

## TYPHON RISING

### The Magical Legacy of Kenneth Grant (1924-2011)

Five years on from the death of British author, occultist & poet Kenneth Grant, we are only just now beginning to see the first attempts at assessing the impact and legacy of the man who was the last-ever student & secretary of the notorious Aleister Crowley, and thought by many to be his natural successor. Grant was also a close friend to the magical artist Austin Osman Spare, supporting him in his final years, counted the godfather of Wicca, Gerald Gardner, as a colleague and sometimes rival, and during his time with Crowley met New Age Priestess, Dion Fortune. As such, Grant had direct contact with four of the most influential figures of the Magical & Mystical Revival of the mid-Twentieth Century. Regarding his own work, the nine volumes of Grant's three 'Typhonian Trilogies' written across the three decades from 1972 to 2003 – as well as several volumes of occult-themed fiction, and memoirs of the magical personalities he encountered – range across Alchemy, Cabala, Dream Control, Egyptology, H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, Left Hand Path, Sex-Magick, Surrealism, Tantra, Thelema, Tibetan Buddhism, UFOlogy, Witchcraft, Voodoo, and Back Again, and are a unique portrait of the Modern Occult Revival, as well as arguably one of its most creative currents.

So, just who exactly *was* Kenneth Grant?

Born 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1924, very little is known of Grant's background or actual biography. He was an intensely private man, who despite – or perhaps even because of? – the nature of his work and the notoriety of his mentor, Aleister Crowley, nonetheless pursued a rigid policy of non-disclosure, akin to the erasing of personal history advocated in the books of Carlos Castaneda. By his own admission something of a bookish, dreamy youth, fascinated by magic and mysticism, the young Grant had experienced astral projection and, at the age of 15, what he felt were spontaneous contacts from a being calling itself *Aushik* or *Aossic*, which he would later identify as his Holy Guardian Angel. Grant had come across *Magick In Theory and Practice* by 'The Master Therion' (a pen-name of Crowley's) in the Charing Cross Road bookshop, *Zwemmer's*, and, feeling here might be a key to understanding – or even controlling – his experiences, had prevailed upon Michael Houghton, proprietor of *The*

*Atlantis Bookshop*, to put him in touch with the author. Houghton declined, however – the reasons for which are unclear – but what *is* a matter of record is that Grant, after first writing, finally met with Crowley. It was December 1945, and as they shook hands for the first time the song *Shine On Harvest Moon* was playing on the radio in the background.

So it was that the young Kenneth Grant became, for a while, an informal assistant-cum-secretary to the aged Magus upon forsaking Blitz-battered London for the peace and quiet and relative safety of a lodging-house on the South Coast. It was at ‘*Netherwood*’ in Hastings, where The Great Beast would end his days just three short years later, that Grant would become apprenticed to Crowley’s Magick in earnest, be initiated into his Ordo Templi Orientis, meet the likes of Dion Fortune, Gerald Gardner, and Lady Frieda Harris, the gifted artist who illustrated Crowley’s superlative *Book of Thoth* Tarot-deck. He also became aware of Crowley’s still-extensive network of correspondence with occultists overseas – such as Karl Germer and Eugen Grosche in Germany, and Jane Wolfe, W. T. Smith, and Jack Parsons in America. For a while it even seems that the ageing Beast was grooming young Grant to be a possible successor, referring to him as a “*Gift from the Gods*”, and noting in his diary:

. . . *value of Grant. If I die or go to the USA, there must be a trained man to take care of the English OTO.*

But even at this early stage, Grant’s propensity for daydreaming and otherworldliness bewildered and frustrated the older man, who – after all – was looking for practical, day-to-day assistance first, and to train an heir second. Eventually it all became too much – particularly for Grant, who was missing his fiancée, Steffi – and Crowley let him go, but not before initiating Grant into the IX<sup>O</sup> O.T.O. and furnishing him with a Charter to set up an encampment of the Order.

Shortly before Crowley’s death, Grant would also meet a man who would later prove to be almost as much of an influence on him as The Great Beast: albeit more in the form of an *éminence grise*, who would influence Grant from behind the scenes. He would provide an initiation and inspiration that would have a definitive impact on Grant’s reformulation of Thelema, the purpose and rituals of the branch of the O.T.O. he would found, and much of the focus of his Typhonian Trilogies. His name was David Curwen.

A practicing Alchemist and student of Tantra, who had taken the step of devotion to an Indian Guru – unusual for a Westerner at the time – David Curwen was first mentioned in Grant's 1991 memoir, *Remembering Aleister Crowley*:

*David Curwen was first mentioned in Crowley's diaries on 2.9.1944. When I met him, shortly before Crowley's death, he was a member of the IX° O.T.O. His passion for Alchemy was all-consuming; so much so that he had nearly died after imbibing liquid gold. His knowledge of Tantra was considerable. It was through Curwen that I received, eventually, full initiation into a highly recondite formula of the Tantric vama marg.*

In discussing Crowley's attempted formulation of an 'elixir' as part of his sex-magickal workings, Grant mentions a detail of key relevance to his later weaving of Tantra and Thelema, which would be essential to his own journey of initiation:

*There exists a document relative to this formula compiled by Curwen's erstwhile guru, a South Indian tantric. It is in the form of an extensive commentary on an ancient text of the Kaula School. Curwen lent Crowley a copy of it.*

The document in question was a copy of the *Anandalahari*, or 'Wave of Bliss', annotated by Curwen's South Indian Guru and with a Commentary explaining the *physiological* – and explicitly *sexual* – symbolism. This provided Grant with a key to unlocking the hidden mysteries of the Sanskrit Sacred Texts, from which he was able to develop – with Curwen's help – a deeper insight into Tantra than his former mentor had *ever* achieved:

*In the instructions which accompany the higher degrees of the O.T.O., there is no comprehensive account of the critical role of the kalas, or psycho-sexual emanations of the woman chosen for the magical rites. The commentary was an eye-opener for Crowley, and it explained some of his preoccupations during my stay at 'Netherwood'. These involved a formula of rejuvenation. The O.T.O. lacked some vital keys to the real secret of magick which Crowley claimed to have incorporated into the higher degrees. Curwen undoubtedly knew more about these matters than did Crowley, and Crowley was piqued.*

Despite his outsider credentials as an occultist and sometimes transgressive attitudes as a drug-taker and promiscuous bisexual, Aleister Crowley was still in many respects a product of his time: he may not have been an out-and-out misogynist, but he suffered from a male

chauvinism all-too-typical of his Victorian, privileged, white male background. He also had little-or-no knowledge of authentic Tantra from original sources, whereas when I exchanged letters and briefly met with Kenneth Grant in 1981, he made it clear that despite his lifelong dedication to Crowley and the Law of Thelema, really his “first love”, spiritually speaking, was *Advaita Vedanta*. This ancient Hindu philosophy of non-duality asserts that *Atman*, or the True Self, is essentially no different from the Highest Universal Principle, or *Brahman*. Grant would become for a while in the 1950s a follower of the Sage of Arunachala, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and saw his essential meditation “*Who am I?*” as equated to Thelema’s pursuit of realising one’s True Will, writing:

*The natural spirit of the East, in its deeper rootage, is in complete accord with the doctrine of Thelema. That this is so may be proved by comparing the basic tenets of Thelema with the Chinese Way of the Tao, the Vedantic doctrine of Advaita, and the pivotal philosophy of Hindu and Buddhist Tantricism.*

A number of articles that Grant wrote for Anglo-Indian journals were later gathered together and published as *At the Feet of the Guru*.

After a period of association with Gerald Gardner – who was also a member of the O.T.O., likewise with a charter to set up an encampment (although there is no evidence that he ever put it to use) – Grant would set up a Working Group of his own, “*evolved . . . for purposes of traffic with the Outer Ones*”, of which he wrote:

*Between the years 1955-1962, I was involved with an occult Order known as New Isis Lodge. It functioned as a branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.), with headquarters in London. I founded the Lodge to channel transmissions from transplutonic sources . . . The body of these transmissions forms the basis of the Typhonian Trilogies.*

This caused a falling out with Karl Germer, nominal Head of the O.T.O. upon Crowley’s death, who felt that Grant had exceeded his authority. There were also personality clashes because New Isis Lodge had issued a manifesto in conjunction with the former Grandmaster of the German Fraternitas Saturni, Eugen Grosche, with whom Germer had fallen out previously – the net result being Grant’s expulsion from the Order. This Grant disregarded, however, considering his authorisation to have come from Crowley himself, and also his own

‘Inner Planes’ contacts. Thus began the parting of the ways between Grant’s Typhonian Order and the so-called ‘Caliphate’ O.T.O. reformulated in America by Grady McMurtry.

A key to understanding the notion of ‘Typhonian Gnosis’ is Kenneth Grant’s emphatic identification of Typhon – a monstrous entity from Greek mythology, leader of the Titans, who make war against the gods of Olympus, and decidedly *male* – as the *Mother* of Set. Grant does not hesitate to appropriate this gigantic, multi-winged and snake-limbed chthonian monster, Primal Typhon, as an avatar of The Great Mother, i.e. ‘Mother Nature’ Herself, and boldly asserts:

*She typified the first parent at a time when the rôle of the male in procreation was unsuspected. Because she had no consort she was considered to be a goddess without a god, and her son – Set – being fatherless was also godless and was therefore the first ‘devil’, the prototype of the Satan of later legends.*

With regard to Set – a dark, primal figure of raw potency from aboriginal, pre-Dynastic Egypt, later cast as the killer of the god-king Osiris and thereafter prototype of the “God against the Gods” – Grant wrote in the *Foreword* to the 1990 edition of what had originally been his first book, *The Magical Revival*:

*“For us, who have the inner knowledge, inherited or won, it remains to restore the true rites of Attis, Adonis, Osiris, of Set, Serapis, Mithras, and Abel.”*

*These words of Aleister Crowley inspired me as a youth, and, imagining myself as one of those to whom they were addressed, I soon discovered that for some reason I have not been able to fathom it was the god Set I was being called upon to honour. I accordingly took it upon myself to penetrate the Mysteries of this, the most ancient of deities, and to trace the history of his rites from an indefinite antiquity to the present day.*

The Egyptian Mysteries very much form the core of the Western Magical Tradition, and were certainly the basis for the mythos and rituals of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, where Crowley had learned most of what he needed for his later development. Ancient Egypt as a source of supernatural power sanctioned his role as Prophet, and as much as Grant built on Crowley’s Aeon of Horus and *The Book of the Law*, the primary source for his Typhonian Gnosis was the controversial work of self-taught Esoteric Egyptologist, Gerald Massey. In monumental works such as *Natural Genesis* and *Ancient Egypt: The Light of the World*,

Massey set out in no uncertain terms what he claimed was the Afrocentric and physiological basis of Gnosis: “*The oldest symbols and religions originate in Africa.*” He conceived of Typhon as equivalent to the Egyptian Tauret, or Ta-Urt, the hippopotamus “Mistress of the Birth-House.” She was the Goddess of the Seven Stars of the North, and Her son was the Dog Star, Sothis or Sirius (equated with Set), whose heliacal rising appeared above the horizon just before the inundation of the Nile. ‘Typhonian’ referred to those who worshipped this Primal Goddess, and members of Her Stellar Cult had fled East, taking their wisdom with them, when the Solar worshippers gained the ascendancy. In many ways, Kenneth Grant’s major innovation was in linking this Typhonian Tradition to Modern Occultism.

While Grant built extensively on the works of other occultists that had gone before him – Blavatsky, Crowley, Fortune, Grosche, Spare – and cited academics and scholars, from pioneering sexologist Havelock Ellis to ‘Egyptosophist’ Gerald Massey, he also had the curious habit of referencing works of *fiction* with the same apparent seriousness. Thus, discussions of the Stellar Wisdom and survival of pre-Dynastic worship from earliest Egypt may include, as well as references to archaeological sources, also speculative material drawn from the Akashic Record. Comparisons with writings on Tantra and Voodoo are all mixed together with the horror stories of Bram Stoker, the pulp novels of Sax Rohmer, supernatural fiction of Arthur Machen, and the ‘Weird Tales’ of H. P. Lovecraft. Grant had a special affection for Lovecraft, apparently believing that he was “onto something” – that his dread grimoire, *The Necronomicon*, in fact existed on the astral plane, and that HPL had apprehended this through his dreams, but was unable to accept the ‘truth’ of what he had discerned – that he was, in effect, an *unconscious* magician. To add to the apparent confusion, in a number of works Grant has given accounts – allegedly from the Annals of his New Isis Lodge – that read like something from the purple prose of supernatural horror writers, and has talked about fictional characters as if they were “real” – and then in his supposedly fictional works he has drawn on presumably biographical elements from his own life, also ‘real’ characters and locations.

To my mind, this over-literal examination of certain writings, such as Grant – or even Carlos Castaneda, with whom he has sometimes been compared – can miss the point. Whether or not Don Juan ‘really’ turned Castaneda into a crow, or that they jumped off the mountain together – or whether Crowley ‘really’ asked Kenneth Grant if they were distantly related via a shared cousin in an extended clan, who just happen to have been in possession of a family heirloom in the form of a grimoire documenting their generations-long traffic with

otherworldly intelligences – is neither here nor there. What Grant is trying to stress – what he was an undoubted Master of – is the use of fiction or literature as a form of magical Glamour.

Words can weave worlds, words can conjure ghosts – words can transport and transform, and alter consciousness – the only limit being imagination. It is to be remembered that *imagination* is concerned with creating *images*, in which respect it is directly related to the Ancient Egyptian *Heka*: a word that meant both ‘Magic’ and “the making of images.” The roll-call of writers who were also magicians – or alternatively, occultists who employ fiction as a means of expressing magical concepts – is a long and distinguished one. Grant himself follows in the footsteps of Aleister Crowley and Dion Fortune, both of whom had a background in the Golden Dawn and its offshoots, as did Algernon Blackwood, J. W. Brodie-Innes, Arthur Machen, Sax Rohmer, Bram Stoker, and A. E. Waite. Grant saw the occult implications in the work of such writers as being not that dissimilar to his own:

*Machen, Blackwood, Crowley, Lovecraft, Fortune, and others, frequently used as a theme for their writings the influx of extra-terrestrial powers which have been moulding the history of our planet since time began . . .*

As well as other Decadent and Symbolist poets and writers such as Baudelaire, Huysmans, Lautréamont and Rimbaud, Surrealist painters like Salvador Dali, Paul Delvaux, Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy come in for special appreciation. Dali in particular was praised as “*One of the foremost magicians of our time*” – with Grant going on to make the comparison with Spare explicit:

*Spare had already succeeded in isolating and concentrating desire in a symbol which became sentient and therefore potentially creative through the lightnings of the magnetized will. Dali, it seems, has taken the process a step further. His formula of ‘paranoiac-critical activity’ is a development of the primal (African) concept of the fetish, and it is instructive to compare Spare’s theory of ‘visualized sensation’ with Dali’s definition of painting as ‘hand done colour photography of concrete irrationality.’ Sensation is essentially irrational, and its delineation in graphic form (‘hand done colour photography’) is identical with Spare’s method of ‘visualized sensation.’*

The emphasis on the use of such creativity, charged with magical Intent and directed by the trained Will, is a key concept of the Typhonian Gnosis:

*Dion Fortune emphasized the importance of the consciously controlled day-dream. Basing her practices on aspects of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, she demonstrated the magical value of “dreaming true”, an expression derived from George du Maurier’s novel, Peter Ibbetson. The theory is that if one weaves a day-dream with sufficient intensity it induces so total an abstraction of the senses that the dreamer merges into a waking dream, wherein he is the creator and master of his own fantasies. If powerfully formulated, these concretize, reify, and assume a reality equal in degree – and often more so – to that which is experienced in ordinary wakeful consciousness. The advantages of being able to induce such a state are evident . . .*

Perhaps more than any other modern occult writer, Grant stressed the importance, potential and power of such creativity, writing in *Aleister Crowley & The Hidden God* that “Great art is always simple . . . true art expresses Eternity.” From the beginning, Art by the likes of Austin Osman Spare and Grant’s wife, Steffi, is essential to the function of the Typhonian Trilogies – the text illustrates the pictures as much as the pictures illustrate the text. Later, in *Outside the Circles of Time*, Grant writes regarding artists such as Dali, Sidney Sime, Spare, and Tanguy:

*These artists accomplished a leap into other dimensions and – this is the important point – returned to record their extra-dimensional experiences . . . Art, in the true and vital sense, is an instrument, a magical machine, a means of occult exploration which can project the seer into the realm of the Unseen, and launch the waking mind into the seas of the subconsciousness.*

As much as Kenneth Grant’s works can stand as invaluable documents of the evolution of contemporary occultism – as well as records of the contribution of many of the pioneering figures that he had personal contact with – it is to be hoped that the greater contribution of his books will be as magical catalysts for the reader who is prepared to approach them in the same light. As Grant’s former protégé, Priestess of Maat Magick, Nema, wrote:

*These aren’t just books about Magick; they’re books that are Magick.*

Used as portals to the Nightside, the nine volumes of the Typhonian Trilogies – as well as Grant’s various other books – can ultimately serve as guides to that place of exploration and inspiration beyond such distinctions as ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ that he liked to call “*the Mauve Zone*.”



As such they can serve as launch-pads or even vehicles to that place which each of us needs to find for ourselves: the place where the Magick happens.

Finally, in closing, I know that a picture of Grant is often painted as autocratic, even ‘Old School’ authoritarian, which may well have been so – several people have lead me to believe that he was actually easier to get on with if you *weren't* a member of his Typhonian Order ! – but there is no doubting his obvious dedication to the Daemonic Feminine. The Fellowship of Isis, whom Grant supported, have asserted he was “*totally for the Goddess.*” His championing of the work of Dion Fortune, of Marjorie Cameron – at a time when most people, if they were aware of her *at all*, just thought of her as “Jack Parsons’ widow” – his active encouragement of successive generations of strong women occultists such as Janice Ayers, Jan Bailey, Linda Falorio, Margaret Ingalls (the aforementioned Nema), Mishlen Linden, and Caroline Wise – as well as his life-long devotion to his wife, the artist Steffi Grant, whose works vividly complement and illustrate his books – all attest to this.

The last living link to Aleister Crowley, Gerald Gardner, Eugen Grosche, and Austin Osman Spare, Kenneth Grant’s legacy is yet to be fully assessed and we shall not see his like again.

Matthew Levi Stevens, Vernal Equinox 2016.

This article first appeared in *New Dawn*, No.156, May-June 2016, and was made available for one day only, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016, from [www.whollybooks.wordpress.co.uk](http://www.whollybooks.wordpress.co.uk) in commemoration of the birth of Kenneth Grant.