

Solve et Coagula: Attitudes Toward the Ambrosial Aspects of Human Seed in Certain Yogic Traditions and in the Sexual Magick of Aleister Crowley*

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Abstract

Solve et Coagula: Attitudes envers les aspects ambrosiens de la semence humaine dans certaines traditions yogiques et dans la magie sexuelle d'Aleister Crowley

Certaines traditions du yoga voient dans la semence mâle l'élixir potentiel d'immortalité. L'éjaculation du sperme, lequel devrait retourner à son lieu d'origine, la tête, est une perte de ce potentiel. Dans celle-ci, en effet, cette substance acquiert sa forme subtile par transformation, devenant ainsi l'élixir. La méthode consiste en une spiritualisation du matériel. Cela correspondrait au *solve* selon la terminologie alchimique.

La magie sexuelle d'Aleister Crowley part d'un point de vue similaire, mais ici la méthode se trouve inversée, car la semence est éjectée et consommée. Le sperme matériel est sanctifié, et vu comme une théophanie. Le spirituel est matérialisé: *coagula*.

L'objet de cet article est de comparer ces deux orientations et d'en explorer les implications, la question essentielle étant ici celle de la localisation du sacré; en effet, l'une reflète l'acosmisme des traditions indiennes, et l'autre la tendance, propre à la magie d'Aleister Crowley, de valoriser l'existence matérielle.

Keywords

Aleister Crowley; Sexual magick; Nāth Yogis; Haṭha yoga; Spermatophagy; Elixir of immortality

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[T]here are love and love. There is the dove
and there is the serpent. Choose ye well!

– *The Book of the Law*, I: 57.

The way up and down is one and the same.

– *Heraclitus*, DK22b66

Introduction

There is a great deal of difference between the theory and practice of Indian tantra and the sexual magick associated with the exploits of Aleister Crowley (1875–1947).¹ However, as Hugh Urban has argued on several occasions, a curious outcome of Crowley's influence on Western esoteric traditions lies precisely in the (re)interpretation of tantric teachings as being centered on the ritual use of sex.² Contemporary Western “neo-tantra” seems to be even more emphatically oriented towards the pursuit of prolonged orgasmic pleasure, an attitude that often provokes outright dismissals of this type of spirituality as inauthentic and based on misunderstanding.³ Nevertheless, there is an interesting parallel, a sort of mirroring, between ideas about the properties of human

¹ On Crowley, see Pasi, *Aleister Crowley e la Tentazione della Politica*, and von Stuckrad, ‘Aleister Crowley, Thelema und Religionsgeschichte’. For a biographical account see, among a number of others, Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*.

² See, for example, Urban, ‘The Cult of Ecstasy’, esp. 215–223, and idem., ‘The Beast with Two Backs’ and ‘The Yoga of Sex’.

³ ‘In these forms of New Age tantra, we see a Western projection on the Mystic East, which is believed to be more sensual and world-affirming than Western culture. These writers and practitioners are inventing something new, but claiming authority based on the old, giving knowledge and authority without study or effort. Tantra becomes a sales gimmick, whose aspects of renunciation, transcendence, and yogic meditation are largely forgotten, as are its devotional and philosophical aspects’. McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*, 277. Harsher in his assessment is White, who refers to the practitioners of Western neo-tantra as ‘ersatz entrepreneurs of ecstasy, male and female’. *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 272. An alternative view, consonant with my own approach, is proposed by Urban: ‘Unlike many recent scholars, however, I do not think that the popular American and New Age versions of Tantra can be dismissed as the mere products of ‘for-profit purveyors of Tantric sex’, who ‘peddle their shoddy wares’. Rather, I see these contemporary neo-tātrikas (however absurd they might appear to those in the academy) as *important representations of the ongoing transformations of Tantra in culture and in history*’ [emphasis added]. Urban, ‘Diagnosing the “Disease” of Tantra’, 5. Urban is quoting White, ‘Tantra in Practice’, 5.

seed in certain traditions of tantric yoga and in Crowley's teachings. In both cases, the male seed is considered to have great magical power and, in the final instance, ambrosial attributes. But the reflected image is upside-down: while the yogis attempt to sublimate the sperm by forcing it to traverse upwards from the genitals to the head, where it turns into elixir of immortality, in Crowley's case the sperm moves downwards, it is ejected and made use of as elixir in its material form.

In other words the yogis, and I have in mind particularly the Nāth Siddha yogis (*vide infra*), are predominantly engaged in the transformation of the semen from the gross into the subtle form. The method thus consists of the spiritualization of the material: in Western alchemical terms, and with respect to the famous formula of *solve et coagula*, this process may be designated as *solve*. It may also be considered as the path of the serpent, which may be related to the "serpent power", *kundalinī*, which—when "awakened"—rises from the lowest *cakra* at the base of the spine to the top of the head. In Crowley's case, conversely, the *material* form of the semen is sanctified as a form of Eucharist and taken, *inter alia*, as a symbolic representation of the natural human body that has become divine.⁴ We may interpret this other method as the materialization of the spiritual, or, in alchemical terms, *coagula*. This may also be designated as the path of the dove, which may be related to the descending dove represented on the seal of Crowley's magical order Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.).⁵ In what follows, my intention is to explore formal characteristics and implications of this thematic parallel and these methodological differences.

Solve: The Nāth Siddhas Or The Path Of The Serpent

The order (*sampradāya*) of North Indian *hatha* yogis (with tantric connections) known as the Nāth Siddhas⁶ was founded in the early medieval period. Their lineage particularly venerates two semi-legendary adepts, Matsyendranāth

⁴ For example, in the ritual of the Gnostic Mass. See Crowley, *Magick*, 584–597.

⁵ For a concise account of the structure and history of the O.T.O., see Pasi, 'Ordo Templi Orientis'.

⁶ On the Nāth Siddhas, see (in alphabetic order) Bouillier, *Ascètes et Rois*; Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānpaṭa Yogis*; Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*; Gold, *A Carnival of Parting*; and White, *The Alchemical Body*. For an attempt to correlate the system of the Nāth Siddhas (and Indian tantra in general) with the Western esoteric tradition, see Djurdjevic, *Masters of Magical Powers*.

(who possibly lived in the 8th or 9th century) and Gorakhnāth (who probably lived in the 12th century). An important aspect of their teaching lies in the notion that the human seed originates in the cranial vault, at which place it exists in the subtle form of the elixir of immortality, *amṛta*. Unfortunately, this precious liquid drips continually down the spinal column and eventually gets destroyed in gastric fire or through ejaculation.⁷ The Nāth yogis believe that this process is the principal cause of disease, old age, and dying. Thus we read in ‘The Sayings of Gorakh’, a collection of vernacular poetry attributed to Gorakhnāth, the following description of the consequences to which the dissipation of the semen leads: ‘The legs become shaky, the stomach loose / And the [hair on the] head [white] like a heron’s wings’.⁸ The first necessary step to counteract this process lies in the adoption of a celibate lifestyle. As a consequence, the Nāths embrace an anti-sexual and sometimes outright misogynic attitude, as evidenced in the following statements:

The vagina is a vampire. The vagina is a vampire.
Without teeth, she has devoured the whole world.
The wise have saved their head with wisdom;
The [ordinary] people have forgotten their own selves.⁹

Celibacy, however, is not in and of itself the final goal of the Nāth yogis, but only its preliminary requirement. The most important work consists of the process of reversal, *ultā sādhanā*, by which the sperm, or *bindu*, needs to return to its place of origin in the head. This is achieved through the regime of

⁷ It is evident that Crowley was cognizant of these ideas. In the ‘Part II’ of his *Magick*, originally published in 1913, he writes: ‘In Hindu symbolism the *amṛta* or “dew of immortality” drips constantly upon a man, but is burnt up by the gross fire of his appetites. Yogins attempt to catch and so preserve this dew by turning back the tongue in the mouth’. Crowley, *Magick*, 74 (68 in the first edition). Crowley is making reference here to the practice of the so-called *khēcari mudrā*; for this practice and its associated classical text, see Mallinson, *Khēcarividyā of Ādinātha*. See also *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* III: 32–53.

⁸ ‘The Sayings of Gorakh’ or ‘Gorakh Bānī’ (hereafter G.B.), Pad 43: 2. ‘gṛ bhae ḍagmag peṭ bhayā ḍhī ā, sir bagulām pankhiyā’. All the translations from the ‘The Sayings of Gorakh’ are by Singh and Djurdjevic.

⁹ G.B., Pad 48: refrain. ‘bhag rākasi lo, bhag rākasi lo, biṃṇaṃ dantā jag khāyā lo / gyāṃnī hutā su gyāṃn mukh rahiā, jī v lokāpai āp gaṃvāyā lo’. For a similarly construed Western view of woman as a predator and/or vampire (comparable to Indian *rākṣasī*, as in our translation above), see Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters*. The following statement expresses the attitude *in nuce*: ‘the male was a container filled with sexual fluids [*totus homo semen*], and woman, the sexual animal, longed to gather these into her deadly womb’. Ibid., 66.

yoga, consisting of postures, *āsanas*, breathing exercises, *prāṇāyāma*, muscular contractions, *bandhas*, chanting of *mantras*, and the practice of meditation, *dhyāna*.¹⁰ The successful completion of the process of reversal results in the transformation of the sperm back into the elixir of immortality, which causes the yogi to become godlike, “a second Śiva”. His body becomes divine, *divya deha*, and he obtains immortality, *amṛtatva*, and miraculous powers, *siddhis*, which render him an accomplished adept, *siddha*. As Shashibhushan Dasgupta has stated, ‘[I]t has been emphatically declared in all texts of yoga that he, who has been able to give an upward flow to the [seminal] fluid is a god, and not a man’.¹¹

As has been observed by several scholars, the basic operative principle of the yoga associated with the Nāth Siddhas represents an application and internalization of the Indian alchemy, *rasāyana*. Indian tradition relates mercury and sulfur, the two major (al)chemical substances comparable to the Western *materia prima*, to the divine couple Śiva and Śakti. When internalized, these chemical elements are identified with the sperm, *bindu*, which corresponds to Śiva, and the menstrual blood, *rajas*, corresponding to Śakti.¹² Śiva’s dwelling place, within the esoteric geography of the human body, is situated in the head, or to be more precise, in the *sahasrāra* cakra, the topmost center of occult energy. Śakti lies dormant in the *mūlādhāra* cakra, at the base of the spine. The principle task of the yogi is to make these two divinities unite, which attainment results in the liberation from fundamental duality, *dvandva*,¹³ which is understood as the cause of suffering, *duḥkha*, based on ignorance, *avidyā*. Thus Gorakhnāth urges his disciples: ‘Take Śiva and Śakti and make them meet’,¹⁴ while he expresses his own achievement by stating, ‘Joining Śiva and Śakti, I have remained within my own house’.¹⁵ Similarly, we read in a Sanskrit text, also attributed to Gorakhnāth:

¹⁰ For a manual of yoga typical of the Nāth Siddhas see, for example, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

¹¹ Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 246.

¹² ‘Śakti is in the form of blood, / Śiva is in the form of semen’. G.B., Pad 12: 5. ‘śakti rūpī raj āchai siv rūpī byand’.

¹³ Gopināth Kaviraj has observed that ‘when Śiva and Śakti are united this phantasm [of phenomenal world where Śiva and Śakti appear as divided] vanishes into nothing. We shall see that the aim of Yoga is the establishment of this Union’. Kaviraj, ‘Some Aspects of the History and Doctrine of the Nāthas’, 73.

¹⁴ G.B., Sabad 84. ‘siv śakti le kari jrau’.

¹⁵ G.B., Sabad 130. ‘khartar pavanām rahai nirantari / mahāras sī jhai lāyā abhiantari / gorakh kahai amhe cañcal grahiyā / siv śakti le nij ghari rahiyā.’

Bindu is Śiva, menstrual blood is Śakti; *bindu* is the Moon, menstrual blood the Sun. Highest station is obtained only by joining them together.

Semen is associated with the Moon, and menstrual blood is associated with the Sun. The person who knows that they are of identical essence is the knower of yoga.¹⁶

Based on the above attributions, it would appear that a natural method of uniting Śiva with Śakti lies in the commingling of the semen with menstrual blood. It is quite possible that this methodological orientation was characteristic of the early phase of tantra, associated with the cult of the divine *yoginīs* and the Kaula tradition of Matsyendranāth.¹⁷ In fact, as David Gordon White has persuasively argued, this early phase of tantra¹⁸ was based on the lineage tradition that involved, as the core element of initiation, the consummation of the “clan nectar”, *kulāmṛta*, issuing from the nether “mouth” of the female *yoginī*.¹⁹ The later Nāth tradition, however, is predominantly androcentric and misogynic.²⁰

¹⁶ *Gorakṣa Vacana Samgrahaḥ* vv. 38–39. In ‘Collection of Gorakṣa’s Sayings’. Original Sanskrit text in Banerjea, *Philosophy of Gorakṣnath*, 333–344.

¹⁷ See White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*.

¹⁸ ‘For all intents and purposes, the Kaula disappeared, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with a catastrophic break in most of the guru-disciple lineages, a break most likely occasioned by the progressive Muslim conquest of north India’. *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁹ ‘This was the basic doctrine of Matsyendranāth’s venerable Yoginī Kaula: women, because they are embodiments of the Goddess and because it is through their ‘wombs’ that the lineage is perpetuated, have something that men do not; it is therefore necessary for males to tap into the female in order that that boundless source of energy be activated within them. This fluid power substance (*dravya*) or lineage nectar (*kulāmṛta*), also simply known by the term ‘true being’ (*sadbhāva*)—the purest substance found in the human body—is unique to women in their multiple roles as sexual consorts, practitioners of yoga, and biological mothers’. White, *Alchemical Body*, 200.

²⁰ However, Dasgupta writes that ‘in spite of this general attitude of aversion towards women, the Nāth Siddhas also practiced some well-known processes of yoga like Vajraulī, Amaraulī, Sahajaulī, etc. in the company of women. But these practices are yogic practices, pure and simple, in which women are neither philosophised upon, nor idealised’. Dasgupta, *Obscure Cults*, 250. On these practices, see *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3: 82–96. Gold suggests that the misogyny of the Nāth Siddhas is counterbalanced by the esteem for women as natural possessors of magical power. Writing on the subject of Rajasthani folk songs about the famous Nāth yogi Gopi Chand, she claims: ‘As a whole the Rajasthani Gopi Chand transmits a world view in which gender is construed flexibly, the attributes of the different sexes are at times interchangeable, and misogyny coexists with a view of women as definitely the better half. Both in love and in magic, women command the power of *māyā*, and no ordinary male can overcome this—although the very best

The focus of attention becomes the male seed, *bindu*,²¹ and its transformation into the elixir. The *bindu* is invested with miraculous powers: it is considered the root of the body, essence of yoga, and the provider of immortality. But only, and this is an important qualification, if it is not wasted, if it is not ejaculated in the act of sex. This is so because *bindu* is the elixir only if brought back from the genitals to the top of the head. For, once it has trickled down to the genitals, it has lost its ambrosial value.

The properties and transformations of the *bindu* are closely related to other constituents of the yogi's subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*), such as the *kundalini*²² and the *cakras*. The latter, as is well known, are the subtle centres of occult energy, situated along the spinal column, usually considered to be four, five, or seven in number.²³ Each *cakra* is associated with a cluster of corresponding properties and, *inter alia*, each one carries an elementary attribution. The lowest *cakra* is associated with the element earth, the one above it with water, then follows fire, and finally air. Above these, in the region of the “third eye” is the *cakra* corresponding with the space or ether, *ākāśa*. The highest *cakra* is the dwelling place of Śiva. As the *cakras* rise up along the spine, their properties become more and more subtle. The spiritual progress of a yogi follows precisely this path of “involution”²⁴ or sublimation, so that the typical method of practice starts with the yogi meditating on and thus identifying with the lowest *cakra*, while the ultimate goal is to reach and ‘awaken’ the highest one and in this manner to acquire a divine body and become equal to the god Śiva. In other words, the yogi initially identifies with the *bindu*²⁵ by focusing attention at the level corresponding to the material realm and from there the

of yogis can outdo women by rejecting the former and co-opting the latter’. Gold, ‘Gender and Illusion in a Rajasthani Yogic Tradition’, 126.

²¹) A Sanskrit text attributed to Gorakhnāth, *Vivekamārtanḍa*, suggests that both male and female type of the *bindu* is present within, what appears to be androgynous, subtle body of a yogi. See *Vivekamārtanḍa*, vv. 75–77.

²²) See the classic study by Silburn, *Kundalini, the Energy of the Depths*.

²³) On the subject of *cakras*, see an important article by White, ‘Yoga in Early Hindu Tantra’, 143–161, and a study by Heilijger-Seelens, *The System of the Five Cakras*. As White has convincingly argued, Western ideas on the number of *cakras* are based on the popularity of a work by Avalon (a.k.a. Woodroffe), *The Serpent Power*.

²⁴) The spiritual progress of a yogi is thus contrary to the process of the evolution of the cosmos. This subject is treated in White, ‘Why Gurus Are Heavy’.

²⁵) The *bindu* is here understood as the real carrier of one's identity and the root of the body.

direction is to proceed upwards and towards more subtle levels of existence and identity. From earthly body towards divine, spiritual body: the method is *solve*.

The Nāth yogis consistently glorify the powers of the *bindu*. ‘*Bindu* is verily yoga’, claims Gorakhnāth. ‘The one who knows the mystery of this *bindu*, / He is creator, he is god’.²⁶ But the typical leitmotif is that the flow of semen has to be reversed. Consequently, Gorakh advises that ‘The lower Ganges should be brought up to the [top of the] world’,²⁷ a metaphorical rendition of the principle of seminal reversal. On the “top of the world”, in the “circle of the sky”, in other words, in the highest *cakra*, the *bindu* resides in the pool of nectar, which the adept yogi internally drinks and thus obtains magical powers, including immortality. ‘In the circle of the sky is an upside-down well. / There is the residence of nectar. / He who has a guru can drink it all’.²⁸ The yogi who has successfully accomplished this feat transcends in his status even the gods, or as Gorakhnāth puts it: ‘Even Viṣṇu washes the feet / Of the yogi who holds above what [otherwise] goes below’.²⁹

According to the well-known legend of the Nāth lore, Gorakhnāth’s guru Matsyendranāth temporarily lost his yogic way of life by succumbing to the powers of the queen of the “land of women”.³⁰ As a result, Matsyendranāth, a “fallen yogi”, is often depicted as an old man, the inevitable outcome of his waste of semen in the embrace of a woman. Contrary to that, Gorakhnāth is typically represented as a youth, a “child Gorakh”, *Gorakh bālak*. In fact, one of the most significant verses in the ‘Sayings of Gorakh’ alludes to Gorakhnāth as a child that delivers a yogic sermon from the “summit of the sky”, in other words, from the *sahāsrāra cakra*.³¹ Thus, in a certain sense, the “child Gorakh” dwells esoterically at the highest level of the human mind-body complex, which is otherwise accessed by, and after a manner identical with, the semen that has returned to its place of origin, and to its condition of elixir, at the “summit of

²⁶ G.B., Sabad 148. ‘byand hīm jog. .../yā bind kā koi jāṃṇaiṃ bhev/so āpaiṃ kartā āpaiṃ dev’.

²⁷ G.B., Sabad 2. ‘pātāl kī gaṅgā brahmaṇḍNcaṛhāibā’.

²⁸ G.B., Sabad 23. ‘gagan maṇḍal maiṃ ūṃdhā kūbā tahāṃ amṃṛt kā bāsā/sagurā hoi su bhari bhari pī vai’.

²⁹ G.B., Sabad 17. ‘aradhai jātā uradhai dharai .../tākā bisnu pakhālai pāyā’.

³⁰ See, for example, Gautam, *Śrī Gorakhnāth Caritra*.

³¹ G.B., Sabad 1: ‘In the circle of the sky, a child is speaking’. ‘gagan-sikhar mahiṃ bālak bolai’.

the sky”.³² In other words, it is possible on at least one metaphorical level to interpret the “child Gorakh” as an anthropomorphic image of the human seed in its highest, divine aspect. We will subsequently see that Crowley also considers the human sperm in both anthropomorphic and theomorphic registers. It hardly merits mentioning that the operating mechanism, which makes possible this chain of associations, rests on the esoteric notion of *correspondence* (in Sanskrit, *bandhu* or *nidāna*), which connects Gorakhnāth with Śiva who also is the *bindu*.

To summarize: the Nāth Siddhas attribute miraculous powers to the male seed but only under the condition that it has been sublimated, returned to the top of the head, and transformed from its gross material condition into the subtle form of the elixir. Thus, in addition to gender disparity, evidenced in the devaluation of women and the ambrosial potentials of their bodily fluids, the ideology of the Nāth yogis incorporates the hierarchical distinction between pure, that is to say the upper, parts of the human body and impure, lower parts of the body, those that are below the navel. Similarly, aspects of reality are considered more important when they exist in their subtle form (such as the seed in the aspect of elixir), while the material manifestations of the same (such as the physical seed) are devalued.

Coagula: Aleister Crowley or the Path of the Dove

It is not entirely clear through which historical channels has Aleister Crowley arrived at and synthesized his version of sex magick, which supposedly informs the highest teaching of his magical order Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.) (Crowley became the head of the O.T.O. in 1922). A probable link points in the direction of Paschal Beverly Randolph and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light.³³ Another major influence seems to be Clément de Saint-

³² It is also highly significant that, according to the same legend, Gorakhnāth was born from the earth (in fact, from the heap of the cow dung), where he dwelled for twelve years before being “discovered” and “unearthed” by his teacher. It is possible to read in this description an allusion to Gorakhnāth as the *bindu* “born” in the *mūlādhāra cakra*, traditionally associated with the element of Earth. Understood in this way, Gorakhnāth’s yogic career, which parallels the reversed journey of the *bindu*, starts with the birth in the lowest *cakra* and ends with him as an eternal youth in the uppermost *cakra* in the human body.

³³ See Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*; idem., ‘Randolph and Sexual Magic’; and Godwin, Chanel and Deveney (eds.), *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*. However, Marco Pasi

Marcq.³⁴ There is no doubt, however, that Crowley has *amplified* the teaching transmitted through the original O.T.O. by references to other related techniques that blend spirituality with sex and it seems clear that he was familiar with some tantric and *hatha* yogic ideas on the subject. This being said, it is emphatically not my intention to claim a historical link but rather to investigate formal similarities between Crowley's sex magick and the yoga of the Nāth Siddhas.

It calls for immediate mention that the line of connection between sexual aspects of the early phase of tantra (*vide supra*) and Crowley's teachings is simultaneously the line of demarcation that separates him from the contemporary New Age neo-*tāntrikas*. Unlike the latter, Crowley does not appear to be primarily interested in the prolonged orgasmic bliss; instead, his main preoccupation seems to lie in the ambrosial potential of sexual fluids. In the same way as the Nāth Siddhas, Crowley appears sexist³⁵ in assigning the superior value to the male seed; in other words, he too tends 'to fetishize manhood as a gateway to immortality'.³⁶ What distinguishes his method is the methodological preference for the material form of the semen, which is ejaculated, commingled with vaginal fluids, and either consumed as a magical form of Eucharist or employed in order to consecrate talismans.

It is significant that in one of the earliest essays on the subject, Crowley places emphasis on the physiological, i.e. material aspects of sexual magick, while simultaneously establishing connection between the sexual activity and artistic creativity. He writes:

The divine consciousness which is reflected and refracted in the works of Genius feeds upon a certain secretion, as I believe. This secretion is analogous to semen, but not identical with it. ... So closely is this secretion connected with the sexual economy that it appears to me at times as if it might be a by-product of that process which generates semen.³⁷

points out that 'unfortunately there is no evidence in support of this possibility'. He speculates, nevertheless, that Randolph's writings may have influenced the founders of the O.T.O. via John Yarker. See Pasi, 'Ordo Templi Orientis', 902.

³⁴ On Saint-Marcq, see Pasi, 'The Knight of Spermatophagy'. See also n. 41.

³⁵ Crowley's sexism is notorious but not exceptional in the context of Edwardian gender relationships. In addition, it needs emphasizing that he was also quite capable of glorifying women, the best example of which is provided in some of the comments on *The Book of the Law*. See, for example, Crowley, *The Law is for All*, 170–178. See also n. 20.

³⁶ Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters*, 5.

³⁷ Crowley, 'Energized Enthusiasm', 19.

An important assertion in the above quotation is that it is vigorous sexual activity, and not the ascetic denial of the same, which leads to the creative outbursts: the one seems to parallel the other. Crowley will eventually arrive at the position that the sexual (and especially male) fluids represent crystallization of the highest magical power. His magical diaries, the most representative of which is his ‘Rex de Arte Regia’,³⁸ are consequently filled with continual references to the sexual rites conducted with specific aims in mind, at the conclusion of which he would partake of the “Eucharist”, consisting of the *bindu* mixed with vaginal fluids and/or menstrual blood. Thus, in contradistinction to the method of the Nāth yogis, Crowley commences his practice at the mental or ideal level, by concentrating the attention on the goal of practice and by remaining focused on it up to, and through, the moment of orgasm and ejaculation. In doing so, he in effect “fixes the immobile” and earths, or draws down, the spiritual or ideal (in the Platonic sense) form of semen, originally impressed by the image of the goal meditated upon, which now becomes material and turns into a sacrament. His view of the value of this sort of a sacrament is neatly summarized in the following passage from his *magnum opus*, *Magick in Theory and Practice*:³⁹

The Magician becomes filled with God, fed upon God, intoxicated with God. Little by little his body will become purified by the internal lustration of God; day by day his mortal frame, shedding its earthly elements, will become in very truth the Temple of the Holy Ghost. Day by day the matter is replaced by Spirit, the human by the divine; ultimately the change will be complete: God manifest in flesh will be his name.⁴⁰

Keeping in mind the fact that Crowley’s method of sexual magick has already received a significant amount of scholarly treatment, I will refrain from going into details of its principles and technicalities, and focus instead on some less explored areas. In particular, my intention is to investigate a set of ideas that relate to the notion that the human seed represents an essential identity of the person, a form of a deity, or an aspect of one’s Holy Guardian

³⁸ ‘Rex de Arte Regia’ is (incompletely) published in Crowley, *Magical Record of the Beast 666*, 1–82.

³⁹ Part III of *Magick*; see the next note. First edition, issued as a separate monograph, is Paris: Lecram Press, 1929. (The title page gives 1929 as the publication date; the actual date is 1930. See *Magick*, 726.)

⁴⁰ Crowley, *Magick: Liber Aba: Book Four: Parts I–IV*, 269.

Angel (Crowley's adopted term for one's "higher" or "essential" Self). This investigation will eventually lead to a comparison with the related ideas implied in the system of yoga as practiced by the Nāth Siddhas.

The implied divine nature of sexual fluids is apparent in the previous quotation, where Crowley refers to the consummation of the "Eucharist" as resulting in the Magician being 'filled with God, fed upon God, intoxicated with God'. Just as the Christian theology understands the bread and wine used in the ritual of the Mass to be equivalent to the *real* body and blood of Jesus Christ, Crowley assumes of his version of the "Eucharist" to be literally the material incarnation of the god.⁴¹ This is also already evident in the lines from one of his "holy" or inspired texts, which in this case predates his involvement with the O.T.O. 'Liber Stellae Rubeae', describes the ejaculation of the sperm in a sexual rite under the disturbing metaphor of child sacrifice: 'Also he shall slay a young child upon the altar, and the blood shall cover the altar with perfume as of roses. Then shall the master appear as He should appear—in His glory'.⁴² Who is this master? It would appear that it is the sperm understood in its metaphysical aspect. The same idea is entertained, *inter alia*, in the chapter from *The Book of Lies*, called 'Dewdrops', where the sperm is equated with the "Dew of Immortality", and described as 'the Quintessence and Elixir of [man's] being', with the following admonition: 'Let this go free, even as It will; thou art not its master, but the vehicle of It'.⁴³

There are scattered allusions in Crowley's writings to the effect that the human sexual secretions, in their religious connotation, constitute the secret or "silent" Self of the person. This secret Self is occasionally equated with the "Babe in the Egg of Blue", and identified as the god of silence, Hoor-Pa-Kraat (Harpocrates), one of the principal Thelemic deities. The "egg" in question is 'not only Akasha, but the original egg in the biological sense. This egg issues

⁴¹) The Gnostic sect of Borborites or Barbelites seems to have held a similar view about sexual fluids as a form of Eucharist. See Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 82–99. It appears that the O.T.O. position on the matter was significantly informed, *inter alia*, by the writings of Clément de Saint-Marcq, particularly his booklet *L'Eucharistie*, published in 1906. According to Pasi, this essay 'would become one of the most important sources for [Theodor] Reuss's ideas on sexual magic'. Pasi, 'Ordo Templi Orientis', 900. (Theodor Reuss was Crowley's predecessor as the Head of the O.T.O.) Crowley's text 'Agape vel Liber C vel Azoth' seems to be suggesting that the seminal Eucharist is the mystical form of Jesus Christ. See *The Secret Rituals*, 207–229.

⁴²) 'Liber Stellae Rubeae', vv. 22–23, in Crowley, *The Holy Books of Thelema*, 89.

⁴³) Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 46.

from the lotus, which is the symbol of the Yoni [vagina]'.⁴⁴ Despite the fact that Crowley recognizes the role of a female "egg" in its generative function, it is more consonant with his general ideological position to give precedence to the inherent virtues of the male seed. This is perhaps most clearly evident in his adoption of the Nicolaas Hartsoeker's (1656–1725) famous image of the sperm cell containing within it the fully formed miniature child.⁴⁵ This image appears on the Tarot card 'The Hermit', painted by Frieda Harris (1877–1962) under Crowley's instructions (the homunculus is incorporated within the Hermit's staff).⁴⁶ His comments on the card are highly illuminating in the context of present considerations.

'The Hermit' is associated with the Hebrew letter *yod*, which by its shape resembles the seed. It is also the first letter of the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), and thus it 'symbolizes the Father, who is Wisdom; he is the highest form of Mercury, and the Logos, the Creator of all worlds. Accordingly, *his representative in physical life is spermatozoon*; this is why the card is called The Hermit'.⁴⁷ (Note that both Crowley and the Nāth Siddhas relate the sperm to Mercury). In addition this card, and its associated set of correspondences, is considered to illustrate 'the entire mystery of Life in its most secret workings'.⁴⁸ Perhaps the most important aspect of the card, however, lies in the notion that it represents 'the general doctrine that *the climax of the Descent into Matter is the signal for the reintegration by Spirit*. It is ... the mode of fulfillment of the Great Work'.⁴⁹ And it is precisely this ideological position, the notion that the descent into material form is a necessary prerequisite for spiritual reintegration, that on the one hand justifies and explains Crowley's valorization of the material form of the seed (and a cluster of related ideas and practices), while on the other hand distances his mode of approaching the potentials of sexual secretions from the method of the Nāth Siddhas. The ultimate result may be the same but the two methodological orientations reflect divergent views about the relationship between the material and the spiritual realms of existence. I will elaborate on this in the following section.

⁴⁴ Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 62.

⁴⁵ On Hartsoeker's and related 17th and 18th century theories of conception, see Pinto-Correia, *The Ovary of Eve*. For a reproduction of Hartsoeker's drawing of a sperm cell, see *ibid.*, 212.

⁴⁶ For a reproduction of 'The Hermit', see *ibid.*, 240; see also Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 88; emphasis added.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

Conclusions

The Nāth Siddhas occupy a somewhat controversial position with respect to the tantric traditions of India. In general, they share with tantric practitioners an interest in the human body as an instrument of liberation and microcosm infused with hidden powers and properties. But with respect to the liberating potentials of sexuality, they appear rather puritanical. They do not draw the tantric equation between yoga and *bhoga*, between meditation and (this-worldly and sexual) pleasure. As a consequence, their ultimate goal seems to be imbedded in the traditional Indian model of withdrawal from the world and material existence. This is also reflected and apparent in their attitude towards the ambrosial potential of the human seed: it is considered an elixir of immortality but only if withdrawn from sexual organs (associated with the element of Earth) and brought up to the top of the head (associated with emptiness, *śūnya*, or Heaven, *gagana*). In a similar vein, guru Matsyendranāth, who marries and has children, is considered a “fallen” (*patita*) yogi, in contrast to Gorakhnāth, the celibate and for that reason (from the perspective of the Nāths) eternally young yogi, the one who has preserved his seed.

The sexual magick of Aleister Crowley is anchored in a different ideological perspective. Crowley considered his religious / magical philosophy of Thelema to be representative of what he termed the White School of Magick, understood in its special meaning of a doctrine that accepts and celebrates material existence.⁵⁰ As a consequence, the ultimate goal of the Thelemic adept consists not in withdrawal from the world but in the deliberate intention ‘[t]o do [one’s] pleasure on the earth [a]mong the legions of the living’.⁵¹ An important aspect of this doctrinal attitude lies in the positive orientation towards the human body and sexuality. By extension, and as a practical implementation of this theoretical position with respect to the ambrosial potentials of the human seed, Crowley attributes magical significance to the

⁵⁰ Interestingly enough, Crowley also considers the Indian tantric traditions among historical representatives of the White School of Magick. See his ‘Three Schools of Magick’.

⁵¹ ‘The Mass of the Phœnix’, in *The Book of Lies*, 99. The ultimate source of this phrase lies in a chapter from *The Book of the Dead*, inscribed in the so-called Stèle of Revealing, ‘a funerary monument of Ankh-f-n-khonsu, a Theban priest of Month (or Mentu) who flourished (according to modern scholarship) circa 725 BCE, in Egypt’s 25th Dynasty’. McMurtry, ‘Preface’, xi. Crowley claimed spiritual identity with (i.e., considered himself a reincarnation of) Ankh-f-n-khonsu. See also *Magick*, 745, n. 257.

material form of the semen. In doing so, he gives precedence to the path of the dove over the path of the serpent, to *coagula* over *solve*.

The closest resemblance between the yoga of the Nāth Siddhas and the sexual magick of Aleister Crowley lies in the theophanic understanding of sexual fluids. The Nāths imply that the semen and menstrual blood are forms of Śiva and Śakti, and Crowley holds a similar view. They all also attach great importance to the symbol of the child, and from a certain perspective, this “child” is identical to the human sperm. In the case of the Nāths, this is implied through the correspondence between the semen, Śiva, and Gorakhnāth (who is occasionally deified as a “second Śiva”). Gorakhnāth is also the child who is giving the speech from the “summit of heaven”, in other words, from the highest *cakra*, the ultimate destination of the *bindu*, which in this place also assumes the form of the elixir. Gorakhnāth is Śiva, who is the semen, which is the eternal divine child. Similarly, Crowley refers to the theogony of *The Book of the Law* under the rubric of *Kteis* (vagina), *Phallos*, and *Sperma*:⁵² the Mother, the Father, and the Child. This “child”, the Lord of the Eon of Thelema, is thus, from at least one point of view, correspondent to the spiritual aspect of the sperm.⁵³

Both Crowley and the Nāths draw a connection, on several levels, between the properties of the human seed and the condition of immortality. A common feature of the yogic stories is their ability to “trick Death” (*kāla vañcana*). The implication is that those who control their *bindu* thereby escape the clutches of mortality. This is comparable to Crowley’s suggestion that the sperm is able to tame the three-headed hound of Hell, Cerberus.⁵⁴ It is a biological fact that the sexual secretions are the “secret” of the physical continuation, or “immortality”, of the human species. Immortality is the condition of the gods, who are “not mortal” (*amar*), a Sanskrit word related to *amṛta* (elixir of immortality), which is again an aspect or property of sexual fluids. The connection between these ideas should be apparent. And the view that the human sperm might be considered a form of the god should also appear less strange if approached from the perspective of the identity between the microcosm and macrocosm. This

⁵² See *ibid.*, 11.

⁵³ The divine property of the human seed is also made evident in the following statement: ‘Now the Semen is God (the going-one, as shewn by the *ankh* or Sandal-strap, which He carries) because he goes in at the Door, stays there for a specific period, and comes out again, having flowered, and still bearing in him that Seed of Going’. An excerpt from ‘Liber XCVII: Soror Achitha’s Vision’, qtd. in *The Law is for All*, 171–172.

⁵⁴ See *The Book of Thoth*, 89.

view is usually taken in the sense that the human being analogically resembles the universe, but it is equally possible to analogically identify the macrocosm as the human being and the microcosm as the human seed. Consequently, at least in some of their theories, both the Nāth Siddhas and Aleister Crowley ascribe to the view that imputes divine properties to the potentials of the human sexual secretions.

There remains the question of historical connections between sexual practices of the yogis and Crowley's magick. His mode of practice is, by his own admission, transmitted to him through the channel of the O.T.O.⁵⁵ One of the founders of this Order was Carl Kellner, who was supposedly initiated in these teachings by three "Oriental Adepts".⁵⁶ Two of these three were genuine yogis: Bheema Sena Pratapa and Agamya Guru Paramahansa, whose works on yogic traditions were published in English and known by Crowley.⁵⁷ Kellner's successor, Theodor Reuss, was similarly interested in yoga and wrote on the subject, as Kellner also did.⁵⁸ It is conceivable that some sort of genuine transmission was effected along these lines. In addition, Crowley traveled in India and was familiar with some literature on the topic—such as *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* and *Śiva Samhitā*—which treat of the *cakras*, *kundalinī*, and the practice of urethral suction (*vajroli mudrā*) by which the yogi withdraws commingled semen and vaginal fluids.

It is also almost certain that some relevant information reached the O.T.O. through the teachings of P.B. Randolph and particularly through the writings of Clément de Saint-Marcq on the subject of spermatophagy. An often-overlooked *possible* historical influence might lie in some of the practices of Count Cagliostro and his "Rite of Mizraim".⁵⁹ According to Massimo Introv-

⁵⁵ See *The Magical Record*, 3.

⁵⁶ On Kellner and his contacts with these adepts, see Kaczynski, 'Carl Kellner's Esoteric Roots'.

⁵⁷ See Agamya, *Śrī Brahma Dhāra: "Shower from the Highest"* and *The Land of Eternity: Amar Bhumika Discourses*. On Crowley and Agamya, see Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 137–138.

⁵⁸ See Reuss, 'Mystic Anatomy', and *Lingam-Yoni*. On Reuss, see Möller and Howe, *Merlin Peregrinus: Vom Untergrund des Abendlandes*, and Howe and Möller, 'Theodor Reuss: Irregular Freemasonry in Germany, 1920–1923'. Kellner wrote 'Yoga, eine Skizze über den Psychophysiologischen Teil den Alten Indischen Yogalehre'.

⁵⁹ The closely related Rites of Memphis and Mizraim were listed among those bodies whose "wisdom and knowledge" were incorporated into the O.T.O. See 'Manifesto of the O.T.O.'. It is of some significance that Crowley considered Cagliostro as one of his previous incarnations. See Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 261.

gne, certain French and German occult schools draw a distinction between “dry” and “wet” methods of alchemical practice. The “wet” method, alternatively designated as “inner” alchemy, consists of ‘eating, in diverse ways, the semen’.⁶⁰ Interestingly enough, the ultimate goal of inner alchemy was again the obtainment of immortality.⁶¹ Christopher Macintosh also noted the employment of semen for the purpose of the production of elixir in inner alchemy.⁶² But it would be, perhaps, an oversimplification to assume that the ideas of the mystical properties of human sexual secretions were limited to the above sources. They in fact seem to be widespread. I suggest that it is feasible to treat these notions as an example of an “ideal” or “logical object”, as proposed initially by Ioan Culianu⁶³ and, more recently, Leon Marvell.⁶⁴ Let me elaborate:

In Culianu’s interpretation, an ideal or logical object originates in the operations of the human mind, which is thus the locus of the genesis of ideas, unconstrained by the necessity of historical transmission. “The concept of ideal objects implies that a non-linear approach to the history of ideas is possible. ... The logical space represented by the ideal object is not restricted to the “arrow of time””.⁶⁵ The ideas of sanctity related to human sexual secretions thus do not need to originate among Gnostics (as reported by Epiphanius) or among Hindu Tantrikas: they *logically* follow on the basis of the convergence of several factors. Association between sexuality and the generation of life is obvious. The flow of energy between the head and genitals along the spinal column during an orgasm is empirically observable. That the male semen has an origin in the head, to which it needs to return, is attested belief in ancient India as well as

⁶⁰ Introvigne, ‘Arcana Arcanorum’, 127.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, 129–131. Introvigne speculates that practices incorporating the ingestion of sexual fluids represent ‘very ancient rituals that, in Europe, pass from some gnostic schools through the alchemic and cabalistic currents of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (where many alchemic texts can be read at two levels), until one finds them again in occult organizations formed and organized—above all in Germany—in the seventeenth century’. *Ibid.*, 129. See however Pasi, ‘Knight of Spermatophagy’, n. 73, where Introvigne’s interpretation of the evidence was rejected as “speculative”.

⁶² Macintosh writes that ‘certain “salts” ... are present in bodily secretions and, if the secretions are distilled, the prana-bearing essence can be extracted. It was this thinking that lay behind the formulae for making the elixir out of blood, sweat, urine, and semen’. Macintosh, *Rosicrucians*, 58.

⁶³ See, for example, Culianu, *The Tree of Gnosis*.

⁶⁴ See Marvell, *Transfigured Light*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

in Greece⁶⁶ and China;⁶⁷ however, the notion of logical object implies that this belief does not necessarily result from the historical contacts and transmissions: it is, instead, based on observation and combination of associated notions. The idea that the semen might be the essence of the person is not that odd if we recall that the origin of something is often viewed as its essential form. As Eliot, admittedly in another context, wrote in the *Four Quartets*, ‘In my beginning is my end’.⁶⁸ Thus I suggest that Crowley’s ideas on the subject are much more complex in their origin than a simple and straight line of historical transmission would allow for. He was exposed to these ideas and practices through several channels and he elaborated on them through research and experimentation. In the end, despite all the commotion that the subject still provokes, in its essentials it is something rather natural. The generations of humanity bestow life to their descendants through the medium of sexual fluids and if there is any biological candidate for an elixir of life, these same fluids seem a logical choice.

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⁶⁶ See the references in Onians, *The Origins of European Thought*. For example, ‘it was generally believed that the seed was ψυχή and was stored in the head’ (111). Alcmeon of Croton (6th century BCE) ‘held that the seed came from brain’ (115). Similarly, it was believed at the time that the ψυχή is itself “seed” (σπέρμα), or rather is in the “seed”, and this “seed” is enclosed in the skull and spine ... It breathes through the genital organ’ (119). Among later Gnostics, there is a curious statement attributed to the Ophites, according to which, ‘When the Waters of the Jordan flow downwards, then is the generation of men; but when they flow upward, then is the creation of the gods. Jesus (Joshua) was one who had caused the Waters of the Jordan to flow upwards’. See Mead, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (186).

⁶⁷ See, for example, Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, esp. 517–541. Thus we read, ‘A Book of the Immortals says: the principle of making Essence [i.e. semen] return to restore brain consists in copulating so that the Essence is very excited [and then pressing the area between the scrotum and penis]. Then, when the Essence is emitted, it cannot go out but returns to the Jade Shaft, *yü-ching* (penis), and goes up and enters the brain’ (ibid. 522). Incidentally, this and related methods are aimed at turning an adept into Immortal—another correlation between the potentials of seminal fluids and ambrosia. See also van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, who otherwise seems to hold a view that these ideas and practices were transmitted from India to China together with Buddhism. Robinet, however, claims that ‘longevity techniques much like those later associated with the Taoists definitely existed as early as the third century BC’. *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, 38.

⁶⁸ Elliot, ‘East Coker’.

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