

The Cactus and the Beast:

Investigating the role of peyote in
the Magick of Aleister Crowley

*There is the Snake that gives delight
And Knowledge, stirs the heart aright
With drunkenness. Strange drugs are thine,
Hadit, and draughts of wizard wine!*

Aleister Crowley, 'AHA!'

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Introduction

This thesis tells the story of the relationship between two of the most controversial characters in the history of modern religion. On the one hand, we have Aleister Crowley, the self-proclaimed ‘Great Beast 666’ and ‘prophet of Thelema’, once branded by the tabloid newspapers of his day as ‘The Wickedest Man in the World’. On the other, we have peyote, the mescaline-containing psychedelic ‘Divine Cactus’, worshipped as a god and consumed as an intoxicating sacrament for millennia by a number of Mexican and Native American tribes. It is well known that Crowley was one of the first Europeans to experiment with peyote and that he used it in his magical ceremonies. Nevertheless, while a number of valuable academic studies have already been written about Crowley’s life, thought, influence, and magic, there are no works of scholarship which examine his relationship with peyote. The purpose of this thesis is to redress this situation by bringing together as much evidence as possible and exploring the following question: what role did peyote play in Aleister Crowley’s magick?

As we shall see, he primarily used peyote to attain visionary contact with the spiritual entities that, according to him, oversaw his spiritual evolution and guided him through the development of Thelema, the new religious movement he founded in the first half of the twentieth century. The first chapter shall outline Crowley’s life and magick, particularly his ‘occult career’ and his early encounter with ceremonial drug use. The second shall provide an overview of the history of peyote, its discovery by modern science, and the reactions of the first Westerners to experience its remarkable effects. Crowley’s own experiments with peyote shall be outlined in the third chapter, while the fourth shall examine the particular forms of magic that he combined peyote with. The fifth shall investigate the role of peyote in a series of visions that became a central component of Thelemic theology. The final chapter shall explore the possibility that peyote was involved in the production of *Liber AL vel Legis*, *The Book of the Law*, the central sacred volume in the scriptural canon of Thelema.

Crowley’s use of drugs is legendary and it is well-known that he was heavily addicted to cocaine and heroin at several points in his life. However, the ‘drug fiend’ Crowley is not the subject of this thesis. Rather, this thesis concerns Crowley the explorer of the sub-strata of consciousness: the mystic who considered intoxication ‘a key to knowledge’, the magician who sought a chemical means of ‘opening the gate of the Other-world’, and the prophet who said ‘ceremonial intoxication constitutes the supreme ritual of all religions’.

Chapter 1 – The Great Beast

Aleister Crowley was born Edward Alexander Crowley on 12 October 1875 in Royal Leamington Spa, England.¹ His family were wealthy members of the Exclusive Sect of the Plymouth Brethren, a particularly conservative Christian group. As a child, young ‘Alick’ had little access to any reading material other than the *King James Bible*. The turning-point of Crowley’s early life occurred in 1887 when his father, a devout Brethren preacher, died of tongue cancer. Crowley was then raised by his mother and her family, whose religious hypocrisy he came to despise. In his adolescence, Crowley rejected the faith of his family and began rebelling against their fundamentalist values: he started smoking, masturbating, and openly criticising their literal interpretation of the Bible. Apparently at some point in his early life his mother called him ‘the Beast’; from then on, Crowley privately identified as the Beast of the Biblical *Book of Revelation*, whose number is ‘Six hundred threescore and six’ or 666.

As a teenager Crowley was privately educated, primarily by tutors. In 1895 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge as a student of philosophy and, later, English literature. He spent his time at Cambridge avidly reading the classics of literature that were forbidden to him in his youth. Around this time he started exploring his sexual identity and began to attain some renown as a poet, chess-player, and mountaineer of note. His considerable inheritance afforded him the financial security to pursue these extra-curricular activities. He left Cambridge in 1898 without graduating. His subsequent writing career lasted almost fifty years during which he published volumes of poetry, dozens of short stories, a couple of novels, and scores of articles for many magazines and newspapers, including *Vanity Fair*. He also wrote extensively on the subjects that interested him most: religion, mysticism, and magic.

¹ The biographical information in this chapter has been compiled from a number of sources, primarily: Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, ed. by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Penguin, 1979); Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley* (California: North Atlantic Books, 2010); Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley* (St Albans: Granada Publishing Limited, 1973); Tobias Churton, *Aleister Crowley The Biography: Spiritual Revolutionary, Romantic Explorer, Occult Master – And Spy* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2012); Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: An Interpretation of Aleister Crowley* (Reno, NV: New Falcon Publications, 2009); and, Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr, ‘Introduction’, in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 3-13. For an academic assessment of Crowley biographies, see: Marco Pasi, ‘The Neverendingly Told Story: Recent Biographies of Aleister Crowley’, in *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, 3.2 (2003), 783-785.

Although initially interested in a career in the British Diplomatic Service, Crowley abandoned this path in favour of mystical pursuits. His first mystical experience, which probably coincided with his first homosexual encounter, occurred in 1896 while in Stockholm. The remainder of his life is characterised by a seemingly unquenchable appetite for mystical experiences and Crowley increasingly identified religious ecstasy with sexual bliss. He soon began studying occultism and, in the works of Arthur Edward Waite (1875 – 1942) and Karl von Eckharthausen (1752 – 1803), he discovered hints about the existence of an ‘Invisible College’: a hidden group of magical adepts who instructed earnest seekers of wisdom in the religious secrets of mankind. In 1898 he met two chemists, Julian Levett Baker (1873 – 1958) and George Cecil Jones (1873 – 1960). Both Baker and Jones were members of The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the most famous secret society of late Victorian England. Shortly after their meeting, Jones introduced Crowley to the Order.²

The Invisible College

The Golden Dawn was an initiatory society composed of both men and women that instructed its members in the theory and practice of ceremonial magic.³ Its members advanced through a structured series of grades or ‘degrees’.⁴ The ten grades of the Golden Dawn system were separated into three subdivisions. The first four grades comprised the ‘First Order’ and the magical instructions given in these grades were primarily theoretical. Advancement to the next three grades, the ‘Second Order’, was by invitation only, and it was here that initiates were instructed in the practice of ceremonial magic. The highest triad of degrees, the ‘Third Order’, was exclusively reserved for the Chiefs of the Order. Like many occultist and masonic societies, the Golden Dawn depicted itself as the external representation of an eternal immaterial organization. According to occultist mythology, the individual humans who actually organized and led these groups were not the true Chiefs of the Orders; instead, they were merely the representatives of the real ‘Secret Chiefs’. The Chiefs themselves were advanced spiritual masters who directed the material order from an immaterial plane.⁵

² Quite a lot is now known about this group, but in 1898 its existence was still a well-kept secret. New-comers were typically introduced by existing members.

³ The syncretic ritual theory of the Golden Dawn drew on an eclectic range of sources, including Graeco-Egyptian papyri, Medieval grimoires, Renaissance and Elizabethan manuscripts, the rituals of Freemasonry, and modern works of occultism.

⁴ Each degree was associated with a particular initiation ceremony and a set of instructional papers corresponding to the grade. Successful completion of an examination in those instructions was a pre-requisite to further advancement.

⁵ The authority of the human leaders to initiate its members stemmed directly from these enlightened masters.

On 18 November 1898 Crowley was initiated into the degree of Neophyte, the first grade of the Golden Dawn. Initiates were required to adopt a magical motto that expressed their spiritual aspiration and Crowley chose the name *Frater Perdurabo* (*Lat.* 'I shall endure unto the end').⁶ By the turn of the century the Golden Dawn had erupted into schism over the purported legitimacy of its founding documents and the integrity of its leadership. Crowley initially sided with its *de facto* leader Samuel Liddell 'MacGregor' Mathers (1854 – 1918), but soon grew disillusioned by the order and Mathers. He eventually parted from both but continued to practice magic independently and soon travelled to Asia where he studied the yogic traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

The Golden Dawn dissolved in 1903 and many former members went on to establish their own societies based on its framework. In 1907, Crowley began formulating a new magical order with fellow Golden Dawn alumnus George Cecil Jones. The name of their new order was A∴A∴ and it taught a new system of practical occultism called 'Scientific Illuminism'. This system was Crowley's personal re-formulation of the old Golden Dawn system, extended to include the Eastern practices he studied. In 1909, he began publishing *The Equinox*, a journal of occultism, to promote both A∴A∴ and Scientific Illuminism. The essence of Scientific Illuminism is succinctly encapsulated by the motto of *The Equinox*: 'The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion'. In other words, Crowley's system married scientific methodologies to religious practices. According to Crowley, he had risen to the highest levels of spiritual attainment by this system. He maintained that he had surpassed the theoretical limit of the Golden Dawn system and gained admission into the Third Order, the abode of the Secret Chiefs. This was the true A∴A∴, the real Invisible College: that Great White Brotherhood whose membership includes every spiritual master and religious prophet the world has ever known.

Prophets and Angels

Crowley had a theory about the world's religions. Religious geniuses, such as Moses, Buddha, Christ, and Mohammed, were all relatively unassuming individuals up to a certain point when they suddenly withdrew from society. Following a mysterious period of absence, each returned sufficiently inspired to initiate new religious movements and alter the course of human history. Even 'in the legends of savages' similar tales are found:

⁶ Initiates of the Order referred to each other as 'Brother' or 'Sister'; or, in Latin, 'Frater' and 'Soror'.

[S]omebody who is nobody in particular goes away for a longer or shorter period, and comes back as the ‘great medicine man’; but nobody ever knows exactly what happened to him.⁷

Crowley speculated that these individuals attained a transformative experience during their retirement from worldly affairs, an experience sometimes called ‘spiritual’, sometimes ‘supernatural’. He labelled this experience ‘Samadhi’, or ‘Union with God’, and argued that there was nothing supernatural about it.⁸ It was simply a natural ‘development of the human brain’, albeit a remarkable one that provided access to the ‘secret source of energy’ responsible for genius. He further argued that it could be wilfully attained ‘by the following out of definite rules’.⁹ He therefore advocated a scientific investigation into the processes which led to Samadhi and similar religious experiences.

According to Crowley, religious experiences are natural phenomena characterised by the dissolution of the normal boundaries of consciousness. He argued that meditation and ceremonial magic were two proven methods of attaining such experiences. Meditation, mysticism, prayer, and yoga were essentially identical for Crowley. Each involved devoted aspiration to, and single-pointed concentration upon, divine union. Success led to a transformation of consciousness in which the boundaries between the Ego and the non-Ego are dissolved. The difficulty with meditation lies in effectively constraining the mind to single-pointed concentration. Crowley therefore recommended that aspirants strengthen their willpower and develop their mental concentration by the practices of ceremonial magic.

Ceremonial magic, or ‘magick’ as Crowley called it, is the Western parallel to Eastern yoga.¹⁰ Magical practices, like yogic practices, develop the mind and focus the will. In

⁷ Aleister Crowley, *Magick: Liber ABA, Book 4, Parts I-IV*, with Mary Desti and Leila Waddell, 2nd rev. edn, ed. by Hymenaeus Beta [William Breeze] (San Francisco, CA: Weiser, 2010), p. 8.

⁸ Ibid, p.13.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Crowley gave four main definitions of Magick. First, there is ‘ceremonial magick’, the actual ritualistic techniques he described as ‘the training for meditation’. Ibid. pp.45-48. Second, ‘Magick investigates the laws of Nature with the idea of making use of them [and] is science in the tentative stage’. Aleister Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, ed. by Israel Regardie (Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Publications, 1998), p. 64. In other words, Magick can refer to the conscious use of natural forces for specific purposes at a time when (i) the operation of those forces falls outside the explanatory scope of the natural sciences and (ii) the experimental results are somewhat difficult to predict. Third, ‘Magick is the Science of understanding oneself and one’s conditions [and] the Art of applying that understanding in action’. Crowley, *Magick*, p. 131. Finally, and probably most famously, ‘Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will’; accordingly, ‘Every intentional act is a Magical Act’. Ibid., pp. 126-127. These definitions are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are inter-related and should more properly be understood as representing key points on the ‘spectrum’ of meaning that Crowley intends when he uses the word ‘Magick’.

meditation, the mind is constrained to a single point until normal consciousness is transcended. In magick, the mind is ritualistically ‘exalted’ by ceremonial instruments, words, symbols, and gestures, until normal consciousness is transcended. Meditation is an introverted method of transforming consciousness; magick is its extroverted analogue. The supreme goal of magick is identical to that of meditation: divine union. Crowley described this union in magical terms as the ‘Invocation of the Holy Guardian Angel’.¹¹

Crowley depicted the Angel as the personal god of the magician: an infallible divine guardian who lovingly guides the magician through their spiritual evolution.¹² The magician who achieved contact with the Angel (or attained ‘Knowledge and Conversation’) would be safe to pursue magic without fear of self-deception:

By development of will-power, by rigorous self-control, by solitude, meditation, and prayer, a man may be granted the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel; this being attained, the man may safely confide himself to that Guardianship: [...] this attainment is the most sublime privilege of man.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 144. Crowley adopted this concept from *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage* (1897), an English translation of a medieval magical grimoire (the so-called *Book of Abramelin*) ascribed to Abraham of Worms (c. 1362 – 1458). The *Book of Abramelin* is a set of writings by Abraham to his son Lamech describing a system of magic he claimed to receive from an Egyptian mage named Abramelin. The purpose of Abramelin’s magic is to obtain visionary contact with one’s ‘guardian angel’. The method begins with a long period of devotional prayer and self-discipline (up to 18 months), after which the angel appears and discloses magical secrets to the magician, who must then perform a number of magical rituals to evoke and constrain a series of demons. The first English translation of a *Book of Abramelin* manuscript (of which there are several extant) was translated and published in 1897 by ‘MacGregor’ Mathers, the leader of the Golden Dawn. See: S. L. MacGregor Mathers, trans., *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage* (Surrey: The Aquarian Press, 1980). Crowley later wrote that, although he could have used any terminology to describe his magical system, he chose the language of the Abramelin book because: (i) ‘[the] system is so simple and effective’; (ii) ‘since *all* theories of the universe are absurd it is better to talk in the language of one which is patently absurd, so as to mortify the metaphysical man’; and, (iii) ‘[because] a child can understand it’. Crowley, *The Equinox*, 1.1 (1909), p. 159.

¹² Devoted aspiration to union with the Angel safe-guards the magician during their quest for enlightenment. ‘Any deviation from this line tends to become black magic. Any other operation is black magic.’ Ibid., p. 275. In other words, unless the goal of a magical ritual is union with the divine, or unless the goal is somehow subservient to divine union, it tends toward ‘black magic’. Rituals may also be used to perform instrumental forms of magic aimed at gaining material advantage. Crowley accepted the efficacy of instrumental magic, provided it was properly performed according to correct principles, and he practised it often himself. However, he thought that such magic had built-in safeguards that would inevitably impel magicians towards more spiritual aspirations. For instance, in order to evoke a demon to perform some task, the magician must first invoke a more pure and holy intelligence: the intelligence which governs the particular demon in question. Thus the magician is forced to seek higher forms of knowledge and consult higher intelligences before acting, and the magician’s aspiration and devotion to the higher is strengthened. As this continues, the magician purifies their consciousness and eventually discovers the necessity of invoking the Holy Guardian Angel.

¹³ Excerpt of a 1910 letter from Crowley to Rev. R. St. John Parry, Dean of Trinity College Cambridge; quoted in: Churton, *Biography*, p. 157.

Crowley claimed to have been granted the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel, and was thus a genuine magical adept. He also claimed to have achieved Samadhi, an attainment that entitles one to found a new religious movement. Like the religious masters of the past, Crowley's transformation into a prophet turns upon a mysterious period of time during which he said he attained a series of religious revelations.

The Birth of a New Aeon

Crowley said that in 1904, while on honeymoon in Cairo with his wife Rose Edith Kelly (1874 – 1932), 'the only event of my life which has made it worth living' took place:

My entire previous life was but a preparation for this event, and my entire subsequent life has been not merely determined by it, but wrapped up in it.¹⁴

According to Crowley, their honeymoon was interrupted when Rose began to 'receive' messages from the Egyptian God Horus.¹⁵ Although initially sceptical, a chain of synchronicities led Crowley to take Rose's claims seriously and he proceeded to conduct a series of magical operations to invoke Horus according to instructions given by Rose. Crowley was then commanded to go into a room in their apartment on three consecutive days, between noon and 1pm, where he was to write down precisely what he heard. He said a mysterious entity called Aiwass dictated a book which he dutifully transcribed. The text Aiwass dictated became known as *Liber Legis*, or *The Book of the Law*, and Crowley later identified Aiwass as his own Holy Guardian Angel.¹⁶

Liber Legis announced 'the Law of Thelema' and the dawn of a new religious epoch called 'the Aeon of Horus'.¹⁷ The principal tenets of Thelema are: 'Every man and every woman is a star,' 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law,' 'Love is the law, love under will,' and 'There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt.' According to Crowley:

The New Aeon proclaims Man as Immortal God, eternally active to do His Will.
All's Joy, all's Beauty; this Will we celebrate.¹⁸

¹⁴ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 385.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 393.

¹⁶ Crowley, *Magick*, p. 277.

¹⁷ 'Thelēma' (Gr. θελημα) is an ancient Greek word for 'will' which also carries connotations of 'divine will'.

¹⁸ Aleister Crowley, *The Law is for All: The Authorized Popular Commentary to The Book of the Law*, ed. by Louis Wilkinson and Hymenaeus Beta [William Breeze] (Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Publications, 1998), p. 124.

In other words, the Law of Thelema asserts the intrinsic divinity of each individual and confirms their divine right to pursue their own personal path through life. Most previous religions had devalued the physical in favour of the spiritual and asserted that human life was essentially sorrowful or sinful. Thelema, however, affirms the divine perfection of the physical universe and proclaims 'pure joy' as the essence of existence. The initially reluctant prophet increasingly identified with his own doctrine and eventually declared himself The Great Beast 666: the prophet of the Law of Thelema and the Logos of the Aeon of Horus.

Crowley interpreted the reception of *Liber Legis* as a message from the Secret Chiefs. These Secret Chiefs not only governed societies like the Golden Dawn, but also mysteriously directed the spiritual evolution of the entire human race. They were now overseeing Crowley's initiation themselves and they had given him a task. Crowley was to formulate a new system of religious attainment along scientific principles: he was to examine the old traditions, discard the superstitious elements, and distil their essential truths. The model for the new system was to be Crowley's own 'occult career', particularly the episodes which took place between 1898 and 1912.¹⁹ This led to Crowley's development of A.:A.: and Scientific Illuminism.

Drugs and Magick

Crowley postulated an essential and intrinsic relationship between sex, drugs, and religion. For him, the bliss of sex and the intoxicating effects of drugs are analogous to the blissful intoxications of consciousness that accompany religious experiences. For decades Crowley conducted magical experiments that ceremonially combined all three, earning him a sinister reputation as a 'black magician'; presumably his self-identification as the Great Beast of *Revelation* did his reputation no favours either. Crowley's experimentation with drugs and magick started in 1898, when he began receiving private lessons in magical practice from Charles Henry Allan Bennett (1872 – 1923), a senior member of the Golden Dawn's Second Order.

Allan Bennett was an analytical chemist by profession, a well-respected magician within the Order, and a close friend of its leader 'MacGregor' Mathers. He also suffered from severe asthma and possessed an extensive range of chemicals that he used to treat his own

¹⁹ The first half of this period involved his advancement to the level of adept and his attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. The second half concerned his advancement to the level of 'Master of the Temple' by a process he called 'Crossing the Abyss', discussed further in Chapter 5.

condition. When they first met, Bennett had no financial security and was nearly homeless, whereas Crowley was heir to a significant fortune and lived in relative opulence. Crowley offered to host Bennett at his Chancery Lane apartment in return for instructions in magical practice. Bennett then moved in with Crowley and brought along his medicine cabinet. Crowley wrote about this period:

Together for many months we studied and practised Ceremonial Magic, and ransacked the ancient books and [manuscripts] of the reputed sages for a key to the great mysteries of life and death. Not even fiction was neglected, and it was from fiction that we gathered one tiny seed-fact [...]. Through the ages we found this one constant story. Stripped of its local and chronological accidents, it usually came to this—the writer would tell of a young man, a seeker after the Hidden Wisdom, who, in one circumstance or another, meets an adept; who, after sundry ordeals, obtains from the said adept, for good or ill, a certain mysterious drug or potion, with the result (at least) of opening the gate of the Other-world. This potion was identified with the Elixir Vitae [i.e. the Elixir of Life] of the physical Alchemists [...] which transforms the base metal (normal perception of life) to silver (poetic conception), and we sought it by fruitless attempts to poison ourselves with every drug in (and out of) the Pharmacopœia. Like Huckleberry Finn's prayer, nuffin' come of it.²⁰

Crowley would later credit Bennett with bestowing upon him 'the right Art of Magick'.²¹ Shortly after the Chancery Lane days, the Golden Dawn fell apart and both Bennett and Crowley left the order. Bennett went to Ceylon to pursue monastic Buddhism, while Crowley continued his search for the alchemical elixir independently.

While studying yoga in India, Crowley discovered that many 'lesser Yogis' employed hashish to attain Samadhi.²² In 1906 he began combining his meditative practice with hashish to test this possibility. His experiments continued for more than a year and he summarised his results in 'The Psychology of Hashish', written in 1908. He wrote that hashish was indeed a

²⁰ Aleister Crowley, 'The Herb Dangerous: Part II – The Psychology of Hashish', in *Equinox* 1.2 (1909), 33-89 (p. 36). Crowley recommended many books for his students, including works of fiction. The first five works of fiction ('of a generally suggestive and helpful kind') listed in *Equinox* (3.1) are: *Zanoni* (1842) and *A Strange Story* (1862), by Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton; *The Blossom and the Fruit* (1887) by Mabel Collins; *The Satyricon* (1st Century CE) by Gaius Petronius 'Arbiter'; and, *The Golden Ass* (2nd Century CE), by Apuleius. All of these works involve some kind of drug, 'potion', or other intoxicant, that is employed for magical purposes, typically in a manner crucial to the actual narrative itself.

²¹ Aleister Crowley, *Liber Aleph: The Book of Wisdom or Folly* (San Francisco, CA: Level Press, 1974), p. 185.

²² Crowley, 'Psychology of Hashish', p. 36.

useful aid to meditation, primarily in the earliest stages of practice, because it offers a taste of mystical consciousness and this is encouraging for students as it assures them that mystical states of consciousness do exist.²³ He stated, however, that he personally had ‘no use for hashish save as a preliminary demonstration that there exists another world attainable—somehow.’²⁴ He concluded his article by recommending his readers to conduct their own experiments along similar lines aided by hashish or ‘some better physical expedient’.²⁵ He did not mention in the article, however, that he had already begun a new series of experiments himself with another ‘physical expedient’: a medicinal fluid extract of peyote, the ‘divine cactus’ of the New World and the subject of the following chapter.

²³ He also said it alleviated the spiritual ‘dryness’, or demotivating depression, that is almost always parasitic upon any sincere attempt to meditate. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Chapter 2 – The Divine Cactus

Peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) is a small blue-green spineless cactus that grows in certain dry desert regions of Mexico and the United States.²⁶ It contains a number of alkaloids, including a high concentration of mescaline. Mescaline produces colourful and complex kaleidoscopic visions when ingested and is considered a ‘classical’ psychedelic along with LSD, DMT, and psilocybin.²⁷ Classical psychedelics (or ‘serotonergic’ psychedelics) are a unique class of chemical compounds that produce particular characteristic effects upon consciousness.²⁸ Psychedelics should not be confused with sedatives or stimulants, which merely inhibit or excite normal psychobiological functioning.²⁹ The classical psychedelics ‘affect those aspects of consciousness that we identify most closely with our sense of being human – that is, particular ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and willing.’³⁰ In other words, they modify the parameters of consciousness itself and give rise to forms of

²⁶ Since 1854, peyote has had a number of botanical classifications, including *Anhalonium lewinii*. This nomenclature has since been abandoned. Peyote is sometimes called ‘mescal’, ‘mescal bean’, or ‘mescal button’. These names more properly refer to *Sophora secundiflora*, a poisonous red bean which grows in the same regions of North America as peyote and was used ritually before the wide adoption of peyote. Peyote is also colloquially called ‘pellote’ or ‘peyotl’. Crowley apparently never used the name *Lophophora williamsii* to refer to peyote, favouring the now-deprecated name *Anhalonium lewinii*. When Crowley wrote about using peyote, he typically meant the Parke-Davis fluid extract of peyote, which is not the same as pure mescaline. When he referred to the cactus itself, he sometimes used the technically inaccurate names ‘mescal’ and ‘mescal buttons’. For the sake of simplicity, to eliminate redundancy, and for reasons explained at the end of chapter 3, when I am discussing Crowley’s use of the fluid extract, I typically refer to it simply as peyote. For more information on the botanical naming controversy surrounding peyote, see: Edward F. Anderson, *Peyote: The Divine Cactus* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1996), pp. 159-165.

²⁷ Mescaline is found in peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*), San Pedro (*Echinopsis pachanoi*) and Peruvian torch (*Echinopsis peruviana*), all of which are cacti native to the New World. Lysergic acid diethylamide-25 (LSD or ‘acid’) is a synthetic compound derived from ergot, a grain fungus that typically grows on rye. Psilocybin is the active ingredient of ‘magic mushrooms’, such as *P. azurescens*, *P. semilanceata*, and *P. cyanescens*. N,N-dimethyltryptamine (or DMT) is the primary visionary component of the psychedelic Amazonian brew *ayahuasca*. I have found no evidence that Crowley ever experimented with any classical psychedelic other than the mescaline contained in the peyote he ingested.

²⁸ Three of the most common terms used to describe these chemicals are: psychedelic (‘mind-manifesting’), hallucinogen (‘generates hallucinations’), and entheogen (‘generates the divine within’). Others include: mysticomimetic (‘mimicking the mystical state’), schizotoxin (‘toxic in a way that causes schizophrenia’), psychotomimetic (‘psychosis mimicking’), and psychotogen (‘psychosis generating’). I have chosen to use the term ‘psychedelic’ since it is largely value-neutral and does not *a priori* limit the effects of these compounds to some particular category. Classical psychedelics are sometimes called ‘serotonergic’ psychedelics as their method of action is strongly related to the neurotransmitter serotonin. See: Robin Carhart-Harris, Mendel Kaelen, and David Nutt, ‘How Do Hallucinogens Work on the Brain?’, in *Psychologist*, 27.9 (2014), 622-665.

²⁹ Stimulants amplify functions such as attentiveness, rate of thinking, wakefulness, anxiety levels, and motor activity. This group includes caffeine, nicotine, cocaine, amphetamine, and methamphetamine. Sedatives cause attention to drift, decrease the speed of thought, reduce overall arousal, induce sleep, and cause anaesthesia. This group includes alcohol, benzodiazepines, opiates, and general anaesthetics.

³⁰ Rick Strassman, ‘The Psychedelics: Overview of a Controversial Drug Type’, in *Inner Paths to Outer Space* (Vermont: Park Street Press, 2008), pp. 7-32 (p.10).

consciousness qualitatively different from both normal consciousness and the states produced by other drugs.

Since the 1960s psychedelics have been subject to severely restrictive legal prohibitions in most Western cultures, allegedly because they present a high potential for abuse and possess little or no recognized medicinal value. Unfortunately the legal prohibition of psychedelics has done little to curb their recreational or ‘street’ use, although it has seriously hindered sincere scientific research into their remarkable properties and therapeutic potential.³¹ However, psychedelic research is currently undergoing a ‘renaissance’ of sorts and it has been shown that the responsible use of psychedelics under appropriate and controlled conditions is essentially safe and presents little danger to the human subject.³² Psychedelics are now generally considered non-addictive and clinical trials suggest they may even be profitably employed in the treatment of various forms of addiction, including alcoholism.³³ In fact, psychedelics have actually shown remarkable therapeutic potential in the treatment of a wide range of mental health conditions including depression, cluster headaches, and obsessive compulsive disorder.³⁴ Psychedelics have also been successfully used to alleviate the anxiety associated with death in terminally ill patients.³⁵ Psychedelic therapy may even be beneficial in reducing the rate of recidivism in individuals whose criminal lifestyle and behaviour usually results in their repeated incarceration.³⁶ The key factor in successful psychedelic therapy seems to be due to a species of transformative transcendent experiences that psychedelic compounds may occasion.³⁷

Classical psychedelics are increasingly regarded as reliable generators of religious experiences and profound spiritual transformations when used in the appropriate context.³⁸

³¹ See: David J. Nutt, Leslie A. King, and David E. Nichols, ‘Effects of Schedule I Drug Laws on Neuroscience Research and Treatment Innovation’, in *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience*, 14 (2013), 577-585.

³² For more details, see in bibliography: Krebs (2013), Barbosa (2012), Halpern (2008), Johnson (2008), and Leary (1963).

³³ See: Liester (2014), Bogenschutz (2013), Bogenschutz (2015), Johnson (2014), and Garcia-Romeu (2014).

³⁴ See: Kraehenmann (2015), Moreno (2006), and Sewell (2006).

³⁵ See: Grob (2011), Gasser (2014a), and Gasser (2014b).

³⁶ See: Hendricks (2014).

³⁷ For the remarkable tale of Leo Zeff (1912 – 1988), see: Myron J. Stolaroff, *The Secret Chief Revealed: Conversations with Leo Zeff, Pioneer in the Underground Psychedelic Therapy Movement*, rev. ed (Sarasota, FL: Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, 2004). Zeff was an American psychologist and psychotherapist who, at the risk of severe legal punishment, conducted pioneering clandestine therapy sessions using psychedelic compounds (including mescaline) and transformed the lives of hundreds of his patients.

³⁸ See: William A. Richards, *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); also: Leary (1964), Pahnke (1966), Griffiths (2006), Griffiths (2008), Griffiths (2011), and Richards (2014).

Accordingly, psychedelics possess close cultural associations with spirituality. Furthermore, psychedelics may also produce visions of non-human ‘entities’ or intelligences that offer the user personal or spiritual guidance.³⁹ The ontological status of these entities is interpreted in various ways, typically dependent upon cultural context. Sometimes they are seen as personifications of internal physiological or psychological faculties, sometimes as the spirit or intelligence of the plant or chemical itself; sometimes they are conceived of as spirits of tribal ancestors, sometimes as personal spiritual guides. Visionary contact with these entities or intelligences usually provokes intense feelings of awe, love, and even fear in the subject. In light of these phenomena, some scientists have speculated that spontaneous mystical and visionary experiences may be due to the action of endogenous psychedelic compounds (i.e. psychedelic compounds naturally produced by normal human neurophysiology).⁴⁰ The deliberate use of psychedelics to attain spiritual experiences is called ‘the entheogenic use of psychedelics’.⁴¹

The entheogenic use of psychedelics depends heavily upon the parameters of ‘set and setting’.⁴² Deliberate and minute control of set and setting allows users to direct their psychedelic experiences towards spiritual goals.⁴³ The term ‘set’ refers to the internal mind-set of the user including their cultural background, their knowledge of drug effects, and their intention in using the drug. ‘Setting’ refers to the external environment of a psychedelic session including the time and place of the session, the user’s relationships with the other participants, and any ritualistic elements present in the environment. Given these properties, Crowley’s relationship with peyote is certainly deserving of investigation. As mentioned earlier, Crowley was actively searching for a drug that could produce religious intoxication

³⁹ The most well documented accounts of ‘entity encounters’ in clinical trials are probably the reports given by the volunteers in Dr. Rick Strassman’s DMT study in the 1990s. See: Rick Strassman, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2001), pp. 185–219. Modern anecdotal accounts also connect mescaline and psilocybin with similar encounters. Terence McKenna (1946 – 2000), the American author and psychedelic advocate, often spoke of the ‘self-transforming machine elves’ that populated his DMT experiences, as well as the ‘Voice’ he communicated with through the use of psilocybin mushrooms. Also, the controversial Peruvian-born American author and anthropologist Carlos Casteneda (1925 – 1998) famously wrote about Mescalito, the teaching spirit contactable through the use of peyote.

⁴⁰ For example, Dr. Rick Strassman proposed this idea in his first popular work on his DMT studies; see, *ibid.*, pp. 42–85. Strassman later explored this idea more deeply, with specific reference to the phenomenon of prophecy in the Jewish religious tradition, in: Rick Strassman, *DMT and the Soul of Prophecy: A New Science of Spiritual Revelation in the Hebrew Bible* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2014).

⁴¹ In other words, the use of psychedelics to ‘generate the divine within’.

⁴² The classic text on ‘set and setting’ is: Norman E. Zinberg, *Drug, Set, and Setting: The Basis for Controlled Intoxicant Use* (New York: Yale University Press, 1984).

⁴³ See, for example, the method described in: Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008).

and spiritual visions. Also, the central goal of his system of Magick is the attainment of visionary contact with non-human intelligences and spiritual guardians. Furthermore, Crowley's religious mind-set, reinforced by the ritual parameters of his ceremonial magic, are exactly the kind of 'set and setting' one would expect to produce the profound spiritual transformations associated with the entheogenic use of psychedelics.

Native Peyotism

Plants that contain psychedelics are often the centre of tribal religious practices; peyote is no exception and its sacramental use is called 'peyotism'. Peyote is consumed as a medicine and religious sacrament by a number of Mexican and Native American tribes who also worship the cactus as a deity. Archaeological evidence suggests that peyotism is many thousands of years old.⁴⁴ The first European explorers and Christian missionaries in the New World were appalled when they encountered peyotism, as the native practice of consuming a divinized plant to obtain spiritual intoxication seemed a blasphemous bastardization of their own Christian Eucharist.⁴⁵ Attempts were made to quash peyotism but were unsuccessful.⁴⁶ Peyote ceremonies continued in secret and many tribes integrated Christian symbolism into their rituals. For Christian peyotists, the divine cactus facilitates direct communion with their Lord:

The white man goes into a church and talks about Jesus, but the Indian goes into a tepee and talks to Jesus.⁴⁷

Peyote itself is even hailed as the saviour by some natives:

Peyote was sent to the Indians and [...] afterwards Jesus was sent to the Whites, with the same purpose. However, the Whites killed Jesus in their ignorance, and thus have only the cross left; whereas the Indians never killed Peyote, with the result that they still have him.⁴⁸

Peyote ceremonies are typically group affairs involving many ritual elements.⁴⁹ They are usually all-night fire-lit vigils led by experienced medicine-men, and an officer in the

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Peyote*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 4-11.

⁴⁶ Similar attempts were made by Christian moralists at the beginning of the twentieth century after peyotism re-emerged as a significant religious movement among Native Americans.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 49-78.

ceremony is tasked with maintaining the fire throughout the night. Sage incense and tobacco are burned to cleanse both the ritual space and the participants. Rhythmic drums and rattlers are played throughout the ceremony, and ceremonial songs are sung. Peyote songs contain many meaningless syllables grouped into sequences resembling words. The songs are considered powerful prayers and are highly revered. It is a cultural taboo to speak lightly of peyote songs or to sing them outside of a ritual. A large peyote cactus usually occupies the centre of a crescent-shaped altar. This 'Father Peyote', or 'Chief Peyote', is the focal point of the ceremony, and participants direct their prayers and songs toward it. Throughout the night-long ceremony, participants concentrate upon the Father Peyote while the entheogenic effects of the cactus manifest and take hold. During the ceremonial intoxication, participants report experiences of divine ecstasy and enthusiasm, revelatory visions and spiritual insights, and a sense of group unity and shared consciousness that seemingly borders on the telepathic. Peyote intoxication typically lasts between 10 and 12 hours. The all-night ritual concludes at sunrise with a ceremonial breakfast.

For many tribes, peyote harvests are also ritualistic and take the form of a group pilgrimage.⁵⁰ In the harvest ritual, the peyote hunt is patterned after a deer hunt. When the first cactus is discovered, hunters ritually consume a small portion of peyote and continue their hunt. According to the peyotist pilgrims, wild peyote cacti sing in the desert and once the hunters have eaten their first dose they can hear the songs of the peyote more clearly. This leads them to more cacti which are then carefully harvested. Only the top of the cactus is removed, as the top contains the highest concentration of mescaline; the remainder of the plant and its long root are left in the ground. The cactus eventually grows a new top and may be harvested again. Peyote is consumed in a variety of forms: slices of the cactus, called 'buttons', are slowly chewed or brewed in a tea.⁵¹ Dried peyote buttons can maintain their potency for decades. The powerful alkaloids in peyote often cause nausea and vomiting, and peyotists interpret this as a purgative effect of the peyote: it is a manifestation of the body and blood being cleansed of their filth, and represents the restoration of the participant to their normal physical and spiritual condition.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 15-23.

⁵¹ Sometimes peyote is chewed, mixed with saliva, and applied to the skin as a medicine.

Peyote is sometimes used by natives during ‘vision quests’.⁵² A vision quest is a traditional tribal rite of passage often undertaken during puberty, the goal of which is to attain visionary contact with spiritual guides.⁵³ Vision quests usually take place in a harsh and unforgiving environment, like a desert, where the candidate is left at the mercy of the natural elements while abstaining from food and water. Prolonged exposure to these bleak psychological and physiological conditions facilitates visionary experiences. Candidates are not supposed to return until visionary contact with a spiritual guide has been firmly established. These guides are conceived of as ancestor spirits or the intelligences of natural forces who are supposed to help the candidate discover their destiny and may even confer upon them a new name. Peyote has sometimes been used to facilitate the attainment of these visions. As we shall see, Crowley often used peyote during his own quests for visions. He also held that the primary goal of magick is to attain visionary contact with spiritual guardians, which is also the goal of vision quests.

Early Peyote Research

Modern scientific research into peyote began in 1886 with American physician John Raleigh Briggs (1851 – 1907) who was the first researcher to publish a report of its effects.⁵⁴ According to Briggs, his brother spent several years among ‘different tribes of wild Indians’ and brought back tales of a ‘fruit’ eaten by ‘both Indians and Mexicans [...] for purposes of intoxication’.⁵⁵ Briggs said that ‘reliable sources’, including some Mexican acquaintances, informed him that those under its influence became totally unconscious within a few hours and often remained that way for days. When they eventually returned to consciousness, they described ‘many remarkable adventures’ in the ‘spirit world’. It was therefore regarded as

⁵² Ibid., pp. 37-38. Also, Daniel M. Perrine, ‘Visions of the Night: Western Medicine Meets Peyote 1887-1899’, in *The Hefter Review of Psychedelic Research*, 2 (2001), 6-52 (p. 22).

⁵³ ‘Each primitive Indian has his guardian manitou, to whom he looks for counsel, guidance, and protection [...]. At the age of fourteen or fifteen, the Indian boy blackens his face, retires to some solitary place, and remains for days without food. [...] His sleep is haunted by visions, and the form which first or most often appears is that of his guardian manitou — a beast, a bird, a fish, a serpent, or some other object, animate or inanimate.’ Quoted in: Philip Jenkins, *Dream Catchers: How Mainstream America Discovered Native Spirituality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 52. See also: Ruth M. Underhill, *Red Man’s Religion: Beliefs and Practices of the Indians North of Mexico* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 96-105.

⁵⁴ Briggs was a native of Tennessee and a doctor who specialized in diseases of the eye, ear, nose and throat. He was an accomplished writer of medical essays, the founder of a sanatorium for the treatment of tuberculosis, and a vocal opponent of ‘quackery’ in medicine. He established and edited the *Texas Health Journal*, where he was ‘an outspoken nonconformist who wrote what he thought and who kept a gun on his desk and a lawyer on his staff to support his views’. Jan G. Bruhn and Bo Holmstedt, ‘Early Peyote Research: An Interdisciplinary Study’, in *Economic Botany*, 28 (1974), 353-390 (pp. 354-358).

⁵⁵ J.R. Briggs, ‘“Muscale Buttons”—Physiological Effects—Personal Experience’, in *The Medical Register: A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery*, 1 (1887), 276-277.

sacred and only eaten by medicine-men, chiefs, and 'other notable worthies'. Briggs was 'interested in its physiological effects', so he 'procured from Mexico some specimens' of peyote.

Briggs consumed one-third of a 'muscale button' on 20 June 1886 at 10am. He sat and waited, ready to record its effects. After fifteen minutes his pulse and respirations started to increase rapidly. He soon lost count of his breath. Then his pulse began to alarm him. After forty five minutes, Briggs was seriously concerned:

It seemed to me my heart was simply running away with itself, and it was with considerable difficulty I could breathe air enough to keep me alive. I felt intoxicated, and for a short time particularly lost consciousness.⁵⁶

Briggs was so distraught that he sought assistance from a nearby physician friend. Briggs remained convinced that he would have died had his friend not been there to help, although his friend appears to have done little more than advise him to drink shots of whiskey. His pulse and respirations slowly returned to normal over the next seven hours, and Briggs felt very depressed for several hours more. His article was published in the April 1887 issue of the *Medical Register* and then re-published a month later in *The Druggists' Bulletin*. He concluded:

Whatever may be the ultimate constituents of this poison, it certainly is the most *violent* and *rapid* of all fruits, or even medicines, known to me – manifesting its first effects in less than fifteen minutes. I know of nothing like it except opium and cocaine. [...] I think it well worth the trouble to investigate the matter. One man's experience is worth but little, and it is to be hoped some enterprising experimenter will carry out the research. As to *myself*, I must admit I feel somewhat abstemious on the subject.⁵⁷

One enterprising reader of *The Druggists' Bulletin* was particularly intrigued by the mysterious 'muscale buttons': George S. Davis (1845 – 1930), secretary and general manager of Parke-Davis and Company.⁵⁸ Davis was a sharp medicine salesman with a keen instinct for the therapeutic possibilities of new botanical discoveries, and Parke-Davis began

⁵⁶ Quoted in: Bruhn and Holmstedt, 'Early Peyote Research', p. 356.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See: Milton L. Hoefle, 'The Early History of Parke-Davis and Company', in *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry*, 25.1 (2000), 28-34.

corresponding with Briggs seeking more information and hoping to secure samples of the ‘muscale buttons’.⁵⁹ A letter from Briggs stated his ‘pellote’ was ‘smuggled through from Mexico to Texas by a half breed Mexican who makes it a business to furnish the wild tribes of Indians with it’.⁶⁰ Parke-Davis received a cigar-box full of dried peyote buttons from Briggs at the beginning of June 1887 and samples were sent to various researchers, including the German pharmacologist Dr. Louis Lewin (1850 – 1929).⁶¹ In 1888, Lewin published his first study of peyote.⁶² He drew attention to the abundance of alkaloids in the material and showed ‘for the first time that a cactus can possess an extraordinarily high toxicity’.⁶³

Around the time Lewin published his results, Parke-Davis found a reliable supplier of ‘pellote buttons’ and now had enough plant material to mass-produce medicinal peyote preparations for the first time.⁶⁴ Included amongst the vast list of items in their product catalogue of February 1889 was a tincture of peyote.⁶⁵ By 1900 they had stopped marketing this tincture and had begun producing a more highly concentrated fluid extract of dried peyote buttons.⁶⁶ As we shall see, Crowley experimented with the Parke-Davis fluid extract of peyote for over a decade.

Early Ethnographic Studies of Peyote

Peyote use among Mexican and Native American tribes began to attract attention in anthropological circles during the 1890s, primarily due to the work of two men: Carl Lumholtz (1851 – 1923) and James Mooney (1861 – 1921). Lumholtz, a Norwegian

⁵⁹ For the full details of the company’s attempts to acquire peyote, see: George A. Bender, ‘Rough and Ready Research—1887 Style’, in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 23 (1968), 159-166.

⁶⁰ Bruhn and Holmstedt, ‘Early Peyote Research’, pp. 357-358.

⁶¹ Lewin was an internationally renowned pharmacologist and toxicologist, and a respected authority on opium and cocaine. By 1887 Lewin had secured his international reputation through the publication of three works: one classifying the side effects of commonly used pharmaceuticals (the first of its kind), one giving an encyclopaedic listing of the recommended dosages of all known drugs, and one widely used textbook of pharmacology. From 1874 to 1929, he published nearly 250 major publications in his field. *Ibid.*, pp. 359-360; also, Perrine, ‘Visions of the Night’, p. 46.

⁶² Frank Augustus Thompson of the Parke-Davis laboratories was actually the first to report that the material received from Briggs contained ‘a large amount of alkaloids’. Thompson’s report is dated 5 July 1887, almost a year before the corroborating results of Lewin were published. *Ibid.*, p. 17. Also: Bruhn and Holmstedt, ‘Early Peyote Research’, p. 359.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

⁶⁴ Mrs. Anna B. Nickels of Laredo, Texas, a trader and collector of cacti who owned her own plant nursery wrote to Parke-Davis in May 1888. She told them that she had ‘3000 plants growing in my garden, and can collect all I can find sale for’. Bender, ‘Rough and Ready’, p. 164.

⁶⁵ Bender, ‘Rough and Ready’, p. 164.

⁶⁶ One pint of the fluid extract could be used to make eight pints of the tincture; thus the fluid extract was approximately eight times stronger than the tincture. So whereas a pint bottle of tincture was made from two ounces of dried peyote (56g), a pint of fluid extract was presumably made from around sixteen ounces (454g).

anthropologist and zoologist, encountered peyote during his travels in Mexico between 1892 and 1897.⁶⁷ According to Lumholtz, the natives not only used peyote in their religious ceremonies, but also to alleviate hunger, thirst, and fatigue during long journeys.⁶⁸ Lumholtz first tried peyote during a religious ceremony; however, he did not find it pleasurable and reported no spiritual experiences as a result. Nevertheless, he was astonished by the intensity of its effects.⁶⁹ Lumholtz remained impressed by peyote's effects for the rest of his life and, shortly before his death, wrote:

Of the ethnological results gained during my travels in Mexico I consider the information which was collected about the anciently well-known *peyote* (*lophophora*) among the most important.⁷⁰

James Mooney was an American ethnographer who was also deeply impressed by peyote.⁷¹ While living with the Kiowa of Oklahoma in 1891, he was invited to participate in their peyote ritual and was the first non-native to observe such a ritual in the United States.⁷²

⁶⁷ Lumholtz was given funding from the University of Christiania and several Norwegian museums to travel to Australia and collect specimens. Once there, he left settled Australia seeking out aboriginal natives with whom he lived for four years. He discovered several new animal and plant species in Australia and returned to Europe bringing insightful descriptions of aboriginal life. In 1890 Lumholtz began exploring the northern part of Mexico's Sierra Madre. Again he sought out and integrated himself into the native way of life. Around 1892 he first observed peyote (or 'hikuli') use among the Tarahumares. He later observed the peyote ritual of the Huichols during his expedition from 1894 to 1897. His experiences are described in: Carl Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico: A Record of Five Years' Exploration Among the Tribes of the Western Sierra Madre; in the Tierra Caliente of Tepic and Jalisco; and Among the Tarascos of Michoacan*, 2 Vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902).

⁶⁸ He said it allowed the native user to maintain 'the balance of his body even better than under normal conditions' and helped him 'walk along the edge of precipices without becoming dizzy'. Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico*, I, pp. 357-359. He later accompanied the Huichol on an expedition to some sacred caves while recovering from a bout of malaria. He became seriously fatigued by the arduous journey, so he ate some peyote. He quickly experienced a dramatic resurgence of energy that allowed him to continue the pilgrimage. Later that night he experienced nausea and 'colour visions of beautiful purple and green flashes and zigzags'. Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico*, II, pp. 177-179.

⁶⁹ He became stimulated very rapidly and the subsequent intoxication produced 'a depression and chill such as I have never experienced before'. Even his close proximity to the fire could not abate the severe coldness he felt. Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico*, I, pp. 374-375.

⁷⁰ Carl Lumholtz, 'My Life of Exploration', in *Natural History: The Journal of the American Museum*, 21.3 (1921), 225-243 (p. 235).

⁷¹ Mooney was born in Indiana to immigrant parents hailing from County Meath in Ireland. As a child, Mooney was fascinated by the stories of Native Americans and by age 12 had begun cataloguing all the names and locations of their tribes. Mooney went on to work as a reporter and writer for a few years in his hometown, before joining the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. In 1885 he became the first white man to be shown an ancient Cherokee ritual written in the native script. Mooney went on to play a pivotal role in the founding of the Native American Church. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁷² Mooney did not ingest peyote during his first ritual and was exhausted by the all-night vigil. Impressed by the energy of the other participants, he decided to try a small amount of peyote during the next ceremony to aid his concentration and to remain observant. When Mooney returned to Washington that autumn, he spoke enthusiastically about the 'Kiowa Mescal Rite' to the Anthropological Association of Washington. *Ibid.*, p.21.

Unlike Lumholtz, Mooney found that the combination of the ceremony and the peyote produced the spiritual exaltation so highly regarded by peyotists:

One seems to be lifted out of the body and floating about in the air like a freed spirit. The fire takes on glorious shapes, the sacred mescal [i.e. peyote] upon the crescent mound becomes alive and moves and talks and you talk to it and it answers. You look around on your companions and they seem far away and unreal, and yet you know they are close by your side. At times the songs and the drum-beat fill the tipi like a burst of thunder, then the ear seems for a time unconscious and you hear it not, although you see the motion of the lips and the hands. And then the sound comes up from the ground and comes out of the air and is all around you like spirit whisperings.⁷³

Mooney brought a large quantity of peyote back to Washington in 1894, which was then split up and dispatched to various researchers. In Chapter 5, we shall consider the possibility that Crowley himself also took part in a peyotist ritual while in Mexico.

Wiley, Prentiss & Morgan, and Mitchell

Roughly half of Mooney's buttons were sent to Dr. Harvey Washington Wiley (1844 – 1930) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Chemistry.⁷⁴ Wiley assigned the task of analysing the peyote to a young chemist named Erwin Ewell, who proceeded to self-experiment with the cactus. According to Mooney, Ewell became so alarmed by the effects that he 'wrote out his will' and, even though it was past midnight, went searching for a drug-store 'so that he might be safe in case anything happened'. A policeman found Ewell and brought him back to his office. Once there, Ewell wrote out his will again and 'got all ready to die, if things happened that way'. The following day, Ewell had recovered and excitedly discussed peyote with Mooney. According to Wiley, during his intoxication the young chemist spoke constantly, saying:

⁷³ Quoted in: Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁷⁴ Wiley became the first professor of chemistry at Purdue University in 1874, and stayed in that post until 1883 when he became chief chemist of the Bureau of Chemistry at the USDA. Wiley campaigned for federal legislation against food adulteration and was later hailed as the 'Father of the Pure Food and Drugs Act'. He played a central role in the founding of the American Chemical Society and once served as its president. Ibid., pp. 24-25.

Oh, how beautiful; oh, how splendid; how magnificent. [...] there is a heaven. I see it. I see the angels in the streets of gold.⁷⁵

About the same quantity of Mooney's buttons were sent to Daniel W. Prentiss and F.P. Morgan in Washington.⁷⁶ Prentiss and Morgan used them to conduct the first clinical studies of peyote intoxication using human subjects. Their subjects experienced a range of effects: colourful and constantly changing visions; mental stimulation; physical excitation; heightened concentration; nausea; depression; headache; paranoia; and insomnia. Some reported distortions in their perception of time and space; some reported the total loss of such conceptions. Only one subject experienced the entheogenic ecstasy and spiritual awe associated with peyote:

[My] pleasure so far passed the more ordinary realms of delight as to bring me to that high ecstatic state in which our exclamations of enjoyment become involuntary. I truly thought I had experienced great pleasure upon many occasions, but the experience of this night was one quite unique in this regard in the history of a lifetime. The tendency of every feature of the experience to prove a source of pleasure was quite remarkable.⁷⁷

The last few buttons of Mooney's supply were sent to American physician and writer Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell (1828 – 1914). Mitchell was one of the most famous physicians in the world at the time, and had received numerous honours and awards for his work.⁷⁸ Intrigued by the visionary effects reported by Prentiss and Morgan's subjects, Mitchell decided to self-experiment with the peyote. He wanted to observe its effects first-hand, as he had previously done with morphine and hashish. Mitchell wrote a long and evocative account of his experience, published in the *British Medical Journal* of December 1896.⁷⁹ Within a few hours he began to experience the characteristic visions of peyote and wrote:

⁷⁵ Quoted in: Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁶ Prentiss was Professor of Materia Medica and Therapeutics, while Morgan was Assistant to the Chair of Materia Medica and Therapeutics, at the Medical Department of Washington D.C.'s Columbian University.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 27. It is possible that this subject was the young chemist Ewell.

⁷⁸ He was a trustee of the University of Pennsylvania and the Carnegie Institution of Washington; and the first president of the Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons. He conducted research on snake-venoms and the neurological consequences of gunshot wounds, and developed the 'Rest Cure' for melancholy and hysteria. He also wrote some highly regarded novels and poems. Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁷⁹ Mitchell reported 'an unusual amount of physical endurance', stomach discomfort, and headache. He had 'a certain sense of the things about me as having a more positive existence than usual'. The accomplished writer struggled in vain to find a suitable word or phrase to describe this sense. He also had 'a decisive impression that I was more competent in mind than in my everyday moods' and a 'gently flattering' feeling of 'consciousness of

I find it hopeless to describe in language which shall convey to others the beauty and splendour of what I saw [...] projected on the screen of consciousness.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, he did his best and the long account of his visions is impressively detailed, and evokes Mitchell's genuine sense of awe. His article concludes:

Were I to take mescal again I should dictate to a stenographer all that I saw and in due order. No one can hope to remember for later record so wild a sequence of colour and of forms. But since to talk does not disturb these visions, a perfect account might easily be given.⁸¹

James, Ellis, Symons, and Yeats

Mitchell sent some peyote buttons to William James (1842 – 1910), the American philosopher, psychologist, and physician. James is best known in religious studies for his landmark work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Unfortunately, the specimens Mitchell sent to James were either rotten or contaminated. When James sampled them on 8 June 1897, his experience was distinctly different to Mitchell's.⁸² He described the experience to his brother, the famous novelist Henry James (1844 – 1916), in a letter:

I took one bud 3 days ago, vomited and spattered for 24 hours and had no other symptom whatever except that and the Katzenjammer [i.e. hang-over] the following day. I will take the visions on trust.⁸³

English sexologist Henry Havelock Ellis (1859 – 1939), inspired by Mitchell's article, conducted his own experiment with peyote.⁸⁴ He was fascinated by the visions Mitchell

power, with meanwhile absolute control of every faculty'. See: S. Weir Mitchell, 'Remarks on the Effects of Anhelonium [sic] Lewinii (the Mescal Button)', in *British Medical Journal*, 2 (1896), 1625-1629. Appended to Mitchell's account is that of one Dr. Eshner, 'one of the clinical staff of the Infirmary for Nervous Disease', who also experimented with peyote.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 1626.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 1628. Mitchell later wrote to Mooney in 1903 regarding the efforts to ban peyote, which he called 'really a rather harmless drug as compared with most of the others which men use'. He described the attempted legislative prohibition as 'quite ridiculous' and predicted it 'may open the way to much cruelty and injustice'. Quoted in: Perrine, *Visions of the Night*, p. 35.

⁸² James was interested in both religious experiences and alterations of consciousness. He wrote about his experiences with nitrous oxide and developed some progressive views about alterations of consciousness and their value to mankind. It is therefore a pity James never properly experienced the characteristic effects of peyote, as his report undoubtedly would have made very interesting reading.

⁸³ Quoted in: Ibid., p. 35.

⁸⁴ Although Ellis never practised medicine, he earned a nominal M.D. in 1889 from the Society of Apothecaries in Britain. He produced sets of publications in two distinct fields: *Mermaid*, a literary series which reprinted plays by contemporaries of Shakespeare, and *Contemporary Science*, a popular scientific series in which accomplished scientists explained their fields to educated readers. He is now most well-known for his extensive

reported and discovered that he could buy ‘mescal’ buttons from an apothecary in London called Potter and Clarke. On Good Friday of 1897, Ellis ate the buttons and recorded their effects. Like Mitchell, Ellis experienced a series of elaborate and colourful visions which seriously impressed him. He went on to write a number of articles about his experiences with peyote.⁸⁵ He prophesied:

there is every likelihood that mescal [i.e. peyote] will become popular. It certainly has a great future before it with those who cultivate the vision-breeding drugs.⁸⁶

Ellis also ‘made experiments on two poets, whose names are both well known’.⁸⁷ Although he never explicitly named the two, they have since been identified as Welsh poet Arthur Symons (1865 – 1945) and Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939).⁸⁸ Symons was apparently very impressed with peyote, which gave him ‘intense pleasure’.⁸⁹ Yeats, on the other hand, was less enthusiastic about the whole affair. According to Ellis:

[Yeats] is interested in mystical matters, an excellent subject for visions, and very familiar with vision-producing drugs and processes. His heart however, is not very strong. While he obtained the visions, he found the effects of mescal [i.e. peyote] on his breathing somewhat unpleasant; he much prefers haschisch [sic], though recognising that its effects are much more difficult to obtain.⁹⁰

Yeats also apparently sent some peyote to the English-born Irish revolutionary and actress Maud Gonne (1866 – 1953) in 1897.⁹¹ Since both Yeats and Gonne were members of the

scientific investigations into human sexuality which resulted in the six-volume work *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, published between 1897 and 1910.

⁸⁵ See: Havelock Ellis, ‘A Note on the Phenomena of Mescal Intoxication’, in *The Lancet*, 5 June 1897, 1540-1542; ‘Mescal Intoxication’, in *The Lancet*, 12 June 1897, 1636; ‘Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise’, in *The Contemporary Review*, 73 (1898), 130-141, also reprinted in *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898), 537-548; and ‘Mescal: A Study of a Divine Plant’, in *Popular Science Monthly*, 61 (1902), 57-71.

⁸⁶ Ellis, ‘A Note on the Phenomena of Mescal Intoxication’, p. 1542.

⁸⁷ Ellis, ‘Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise’, in *Contemporary Review*, p. 139; in *Annual Report*, p. 545.

⁸⁸ Perrine, ‘Visions of the Night’, pp. 41-42.

⁸⁹ He wrote: ‘I have never seen a succession of absolutely pictorial visions with such precision and such unaccountability. It seemed as if a series of dissolving views were carried swiftly before me, all going from right to left, none corresponding with any seen reality.’ Ellis, ‘Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise’, in *Contemporary Review*, p. 139; in *Annual Report*, pp. 545-546.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Their correspondence around this time mentions a ‘dream drug’. See: Maud Gonne, *The Gonne-Yeats Letters, 1893-1938*, ed. by Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994) pp. 70-71; and, Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1995), p. 187.

Golden Dawn, it is possible that rumours of its effects circulated within the Order, and this may be the channel by which Crowley first heard of peyote.⁹²

From Heffter, through Hofmann, to Huxley

The most critical scientific discovery in early peyote research occurred in 1897 when German pharmacologist and chemist Arthur Heffter (1859 – 1925) performed a series of experiments on himself with peyote and a selection of alkaloids he isolated from the cactus.⁹³ As a result, Heffter was the first to demonstrate that the visionary effects of peyote were produced by one particular alkaloid: mescaline. He was thus the first human to ingest pure mescaline and the discoverer of the first classical psychedelic identified by science. Mescaline remained the only psychedelic compound positively identified as psychoactive for almost half a century. After Heffter's experiments, scientific research into the chemistry of peyote began to dwindle and had effectively ground to a halt by the beginning of the twentieth century.

The field of peyote research lay mostly dormant until 1919, when the Austrian chemist Ernst Spath (1886 – 1946) became the first to synthesize mescaline. This slowly rekindled scientific interest in peyote.⁹⁴ Psychedelic research later developed into a field of its own following the discovery of the psychoactive effects of LSD in 1943 by the Swiss chemist

⁹² If rumours of the effects of peyote did circulate within the Order, then they would have almost certainly found their way to the ears of Allan Bennett, who was not only a respected senior magician in the Order, but had both a personal and professional interest in drugs and their effects. Crowley may even have encountered a reference to peyote in the writings of the English explorer and writer Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821 – 1890), who Crowley greatly admired. Burton made a brief reference to peyote in a footnote to his 1862 work describing the journey he made to find the Mormons by following the Pony Express route: 'There is another kind of cactus called by the whites "whiskey-root," and by the Indian "peioko," [i.e. peyote] used like the intoxicating mushroom of Siberia [i.e. *Amanita muscaria*].' See: Richard Burton, *The Look of the West 1860: Across the Plains to California* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), note to p. 79. This footnote of Burton's is particularly interesting because he may have been the first writer to speculate that the effects of the peyote cactus bore some resemblance to the effects of the 'fly agaric' mushroom (*Amanita muscaria*). It is also possible that Crowley read the articles by Mitchell or Ellis, although I have found no solid evidence that he did. Furthermore, peyote was at least vaguely known in some European occult circles as it is referenced in the 5 June 1898 issue of the French esoteric journal *Le Voile D'Isis: Journal Hebdomadaire D'Études Ésotériques*, edited by the Spanish-born French physician, occultist, and founder of the modern Martinist Order Gérard Encausse (1865 – 1916), also known as Papus. So perhaps Crowley or Bennett heard of peyote either directly or indirectly via *La Voile D'Isis*.

⁹³ Heffter was the first chairman of the German Society of Pharmacologists, played a pivotal role in the publication of the first *Handbook of Experimental Pharmacology*, and held positions in various universities until 1908 when he became professor of pharmacology at the University of Berlin. Bruhn and Holmstedt, 'Early Peyote Research', p. 363.

⁹⁴ Spath carried on his research with peyote and mescaline into the late-1930s, and between 1918 and 1939 he and his colleagues published nineteen papers on the chemistry of peyote. In 1927, the German neurologist and psychiatrist Kurt Berginer (1893 – 1949) published *Der Meskalrausche*. Beringer was a student of Lewin's and conducted hundreds of human trials with peyote. The following year German psychologist Heinrich Kluver (1897 – 1979) published *Mescal, the Divine Plant and Its Psychological Effects*.

Albert Hofmann (1906 – 2008).⁹⁵ Studies of peyote and mescaline then became subsumed within this new field of scientific research. The period during which peyote research lay dormant, between 1900 and 1919, is precisely when Aleister Crowley was conducting his own experiments with peyote. However, Crowley is probably not the sort of ‘enterprising experimenter’ that the ‘abstemious’ Briggs had in mind when he wrote the article that first brought peyote to the attention of modern science.

Peyote use outside its native habitat was largely unheard of in the first half of the twentieth century. One notable exception is the impromptu ‘ceremony’ held in 1914 at the Greenwich Village apartment of Mabel Dodge Luhan (1879 – 1962), a wealthy American bohemian and patroness of the arts.⁹⁶ She was persuaded to host the ceremony by the American archaeologist Mark Raymond Harrington (1882 – 1971) whom she met through Harrington’s cousin, the American journalist and anarchist Hutchins Hapgood (1869 – 1944). Harrington had discovered peyote while researching the Kiowa tribe in Oklahoma and their intention was to reproduce an authentic peyote ritual in Dodge’s apartment. Also present at the ceremony were Hapgood’s wife the American novelist and playwright Neith Boyce (1872 – 1951), the American writer and political activist Max Eastman (1883 – 1969), and Andrew Dasburg (1887 – 1979), the American modernist painter and one of the earliest exponents of cubism. The ‘experiment with consciousness’ eventually proved too much for some of the participants and one even experienced what would later become known as a ‘bad trip’.⁹⁷ Dodge was horrified by the outcome and campaigned against peyote for years; however she later had an extremely positive experience with peyote and reversed her stance. As we shall see, Crowley held similar parties between 1913 and 1917 at which many occultists, writers, and other artists were initiated into the use of peyote.

It was not until the 1950s that knowledge of mescaline and its effects reached a large audience of educated and curious Westerners. In 1953 English novelist Aldous Huxley (1894 – 1963) experimented with mescaline under the supervision of another Englishman, psychiatrist Humphry Osmond (1917 – 2004).⁹⁸ The following year Huxley published *The*

⁹⁵ For Hofmann’s own account of his discovery, see: Albert Hofmann, *LSD: My Problem Child*, trans. by Jonathan Ott (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983).

⁹⁶ See: Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p. 96. Also: Cynthia Palmer, and Michael Horowitz, *Sisters of the Extreme: Women Writing on the Drug Experience* (Rochester, VT; Park Street Press, 2000), pp. 83-84.

⁹⁷ For Dodge’s own account of the event, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 84-89.

⁹⁸ Osmond was conducting research in Canada into the apparent similarities between the effects of psychedelics and the symptoms of schizophrenia.

Doors of Perception, an account of his mescaline experience.⁹⁹ Huxley had previously written *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), a comparative study of mystical traditions, and in *Doors of Perception* he drew attention to the similarities between psychedelic experiences and mystical states of consciousness. It has been suggested in a number of works that Crowley may have introduced Huxley to mescaline in the 1930s, a possibility we shall investigate in the following chapter which examines Crowley's own experiments with peyote.

⁹⁹ This influential work is now considered a classic of psychedelic literature. Many famous writers, artists, and musicians were inspired by Huxley's work and went on to experiment with peyote and mescaline themselves, including William S. Burroughs (1914 – 1997), Alan Watts (1915 – 1973), Allen Ginsberg (1926 – 1997), and Jim Morrison (1943 – 1971).

Chapter 3 – Alchemical Experiments

As the previous chapter shows, when Crowley began experimenting with peyote in the early part of the twentieth century very little was understood about its often overwhelming effects. He was one of the first Westerners to ever experiment with the drug and, by his own admission, he was actually searching for a drug which could produce precisely those effects upon consciousness that are occasioned by peyote. Therefore, we should expect him to have quite a lot to say about peyote and its remarkable effects. One of the most intriguing things about Crowley's experiments with peyote, however, is how rarely they are explicitly referred to in his published works. In fact, the drug itself is hardly ever mentioned.

Explicit Material

The first explicit mention of the cactus appears in 'The Eyes of St. Ljubov', a short story about a beautiful young girl whose breath-taking eyes are tragically torn from their sockets and stolen.¹⁰⁰ This strange tale is attributed to J.F.C. Fuller (1878 – 1966) and George Raffalovich (1880 – 1958), and appeared in *The Equinox* (1.4) of 1910. Immediately after Ljubov loses her eyes, the narrative is abruptly interrupted by a curious diversion:

[...] what need is there for me to think, to fathom the depths of childish or human sorrow, to send my brains into a tiring process of elucidation? Far more pleasant it is to remain a contemplative individual. Therefore, O Mexican Gaucho, pass me thy pellote pouch and let me take a helping of the leaves and root of thy wonderful mescal plant. And without thought and without fatigue, I can then *SEE*.¹⁰¹

The narrative then returns at once to the story of Ljubov's life without eyes. It is an unusual tale which, apart from the above excerpt, has apparently nothing to do with peyote.

The next explicit mention of peyote occurs in *The Equinox* (3.1) of 1919. Listed among the 'principal items' to be published in the forthcoming issues of the journal is the following tantalising entry:

Liber CMXXXIV [934]. The Cactus. An elaborate study of the psychological effects produced by Anhalonium Lewinii (Mescal Buttons) [i.e. peyote],

¹⁰⁰ J.F.C. Fuller and George Raffalovich 'The Eyes of St. Ljubov', in *Equinox*, 1.4 (1910), 293-309.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 299.

compiled from the actual records of some hundreds of experiments; with an explanatory essay.¹⁰²

Crowley wrote similar studies on the use and effects of both hashish and ether, but unfortunately this work about peyote seems to have never been written.¹⁰³ In 1928 Crowley wrote to his close friend and student, the English writer Gerald Joseph Yorke (1901 – 1983), saying:

‘The Cactus’ was never written. What existed was a package containing something like 100 records of people who ... experimented with anhalonium lewinii [i.e. peyote].¹⁰⁴

Apparently these ‘records’ were destroyed by British Customs during the 1920s.¹⁰⁵

Crowley also mentioned peyote in his autobiography, the first two volumes of which were published in 1929. Its name appears in a discussion about the possibility of devising some ‘pharmaceutical, electrical or surgical method of inducing Samadhi’, although the reference merely credits peyote with producing ‘hallucinations of colour’.¹⁰⁶ In the same work he described a 1915 trip to Detroit where he visited the Parke-Davis company and was given a tour of their ‘wonderful chemical works’. According to Crowley:

[Parke-Davis] were kind enough to interest themselves in my researches in Anhalonium Lewinii [i.e. peyote] and made me some special preparations on the lines indicated by my experience which proved greatly superior to previous preparations.¹⁰⁷

He does not provide any details about this ‘superior’ preparation however, nor does he explain how he developed a relationship with the company.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Aleister Crowley, *Equinox*, 3.1 (1919), p. 16.

¹⁰³ See: Crowley, ‘The Psychology of Hashish’; and, Aleister Crowley, ‘Ethyl Oxide’ (1923), made available by United States Grand Lodge of *Ordo Templi Orientis* at <http://lib.oto-usa.org/crowley/essays/ethyl-oxide.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Crowley, *Magick*, p. 753. This excerpt appears in the Editor’s Notes to the most recent edition of *Magick*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 768.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

¹⁰⁸ It is possible that Crowley’s contact in the company was Dr. Cedric Putnam Sibley (b. 1886), a surgeon born in Bennington, Vermont, who once worked for Parke-Davis in Detroit. Sibley was a mason who affiliated with *Ordo Templi Orientis* (OTO) in 1919. Kaczyński, *Perdurabo*, pp. 345-346.

The final explicit mention of peyote occurs in *Little Essays Toward Truth* (1938). In the chapter 'Laughter', Crowley states that peyote and cannabis, which he describes as drugs that 'loosen the girders of the soul which give her breathing', both 'cause immediate laughter as one of their most characteristic effects'.¹⁰⁹

These references provide some information about Crowley's experiments with peyote, but not much. For instance, he was definitely aware of peyote's Mexican origins and knew it was colloquially referred to as 'pellote', 'mescal', and 'mescal buttons'. He also claimed to have conducted hundreds of experiments with it, although he never published their details. He supposedly planned to write an article about peyote and its effects, but this never materialised. He also developed a relationship with the Parke-Davis company who apparently furnished him a customized preparation of peyote. These are interesting pieces of information but, all things considered, this is a relatively disappointing find.

We learn nothing from these excerpts about Crowley's own experiences with peyote; nor do we learn how he discovered it despite its obscurity, nor how he obtained it despite its rarity. Similarly, we learn nothing about the particular forms of magick that Crowley combined peyote with. There is also barely any information about peyote's characteristically startling effects. The most we can say is that he knew it alleviated fatigue, altered consciousness, caused laughter, and produced visions (which he called 'hallucinations'). The absence of any further comment is very surprising since every previous experimenter with peyote was overwhelmed and astonished by its effects, and many were inspired to write detailed accounts of their experiences.

The majority of the earliest experimenters with peyote had extensive pharmacological and toxicological expertise, and they all considered peyote a most remarkable drug. The visions it produced made a profound impact upon many, and those with literary skill wrote elaborate accounts of their visions. W.B. Yeats, for example, was already 'very familiar with vision-producing drugs and processes', and he found peyote more conducive to the production of visions than hashish. Some early experimenters even experienced the religious ecstasy prized by native peyotists, while others were absolutely convinced they would die. Whereas Aleister Crowley, the poet-prophet who was searching for a religious intoxicant and a visionary chemical agent, had little more to report about peyote other than it causes

¹⁰⁹ Aleister Crowley, *Little Essays Toward Truth* (Scottsdale, AZ: New Falcon Publications, 1991), pp. 38-39.

hallucinations and the giggles. Something about this does not ring true. Crowley's experiments with peyote and his opinions about its effects are conspicuously absent from his published works. If we are to discover them, we must look further than the explicit references to the drug in his published works and examine evidence that only came to light posthumously.¹¹⁰

The Experiments of 1907

The earliest mention of peyote in Crowley's private diaries appears on Tuesday, 12 March 1907. It records Crowley's first experiment with the Parke-Davis fluid extract. It is worth quoting the relevant parts of this particular entry in full as it nicely illustrates his experimental technique:

At 10 P.M., about, the *minimum* dose of F.E. Anhalonium Lewinii [i.e. fluid extract of peyote] being 2 drops, took 1 drop only. [...] Before taking drug, I note my physical condition excellent, my mental depressed from not being able to write what I want to, my magical exalted and on the verge of Samadhi. [...]

10.15. As stated opposite, took 1 drop A.L. [peyote] in a good deal of warm water. The taste is not unpleasant; it is very strangely reminiscent of the tea of Yunan, as there prepared and drunk. I proceed to A.∴I.∴ [Augoeides Invocation]

10.35. am busying myself with colour-thoughts of divine nature; and the A.L. [peyote] having produced no perceptible result whatever, took 1 drop more [total: 2 drops].

10.55. Still no apparent result. Took 2 drops [total: 4]. Possibly the violet centres are stimulated. I see the flame of a match with green, blue and violet at its edge. Probably this is mere Pratyahara resulting from intention to attain. Closing the eyes produces no result.

11.07. Striking the magic Bell, closed eyes; I saw an opalescent light, not well marked. Further, I had seen some fine opal. matrix in Bond St. a few hours earlier.

11.27. Have made and drunk much tea. No symptom whatever from the A.L. [peyote]

¹¹⁰ Crowley kept extensive personal diaries throughout his life. He recorded many details of his daily life in these diaries: from the food he ate, to the people he met, even down to the regularity and consistency of his bowel movements. He also recorded detailed accounts of his magical ceremonies in his 'magical diaries'. Most of this material was only published after his death and a number of these diaries contain references to peyote. Furthermore, Crowley wrote annotations in his personal copies of his works, and some of these annotations demonstrate that he occasionally made veiled allusions to peyote in his writings.

11.30. Took 3 drops more [total: 7].

11.50. No symptoms. Took 3 drops more. 10 drops in all. This being maximum dose mentioned on label, will take no more. [...]

[00:15am, Wednesday, March 13th]

Concentration not interfered with by drug. Maybe one gets occasional brilliant pictures with eyes shut; but it is not enough to record. I could get as good with plain expectation. Am apparently very sleepy. Pupils certainly not dilated. Eyes bloodshot, which is no surprise, after staring hard at the electric globe for over 10 minutes. [...]

12.30 A.M. Went astral tour – no colour effects to speak of.

9.30 A.M. Nothing whatever unusual.¹¹¹

Three nights later, Crowley ingested 28 drops at incremental doses between 9.15pm and 11.03pm.¹¹² His notes for the experiment are minimal: he merely records that the dose produced no clear result, except a slight discomfort in his stomach, but he ‘felt as if near something’. The next record of a peyote experiment occurs five weeks later.¹¹³ The entry states that the last experiment proved ‘useless’, so he ingested 30 drops in a single dose at 4.15pm. Two hours later he attempted a ‘prolonged meditation’ but nothing came of it so he abandoned the attempt. An entry at 2.20am, ten hours after he ingested the 30 drops, states that Crowley was suffering from insomnia and headache, and he wondered if this was due to the drug.¹¹⁴

Crowley seemed unimpressed with the results of these experiments. Nevertheless, these entries contain valuable information about his experimental methodology for testing drug effects. Crowley clearly followed a systematic method to determine an adequate dosage of drugs.¹¹⁵ He recorded various parameters of the experiment such as his physical, mental,

¹¹¹ Aleister Crowley, ‘Diary 1906 e.v. to 1907 e.v.’, in *The Equinox Vol V No. 4: Sex and Religion*, ed. by Marcelo Ramos Motta (Nashville, TN: Thelema Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 70-166 (pp. 115-117).

¹¹² Ibid., p. 117.

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 126-127.

¹¹⁴ There is an entry for 23 November 1907 which states: ‘A.L. in town. Met A.K.J.’; see *ibid.*, p. 162. This is possibly a reference to peyote, but the context does not make that clear. Also, I have been unable to discover who, or what, ‘A.K.J.’ refers to.

¹¹⁵ He began experimenting with half the minimum dosage and took extra drops at intervals averaging roughly twenty minutes if the drug effects had not manifested. He also slightly increased the dosage at every second interval. He terminated his first experiment when he reached the maximum stated dosage (10 drops). He began his second experiment with four drops and stopped when he reached nearly three times the maximum dosage (28 drops). Since this also produced no effect, he began his next experiment with roughly the same total dosage of his previous experiment (30 drops), but this time all at once rather than incrementally over a prolonged period. This was the ‘old Chancery Lane rule’ in action: ‘begin with half the minimum dose of the

emotional, and spiritual states at the time of ingestion. He experimented with invocation, prayer, astral projection, and prolonged meditation as a way of testing drug effects. He paid close attention to any visual effects that might have been produced by the drug, including the colours of his astral visions: this suggests he was already aware of peyote's visionary powers. The record of his first experiment even tells us where he bought his fluid extract.

Crowley said he had been on Bond St. earlier that same day which was the location of Lowe and Co., the pharmacy run by his friend Edward Whineray (1861 – 1924), an English chemist.¹¹⁶ *The Equinox* even carried an advertisement for Whineray's store:

Messrs. Lowe and Co., 8 Stafford Street, Bond Street, beg to announce that they have been entrusted for twelve years past with the preparation of the oils, perfumes, unguents, essences, incenses, and other chemical products useful to members of all the lesser grades of the A.:A.:¹¹⁷

Crowley bought his own incense- and perfume-making supplies from Whineray for many years, presumably in addition to 'other chemical products' such as cannabis and fluid extract of peyote.

The Drug that Giveth Strange Vision

Towards the end of 1908, Crowley wrote 'The Drug', a short story published anonymously the following year in *The Idler* magazine.¹¹⁸ The narrator describes an eventful visit to the house of a 'quiet friend' one Sunday afternoon during which he discovered that his friend

Pharmacopoeia, and if nothing happens within the expected time, double the dose. If you go on long enough, something is nearly sure to happen!' Crowley, 'Psychology of Hashish', p. 40.

¹¹⁶ Whineray was an apprentice of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and helped found the Chemists' Assistants' Union. When Crowley met him, Whineray was the managing director of W.E. Lowe Co. Ltd. and had quite a distinguished clientele. Apparently Whineray supplied a range of different drugs to London's upper-class, including many high-society ladies who had acquired a secret taste for morphine. He was therefore the keeper of secrets for a number of London's elite. According to Crowley, Whineray was the inspiration for the chemist who secretly dispensed morphine to society ladies in the novel *Felix* (1902) by the English satirist Robert Smythe Hichens (1864 – 1950). Whineray also had with an interest in occultism and made two contributions to *The Equinox*. He published an article on the chemistry and history of cannabis (primarily a digest of several previously published articles by other authors), and wrote a review of a pharmaceutical history book, *Chronicles of Pharmacy* (1910) by A.C. Wooton. In his review he wrote: 'To the student of the occult it ought to appeal strongly, as the author gives a long list of drugs used in religious ceremonies in different ages [...]. Mention is also made of the preparations made by the ancient alchemists which were thought to have magic power.' See: E. Whineray, 'The Herb Dangerous: Part I – A Pharmaceutical Study', in *The Equinox*, 1.1 (1909), 233-255; and 'The Big Stick', *The Equinox*, 1.6 (1911), 170.

¹¹⁷ This advertisement appeared in four issues: *Equinox*, 1.3-6 (1910-1911).

¹¹⁸ Aleister Crowley, 'The Drug', in *The Drug and Other Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2010), pp. 77-83.

operated a secret alchemical laboratory.¹¹⁹ By various occult means, his friend had created a mysterious ‘liquor’, which he described as ‘the drug that giveth strange vision’. The alchemist offered the narrator a sample of the strange-looking potion. Upon sampling the drug, the narrator is plunged into an intense series of visions and experiences a profound spiritual transformation. Throughout his ‘trip’, the narrator is alternately elevated to celestial heights of spiritual ecstasy and plunged into the abysmal depths of madness and depression, and is regularly assaulted by the question ‘Am I insane?’ Although the drug itself is never named in the text, both the transformations of consciousness and the visions described are extremely suggestive of a classical (or serotonergic) psychedelic; therefore, the effects of peyote are almost certainly the inspiration behind ‘The Drug’. In fact, the experience described in ‘The Drug’ would not look out of place alongside accounts of psychedelic experiences written after the 1950s. So although ‘The Drug’ is not the first autobiographical account of a peyote experience ever published, it is the first published account to place such a strong emphasis upon the entheogenic and spiritually transformative effects of the drug (or, indeed, any psychedelic).

Clearly then at some point between his early experiments of 1907 and the writing of ‘The Drug’ in late 1908, Crowley had discovered a dosage of fluid extract of peyote with a high enough concentration of mescaline to produce its characteristic visionary and entheogenic effects. This semi-autobiographical account, probably a digest of several peyote experiences, suggests that Crowley was genuinely awed and terrified by the intensity of psychedelic doses of peyote. So apparently Crowley discovered its entheogenic effects and decided to publicise this ‘tiny seed-fact’ in an anonymous work of ‘occult fiction’. This was a traditional technique used by occultists to publish ‘secrets’ about drugs; indeed, by his own admission, occult fiction is where he first encountered that same ‘seed-fact’ himself.¹²⁰

Crowley continued to associate peyote with visions in his writings. Its visionary effects are mentioned in *Liber 777*, a reference work of practical ceremonial magic published anonymously the same year as ‘The Drug’.¹²¹ *Liber 777* contains page upon page of magical, mystical, and religious correspondences tabulated according to the qabalistic framework of

¹¹⁹ Given what is known of Crowley’s autobiography, the ‘quiet friend’ is probably a fictionalized amalgamation of Allan Bennett and Edward Whineray.

¹²⁰ See Chapter 1 of the present work.

¹²¹ Aleister Crowley, *Liber 777 vel Prolegomena Symbolica Ad Systemam Sceptico-Mysticæ Viæ Explicandæ, Fundamentum Hieroglyphicum Sanctissimorum Scientiæ Summæ*, in *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings of Aleister Crowley*, ed. by Israel Regardie (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1986).

the Golden Dawn.¹²² Peyote appears in the columns ‘Plants, Real and Imaginary’ and ‘Vegetable Drugs’.¹²³ Crowley’s annotations to these entries state that it has two distinct types of action: producing either ‘voluptuous visions’ of ‘very varied and brilliant colour’ or conferring ‘the power of self-analysis’.¹²⁴

In 1918, Crowley wrote a series of epistles to Charles Stansfeld Jones (1886 – 1950), also known as Frater Achad, which also refer to the visionary effects of peyote. This work was published after Crowley’s death as *Liber Aleph: The Book of Wisdom or Folly*.¹²⁵ Peyote is mentioned in two chapters of *Liber Aleph*: Chapter 21 ‘On Diseases of the Blood’ and Chapter 93 ‘On Chemical Agents According to the Four Elements’.¹²⁶ The first credits peyote with producing ‘Ecstasy of colour and what not’, while the second attributes both hashish and peyote to the element of water since ‘they make Images, and they open the hidden Springs of Pleasure and of Beauty.’¹²⁷

Hundreds of Experiments

The announcement of *Liber 934 – The Cactus in Equinox* (3.1), Crowley’s planned but unwritten work on peyote, mentioned ‘hundreds of experiments’ but provided no specific details about them. However, Crowley’s letter to Gerald Yorke in 1928 stated that there once existed around 100 individual records of these experiments. Crowley also mentioned in *Confessions* that Parke-Davis took an interest in his ‘researches’, but again the specifics were left unsaid. The experiments are referred to in a marginal note Crowley made to his own copy of his novel *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (1922):

Anhalonium Lewinii [i.e. peyote] ... I made many experiments on people with this drug in 1910, and subsequent years.¹²⁸

¹²² The purpose of the work is to help ceremonial magicians construct coherent personal rituals. By consulting the correspondences which relate to the particular goals of a magical ceremony, and then arranging and organising the symbolism of the ritual according to the given correspondences, every aspect of the ritual will continually draw the attention of the magician to the desired objective of the ceremony. Accordingly, the specific intent of the magician is concentrated and reinforced.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 10 and p. 13.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 97 and p. 122.

¹²⁵ *Liber Aleph*, technically titled *Liber Aleph Vel CXI: The Book of Wisdom or Folly, in the Form an Epistle of 666, the Great Wild Beast to His Son 777*, was first published in 1961.

¹²⁶ Aleister Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, p. 21 and p. 93.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, p. 609. The annotation is to the reference to peyote in: Aleister Crowley, *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (Boston, MA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2004), p. 34.

So Crowley's experiments with peyote on others apparently began around 1910, the year he wrote 'The Rites of Eleusis'.¹²⁹ The Rites consists of a series of seven magical ceremonies, each corresponding to one of the seven classical planets of ancient astrology. The Rites were staged publicly at Caxton Hall in London in October and November of that year. The prototype for the seven Rites of Eleusis was a ritual called the Rite of Artemis.¹³⁰ Audience members at a semi-private performance of the Rite of Artemis were given a strange ceremonial brew to drink in 'the Cup of Libation': a cocktail of fruit juices infused with peyote.¹³¹ This was perhaps the first time, but certainly not the last, that Crowley introduced peyote to individuals who were not his magical students. In a manuscript note to 'The Rites of Eleusis', Crowley wrote that his peyote experiments had directly inspired the Rites:

The idea of general 'rites' developed during this summer [of 1910] from the casual rituals adopted during the *Anhalonium* [peyote] experiment. When L[eila] W[addell] and I played and read poetry against each other before the Lord, we got such wonderful spiritual results that we tried to reduce all to a rule.¹³²

In other words, the Rite of Artemis and the 'casual rituals' that inspired it were, among other things, deliberate experiments in group ceremonial intoxication using peyote. The ritual pattern of these peyote ceremonies became the basis for the Rites of Eleusis; however, when Crowley wrote publicly about his inspiration for the Rites at the time, this important piece of information about peyote was left unsaid.¹³³

William Arthur Hans Bernhard-Smith (1868 – 1928), a botanist and expert in poisonous plants, wrote the short article 'A Note on the Action of Mescal', published in the *British Medical Journal* of June 1913.¹³⁴ He said:

¹²⁹ Aleister Crowley, 'The Rites of Eleusis', in *Equinox*, 1.6 (1911), Special Supplement. This 'Special Supplement' appears after the conclusion of the usual pagination at p. 170.

¹³⁰ The Rite of Artemis and the Rites of Eleusis were experiments in developing a general ceremonial formula based on methods Crowley had employed in a ritual known as 'The Bartzabel Working' on 9 May 1910, which took place in the Dorset home of a student. The Bartzabel ritual was itself an adaptation of an innovative method of evocation that he had previously used in the Algerian desert in November 1909. Less than a fortnight after the Bartzabel operation, and perhaps seeking inspiration for the 'general Rites', Crowley visited Venice where he ingested peyote, wandered around, took a trip in a gondola, and had a homosexual encounter. Aleister Crowley, *The Vision & the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers: The Collected Diaries of Aleister Crowley 1909-1914 E.V.*, with Victor B. Neuburg and Mary Desti (Boston, MA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1998), pp. 421-422.

¹³¹ The Rite of Artemis was later adapted into the Rite of Luna. Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, pp. 218-219.

¹³² Crowley, *The Vision & the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers*, p. 259.

¹³³ Aleister Crowley, 'The Rites of Eleusis: Their Origin and Meaning', *The Bystander*, 23 November 1910.

¹³⁴ Bernhard-Smith, 'A Note on the Action of Mescal', in *The British Medical Journal*, 2.2740 (1913), 21. Arthur Bernhard-Smith also wrote one of the first ever botanical catalogues of poisonous plants, including

Some years ago I carried out a series of personal experiments, in conjunction with Dr. Havelock Ellis, on the effects of the reputed deliriant mescal (*Anhalonium lewinii*) [i.e. peyote], making use of a strong infusion of the seeds [sic] or ‘buttons’ of the plant; but, in my own case, with entirely negative results. The full dose of the fluid extract of anhalonium (Parke, Davis, and Co.) is given in the *Extra Pharmacopoeia* as ℥x [ten drops]. I recently swallowed ℥l [fifty drops] diluted, on an empty stomach, but again with negative results. However, acting on the advice of a literary acquaintance, a latter-day magician well known in the West End of London, who claims to have administered this form of the drug to hundreds of his clients, I proceeded to a dose of ℥c [one hundred drops].¹³⁵

The ‘latter-day magician’ who ‘administered this form of the drug to hundreds of his clients’ can only be a reference to Aleister Crowley. Bernhard-Smith’s article contains a very useful piece of historical information regarding Crowley’s dosage: he recommended a single dose of 100 drops of fluid extract on an empty stomach as sufficient to produce noticeable effects. Given the effects Bernhard-Smith goes on to describe, we can infer that 100 drops of Parke-Davis fluid extract contained a threshold dose of mescaline: enough to induce the characteristic symptoms of peyote intoxication, without causing intense visions or overwhelming psychedelic effects.¹³⁶

Between 1913 and 1917, Crowley hosted ‘anhalonium parties’ in London and New York.¹³⁷ At these parties, many figures from the occult and literary circles he moved in were initiated into the use of peyote. Two notable individuals who attended these gatherings were

peyote: *Poisonous Plants of All Countries* (First Edition, 1905; Second Edition, 1923). He was also the ‘House-Surgeon’ of the English surgeon and pioneer of antiseptic surgery Lord Joseph Lister (1827 – 1912). Crowley once met Lord Lister in 1892 on a trip to Skye with his mother when he was almost seventeen years old. At the time, he was only mildly interested in hill-walking and it was Lister who arranged for Crowley to join some ‘real climbers’ on an expedition the following day. It was then that Crowley realized there was more to climbing ‘than scrambling’. See: Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 88. An obituary for Arthur’s wife, Molly Bernhard-Smith (? – 1969), an English painter and the owner of several London art galleries, states that she was ‘a Bohemian who hated restriction’ and associated with many artists and literary figures, including the English novelist Christopher Isherwood (1904 – 1986) and the English playwright and critic Clifford Bax (1886 – 1962). Crowley also knew both Isherwood and Bax, and moved in similar artistic circles. This perhaps explains how Bernhard-Smith made Crowley’s acquaintance.

¹³⁵ Bernhard-Smith goes on to describe the physiological and psychological effects he experienced: breathlessness, headache, intermittent spasms in the extremities, a ‘sensation of general *bien aise* [i.e. satisfaction]’, and ‘a sense of egotistical concentration, together with a delightful feeling of irresponsibility towards one’s surroundings’ which lasted eleven hours. He also noted the absence of ‘spectral illusions’.

¹³⁶ This explains the underwhelming results of Crowley’s experiments of March and April 1907 when he ingested 10, 28, and 30 drops. These dosages were clearly insufficient to produce psychedelic effects.

¹³⁷ Similar to Dodge’s ‘impromptu’ ceremony of 1914 in New York.

New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield (1888 – 1923) and American writer Theodore Dreiser (1871 – 1945).¹³⁸ Crowley's close personal friend and literary executor, the English writer Louis Umfreville Wilkinson (1881 – 1966), wrote an account of a party Dreiser attended:

'It will take treble the usual dose to move Dreiser,' said Crowley as he prepared it for him. Dreiser, none the less, drank his glass of 'the mixture' at one gulp, with determined bravado. Then he felt a little uneasy. He asked Crowley if there was a good doctor in the neighbourhood, 'just in case anything goes wrong.' 'I don't know about a doctor,' said Crowley, 'but,' he added in a tone of genial reassurance, 'there's a first-class undertaker on the corner of Thirty-third Street and Sixth Avenue.'¹³⁹

Dreiser was unimpressed by the joke. According to Wilkinson, Dreiser waxed eloquently under the influence of peyote, as an unnamed 'little English actor' lay on a bed above which was inscribed 'Jesus Wept' while vomiting into a basin. Wilkinson also tried peyote at these parties, and wrote:

[It] makes you see visions in bright colours: its effects are surprising and exciting, but I found it made me feel sick afterwards so I took it only two or three times.¹⁴⁰

The Elixir

Crowley's essay 'Energized Enthusiasm: A Note on Theurgy', published in *The Equinox* (1.9), describes the theory and practice of invocatory magick.¹⁴¹ It outlines three traditional techniques of arousing ceremonial ecstasy: 'Dionysus, Aphrodite, and Apollo' or 'wine, woman, and song'. This phrase is often re-cast in a more contemporary and gender-neutral form as: 'sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll'. In the essay, Crowley mentions that if desired the use of wine may be substituted for 'the elixir introduced by me to Europe'.¹⁴² An annotation to

¹³⁸ Kaczynski states that 'accounts vary as to whether [Mansfield was given] hashish or Crowley's favourite hallucinogen, *Anhalonium Lewinii*'. The two descriptions of her experience that he cites, combined with what is known about the extent of Crowley's experimentation with peyote at this time, suggest that it was in fact peyote. For Mansfield, see: Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, pp. 258-259; for Dreiser, see: *ibid.*, p. 315.

¹³⁹ Louis Marlow, *Seven Friends* (London: The Richards Press, 1953), pp. 57-59. 'Louis Marlow' was Wilkinson's pen name.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁴¹ Aleister Crowley, 'Energized Enthusiasm: A Note on Theurgy', in *The Equinox*, 1.9 (1913), 17-46. The essay is in many ways a summary of theentheogenic theory at the basis of the Rites of Eleusis.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

the text, handwritten by Crowley, confirms this is a reference to peyote.¹⁴³ This statement is therefore sometimes interpreted as a claim on Crowley's part to have introduced peyote to Europe; however, we know from the previous chapter that he did not in fact introduce peyote to Europe.

Havelock Ellis, W. B. Yeats, and Arthur Symons had all experimented with peyote in England before the turn of the century. Ellis was even able to buy peyote buttons from an apothecary in London, just as Crowley was able to buy his fluid extract from Whineray. Therefore, Crowley did not introduce peyote to Europe; on the contrary, the pharmaceutical industry did, and Crowley was obviously aware of this. Therefore, the statement in 'Energized Enthusiasm' should not be read as a claim to have introduced peyote to Europe. Instead, it should probably be understood as a claim to have introduced the use of the 'elixir' to Europe, the fluid extract of peyote, since Crowley was almost certainly the first European to discover a psychedelic dosage of the Parke-Davis product.

The Peyotism of Aleister Crowley

Even if Crowley did not introduce peyote into Europe, he was certainly introducing Europe to peyote. In fact, Crowley can probably be credited with introducing the ancient religious tradition of peyotism to Europe, and he was perhaps the first person to ever cultivate a personal entheogenic practice with peyote outside of the Americas.

It is often reported that Crowley experimented with mescaline, and this is true in a sense; however, strictly speaking, it is inaccurate.¹⁴⁴ There is no documentary evidence that Crowley ever ingested pure mescaline: the evidence is only a witness to peyote use.¹⁴⁵ Peyote contains a number of alkaloids in addition to mescaline, and its effects are probably due to the combination of these alkaloids.¹⁴⁶ The Parke-Davis fluid extract was not pure mescaline.

¹⁴³ A note to this line in Crowley's own copy of *Equinox* (1.9) states: 'Anhalonium Lewinnii [sic]. The physiologically standardised preparation (Parke, Davies [sic] and Co) of Cannabis Indica is also excellent if the administration be in expert hands.' This suggests that peyote was Crowley's preferred substance for generating energized enthusiasm, although hashish was also 'excellent' if properly administered. For Crowley's annotation, see the footnote on p. 15 of the typescript version of 'Energized Enthusiasm' made available by the Ra-Hoor-Khuit Network at: http://www.rahoorkhuit.net/library/libers/pdf/lib_0811.pdf.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Churton, *The Biography*, p. 130, p. 161, p. 199, p. 230, and p. 236.

¹⁴⁵ Mescaline was first synthesized in 1919 by Ernest Spath. Arthur Heffter experimented with pure mescaline in 1897 because he isolated the alkaloid from the plant material himself. It is therefore extremely unlikely that pure mescaline would have even been available to Crowley between 1900 and 1919.

¹⁴⁶ For example, peyote seems to cause insomnia whereas pure mescaline apparently does not. See: Perrine, 'Visions of the Night', p. 13. For more on the range of alkaloids in peyote and their known effects, see: Anderson, *The Divine Cactus*, pp. 120-123.

The extract contained the same combination of alkaloids as peyote and in the same proportions as they occur in the cactus. So Crowley did experiment with mescaline, but only by virtue of the fact that it was one of a number of alkaloids contained in the peyote he ingested.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, from a strictly biochemical point of view, Crowley'sentheogenic practice is closer to native peyotism than it is to Huxley'sentheogenic use of mescaline for example. Since native peyotism is rarely conflated with the modern use of mescaline in religious studies, scholarship on Crowley should pay similar attention to the subtle differences between the two.

It has also been suggested that Crowley introduced Aldous Huxley to peyote or mescaline in 1930.¹⁴⁸ The Huxley estate explicitly denies this however:

There is no evidence to support Francis King's assertion that Aleister Crowley introduced Huxley to mescaline [sic] in Berlin in the 1920s [sic].¹⁴⁹

Although the two men definitely did meet several times in Berlin in 1930, and apparently both enjoyed each other's company, there is very little documentary evidence which describes their interactions in detail.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the possibility that Crowley discussed peyote with Huxley cannot be ruled out.¹⁵¹ Crowley introduced numerous occultists and

¹⁴⁷ Crowley was even aware of the distinction between the action of an isolated alkaloid and that of a combination of alkaloids: 'Morphine has much more direct hypnotic effect than opium; its action is speedier and more violent; but it is also a very dangerous drug, and its effects are often disastrous. The action of morphine is sensibly modified by the other twenty odd alkaloids which exist in opium.' Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Thoth: A Short Essay on the Tarot of the Egyptians* (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2008), p. 47.

¹⁴⁸ Crowley and Huxley met in Berlin in 1930 via their mutual friend John William Navin Sullivan (1886 – 1937), the English mathematician and popular science writer. Sullivan was also a friend of the famous German-born physicist Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955) and wrote some of the earliest non-technical accounts of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity in the English language. Crowley also knew Christopher Isherwood, the English novelist and a close friend of Huxley's. See: Tobias Churton, *Aleister Crowley: The Beast in Berlin* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2014), pp. 170-177.

¹⁴⁹ Aldous Huxley, *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience*, ed. by Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1999), p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Crowley, Sullivan, and Huxley dined together on 4 October 1930. Crowley believed that 'he had raised Huxley from his usual apathy'. Crowley and Huxley then spent the following day together, and Crowley found Huxley 'charming' and had 'improved on acquaintance'. Crowley wrote about Huxley in a letter to his secretary at the time Francis Israel Regardie (1907 – 1985), the English occultist and a key figure in the mid-twentieth century revival of interest in the Golden Dawn. Crowley told Regardie that he had 'a gorgeous three days with [Huxley] in Berlin', and asked him to send Huxley an astrological figure (based on Huxley's birth details) and a copy of Crowley's poetry book *Clouds without Water* (1909). After their 1930 meetings in Berlin, the two men maintained a correspondence, some of which still survives: a letter Huxley wrote to Crowley in 1932 and two postcards from Huxley dated 1933. See: *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Although there are no explicit references to peyote in *Clouds without Water*, the book contains two references to cannabis which associate it with astral projection. Interestingly, Huxley actually made a joke about astral projection in one of his postcards of 1933: apparently Crowley had extended Huxley a 'kind invitation' which Huxley said he could not accept 'for geographical reasons which I'm not yet far enough advanced in the

literary figures to its use between 1910 and 1917, and Huxley was not only a writer but was very interested in mysticism.¹⁵² Furthermore, one of Crowley's favourite writers was the English biologist and philosopher Thomas Henry Huxley (1825 – 1895), the grandfather of Aldous Huxley. It is possible then that, wishing to impress the young Huxley, Crowley mentioned his peyote experiments. Ultimately, however, unless some new evidence comes to light about these meetings, we will probably never know for certain if Crowley actually introduced Huxley to peyote.

During the early 1920s, Crowley established a commune in the small Sicilian fishing village of Cefalù. The 'Abbey of Thelema' at Cefalù was part social experiment, part monastic retreat.¹⁵³ The Cefalù period is probably the most infamous era of Crowley's life and he was heavily addicted to both cocaine and heroin at this time.¹⁵⁴ In 1922, Crowley attempted to kick his cocaine and heroin habits. He recorded the details of his attempt in a diary that remained unpublished until after his death, called *Liber 93 – The Fountain of Hyacinth*. Peyote is briefly mentioned in *Liber 93*:

[With] ether, hashish, mescal [i.e. peyote], opium-smoking and morphine, I find no tendency to habit whatever. More still, I am unable to force myself to use these drugs at all, except on the rarest occasions. Yet I have nothing but the most

Black Arts to nullify!' This suggests that they discussed astral projection in 1930, a magical practice which Crowley explicitly associated with both peyote and cannabis (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, *Clouds without Water* was written in 1908, shortly after Crowley concluded his hashish experiments, and only months before he discovered the psychedelic dosage of fluid extract that inspired 'The Drug'. It is therefore entirely possible that the two men also discussed Crowley's early experiments with both drugs. See: *ibid*, pp. 176-177; and, Aleister Crowley, *Clouds without Water* (1909), pp. 41-43 and p. 134, made available by 100th Monkey Press at: https://www.100thmonkeypress.com/biblio/acrowley/books/clouds_without_water_1909/clouds_text.pdf.

¹⁵² He introduced peyote to his students who participated in the Rite of Artemis and the rituals that inspired them, as well as the invited audience at the Rite of Artemis. He also introduced peyote to Bernhard-Smith (or at least the efficient dosage of fluid extract), Mansfield, Dreiser, Wilkinson, the unnamed 'little English actor', and whoever else attended his 'anhalonium parties'.

¹⁵³ He invited students to join him there to receive magical instruction from him personally. He also advertised the Abbey as a rehabilitation centre for drug addiction. It is possible that peyote was used at Cefalù, particularly in *La Chambre des Cauchemars*. See: Gordan Djurdjevic, 'The Great Beast as a Tantric Hero', in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, pp. 107-140 (p. 123). However, I have found no solid evidence to confirm peyote was used at Cefalù, and it also seems that Parke-Davis ceased marketing their fluid extract of peyote sometime between Crowley's 1915 visit and 1920. This might explain the absence of solid evidence for its use after 1918. For example, there are no explicit references to peyote use in 'The Magical Record of the Beast', his diary for 1919 and 1920; see: Aleister Crowley, *The Magical Record of the Beast 666: The Diaries of Aleister Crowley 1914-1920*, ed. by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Duckworth, 1993), pp. 83-300. Nor are there explicit references to its use in his Tunisian diary of 1923; see: Aleister Crowley, *The Magical Diaries of Aleister Crowley*, ed. by Stephen Skinner (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1981).

¹⁵⁴ The experiments with sex and drugs that took place in the Abbey were publicised and sensationalised in a number of tabloid newspapers at the time. The tragic death of one of Crowley's young students at the Abbey, the Oxford undergraduate Charles Frederick 'Raoul' Loveday (1900 – 1923), also made headlines around the world.

pleasant and profitable experiences in connection with them. With heroin & cocaine, on the contrary, I have not much to thank them for; and there has been a good deal of annoyance connected with them. Yet it is for these and these only that I hanker.¹⁵⁵

This entry tells us a couple of things about Crowley's own use of peyote. First, he did not find it addictive, which makes sense as it is generally considered non-addictive. Second, he used it himself only rarely and when he did his experiences were both 'pleasant and profitable'. We shall now turn our attention to Crowley's own use of peyote for magick in order to discover for which particular magical practices he found peyote 'profitable'.

¹⁵⁵ Aleister Crowley, *Liber 93 – The Fountain of Hyacinth* (1922), made available by the Hermetic Library at: <http://hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib93.html>.

Chapter 4 – Magick, Strange Drugs, and Draughts of Wizard Wine

There are no explicit references relating the use of peyote to magick in Crowley's published works. The few suggestions for use which do appear are 'veiled', although Crowley often left hints nearby to point his readers in the right direction. Furthermore, there are two very important practices that Crowley himself 'profitably' employed peyote for, although we only know this from his posthumously published magical diaries.

Astral Projection

The clearest published suggestion of a magical use for peyote connects it with astral projection.¹⁵⁶ The following diary entry from 1901 was published in *The Equinox* (1.4):

[I think] Astral Projection should be preceded by a (ceremonial) 'loosening of the girders of the soul.' How to do it is the great problem. I am inclined to believe in drugs—if one only knew the right drug.¹⁵⁷

As we saw earlier, Crowley identified both cannabis and peyote as drugs which 'loosen the girders of the soul'. It is therefore no coincidence that this diary entry appears in the same issue of *The Equinox* as the final section of 'The Herb Dangerous', Crowley's four-part work on hashish.¹⁵⁸ Nor is it a coincidence that this is also the same issue which contains 'The Eyes of St. Ljubov', the short story in which peyote is explicitly named for the first time in Crowley's published works.¹⁵⁹ Also, in 1910 Crowley initiated the English writer and occultist Roland Meredith Starr (1890 – 1971) into the practice of astral projection by the use of peyote.¹⁶⁰ Therefore Crowley clearly considered the ceremonial use of peyote a valuable precursor to astral projection, although he never explicitly asserted this in his writings. He merely hinted in *The Equinox* that drugs might be the key to astral projection, 'if one only knew the right drug': he then helpfully included the names of two possible candidates, in

¹⁵⁶ Astral projection is the practice of wilfully dissociating consciousness from the physical body and transferring it to an 'astral double' or 'body of light'. This non-physical body then 'perceives a universe which we do not ordinarily perceive' known as 'the astral plane': a landscape beyond the normal bodily senses which the magician then observes and explores. Crowley, *Magick*, p. 242.

¹⁵⁷ Crowley, *Equinox*, 1.4 (1910), p. 117.

¹⁵⁸ 'The Herb Dangerous: Part IV – The Hasheesh Eater', *Ibid.*, pp. 241-271.

¹⁵⁹ 'The Eyes of St. Ljubov', *Ibid.*, pp. 293-309. Peyote is named on p. 299.

¹⁶⁰ Meredith Starr was the pen name of Herbert H. Close, an old friend of Crowley's student J.F.C. Fuller. Starr was a writer and poet interested in mysticism, aromatherapy, and homeopathy, and was a regular contributor to *The Occult Review*. Starr joined Crowley's A.A. in 1910, adopting the magical motto 'Superna Sequor' ('I follow heavenly things'). Starr eventually parted from Crowley, probably around the same time as Fuller, and later played a key role in introducing the Indian guru Meher Baba (1894 – 1969) to the West in the early 1930s. Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, p. 211.

addition to an advertisement for his own personal pharmacist, elsewhere in the very same issue.

Invocation

Similarly, Crowley left hints in *The Equinox* that peyote was useful for magical invocations. *The Equinox* (1.7) contains two rituals of invocation written by Crowley.¹⁶¹ These rituals, ‘Liber Nu’ and ‘Liber Had’, are supposed to invoke Nuit and Hadit, the two principal deities of Thelema.¹⁶² Amongst the various traditional magical paraphernalia listed as ‘necessary possessions’ required to invoke Nuit is an ‘elixir’. The ritual instructs the aspirant to ‘prepare an Elixir or libation as he may have wit to do’. Although the text itself does not specify that the ‘elixir’ must be intoxicating, this is almost certainly a reference to fluid extract of peyote. As we saw, Crowley alluded to the extract in ‘Energized Enthusiasm’ by the phrase ‘elixir’, which the essay says should be distributed in a ‘bowl of libation’.¹⁶³ Furthermore, in the Rite of Artemis the peyote cocktail was administered in the ‘Cup of Libation’.

‘Liber Had’, on the other hand, definitely contains an explicit reference to intoxicating drugs. In fact, ‘wine and strange drugs’ is the only entry in the list of ‘necessary possessions’ required for invoking Hadit. Although no specific drug is explicitly named in the text, it is extremely likely that peyote is first among the drugs that Crowley had in mind when he wrote this ritual. The peculiar phrase ‘wine and strange drugs’ originates in a verse of *Liber Legis*:

I am the Snake that giveth Knowledge & Delight and bright glory, and stir the hearts of men with drunkenness. To worship me take wine and strange drugs whereof I will tell my prophet, & be drunk thereof! They shall not harm ye at all. It is a lie, this folly against self. The exposure of innocence is a lie. Be strong, o man! lust, enjoy all things of sense and rapture: fear not that any God shall deny thee for this.¹⁶⁴

Crowley made several attempts to write a commentary to *Liber Legis*, but was dissatisfied with each. Nevertheless, he sometimes published portions of these commentaries. One of his

¹⁶¹ Crowley, *Equinox*, 1.7 (1912). Liber Nu, pp. 13-20; and, Liber Had, pp. 85-91.

¹⁶² Nuit is ‘the Queen of Heaven’ and the ‘Goddess of Infinite Space’; while Hadit, her divine consort, is ‘the flame that burns in every heart of man, and in the core of every star’.

¹⁶³ Crowley, *Equinox*, 1.9 (1913), p. 37.

¹⁶⁴ AL II: 22. Aleister Crowley, *The Book of the Law: Liber AL vel Legis – Centennial Edition* (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2004), p. 41.

commentaries appears in the very same issue of *The Equinox* as ‘Liber Had’.¹⁶⁵ Crowley’s comment to the above verse states:

Hadit now identifies himself with the Kundalini, the central magical force in man. This privilege of using wine and strange drugs has been confirmed; the drugs were indeed revealed.¹⁶⁶

According to Crowley, *Liber Legis* confirms that the use of ‘wine and strange drugs’ (according to knowledge and experience) is a legitimate technique of spiritual attainment in the Aeon of Horus. He asserts that Hadit, whom he identifies with both the Kundalini and the magical force in mankind, may be ritually invoked by the ceremonial use of the ‘strange drugs’ mentioned in *Liber Legis*. It also seems that by 1912 he considered the ‘strange drugs’ prophesied in *Liber Legis* to have been ‘revealed’. Given what we have already seen of Crowley’s experimentation with peyote leading up to this time, it is very likely that he intended peyote to be counted first among the ‘strange drugs’ that were ‘revealed’. Peyote was certainly the strangest drug that Crowley would ever encounter and, given that he was one of the very few people in the world who was even aware of its existence, he probably considered it a revelation. Therefore, Crowley clearly thought peyote was useful for rituals of invocation, particularly for invocations of Hadit; however, he does not explicitly state this himself in his works.¹⁶⁷

Revelatory Visions

In 1915 and 1916, Crowley began working to advance to the grade of Magus, the second grade in the Third Order of A∴A∴, and the penultimate degree of his magical system. His magical diaries from this period, known as *The Urn*, mention the Parke-Davis fluid extract of peyote.¹⁶⁸ While staying at the New Hampshire cottage of the American astrologer

¹⁶⁵ Crowley, *Equinox*, 1.7 (1912), pp. 387-400.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

¹⁶⁷ The connection between peyote and Hadit is also suggested in *Not the Life and Adventures of Sir Roger Bloxam*, a humorous novel written by Crowley in 1916 and 1917. This unpublished work contains countless veiled allusions to the homosexual escapades of Crowley’s Cambridge years. It also contains one brief reference to peyote (‘mescal’): ‘if my reader will to whirl in colour and form, let him quaff mescal to the glory of Quetzlcoatl, and it shall not fail him. Anon.’ Quetzlcoatl is the name of an ancient Mesoamerican deity, the Aztec patron god of learning, knowledge, and the priesthood. The name Quetzlcoatl means ‘winged serpent’ in the Nahuatl language of Central Mexico. Crowley also referred to Hadit as the ‘winged snake of light’. So this excerpt implies that the reader who wills to ‘whirl in colour and form’ should ingest peyote in honour of Hadit, the deity who may be worshipped and invoked by ‘strange drugs’.

¹⁶⁸ Aleister Crowley, *Liber 73 – The Urn* (1915/1916), made available by the Ra-Hoor-Khuit Network at: http://www.rahoorkhuit.net/library/libers/pdf/lib_0073.pdf.

Evangeline Adams (1868 – 1932) in the summer of 1916, Crowley used peyote to obtain visions and analyse his thought processes. Peyote is mentioned in entries from June, July, and August of that year. His entry for June 28 states:

Took 200 drops Chocolate base preparation *Anh. Lew.* [i.e. peyote]¹⁶⁹

His entry for the following morning states: ‘Colour-visions few, vague, and not very brilliant; but I had a wonderful dream.’ A month later, on July 28, he took 400 drops of the same ‘chocolate base’ preparation. Within half an hour, his eyes had dilated and he became ‘rather dazed and excited’. A little over an hour later he wrote that the effects had ‘apparently all passed off’, but ten minutes after that wrote:

Find myself highly amused, but complaining that *A.L.* [i.e. peyote] is a fraud.
Dear old symptom!¹⁷⁰

He then proceeded to analyse his thought processes. His entry for the following morning states:

Work at 8 after probably 5 ½ hours sleep. Long dreams of war and adventure, very vivid. Dose evidently inadequate to my exalted Grade!¹⁷¹

One week later, Crowley wrote:

Took 400 drops new *A.L.* [peyote] preparation as before, but will drink wine to aid it. [...] Nothing at all came of this except ‘bien-être,’ especially this day following.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Crowley, *The Urn*, p. 30. He goes on to describe his creation of a phallic effigy using a felled tree, which he proceeded to set alight. He then watched the effigy burn throughout the night. There is clearly some connection between these events and those Crowley wrote about in 1933 regarding his preparation of ‘the elixir of life, that magical draught which gives eternal youth’. He wrote: ‘I made it first when I was forty. It was done hastily and with imperfect knowledge. I took seven doses, as the first two or three had no apparent effect. The consequences were extremely violent. One day, without warning, I woke up to find that I had lost all my maturity. I became mentally and physically a stupid stripling. The only thing I could think of doing was to cut down trees! I was living in a cottage in New Hampshire; for fifteen hours a day I toiled at felling trees. I worked like a madman. No feat of strength was too great for me. These fantastic physical powers lasted for about two months, and were followed by reaction. For half a year I was in a state of lassitude. I had been playing with a dangerous recipe. Six years later I experimented again with the elixir, taking precautions to avoid such drastic results. The result was that at 47 I was as powerful an athlete as any man of 30. I still retain much of the good effect of this experiment. My intellectual activity has not only been conserved but intensified, and I am still enjoying perfect health and energy.’ See: Aleister Crowley, ‘Black Magic is Not a Myth’, *London Sunday Dispatch*, 2 July 1933.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 39.

The references to a 'new preparation' in these entries indicate Crowley was experimenting with his newly acquired extract of peyote, the 'superior' preparation he received in 1915 during his visit to the Parke-Davis factory. The entries also suggest Crowley was unimpressed with its strength; perhaps the only modification to the formula was the 'chocolate base' mentioned, presumably a measure introduced at his suggestion to improve the taste of large doses. The July entry suggests Crowley was so frequently assailed by the thought that peyote was a 'fraud' while under its influence that he considered it a typical symptom of the drug. It is also interesting that Crowley considered the apparent lack of effects due to his 'exalted Grade' rather than as indicative of a weak preparation of extract.

In 1918, Crowley retired in isolation to Esopus Island on the Hudson River.¹⁷³ The purpose of this retirement was to seal his attainment of the grade of Magus and obtain visions of his previous 'magical incarnations'. Crowley combined meditative practices with drugs, including peyote, to obtain these visions. The operations recorded in *The Urn* and conducted on Esopus Island had immense initiatory significance for Crowley. They related to his advancement through the grades of the highest levels of the A∴A∴ system. He considered the visions he obtained to be 'revelatory' with respect to both his personal 'karma' and his prophetic mission. So although Crowley often publicly referred to peyote visions as 'hallucinations', it is clear from his own use of the drug that he considered them much more than that. Furthermore, the advertisement published in *The Equinox* for Whineray's pharmacy stated that the 'other chemical products' sold there were primarily 'useful to members of all the lesser grades of the A∴A∴'. Nevertheless, Crowley obviously found that they were useful to members of the highest grades of A∴A∴ also. Therefore, Crowley considered peyote a useful drug for obtaining visions of initiatory importance, although he does not say this explicitly in his published works.

¹⁷³ Kaczyinski, *Perdurabo*, pp. 330-331.

Praeterhuman Communications

At several key points during his occult career, Crowley conducted magical ceremonies to contact discarnate intelligences, or spiritual guides.¹⁷⁴ In operations of this sort, Crowley would attempt to communicate with the intelligence via the medium-ship of a clairvoyant (or ‘seer’) who was usually, but not invariably, a female and his lover at the time. Typically both Crowley and the seer would exalt their consciousnesses through an intense combination of ceremonial magic, liberal doses of psychoactive drugs, and ritualistic sex performed to the point of physical exhaustion. The seer would then attempt to ‘scry’, or explore the visionary state, and relay to Crowley the messages conveyed by the intelligences. Crowley would then employ various forms of magical ‘testing’ to ensure that the invoked intelligence was both friendly and in possession of knowledge and power beyond normal human capacities. The methods Crowley used to test the entities were based on the techniques he had employed in 1904 when he established contact with Aiwass through the medium-ship of his wife Rose.

Towards the end of 1911 Crowley conducted magical operations to communicate with another discarnate intelligence. This time the entity was named Abuldiz and the seer was Mary Desti Sturges (1871 – 1931). Like Aiwass, Abuldiz commanded Crowley to write a

¹⁷⁴ Crowley referred to ‘discarnate intelligences’ like Aiwass, Abuldiz, Amalantrah, and ‘the Secret Chiefs’ as ‘praeter-human’, which means ‘beyond-human’ or ‘more-than-human’. He referred to Aiwass as ‘both more than human, and other than human’. Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, p. 302. He depicted them as entities ‘whose nature it would be hard to define, but who are at the very least endowed with knowledge and power far beyond anything that we are accustomed to regard as proper to the human race’ (Ibid., p. 66). He asserted that: ‘My observation of the Universe convinces me that there are beings of intelligence and power of a far higher quality than anything we can conceive of as human; that they are not necessarily based on the cerebral and nervous structures that we know; and that the one and only chance for mankind to advance as a whole is for individuals to make contact with such Beings’ (Ibid., p. 217). Crowley, therefore, conceived of these entities as ‘more-than-human’: outside the current explanatory scope of the natural sciences, but nevertheless entirely natural. Pasi has argued that Crowley found an ‘unexpected and unavoidable obstacle in the religious revelation of Thelema’ and claims that Crowley’s depiction of Aiwass prevents him from going ‘all the way down to a complete naturalization and psychologization of magic’. See: Marco Pasi, ‘Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley’s Views on Occult Practice’, in *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 6.2 (2011), 123-162 (pp. 161-162). In other words, in order for the revelation of Thelema to be of universal human significance, Aiwass must be more than just a figment of Crowley’s imagination or an aspect of his personal psychology. Accordingly, Crowley was forced to abandon his early psychologically reductive interpretation of occult phenomena. Pasi then concludes that Crowley is committed to ‘a more traditional view of preternatural reality’ and a belief in ‘preternatural entities’ (Ibid., p. 127, and p. 162). However, Crowley never described Aiwass (or Abuldiz or Amalantrah or the Secret Chiefs) as either ‘preternatural’ or ‘supernatural’: he consistently called them ‘praeterhuman’. They are ‘beyond-human’, but they are not ‘beyond-natural’. In fact, he continually stresses that they are natural entities, albeit entities of a kind presently not understood by the natural sciences. For Crowley, they are parts of the natural universe, rather than intrusions into the universe by something from beyond it. Therefore, Pasi’s conclusion is false. He is correct that the revelation of Thelema prevents Crowley from positing a psychologized explanation of Aiwass, but he is incorrect when he further asserts that this means Crowley cannot posit a naturalistic explanation of Aiwass. On the contrary, Crowley’s description of Aiwass as an intelligence independent of himself, who is in some way present in the natural universe, and who possesses a ‘more-than-human’ level of knowledge and power is Crowley’s naturalistic explanation of Aiwass.

book, although this time not by dictation but a book of his own creation. It was to be a book of 'instructions for the brothers', with the title of 'ABA' and to be numbered '4'. This resulted in *Liber ABA: Book 4 – Parts I and II* (1912/1913), an important technical work outlining Crowley's personal synthesis of the philosophies and practices of both meditative yoga and ceremonial magick. At one point during the operations to contact the entity, Crowley asked Abuldiz the following question about Sturges:

Shall she be 391 (*normal*) or under C_2H_6O or 31? (Dr 4.)¹⁷⁵

This coded diary entry requires some explaining.

In order to test that the discarnate intelligences were both friendly and possessed praeterhuman knowledge and power, Crowley would ask coded questions to his seers. The codes he used combined traditional magical correspondences with his own private magical language. This ensured that the seer would be unable to consciously answer the question correctly themselves. Crowley would then evaluate the answers based on interpretations of their visions dictated by the traditional magical correspondences and private information known only to him. If the seer's visions were coherent according to these interpretations, then it ensured the entity was friendly and displayed something akin to telepathic powers. If the visions were incoherent then the magical operation was a failure, the entity was 'banished', and the ceremony concluded. His questions were simultaneously a method of obtaining information from the entity and testing its praeterhuman nature. This was apparently the method he used to test Rose's visions in Cairo when he received *Liber Legis* from Aiwass. In this question to Abuldiz, '391' means sober (or, as Crowley's annotation states, 'normal'); C_2H_6O is a molecular formula for ethanol or alcohol; while '31' was Crowley's private magical code for peyote.

The Hermetic Qabalah, an occultist variation of the Jewish Kabbalah, was a central component of Crowley's magical practice. A key part of Qabalah is the numerological practice of 'gematria'. Traditionally, the individual letters of both the Hebrew and Greek alphabets have each been associated with a numerical value. This means that every word in Hebrew and Greek has its own numerical value, which is the sum of the values of its individual letters. According to practitioners of gematria, different words which share the same value have an intrinsic underlying connection. Since the Bible is written in both

¹⁷⁵ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers*, p. 323.

Hebrew and Greek, every verse has its own numerical value, which is the sum of the values of each word in the verse. For centuries, Jewish Kabbalists and Christian Cabalists have used the technique of gematria as a method of scriptural exegesis, to analyse verses of the Old and New Testaments, and discover esoteric connections between the verses. Crowley knew peyote by the name '*anhalonium lewinii*', and the initials of this name are 'AL'. The Hebrew equivalents of the English letters 'A' and 'L' are 'Aleph' (א) and 'Lamed' (ל). According to gematria, Aleph has a value of 1, while Lamed has a value of 30. Therefore, the word 'AL' has a value of 31. Hence, Crowley encoded *anhalonium lewinii*, or 'AL', as 31.

The question to Abuldiz also says 'Dr. 4'. This has sometimes been mistakenly translated as 'Dr[ops] 4'; in other words, 4 drops of fluid extract of peyote.¹⁷⁶ However, given what we have already seen of Crowley's dosages of this product, it is extremely unlikely that this code means 4 drops. It is far more likely that it means 'Dr[ams] 4', as 4 liquid drams is the equivalent of roughly 300 drops.¹⁷⁷ Based on the information contained in Bernhard-Smith's article, this would contain around three times the threshold dose of mescaline.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, this dosage would certainly deliver powerful visions to the seer if she ingested it. Accordingly, the question to Abuldiz means: 'Shall the seer be sober or under alcohol or fluid extract of peyote? (Drams 4)'. Crowley interpreted Abuldiz's response as an indication to use alcohol, and so the following day Sturges 'excited' herself with 'half a bottle' of Pommery champagne.¹⁷⁹ What is important to note, however, is that fluid extract of peyote was on-hand to improve communications with Abuldiz, if that became necessary.

Crowley conducted a similar series of operations in 1918, this time to communicate with the Wizard Amalantrah via the medium-ship of Roddie Minor (1884 – 1979).¹⁸⁰ As with the Abuldiz operations, fluid extract of peyote was present. The record for 9 March 1918 states that the day's operations began at 9.50pm with the use of peyote. A note describes it as a 'complete failure' and peyote is described as 'a mercurial drug'. In *Liber 777*, Crowley had

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. Also, Matthew D. Rogers, 'Frenzies of the Beast: The Phaedran *Furores* in the Rites and Writings of Aleister Crowley', in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, pp. 209-225 (p. 215). Rogers also mistakenly refers to Crowley's 'peyote potion' as a 'tincture': Ibid., pp. 213-214. Crowley's peyote preparation was *not* the Parke-Davis tincture of peyote: it was their fluid extract of peyote which was approximately eight times more concentrated than the tincture (which they appear to have stopped marketing before 1900). See Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁷ 4 liquid drams is a little over 295 drops.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. previous chapter.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Aleister Crowley, *Liber 729 – The Amalantrah Working* (1918), made available by the Hermetic Library at: <http://hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib729.html>.

associated peyote with the Roman deity Mercury, the patron god of communication, divination, and trickery.¹⁸¹ Shortly after midnight, the record states:

[Minor] has been rolling about in agony. The God Mercury [i.e. the peyote] being too pure for her corrupt mind and body.

Clearly Minor had ingested a dose large enough to induce the nausea and stomach discomfort associated with peyote. Crowley apparently concurred with the standard peyotist interpretation of these symptoms: they are purgative effects indicative of a lack of physical and mental purity.

The following afternoon Crowley asked Amalantrah, 'Why doesn't 31 suit [Minor]?' Amalantrah responded with a vision Minor interpreted to mean 'I took too much'. She then states that Amalantrah instructed her to use hashish for that evening's operations. Crowley, presumably seeking confirmation via a vision, then asked:

Which this p.m., HH or 31? (i.e. which this evening, hashish or peyote?)

A vision from Amalantrah reiterated that hashish should be used. Six days later, Crowley again asked Amalantrah which drug should be used for the evening's working:

[Crowley]: 'M., B. or A.?' (Mescal, Bhang or Aethyr?) [i.e. peyote, hashish, or ether?]

[Amalantrah]: B.! (He roars with laughter.) M. is right answer.

For some reason Amalantrah found the suggestion of hashish to be simply hilarious on this occasion and replied that peyote was the 'right answer'.

There are several important pieces of information conveyed by these extracts. For example, Crowley obviously considered peyote a useful tool for contacting discarnate entities, although he never explicitly states this in his writings. When Crowley wrote autobiographical accounts of these two operations, he made no reference to peyote, or indeed to any of the other drugs used, despite the fact that they were obviously an important part of the ceremony. Also, Crowley's assertion in 'The Psychology of Hashish' that he has 'no use

¹⁸¹ Crowley, *Liber 777*, p. 10 and p. 13. Peyote is attributed to Hod, the 8th qabalistic sephira, which is also associated with the Roman god Mercury and the Greek god Hermes.

for hashish save as a preliminary demonstration that there exists another world attainable—somehow’ is plainly untrue.¹⁸²

Furthermore, as with the initiatory visions he obtained at New Hampshire in 1916, and on Esopus Island in 1918, he did not discount the value of visions simply because they were achieved through the use of a powerful psychoactive drug like peyote. Both the Abuldiz and the Amalantrah workings had immense initiatory significance for Crowley. The Abuldiz workings led to the writing of *Book 4*, the book of ‘instructions for the brothers’, and Crowley later maintained that the Amalantrah workings led to his discovery of a new magical name for himself and an important variant spelling of the name of his Holy Guardian Angel.¹⁸³

Peyote Ceremonies and Spirit Guides

From the point of view of spiritual practice, there are striking parallels between what we have seen of Crowley’s peyote use and native tribal uses of peyote. The ceremonial use of peyote in 1910 during the Rite of Artemis (and the experiments that inspired them) was led by music and rhythmic drumming, against which spiritual poetry was recited. This is very similar to the traditional rituals of North and Central American peyotists, which are also led by rhythmic drumming and sacred songs. Their goals were also similar: to generate a shared sense of divine enthusiasm among those present.

Consider Crowley’s use of peyote in 1911 and 1918 to contact spiritual entities via visionary states. As we saw in Chapter 2, visionary contact with non-human intelligences is often associated with the entheogenic use of serotonergic psychedelics, in both tribal societies and modern scientific cultures. Consider, in addition to the above, Crowley’s magical retirements of 1916 and 1918, during which he isolated himself from social interactions and used peyote to obtain visions. For Crowley, all of these visionary episodes revealed things about his destiny and sometimes brought him into contact with spiritual guides from whom he obtained important information, including new magical names. This is a strikingly similar practice to the traditional vision quests of tribal cultures, which have the goal of establishing visionary contact with spiritual guides who also often reveal a new name, and these too are sometimes facilitated by peyote.

¹⁸² Crowley, ‘Psychology of Hashish’, p. 56.

¹⁸³ See: Crowley, ‘Notes for an Astral Atlas’, in *Magick*, pp. 499-512; particularly, pp. 508-509.

Peyote and Magick

There is no doubt that peyote was an important part of Crowley's personal magick for more than a decade. Yet the number of explicit references Crowley made to peyote in his published writings may be counted on one hand. He never explicitly published any details of its intense effects, nor any suggestions about its use for particular magical practices. He wrote about some of its effects in 'The Drug', but this was anonymously published as a work of fiction and peyote is never explicitly named in the text. He made veiled allusions in his works that peyote could be profitably employed for both invocation and astral projection, but he never mentioned that he used it to obtain many of the visions that were central to his occult career after 1910. In fact, he explicitly described peyote visions as 'hallucinations' in *Confessions*. Yet we know that he put great stock in the value of his own visions, despite the fact that they were facilitated by peyote. There is therefore no doubt that Crowley deliberately downplayed the role of peyote in his personal magick after 1910. The next chapter shall investigate the possibility that Crowley had been using peyote during the most crucial era of his occult career, the period between 1900 and 1909 when he produced the core components of the scriptural canon of Thelema.

Chapter 5 – Half Known, Half Concealed

It was noted earlier that Crowley's relationship with peyote was conspicuous by its absence from his public writings; however, it has now been shown that peyote was a consistent presence in his magical ceremonies between 1910 and 1918. The degree to which Crowley consciously veiled his personal relationship with peyote invites academic comment. It is my thesis that this is indicative of a discursive strategy of legitimation on Crowley's part. In other words, since many of Crowley's religious experiences were directly tied to claims he made about his own spiritual authority, he deliberately down-played the important role played by drugs in these experiences, especially peyote. The purpose of this chapter and the one following is to investigate the extent of this strategy and to bring to light the crucial role peyote played in the revelation of Thelema.

Like most religious movements, sacred writings form the core of Thelema. The primary text in the scriptural canon of Thelema is *Liber Legis*. Of secondary importance are the visionary episodes recorded in *Liber 418*. These thirty visions were 'given' to Crowley on two separate occasions: the first two in 1900, and the remaining twenty-eight in 1909. In addition to *Liber Legis* and *Liber 418*, there is a further series of inspired texts known as *The Holy Books of Thelema*, 'received' in 1907 and 1911. According to Crowley, Thelemic scripture displays such a high degree of symbolic harmony and contains so much information unknown to him, including predictions of future events, that the possibility of conscious fraud on his part is automatically precluded.¹⁸⁴ He argued that it must have come from some intelligence other than his own: an intelligence possessing a beyond-human level of knowledge and power. He consistently disavowed personal authorship of *Liber Legis* and continually ascribed it to Aiwass. Similarly, he said the *Holy Books* of 1907 and 1911 were written by V.V.V.V.V., the 'Master of the Temple' responsible for the A∴A∴ movement.¹⁸⁵

Master of the Temple, or 'Magister Templi', is the name of the first grade in the Third Order of A∴A∴. Therefore, V.V.V.V.V. is something akin to an immaterial Secret Chief. The human Crowley was merely the 'physical vehicle' of this master, who wrote the inspired texts through Crowley's hand. Crowley designated these texts 'Class A' writings:

¹⁸⁴ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers*, p. 17.

¹⁸⁵ This magical motto means 'Vi Veri Universum Vivus Vici' (Lat. 'By the force of Truth I have conquered the Universe while living'). Crowley adopted this motto when he considered himself to have finally attained the grade of Magister Templi. Crowley, *Magick*, p. 725, n. 100.

books of which may be changed not so much as the style of a letter: that is, they represent the utterance of an Adept entirely beyond the criticism of even the Visible Head of the Organization.¹⁸⁶

In other words, the ultimate source of Class A texts is the Third Order of A.:A., the Secret Chiefs of the Great White Brotherhood. They are therefore not subject to criticism from those human individuals who are merely the material representatives of these immaterial Chiefs, including Crowley himself. We shall now investigate the role of drugs, particularly peyote, in the production of the Thelemic canon.

Blinds and Veils

In 1914, Crowley and his student Victor Benjamin Neuburg (1883 – 1940) conducted a series of experiments in Paris using the techniques of sexual magick taught by *Ordo Templi Orientis* (OTO).¹⁸⁷ The magical diary for *The Paris Working* contains a curious reference to peyote. After describing a series of particularly vivid visions, Neuburg states that ‘anhalonium [i.e. peyote] visions must be very similar’.¹⁸⁸ This implies Neuburg had never experienced peyote visions before. However, there are several pieces of evidence which demonstrate that Neuburg had definitely tried peyote by this time. He was a constant presence in Crowley’s magical circle during the peyote experiments of 1910 and an officer in the Rite of Artemis. He even compared his cannabis visions to his peyote visions during a cannabis experiment conducted in 1910.¹⁸⁹ Crowley biographer John Symonds (1914 – 2006)

¹⁸⁶ Crowley, *Equinox*, 1.10 (1913), p. 43.

¹⁸⁷ *Ordo Templi Orientis* is an initiatory co-fraternal magical order that was founded in Germany by several high-ranking Freemasons towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1912, Crowley became the head of OTO in the British Isles and then later its global leader. According to a 1912 publication by OTO: ‘Our Order possesses the Key which opens up all Masonic and Hermetic secrets, namely, the teaching of sexual magic, and this teaching explains, without exception, all the secrets of Nature, all the symbolism of Freemasonry and all systems of religion’. Quoted in: Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 150. For an overview of the history of OTO and their teachings, with further references, see: Marco Pasi, ‘Ordo Templi Orientis’, in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, pp. 898-906. For an account of the early history of OTO and its founders, with further references, see: Richard Kaczynski, *Forgotten Templars: The Untold Origins of Ordo Templi Orientis* (n.p.: Printed for the author, 2012). For a concise historical account of OTO since Crowley’s death, see: Christian Giudice, ‘Ordo Templi Orientis’, in *The Occult World*, ed. by Christopher Partridge (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 277-282. For an overview of OTO’s rituals of initiation and an analysis of their historical relationship to Freemasonic and Wiccan ceremonies, see: Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, pp. 145-168.

¹⁸⁸ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers*, p. 374.

¹⁸⁹ An unpublished diary from 4 June 1910 records an experiment which took place on a London rooftop with Victor Neuburg, Charles Stansfeld Jones, and the Australian violinist Leila ‘Laylah’ Bathurst Waddell (1880 – 1932). Dried tops of the cannabis plant were burned on charcoal and the magicians basked in the intoxicating fumes. Neuburg commented that the visual effects he experienced were different to those produced by peyote. Quoted in: Churton, *Crowley: The Biography*, pp. 153-155.

also highlights this anomaly.¹⁹⁰ He suggests it is a veil for actual peyote use during *The Paris Working* and suspects that:

[Crowley] did not want to reveal this in case anyone should think that his, and [Neuburg's], visions and conversations with gods were only mescaline dreams.¹⁹¹

It seems then that Crowley sometimes deliberately included misleading information, or 'blinds', in his magical diaries to mask ceremonial drug use. Symonds is probably correct about Crowley's reasons for doing this.¹⁹² As we have seen, Crowley himself put a lot of stock in his own peyote visions. Nevertheless, when he wrote about these visions publicly he invariably omitted the role played by peyote. Obviously he thought the average reader would dismiss them much more readily if the important role of powerful psychoactive drugs was known.

It is possible that a similar 'blind' appears in Crowley's diary for 1907, which records the beginning of his reception of the *Holy Books*. When he later described the reception of these works, he wrote:

[The] spirit came upon me and I wrote a number of books in a way which I hardly know how to describe. They were not taken from dictation like *The Book of the Law* nor were they my own composition. I cannot even call them automatic writing. I can only say that I was not wholly conscious at the time of what I was writing, and I felt that I had no right to 'change' so much as the style of a letter. They were written with the utmost rapidity without pausing for thought for a single moment, and I have not presumed to revise them. [...] The prose of these books, the chief of which are [*Liber 65* and *Liber 7*], is wholly different from anything that I have written myself. [...] I cannot doubt that these books are the work of an intelligence independent of my own.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ John Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1958), p. 119.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Rogers believes there would be 'scant reason for the record to distort Neuburg's experience'. However, he seems to have failed to appreciate the point Symonds was making and also seems unaware that there is no doubt Neuburg had already experienced peyote visions on numerous occasions before 1914. Rogers, 'Frenzies of the Beast', p. 218.

¹⁹³ Quoted in: Aleister Crowley, *The Holy Books of Thelema* (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1988), pp. xvii-xviii.

He attributed these books to an intelligence called V.V.V.V.V. and said that during their writing he had ‘a feeling that V.V.V.V.V. was in His Samadhi, and writing by my pen’.¹⁹⁴ In ‘The Temple of Solomon the King’, Fuller also described the ‘actual conditions under which [Crowley] received them’:

It appears that during the whole period of writing he was actually in Samadhi, although, strangely enough, he did not know it himself. It is a question of the transference of the Ego from the personal to the impersonal. He, the conscious human man, could not say ‘I am in Samadhi’; he was merely conscious that ‘that which was he’ was in Samadhi.¹⁹⁵

What both Crowley and Fuller omit to mention is that this was also the same period during which Crowley was experimenting with hashish to attain Samadhi. The diary entry which records the reception of *Liber 7*, the first *Holy Book* to be received in this way, states:

Tuesday 29 [October]

5.30. Took 2.5gr Cann. Ind. [i.e. hashish] before or with tea.

6.25. [...] Lit kif pipe. [i.e. his hashish pipe]

6.50. Turning to Meditation and Prayer.

7.40. Nuffin’ come of anyfink.

(This sample of Hashish was quite inert through age.)

Wednesday 30 [October]

1.30 A.M. About 11[pm] (I suppose) I began the 7fold Word [i.e. *Liber 7*] and finished the same.

Now, was this Hashish, or the Incense [...] or just a.c. [Aleister Crowley]?¹⁹⁶

There is a glaring contradiction between two of these entries: the one asserting the hashish was ‘quite inert’ and the one questioning the role of hashish in the reception of *Liber 7*. This could mean that at 7.40pm the poor results of his meditation led Crowley to believe that the hashish was inert, but by 1.30am (as a result of writing *Liber 7* in an inspired state) he realized it was not inert and wondered if it played a role in the writing of the text. It is also possible that the ‘inert’ comment was inserted as a ‘blind’ *after* Crowley had written his question about the role of the hashish. The function of this ‘blind’ would be to distance the

¹⁹⁴ Crowley, ‘Diary 1906-1907’, p. 160. Also: Crowley, *Holy Books*, p. xix.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. xviii.

¹⁹⁶ Crowley, ‘Diary 1906-1907’, p. 160.

reception of *Liber 7* in the mind of the reader from the large quantity of hashish consumed less than six hours earlier.¹⁹⁷ Whatever the case, the actual text of *Liber 7* itself states:

By the burning of the incense was the Word revealed, and by the distant drug.¹⁹⁸

Crowley began experimenting with hashish and meditation in 1906 and continued until at least the end of 1907. He was testing the possibility that hashish could facilitate the attainment of Samadhi more easily than meditation alone, as the ‘lesser Yogis’ of India claimed.¹⁹⁹ His diary entries from the time show his ambivalence about the relationship between the two. At times he seems certain that hashish can occasion a genuine Samadhi; at others he appears to doubt it; and yet at others he is unable to even clearly distinguish between the effects of his meditation and the effects of the hashish.²⁰⁰ The diary entries contain no definitive conclusions about the matter. Nevertheless, they plainly show that his hashish experiments led directly to, and even overlapped with, the Samadhi states in which he received the *Holy Books*. Yet Crowley never mentioned this in his account of their reception, nor in his article on hashish and Samadhi.²⁰¹ In fact, when the diaries from 1906 were published in *The Equinox*, all references to the hashish experiments were redacted.²⁰² So while *The Equinox* depicted Crowley’s hashish experiments and his attainment of Samadhi in October 1906 as unconnected events in his life, his un-redacted diary from the time shows that they were inextricably linked. This is another instance of Crowley veiling his use of drugs for meditation and magic, as we have seen was consistently the case with his peyotism. Nevertheless, as with his peyotism, the role of hashish is only thinly veiled. In fact, Crowley

¹⁹⁷ 2.5g of hashish is a very large dose by most standards and is the largest single dose of hashish recorded in Crowley’s diaries of 1906-1907.

¹⁹⁸ Crowley, ‘Liber VII’, in *Holy Books*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁹ Crowley, ‘Psychology of Hashish’, p. 36.

²⁰⁰ See: Crowley, ‘Diary 1906-1907’, pp. 95-99, and pp. 102-105. Sutin also draws attention to this, see: Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, pp. 173-177.

²⁰¹ Interestingly, Regardie also makes no reference to the connection between the hashish experiments and the *Holy Books* of 1907 in his article on Crowley’s hashish essays. See: Israel Regardie, ‘Roll Away the Stone: An Introduction to Aleister Crowley’s essays on the Psychology of Hashish’, in *Roll Away the Stone* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1968), pp. 3 – 65. Perhaps Regardie had never read the un-redacted diaries and simply unwittingly followed Crowley’s public narrative of events. More surprising is the fact that when Marcelo Ramos Motta (1931 – 1987) published the 1906 and 1907 diaries with his own annotations in 1981, he made no comment relating the reception of *Liber 7* to the considerable quantity of hashish ingested mere hours earlier. Similarly, in his preface to the *Holy Books* written in 1982, Hymenaeus Alpha [Grady Louis McMurtry] (1918 – 1985) makes no reference to hashish during his analysis of the reception of *Liber 7*, despite the fact that he even quotes the diary entry of 30 October 1907. McMurtry simply states that ‘all of these Holy Books were penned during high trance’. Crowley, *Holy Books*, pp. xvii-xix. Clearly some of Crowley’s followers shared his concerns and passed over the obvious hashish connection in silence; or perhaps they simply fell for the ‘blind’.

²⁰² Compare: Crowley, ‘Diary 1906-1907’, p. 90, with Crowley, *Equinox* (1.8), p. 32. Also: ‘Diary 1906-1907’, p. 94, with *Equinox* (1.8), p. 35; ‘Diary 1906-1907’, p. 95, with *Equinox* (1.8), p. 38 and p. 44.; ‘Diary 1906-1907’, p. 98, with *Equinox* (1.8), p. 45; and, ‘Diary 1906-1907’, p. 99, with *Equinox* (1.8), pp. 45-46.

left subtle hints about the connections between hashish, Samadhi, V.V.V.V.V., and the *Holy Books* in *The Book of Lies* (1913).²⁰³

Secrets and Lies

Crowley often encoded ‘secrets’ in his works. For example, he hid his own name and the name of his homosexual lover, the transvestite performer Herbert Charles Jerome Pollitt (1871 – 1942), in *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz* (1910), an anonymously published collection of homoerotic poetry.²⁰⁴ He also published a book of verse containing poems dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The work, *Amphora* (1908), was initially published anonymously but gave the ostensible impression of being the creation of a devout Roman Catholic nun. Hidden in the epilogue to the work, and revealed by reading only the first letter of each line, was the phrase: ‘The Virgin Mary I desire, but arseholes set my prick on fire’.²⁰⁵ Clearly Crowley had a habit of encoding information in his works that required both knowledge of his biography and sympathy to his sense of humour. Appreciating the joke therefore coincided with discovering the secret, and laughter was indicative of comprehension.

Similarly, Crowley had an idiosyncratic method of communicating ‘secrets’ to initiates. He combined humorous puns, numerological codes, and inter-textual allusions to point students towards layers of meaning hidden behind the symbolic veil of his texts. Regarding the use of these techniques in *The Book of Lies*, he wrote:

Sometimes the text is serious and straightforward, sometimes its obscure oracles demand deep knowledge of the Qabalah for interpretation, others contain obscure allusions, play upon words, secrets expressed in cryptogram, double or triple meanings which must be combined in order to appreciate the full flavour; others again are subtly ironical or cynical. At first sight the book is a jumble of nonsense intended to insult the reader. It requires infinite study, sympathy, intuition and initiation.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Lies* (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weister, 1981).

²⁰⁴ Kaczyński, *Perdurabo*, p. 45.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

²⁰⁶ Crowley, *Book of Lies*, pp. 5-6.

The most obvious example of this method in action is Chapter 69, ‘The Way to Succeed–And the Way to Suck Eggs’.²⁰⁷ This short chapter describes a magical ritual involving ‘the descending tongue of grace’, ‘the ascending tongue of prayer’ and ‘the Double Gift of Tongues’. His commentary to the chapter states:

The key to the understanding of this chapter is given in the number and the title, the former being intelligible to all nations who employ Arabic figures, the latter only to experts in deciphering English puns.²⁰⁸

Between the chapter number, the pun in the title (‘suck seed’), the commentary, and the references to tongues, the allusion to a magical operation involving mutual oral sex could not be more obvious. The ‘secret’ cannot truly be called ‘concealed’ in this case; rather, it is ‘veiled’, and even then only thinly, and an appreciation of the joke signifies an understanding of the chapter. There are two chapters in *The Book of Lies* that contain obvious puns on hashish and, funnily enough, both of them allude to Samadhi, V.V.V.V.V., and the *Holy Books*. They are ‘Corn Beef Hash’ and ‘Hashed Pheasant’.²⁰⁹

The chapter ‘Corn Beef Hash’ is actually about V.V.V.V.V., described in the commentary as:

[the] Master of the Temple [...] responsible for the whole of the development of the A∴A∴ movement [...]; His utterance is enshrined in the sacred writings.²¹⁰

The chapter ‘Hashed Pheasant’ concerns the ‘Shemhamphorash’, the Divine Hebrew name:

The Hebrews say that by uttering this Name the universe is destroyed. This statement means the same as that of the Hindus, that the effective utterance of the name of Shiva would cause him to awake, and so destroy the universe.²¹¹

This chapter refers to the mystical practice of destroying all thought and conscious phenomena by the vocal utterance of powerful divine words. By this method:

[No] single idea, however high, however holy (or even however insignificant!!), can escape the destruction.²¹²

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., ‘Chapter 41 – Corn Beef Hash’, pp. 92-93; and ‘Chapter 72 – Hashed Pheasant’, pp. 154-155.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 155.

It is the experience of Shivadarshana, ‘the Vision of the Destruction of the Universe, [and] the Opening of the Eye of Shiva’. In ‘The Psychology of Hashish’, Crowley described Shivadarshana as ‘Samadhi upon consciousness, Space, Nothing, and that which is neither P nor [not-P], in logical phraseology’.²¹³ He later associated this experience with the grade of Master of the Temple.²¹⁴

Crowley’s commentary to this chapter actually draws attention to the ‘intentionally blasphemous puns and colloquialisms’ on the words ‘hash’ and ‘high’.²¹⁵ Therefore, in these two short chapters, their titles, and their commentaries, Crowley used puns and inter-textual allusions to obliquely link hashish, Samadhi, V.V.V.V.V., and the *Holy Books*. This suggests that Crowley considered himself to have attained Samadhi by the use of hashish, thereby establishing contact with V.V.V.V.V., from whom he received *Liber 7* and *Liber 65*. So although Crowley veiled the important role hashish played in the inspired states of 1907, he left subtle hints in his works to point students in the right direction.

Algeria and Liber 418

In late 1909 Crowley and Neuburg went into the Algerian desert together to conduct a series of ceremonies based on the so-called ‘Enochian’ material derived from the angelic conversations of Dr. John Dee (1527 – 1608) and Edward Kelley (1555 – 1597).²¹⁶ The purpose was to enable Crowley to ‘Cross the Abyss’ which separated the Second Order of A∴A∴ from the Third Order. This would allow him to surpass the theoretical limit of the Golden Dawn system, attain the grade of Master of the Temple, and enter ‘the City of the Pyramids under the Night of Pan’ where all such Masters dwell. In order to do this, he had to ‘scry’ (or obtain visions of) the thirty ‘Enochian Aethyrs’.

²¹² Crowley, ‘Psychology of Hashish’, p. 81.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Aleister Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, p. 112.

²¹⁵ Crowley, *Book of Lies*, p. 155.

²¹⁶ Dr. John Dee was an English magician, mathematician, cryptographer, astrologer, and an advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, while the mysterious and morally ambiguous Edward Kelley was an alchemist, clairvoyant, and spirit medium. The two conducted a series of ceremonies to contact and communicate with angels, and the manuscripts they used to record their workings and results have since been adopted and adapted by many magicians and magical groups, including the Golden Dawn. Crowley encountered the Enochian material during his Golden Dawn years and later supplemented it with his own studies of Dee’s original manuscripts. For an account of the reception history of the Dee and Kelley materials, see: Egil Asprem, *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic & Modern Occulture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

To obtain the visions, Crowley exalted his consciousness by reciting the ‘The Call or Key of the Thirty Aethyrs’.²¹⁷ This Call was in a non-human language, allegedly the language of the angels that Dee and Kelley had contacted in the 16th Century. After reciting the Call, Crowley would gaze into a golden topaz stone and ‘scry’ the Aethyr:

When I say I was in any Aethyr, I simply mean in the state characteristic of, and peculiar to, its nature. [...] I would describe what I saw and repeat what I heard, and Frater O.V. [Neuburg] would write down my words and incidentally observe any phenomena which struck him as peculiar. (For instance: I would at times pass into a deep trance so that many minutes might elapse between two successive sentences.)²¹⁸

In other words, Crowley was deliberately altering his consciousness to particular discrete states and relaying the contents of his visions to Neuburg, who recorded their details. He had previously attempted to scry the thirty Aethyrs in 1900, but was only able to obtain visions of the first two because, according to him, the remaining twenty-eight were beyond his magical abilities at the time.²¹⁹

About half-way through the 1909 operation, Crowley again found it impossible to continue attaining visions. He realised that in order to continue the workings, he had to give up ‘certain conceptions of conduct’, so they performed a magical ceremony in which Crowley ‘made the most bestial blasphemy my holiest hymn’.²²⁰ They ‘erected an altar’ out of loose rocks, and Crowley ‘sacrificed’ himself upon the altar. He said

[the] fire of the all-seeing sun smote down upon the altar, consuming utterly every particle of my personality.²²¹

Although Crowley was less than explicit about the details, it is now widely thought that what actually took place was an act of sexual magic dedicated to ‘The Horned God’ Pan, in which Crowley assumed the passive role, while Neuburg was his active counterpart.²²² Crowley considered himself forever altered by the operation and afterwards he was able to proceed

²¹⁷ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers*, pp. 27-29.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 21-22.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Alex Owen, ‘The Sorcerer and His Apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the Magical Exploration of Edwardian Subjectivity’, in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, pp. 15-52 (pp. 21-22).

with the visionary workings.²²³ In the next vision, Crowley's Angel 'whispered the secret words whereby one partakes of the Mysteries of the Masters of the Temple' and showed him a vision of these Masters 'in the City of the Pyramids under the Night of Pan'. I propose that the phenomena described as the result of this ceremony, particularly the profound transformation it produced in both men, strongly suggests that fluid extract of peyote was used. Furthermore, there are subtle allusions in *The Book of Lies* that peyote combined with sex magick was the method used during this operation.

The chapter 'Sodom-Apples' mentions 'the City of the Pyramids beneath the Night of PAN' in its final paragraph, which the commentary states 'will only be understood by Masters of the Temple'.²²⁴ In a commentary to an earlier chapter, the 'Sodom-Apple' is called 'an uneatable fruit found in the desert'.²²⁵ 'Sodom-Apple' is almost certainly a coded reference to peyote, which grows in the desert, and its description as 'uneatable' is therefore both a 'cynical' joke and a 'subtly ironical' lie: this is *The Book of Lies*, after all. The name 'sodom-apple' also alludes to the act of 'sodomy' Neuburg performed upon Crowley in the desert, which he said enabled him to Cross the Abyss, enter the City of the Pyramids under the Night of Pan, and become a Master of the Temple. Furthermore, the 'Sodom-apple' is mentioned in Crowley's poem 'Lilith' included in the collection *The Winged Beetle* (1910):

Fair-seeming Sodom-apple! [...] thy kisses smote all my spine to shuddering ecstasies!²²⁶

The phenomenon described here, and even the wording of the verse, alludes to the ceremony of sex magick Crowley and Neuburg performed in 1909, and even associates it with peyote, the 'sodom-apple'.

Furthermore, consider what Symonds wrote about the 1914 workings of Crowley and Neuburg:

If Crowley was under the influence of anhalonium [peyote] during the invocations of The Paris Working, then his ecstatic trances take on a deeper shade of reality for those who are sceptical of the results of ceremonial or even

²²³ Crowley could remember nothing of his journey back to town. He said there 'was an animal in the wilderness, but it was not I'. Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers*, p. 22.

²²⁴ Crowley, *Book of Lies*, 'Chapter 67 – Sodom-Apples', pp. 144-145.

²²⁵ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

²²⁶ Aleister Crowley, 'Lilith', in *The Winged Beetle* (1910), pp. 95-96, made available by 100th Monkey Press at: https://www.100thmonkeypress.com/biblio/acrowley/books/winged_beetle_1910/winged_beetle_text.pdf.

of sexual magic alone. Indeed, this would explain the colourful nature of the visions, for this drug produces in particular hallucinations of vision [and] produces images which affect one with such force that they appear real [and] may also be accompanied by hallucinations of hearing.²²⁷

The episodes in Algeria effected a profound transformation in both men and many who knew them personally said they were never the same after the events of 1909. I propose that the intensity of these operations, the transformations they produced, and the visionary phenomena described are all indicative of the ceremonial use of fluid extract of peyote.²²⁸

Consider also that although Crowley discovered an entheogenic dosage of fluid extract in 1908, he only began experimenting with it extensively in 1910. It is possible that Crowley simply stopped experimenting with the fluid extract between 1908 and 1910. I propose, however, that his 1910 experiments were primarily inspired by the successful results produced by peyote during the 1909 workings recorded in *Liber 418*.²²⁹ It is reasonable to postulate a temporary lull in Crowley's magical experiments with the visionary peyote, but to suppose that such a lull coincided with his most important visionary magical experiment simply strains credulity.

²²⁷ Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, p. 119.

²²⁸ Interestingly, Crowley's use of Neuburg as a stenographer is exactly the method Mitchell recommended in the conclusion of his 1896 article; see Chapter 2.

²²⁹ Another important episode recorded in *Liber 418* is the vision of the 10th Aethyr and Crowley's evocation of Choronzon, the 'Demon of Dispersion' and 'the Dweller in the Abyss'. During the working, Neuburg claimed that Crowley transformed into a variety of forms, including a woman he had once loved and a naked savage who attacked him. Crowley wrote that to perform the operation, he retired to 'a secret place, where is neither sight nor hearing' and sat 'within his black robe, secretly invoking the Aethyr'. He also said: 'The greatest precautions were taken at the time, and have since been yet further fortified, to Keep Silence concerning the Rite of Evocation.' Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers*, p. 160. I propose that the ceremonial use of peyote was a component of this secret Rite of Evocation, particularly in light of the intense visionary results reported. The technique used, whereby one magician stayed inside the magic circle and evoked the entity, while the other sat inside the 'Triangle of Art' acting as the material basis in which the entity could manifest, was later adapted for use in the 1910 Evocation of Bartzabel. The results of the Bartzabel operation, and the peyote experiment in Venice a fortnight later, inspired Crowley to write the Rite of Artemis, and the more general Rites of Eleusis (see Chapter 3). Therefore, it seems that these workings, which innovatively combined traditional evocatory and invocatory techniques, evolved from the Choronzon operation, through the Bartzabel operation, to the Rite of Artemis, and resulted in the Rites of Eleusis. The general theory behind these workings is outlined in 'Energized Enthusiasm'.

Mexico and Liber 418

If we accept the likelihood that peyote was used to obtain the visions of 1909, then we should also consider the possibility that it was used to obtain the first two visions of *Liber 418* in 1900, particularly since these visions took place in Mexico. It has been suggested in a number of secondary sources that Crowley first encountered peyote during this particular Mexican trip.²³⁰ Crowley himself never mentioned peyote in his autobiographical accounts of this period.²³¹ However, something about his time there made a great impact on him:

O Mexico, my heart still throbs and burns whenever memory brings you to my mind! For many other countries I have more admiration and respect, but none of them rivals your fascination. Your climate, your customs, your people, your strange landscapes of dreamlike enchantment rekindle my boyhood.²³²

I propose that one of the Mexican ‘customs’ that he admired and respected most was the native practice of peyotism which gave him access to ‘strange landscapes of dreamlike enchantment’. As we should expect by now, there are a number of puns and inter-textual allusions in Crowley’s works which connect peyote to his Mexican trip of 1900.

The most obvious allusion is in ‘The Eyes of St. Ljubov’, that strange short story published in *Equinox* (1.4) which mentions ‘pellote’ and the ‘mescal plant’. The story of Ljubov’s eyes being forcibly removed parallels an incident Crowley witnessed while in Mexico. He wrote in his autobiography that during this trip he saw a gambler’s eyes being torn from their sockets, after which the majority of witnesses maintained an attitude of

²³⁰ See, for example, Booth, *A Magick Life*, pp. 285-286; and Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, p. 210. Nevertheless, these biographers provide no references to any primary sources which support this suggestion.

²³¹ Crowley’s ostensible reason for going to Mexico in 1900 was to climb mountains with Oscar Eckenstein (1859 – 1921). However, Crowley reached Mexico in July and Eckenstein arrived in December. It is possible Crowley went there with the intention of finding peyote, which he may have heard rumours of during his time with the Golden Dawn. In May 1900, Crowley visited Mathers in Paris. Crowley said that while he was there, Mathers ‘had two guests, members of the Order. They had just come back from Mexico. The fancy took me to go there. I wanted in particular to climb the great volcanoes.’ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 197. It seems as if these two ‘members of the Order’ told Crowley something that inspired him to go to Mexico, because he set sail only days after meeting them and arrived almost six months before his climbing partner.

²³² Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 222.

philosophical indifference.²³³ This exactly parallels the abrupt diversion in the narrative of ‘St. Ljubov’ which mentions peyote.²³⁴

Furthermore, *The Equinox* (1.1) contains a work called ‘The Chymical Jousting of Frater Perardua’.²³⁵ This short work was later given the technical title ‘Liber LV’ and was described as ‘An account of the Magical and Mystic Path in the language of Alchemy’.²³⁶ Behind the grandiose alchemical metaphors, there are definite veiled allusions to a traditional peyotist harvest pilgrimage. The narrative describes an initiate’s journey into a ‘place where is no field, nor any furrow’. There he discovers ‘seven plants, that shone in the blackness’. He plucks the plants ‘as the mystic rites ordain’ and subjects them to an alchemical operation. This transmutes them into a ‘button of fused gold’, the ‘gold of the Philosopher’:

at a touch this gold philosophical dissolveth his being, oftentimes with a great and terrible explosion.²³⁷

This work is clearly suggestive of a pilgrimage into the desert to obtain ‘buttons’ of a small psychoactive plant.²³⁸ Therefore, ‘Liber LV’ can be read as an account of peyotism veiled in the language of alchemy.

Furthermore, the chapter ‘Pilgrim-Talk’ in *The Book of Lies* describes a pilgrim’s journey along the initiatory path.²³⁹ The commentary states that the chapter is ‘perfectly clear

²³³ ‘The man’s eyes were torn from their sockets in a second and his assailant, disengaging himself by a violent jerk from his victim’s clutch, made off like an arrow across country to the frontier. The shrieks of the mutilated man were answered by universal uproar. Some followed on foot, others ran to their bronchos, but the great majority maintained an attitude of philosophical indifference.’ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 222.

²³⁴ Immediately after Ljubov has her eyes forcibly removed, the main narrative pauses and the following interjection occurs: ‘[...] what need is there for me to think, to fathom the depths of childish or human sorrow, to send my brains into a tiring process of elucidation? Far more pleasant it is to remain a contemplative individual. Therefore, O Mexican Gaucho, pass me thy pellote pouch and let me take a helping of the leaves and root of thy wonderful mescal plant. And without thought and without fatigue, I can then SEE’. Fuller, ‘The Eyes of St. Ljubov’, p. 299.

²³⁵ See: Aleister Crowley, ‘The Chymical Jousting of Frater Perardua’, in *Equinox*, 1.1 (1909), pp. 87-93. No author is credited in *Equinox*, 1.1 (1909), although the text was attributed to Crowley in *Equinox*, 1.10 (1913), p. 237. Regardie later attributed the text to J.F.C. Fuller and described this ‘obscure alchemical piece’ as: ‘ebullient and effervescent, and almost conveys the impression of being informative. Actually it says nothing and is merely a literary tour de force.’ See: Aleister Crowley, *Gems from the Equinox: Instructions for his own Magical Order by Aleister Crowley*, ed. by Israel Regardie (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2007), p. xxxii. It is possible the text was written by Fuller, as it matches his literary style; furthermore, a painting of Fuller’s is printed as a frontispiece to the text: see, *Equinox*, 1.1 (1909), p. 88.

²³⁶ Crowley, *Equinox*, 1.10 (1913), p. 49.

²³⁷ Crowley, ‘Chymical Jousting’, p. 92.

²³⁸ In fact, it contains many indications of an awareness of native peyotism. See Appendix I for a more thorough analysis of the information relating to peyotism contained in this text.

²³⁹ Crowley, *Book of Lies*, ‘Chapter 13 – Pilgrim Talk’, pp. 36-37.

to anyone who has studied the career of an Adept', presumably Crowley himself.²⁴⁰ The text mentions the 'Sodom-Apple', which we have already identified as peyote. The pilgrim is later mentioned in the chapter 'Buttons and Rosettes', also a pun on peyote 'buttons'.²⁴¹ Therefore, it seems as if Crowley took part in some form of pilgrimage through the Mexican desert to obtain peyote. However, if he did not, he certainly knew of the practice.

It is also possible that Crowley took part in a native peyotist ceremony. We have already noted the similarity between the ritual parameters of native peyotist ceremonies and the ritual parameters of both the Rite of Artemis and the 'casual rituals' of 1910 which inspired it. Crowley later wrote that:

In Mexico, he kept vigil during several nights in the Temple of the Order of the Lamp of the Invisible Light, an Order whose High Priest is pledged to maintain a Secret and Eternal Lamp. In this shrine he received some shadowing forth of the Vision of the Holy Guardian Angel [...].²⁴²

As we saw earlier, native peyote rituals typically involve all-night vigils around a fire, during which an officer is tasked with maintaining the fire throughout the night.²⁴³

Crowley apparently founded the Temple of the Order of the Lamp of the Invisible Light with the mysterious Freemason Don Jesus de Medina-Sidonia:²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Crowley considered the Mexican period a crucial moment in his occult career, and the point at which he truly became adept at magick. It was then that he began experimenting independently with the techniques he had learned during his time with the Golden Dawn.

²⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 102-103.

²⁴² Crowley, *Magick*, p. 401.

²⁴³ See above, chapter 2.

²⁴⁴ Almost nothing is known about Don Jesus, other than Crowley's claim that Medina was 'an old man [...], a descendant of the great duke of Armada fame, and one of the highest chiefs of Scottish rite free-masonry'. He was apparently very impressed with Crowley's knowledge of qabalah and considered him 'worthy of the highest initiation in his power to confer'. Accordingly, Medina conferred upon Crowley the 'thirty-third and last degree' of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. Crowley claimed that he had personally been granted 'a certain amount of latitude [...] by Mathers to initiate suitable people'. The two then attempted to found their own order, called the 'Lamp of the Invisible Light', as a kind of Mexican off-shoot of the Golden Dawn, and 'Don Jesus became its first High Priest'. Crowley, *Confessions*, pp. 202-203. Most biographies of Crowley simply re-state Crowley's own account of Don Jesus de Medina. See: Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, pp. 85-86, and pp. 586-587 (n. 18 and n. 19); Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, p. 83; and, Booth, *A Magick Life*, pp. 129-130. Crowley scholar Martin P. Starr has stated that '[w]hatever documentation Medina-Sidonia furnished Crowley, no trace of it survives among Crowley's voluminous papers [and his] attempts to trace Medina-Sidonia's archives in Mexico have not met with success'. See: Martin P. Starr, 'Aleister Crowley-Freemason?!', in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, pp. 227-242 (pp. 229-230). Churton's biography mentions that de Medina was an 'old journalist' who produced a journal called *El Boazeo* and signed his articles 'Jesus Medina'. Churton, *The Biography*, pp. 64-66 and p. 434. See Appendix II for a scan of the front page of the first issue of *El Boazao* from December 1894 edited by a 'Jose M. Medina'.

The general idea was to have an ever-burning lamp in a temple furnished with talismans appropriate to the elemental, planetary and zodiacal forces of nature. Daily invocations were to be performed with the object of making the light itself a consecrated centre or focus of spiritual energy. This light would then radiate and automatically enlighten such minds as were ready to receive it.²⁴⁵

This description sounds like it *may* have been originally inspired by a native peyotist ceremony, during which a peyote cactus is the focal point of the ceremony.²⁴⁶

There is also an inter-textual allusion contained in ‘The Drug’ which links peyote to the Enochian magic Crowley performed in Mexico. Before showing the narrator his laboratory, the alchemist says:

‘As you know, I dabble slightly in chemistry, and an important operation awaits a particular instant of time this afternoon. Stay!’ he added, ‘why should you not become (as Kelly says) “partaker of the mysteries of the creation”?’²⁴⁷

The name ‘Kelly’ is a reference to Edward Kelley, the clairvoyant who received the Enochian materials with Dr. Dee.²⁴⁸ The phrase ‘partaker of the mysteries of the creation’ is an allusion to the final line of ‘The Call or Key of the Thirty Aethyrs’:

Open the Mysteries of your Creation, and make us partakers of THE
UNDEFINED KNOWLEDGE.²⁴⁹

As mentioned, Crowley recited this call to obtain each vision in *Liber 418*. The line in ‘The Drug’ also alludes to the vision of the 29th Aethyr, which Crowley received in Mexico:

²⁴⁵ Crowley, *Confessions*, pp. 202-203.

²⁴⁶ See chapter 2 above, especially Mooney’s description of his experience. Perhaps Medina is the inspiration for the ‘Mexican Gaucho’ with the ‘pellote pouch’ mentioned in ‘The Eyes of St. Ljubov’. It is possible that irregular Freemasonic bodies in Mexico employed peyote in their rituals. The double-headed eagle is the symbol of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. Crowley refers to this symbol in the first line of Chapter 33 in *The Book of Lies* and the commentary refers to Don Jesus, crediting him with conferring ‘the Last [i.e. 33rd] Degree of Masonry’ upon Crowley. Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, pp. 76-77. The double-headed eagle symbol is also commonly used by the peyotist Huichol people of Mexico, and often appears on their ceremonial peyote bowls (see Appendix III for a comparison of the symbols). I am indebted to Masonic scholar P.D. Newman for bringing this fascinating parallel to my attention. Furthermore, the Scottish Rite Foundation for Schizophrenia Research provided a generous research grant towards Dr. Rick Strassman’s clinical trials with DMT at an early and crucial stage of the project. So it seems that Scottish Rite Freemasonry has some relationship with, or interest in, the classical psychedelics.

²⁴⁷ Aleister Crowley, ‘The Drug’, in *The Drug and Other Stories*, p. 78.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 597.

²⁴⁹ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers*, p. 29.

He cried: I have conquered! Let the Sons of Earth keep silence; for my Name is become as That of Death! When will men learn the Mysteries of Creation?²⁵⁰

Therefore there are clear allusions in ‘The Drug’ to Enochian magic, *Liber 418*, and the Mexican trip of 1900.

Finally, consider the titles of the two works published in *The Equinox*: ‘The Eyes of St. Ljubov’ and ‘Liber LV’. These are both puns on *Anhalonium* ‘Lew’-ini, the name Crowley used for peyote (i.e. St. ‘Lew’-bov, and ‘Liber LU’ or ‘Liber Lew’).²⁵¹ Given his use of puns in the hashish chapters of *The Book of Lies*, this is precisely what we should expect.

The combination of this evidence strongly suggests that Crowley did in fact encounter peyote in 1900 while in Mexico, perhaps even in a native ritual context, and used it in the Enochian workings he performed there when he obtained the first two visions of *Liber 418*. If Crowley did take part in a native peyotist ceremony in 1900, then he was one of the first ever Europeans to do so. Also, from the point of view of religious practice, it is very interesting that Crowley combined conjurations in the Enochian language with peyote. As we saw earlier, native tribes usually sing songs and prayers during their peyote rituals, and their songs contain many syllables that are not part of their natural language.²⁵² They are therefore similar to the Enochian calls and ‘barbarous words’ that Crowley employed in his own rituals. In light of the above, the desert trips which led to the writing of *Liber 418* should be considered a truly innovative take on a traditional peyote vision quest.²⁵³ Furthermore, one of Crowley’s most famous followers, the American rocket engineer John ‘Jack’ Whiteside

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁵¹ Crowley sometimes transliterated ‘U’ to ‘V’, as when he abbreviated ‘Vi Veri Universum Vivus Vici’ to V.V.V.V.V., for example. Therefore the title ‘Liber LV’ is not just a reference to the Roman numeral for 55: it is also a visual pun on its resemblance to the word ‘LU’ and an aural pun on the resemblance of ‘LU’ to ‘Lew’. This is a subtle joke that involves a synaesthesia of sight and sound, i.e. it relates to both the vision and the voice. This is therefore also an allusion to *Liber 418*, which is called *The Vision and the Voice*. Crowley was a consummate prankster and a master of coded humour.

²⁵² Since ‘The Eyes of St. Ljubov’ is credited to J.F.C. Fuller, as is the painting which acts as a frontispiece to ‘Liber LV’, it is very possible that Fuller was also experimenting with peyote during his association with Crowley. See Appendix IV for a comparison of a piece of Fuller’s occult artwork from that time with some Native Mexican Huichol art inspired by peyote: they certainly exhibit some interesting parallels and overlapping motifs. Perhaps this indicates that Fuller’s experiences with the visionary peyote inspired his own art.

²⁵³ Alex Owen never considers the possibility that peyote may have been involved in the events of 1909, which she analyses in her valuable study of Victorian occultism. This is a pity since it would have strengthened her thesis that the Alergian episode was a deliberate and thoroughly modern experiment in pushing the boundaries of consciousness by ceremonial methods. Unfortunately Owen often seems more interested in providing her own evaluations and moral judgements of Crowley’s life and magic, and uncritically repeating aspects of the interpretation of Crowley proposed in Regardie’s *Eye in the Triangle*. Her analysis is therefore limited due to an excessive reliance on secondary sources and an insufficient awareness of primary source material.

Parsons (1914 – 1952), later combined peyote and Enochian magic in his own ceremonies, presumably because he knew Crowley had previously done the same.²⁵⁴ At this point, the only question that remains to be asked is: did either peyote or hashish (or both) play an important role in the events that led to the writing of *Liber Legis*? In the next chapter I shall propose that this is not only possible, but likely.

²⁵⁴ Parsons even mentioned peyote in his poetry: 'I height Don Quixote, I live on Peyote, marihuana, morphine and cocaine. I never knew sadness but only a madness that burns at the heart and the brain, I see each charwoman ecstatic, inhuman, angelic, demonic, divine, Each wagon a dragon, each beer mug a flagon that brims with ambrosial wine.' John Carter, *Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2004), p. 115, and pp. 123-125. For an analysis of a particular set of Enochian workings that Parsons conducted with Lafayette Ronald Hubbard (1911 – 1986), the American science fiction author and founder of the controversial Church of Scientology, see: Henrik Bogdan, 'The Babalon Working 1946: L. Ron Hubbard, John Whiteside Parsons, and the Practice of Enochian Magic', in *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*, 63.1 (2016), 12-32. Bogdan does not make any reference to the use of peyote by either Parsons or Hubbard during the operations. Interestingly, Symonds makes an explicit connection between Enochian magic and ceremonial drug use in his biography of Crowley. He describes drugs as the 'essential element' of Enochian scrying, although one which was 'unknown to [Edward] Kelley, as far as I am aware'. See: Symonds, *The Great Beast*, pp. 282-283. Perhaps this indicates that he heard first-hand from Crowley about his technique of combining Enochian magic with peyote.

Chapter 6 – *Liber Legis* and the Key of AL

Although Crowley would have encountered no difficulty acquiring hashish in Cairo, he certainly would not have been able to purchase peyote there. If he did use peyote in Cairo, then he must have brought his own supply. This is not impossible, however, as he could have easily brought some back from Mexico with plans to experiment further in Great Britain. Dried peyote buttons are only a few centimetres in diameter and can maintain their potency for decades. He could have easily fit them in a small box, no bigger than a cigar-box, and packed them alongside the magical gear he used to conduct the Enochian workings.²⁵⁵ In fact, it is very likely that Crowley would have wanted to continue experimenting with peyote after he left Mexico.

First, he had used peyote with great success to obtain the first two visions of *Liber 418*, so perhaps he intended to continue the operation with peyote at a later date. Second, by his own admission he was actively searching for a visionary drug and religious intoxicant. Third, he was actually attempting to contact his own spiritual guides and seemed to have some awareness of the practice of native vision quests. He wrote about tribal myths in which:

[S]omebody who is nobody in particular goes away for a longer or shorter period, and comes back as the ‘great medicine man’; but nobody ever knows exactly what happened to him.²⁵⁶

This argument does not prove that he brought peyote from Mexico, but it demonstrates that it is certainly neither impossible nor inconceivable.

Peyote in Cairo?

The diary entries for the 1904 Cairo events are very fragmented and often impenetrably obscure. Crowley said he put deliberate blinds in these diaries at the time as an act of spite against himself.²⁵⁷ They contain bizarre codes, which Crowley described as ‘unintelligible blinds’, such as the following series of entries:

Feb. 11 Saw b.f.g.
b.f.b [...]

²⁵⁵ A cigar-box was the container Briggs had used to send his ‘muscale buttons’ to Parke-Davis in 1887. It contained enough buttons for the company to send samples out to at least two researchers.

²⁵⁶ Crowley, *Magick*, p. 8.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 410.

March 22 X.P.B [...]
 E.P.D. in 84 m. [...]
 wch trouble with ds. [...]
 P.B. [...] ²⁵⁸

It is difficult to extract any coherent meaning from this stream of apparent gibberish which seems a lot like ‘a jumble of nonsense intended to insult the reader’. ²⁵⁹

Nevertheless, there is a possible peyotist interpretation of two of these entries: X.P.B. and P.B. They could mean ‘10 peyote buttons’ and ‘peyote buttons’ respectively. ²⁶⁰ Therefore, these ‘unintelligible blinds’ could mean everything; however, they could also mean nothing or, frankly, just about anything. The diary entries from this period are so hopelessly mired in vagueness that almost any desired meaning may be extracted from them. ²⁶¹ They therefore cannot be considered admissible as solid evidence. Nevertheless, these two entries are still worth highlighting as they may be indicative of something. Far more convincing, however, are the patterns of working that we have observed in Crowley’s magical practice and the phenomena he described as the results of the operations.

Peyote Patterns

When Crowley attempted to contact Abuldiz in 1911 and Amalantrah in 1918, the model for his operations were his 1904 ceremonies in Cairo by which he invoked Horus and contacted Aiwass. Furthermore, the methods Crowley used to test the visions of his seers in 1911 and 1918 were based on the methods he used in 1904 to test Rose. ²⁶² Incidentally, the 1904 ‘testing’ took place around the same period of time marked in the diary by the codes ‘X.P.B.’ and ‘P.B.’. ²⁶³ Since we know both sex and drugs were used to obtain visionary contact with Abuldiz and Amalantrah, it is reasonable to suppose that sex and drugs played some role in 1904. In fact, a posthumously published manuscript of a Tarot divination performed in Cairo

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 409.

²⁵⁹ Crowley, *Book of Lies*, pp. 5-6.

²⁶⁰ Or ‘pellote’ buttons, as peyote was called in ‘The Eyes of St. Ljubov’.

²⁶¹ They could be read as: ‘Ex-Plymouth Brethren’ and ‘Plymouth Brethren’, or as ‘Xylophone Pygmy Blavatsky’ and ‘Prickly Beats’, or as any other similar nonsense.

²⁶² Crowley said that he tested Rose’s claim to be receiving messages from Horus by asking her a long series of questions about the God’s nature. He evaluated her answers based on the qabalistic correspondences of the Golden Dawn system, of which he said Rose knew nothing. According to Crowley, she answered every question correctly. He also said that he twice asked her to pick one symbol out of an arbitrary series of symbols, one of which he had privately associated with Horus in his own mind. According to Crowley, Rose picked the correct symbol on both occasions. He took this to mean that Rose could not have cheated and that the intelligence she was in contact with had something akin to telepathic powers. Crowley, *Magick*, pp. 411-412.

²⁶³ Ibid., pp. 409-411, and p. 434.

states ‘the ritual is of sex’.²⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, however, Crowley never mentioned sex magick in connection with 1904. We also know that fluid extract of peyote was on-hand to improve communications with the entities in the later operations: perhaps this was because dried peyote buttons had been used so successfully in 1904.

Given the patterns of usage we have discovered in his later career, and the magical phenomena described as the results of the operation, I propose that both peyote and hashish were involved in 1904. Contact with discarnate intelligences and their subsequent testing was invariably connected with peyote in Crowley’s later years, so it is reasonable to speculate that peyote was also involved in 1904. Crowley probably used peyote to facilitate visions during the testing of Rose and when he received the instructions to invoke Horus. Perhaps it was also used during the ritual of invocation itself. It is even possible that Crowley or Rose (or both) were under the influence of peyote during their famous visit to the Cairo Museum.²⁶⁵ Hashish was probably used during the actual writing of *Liber Legis*, as it was later used to facilitate the writing of *Liber 7*.

The use of these drugs in the ways I propose corresponds exactly with the ways Crowley used them in later years. In fact, it was probably because peyote and hashish were employed so successfully in 1904 that Crowley later used them as he did. Furthermore, the long-lasting and profound transformations produced by the magick that Crowley performed in 1904 (and, indeed, in 1900 and 1909), are also strongly indicative of the ceremonial use of a classical psychedelic. As we saw in Chapter 2, modern clinical trials have confirmed the potential of these substances to produce meaningful spiritual transformations under the appropriate conditions. Furthermore, encounters with non-human intelligences and instances of seeming telepathy have been reported as a result of psychedelic use in both native contexts and modern clinical trials.

Even if one doubts Crowley’s story about the Cairo ‘reception’, there are still some very subtle puns, codes, and inter-textual allusions that connect *Liber Legis* with peyote. As

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 414.

²⁶⁵ Crowley tested Rose’s ability to recognise Horus by escorting her to the Cairo Museum and challenging her to pick out his image. He ‘noted with silent glee’ that as Rose walked through the museum she passed by several images of Horus. When they came to the painted wooden funeral stela of the Theban priest Ankh-ef-en-Khonsu, Rose stopped and exclaimed, ‘there he is!’ The stela depicted a relatively obscure form of Horus. More importantly from Crowley’s perspective, however, was the tag it bore displaying its exhibit number according to the museum’s own catalogue: 666, the number of the Beast that Crowley had personally identified with since adolescence. He took this as further proof that something magical was occurring. Ibid., p. 412.

mentioned earlier, the qabalistic technique of gematria was an extremely important part of Crowley's magical practice. One of the things that impressed Crowley most about *Liber Legis* was the qabalistic correspondences between its key concepts. The most significant correspondence links the two central principles of Thelema: 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law' and 'Love is the law, love under will'.

93 and 31

Shortly after receiving *Liber Legis*, Crowley discovered that the ancient Greek words for Will (Thelēma, Gr. θελημα) and Love (Agapē, Gr. αγαπη) shared the same qabalistic value (93). This seemed to confirm the equivalence of both will and love asserted by Thelemic doctrine, and Crowley took this as an indication that Aiwass possessed a knowledge of qabalah far superior to his own. He later discovered that 'Aiwaz' was actually a Hebrew name (OIVZ, Heb. עיוז) and it too had the numerical value of 93.²⁶⁶ So the number 93 came to have a monumental significance for Crowley: this one symbol expressed the dual-aspects of the Law of Thelema and represented his Holy Guardian Angel who delivered that Law. Accordingly, 93 became his magical code for both Thelema and Aiwaz. In his personal correspondence to magical students, Crowley often abbreviated the phrase 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law' as '93', and the phrase 'Love is the law, love under will' as '93 93/93'.²⁶⁷ He also used these abbreviations and codes in his diaries and magical rituals.²⁶⁸ Many Thelemites have since adopted these expressions as traditional forms of greeting.

In 1916, Charles Stansfeld Jones performed his own qabalistic analysis of *Liber Legis*, and discovered that the number 31 was a 'key' to many of the most cryptic verses in the text.²⁶⁹ 31 is the value of the Hebrew words AL, which means 'God', and LA, which means

²⁶⁶ He related this revelation to the ceremonies he conducted to communicate with the Wizard Amalantrah. See: Crowley, 'Notes for an Astral Atlas', in *Magick*, pp. 508-509.

²⁶⁷ In other words: 'Love is the law' translated to '93', and 'love under will' translated to $\frac{93}{93}$. Thus, the full expression became '93 $\frac{93}{93}$ ' or '93 93/93'.

²⁶⁸ For example, see: *Liber 93 – The Fountain of Hyacinth*.

²⁶⁹ For his own account of this discovery, see: Charles Stansfeld Jones, *Liber Thirty-One* (1918), made available by the Hermetic Library at: <http://hermetic.com/achad/pdf/liber31.pdf>. The *Liber Thirty-One* written by Jones and the handwritten manuscript of *Liber Legis* (which is technically called *Liber 31*), should not be confused. To avoid confusion, Jones's work is called *Liber Thirty-One*, while the manuscript of *Liber Legis* is called *Liber XXXI*.

‘not’. According to Crowley, this key revealed a whole new dimension of meaning in *Liber Legis*.²⁷⁰ When Jones informed Crowley of his discovery, Crowley wrote to Jones saying:

Your key opens Palace. [*Liber Legis*] has unfolded like a flower.²⁷¹

Crowley came to consider Jones his ‘magical son’ and the ‘child’ prophesied by *Liber Legis* who would discover ‘the Key of it all’. Crowley took this discovery as further evidence that Aiwass, the author of *Liber Legis*, possessed knowledge of qabalah far superior to Crowley’s own, in addition to the power to predict and control future events. Oddly enough, the keys that Jones discovered (‘AL’ and ‘31’) were also Crowley’s private magical codes for peyote.²⁷²

Liber AL and Liber 31

For fifteen years Crowley had called his *magnum opus* either ‘Liber Legis’, ‘Liber L’, or ‘The Book of the Law’. After 1919, as a result of the discovery made by Jones, Crowley began referring to *Liber Legis* as *Liber AL*, and specifically gave the actual handwritten manuscript of *Liber Legis* the technical title *Liber 31*.²⁷³ Was this a subtle hint from Crowley that *Liber Legis* and its manuscript had some relation to AL and 31 (i.e. peyote)? If peyote was involved in the reception of *Liber Legis* then perhaps Crowley took Jones’s discovery as a ‘sign’ from the Secret Chiefs that the time had come to spill the peyote beans and let the cactus out of the bag. For instance, it was shortly after this discovery that he announced his plan to publish *Liber 934 – The Cactus*, his book about peyote.

Furthermore, in *Liber Aleph*, Crowley’s epistles to Jones, the chapter on ‘Chemical Agents’ (which mentions peyote) is Chapter 93. Similarly, the diary of Crowley’s attempt to

²⁷⁰ Since 31 meant ‘God’ and 93 (which is 31 multiplied by 3) meant ‘Thelema’, it seemed to relate to the divine trinity of Thelema: Nuit, Hadit, and Ra-Hoor-Khuit. Similarly, since LA meant ‘Not’, it seemed to relate to Crowley’s ‘negative theology’. Negative theology is the idea that the notion of divinity so far surpasses the capacities of the human intellect, that God (or ‘the Absolute’) is best conceived of as ‘Nothing-ness’. In one of Crowley’s earliest works on magick and religion, he had written: ‘I assert the absoluteness of the Qabalistic Zero’. Thus, the key of 31, by both qabalism and puns, seemed to equate ‘AL’ (‘God’, the ‘All’, the Absolute) with ‘LA’ (‘Not’, the Nothing, the Zero, the Void). See: Aleister Crowley, ‘An Essay in Ontology with Some Remarks on Ceremonial Magic’, in *Collected Works of Aleister Crowley: Volume II* (Foyers: Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth, 1906), pp. 233-243 (p. 236).

²⁷¹ Jones, *Liber Thirty-One*, p. 1.

²⁷² Crowley did not encode peyote in his diaries as ‘AL’ and ‘31’ in reference to *Liber Legis*. In fact, there are no indications that he ever called *Liber Legis* either *Liber AL* or *Liber 31* until after the discovery made by Jones. See: Marlene Cornelius, *Liber AL: An Examination* (Berkeley, CA: Conjoined Creation, 2013), pp. 10-13. However, he had encoded peyote as ‘AL’ since at least 1907, and as ‘31’ since at least 1911. See: chapters 3 and 4 of the present work.

²⁷³ Accordingly, *The Book of the Law* is now called *Liber AL vel Legis*, which means ‘Liber AL or Liber Legis’.

give up cocaine and heroin, which also mentions peyote, is *Liber 93*.²⁷⁴ Also, the planned book on peyote, *The Cactus*, is called *Liber 934*. The significance of 93 is explained above, and we have already seen that 4 was the number of *Magick*, Crowley's book of 'instructions for the brothers'.²⁷⁵ So after 1919, we find Crowley renaming *Liber Legis*, the central text of Thelema, after the magical codes he used for peyote; and, at the same time, he began tagging important works about drugs and peyote with his magical code for Thelema. The fact that he formally re-titled the actual hand-written manuscript of *Liber Legis* as *Liber 31* is particularly suggestive: Crowley appears to have only used 31 as a code for peyote in his diaries for magical operations intended to establish contact with praeterhuman intelligences. This is significant because Crowley held that the hand-written manuscript of *Liber Legis* was the singularly most important piece of material evidence which demonstrated that he had attained contact with praeterhuman intelligences. According to Crowley, even the shapes of the letters in the manuscript and their relative positions to one another held mysteries that confirmed their praeterhuman origin. Undoubtedly these codes, puns, and inter-textual allusions are *extremely* subtle, yet they conform precisely to the style of cryptographic humour and the habit of hiding secrets in plain sight that we saw Crowley display consistently throughout the previous chapter.

While the description of *The Cactus* will probably always intrigue any reader of *The Equinox* (3.1) who has an interest in drugs, its numerical code ensures that it will forever draw the attention of Thelemites. It should be recognized that these numerical values were extremely important to Crowley and he did not assign numbers to his writings arbitrarily. He considered his books to be magical talismans and he invariably had some reason behind his decision to number them as he did. Therefore, the qabalistic allusions that associate *Liber Legis* with peyote (*Liber AL*, *Liber 31*), and peyote with Thelema (*Liber 934*, *Liber 93*,

²⁷⁴ The correct numerical title of this work is a relatively confusing matter as the full title given in the manuscript is: *Liber א ז ז' vel Νικη sub figura XXVIII, The Fountain of Hyacinth*. It therefore could be referred to by 3 distinct numerical titles: 93 (the qabalistic value of the Hebrew word צבא, which means 'army'), 88 (the qabalistic value of the Greek word Νικη, which means 'victory'), or 28 (the value of the Roman numerals in the title). Matters are further confused by the fact that the number 28 had already been assigned to an earlier work, *Liber Septem Regum Sanctorum, Ritual XXVIII, The Ceremony of the Seven Holy Kings*. See: Crowley, *Magick*, p. 753. See also: *Ibid.*, p. 460, p.464, and p. 481; and, Crowley, *Holy Books*, pp. 263-264.

²⁷⁵ Interestingly, it would have made more sense for Crowley to assign this work the number 944, which is the qabalistic value of 'ANHALONIUM LEWINII' when transliterated into Hebrew (אנהאלעניום להויניי). Presumably Crowley preferred the qabalistic aesthetic of 934 because of the occurrence of 93, and so numbered *The Cactus* as 934. This suggests that Crowley favoured the qabalistic spelling 'ANHALONIUM LEWINI' (אנהאלעניום להויניי), i.e. with the final Yod discarded (the value of Yod according to gematria is 10).

Chapter 93) suggest an important connection between peyote and Thelema, and imply that Crowley deliberately left subtle clues about this connection in his published works. The alternative to my proposal is considerably less convincing because if the writing of *Liber Legis* did not involve peyote or hashish (or both), then it stands out as a lone exception in a long series of magical ceremonies, spanning almost two decades, that displays a clear and consistent pattern of the ceremonial use of both.²⁷⁶ Accordingly, the combined weight of the evidence presented in this thesis argues very strongly for an academic re-assessment of the role played by Crowley's ceremonial use of psychoactive drugs during his development of Thelema, especially hisentheogenic use of peyote.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Drugs were obviously a crucial component of Crowley's magical practice for decades and he clearly had a considerable working knowledge of drugs acquired through his own experimentation. He also had a solid grounding in the technicalities of pharmacology, as he had taken a special exam in chemistry while at Cambridge (Kaczyński, *Perdurabo*, p. 52). However, he was not the only occultist with pharmacological interests. In fact, throughout his life, Crowley continually associated with a number of individuals who shared his interests in both mysticism and chemistry. Unsurprisingly, many of these individuals have already been mentioned in earlier sections of this thesis. George Cecil Jones, who introduced Crowley to the Golden Dawn and went on to help him found A∴A∴, was an industrial chemist by profession. Julian L. Baker, who introduced Crowley to Jones, was a highly accomplished and well-respected chemist. Allan Bennett, who taught Crowley 'the right Art of Magick' by introducing him to pharmacologically assisted ceremonial techniques, was an analytic chemist by profession. Oscar Eckenstein, the mountaineer who joined Crowley on his 1900 trip to Mexico and taught him techniques of concentration there, was interested in Eastern mysticism and once worked as a chemist (Ibid. p. 43). Edward Whineray, who occasionally contributed to *The Equinox* and supplied Crowley with hashish and fluid extract of peyote, was a highly regarded chemist in London. Kenneth Martin Ward (1827 – 1927), one of Crowley's first A∴A∴ students, entered Cambridge University on a physics and chemistry scholarship (Ibid., p. 189). Dr. Samuel Perry (1869 – 1952), an early member of A∴A∴, and its Chancellor by 1911, was a physician and pharmacologist (Crowley, *The Drug*, p. 597). Mary Desti Sturges, the seer during the Abuldiz workings who assisted in the writing of *Book 4*, later owned a cosmetics shop and created her own cosmetic products. Roddie Minor, the seer during the Amalantrah operations who also assisted Crowley to prepare for his visionary retreat on Esopus Island, was a highly qualified pharmacist who also worked as a chemist. Cecil Frederick Russell (1897 – 1987), a student of Crowley's during the Cefalù period, was a medic and pharmacist in the U.S. Navy (Kaczyński, *Perdurabo*, p. 239). William Bernard Crow (1895 – 1976), the occultist writer who corresponded with Crowley in his final years, was a lecturer in biology who wrote on the 'occult' properties of plants and herbs (Ibid., p. 528). Therefore, for the majority of his occult career, Crowley was never far from an individual equipped with the requisite knowledge to assist him in his magical experiments with drugs. If these 'friends with benefits' also had qualifications that gave him access to useful pharmaceutical products, so much the better.

²⁷⁷ The conclusion of this chapter (that Crowley ceremonially combined sex and drugs in the magical workings that led to the production of *Liber Legis*) and the conclusion of the previous chapter (that Crowley encountered peyote in Mexico and that peyote was a crucial component of both *Liber 418* workings) will probably come as no surprise to many who are familiar with his life and writings. However, the argument I have presented is, as far as I am aware, the first to use primary source material as a means of supporting these suggestions. This not only shows that these suggestions have a sound historical basis, but also demonstrates that Crowley himself left clues pointing to 'the story behind the story'.

Conclusion

In 1898, Aleister Crowley began searching for the ‘Elixir Vitae’, the alchemical elixir of life, ‘which transforms the base metal (normal perception of life) to silver (poetic conception)’. In 1900, he discovered peyote, the divine cactus of Mexico that contains mescaline, the first classical (or ‘serotonergic’) psychedelic identified by modern science. At the time almost nothing was understood about the astonishing effects of psychedelics and for nearly twenty years, while peyote research had effectively ceased, Crowley was conducting his own experiments with peyote and using it in his magical ceremonies. His primary use for peyote was as a religious intoxicant, sacramentally ingested to obtain visions about his destiny and to contact his spiritual guardians, precisely as it has functioned in its native habitat for millennia. He probably introduced at least one hundred more Westerners to its use and these were essentially the only people in the world using peyote outside of its indigenous context. By 1919, Crowley was probably the most knowledgeable non-native in the world when it came to peyote, its effects, and its ceremonial use. It would take almost a quarter of a century more for modern science to recognize the significance of classical psychedelics and their remarkable properties.

In Crowley’s published works, he deliberately veiled his use of peyote for magick. In fact, he rarely ever mentioned it by name. There are several likely reasons for this. First, it was probably a ‘trade secret’ in the early days of the A∴A∴ movement: a unique selling-point that distinguished his magical order from other post-Golden Dawn groups, revealed to initiates only after they had joined his order. Second, if the crucial role played by peyote in the major attainments of his ‘occult career’ was widely known, it would imply others could attain by similar pharmacological methods and this would detract from the exclusivity of his claims. Third, although he placed considerable stock in the value of his own visions, he knew his occultist audience would dismiss them much more readily if they knew the visions were obtained by the use of psychoactive drugs.²⁷⁸ Apparently Crowley thought that, within occultist discourse, it was less controversial to declare yourself the Beast of *Revelation* than it was to write about your own use of an ancient visionary plant sacrament as a method of spiritual attainment.

²⁷⁸ Hanegraaff has recently made a similar argument with regard to some writers in the New Age movement; see: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Entheogenic Esotericism’, in *Contemporary Esotericism*, ed. by Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 392-409 (pp. 396-400).

According to his diary, when Crowley discussed the relationship between hashish and Samadhi with George Cecil Jones in 1906, Jones said ‘hashish had nothing to do with Samadhi, though [it was] possibly useful as a starter’.²⁷⁹ This is interesting because Jones was a professional chemist and an accomplished magician. He also sponsored Crowley’s admission into the Golden Dawn, was the co-founder of A∴A∴, and the first individual to recognise Crowley as an adept and a master. Yet Crowley obviously disagreed with Jones because his diaries for the period are replete with suggestions of an important connection between the two. Nevertheless, when he published the summary of his experiments in ‘The Psychology of Hashish’, he simply repeated Jones’s opinion as if it were his own conclusion, when clearly it was not. This all suggests that the use of psychoactive drugs to occasion religious experiences and facilitate attainment was a contested issue within occultist discourse at the time, which presumably also fuelled Crowley’s efforts to veil his peyote use.

We began with the question: what role did peyote play in the magick of Aleister Crowley? The answer we have arrived at is this: it facilitated visionary contact with the entities he considered his spiritual guides as he developed the new religious movement known as Thelema. He obtained, through his use of peyote, the theological visions of his ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ and ‘the Secret Chiefs’, which are recorded in *Liber 418*. He communicated with ‘praeterhuman intelligences’, like Abuldiz and Amalantrah, who ‘revealed’ information to him about his prophetic mission. And, I propose that the ceremonial use of peyote was a key factor in the production of *Liber AL vel Legis: The Book of the Law*, the central sacred text of Thelema.

The evidence presented in this thesis implies that a serious re-assessment of Crowley’s initiatory career between 1900 and 1909 is called for in the study of Western Esotericism, as we are presented with two conflicting narratives. On the one hand, we have Crowley’s ‘sanitized’ version of events which suggests that the reception of the *Holy Books* in 1907 was due to meditation alone, that the visions of *Liber 418* were attained solely by ceremonial magick, and that drugs played no role in the production of *Liber Legis*. On the other hand, we have the version of events suggested by diary entries, patterns of ceremonial drug use and patterns of sex magick, as well as the puns, codes, blinds, veils, and inter-textual allusions that Crowley deliberately scattered throughout his works.

²⁷⁹ Crowley, ‘Diary 1906-1907’, p. 97.

Scholars and emic commentators have already re-evaluated Crowley's sanitized narrative in places and it is now widely accepted that sexual magic was a crucial component of the Algerian workings with Victor Neuburg. I propose that a similar re-evaluation is required with regard to the use of peyote and hashish in the magical ceremonies that Crowley conducted during the first decade of the twentieth century. There are strong indications that hashish inspired the writing of *Liber 7*, and there is an abundance of evidence pointing to the ceremonial use of peyote during the visionary workings recorded in *Liber 418*. It would therefore be naïve for future academic studies of Thelema to uncritically follow Crowley's public narrative and overlook the crucial role played by peyote and hashish in the events of 1900, 1907, and 1909. To do so would ignore the important fact that the entheogenic use of peyote and hashish were primary contributing factors in the development of this new religious movement and its scriptural canon. This particular characteristic of Thelema has important implications for its academic categorization. For instance, Thelema bears a 'family resemblance' to the peyotist movements that have emerged in the Americas since the nineteenth century; similarly, the ancient tradition of peyotism is a fundamental component of Thelema's genealogy.

This discovery also has implications beyond the field of academia. For instance, since Crowley's entheogenic use of peyote played such a central role in the revelation of Thelema and the development of its theology, this raises important questions about the legal right of Thelemites to employ peyote as a spiritual sacrament in their own religious practice. The sacramental use of peyote by Native Americans is now recognised as a sincere religious tradition in the United States and they are therefore afforded the legally protected right to possess and consume this otherwise prohibited plant for bona fide ceremonial purposes. The question as to whether Thelemites ought to be granted a similar right is certainly worth considering. There is no doubt that Crowley and many of the earliest Thelemites used peyote in their ceremonies for sincere religious purposes for years; therefore, a case may be made for regarding the entheogenic use of peyote as a tradition within Thelema.

I further propose that Crowley never truly intended to cover-up the extent of his peyote use entirely, since it is primarily due to clues which he deliberately left in his published works that I have been able to construct this argument. If Crowley was employing peyote and hashish as extensively as I am suggesting, then it would seem that he did not take seriously his own dictum 'The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion'. Crowley claimed his

private magical diaries and the published results of his workings were scientific records, but how can that be the case if he was consistently ‘fudging’ those records? I propose that he was sincere in his scientific intention and simply obscured the superficial narrative for the reasons mentioned above. Nevertheless, he consciously and consistently scattered clues throughout his writings pertaining to his actual methodology: combining anciententheogenic sacraments with Eastern meditative techniques and Western ceremonial practices to produce inspired texts which he and many since have considered revelatory. While he certainly ‘veiled’ the pertinent facts, he did so only thinly: the clever puns, the subtle allusions, and the obvious blinds all suggest that he eventually wanted his jokes to be appreciated and expected the actual record to be decrypted, reconstructed, and recognised as such.

Who then is the butt of Crowley’s jokes? The answer is simple: occultists who discount the value of religious experiences occasioned by the entheogenic use of drugs and who dismiss the possibility that drugs could play a central role in the attainment of spiritual enlightenment. In other words, occultists who stigmatise ‘the right Art of Magick’: those pharmacologically-assisted ceremonial techniques that Crowley learned from Bennett, the very techniques by which Crowley himself attained. He wrote in *Confessions*:

Now, Samadhi, whatever it is, is at least a state of mind exactly as are deep thought, anger, sleep, intoxication and melancholia. [...] Why then should we not be able to devise some pharmaceutical, electrical or surgical method of inducing Samadhi; create genius as simply as we do other kinds of specific excitement? Morphine makes men holy and happy in a negative way; why should there not be some drug which will produce the positive equivalent? The mystic gasps with horror, but we really can’t worry about him. It is he that is blaspheming nature by postulating discontinuity in her processes.²⁸⁰

Crowley was a thorough-going naturalist who rejected the ‘humbug of the supernatural’ so radically that, to him, positing supernatural occurrences was blaspheming the perfection of nature. If natural processes like meditation and ceremonial magick, facilitated by natural substances (or ‘strange drugs’) like peyote and hashish, can induce valuable transformations of consciousness, then those experiences should be evaluated on their own merits irrespective of the role played by drugs. Mystics and magicians who are horrified by this suggestion are simply objects of ridicule to Crowley; hence, his jokes are at their expense.

²⁸⁰ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 386.

In 1953, Aldous Huxley experimented with mescaline and experienced a spiritual transformation. He was so impressed by the psychedelic experience that, as he lay on his death-bed, he had his wife administer his two final doses of LSD. She then read aloud excerpts from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as Huxley drifted into the void and left this world behind. In the 1960s, Harvard professors Dr. Timothy Leary (1920 – 1996) and Dr. Richard Alpert (b. 1931) conducted research into the therapeutic potential of psychedelics by experimenting on themselves and others. When their research began to attract negative attention from the university authorities, Alpert was formally dismissed and Leary resigned in protest. They continued their experiments privately and by the end of the decade Alpert had transformed into the spiritual guru Ram Dass, and Leary had become almost evangelical about LSD. Huxley, Leary, and Alpert all publicly declared that the sacramental use of serotonergic psychedelics could produce profound and long-lasting religious transformations and their lives are a testament to the truth of this claim, at least with respect to themselves. Recent clinical trials with psychedelics lend considerable support to their claim also.

In 1887, the devout Plymouth Brethren preacher Edward Crowley died, and his pious son Alick began transforming into the decadent Cambridge poet Aleister Crowley. In 1898, Aleister found his way into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and began transforming into Frater Perdurabo. And, in 1900, Frater Perdurabo travelled to Mexico, discovered peyote, started using it as a ceremonial sacrament, and began transforming into The Great Beast 666: The Prophet of the Law of Thelema and the Logos of the Aeon of Horus. Crowley, who once described himself as one ‘hell of a Holy Guru’, wrote:²⁸¹

I do admit that my visions can never mean to other men as much as they do to me. I do not regret this. All I ask is that my results should convince seekers after Truth that there is beyond doubt something worthwhile seeking, attainable by methods more or less like mine. I do not want to father a flock, to be the fetish of fools and fanatics, or the founder of a faith whose followers are content to echo my opinions. I want each man to cut his own way through the jungle.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Crowley, *The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, p. 295.

²⁸² Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 618.

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Appendices

Appendix I – Liber LV: The Chymical Jousting of Frater Perardua

Lines from <i>Liber LV</i> (or ‘Liber Lew’)	Peyotist Interpretation
[He] went forth into that place where is no field, nor any furrow therein (p. 89)	He went into the desert.
Nor for all his care and labour could he gather therefrom more than seven plants, that shone in the blackness (p. 89)	He gathered seven plants.
each plant beareth a single blossom that hath seven petals—one would have thought them stars (pp. 89-90)	Peyote cacti flower sporadically, and usually produce a single large white, yellow, or pink, star-like blossom (see fig. 1.1).



Figure 1.1 – Peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*) with single blossom

These plants did our brother Perardua pluck, as the mystic rites ordain (p. 90)	Harvesting peyote is a sacred and ritualistic practice for indigenous peoples. Only the tops are removed because: (i) the tops contain the highest concentration of mescaline; and, (ii) the root of the cactus eventually grows another top and may be harvested again (which is very important to the natives because peyote is an endangered species).
and these did he heat furiously in his alembic (p. 90)	He began transmuting (perhaps simply drying) the cacti tops or 'buttons'.
it had the crown and horns of Alexander the mighty king; (p.90)	The curling horns that commonly appear in ancient depictions of Alexander the Great bear a slight resemblance to the curled tufts of woolly hair that grow on the areoles of peyote (see figs. 1.2 and 1.3). Interestingly, J.F.C. Fuller later wrote a highly regarded historical work analysing Alexander's military tactics.



Figure 1.2 – Coin depicting Alexander the Great



Figure 1.3 – Peyote cactus with curling woolly hairs

its fore part was like the Lion, (p. 90)

The top ('fore part') of peyote is green and somewhat flared, like a lion's mane, relative to the root of the plant. Alternatively, the flower or wool on the top of a peyote cactus *might* be said to resemble a lion's mane (see fig. 1.4). The 'Green Lion' is an alchemical symbol; it is depicted in the painting by J.F.C. Fuller that appears as the frontispiece to *Liber LV* (see fig. 1.5).



Figure 1.4 – Peyote cactus with many hairs



Figure 1.5 – Art by J.F.C. Fuller: *Equinox* (1.1), p. 88

whereby indeed it [i.e. the 'fore part'] partook of the highest Virtue (p. 90)

The top ('fore part') of peyote contains the highest concentration of mescaline ('partakes of the highest Virtue').

and its hinder quarters were as a bull's (p. 90)

Peyote cacti have long, thick, tough roots ('hind quarters'). Combined with the description of the 'fore part', this sounds like a description of a full-length peyote plant: from its flared green top, like a lion's mane, to its tough brown root, like the 'hind quarters' of a bull (see fig. 1.6).



Figure 1.6 – Full-length peyote cactus, from root to top

when he had broken the cucurbite, he find therein no trace of the seven, but a button of fused gold—as we say, for it is not gold... (p. 91)

When the transmutation was complete, he was left with a 'button' of gold – although it was not 'gold'...

Now this metal is not in any wise like unto earthly metal; (p.92)

The 'metal' was not a 'metal' in the normal sense of the word.

let the brethren well beware, for many false
knaves be abroad (p. 92)

Other cacti resemble peyote and grow in the
same regions but do not contain significant
concentrations of mescaline, e.g. *Lophophora*
diffusa (see fig. 1.7).



Figure 1.7 – *Lophophora diffusa*, the so-called ‘False Peyote’

the sole marketable gold of the Philosopher
(p. 92)

These ‘buttons’ are the alchemical
philosopher’s ‘gold’ (see fig. 1.8).



Figure 1.8 – Dried slices or ‘buttons’ of peyote

at a touch this gold philosophical dissolveth his being, oftentimes with a great and terrible explosion, oftentimes so softly and subtly that no man may perceive it (p. 92)	This 'gold' dissolves consciousness, sometimes dramatically, sometimes subtly.
at that Lightning Flash all did entirely disappear, and the Cucurbite and the Alembic and the Athanor were shattered utterly (p. 93)	As a result of the psychedelic transformation, the initiate's consciousness and old-self was utterly destroyed.
unto this hour hath the name of Perardua been forgotten, and they that have need to speak of him say in right joyaunce <i>Non Sine Fulmine</i> (p. 93)	Henceforth, the initiate was no longer called <i>Per Ardua ad Astra</i> (Lat. 'By struggle to the stars', Fuller's first A·A·A· motto), but was now known as <i>Non Sine Fulmine</i> (Lat. 'Not without a thunderbolt', Fuller's second motto).
In light of the above analysis, I propose that <i>Liber LV – The Chymical Jousting of Frater Perardua</i> is inspired by the indigenous Mexican religious practice of peyotism. The literary style, the frontispiece painting, and the magical mottoes mentioned all suggest it was written by J.F.C. Fuller. Nevertheless, the text is attributed to Crowley in <i>The Equinox</i>, 1.10 (1913), p. 237. It <i>may</i> be a description of an actual peyote pilgrimage undertaken by Crowley or Fuller. In any case, Israel Regardie was incorrect when he said that the text 'says nothing and is merely a literary tour de force'. On the contrary, it is almost certainly a field guide to recognising, harvesting, and preparing a peyote cactus for consumption, veiled in the language of alchemy. When decrypted, it conveys the same information as figure 1.9.	

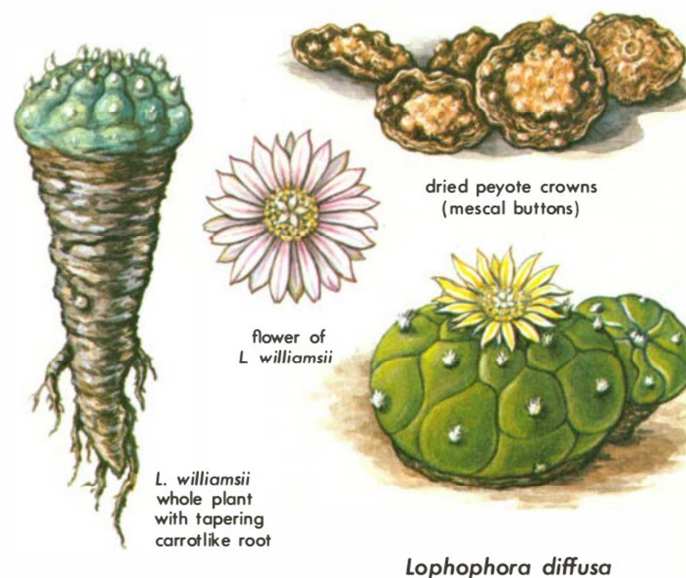
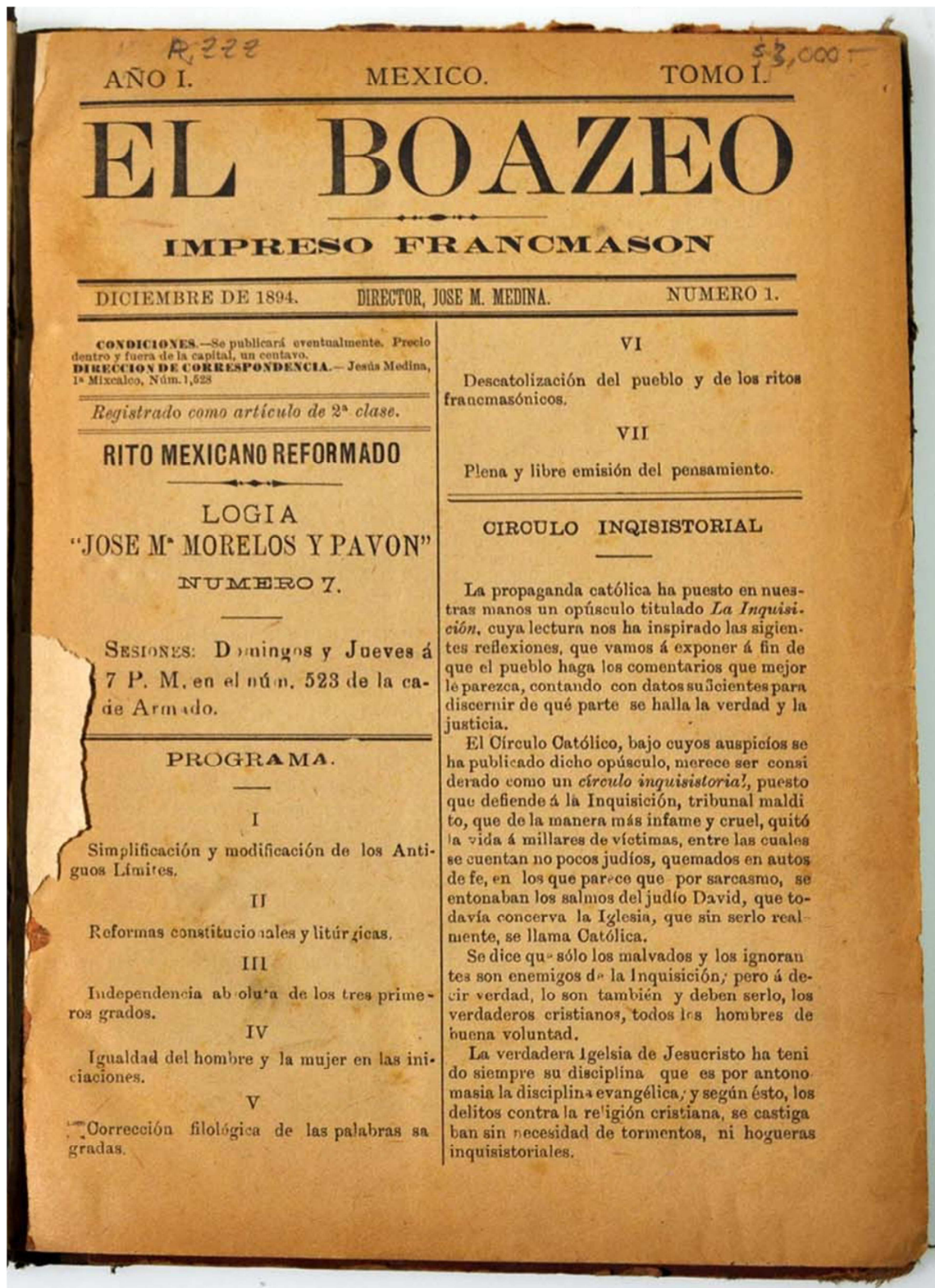


Figure 1.9 – Basic field guide information on peyote, from Schultes (1976), p. 115

Appendix II – El Boazeo, December 1894

Figure 2.1 – Front cover of first issue of *El Boazeo* (December, 1894), ed. by Jose M. Medina

Appendix III – The Double-Headed Eagle (Huichol and Scottish Rite)



Figure 3.1 – Ceremonial Huichol peyote gourd bowl



Figure 3.2 – Ceremonial Huichol peyote gourd bowl



Figure 3.3 – Ceremonial Huichol peyote gourd bowl



Figure 3.4 – Beaded Huichol ornament

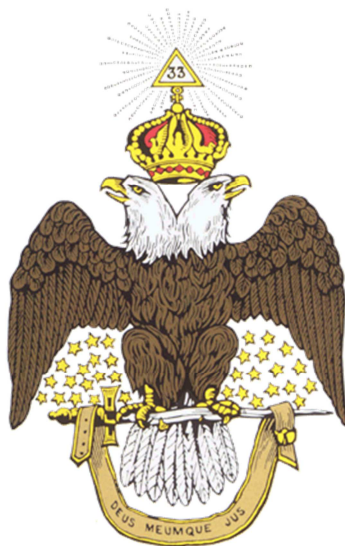


Figure 3.5 – Symbol of Scottish Rite Freemasonry



Figure 3.6 – Symbol of Scottish Rite Freemasonry

Appendix IV – Huichol Art and J.F.C. Fuller's Art

Figure 4.1 –Huichol peyote art



Figure 4.2 –Huichol peyote art



Figure 4.3 – Artwork by J.F.C. Fuller