

Non-Crowleyan Thelema

The doctrine of Thelema is usually believed to have been proclaimed to the world in April 1904 when Aiwass dictated Liber AL to Frater Perdurabo. The roots of the teachings contained in it may be, however, traced further back in time. Crowley himself admitted it and mentioned among others St. Augustine and Rabelais as teachers of something quite similar to the chief law of Thelema "do what thou wilt". There were also other instances of surfacing of Thelema and I would like to bring out two of the more recent examples.

1. Thelema and hermetic alchemy.

I have come across a French occult book published in 1911 and entitled L'Evolution de l'Occultisme. The author of it was Pierre Piobb, a contemporary of Papus and author of several good works. My knowledge of the French language is almost non-existent but on looking through the book I noticed a familiar word "Theleme" which, on closer inspection, proved to appear in the text of the Emerald Table of Hermes Trismegistos. With the help of friends I had the relevant parts of the text translated and here is what I have found out.

The text of the Emerald Table given by Piobb is generally the same as elsewhere (with minor stylistic differences), except line 5, which reads: "It is the father of all, Thelema; its force is entire if it is converted into earth". The Latin text of the first part of this line is usually given as: "Pater omnis telesmi totius mundi est hic", which is translated as "It is the father of all things in the universe" or "It is the father of all forms in the universe".

The question arises whether the change in the text was introduced by Piobb or whether he had had access to some generally unknown ("esoteric") variety of this text. He does not give any source of it, so the question has to remain unanswered. It may be interesting, however, to consider Piobb's interpretation of the word "Thelema" itself in connection with alchemy. Discussing the concept of the intermediary world, between ether and matter, as it was understood by the physics of his time, he says: "This intemediary world is an old hermetic concept. It must be understood as the domain of fluids, those mysterious vehicles with the help of which the acts of magic were accomplished. The famous Thelema is met there. /.../ By Thelema should be understood the very cause of chemical affinity. Thelema, in fact, signifies in Greek, from which it is derived, desire and therefore affinity. /.../ So Thelema is the energy accumulated in the atom by transormation of ether". What is especially interesting in these

explanations is that Piobb calls Thelema "famous", as if it had been well known to his contemporaries. I could not find any reference to it in any other occult author who was not influenced by Crowley, but, of course, it is not a proof that it was not known. The other interesting thing is that the origin of the term is the same as of that used by Crowley, i.e. the Greek word meaning "desire" or "will". The remaining part of Piobb's explanations is rather obsuring than explaining, due to his struggles to reconcile occultism and the science of his time.

Thelema is mentioned only in three other places in the book, namely in three interpretations of the Emerald Table from various points of view. Here are the fragments of these devoted to the line we are considering:

"The Emerald Table interpreted as a resume of alchemical principles:

The origin of chemical affinity, the cause or father of all, is the intra-atomic force, produced by the movements of electrons or materialized ether. When this force causes creation of an object, it becomes entire, i.e. it is conserved. This may lead to the conclusion that the law of conservation of energy was suspected by alchemists. In our times we cannot think of the possibility of transmutation, such as that of metals into gold, without application of the intra-atomic force. However we do not know the way of its utilization yet.

The Emerald Table interpreted as the formula of the Great Work:

This sulphur is Thelema or the cause of chemical affinity, the father of all. Its force is entire when it is converted into that indestructible particle, which should be considered to be an energetic unit - the basis of all objects and the true earth principle, as the alchemists say. Therefore one should ~~practise~~ practise impregnating, by which action the volatile (or electron) and the fixed (or atom) are intimately connected. Then we shall have sulphur converted into earth, i.e. the intra-atomic energy which may be manipulated.

The Emerald Table interpreted as the description of the Philosophers' Stone:

The principle of chemical affinity itself, Thelema, is contained in the elixir. Even if it were converted into earth, i.e. in relation to any material object, this principle conserves the whole of its energy. Therefore the latter may be utilized."

Again the whole thing is obscured by Piobb's attempts to be "very scientific indeed" (or for some other reason). However, when this text is read from the Crowleyan-Thelemic standpoint, something,

somehow seems to fit. Thelema, the True Will, described as "the father of all", i.e. the creative principle, is not contradictory to Crowley's teachings. In fact I do not know about any version of Crowlean cosmogony which would make use of the concept of Will but it seems to me that it is a logical extension of Thelemic teaching. It may be seen as a manifestation of Thelema on the universal level and can be expressed as: "In the beginning was the Will".

Piobb's interpretation of Thelema as "chemical affinity" may ~~be~~ also be considered in Crowlean terms. Using the term "True Will" in relation to inanimate objects may sound strange at first, but when we remember the fact that according to the occult ~~the~~ doctrine (generally accepted) all existence is animate, though on different stages of evolution, it is not quite out of place to suggest that atoms have some kind of "will". And then why should not ~~the~~ chemical affinity be called "Thelema" or "True Will" of atoms ?

Now let us consider the second and third of Piobb's interpretations quoted above as ~~xxx~~ veiled instructions in sex magic. "Sulphur" or "Thelema", which is "the father of all" and "the basis of all objects" is semen (this symbolism is known very well in alchemy). One should practise "impregnation" which is "intimately connecting the fixed with the volatile", i.e. one should practice sex magic through which the male and female secretions are joined to produce the elixir possessing magical "energy" which can be manipulated. This energy is also conserved "in relation to any material object", which means that it may be used to charge a talisman.

Is all this only my distorted imagination or was Pierre Piobb really an exponent of sex magic ? I cannot say much on this. However it may be mentioned that one of the earlier books written by ~~Piobb~~ Piobb was entitled The Morality of Pleasure. Venus - the Magical Goddess of Love. Unfortunately I do not know its contents.

If the change in line 5 of the Emerald Table was made by Piobb himself (and is not "the true esoteric version of Hermes"), then an obvious ~~is~~ question is: why did he do that ? And where did he take the term "Thelema" from ? It must be remembered that he refers to it as "famous" spells it with a capital T (as Crowley does) and derives it from Greek (also as Crowley). So perhaps Piobb took it from Crowley ? It is rather unlikely, as Piobb's book was published in 1911 and is a well thought out construction which could not have been written in a very short time. Crowley started to teach the doctrine of Thelema a little more than a year earlier and to a rather close circle of acquaintances.

Furthermore there is no evidence that they contacted or even heard of each other.

Therefore I believe it can be safely stated that Pierre Piobb's "Thelema" and Crowley's Thelema are an example of synchronicity in relation to the Word of the New Aeon of Horus, which surfaced in two different environments almost simultaneously.

2. Thelema and anthroposophy.

Rudolph Steiner is perhaps one of the two most interesting occult teachers of the first half of our century (Crowley is the other one, of course). The occult (actually not only occult) movement started by him and known as anthroposophy seems to be quite successful and flourishing. Although many of his books are available in Polish translation published before the war, I found them rather repelling as far as the style and clarity of writing is concerned. In fact I have read only one of them, The Philosophy of Freedom, as I had been told it is very important and also because I wanted to know something about Steiner's school. The book really proved to be important, especially in Thelemic context. For those who would like to check it for themselves I recommend reading only one chapter entitled "The Idea of Freedom", as the rest is not interesting for Thelemites (or rather not so interesting).

Some fragments of Steiner's text read as if they had been taken from a commentary on Liber AL. For example:

"If we want to comprehend how the actions of man result from his moral will, we must first consider the relationship of that will to the actions. First the attention has to be directed towards the actions in which this relationship decides about things. When afterwards I or someone else think about those actions, the moral principles which ~~had been followed~~ had been followed can be discovered. During the actions I am being guided by the moral principle only as far as it may live in me intuitionally; it joins itself with the "love" to the object which I want to realize by my actions. I do not ask anybody, nor look for a rule, whether I should do it, but simply do it when I catch the idea of it. By this only it becomes my own action. If one acts only because he acknowledges certain moral norms, then his actions are the outcome of his moral code. He becomes a performer of that moral code, as if he were a higher automaton. /.../ Only when I do something because of my love to the object, am I acting myself. On this level of morality I do not act because I recognize someone

above me, an outer authority or the so called inner voice. I do not recognize any outer principle of my actions as I have found a principle in myself: love to the act. I do not check with my reason whether my action is good or bad, but I perform it because I love it.

/.../ I also do not ask myself what someone else would do in my situation but I act in the way I, this particular individual, do./.../ I do not feel any compulsion, neither from nature guiding me with its stimuli, nor from the moral rules, but just want to fulfill that which is in me."

Is that really Steiner ? Yes. Perhaps my translation may differ in wording from the English one (which I do not have at hand) but the message is the same. And it is the same as the message of Liber AL. The principal teachings of "do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" and "love is the law, love under will" are easily seen here and, moreover, their interpretation is virtually identical with Crowley's:

On another page in the same chapter Steiner says:

"Moral misunderstandings, or conflicts, are impossible between morally free men. Only a man who is not morally free, following natural instinct or acknowledging commandment of obedience, attacks another one, when that one does not submit to the same instincts or the same commandment. To live in love to action and to let live others in the understanding of the will of others, is the principal rule of free people. They do not know any other duty but this one, with which their will merges in a harmonious cooperation of intuition."

Again we have the same teachings as in Liber AL: "thou hast no right but to do thy will". The remark about impossibility of conflict between morally free men is not very different from the Thelemic understanding of "every man and every woman is a star".

The similarities of the new morality teachings in both cases are so striking that one wonders if they come from the same source. Steiner's book was published in 1894, so it is not possible that he took his concepts from Crowley (the latter was not even interested in the occult at that time). However it is theoretically possible that Crowley was aware of Steiner's teachings, though I do not think it was so.

As far as I could ascertain Crowley did not read books in German (probably did not know that language) but I am not sure if The Philosophy of Freedom had not been translated into English before 1904. Another possibility of Crowley's learning about the teachings of Steiner was through possible articles or translations in occult periodicals of the period, such as Occult Review, but I was not able to check whether

Steiner ~~was~~ was known in England at that time (i.e. before 1904) or if he had any followers there. So I arrived at two possibilities: (1) Crowley had somehow learnt about the teachings of Steiner concerning freedom and morality, and these were unconsciously incorporated in the text of Liber AL, or (2) Crowley did not know these teachings and their similarity is another proof of validity of Liber AL and the beginning of the Aeon of Horus. In the latter case Steiner may be compared to St. John the Baptist, who announced the previous Aeon of Osiris and then founded his own religion, called Mandaeism.