

LEVITY'S VESTMENTS

A STUDY IN CREATIVE PLAGIARISM

By Raven Dancingstar

In a number of books by the popular occult historian Francis X. King we find the assertion that Aleister Crowley was responsible at least in part for writing the rituals of the modern syncretic 'pagan'; religion known as Wicca. The main evidence presented for this assertion is the large number of blatant quotations or paraphrases from Crowley's published writings which appear in the earliest known versions of the Wicca rituals. A closer examination of the materials suggests that this can be more plausibly explained by assuming that someone, quite probably Gerald Brosseau Gardner, Frater Scire IV^o O.T.O., engaged in a measure of re-use. In King's biography of Crowley¹ he states, concerning the 'Book of Shadows', the compilation of rituals and instructions of Gardner's cult:

It is a curious blend of Crowleyanity on the one hand and the Gnostic survivals recorded by C.G. Leland in his nineteenth-century studies of Italian folklore on the other. This mingling of seemingly incompatible elements into a homogenous whole is well illustrated by the section of The Book of Shadows known as 'the Charge.'

Possibly because he was working from a later revision of the 'Charge of the Goddess' which had been deliberately re-written to disguise Crowley's influence, King did not realise that this piece of ritual originally consisted, with the exception of two lines of preamble, *entirely* of quotations or paraphrases from Leland's *Aradia*² and writings by Crowley in the *Blue Equinox*.³ This can however be demonstrated. This, I will now procede to demonstrate.

The text of the Charge here analysed is a transcription made by Aidan A. Kelly from Gardner's ritual notebook, *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical*, formerly in the collection of Ripley's International, Toronto (henceforth BAM).⁴ Errors or eccentricities in spelling and punctuation represent Kelly's attempt to transcribe the near-dyslexic manuscript as closely as possible. A defective version which had been "cleaned up" with regard to spelling and punctuation but omitted a few sentences was published in Kelly's *Crafting the Art of Magic, Book I*⁵ (henceforth CAM). The transcript used here appeared in a 'supplement' to *Crafting the Art of Magic* (there is actually a large measure of overlap between the two works) which was privately published in electronic form by Kelly.⁶ Kelly's analysis in these works was somewhat lacking as regards identifying and sourcing the Crowley quotes.

¹ *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley*, London, Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1977.

² C.G. Leland, *Aradia: or, the Gospel of the Witches*: London, David Nutt, 1899; various reprints. The authenticity or otherwise of the material in this work is a controversy on which I will not here enter.

³ *Equinox* III (1), Detroit: Universal Publishing Company, 1919; reprinted York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1974, 1992; Thame, Oxon: First Impressions, 1993.

⁴ I subsequently found (on the electronic publishing site scribd.com) a set of scans of a transcript of BAM, of unclear provenance (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/7410415/>). That transcription shows no significant variations in the "Leviter Veslis" with the one I had used. The original notebook was later sold by Ripley's to a private collector associated with a Canadian Wiccan "church."

⁵ St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1991.

⁶ "The original Gardnerian Documents for the Book of Shadows: A Supplement to *Crafting the Art of Magic, Book I*," Seattle: Art Magickal Publications, 1993)

LEVI+ER VESLIS

This title appeared in BAM and has been identified (by the historian Ron Hutton, cited in an article by Roger Dearnaley "The Influence of Aleister Crowley on 'Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical')⁷ as a piece of medieval ecclesiastical Latin used to mean "lifting the veil."

The Charge begins with the following brief preamble. When the text is used ceremonially it would be spoken by the High Priest.

*List to the words of the Great Mother who of old was also called among men
Artemis: Astarte: Dione: Melusine: Aphrodite And by meny other names.*

The version in CAM adds four more names, possibly from an intermediate version of the text. This does not appear to be a quotation from anything and so may be assumed to be one of the two original sentences of Gardner's in this text.

Commenting on this line, Elliot Rose in *A Razor for a Goat*⁸ (p. 206) says:

First, that string of names. Those ladies, or rather four of them (Dione is a name of Aphrodite) were worshipped, when they were worshipped seriously, as different people. At the utmost, I will allow that identification between Astarte and Aphrodite occurred in a syncretic age;⁹ it was not original, and Artemis and the syren Melusine cannot be dragged into it. Lumping them together and calling them the Great Mother is not possible in religion, but only in Comparative Religion. If you believe seriously in Aphrodite you do not believe she is really Artemis; they may once in fact have been the same person in two aspects, but the worshipper who knows and accepts their separate legends will not believe it. (Myself, I doubt if they were ever the same; but I should be in a minority there today.) And did Isobel Gowdie of Auldearne¹⁰ know all this Classical Dictionary stuff? Would she have thought it important? Is it not plainly the product of an anthropologically minded age?

The speech of the Priestess, supposedly speaking as the goddess, begins:

At mine Altars the youth of Lacedmonia and Spala made due sacrifice.

Usually corrected to 'Lacedæmon' or sometimes 'Lacedæmon in Sparta' Lacedæmon and Sparta were two different names for the same place, a city state in a region called Laconia. The reference is to ritual flogging of young men at the altar of a local form of Artemis. Again this does not appear to be a quote from anything but is probably original to Gardner. I here append two more paragraphs from Elliot Rose (*op. cit*, p. 206-7):

⁷ <http://www.lashtal.com/nuke/module-subjects-viewpage-pageid-141.phtml> (last checked December 2010). This essay is a general study of Gardner's use of Crowley material in his ritual notebook. I should mention that my attention was only drawn to Dearnaley's essay after I had posted the first version of this study. In accordance with his interpretation of certain of his oaths, Dearnaley's analysis of the *Leviter Veslis* follows the defective and 'cleaned-up' publication in CAM rather than the actual BAM text.

⁸ University of Toronto Press, 1962; reprinted 1989, 2003. Rose was discussing the selective quotations from the rituals which Gardner presented in his book *Witchcraft Today* (London: William Rider, 1954; reprinted Thame, I-H-O, 2001). While purportedly a historical / anthropological work this latter book is better understood as Gardner's manifesto.

⁹ For example, the age that produced the Greek Magical Papyri which routinely identify previously distinct deities with each other (e.g. Hekaté, Koré (Persephone), Artemis and Ereshkigal).

¹⁰ A Scottish woman tried (and presumably executed) for witchcraft in 1662; her detailed "confession" was one of Margaret Murray's main sources for her theories as to the structure and nature of the supposed witchcraft-religion.

Then, those youths. Apart from the affectation of “Lacedaemon” (for Sparta; sciolism, too, in the context), why specifically drag them in? Artemis has already been listed. The point *must* be the “due sacrifice.” The reference is of course, to ritual flagellation at the altar of Artemis Orthia; making two references to flagellation so far.¹¹ There are in fact, two others in Mr. Gardner’s book, and some vague talk about “ordeals” and “frightening”; the context in every case is initiation. All this is at least mildly interesting, because there is no hint of it in any earlier account of initiation ceremonies.¹² There is a good deal, in the accounts collected by Miss Murray, about the “Devil” beating his disciples,¹³ but the context is always straightforward maintenance of discipline; as such, of course, it has no special interest because it was, anyway, the standard minor punishment most often employed in the countries and periods involved. It is really insignificant, but it might not seem so to a modern reader, to someone who was trying, from outside, to build up a picture of what a traditional coven was like and what it did.

There are, however, relatively few people who would seize on this element and expand it, making *ritual* flagellation a crux of the initiation ceremony (as we may reasonably guess it to be), inserting a reference in the solemn moment of the liturgy, that at which the goddess's names are recited, and justifying it by a legend, the very same legend that professes to explain the theogeny of the goddess. The moving spirit behind the change¹⁴ would therefore seem to have been a person of that particular kind of specialized sensibility;¹⁵ it might, for example, have been Swinburne, and though I do not think it was (for there would surely in that case be also hymns and so forth, that Mr. Gardner could not mistake for anybody else’s), it is not improbable that the actual author was under his influence.

The Charge continues:

Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month, and better it be when the moon is full. They ye shall assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of me who am Queen of all Witcheries.

There ye shall assemble, ye who are fain to learn all Sorcery, yet have not won to its deepest secrets, to those will I teach things that are yet unknown.

And ye shall be free from slavery, And as a sign that ye be really free, ye shall be naked in your rites, both men and women, . . .

¹¹ Rose has already discussed the “Legend of the Descent of the Goddess” a mash-up of the myths concerning the underworld adventures of Inanna / Ishtar and Persephone, in which the goddess, after initially refusing to yield to the embraces of the lord of the underworld (treated as a personification of Death), has instead to “receive Death’s scourge.” A version of the “Legend” was printed in *Witchcraft Today* and later incorporated into one of Gardner’s initiation rituals.

¹² Rose was not aware of Crowley’s *Liber Pyramidos*; but in the context he may be talking specifically about initiation ceremonies into the alleged witch-cult; he was aware of the flagellation scene in the Pompeii ‘Villa of the Mysteries’ murals.

¹³ Margaret A. Murray. *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 197-203.

¹⁴ That is, the change from a “witch cult” based around the worship of a male deity, as postulated by Murray, the existence of which in some form Rose—despite his extended critiques of Margaret Murray—seems to have seriously believed in, indeed practically taken for granted in *A Razor for a Goat*, to one, as described by Gardner, with a goddess in the central position.

¹⁵ *i.e.*: a heterosexual male masochist, probably a product of the British public school system. Aidan Kelly made much—perhaps far *too* much—of this point in *Crafting the Art of Magic*.

As is now well known, this section is paraphrased from *Aradia*, specifically the following speech in cap. I (it comes at the end of the legend of Aradia and is said to have been her final address to her followers on earth before returning to the realm of her mother):

When I shall have departed from this world,
Whenever you have need of anything,
Once in the month, and when the moon is full
Ye shall assemble in some desert place
Or in a forest all together joined
To adore the potent spirit of your queen
My mother, good Diana. She who fain
Would learn all sorcery, them my mother will
Teach her, in truth all things as yet unknown.
And ye shall all be freed from slavery
And so ye shall be free in everything
And as the sign that ye are truly free
Ye shall be naked in your rites; both men
And women also; this shall last until
The last of your oppressors shall be dead.

The Charge continues:

. . . And ye shall dance, sing, feast make music, and love, all in my praise.

Compare *Aradia*, cap. II, describing the 'Sabbat, Tregunda or Witch-Meeting' (this passage follows a series of conjurations to be said while making the bread for the Sabbat):

And thus it shall be done; all shall sit down to the supper, all naked, men and women, and, the feast over, they shall dance, sing, make music, and then love in the darkness, with all the lights extinguished, for it is the Spirit of Diana who extinguishes them, and so they will dance and make music in her praise.

The reference to extinguishing the lights recalls the common-currency charge against 'deviant' religious sects that their meetings would end with the lights being put out and a wild, frequently incestuous, sex orgy ensuing. This was charged against Christians in the Roman Empire back in the second century c.e., but after the establishment of the Nicene 'orthodoxy' the stories were recycled for use against Gnostics, Montanists, Waldensians, etc., etc.¹⁶

Compare also this, from Crowley's editorial to the Blue Equinox (in which volume all the identifiable Crowley quotes in the *Leviter Veslis* appear; a copy was indeed found in the collection of Gardner's books acquired by Ripley's):

[religious] celebrations must conform to custom and nature of the people. Christianity has destroyed the joyful celebrations, characterized by music, dancing, feasting and making love; and has kept only the melancholy.

The Charge continues:

For ecstasy is mine, and joy on earth. For love is my law. Keep pure your highest ideal: strive ever toward it. Let naught stop you or turn you aside.

¹⁶ See *Europe's Inner Demons* by Norman Cohn (London: Heinmann, 1972), *passim*.

This section was omitted in the paper edition of *CAM*. The first sentence does not need to be specifically dealt with here as a slightly different version appears later on in a context which makes identifying the source easier. For the rest we must turn to Crowley's tract "Liber DCCCXXXVII: The Law of Liberty" (henceforth Liber 837). About halfway through chapter 2 we find:

Again She speaks: "Love is the law, love under will." Keep pure your highest ideal; strive ever toward it without allowing aught to stop you or turn you aside, even as a star sweeps upon its incalculable and infinite course of glory, and all is Love. The Law of your being becomes Light, Life, Love and Liberty. All is peace, all is harmony and beauty, all is joy.

The quote is from *Liber AL vel Legis*, a.k.a. *The Book of the Law* (henceforth cited simply as *AL*), I. 57. Of course, it is one of the most quoted lines from that little text—both by Crowley and later commentators on his work—but it is probably no coincidence that in both Liber 837 and the *Leviter Veslis* it comes immediately before "Keep pure your highest ideal."

The Charge continues:

There is a Secret Door that I have made to establish the way to taste even on earth the elixir of immortality. Say 'Let ecstasy be mine, and joy on earth even to me, To Me'

This appears to be an amalgam of two passages: the first, from *AL* III. 38.¹⁷

There is a secret door that I shall make to establish thy way in all the quarters

And this, from Liber 837, chapter 2:

Do not embrace mere Marian or Melusine; she is Nuit Herself, specially concentrated and incarnated in human form to give you infinite love, to bid you taste even on earth the Elixir of Immortality. "But ecstasy be thine and joy of earth: ever To me! To me!"

The quote is from *AL* I. 53. Dearnaley (*op. cit.*) suggests that the mention of Melusine here inspired her citation in the preamble, since on the face of it she is a figure from French fairy lore who was never seriously worshipped as a goddess.

The Charge continues:

For I am a gracious Goddess. I give unimaginable joys, on earth certainty, not faith while in life! And upon death, peace unutterable, rest, and ecstasy, nor do I demand aught in sacrifice.

This is a very slight modification of a passage in Liber 837, chapter 2:

For hear, how gracious is the Goddess; "I give unimaginable joys on earth: certainty, not faith, while in life, upon death; peace unutterable, rest, ecstasy; nor do I demand aught in sacrifice."

The quote is from *AL* I. 58. Gardner's version manages to be even more strangely punctuated than the original (most published versions have been "cleaned up" to make them more coherent). The last phrase appears to contradict the reference to "due

¹⁷ This was quoted in "Liber CCC: Khabs Am Pekht," another Crowley tract printed in *Equinox* III (1).

sacrifice" at the start (this has been remarked on by Kelly, and by Farrar & Farrar¹⁸). 'Due' does not simply mean 'gratefully received' or 'not refused if offered'; it implies an expectation or obligation.

As normally delivered the first part of the Charge ends here, and the Priest delivers another short line to introduce the next section.

Hear ye the words of the Star Goddess.

I love you: I yearn for you: pale or purple, veiled or voluptuous. I who am all pleasure, and purple and drunkenness of the innermost senses, desire you, put on the wings, arouse the coiled splendour within you, "Come unto me."

Again, if we consider this part as a block, its obvious source is the following passage in Liber 837, towards the end of Chapter 2:

With such, we who have accepted the Law of Thelema have nothing to do. We have heard the Voice of the Star-Goddess: "I love you! I yearn to you! Pale or purple, veiled or voluptuous, I who am all pleasure and purple, and drunkenness of the innermost sense, desire you. Put on the wings, and arouse the coiled splendour within you: come unto me!"

The quote is from AL I. 61 and is of course also part of the Priestess' speech in Crowley's "Gnostic Mass"; the preceding sentence however makes Liber 837 again the more likely source.

The Charge continues:

For I am the flame that burns in the heart of every man, and the core of every Star. Let it be your inmost divine self who art lost in the constant rapture of infinite joy.

The immediate source here is Liber 837, chapter 3:

Hadit tells us of Himself "I am the flame that burns in every heart of man, and in the core of every star." He is then your own inmost divine self; it is you, and not another, who are lost in the constant rapture of the embraces of Infinite Beauty.

The quote is from AL II. 6. This is significant. The Crowley material we have seen so far is with minor exceptions based around the utterances of the goddess as recorded in Chapter I of *The Book of the Law*. Now Hadit, the speaker in Chapter II, may have little in common with the usual Wiccan conception of the male deity (apart from certain solar aspects); but it is just not believable that Crowley would have put his words into the mouth of a syncretic lunar / Earth Mother / stellar goddess; in other words, the presence of those words in this place is further evidence were any needed that Aleister Crowley did not write the *Leviter Veslis*.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, London: Robert Hale, 1981: footnote p. 42)

¹⁹ Dearnaley (*op. cit.*) argues further that given this, and given the general careless quoting of *Liber AL*, it is unlikely that the author of the *Leviter Veslis* was a member of the O.T.O. at the time it was composed. It seems that Gardner was admitted directly to O.T.O. at the IV° / P.I. degree and chartered to run a "Camp of Minerval" in 1947 shortly after first meeting Crowley on the grounds that (a) he was already, or claimed to Crowley to be, a Royal Arch Mason and (b) Crowley was desperate to restart O.T.O. activity in Britain where there had been no serious Lodge-work since 1917. It has been suggested that Gardner was actually ceremonially initiated to Minerval with Crowley and Louis Wilkinson as officers (source: posting by Ben Fernee on the thelema93-1 mailing list) but received the subsequent degrees by being given the scripts. After Crowley's death, Gardner claimed in correspondence to be "head of the O.T.O. in Europe."

The Charge continues:

Let the rituals be rightly performed with joy and beauty. Remember that all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.

Another straight lift from Liber 837, cap. 3:

“... Let the rituals be rightly performed with joy and beauty!” Remember that all acts of love and pleasure are rituals, must be rituals.

The quote is from AL II. 35. The ‘my’ in the Charge is a reasonable inference from AL I. 51,²⁰ given who the speaker is supposed to be.

The Charge continues:

So let there be beauty and strength, leaping laughter, force and fire be within you.

Compare AL II. 20 (quoted in Liber 837):

Beauty and strength, leaping laughter and delicious languor, force and fire, are of us.

The Charge concludes:

And if thou sayest, I have journeyed unto thee, and it availed me not, Rather shalt thou say, “I called upon thee, and I waited patiently, and Low, Thou wast with me from the begining.” For they that ever desired me, shall ever attain me, even to the end of all desire.

Gardner has now finished mining Liber 837 and has instead borrowed some lines from “Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente” (Liber LXV) which also appeared in the Blue Equinox. In chapter II of Liber LXV we find:

59. But I have called unto Thee, and I have journeyed unto Thee, and it availed me not.

60. I waited patiently, and Thou wast with me from the beginning.

and in Chapter III:

63. They that ever desired Thee shall obtain Thee, even at the End of their Desire.

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²⁰ “There are four gates to one palace; the floor of that palace is of silver and gold; lapis lazuli & jasper are there; and all rare scents; jasmine & rose, and the emblems of death. Let him enter in turn or at once the four gates; let him stand on the floor of the palace. Will he not sink? Amn. Ho! warrior, if thy servant sink? But there are means and means. Be goodly therefore: dress ye all in fine apparel; eat rich foods and drink sweet wines and wines that foam! Also, take your fill and will of love as ye will, when, where and with whom ye will! But always unto me.”

Re-reading this study after some years, while attempting to edit it into a form that doesn’t rely on heavy hyper-linking, I suppose that I was alluding specifically to the final “But always unto me” in that verse, repeated in the next verse (“if the ritual be not ever unto me”), of which Crowley makes much in the “New Comment” on these verses.

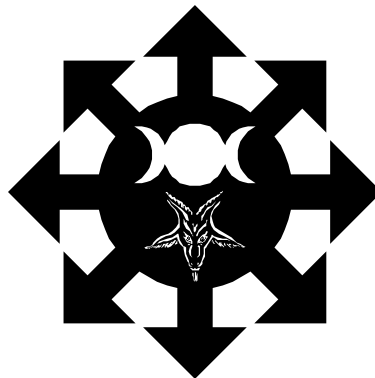
The text of the “Charge of the Goddess” published in later “exposures” and accounts of Wicca rituals is a substantial rewrite by Doreen Valiente.²¹ While the more obvious quotes from Crowley were removed or paraphrased beyond recognition, some were retained; in particular “Keep pure your highest ideal &c.” This was identified in the 1980s by Stuart and Janet Farrar as a Crowley quote; it was however omitted in the text of the “Leviter Veslis” in CAM (probably due to Llewellyn’s lax editorial standards),²² leading commentators in the 1990s who were not familiar with BAM to assume it had been added by Valiente.

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Earlier versions of this analysis were posted on various now defunct Thelemic and pagan Internet mailing lists as “The sources for the Charge of the Goddess.” The minimal feedback received from those postings scarcely contributed to its development (except in so far as my attention was drawn to Dearnaley’s essay) but raised one minor point in need of clarification (in that the critic did not seem to understand what the English word “due” means).

The present text is a revision (mainly corrections of typos and changes to layout) of a version webpublished on the website of the Nu Isis Working Group (also now defunct, but mirrored at http://www.geocities.ws/nu_isis/leviter.html), I forget when but probably 2002 or so, maybe earlier.

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²¹ Valiente stated this in her *Rebirth of Witchcraft* (London: Robert Hale, 1989), and also in comments to Farrar & Farrar, quoted in *Eight Sabbats for Witches*..

²² Ronald Hutton (“Paganism and Polemic,” *Folklore* vol. III, no 1, 2000, now freely available online) replying to one of Kelly’s critics, agreed that “there is something badly wrong with the texts printed in his book. When checked against the original manuscript [...] they sometimes show serious discrepancies” but rejected the claim of deliberate falsification since these errors “do little if anything to reinforce [Kelly’s main thesis].”