Esoteric Victorians: The Hermetic and the Arcane in the Poetry of Browning, Rossetti and Swinburne

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Many are the thyrsus-bearers, but few are the mystics
(Phædo)

The esoteric movement in the West appears to have had an early beginning, with the Græco-Roman practices of magic and mystery, having continued to the present day through such well-known traditions as Neo-Platonism, Alchemy, Kabala, and Theosophy. Though the Hermetic Tradition was forced to 'go underground' in the more empirical and enlightened eighteenth century, it didn't disappear entirely, as editions of Jacob Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg emerged.[2] During the Romantic period in Britain, the Hermetic Tradition came back into great favour, and again inspired poets and artists. William Blake is known to have been influenced by Boehme, Swedenborg and other Hermetics, while S. T. Coleridge not only read Boehme but also transmitted Hermetic ideas to other men-of-letters, arguing that analogy and symbol could be used 'to make the world whole again'.[3] In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley mentions the alchemists Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, and Albertus Magnus, and her protagonist famously states, "I entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life" (II, 47). According to James Hammond (2004),[4] the Hermetic tradition indeed flourished in this period and it later merged with the Occult/Spiritualist movement, revived in 1855 by the French writer Éliphas Lévi;[5] in such a way that, by the late 1800s, many writers were exploring the Hermetic tradition in societies of Rosicrucians, Cabalists, and Theosophists.

As Roger Lockhurst proposes in his article on the "Victorian Supernatural",[6] the nineteenth century is generally considered as the era of secularization, a period when the disciplines and institutions of modern science were founded and cultural authority shifted from the traditional authority of religion to explanation through the scientific exposition of natural laws. The sociologist Max Weber described this process as 'the disenchantment of the

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[2] Boehme, a mystical philosopher, was influenced by the Swiss physician and alchemist, Paracelsus (1493-1541). Swedenborg, who communicated with angels and spirits, had published the *Arcana Coelestia* in London in 1749.

[3] Caroline F. E. Spurgeon classifies Blake as a devotional or religious mystic and Coleridge as a philosophical mystic in *Mysticism in English Literature* (2004).

[4] *Free Newsletter on Philosophy & Literature* (Phlit).

[5] Eliphas Levi (the pen name of Abbé Louis Constant, 1810-1875), was a French occultist who is credited for reviving interest in magic in the 19th century. Levi's writings have been appraised as being highly imaginative but not very accurate. His first and probably most important work was *The Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*. Levi believed in the existence of a universal 'secret doctrine' of magic throughout history, everywhere in the world.

[6] British Library website on *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians*.

world', and the emblematic figure in this evolutionary narrative was Charles Darwin. In fact, Lockhurst states, it is much easier to grasp the religious and scientific strands of the century as being closely intertwined, because "every scientific and technological advance encouraged a kind of magical thinking and was accompanied by a 'shadow discourse' of the occult". For every 'disenchantment', he writes, there was indeed an active re-enchantment of the world. Although for a long time historians ignored these beliefs as mere eccentricities, the century was in reality a golden age of the supernatural, in which ghost stories and unusual phenomena seemed to proliferate.

In the 1830s and 1840s, Lockhurst recalls, there was a fashion for Mesmerism, in which miraculous medical cures could be achieved by manipulating the invisible flows of 'animal magnetism' that passed through and between bodies.[7] And in the turbulent, revolutionary year of 1848, a new religious movement emerged, Spiritualism, which elaborated a method of communicating with the dead in *séances* through mediums. Many Victorians, particularly those who had begun to abandon conventional religion, fervently believed in spiritualism, as is the case of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Mediums were often women because they were thought to have more delicate, sensitive nervous systems than men. Thus, men who were mediums were usually objected and despised – such as the famous D.D. Home who had so enraged Robert Browning that he made him the source for his poem "Mr Sludge". Many men of science were also converts, most famously the evolutionary theorist Alfred Russel Wallace, partly because Spiritualism was consistently figured in terms of new magical technologies, like the telegraph or the telephone. A strange hybrid of science and evolutionary metaphysics, Lockhurst concludes, Victorian Spiritualism exerted an indirect influence on the emergence of the esoteric movements of modern Theosophy and New Age.[8]

Also according to Ronald Pearsall, the Victorian age was the most haunted of all.[9] In "Aesthetic Occultism" (1998), William Terpening states that as Romanticism declined into Decadence toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Victorian aesthetes became engrossed in supernaturalism of all sorts.[10] For the same reasons that they embraced Catholicism, they became interested in mythology, grotesque imagery, the Devil, and Occultism. These were more than sources of potent imagery in their writing, as Terpening

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[7] The Mesmerist would throw his subject into a trance, allowing the passage of energy into the weaker body of his patient, as if literally recharging their battery. Charles Dickens, the novelist, believed himself an expert Mesmerist.

[8] Spiritualism also had an impact on the development of Psychoanalysis (and namely the notion of the' subconscious').

[9] In *Tabble-Rappers: The Victorians and the Occult* (2004). An undergraduate at Cambridge, B.F. Westcott founded the *Hermes Club*, which he named after the Graeco-Egyptian deity, *Hermes Trismegistus*. Subsequent Hermetic societies founded by other Spiritualists would become famous in England – namely the one organized in 1884 by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, which was in close contact with the Theosophical Society. In 1882, Henry Sidgwick and Frederic Myers had founded the Society for Psychical Research, including literary figures as Tennyson, Ruskin, and 'Lewis Carroll'. In 1896, Frederic Myers joined the Synthetic Society, founded by Arthur Balfour and modelled upon the famous Metaphysical Society, of which Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung were to be corresponding members.

[10] "Aesthetic Occultism: A New Terminology — "Bible to Belial, Paradise Lost", *The Victorian Web*.

suggests: “while the Occult retained Catholicism's appealing show of ‘smoke and mirrors’, it embraced Satan and rejected Christianity outright, and with it the repressive political baggage that Protestantism hauled”. By drawing upon Occult imagery in their works, aesthetes achieved both political and creative autonomy and instituted a new language, independent of post-Evangelical middle class norms. For example, *The Order of the Golden Dawn,* founded by MacGregor Mathers and Wynn Westcott, attracted the aesthetes Algernon Swinburne and Oscar Wilde, as well as the prominent Irish poet W.B. Yeats.

According to Dinah Birch, late Victorian occultism characteristically insisted on "the substantial actuality of mental process" and "on symbols as a key to insight."[11] Occult practice was founded on the discipline and examined consciousness, and in that respect it was related to the psychological and psychoanalytical sciences of the time, with their careful scrutiny of dreams and symbols, and their recognition that mental energies could be other than rational. In his study of the Golden Dawn, James Machin (*The Victorian,* 2013), argues that a significant core of occult activity continued an uninterrupted occidental tradition that was Christian, conservative and – to varying degrees – politically reactionary (1). By the 1840s, the Rosicrucians, in particular, had become so obscured in a fog of rumour and wilful mythologizing that it was acknowledged by one writer that nobody “now-a-days pretends to [understand] the mystery of the Rosicrucian Order” (*The Literary Examiner,* Machin, 2-3).

The notion of the existence of a ‘Rosicrucian Brotherhood’, Machin refers, is generally held to have started with the circulation of several anonymous pamphlets in the early seventeenth century (2). “Framed in a language heavy with alchemical symbolism, this literature posited the existence of a secret society of initiates, possessing hidden spiritual knowledge and travelling the world anonymously, doing good works and healing the sick” (2). The writer Edward Bulwer-Lytton appears to have been attracted to the idea of the existence of such a secret society, as it constitutes a fecund subject matter for his novel of supernatural romance, *Zanoni: A Rosicrucian Tale* (1842), which had a great impact in the later Victorians. [12] In 1850, Mary Anne Atwood also published her comprehensive exposition of spiritual alchemy, *A Suggestive Inquiry Into Hermetic Mystery*, in which she emphasizes the centrality of moral regeneration to the alchemical project; indeed, arguing that spiritual refinement *is* the alchemical project.

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[11] In her review essay of Alex Owen's *The Place of Enchantment* in *London Review of Books*.

[12] Bulwer-Lytton alludes to deep Rosicrucian mysteries regarding the four elements, secrets which only initiated Rosicrucians have the power to reveal, the ultimate goal being the discovery of the Elixir of life and the attainment of immortality and eternal youth.The story develops in the days of the French Revolution in 1789. Zanoni has lived since the Chaldean civilisation. His master Mejnor warns him against a love affair but Zanoni does not heed. He finally marries Viola and they have a child. As Zanoni experiences an increase in humanity, he begins to lose his gift of immortality. He finally dies in the guillotine.

Early in his career, Robert Browning (1812-1889),[13] who was a disciple of P.B. Shelley, wrote the long and enchanting poem, *Paracelsus* (1835), a dramatic monologue presenting the career of the sixteenth-century mystic alchemist of the same name and exploring a fascinatingly mature philosophy of life (including 'quintessence' and 'arcana'). This had been originally present in the autobiographical book *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus the Great*, where the mystic professes a belief in Man's magical capacities of inner and outer perception, yet deriving from a close scientific observation:

> Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
> From outward things, whate'er you may believe:
> There is an inmost centre in us all,
> Where truth abides in fullness; […] 14

Paracelsus thus tells the story of his birth to power, and of the divine wisdom he has attained by following the path of Knowledge, in spite of his inferior carnal nature. He tells how

> I stood at first where all aspire at last
> To stand: the secret of the world was mine.
> I knew, I felt, (…) — what God is, what we are,
> What life is —

Through the beauty of the many descriptive passages, Browning creates a revelation and a reflection. And, through Paracelsus, he explores and determines the secrets of the Universe, ranging from alchemy to science, from medicine to philosophy, enlightening his readers with his writing (suggesting the drastic consequences of modernity and the power of healing of successful alchemy or science).

Dahl and Brewer, in "Browning's Four-fold Vision", have recently pointed out that in other poems Browning uses a Neoplatonic Hermetic approach. This is namely the case of "Saul", one of his finest lyrics and a dynamic statement of his emotional mysticism. Showing the development of Browning's religious beliefs between 1845 and 1855, the poem can be a typological account of man's growth in history toward Christianity, an expression of Browning's Evangelical faith in the Incarnation or an example of his use of the past to comment on the present.

> At the first I saw nought but the blackness but soon I descried
> A something more black than the blackness--- […]
> IV.
> He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out wide
> On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to each side;
> […] Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
> With the spring-time,---so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb.

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[13] Strong influences from Swedenborg's religious teachings may be found in many poems in the volumes *Men and Women* (1855), *Dramatis Personae* (1864) and *The Ring and the Book* (1868/69). Both the Brownings were friends of the leading English Swedenborgian, Charles Augustus Tulk, and Robert was an early friend of James John Garth Wilkinson (a spiritualist doctor).

[14] All the quotations from the poems are taken from Christopher Ricks' edition of *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse.*

To read "Saul" in the light of the Platonic, Neoplatonic, or Hermetic tradition's concept of 'four hierarchical levels or stages of mystic vision' indeed adds a new and intriguing dimension to the interpretation and appreciation of the poem's structure and significance.

Famously referring himself to Browning's oddity,[15] the novelist Henry James "intimated that there were 'two Brownings – an esoteric and an exoteric.' The esoteric Browning was the private man, the seer and feeler, the poet […]. The exoteric Browning is the public figure, the bonhomous philistine, the self-confident robust, vigorous … social lion. Browning's oddity was in part that he led strikingly dissimilar dual lives in two air-tight compartments" (quoted in Thomas, 1983, xiv). In his critical essay "Esoteric Browningism" (1888), Andrew Lang corroborates this impression: "Mr Browning is something other than a scientific analyst of souls, using jargon worse than scientific. […] he is as full of magic, of charm, of art; that he has raised and can raise as many phantoms, fair or terrible, as ever Faust beheld in the magic mirror.[…]" (150).

In his work on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Symbolism* (Cambridge, 2007), Rodger Drew pertinently asks if the painter, poet and co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was also a kind of Rosicrucian (127). Drew thus dedicates the major part of his book to arguing this point and the presence of several other esoteric elements in both the poetry and painting of Rossetti, including Neoplatonism, Renaissance hermeticism, alchemy, nature mysticism, numerology, Freemasonry and the Tarot. He begins by examining Rossetti's sonnets and the poet's emphasis on the Neoplatonic ideal of beauty, including the themes of divine light or fire and the transforming power of love. The structure of the sonnet itself, "symbolically divided between octave and sestet, like the Platonic soul" between male and female elements possesses "connotations of the alchemical 'sacred marriage'" (31). In the second part, Drew examines the specific Rosicrucian influences in the poet's work (namely, the appearance of roses in certain paintings) and in the PRB's movement, comparing it to the *Rose Croix Catholique* of Joséphin Péladan, a later religious and artistic movement. He also mentions the important link with the Victorian cult of chivalry and themes such as musical mysticism, the Holy Grail and the Goddess figure in Rossetti's paintings and poetic works.

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[15] Browning created a radically new form (in which the speaker does not represent the poet), used arcane and bizarre vocabulary, made remote or obscure allusions and had an unconventional sense of audience (see George Landow, in 'The Difficulties of Victorian Poetry'). John Ruskin, for example, wrote to the poet in 1855 to describe the poems in his new book *Men and Women* as "absolutely and literally a set of the most amazing Conundrums that ever were proposed to me." Browning's reply to Ruskin is significant, because it suggests that his difficult style (with a knotty, convoluted, and tortuous syntax) is central to the goals of his poetry: "I know that I don't make out my conception by my language; all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite" (Landow).

Lynda Harris, in her essay on "British Raphaelites and the Question of Reincarnation" (2004), refers that Rossetti apparently participated in Spiritualist *séances* and clearly expressed his ideas about reincarnation (or 'metempsychosis', as it was often called) in some of his writings (20). His father was an Italian political refugee, nominally Catholic but actually an antipapist who became more and more fascinated by his own theories about secret societies and Dante's religious occultism (21). Dante Gabriel was later to refer to himself as an "Art Catholic"—not a traditional believer but interested in portraying religious themes, which often had an esoteric aspect (22). According to Rossetti's brother William Michael, this interest in the occult and the supernatural began early: "any writing about devils, spectres, or the supernatural generally, whether in poetry or in prose, had always a fascination for him" (quoted in Harris, 23).

Moreover, Rossetti apparently longed to find "the woman who was his soul", whom he would have known and loved again and again, over a series of incarnations (Harris, 24). And when he was just twenty, he had started work on a story on this theme. Its title, *St. Agnes of Intercession*, does sound Catholic, but as his brother William Michael wrote, it is "essentially of metempsychosis" (quoted in Harris, 25). Rossetti had been particularly struck by the exact match, 'feature by feature', between the face of St. Agnes and that of Mary, his present-day love. His poem "Sudden Light", uncannily representing this idealized picture of love recalled from another life, was written in 1854, when he and Lizzie were staying in the seaside town of Hastings:

> I have been here before,
> But when or how I cannot tell;
> I know the grass beyond the door,
> The sweet keen smell,
> The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.
> You have been mine before—
> How long ago I may not know:
> But just when at that swallow's soar
> Your neck turned so,
> Some veil did fall, — I knew it all of yore (1-10)

J.B. Bullen, in his essay on "Raising the Dead" (2013), claims that the set of four sonnets that make up Rossetti's "Willowwood" sequence are fundamental, not only to the structure of the poet's major work *House of Life* (1870-1881),[16] but also central to his esoteric mediation between painting and poetry. It has often been pointed out that these sonnets, written in December 1868, with themes dealing with loss, parting, death, and melancholy,

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[16] Rossetti's sonnet sequence *The House of Life*, published in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), was his most substantial literary achievement. It is a complex series of poems tracing the physical and spiritual development of an intimate relationship. Rossetti described the sonnet form as a "moment's monument", implying that it sought to contain the feelings of a fleeting moment, and to reflect on their meaning. *The House of Life* was a series of interacting monuments to these moments – an elaborate whole made from a mosaic of intensely described fragments.

were either directed at Rossetti's later involvement with Jane Morris or arose primarily from the death of Elizabeth Siddal, or still that Rossetti was 'haunted' by the platonic idea of the inaccessible woman.[17]

> I sat with Love upon a woodside well, […]
> The certain secret thing he had to tell:
> Only our mirrored eyes met silently
> In the low wave; and that sound came to be
> The passionate voice I knew; and my tears fell. (1-8)

Nevertheless, some believe that the concluding 'secret' imparted by the personification of Love brings comfort, 'hope' or at least 'catharsis' to the hallucinatory nature of the sequence. As Joan Rees pointed out, the fluid, dissolving, and shifting imagery produces "a remarkable blend of the surrealistic with a kind of factual dispassionateness" (quoted in Bullen, 432). Through Love's agency, the speaker seems to momentarily penetrate "the fluid membrane dividing the human world from the spirit world" (433).

> And I was made aware of a dumb throng
> That stood aloof, one form by every tree,
> All mournful forms, for each was I or she,
> The shades of those our days that had no tongue.
> They looked on us, and knew us and were known … (9-13)

Though Rossetti is employing an elaborate form of *prosopopeia* in this scene, we know that he had a long-standing fascination with this kind of spiritual communication. "Everything that appertained to the mystic", wrote his assistant Henry Treffry Dunn, "had a strange fascination for him" (quoted in Bullen, 434).[18] His attitude to supernatural phenomena grew more serious after his wife's death and his growing sense of guilt. For the next two years, so his doctor recorded, he saw her nightly at the foot of his bed; whether he tried to communicate with her we do not know, but he was always anxious to get some message.[19]

In a recent thesis about Rossetti's *Swedenborgian Spiritualism* (2013), Anna Maddison locates Rossetti's use of Swedenborgian imagery and ideas in his written and artistic work, contextualising it within his engagement with spiritualism, and with reference to his interest in a visionary tradition of literature. Drawing together two hitherto separate areas of research, she formulates new and detailed inter-disciplinary readings of Rossetti's poetry, fine art and design.[20] In addressing three major works, 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), *Beata Beatrix* (1863-71) and *The House of Life* (1881), the thesis traces Rossetti's engagement with

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[17] The fact remains that the completion of 'Willowwood' coincided with Rossetti's (in)famous decision to exhume Siddal's body to retrieve his lost manuscript poems.
[18] Between 1856 and 1858, Rossetti allegedly participated in *séances* at the Highgate home of the Howitts.
[19] In 1864, Rossetti began to attend public spiritualist sessions staged by the Davenport brothers, and in 1865 he began to organize sessions of his own in the studio he maintained at 19 Cheyne Walk.
[20] Maddison's approach features an intellectual, literary interest in Swedenborg, coupled with a practical engagement with spiritualism, and a fascination with the mesmeric trance state.

Swedenborgian spiritualism through three distinct phases in his career, the result of which facilitates a greater understanding of the development of his poetics and artistry, and also of the poet's major concerns regarding conjugial love and the Afterlife.

A Pre-Raphaelite of the second generation and a professed member of the hermetic order of the Golden Dawn, Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) was a prolific poet and literary critic. His poetry was highly controversial in its day and he touched on many tabooed themes, including liberty, the relationship between pleasure and pain, and the psychology of sexual passion. Swinburne wrote poems in favour of the independence of Italy, fuelled by a hatred of tyranny, and he had a great disdain of Christianity.[21] Although he is considered a 'decadent' poet, Swinburne professed to rather more vice than he actually indulged in, a fact which Oscar Wilde acerbically commented upon. An example of a poem notable for its decadent mood and matter is "Dolores", but many others evoke classic mythology and the Victorian fascination with the medieval period, notably "The Leper," "Laus Veneris" and "St. Dorothy".

The Italian sestet from *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), a 'blaze and crash' poem revealing a new language in English, was said by Ruskin to be "the grandest thing ever done by a youth, though it is Demoniac youth".[22] This arcane revival of the romantic mode was somewhat of a shock to Victorian readers who were accustomed to Tennyson's moralistic approach to myth and legend. A typical passage in that poem is the esoteric description of "Genesis":

> The immortal war of mortal things, that is
> Labour and life and growth and good and ill,
> The mild antiphones that melt and kiss,
> The violent symphonies that meet and kill,
> All nature of all things began to be,
> But chiefest in the spirit (beast or man,
> Planet of heaven or blossom of earth or sea)
> The divine contraries of life began. (1-8)

Swinburne's next brilliant, and deliberately sensational, collection *Poems and Ballads* of 1866, immediately made him notorious, being filled with heretical sentiments and obscene passages on erotic love.[23] In the book, Love is esoterically cast in various scenarios to dramatize key problems concerning its nature, and these scenarios can be categorized according to the type of problem addressed. Grouping the poems systematically highlights

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[21] Swinburne was an alcoholic and a highly excitable character, known to walk about Oxford at night, decanting poems at the top of his lungs and shouting out blasphemies at God. He also had a transgressive interest in de Sade, masochism, and *femmes fatales*.

[22] Quoted in "Swinburne", in *Poetry.Literatureelearning.org*. *Atalanta* is a lyrical drama, in which Swinburne attempted to re-create in English the spirit and form of Greek tragedy. The poem has been recognized for its compelling, virtuosic prosody, its theological provocativeness, and its pervasive concerns with fate, love, the treacherous but wonderful net of kinship, and with 'our inescapable mortalities'.

[23] For most of the rest of his life, Swinburne would be shunned as a decadent, immoral poet, even though in subsequent years he would tone down his language and focus on much deeper, spiritual issues.

the four claims that Swinburne makes about love: 1. "impossible love", 2. "violent love", 3. "light love" and 4. "transforming love". Each group consists of poems that, while containing a complex web of verbal and imagistic parallels to the other three groups, nevertheless constitute a deliberate thematic and hermetic unit.

Part of Swinburne's hermetic and arcane reputation came from his habit of writing poetry out of doors. His friend Edmund Gosse observed that "in the streets, he had the movements of a somnambulist; and often I have seen him passing like a ghost across the traffic […] without glancing to the left or to the right, like something blown before a wind ... He would sit for a long time together without stirring a limb, his eyes fixed in a sort of trance, and only his lips shifting ..." (quoted in Louis, 1990:137). And the *Saturday Review* (8/66) described the nature of Swinburne's writing in the following terms: "Mr. Swinburne riots in the profusion of colour of the most garish and heated kind. […] We are in the midst of fire and serpents, wine and ashes, blood and foam, and a hundred lurid horrors. Unsparing use of the most violent colours and the most intoxicated ideas and images" (Louis, 138).[24]

Kuduk-Weiner's essay on "Knowledge and Sense Experience in Swinburne's Late Poetry"[25] argues that Swinburne's real subject was "the mediating role language plays between sensation and knowledge" (12), a topic right at the heart of late Victorian empiricist psychologies of perception (visual and auditory).[26] In Levin's own chapter on Swinburne's esoteric myth of creation, he is at his best when explaining in detail the "mythopoetic ecology" (67) of "By the North Sea" and other late poems of natural description. Here Swinburne's efforts to move from sense to the "spirit of sense" create what Levin calls "a material vision of spirituality" (71) where mythopoesis constructs an autonomous natural 'system' of symbiotic relationships among elemental forces (sun, wind, land, sea) which has no need of a creator or human witness (70).

Swinburne served as inspiration for many future poets, like Ezra Pound and the (in)famous Aleister Crowley himself, who canonized Swinburne as a 'saint of the Gnostic Catholic Church'.[27] As stands out in an early draft of his *General Principles of Astrology,* the poet had an enormous influence on Crowley's poetic sensibilities: "Swinburne had been

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[24] For other critics he was "a fiery imp from the pit", stating that "He is either the vindictive and scornful apostle of a crushing iron-shod despair, or else the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs" (Quoted in Louis, *Swinburne and His Gods*, 1990, 139).

[25] Book chapter in Y. Levin's *Swinburne and the Singing,* 2010.

[26] Focussing on *A Century of Roundels* [1883] but also looking back to "Sestina" and "A Ballad of Dreamland" and the often stunning poems of natural description, Weiner sees how elaborate verbal patterns (rhyme, alliteration, assonance, repeated words, rhythmic beats and pauses) can move both poet and readers, toward unexpected meanings by linguistic echo and association, that cut across logical structures supported by syntax.

[27] Edward Alexander Crowley (1875-1947), like Swinburne, became a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult society which taught magic, qabalah, alchemy, tarot, and astrology, in 1898. He claimed to receive messages from Horus, an Egyptian god. These formed the first three chapters of *The Book of the Law*, which introduced Crowley's main concept of Thelema. He founded his own occult society and he was a prolific writer, who published works on a wide variety of topics.

tabooed, reformed and nullified [by] Victorianism, [but] even his most modern work was suffused with the ancient spirit" (Symonds,109). Crowley would indeed use many of Swinburne's poems, including "Ilicet," "Hertha," "The Garden of Proserpine" and several choruses from *Atalanta in Calydon,* in his *Rites of Eleusis*, a series of public pieces of ritual theatre.

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