowledge. In the following discussion the event itself is deconstructed with a view to presenting both a microanalysis of a magical rite performed in a specific context, and a focused discussion of the relationship between psychologized magic and the exploration of subjectivity. The chapter therefore sets out to examine the meaning and significance of a particular magical work performed in a colonial context against a backdrop of fin-de-siècle "decadence," while also getting at its immediate experiential dimensions.

The episode itself provides a rare glimpse of interiorized magic in the making, although that was certainly not Crowley's intention in either his subsequent veiled allusions to the performance of the rite or his documentation of its magical effects. Furthermore, in situating the discussion within the conceptual framework implied by the term *subjectivity* I am stepping outside both the magical episteme and the liberal-humanist conception of self upon which Crowley (in 1909 at least) depended. I am instead relying on a particular theoretical formulation of selfhood that underscores its contingency.[1] The poststructuralist concept of subjectivity is suggestive of a self that is both stable and unstable, knowable and unknowable, constructed and unique. The central purpose of the chapter, however, is to present an analysis of a pivotal magical experience, elucidating its complexities, and arguing for it in terms of an ultimate self-realization that exposed the limitations of a unified sense of self upon which experiential self-identity depends.

The Making of a Magician

Aleister Crowley was born in 1875 to Edward and Emily Crowley, Plymouth Brethren of the strictest kind.[2] He was baptized Edward Alexander, known in the family as Alick, and only later (in his ardent Celtic phase) changed his name to Aleister. The Crowley money had been made in the brewery trade, but the senior Edward Crowley had little to do with the business and lived a gentleman's existence. He was a gifted and devoted preacher, and his son adored and sought to emulate him. Conversely, and significantly, the youthful Alick had no time for his mother, whom he despised and remembered treating virtually like a servant. At the age of eight, and in accordance with the dictates of his social class, Alick was sent away to school, where he continued in a pious vein. In 1887, however, his father died, and an immediate change was wrought in the boy. He began to hate his school, and while continuing to accept the theology of the Brethren quite "simply went over to Satan's side."[3]

In his *Confessions* Crowley states that he could not understand the reason for this sudden identification with the forces of evil. It is possible that his claim that from the age of twelve he sought Satan's path with a passion previously reserved for the God of his father might have been a convenient authorial fiction. On the other hand, it is not difficult to speculate on the possible reasons for a switch of allegiance—the death of a father who was synonymous in the boy's mind with Christ, if not God; the fallibility of the idea of an all-powerful and just God; and so on. Crowley, perceptive and witty about the foibles of others, could apparently display an astonishing

lack of insight when it came to himself. Perhaps this is why he failed to make more of the fact that it was his mother who first referred to him as "the beast," a name he was to make his own. It was she, possibly in the wake of an adolescent episode involving Crowley and a family maid, who "believed that I was actually Anti-christ of the Apocalypse."[4] Whatever the reasons, in a boyhood suffused with biblical imagery, Crowley seems to have made an early identification with Satan and a further connection between Satan and sexuality. This was ultimately to be worked out in the Magick of his adult years.

In 1895 Crowley finally overcame family opposition and went up to Cambridge University. Cambridge was a final liberation from the stultifying religious atmosphere of his home, and he gave himself over to the three proscribed joys of sex, smoking, and literature. Already adept in Latin and Greek, Crowley abandoned work for the moral science tripos and spent his time in an intensive study of English literature supplemented by French literature and the classics. It was at Cambridge that he first read Richard Burton's *Arabian Nights* and began to acquire an extensive library, including valuable first editions. Crowley adopted a luxurious lifestyle, but he was also reading voraciously, won distinction in the game of chess, and began to write and publish verse. Like other young men of his class, he sought *amours* with working-class girls in Cambridge. He found these encounters intoxicating, but beneath the surface his attitude towards the female sex was ambivalent. Crowley later espoused liberated views on the subject of women, recognizing female sexuality and denouncing the sexual double standard (in favor of mutual sexual abandonment). There remained, however, an undercurrent of fear, resentment, and contempt. His tendency to throw himself into passionate romantic entanglements with women was paralleled by an equal facility for discarding them when his needs altered or attention wandered. This single-minded ruthlessness was a feature of his personality and affected both women and men, but it nevertheless remains the case that Crowley left behind a trail of devastation when it came to the women in his life. Alcoholism, insanity, and suicide followed in his wake, and the suggestion that he deliberately sought out "border-line [unbalanced] women" because they could better access the astral plane remains highly questionable.[5]

In his final year at Cambridge, at the age of twenty-three, Crowley met and fell in love with Jerome Pollitt.[6] Pollitt was ten years his senior, a close friend of Aubrey Beardsley's, and a talented female impersonator and dancer who had performed as Diane de Rougy in tribute to the actress Liane de Pougy. In spite of the cautionary tone of Crowley's account of the affair, and his insistence that his sexual life remained intensely heterosexual, he

conceded that their relationship was "that ideal intimacy which the Greeks considered the greatest glory of manhood and the most precious prize of life."[7] Later he immortalized Pollitt in *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist,* also a tribute of sorts to Richard Burton's translated work *The Perfumed Garden.*[8] Crowley's collection of poems are a blend of Persian mysticism and the glorification of homosexual love, written in the style of ghazals by an imaginary seventeenth-century poet. They are supposedly translated into English by an Anglo-Indian, Major Lutiy, helped by an anonymous "editor," and are then discussed by an equally fictitious clergyman. The collection, however, is typically Crowley-esque: both spoof and serious, learned in its own way while designed to amuse. Beginning "As I placed the rigid pen of my thought within the inkstand of my imagination, I tasted the bliss of Allah," the poet Abdullah El Haji, the El Qahar of the ghazals, praises the "podex" of his lover, Habib.[9] More notable than the explicit meaning of the verses are the hidden references to Pollitt and to Crowley himself. In the closing sections of the book, the name of Herbert Charles Jerome Pollitt is spelled out in the first letter of each line, to be followed (but in reverse order) by that of Aleister Crowley.

But Crowley's relationship with Pollitt, while intense, was not the sole source of meaning or diversion in his life. Pollitt introduced Crowley to the "decadent" movement, and in Crowley's words made a poet out of him; but he had little sympathy with the younger man's growing occult interests and did not share his passion for mountaineering. During the Cambridge vacations Crowley went climbing in the Alps, achieving a lone ascent of the Eiger, and began to read widely on esoteric subjects. Inspired by the apparent allusion to a Hidden Church in A. E. Waite's *Book of Black Magic and of Pacts,* Crowley wrote to Waite requesting further information. Waite responded by recommending that Crowley read the occult classic *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary* by Councillor von Eckartshausen, which had recently been translated by Isabelle de Steiger; the book duly accompanied him on a climbing and walking holiday during the Easter vacation of 1898. Crowley discovered that Eckartshausen indeed elaborated on Waite's theme, describing a Secret Sanctuary and a hidden community of saintly beings who possessed the keys to the mysteries of the universe. From that moment, Crowley determined to find and enter into communication with this "mysterious brotherhood": "I longed passionately for illumination . . . for perfect purity of life, for mastery of the secret forces of nature."[10]

Crowley perceived his aspirations as religious—certainly his preoccupation at the time with the origin of evil and the nature of Satan suggested they might be—but from the outset there was also the issue of power and control.

Magic, like mountaineering, was in some respects the perfect answer to the desire for "mastery" of the forces (secret or otherwise) of nature, and he now gave himself over to his magical studies. Pollitt was rapidly seen as inimical to these researches, and Crowley ended the relationship shortly after going down from Cambridge in the early summer of 1898. Crowley was later to recognize this as an "imbecile" mistake, and it remained a cause of permanent regret.

In 1898, however, he was utterly focused, "white-hot," on his several ambitions: climbing, poetry, and the pursuit of magical knowledge. Now a wealthy young man in his own right, he was free to pursue his interests, and several meetings that year were to further them. At Easter he had met Oscar Eckenstein, one of the finest mountaineers in England and a man whom Crowley deeply admired. Eckenstein taught him a great deal about mental discipline and they went on to climb together in major expeditions. About the same time he met Gerald Kelly, a painter who was later to be elected to the Royal Academy and his future brother-in-law. Kelly, unlike Eckenstein, shared Crowley's interest in magic, and was to travel along that path in Crowley's company. A chance meeting that summer, however, was possibly the most auspicious. By this time Crowley had advanced to Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers's *Kabbalah Unveiled,* and was disposed to brag about his occult knowledge. One evening in Zermatt, while taking a respite from climbing, he met and conversed with an analytical chemist named Julian L. Baker, a man who clearly knew more than Crowley about the occult. Upon their return to England, Baker introduced Crowley to George Cecil Jones, also a chemist and, like Baker, a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Crowley was subsequently introduced to MacGregor Mathers, presumably made a favorable impression, and was duly initiated on 18 November 1898 as *Frater Perdurabo* [I will endure] in the Neophyte grade of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. In spite of dismissing most of the Order's initiates as "muddled middle-class mediocrities," Crowley was convinced that he had found and entered "the Hidden Church of the Holy Grail."[11]

Crowley therefore persevered with what he considered disappointingly dull and elementary studies, and was advanced to the grade of Philosophus in May 1899. He had now reached the top grade of the First Order and fully expected to be invited to join the tantalizing Second (or Inner) Order. About this time Crowley met Allan Bennett, an honored magician in the Golden Dawn whose magical powers were considered second only to those of MacGregor Mathers.[12] Bennett approached Crowley after a Golden Dawn ceremony and accused him of dabbling in malignant forces beyond his control.

Crowley, who had indeed been secretly studying the demonic system known as Abra-Melin magic, recognized in Bennett an occult Master and invited the impoverished magician to stay with him in his comfortable London flat at 67 Chancery Lane.[13] A period of intense magical activity now began. Crowley's flat was fitted out with two "temples" consecrated to magical acts, one white and the other black. Here Bennett, Jones, and Crowley, in spite of the latter's relatively junior status, began to experiment with advanced magic and evoke spirits in the Abra-Melin fashion. Bennett also instructed Crowley in the magical use of drugs. These activities did not find general favor with senior members of the Golden Dawn, and Crowley began to acquire an unsavory reputation as rumors of his flamboyant lifestyle, demonic magic, and homosexuality began to circulate. W. B. Yeats thought Crowley was immoral, if not mad, while Crowley was convinced that Yeats was envious of his literary and magical prowess. Nonetheless, as we saw in chapter 2, MacGregor Mathers overruled the London leadership and initiated Crowley into the Second Order in January 1900. Crowley in turn became involved in a bitter power struggle within the Golden Dawn, subsequently abandoned both the Order and MacGregor Mathers, went on to study with other teachers, and finally established his own Magical Order in 1907.

By then a great deal had happened to him. Crowley had traveled extensively, broken several climbing records with Eckenstein and established new ones, married Rose Kelly and taken her and their new daughter on a grueling trek across China, lost that same daughter to typhoid fever, and was in the process of losing Rose to alcoholism. In 1906 he had returned to the intensive Abra-Melin magic of his earlier days, resumed his experimentation with drugs, and been recognized by George Cecil Jones as a master magician. Accordingly Crowley began to work out the details of his own Magical Order, Astrum Argentinum, or Silver Star, and founded its mouthpiece, *The Equinox,* an ambitious, well-produced periodical dedicated to the serious discussion of the occult arts.

By 1907 Crowley was in search of a following and, looking to Cambridge for potential recruits, simply turned up one day in Victor Neuburg's room at Trinity. Neuburg was already a published poet, and Crowley had been attracted by the mystical leanings in his work.[14] Victor Benjamin Neuburg was then in his midtwenties, not having gone up to Cambridge until 1906, when he was twenty-three and his family had finally admitted that he was not cut out for a business career. He came from a comfortable middle-class home in North London, and had been raised by his mother following the departure of his father for his native Vienna shortly after the arranged marriage. The bulk of the family money on his mother's side lay with Victor's

Uncle Edward, who financed his nephew's education and gave his mother a cottage in Sussex as a supplement to the Hove flat to which she had moved in 1903. Victor's family, however, while undoubtedly kind and generous, had little in common with a young man who rejected conventional Judaism along with all organized religion, espoused Freethought views and progressive values, and yet had experienced mystical states since childhood.[15]

Crowley, affluent, charming, and urbane, an erudite fellow poet who claimed to understand spiritual realities, held a magnetic appeal for Neuburg. Equally, Crowley immediately recognized in Neuburg an "altogether extraordinary capacity for Magick," and began to groom him "for the benefit of the Order, and of himself."[16] Crowley thought Neuburg faddish, incurably lazy, and lacking in self-discipline, as well as inhibited and nervous. His answer to some of these shortcomings was vigorous and prolonged physical exertion, combined with a course of extreme mental discipline—important for all embryonic magicians. In the summer of 1908 Crowley took Neuburg on a long tramp across the Pyrenees and down through Spain. Neuburg managed to make it to Madrid before succumbing to illness and exhaustion, but he and Crowley subsequently traveled on to Gibraltar and made the crossing to Tangiers.

By the time Neuburg returned to Cambridge for his final year, he had to not only work for his degree in modern languages but also read his way through the comprehensive corpus of magical, philosophical, mystical, and fictional literature required of any novice in Crowley's Order of the Silver Star. In this Order a seeker first became a Student and then a Probationer before advancing to the Neophyte grade and beyond, and Neuburg seems to have been a Probationer in 1908.[17] Crowley's regimen of magical training was much more demanding than that of the Golden Dawn's First Order, but he seemed fairly pleased with his pupil. For his part, Neuburg was convinced that he stood in the shadow of a Master and, like Crowley at the turn of the century, on the threshold of a Secret Brotherhood. The spring of 1909 found Neuburg cramming feverishly for his final examinations at Cambridge while attending to Crowley's demands. He obtained an adequate Third Class degree and immediately made preparations to join Crowley at Boleskine House, his Master's large residence on the shores of Loch Ness in Scotland.

Neuburg left Cambridge on 16 June 1909 and traveled to Scotland by the night train, accompanied by another Cambridge man, Kenneth Ward. Ward was going only to take up a social invitation and to borrow a pair of Crowley's skis. Whether he knew it or not, Victor Neuburg was destined for a quite different experience. Upon his arrival at Boleskine, Neuburg was in-

formed that he was to undertake a Magical Retirement—a withdrawal from the world during which, as Crowley made clear, he must make a serious attempt to access and explore the Astral Light. Accordingly, on the eighteenth of June, this young and inexperienced fledgling magician took his place in a specially prepared chamber at Boleskine and began what was to prove to be a ten-day period of isolation marked by extreme discomfort, a certain amount of suffering, and occasional glimpses of ecstatic joy. Throughout, Crowley was almost impossibly testing. He expected Neuburg to make the kind of magical progress in days that took years to achieve in the Golden Dawn, and to do this while existing in spartan conditions with little food to sustain him. The young Probationer was made to sleep naked on a bed of gorse for a week, and early in the Retirement Crowley visited the shivering Neuburg at night and scourged him with a bundle of nettles. Later, dissatisfied with his progress, Crowley gave him thirty-two strokes with a switch of gorse and drew blood. Presumably this was not the sole purpose of these nocturnal visits. The Probationer noted in his meticulous written record that Crowley "is apparently a homo-sexual [sic] sadist. . . . He performed the ceremony with obvious satisfaction."[18] Gorse has strong prickles and nettles sting, but the young man had taken a holy vow of obedience to his magical Master. It is small wonder that Neuburg attributed an "emissio seminer" to anxiety.

Crowley's attitude was clearly not that of a disinterested teacher. It also represented part of a complex and ritualized playing out of elements of his personal relationship with Neuburg. He chastised the Probationer, but in terms that related to the man. Crowley afterwards expressed the view that there was a "fundamental moral deficiency in his character," and "a strain of racial congenital cowardice too deeply seated for eradication."[19] At the time he continually harped upon his student's supposed "racial," that is, Jewish, traits, and Neuburg found the personal abuse almost intolerable. He went through periods of rebellion, but in awe of Crowley, bound to him emotionally, and cognizant of his vow, Neuburg always repented of his outbursts. The racial slurs and personal insults continued. Meanwhile, however, Neuburg began to have some magical success. Prolonged periods of yoga and meditation began to facilitate changed states of consciousness, and these in turn gave way to vivid experiences on the astral planes. Moments of supreme spiritual insight, of intense and rapturous identification with the cosmic "Mind," were equaled by episodes of horrifying despair. But Neuburg emerged from the storm to find a sense of peace and harmony, and seemed to find within himself some kind of "center." He understood that, at some level, this sense of center accorded with the magician's will, the essential fo-

cal point for all magical activity. Crowley approved the insight, commenting that this approached a description of initiated consciousness. In Neuburg's account of his Retirement, dated 29 June 1909, he thanked his Most Holy Guru and, fittingly, both praised and blamed him. Crowley then advanced his Probationer to the grade of Neophyte.

North Africa

Crowley and Neuburg traveled to London at the beginning of July, and there set about bringing out the second issue of the *Equinox*. But there was more than the production of his occult periodical on Crowley's mind. His divorce proceedings were coming to a head. Crowley claimed that divorce was inevitable because Rose refused to seek treatment for her alcoholism (she was later incarcerated, suffering from alcoholic dementia), but that he had done the gentlemanly thing by providing his wife with evidence of adultery so that she could appear as the plaintiff. Nevertheless, Crowley was anxious to be out of the country by the autumn of 1909 as the trial was pending. He decided upon North Africa, and maintained that he had no specific magical purpose in mind when he set out on the trip. He loved that region and simply wanted to roam at will. Accordingly, and accompanied by "Frater Omnia Vincam, a neophyte of the A . . . A . . . disguised as Victor Neuburg," Crowley left England and duly arrived in Algiers on 17 November.[20] Here he undoubtedly evinced the unmistakable subtly superior air of the English gentleman abroad.

On arrival, Crowley's attitude toward colonial French officialdom was one of polite disdain. He chose to ignore warnings that an unaccompanied trip through the desert could be dangerous. Instead, confident and at ease, every inch the seasoned traveler, he immediately set about buying the necessary provisions for a journey. Crowley claimed to have a basic grasp of Arabic and understood a fair amount about Muslim culture, but was concerned that the physically slight Victor Neuburg with his "hangdog look" would undermine his credibility. His remedy was surprising. On Crowley's insistence Neuburg's head was shaved, leaving only two tufts at the temples that were "twisted up into horns." Crowley laughingly, but tellingly, comments that his chela was thus transformed into "a demon that I had tamed and trained to serve me as a familiar spirit. This greatly enhanced my eminence."[21]

The two men then took the tram to Arba, and set out on a tramp through the desert. Crowley and Neuburg reached Aumale on 21 November after spending two nights sleeping under the stars. Here Crowley had the sudden insight that he must renew a magical undertaking begun in Mexico nine

years earlier. Although he denied premeditation, Crowley had brought with him various magical accoutrements, including a vermilion wooden cross set with a large golden topaz. The magical operation that he had in mind relied on a complex magical system developed by John Dee, the eminent Elizabethan mathematician and astrologer, and his clairvoyant, Edward Kelley. Dee and Kelley were well versed in practical Cabala, and experimented with the angel magic of the Renaissance magician Henry Cornelius Agrippa. Agrippa had elaborated a system of numerical and alphabetical tables for the summoning of angels, and it was within this framework that the two Elizabethans worked. John Dee used Kelley's gifts as an expert scryer, one who could "travel" in the many realms of spirit existence, to vicariously enter into conversation with the angels in order to tempt from them the secrets of the universe. Dee asked his questions through Kelley and duly recorded the results. During their lengthy séances, Kelley would "Skry in the Spirit Vision" using a "shew-stone" in much the same way as a seer might use a crystal ball. It was Kelley who saw the angel in the stone and communicated its message to Dee. If the instruction concerned a magical invocation or Call, the angel dictated it in reverse, as it was considered too powerful to simply replicate. In 1583 the angels began to give their communications in an "Angelic Secret Language" known as Enochian, and the information was recorded in a complex grid form. Over time, Dee built up an entire cosmology of angels and demons and sketched out thirty Aethyrs (or Aires)—realms of otherworldly existence.[22]

This schema, probably reworked by MacGregor Mathers, had been integrated into the teachings of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Although he had been denied entry to the Second Order, Crowley had studied with other senior Golden Dawn Adepts, most notably Allan Bennett, and was familiar with Dee's system. But whereas Golden Dawn initiates were set to study Dee's so-called Enochian system as a scholarly exercise, Crowley was prepared to test its efficacy. He had made a faithful copy of Dee's nineteen Calls, or Keys, which called up powerful occult forces, and had experimented with the nineteenth Call in Mexico. Now, in Aumale, he felt impelled to resume this magical operation. Crowley considered himself a master of Astral Travel, and was in the process of teaching its necessary techniques and procedures to Neuburg. He felt that the conditions were perfect for undertaking a journey through John Dee's Aethyrs.

Crowley's technique was simple. He would select a secluded spot and recite the appropriate Call—the ritual incantation that would give him access to the relevant Aethyr. After satisfying himself that the invoked forces were present, Crowley would take up his magical shew-stone, in this case the large

golden topaz, and "Skry in the Spirit Vision" much as Kelley had done centuries before. He made "the topaz play a part not unlike that of the looking-glass in the case of *Alice*."[23] By making the relevant Call and concentrating on the topaz, Crowley could enter the Aethyr. He was clear about what this meant: "When I say I was in any Aethyr, I simply mean in the state characteristic of, and peculiar to, its nature."[24] In other words, Crowley recognized that this was a similar experience to that of Astral Travel; it was conducted within his own mind. Having accessed the Aethyr, he would describe his experiences to Neuburg, who would write them down. It is noteworthy that, typically, Crowley adapted the procedure to suit himself. Unlike Dee, he, the master magician, would be his own scryer. Victor Neuburg, whom Crowley recognized as a gifted clairvoyant, was to be merely the scribe.

As the two men made their way through the desert, Crowley increasingly fell under the spell of his experiences in Dee's Aethyrs. He encountered celestial beings, both terrible and beautiful, who divulged in richly symbolic language something of the realms in which they dwelt. Crowley understood much of the symbolism, and began to realize that the Calls did indeed give the scryer access to an intricate but cogent and coherent universal system of other worlds and beings. He was satisfied that, whereas he saw visions and heard voices, he was not the autonomous author of his experiences: "I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears the truth. . . . These visions thus crystallized in dramatic form the theoretical conclusion which my studies of comparative religion had led me to adumbrate."[25]

Crowley fully intended the Calls to be an impersonal exploration of the Aethyrs, and was convinced that he was being shown the "shining simplicity" of cosmic truths. But he gradually became aware that he was personally implicated at another level. The magical work was working on him. As the Calls proceeded, Crowley began increasingly to feel something very akin to fear. It was as though, he says, a hand was holding his heart while a whispering breath enveloped him in words both awful and enchanting. In a gender reversal that was to typify much of this magical experience, Crowley reveals that he "began to feel—well, not exactly frightened; it was the subtle trembling of a maiden before the bridegroom."[26] In order to fortify himself against growing feelings of awe and dread, he began to recite the Qur'an as he marched across the desert. The great stretches of empty landscape, hot by day and icy at night, and continuous intoning of magical and religious formulae, combined to effect a state of almost overwhelming spiritual intensity.

A little over two weeks after arriving in Algiers, Crowley and Neuburg reached Bou Saada. This isolated haven in the desert, with its palm trees,

gardens, and orchards, was where the desert road ran out. Bou Saada gave the impression of a last link with civilization. Some distance from the town was a mountain, Mount Da'leh Addin. It was here that Crowley, acting on instructions from previous angelic interlocutors, made the appropriate Call and attempted to enter the fourteenth Aethyr. He encountered a thick black veil that, try as he might, he could not penetrate. All the while, a voice spoke of Crowley as one about to enter "the Kingdom of the Grave."[27] As he struggled with the blackness a great earthquake rent the veil and Crowley saw "an all-glorious Angel" standing in front of him with his arms outstretched and head thrown back. The angel had a star upon his forehead, but he was surrounded with blackness "and the crying of beasts." The angel instructed Crowley to withdraw, the mystery of the fourteenth Aethyr being so "great and terrible" it cannot be revealed "in sight of the sun."[28] Shaken, Crowley prepared to return to Bou Saada. As he did so, "Suddenly came the command to perform a magical ceremony on the summit" of the mountain. Whatever form the "command" took, Crowley experienced it as absolute. He and Neuburg responded by building a great circle with loose rocks. They inscribed the circle with magical words of power, "erected an alter" in its midst, and there, in Crowley's words: " I sacrificed myself. The fire of the all-seeing sun smote down upon the alter, consuming every particle of my personality."[29]

Crowley says simply in his *Confessions* that what took place amounted to a final tearing away of "certain conceptions of conduct which, while perfectly proper from the standpoint of my human nature," he had regarded as "impertinent to initiation."[30] What happened in prosaic terms was that Crowley was sodomized by Neuburg in a homosexual rite offered to the god Pan. Pan, the man-goat, had a particular significance for the two men. Not only did Crowley revere him as the diabolical god of lust and magic, but Neuburg literally had what acquaintances described as an elfin and "faun-like" appearance.[31] It is likely that what happened on Mount Da'leh Addin was a classic invocation; the young chela, in accordance with accepted magical technique, probably "called down," or invoked, the god Pan. A successful invocation would result in the neophyte's becoming "inflamed" by the power of the god. If this is what happened during the ceremony on the mountain, Neuburg, in his magical capacity, would momentarily identify with all that the man-goat god represented. Put simply, Neuburg with his tufted "horns" would become Pan—the "faun-like" yet savage lover of Crowley's psychosexual world. This may well have been the first time that Crowley (and certainly Neuburg) had performed a magical homosexual act, although Crowley quickly came to believe that sex magic was an unrivaled means to great

power. Conversely, the image of Pan was to haunt Victor Neuburg for the rest of his life. It inspired some of his best early poetry, but later filled him with dread. The experience was overwhelming for both men, but it temporarily devastated Crowley. His summation was brief. "There was an animal in the wilderness," he writes, "but it was not I."[32]

Crowley remembered nothing of his return to Bou Saada. As he slowly came to himself, however, he knew that he was changed.

> I knew who I was and all the events of my life; but I no longer made myself the centre of their sphere. . . . I did not exist. . . . All things were alike as shadows sweeping across the still surface of a lake—their images had no meaning for the water, no power to stir its silence.[33]

Crowley felt that he had ceremonially crossed the Abyss—a term reminiscent of Nietzsche (whom Crowley greatly admired), but denoting the last terrible journey that a magician must make before he could justifiably lay claim to the highest levels of Adeptship. Master of the Temple, a grade of enlightened initiation achieved in Crowley's own Magical Order only after crossing the Abyss, meant renunciation of all that life meant. The Order of the Golden Dawn taught that such awareness could not be accessed this side of death, and Crowley affirmed this in his own way. The Angel of the fourteenth Aethyr had warned him that the Master of the Temple is condemned to darkness. Crowley in turn taught that becoming a Master of the Temple implied not simply symbolic death and rebirth, a concept familiar to all magical initiates, but the annihilation of the personal self. The Abyss, then, was closely associated with the death of the individual—although not necessarily on the physical level.

A few days later, Crowley, who in the aftermath of the "sacrifice" on Mount Da'leh Addin had already acknowledged that at one level "I did not exist," prepared formally to undergo the Abyss ordeal. He understood that he would do so when he entered John Dee's tenth Aethyr, and knew that while there he must meet and defeat the terrible "Choronzon, the mighty devil that inhabiteth the outermost Abyss."[34] He also knew that he could do so only as Perdurabo, a magical Adept, and that it was paramount that he applied the lesson of the fourteenth Aethyr: no shred of ego must remain if he was to survive the experience unscathed. Success depended on Crowley's ability to master Choronzon through the dominating power of the magical will. The complex techniques, rituals, and paraphernalia of magical practice are the means by which a magician develops and "inflames" his will, the single most important attribute of a magician. Crowley understood

that Choronzon's power could be bound and brought under control only through the silent but relentless application of the magical will, and that this was critical for a successful crossing of the Abyss. Failure to force Choronzon into submission would enslave the magician to him, corrupting every subsequent undertaking and bringing disaster in its wake. Given this, and the warnings he had received in the previous Aethyrs, Crowley changed his magical procedure.

On 6 December 1909, Crowley and Neuburg left Bou Saada and went far out into the desert until they found a suitable valley in the dunes. Here they traced a circle in the sand, inscribing it with the various sacred names of God. A triangle was then traced nearby, its perimeters likewise inscribed with divine names and also with that of Choronzon. This was correct magical practice. The magic circle provided protection for the magician; the Triangle of Art was intended to contain any visible manifestation of the forces "called up" or evoked by Perdurabo. The process of evocation was designed to produce a physical materialization of, in this case, the demonic inhabitant of the Abyss. Three pigeons were sacrificed and their blood placed at the three corners of the triangle; Crowley took particular care that it remained within the confines of the figure so that it would facilitate and help sustain any physical manifestation. At this point Neuburg entered the circle. He was armed with a magic dagger, and had strict instructions to use it if anything—even anything that looked like Crowley—attempted to break into the circle. At Crowley's instigation, Neuburg swore an oath to defend its inviolability with his life. Crowley, dressed in his ceremonial black robe, then made an astonishing departure from accepted ritual practice. Instead of joining his chela in the relative safety of the circle, he entered the Triangle of Art. While Neuburg performed the Banishing Rituals of the Pentagram and Hexagram, a procedure designed to protect him, Crowley made the Call of the tenth Aethyr.[35]

The mighty Choronzon announced himself from within the shew-stone with a great cry, "Zazas, Zazas, Nasatanada Zazas":

> I am I. . . . From me come leprosy and pox and plague and cancer and cholera and the falling sickness. Ah! I will reach up to the knees of the Most High, and tear his phallus with my teeth, and I will bray his testicles in a mortar, and make poison thereof, to slay the sons of men.[36]

Crowley probably uttered these words. Thereafter, however, as far as Neuburg could tell, Crowley fell silent; he remained seated in the triangle in the sand, robed and hooded, deeply withdrawn, and "did not move or speak

during the ceremony."[37] It was Neuburg who both heard and saw. Unlike the previous Calls, when he had acted merely as scribe, Neuburg now beheld not Crowley seated within the triangle, but all that Crowley conjured. Before him appeared Choronzon in the guise of a beautiful woman whom he had known and loved in Paris, and she tried to lure him from the circle. She was followed by a holy man and a serpent.

Slowly the demon in his various manifestations managed to engage the inexperienced Neuburg in discussion, and then proceeded to mock him: had he not, "O talkative One," been instructed to hold no converse with the mighty Choronzon? Undoubtedly Neuburg had been so instructed by Crowley, but in the heat of the moment he forgot himself. During the intense debate that ensued, with Victor Neuburg scribbling furiously so as to record every detail, Choronzon began stealthily to erase the protective edges of the circle in the sand. Suddenly, Choronzon sprang from the triangle into the circle and wrestled Neuburg to the ground. The scribe found himself struggling with a demon in the shape of "a naked savage," a strong man who tried to tear out his throat with "froth-covered fangs." Neuburg, invoking the magical names of God, struck out with his dagger and finally forced the writhing figure back into the triangle. The chela repaired the circle, and Choronzon resumed his different manifestations and ravings. Cajoling, tempting, decrying, pleading, he continued to debate and attempt to undermine the scribe. Finally, the manifestations began to fade. The triangle emptied.[38]

Neuburg now became aware of Crowley, who was sitting alone in the triangle. He watched as Crowley wrote the name BABALON, signifying the defeat of Choronzon, in the sand with his Holy Ring.[39] The ceremony was concluded; it had lasted over two hours. The two men lit a great fire of purification, and obliterated the circle and the triangle. They had undergone a terrible ordeal. Crowley states that he had "astrally identified" himself with Choronzon throughout, and had "experienced each anguish, each rage, each despair, each insane outburst."[40] Neuburg, however, had held forbidden converse with the Dweller of the Abyss. Both men now felt that they understood the nature of the Abyss. It represented Dispersion: a terrifying chaos in which there was no center and no controlling consciousness. Its fearsome Dweller was not an individual but the personification of a magnitude of malignant forces made manifest through the massed energy of the evoking magician. But to experience these forces at the most immediate and profoundly personal level, and to believe, as Neuburg did, that he had been involved in a fight to the death with them, was shattering. As Crowley remarked, "I hardly know how we ever got back to Bou Saada."[41]

Over the next two weeks Crowley and Neuburg continued the Calls as

they made their way towards Biskra, a desert journey of over a hundred miles. Some of Crowley's experiences in the Aethyrs were lyrical hymns of beauty and ecstasy, but others seemed full of foreboding—suggesting that he had stumbled into a world for which he was not yet prepared. By the time they reached Biskra on 16 December, Crowley knew that he was perilously close to the absolute limit of his powers. Four days later he concluded the final Call. The magical work was finished. The two men were utterly exhausted, but not by the hardships of the physical journey, which Crowley, at least, found delightful. It was the magical experience that had taken its toll. Those who knew them said that Neuburg "bore the marks of this magical adventure to the grave," and that Crowley, shattered psychologically, never recovered from the ordeal.[42] The two men recuperated in Biskra before returning to Algiers. They sailed for England on the last day of December 1909.

The Soul of the Desert

Although Crowley was casual about the mise-en-scène of the Calls, it is unlikely that the setting for this magical undertaking was mere accident. "Arabia" and the desert held a special significance for him. Crowley reveled in Arab, or, more specifically, Bedouin, culture. After a long day's tramp, he claimed to enjoy nothing more than to join the men of a remote village to while away the night drinking coffee and smoking tobacco or "kif" (hashish). He was already familiar with the effects of a "huqqa . . . laden with maddening cannabis," and felt emancipated by the desert and its society.[43] Crowley acknowledged that while his spiritual self was at home in China, his "heart and hand are pledged to the Arab."[44] When he spoke of "the Arab," however, his abiding identification was with what he took to be the spirit of desert culture—the strong ties that bound man to man, and an existence pared down to the aestheticized essentials. A romanticized ethos of masculinity was one of the aspects of "Arabia" that had particular resonance for him.

A great deal has been written about the European fascination with the desert, the romanticization of the Bedouin, and the creation in travel literature and elsewhere of a particular mythic "Orient."[45] Crowley was not immune to these fictions. While his firsthand experience of the desert was powerful and direct, his affinity with "the Arab" had a different basis. When he assumed that he had intuitively penetrated the heart of the desert Arab, that he understood at an unspoken level the profound effect on the human spirit of living in unmediated dialogue with what he called the eight genii of

the desert, it was because he had read so avidly in the "Arabia Deserta" literature.[46] And if there is a subtext for Crowley's North African adventure—indeed, for all his travels—it was the life and work of the Victorian adventurer and explorer Richard Burton. Burton represented the kind of man Crowley most wished to be—strong, courageous, intrepid, but also a learned scholar-poet, and a man who jibed at conventional restraints. His dark, scarred face and satanic aura seemed to suggest knowledge and powers beyond the accepted and acceptable, his exploits in Africa and the Near East were legendary, and his translations of Italian, Latin, Arabic, and Sanskrit texts had introduced a Victorian readership to European and "oriental" folklore and erotica.[47] A man of astounding breadth and capabilities, Burton was without doubt a model for Crowley. When he undertook his lengthy travels in remote places, Crowley felt that he was "treading, though reverently and afar off, in the footsteps of my boyhood's hero, Richard Francis Burton." He was one of three men to whom Crowley dedicated his *Confessions:* "the perfect pioneer of spiritual and physical adventure."[48]

Crowley aspired to the kind of cultural mastery exhibited in Burton's famous 1853 "pilgrimage" to Mecca when the explorer, perfectly disguised as a Muslim, had penetrated to the heart of a holy city denied to Europeans. Crowley's flamboyant use of a star sapphire ring during his North African travels with Neuburg was based on Burton's information that the stone was venerated by Muslims. According to Crowley, he put a stop to a coffee-shop brawl by calmly walking into the scrimmage and inscribing magical figures in the air with the ring while intoning a chapter from the Qur'an: "The fuss stopped instantly, and a few minutes later the original parties to the dispute came to me and begged me to decide between them, for they saw that I was a saint."[49] Although Crowley's account is self-parodying, he was, like Burton, implicated in the imperialist project. Both men rejected the stifling restrictions of Victorian society, and in different ways sought to dissociate themselves from bourgeois notions of sober, restrained, industrious manhood. Nevertheless, while genuinely revering Arab culture and its peoples, they equally epitomized that unreflective assumption of superiority and desire for mastery that was integral to imperialist endeavors.[50] These issues, however, are complex. In the case of Burton and Crowley, neither a sense of superiority nor the drive for mastery was necessarily equated with the ruthless repression of the feminine that (following Freud) is often associated with accounts of modern masculine subjectivity. If the two men conformed in certain respects to the classic profile of the imperialist, they were also drawn to a culture that could apparently accommodate the expression of the feminine as an intrinsic part of virile masculinity.

Imperialism invariably implies a degree of feminization, but Crowley, influenced by Burton, viewed Arab culture as a positive and irresistible blend of the masculine and feminine. "El Islam," Richard Burton had noted, "seems purposely to have loosened the ties between the sexes in order to strengthen the bonds which connect man and man."[51] This is suggestive of both the profoundly masculinist society of Crowley's imagination and its mirror image, and Burton was in part responsible for this particular characterization of the East. Early in his army career Burton had been asked to investigate the homosexual brothels in Karachi, a mainly Muslim settlement occupied by the British since 1839, because it was feared that they were corrupting British soldiers. Burton's report was so detailed that it subsequently gave rise to rumors about his own sexual proclivities, which he never fully lived down.[52] He had long been fascinated by "oriental" erotica when, late in life, he committed his considerable erudition to paper with the publication of his studies of Eastern pederasty. Through these and other writings, "Arabia" had become synonymous in the European imagination with homosexuality.[53]

It is not insignificant that in the year in which Crowley and Neuburg tramped across the desert, T. E. Lawrence—later to be immortalized as Lawrence of Arabia—was undertaking a walking tour in the Middle East, and that rumors concerning Lawrence's homosexuality were linked with his early close relationship with an Arab assistant. It is also relevant that Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas had anticipated Crowley's discovery of Algeria, and enjoyed all that Algiers had to offer. Indeed, Wilde had arranged for a tremulous André Gide to spend the night with a young male Arab in that city, so confirming for Gide his own sexual identity.[54] For these European men, an apparent acceptance of *le vice contra nature* was part of the lure of the Arab world. Although it went far deeper than that for Crowley, as for Lawrence, the desert signified the expression—often the honorable expression—of a heterodox male sexuality.

Yet Crowley's love of the desert, and its relationship to expressive sexuality, was more complex than this. In "The Soul of the Desert," published in 1914, he writes a lyrical paean to the mystical power of this "wilderness of sand."[55] The desert, he says, has the power to strip a man of everything that he has and is until he must finally stand naked in the face of the elements. So, he writes, "at last the Ego is found alone, unmasked, conscious of itself and of no other thing."[56] There is simply the unreflective consciousness of one who tramps through the dunes. It is this, an uncomplicated acknowledgment of what *is*, that makes it possible to love in the desert "as it is utterly impossible to do in any other conditions."[57] Here, a shared glance, a chosen

place in the sand, and "life thrills in sleepy unison; all, all in silence, not names or vows exchanged, but with clean will an act accomplished. . . . Love itself becomes simple as the rest of life."[58] This simple love, an effect of the crystallized intensity of desert existence, is a prelude to

> the bodily ecstasy of dissolution, the pang of bodily death, wherein the Ego for a moment that is an aeon loses the fatal consciousness of itself, and becoming one with that of another, foreshadows to itself that greater sacrament of death, when "the spirit returns to God that gave it."[59]

But Crowley goes further. In "The Soul of the Desert," "the wilderness of sand" becomes the figurative realization of an eroticized spirituality. It is equated with an ecstatic experience far outstripping an orgasmic loss of sense of self—the "little death" of sexual climax. The desert, with its wastes of endless sand, inescapable solitude, and implacable indifference to the miserable struggles of humanity, is parent to the quintessential mystical experience: the dissolution of "the soul . . . into the abounding bliss of God." And, for Crowley, this "dissolution" is synonymous with what he calls here "the annihilation of the Self in Pan." The coded reference to Crowley's relationship with Neuburg, and the sacrificial ceremony undertaken with him on the summit of Da'leh Addin in 1909, is clear. In a marked eroticization of the supremely spiritual, Crowley writes: "Such must be the climax of any [magical] retirement to the desert."[60]

"It was like Jekyll and Hyde"

Crowley used *Self, Ego,* and *Soul* as interrelated if not synonymous terms. Speaking of the "sacrifice" on Mount Da'leh Addin, he could say that every particle of his "personality" was consumed; elsewhere, he talks of "the annihilation of the Self in Pan." Similarly, he writes of that moment of crisis in the desert "when it becomes necessary to penetrate beneath the shadow-show to the secret sanctuary of the soul"; and, of that same moment, that "at last the Ego is found alone, unmasked, conscious of itself and of no other thing."[61] It was never Crowley's concern to provide a precise ontology of human identity, and he drew on an eclectic metaphysics when he alluded to the nature of being. His commentaries, however, suggest that he predicated his experiential sense of self on both an esoteric and a liberal-humanist understanding of a unique individual essence. He understood a good deal about the "shadow-show" of personality pyrotechnics that exemplified the man Aleister Crowley, but adhered to the notion of a "secret sanctuary of

the soul" as a kind of occult shrine of the ultimate "Self." The "moment of crisis in the desert" signifies a stripping away of the layers of the "personality"—a crucial unmasking in preparation for the unveiling of this final "Self."

Crowley was a man who knew all about masks; he delighted in playing with identity. At Cambridge he had become an ardent Jacobite, changing his name from Alexander to Aleister (a misspelling of its Gaelic equivalent), and afterwards adopted the spurious persona of Lord Boleskine, a Highland laird. Shortly after his initiation into the Golden Dawn, he had taken a flat in London under the name of Count Vladimir Svareff and enjoyed posing as a young Russian nobleman. In Cairo in 1904 Crowley decided to pass himself off as a Persian prince, and became Prince Chioa Khan. While these experiments were undertaken in a spirit of fun and adventure, they were also undoubtedly due to a certain restiveness on Crowley's part over his given position in life. His wealth and education ensured his social acceptability, but his strict Puritanical background and family ties to trade were far removed from his romantic fantasies of aristocratic lineage and lifestyle. Crowley longed to be other than a brewer's son. His adopted identities, however, were never anything more than a rich man's indulgent fictions. There is no sense, for example, that he lived as Chioa Khan in the same way that both Richard Burton and T. E. Lawrence lived as Arabs. Indeed, this was never his intention. Crowley's impersonation of a Persian prince was simply the occasion for a piece of exotic showmanship; an opportunity to dress up in a series of gorgeous silk robes and swagger about the streets of Cairo. There is no sense in which he experienced himself as *traumatically* "divided." He did not have Burton's abiding conviction that he was two men, or Lawrence's painful awareness of psychic dissonance in which he literally embodied the dislocation identified in theoretical discussions of masquerade.[62] Crowley's assumption of different identities was, as he readily acknowledged, mere playacting. He did not experience his various dramatis personae as "selves."

This was not the case with his magical identity. Crowley *was* Perdurabo, and it was as a master magician that he traveled through the timeless Aethyrs of a sixteenth-century magus. The magical self was part of Crowley's concept of selfhood, but in a specific sense. From the time of his initiation into the Golden Dawn, Crowley, like other initiates, gained an understanding of magic as bound up in complex and interrelated ways with the person of the magician and the operation of the magical will. By 1900 he was experimenting with the conscious movement between two separate selves, and had perfected a practice that owed much, he says, to Robert Louis Stevenson:

> As a member of the Second Order [of the Golden Dawn], I wore a certain jewelled ornament of gold upon my heart. I arranged that when I had it on, I was to permit no thought, word or action, save such as pertained directly to my magical aspirations. When I took it off I was, on the contrary, to permit no such things; I was to be utterly uninitiate. It was like Jekyll and Hyde, but with the two personalities balanced and complete in themselves.[63]

Crowley's reference to Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is instructive. This highly popular novel, published in 1886, features a respectable doctor who uses his specialized knowledge to create a second self, which manifests in his body through a process of startling transformation. The loathsome Mr. Hyde—"the beast Hyde"—is the literal embodiment of everything his creator is not; he is the shadow side of the late-Victorian bourgeois male. Hyde understands nothing of sober self-restraint, and freely indulges his craving for unspecified "secret pleasures." The implication that Hyde's nocturnal escapades were sexual as well as violent was clear in the sensational London stage adaptation, which opened in August 1888; W. T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette* was quick to link the play with the gruesome Jack the Ripper murders of five prostitutes in London's East End that autumn. In the furor that followed, the play was closed.[64]

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde articulates specific anxieties about bourgeois masculinity. By the 1880s significant cracks had appeared in the conventional formulation of the decent, disciplined, God-fearing gentleman as the epitome of middle-class male respectability. Late-Victorian concerns over prostitution, pornography, venereal disease, the moral welfare of children, and the safety of respectable women on city streets centered on a series of public campaigns that promoted the representation of male sexuality as predatory and dangerous.[65] In particular, the metaphor of the "beast," precisely the term used by his mother to disparage the adolescent Crowley, was mobilized during this period to refer to the egotistic and lustful attributes of an intemperate "lower self."[66] In the rhetoric of these campaigns, married and single men were equally a source of concern. Indeed, although the marriage bed and supposedly redemptive qualities of pure Victorian womanhood had traditionally been seen as a bulwark against male profligacy, there was a growing sense that marriage merely exposed women to licensed sexual exploitation. An undifferentiated "male lust" accounted for the seemingly endemic spread of "vice," and social purity groups and vigilance committees mobilized throughout the country to combat its influence. Although Stevenson sought to deny any implicit reference to sexuality in his novel, the masculine world it depicts was widely regarded as the setting for a graphic

representation of the debased Hyde in Everyman—the vile and murderous debaucher lurking beneath the surface of urbane gentility. The 1888 play made explicit the target of the villain's lusts.

But *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is also centrally concerned with the idea of the divided self, and is equally a refiguring of the concept of dual personality, which played upon a fin-de-siècle fascination with duality, fragmentation, and disintegration. In the novel, Dr. Jekyll can only speak of his other self, his "devil," via the disclaimer "he" ("He, I say—I cannot say, I"), while the potion with the power to turn a Jekyll into a Hyde is represented as an assault on "the very fortress of identity."[67] The novel's implied challenge to the notion of a unified self as the single source of identity was echoed elsewhere as the century drew to a close, and this was perhaps particularly marked in contemporary discussion of the human mind. Indeed, there is some indication that Stevenson was familiar with developments in European psychology, and that he had been "deeply impressed" by a "scientific" paper he had read in French on "sub-consciousness."[68] As we have seen, advanced occultists were also cognizant of the work of European psychologists and familiar with the idea of "subconsciousness." Nevertheless, when occultists spoke of a second magical or astral self they were referring to the conscious and controlled development of a powerful and effective second self that would explore the spheres beyond conscious awareness. This second self was not the dissociated personality of spiritualist mediumship or psychological disorder. When Crowley suggested that the existence of his two selves, the initiate and "uninitiate" personalities, was somehow similar to the divided self of Dr. Jekyll, he was simply acknowledging the relevance of the novel's central theme to magical practice. The key difference for Crowley between himself and Dr. Jekyll lay in the fact that Crowley's "two personalities [are] balanced and complete in themselves." He would also have wished to argue that Perdurabo was no monster. He was an initiated magical self, and in no way represented a personal crisis of identity. It is in a magical sense that Crowley acknowledged not one self but (over time) many. And because of his magical training, Crowley did not conceive of this as a *problematic* splitting.

As the new century unfolded, Crowley began to combine the conceptual lexicon of magic with insights gleaned from developments in the study of the mind. It seems likely that he had discovered Freud by the time he wrote "The Soul of the Desert" in 1914, in which he refers, as we have seen, to the unmasking of the "Ego." Although this is not conclusive evidence that he understood "Ego" in the strictly Freudian sense—the term was adopted in translations of Freud but had been in use for almost a century to connote the conscious subject and was common currency among occultists—it is the

case that by 1914 Freud's ideas had been circulating in England for several years. At any rate, in "The Soul of the Desert," Crowley clearly conceptualizes the Ego as the "I" (Freud's original "das Ich"), which speaks in the name of Aleister Crowley and suggests that this "I" is the tip of the iceberg. By the 1920s, Crowley was using key psychoanalytic concepts and acknowledging that Freudian theory offers confirmation of some of the critical insights of magical practice. Psychoanalysis in no way undermined the credibility of magical practice for Crowley or other similarly minded magicians. It merely presents a different narrative of the heroic voyager and the landscape through which he or she travels.[69] Crowley made it plain that he approved of Freud's theorizing of the relationship between the conscious and unconscious, but emphasized that Freud had arrived at his conclusions somewhat late in the day. According to Crowley, the father of psychoanalysis was simply articulating what magicians had known for centuries.[70]

Erasing the Line in the Sand

But it was magical practice, not psychoanalytic theory, that taught Crowley that the apparent coherence of human selfhood is illusory. Although he held to the idea of a hidden essential "Self," a unique core at the heart of the man, magic taught him that the "I" of Aleister Crowley was only one possible self among many. The most terrible lesson that Crowley had to learn, however, and he learned it in the desert, was that it is precisely this "I"—that which apparently secures our place in the worldly order of things—that must undergo dissolution in the ordeal of the Abyss. Crowley understood the Abyss to be a great gulf fixed between "intelligible intuition" and "the intellect." Other commentators see it as "an imaginary gulf" between the real and ideal, or "the gulf existing between individual and cosmic consciousness."[71] As in all magical practice, however, the Abyss can manifest in physical form, the plastic representation of its assumed qualities. But whether understood in symbolic or literal terms, crossing the Abyss involves the final and irrevocable abandonment of the "I" along with its accompanying claim to sole rational authority.

The preamble to confronting the Abyss, and its demonic guardian, Choronzon, is a mental crisis, a "terrible pinnacle of the mind"; to cross the Abyss, "one must abandon utterly and for ever all that one has and is." As Crowley recognized, this is represented in the language of mysticism "as the complete surrender of the self to God"—mystical death as the prerequisite for mystical union. In secular terms, it is "the silencing of the human intellect."[72] Crowley, schooled in the magical tradition, conceptualized both

Choronzon and the Abyss as having an external reality, and he made no subsequent attempt to amend this view. But in psychoanalytic terms, terms which Crowley was later to embrace, it can be said that Choronzon is equally a manifestation of the dark, repressed components of the psyche. In this reading, Choronzon's great resistant cry, "I am I," is simultaneously the magician's last cry of horror and terror as he plunges headlong into the Abyss, and the emergent voice of the unknown and unpatrolled unconscious. Characterized by Disintegration, Dispersion, and Chaos, qualities suggestive of the fracturing experience of modernity, the Abyss is both symbolic and real. It is emblematic of breakdown—the breakdown of the personal sense of self as manifested by the ego, the uncoupling of the body from the "I," and the dissolution of everyday consciousness. It marks the formal erasure of the boundary between the conscious and unconscious, an erasure that the future magus must invoke at will. Successful negotiation of the Abyss represents the ultimate test of high Adeptship. The magus is one who can establish a harmonious relationship with the unconscious, working with it to achieve "Change in conformity with the Will."[73]

The magician who makes a successful crossing of the Abyss is an initiate whose control is so complete that he can embrace personal disintegration, abandoning all knowledge or awareness of the "I," while retaining and asserting the power and authority of the magical self and will. The Adept who emerges from the experience unscathed has confronted and contained the unleashed furies of the unconscious not via the patrolling maneuvers of the myopic ego but by dint of a second operation—the exercise of an infinitely clear-sighted and all-powerful magical personality unconnected with the personal self. In this telling, the magus is a magical Adept who has glimpsed the full implications of his subjectivity. Gone forever is the limiting and limited understanding of the "I" as the finite center of his universe. He has entered the unconscious and acknowledges the permeability of its boundaries. In Crowley's case, he had experienced for himself Choronzon's ability to erase the line in the sand.

The narrative that Crowley presents of the events in the desert is written in the direct language of realism. He does not make a psychoanalytic interpretation of his experience. Crowley deals with the episode as a magical undertaking, and represents it as clear evidence that he has achieved enlightened consciousness. He felt that he had first experienced something akin to exalted awareness after the sacrifice at Da'leh Addin: "I knew who I was . . . [but] I did not exist." Crowley understood, in other words, that the "I" is simply a convenient fiction for negotiating one aspect of reality. After his

confrontation with Choronzon, he assumed that he had achieved the insights of the true magus, the Master of the Temple:

> I understood that sorrow had no substance; that only my ignorance and lack of intelligence had made me imagine the existence of evil. As soon as I had destroyed my personality, as soon as I had expelled my ego, the universe which to it was indeed a frightful and fatal force, fraught with every form of fear was so only in relation to this idea "I"; so long as "I am I," all else must seem hostile.[74]

As one who had "expelled" his ego and could never again experience anything in the universe as "a frightful and fatal force," Crowley now welcomed each and every new experience with a catholic embrace that refused discrimination. He increasingly incorporated what he called "repulsive rituals" into his magical practice, and the reckless irresponsibility and amorality of his later behavior is legendary.

Unsympathetic observers take 1909 to be the point at which Crowley finally achieved his true potential and went mad. In magical terms it would be understood as failing to subdue the demon Choronzon and succumbing to his curse. Certainly, Crowley acknowledged that in the aftermath of his 1909 experiences he felt utterly lost and alone. In material terms, too, things became difficult. By his midthirties Crowley had burned through his considerable fortune, and acknowledged that "it has become constantly more difficult to keep afloat."[75] Increasingly, he seems to have lost a clear sense of the distinction between the enlightened magical self, which can access the unconscious at will and acknowledges no limits, and the man Aleister Crowley, who must still function in the world. Functioning in the world requires a stable sense of personal identity, a well-defined ego, even if that ego is understood to be only part of an infinitely complex story. The magical Adept is in control of the initiated personality and can move with ease between an initiate and "uninitiate" consciousness, but Crowley's encounter with Choronzon precipitated the blurring of that critical line between the magical self and the temporal "I." The line in the sand had been erased. Crowley's subsequent behavior suggests, indeed, that he had not made a successful crossing of the Abyss—that he was caught in the grip of unconscious forces that he was unable to filter, monitor, or control. Far from establishing an all-seeing, harmonious relationship with the unconscious, working with it to achieve magical ends, the unconscious now controlled and dominated him.[76]

As a self-professed Master of the Temple, Crowley went on to devise a technique for the systematic destruction of the ego—regarding it as a barrier to magical progress. During the 1920s, his followers were punished severely if they used the word *I*.[77] Crowley's insight was sound, but the technique was flawed. He was seeking to undermine the structural operation by which all meaning, including the sense of a unique, individuated, and gendered self, is produced. There can be no "I" without a clear understanding of that which is not "I"; and, as Crowley put it, "so long as 'I am I,' all else must seem hostile." He was pursuing what we might think of as the erasure of difference, a traditional goal of occultism. Conceived as moving beyond the conceptual grip of oppositional dualities—I/thou, self/other, male/female—Crowley was attempting to find a shortcut to one of the highest goals of occultism: a return to a lost Eden of wholeness and completion.

The notion of human beings as originally whole and androgynous is a persistent motif of occult and magical traditions. Crowley was certainly aware from his training in the Golden Dawn that androgyny has an occult pedigree, but it came to have a particular magical significance for him. In 1904 an event occurred that was to assume momentous importance in his life. In the spring of that year Crowley and his wife, Rose, were living in Cairo, and he was indulging his Prince Chioa Khan lifestyle. One day Rose, pregnant and in a dreamy state of mind, informed her husband that the Egyptian god Horus was awaiting him. Crowley, impressed by his wife's seemingly intuitive or mystical role as messenger, took her subsequent instructions seriously. Accordingly, at noon on the eighth, ninth, and tenth of April 1904, Crowley seated himself in his Cairo hotel room to await the will of the gods. The result—in three one-hour sessions of rapid dictation from Aiwass, an incarnate being whom Crowley regarded as his long sought-after Holy Guardian Angel, or Higher Self—was a book called *Liber AL vel Legis* or *The Book of the Law*.[78] It was this extraordinary document, written in a biblical voice and the form of a prose poem, that first proclaimed the great Rabelaisian "truth" by which Crowley was later to live: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law. . . . There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt. Love is the law, love under will."[79] The sequence of teachings that became *The Book of the Law* established that in 1904 the age of Osiris, the god who died and was resurrected, was to be replaced by the Aeon of Horus, that of the Crowned and Conquering Child. Furthermore, the communications established that the ruling characteristic of the New Aeon of Horus is the unification of the male and female as represented in the androgynous figure of Horus. Crowley was proclaimed the Prophet of this new androgynous aeon, the Beast 666.

Although Crowley rejected these teachings in 1904, they resurfaced dramatically prior to the trip to North Africa in 1909. Crowley claimed that he discovered the lost manuscript of *The Book of the Law* in his loft at Boleskine House just as Victor Neuburg was nearing the end of his Magical Retirement. Significantly, he states that its reappearance struck him like a thunderbolt, cutting the ground out from beneath his feet and sending him into a prolonged two-day meditation. He emerged from this with the clear understanding that the Secret Chiefs intended to hold him to his mission: "I understood that the disaster and misery of the last three years were due to my attempt to evade my duty. I surrendered unconditionally." Instantly, Crowley felt a sense of release. A tragedy in the Himalayas when members of his climbing expedition had lost their lives, the death of his daughter, the "long crucifixion of home life," the uphill struggle in his magical work, were over and put behind him. He acknowledged that his marriage to Rose was finished. Crowley felt for the first time since 1904 that he was free to do his will, and understood what his will was: "I had merely to establish in the world the Law which had been given me to proclaim." He understood, too, that he had been fighting against himself for five years, and had "wasted some of the best years of my life in the stupid and stubborn struggle to set up my conscious self against its silent sovereign, my true soul."[80] If this was Crowley's reaction to the rediscovered *The Book of the Law* in the summer of 1909, it seems likely that his destiny as the Prophet of the androgynous Aeon of Horus was very much on his mind as he made his way through the desert with Victor Neuburg only a few months later.

But the androgynous figure, so important in occult teachings and for Crowley personally, was also an icon of the fin de siècle. Aubrey Beardsley's androgynous illustrations for the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy* were expressions of an anarchic sexuality that was closely associated with the "decadent" "yellow nineties," and Beardsley had been a friend of Crowley's first love, Jerome Pollitt. The "decadent" figures of Beardsley and Oscar Wilde were associated for Crowley with the liberating years of his youth, and in key respects he remained wedded throughout his life to the outlook and modus operandi of the "decadent" movement. A *poseur extraordinaire* in the style of Wilde, and a man who set out to replicate in life the dark, wicked, luxurious world of the fictional Dorian Gray, Crowley consistently experimented with the inversion of dominant categories. This was as much the case with his magic as with his own sexuality and gender identity; in each case, and in different but related ways, he played on the "yellow" theme of perverse delinquency. When the New Aeon of Horus was announced in 1904, and beckoned once again in 1909, Crowley cannot have been altogether unre-

sponsive. For *The Book of the Law* can be read as a hymn to "decadence," while androgyny—possibly the ultimate heterodox masculinity—was an attribute that Crowley wished to claim for himself.

Writing in the 1920s, Crowley maintained that he had long held the conviction that he was in certain respects both male and female. Speaking of himself in the third person, a distancing technique reminiscent of Dr. Jekyll's disclaimer,[81] Crowley notes that while "his masculinity is above the normal," he possesses female characteristics like slight, graceful limbs and well-developed breasts:

> There is thus a sort of hermaphroditism in his physical structure; and this is naturally expressed in his mind. But whereas, in most similar cases, the feminine qualities appear at the expense of manhood, in him they are added to a perfectly normal masculine type. The principal effect has been to enable him to understand the psychology of women, to look at any theory with comprehensive and impartial eyes, and to endow him with maternal instincts on spiritual planes. . . . He has been able to philosophize about nature from the standpoint of a complete human being; certain phenomena will always be unintelligible to men as such, others, to women as such. He, by being both at once, has been able to formulate a view of existence which combines the positive and the negative, the active and the passive, in a single identical equation. . . . Again and again . . . we shall find his actions determined by this dual structure.[82]

While Crowley is here articulating the gendered categories of masculinity and femininity in essentialist terms, also an aspect of traditional occult philosophy, he conceives of himself as embodying a beneficial "dual structure": he is "both at once." Physical "hermaphroditism" is therefore replicated in terms of gender, and represented as giving him the privileged insight of "a complete human being." Crowley maintained that his "dual structure" enabled him to act in the world and "philosophize" about it with an unusual degree of acuity and success. Furthermore, this "dual structure" extended to his sexual identity: he was flagrantly bisexual. There was no shortage of women in Crowley's life, and the Crowley mythology paints him as a tender and inventive lover. He was, in fact, prey to powerful and contradictory attitudes towards women, but these remained largely unacknowledged. Crowley believed that he was irresistible, and that his success as a heterosexual lover was due to his unique ability to express (an again essentialized) "savage male passion to create" modified by a "feminine" gentleness.[83] Bisexuality is

not the same as "hermaphroditism" or androgyny, but in Crowley's mind his sexuality was yet another expression of the wholeness implied by his "being both at once."

There is every indication that Victor Neuburg shared this view, and that he applied it to himself. In a long poem in the *Triumph of Pan,* a collection published in 1910 which incorporates a complex amalgam of personal and magical references, Neuburg writes: "O thou hast sucked my soul, lord of my nights and days, / My body, pure and whole, is merged within the ways / That lead to thee, my queen, who gav'st life to me / When all my heart was green."[84] These lines, addressed to Pan, contain that element of Crowley's relationship to Neuburg—he is both "lord" and "queen"—which must form at least a subtext for the poem if not the collection. Similarly, there can be little doubt about Neuburg's meaning in the title poem: "there is a Great One, cold and burning, / Crafty and hot in lust, / Who would make me a Sapphist and an Urning, / A Lesbian of the dust."[85] Whether or not the "Great One" is Crowley, it is clear that Neuburg experienced his spirituality as a sexualized (or bisexualized) "Sapphist" and "Urning."

The use of the term *Urning* gives a specific clue to Neuburg's thinking. The term, familiar from Plato's *Symposium,* had been adopted by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs half a century earlier in his discussion of homosexuality, and reappeared in a book that greatly influenced Neuburg, Edward Carpenter's *Intermediate Sex*. A great admirer of Carpenter, who was no stranger to Eastern religion and philosophy, and perhaps particularly taken with the suggestion that homosexuality might represent a new evolutionary form, Neuburg apparently absorbed the discussion of what Carpenter called the "doubleness of nature"—the feminine soul trapped within the male body, and vice versa. In *The Triumph of Pan,* however, Neuburg reworks it, combining contemporary discussions of homosexuality with the enduring motif of the hermaphrodite. When he positions himself in his poem as both woman-desiring woman and man-desiring man, Neuburg is claiming a radically different "hermaphroditism": two "inversions" "at once."

Crowley, on the other hand, experienced his bisexuality in classic psychoanalytic terms as "the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche."[86] This meant that, as a desiring man, Crowley gave vent to what he took to be the ultimate expression of masculinity—the (albeit modified) "savage male passion to create"; as a desiring woman, he sought to become the beautiful object of that "savage male passion." He often used the name Alys (a feminized form of Aleister) to signify his femininity, and, as Alys, adopted what he thought of as the feminine sexual role.

In his relationship with Victor Neuburg, Crowley assumed the subject position of a desiring woman. In doing so, however, he was caught up in a fantasy that went far beyond the receptive "feminine." As the object of male desire, Crowley was in thrall to a scenario marked by orgiastic violation. This was exemplified in his relationship with Neuburg by the central importance assumed by the god Pan—"All devourer, all begetter"; to know "Panic" is to experience both ecstasy and terror at the hand of the god.[87] Pan, representative of a pagan Greece that had special significance for Victorian homosexual men, and long associated in the Christian imagination with the devil, was a powerful signifier of the sexualized magic initiated by the two men.[88] When Crowley and Neuburg speak of Pan, the imagery is redolent with heat and violence; a god, half man, half beast, who rapes and ravishes men and women alike. Crowley, who in his younger years had feared and sought to avoid pain, actively recruited it as a woman. And as a desiring woman, Crowley acted out a fantasy in which he became the recipient of his own unrecognized hostility towards women. If his "dual structure" consistently modified the sadistic impulses of his masculine sexuality, it also facilitated—like the great circle of loose rocks at Da'leh Addin—a kind of closure. In a dual identification, he became the sacrificial object of his own desires.

The "sacrifice" at Da'leh Addin, during which Crowley experienced "the annihilation of the Self in Pan" and consummation with "that primal and final breath . . . of God," in fact represents a primal scene of considerable significance. It is one in which an erotic investment in pain and desecration, an investment that increasingly figured in the "repulsive rituals" of his magical practice, was played out in vivid tandem with fantasies of bestiality and male rape. The strong masochistic element that ran through his various sexual identifications, and that Crowley recognized as a constituent element of both his masculinity and femininity, reached its apotheosis in the sacrificial moment.[89] But the "sacrifice" equally marks that elision of identifications, magical and mundane, upon which the Crowley-Neuburg relationship endlessly turned. For just as Crowley could insist that Victor Neuburg, in one incarnation the savage god, was equally a "masochist" and a "pederast," so, too, Neuburg experienced Crowley, his seemingly feminized lover, as a "homo-sexual sadist." It is likely that Crowley's expressive femininity had little to do with the apparent powerlessness it celebrated. A sexual scene dominated by the elaboration of a rape fantasy was probably directed and controlled, like everything else in their relationship, by Crowley himself. Crowley glosses the ritual on the mountain with the simple comment: "there I sacrificed myself." Both active and passive, avowal and disavowal, he who sacrifices and he who is sacrificed, Crowley acknowledges the ambiguity of

the covenant. He closes the account with a final significant move of disavowal and displacement: "There was an animal in the wilderness, but it was not I."[90]

Crowley's is a Manichean vision in which the principles of light and darkness do eternal battle, and in which supreme magical attainments are inextricably bound up with a "savage" bestiality. After crossing the Abyss in 1909, Crowley finally accepted *The Book of the Law,* and with it his destiny as the prophet of Horus. The desert experience confirmed for both Crowley and Neuburg (although only temporarily, in Neuburg's case) the conviction that they were privileged parties to the dawning of a new aeon governed by the glorious occult motif of two-in-one. But if Horus represents the ultimate patricide, the death of God-the-Father and his replacement with the androgynous motif of heterodox spiritual tradition, it is salutary to reflect on the resilience of male subjectivity as it heralds its displacement in the new order of things. Crowley remained, in all senses of the word, a Master. As the prophet of Horus he accepted the title of the Beast 666 and began to live by the ruling: "There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt." The message was starkly simple. It took the Golden Dawn's "Know Thyself" to its logical conclusion, approximating to the ancient Greek exhortation to "Know Thyself; then Be Thyself."

It is possible that after 1909 Crowley was able to fully recognize and be himself only as the Beast. Although this means that he remained enmeshed within the very familial and biblical terms that he so adamantly rejected, the appropriation of "the beast" of the Book of Revelation nevertheless inverted those terms in an ultimate gesture of self-assertion and defiance.[91] In the immediate aftermath of 1909 Neuburg welcomed and celebrated Crowley as the Beast, and the two men went on to experiment with homosexual magical work.[92] By 1914, however, Neuburg must have felt that he simply could not carry on. In the autumn of that ill-fated year he met Crowley and broke with him. On that occasion Crowley apparently ritually cursed Neuburg in a terrifying formula said to be linked with the god Pan. Neuburg suffered a nervous collapse and lived thereafter in constant fear of Crowley's return.[93]

Crowley meanwhile had become involved with German Templarism, and in 1912 was initiated into the Ordo Templi Orientis and its teachings on sex magic. The Order claimed a medieval Knights Templar pedigree, and played upon the Templar's alleged associations with heresy, sodomy, and

bestiality. Maintaining that sex magic lay behind the symbolism of Freemasonry and Hermeticism, the Ordo Templi Orientis taught a form of sexualized spirituality very similar to that of the left-hand Path of Bengali Tantrism.[94] Its higher grades were concerned with autoerotic and heterosexual magic, and the latter, as in tantric rites, could culminate in sexual intercourse. Crowley later added an elevated grade concerned with homosexual magic. The Ordo Templi Orientis regarded the act of sexual intercourse as the holiest of the religious sacraments, and Crowley brought to this his own versions of sexual practice interlaced with what he now took to be relevant veiled teachings in *The Book of the Law*.

As Baphomet, a name carrying strong Templar associations, Crowley became the head of the British branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis and recast certain of its rituals according to his own lights. He came to believe that magical rites and invocations performed in conjunction with specific sexual acts, as had happened apparently instinctively at Da'leh Addin, produce unsurpassed results. After the outbreak of war and his parting from Neuburg in 1914, the pro-German Crowley left England for the United States, and there followed a period of about four years during which he furthered his experiments with sex magic. These were recorded in three magical diaries entitled *Rex De Arte Magica,* and it is clear that by this time Crowley was using casual sexual encounters as well as human waste in ritualized sex magic.[95] Crowley then began to adopt his trademark spelling of "Magick," which, among other things, was intended to signify the sexual content of Crowleyite magical practice.[96]

In 1920 Crowley established his infamous Abbey of Thelema at Cefalu, in Sicily. Its byword, painted above the door, was part of what Crowley called the Law of Thelema: "Do What Thou Wilt." It was here that he lived with Leah Hirsig, the "Scarlet Woman" and most important of his magical consorts, but women and men came and went and with them extraordinary tales of life under the law. Crowley's acceptance of the designation "the Beast 666," which in occult circles is synonymous with his name, and shortly thereafter, Baphomet, had marked a new phase in his magical work. Pain, blood, sexual fluids, and excrement became the trademarks of Crowley's "repulsive rituals," and his followers were obliged to wear upon their bodies "the Mark of the Beast."[97] Stories of bizarre and dangerous sexual orgies began to circulate, Crowley himself believing that "[e]ach individual has an absolute right to satisfy his sexual instinct as is physiologically proper for him. The one injunction is to treat all such acts as sacraments."[98] At Thelema any and all sexual acts were so treated. They became part of Thelemite magical practice.

Sensationalized accounts of Crowley's exploits were circulated in the popular press, and by the early 1920s he had secured his reputation as "the king of depravity" and "the wickedest man in the world"—a reputation that included (probably quite wrongly) a propensity for ritual murder. Crowley was denounced as a devil-worshipping "human beast," and after only three years at Cefalu was expelled from Italy by Mussolini.[99] In an ironic reversal of his own earlier conception of his "two personalities," Crowley came to personify in the public imagination a kind of slavering, animalistic Mr. Hyde. He was transformed into the monstrous creature of Crowley legend, a black magician of mythic status whose demonic persona was reminiscent of W. T. Stead's Jack the Ripper—the sadistic murderer with an eroticized and "uncontrollable taste for blood."[100] Crowley had become the modern representative of a fin-de-siècle "cult of the beast"; the monster howling at the dark side of the moon.[101]

Crowley's is a cautionary tale. A man of considerable gifts, he devoted his life to pushing the boundaries of his mundane and magical worlds in pursuit of an ultimate reality. His is the story of a man who kicked against the traces of a stifling Victorian upbringing, inverting every conventional category, and challenging all limits in a ceaseless search for self-realization: the occult truth of Knowing and Being. But the occult truth that he sought and claimed was precisely situated. Crowley might have been Perdurabo, a master magician who explored the conceptual universe of a sixteenth-century magus, but he clearly brought *himself* to that endeavor. Perdurabo was the magical personality of an early twentieth-century middle-class man with very specific proclivities whose reworking of past magical practice was in constant dialogue with the concerns of the present. In magical terms, Crowley's work was fatally flawed precisely because he was finally unable to distinguish between the magical self and the temporal "I." In mundane terms, however, it is clear that Aleister Crowley's magical work was intrinsically bound up with the articulation of what we have come to understand as a modern sense of self. Certainly, one reading of his North African experience is that advanced ritual magic invited a radical "modernist" decentering of the subject, even as it pursued the occult goal of repairing a split and divided self.[102] Crowley's experiment indicates that magical practice, with its supposedly timeless procedures and "truths," was both an intensely personal and a culturally specific enterprise. Whatever we might make of the magical episteme, it would be difficult to deny that the "two personalities" are in some way constitutive of the particular historical actor. The magus was the man.

I have sought to argue here that Crowley's magical work, flawed or oth-

erwise, represented a self-conscious engagement with the self in all its complexity, recognized and unrecognizable, known and unknown. The episode in the desert suggests that the enlightened magical self—created through the erasure of psychic boundaries, and the unraveling of the processes through which the "I" is constituted—might represent the expression of a *fully realized,* historically contingent subjectivity. It is clear that Crowley's magical exploration of the Aethyrs undertaken in the name of Perdurabo was simultaneously a direct interrogation of the undisclosed phenomena of the personal self. The displaced "I" of the magus was expressive of a historicized self, and Crowley's experience in 1909 involved the display of unconscious elements as specific and theatrical as anything created by Robert Louis Stevenson. His magical work was intrinsically bound up with the enactment of fears, hostilities, and desires that circulated around the expression of a rogue bourgeois masculinity. Certainly the subtext of Crowley's account of events in the desert is a narrative of self that exceeds the exoteric revelations of his *Confessions*. Whatever the merits and demerits of Crowley's magical work, his struggles in the desert—symbolized by the "sacrifice" at Da'leh Addin, the encounter with Choronzon, and that final despairing cry, "I am I"—signified an extraordinary attempt on the part of this Edwardian bourgeois to understand the full implications of his own subjectivity.

Although Crowley did not cast his life's work in this way, the relentless interrogation of subjectivity that his magical methods imply suggests a modern enterprise of heroic if tragic proportions. As a man, Crowley died virtually penniless in 1947 at the age of seventy-two. But as a modern icon, he became a cult antihero of the 1960s and allegedly has his place on the sleeve of the Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.*[103] And as a magician he decorated the left-hand Path with the forbidden names of dark power to produce an influential demonic Magick that is very much with us today.