

Treasures from the Valley of Disgust

**Copyright 2023 © Frater Acher**

*Paralibrum Press, MMXXIII*

All rights reserved

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

All images by Goya (Francisco de Goya y Lucientes)

Written, designed, typeset  
and published by Frater Acher

Typeset in *Arida* by Latinotype  
and *Guglia* by Leo Colalillo

for J. and S.



Dispierta dando patadas

# Treasures from the Valley of Disgust

Frater Acher

MMXXIII

*Clinging to his skin  
A Sep with curving tooth, of little size,  
He seized and tore away, and to the sands  
Pierced with his javelin. Small the serpent's bulk;  
None deals a death more horrible in form.  
For swift the flesh dissolving round the wound  
Bared the pale bone; swam all his limbs in blood;  
Wasted the tissue of his calves and knees:  
And all the muscles of his thighs were thawed  
In black distilment, and file membrane sheath  
Parted, that bound his vitals, which abroad  
Flowed upon earth: yet seemed it not that all  
His frame was loosed, for by the venomous drop  
Were all the bands that held his muscles drawn  
Down to a juice; the framework of his chest  
Was bare, its cavity, and all the parts  
Hid by the organs of life, that make the man.  
So by unholy death there stood revealed  
His inmost nature. Head and stalwart arms,  
And neck and shoulders, from their solid mass  
Melt in corruption. Not more swiftly flows  
Wax at the sun's command, nor snow compelled  
By southern breezes.<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> Lucan, *The Pharsalia of Lucan*, Vol. II, Book IX Cato, translated by Sir Edward Ridley, London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1919, lines 850-872, p. 241-243

# I. Nothing Others Like Disgust

*The contents of this exhibit may cause shock, vomiting, confusion, panic, euphoria and anxiety. If you have high blood pressure, a nervous disorder, or heart palpitations, you should consult your physician before visiting this exhibition.*<sup>2</sup>

It should give us pause that none of the ten *Qlippoth* represent the experience of disgust.<sup>3</sup> Although talk of *evil* is ubiquitous in occult literature, we find far fewer traces of *disgust*. Where this is the rare case, disgust usually appears in the context of fear as an emotion to be mastered, which in many 19th and 20th century writings is entangled with male notions of conquest and empowerment. A positivist view of disgust as a beneficial encounter to be sought out and appreciated is almost impossible to find. On such seemingly paradoxical view - specifically from the perspective of goëtic practice - we want to touch in this short text.

Before we deliberately burden ourselves with cognitive dissonance, though, let's start with a simple definition of the nature of disgust. Both disgust and revulsion are names for the feeling of strong aversion. The experience of disgust is related to that of fear, at least in so far it can produce similarly strong physical reactions: from nausea and vomiting to sweating and falling blood pressure to fainting. Disgust

---

2 Sign at the entrance to the *Sensations* exhibition in New York, 1997. A warning that we would like to preface this article in the same spirit.

3 For a more detailed description of the conception of these daemonic shell beings or rather forces, see my freely available online article *On the Nature of the Qlippoth* at: <https://theomagia.com/on-the-nature-of-the-qlippoth>



*Se repulen.*



has a dual nature as an *affect* and *instinct*. In its function as an at least partially socialised instinct, it is a protective mechanism that serves to prevent intoxication and contagion.<sup>4</sup> We are disgusted by that which is not supportive to our health, that which we should keep outside the corporeal realm of our body. Disgust commands *distance*. Equally, disgust signals *taboo*. In its function as an affect, disgust is culturally and historically not a universal constant, but subject to strong culturally specific conditioning. Whereas in the early 17th century an audience with a ruler while they were doing their business on a *commode*<sup>5</sup> was a sign of special favour, the same scene in the culture of the 21st century West would evoke agony and disgust in all involved.

*No emotion, in the literal sense, comes so much from the depths of man's bowels as disgust; and no emotion, turned metaphorically, becomes so indicative of metaphysical misery as disgust [...].*<sup>6</sup>

*Disgust always intervenes as an instrument of order against an impurity code.*<sup>7</sup>

Now, since the earliest times, magic has been a cultural technique used by institutionalised dignitaries for crisis intervention and prevention. At the latest, since the artificially constructed demarcation of the state-serving *mageia* from the stubbornly subversive *goêteia* in the 6th century BCE, the role of the orthopraxy of magic is clearly defined as a stabilising instrument of the state.<sup>8</sup> However, techniques usually work

---

4 Claudia Reiß, *Ekel. Ikonografie des Ausgeschlossenen*, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie im Fachbereich Kunst und Design der Universität Duisburg-Essen, 2009, p. 13

5 The German term for such a chair with integrated toilette is *Leibstuhl*.

6 Liessmann, Konrad Paul, *Ekel! Ekel! Ekel! – Wehe mir! Eine kleine Philosophie des Abscheus*, in: Enzensberger, Hans Magnus (eds.), *Kursbuch Ekel und Allergie*, Heft 129, 1997; p. 101-110, translation by the author

7 Reiß, 2009, p. 20, translation by author

8 For further detail on the practical path of *goêteia* and its mythical context, please see my essay *GOËTEIA - The Mythical Origin of Chthonic Sorcery* at <https://goeteia.com/myth>.

both ways: what stabilises when in crisis, in its inverted use, can equally mobilise when in standstill. As Paracelsus succinctly put it, *it's the dose that makes the poison*. It is the same with magic and we can say that it is the direction of its application that decides whether it supports chaos or stability. Not only the *hagazussa*, but magic itself rides on the fence between crisis and equilibrium. Magic as a cultural technique - whether in the emperor's tunic or the worker's apron - is to be found precisely *between* the defiant fortification of boundaries as well as their deliberate transgression.

This brief observation helps us to understand that it is not at all a paradox to encounter an army of magical recipes designed to *protect* man from the experience of disgust. While at the same time we also find recipes - according to the above outline we would now have to call these *goëtic* - that serve to *induce* the conscious experience of disgust. Folk magic erects its bulwark of blessings, amulets, and herbal applications against those forces that trigger disgust; whereas the heretical use of magic reverses this relationship. Here, the donkey's anus is kissed, *cakes of light*<sup>9</sup> made with menstrual blood are eaten, or the head is pushed in the organic garbage can until the power of disgust is overcome.

*Then as abominable as the plague is, look, so abominable is the frog.*<sup>10</sup>

This allows us to arrive at a solid working hypothesis: the experience of disgust always requires an *external perspective*. From the point of view of the worm in the flesh, there is nothing nauseating about its existence. If anything, the situation that arouses disgust in us for the worm is a pleasurable moment of nourishment, growth, or reproduction.

---

9 The original description of these host-like cookies can be found in Crowley's *Liber Al vel Legis*; Symonds mentions a possibly sensationalised variant made of excrement in his biography, though the latter cannot be traced to Crowley's own writings. Thanks to Harper Feist for this reference. See: Aleister Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, Maine: Weiser Books, p. 41-42, and John Symonds, *The Great Beast - The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley*, Frogmore: Mayflower Books, 1973, p. 300

10 Paracelsus, *De Pestilitate*

Disgust is not a constant like gravity, or a causal consequence like shadow following light. Disgust is not even a species-specific reaction, but anchored at the individual level.<sup>11</sup> Even within the human species, one man's disgust can be another man's pleasure. The phenomenon of disgust remains diffuse unless we place it at the center of our own experience.<sup>12</sup> In short, we can say: From the center of our self, disgust as an individual instinct recognises the forces that seem hostile to our self.<sup>13</sup> In fractions of a second, disgust punches us into the stomach, slaps us into the face, pierces through our skin, and declares: *Do not lick or swallow, do not touch or grasp. Hold your breath, step back, and do not let this Other become part of your I.* – Nothing others like disgust.<sup>14</sup>

Now we have arrived the threshold beyond which the common view of the disgusting and the daemonic likes to blur and fade into one. For both seem instinctively uncanny and worthy of protection: that which makes us nauseous and that which lies outside the ring of our certified knowledge and clear vision.

However, to present disgust not as an attribute but as a phenomenon in its own right, we need to counter the common double exposure of the disgusting and the daemonic in the same general figure.<sup>15</sup>

From a magical point of view, the function of disgust can be divided into at least three components:

---

11 Reiß, 2009, p. 17

12 Reiß, 2009, p. 19

13 It seems important to emphasise that disgust as an instinctive-emotional reaction is decidedly an aesthetic one. That is, it remains on the surface of the experienced object and does not penetrate into its essence. See on this: Colin McGann, *The Meaning of Disgust*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 6

14 "In order for the prohibition of touching the ugly (feces, phlegm) and the bad (sexuality and internal organs) to work all the better, disgust is not only encoded and passed on as an emotional defense, but above all it is passed on as natural through the objects of disgust, so that it becomes a norm and a judgment." (Knut Eming, *Zur Bedeutung des Ekel-Affekts in der Antike*, in: Hermes A. Kick (ed.), *Ekel. Darstellung und Deutung in den Wissenschaften und Künsten*, Hürtgenwald, 2003, p. 99, translation by author)

15 Reiß, 2009, p. 9



*Subir y bajar.*

- First, as an intentional **scandalous provocation** of the normative-regulated, i.e. as a deliberate impulse to anchor the magical realm in an outsider position. It is also in this context that the form of disgust that deliberately stimulates **voyeurism** is played out, as we see more and more in modern media.<sup>16</sup>
- Second, as the **crossing over a liminal threshold** in a ritualistic sense, i.e. as a technique of leaving the normative space and entering the far reaches of the socially tabooed. Here the connection between disgust and Radical Otherness is significant, especially when disgust reacts to the transgression of social-aesthetic norms and not biological functions.<sup>17</sup>
- And third, as an **inversion and reversal** of the Christian iconography of divine beauty and angelic aesthetics. That is, in the classic Satanic mechanics that take root in the radical opposition to everything that is considered virtuous and good according to Christian orthodoxy. Here, the condemned is elevated to the desired, the failed to the aspired.<sup>18</sup>

---

16 “The other side of the ambivalent moment of disgust, then, is its proximity to lust. [...] In the case of disgust, pleasure and displeasure seem to shed different light on the same side of aesthetic sensation, depending on the perspective, thus resembling a Möbius strip.” (Reiß, 2009, p. 21/26, translation by author)

17 It should be noted that the triangle of *taboo*, *perversion*, and *addiction* is an incredibly difficult one to balance. This is best done not in abstract generalisations, but in the context of our individual, unique biographies. My antivenom might be your poison.

18 “The disgusting is [...] the negation of the beautiful form of appearance by a deformity arising from physical or moral decay.” (Karl Rosenkranz, *Ästhetik des Häßlichen* (1853). In: Dieter Kliche (ed.), *Karl Rosenkranz – Ästhetik des Hässlichen*, Leipzig, 1996, p. 252, translation by author)

# II. Tantric Exposure Training

Already from these brief discussions, it becomes clear that disgust can trigger repulsion as well as attraction. The fascination of disgust is connected with the play on the threshold – whether this threshold is of a social-normative, ritual or orthodox nature. Disgust is the scent that marks the trail of the *Radical Other*.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of the context in which the phenomenon of disgust appears, we note three basic characteristics:

- disgust presupposes an **intrusion of organic otherness** into peripheral areas of our self,
- then it demands direct **encounter and confrontation**, including proximity and physical manifestation,<sup>20</sup> and
- results in the **questioning**, if not the threatening, of our very selves.

Disgust thus allows us to sense a realm which we can only enter at the risk of self-injury or self-poisoning. Whether such poisoning is of corporeal or social nature is all the same.<sup>21</sup> Disgust allows us to look beyond that border, beyond which lies an occult realm into which we cannot traverse without maiming or losing ourselves. Disgust is the shadow opposite of all we hope to gain through love: validation, belonging, and a future in communion.

---

19 For a detailed exposition of the notion of *Radical Otherness* in magical practice, please see my book *INGENIUM – Alchemy of the Mystical Mind* (TaDehent, 2022).

20 May such proximity and manifestation be fantasised or real, both can result in similar reactions of disgust. (Reiß, 2009, p. 19)

21 And yet our feeling of disgust keeps us entirely in the dark about its on validity: Whether we react with aversion due to a violation of our aesthetic, biological or psychological sense of health, life and nourishment, we do not know.

This tendency to expose ourselves to the possibility of harm appears pathological only to the casual eye. The old adage *he who puts himself in danger, perishes in it* is rarely true. In the much more common cases, it is precisely the play with safe doses of danger, terror and fear that pulls us out of the “inferno of the normal”<sup>22</sup>, reawakens our numbed senses and can spur the will to live anew. In such a wicked way, it is not love or wisdom but precisely the repugnant disgust that saves us from “slackness, boredom, and even the tendency to suicide.”<sup>23</sup>

*What do we know about the bodily fluids we leave behind without really caring? Hair and dirt, waste, shit, are the disgusting side of being human. Shit is excreted, it drops and dissolves. In what categories should we reflect on shit?*<sup>24</sup>

The disgusting, wilful confrontation with “monstrous alterity”<sup>25</sup> thus brings tension back to the sensory membrane that envelops our self. Through the apparent assault on the constitutive boundaries of our being, we become aware of ourselves again and strengthen the bastion that shields us from the world and its threats. We feel again our aliveness, our integrity, our actuality, and – startled by the momentary shock of threat - experience these qualities again as something valuable and worth protecting. This is how, for example, the pleasure of disgust works which we might experience at a modern art exhibition, or when watching a horror movie, or even when scrolling through our social media streams.

Such an instrumentalization of disgust is the exact opposite of the use of disgust in some forms of Tantrism.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned above, it is

---

22 Austin Osman Spare, see: A.R. Naylor (ed.), *From the Inferno to Zos: The Writings and Images of Austin Osman Spare*, Volume 1, Seattle: First Impressions, 1993, p. 21

23 Reiß, 2009, p. 27

24 Jean Clair, *Das Letzte der Dinge oder Die Zeit des großen Ekels. Ästhetik des Sterkoralen*. Wien: Passagen, 2004, p. 15, translation by the author

25 Reiß, 2009, p. 35

26 A precise demarcation between Buddhism, Hinduism and Tantrism will be intentionally

in the nature of magic to be a technique that can be used *both ways*, for stabilisation as well as destabilisation. If in the secular West the domesticated and curated use of disgust aims to incite and stabilise our human identity, the same phenomena finds its opposite application in some of the spiritual traditions of the East.

*Sri Naropa, fill a skull with foul-smelling, repulsive, stinking matter and eat from it.*<sup>27</sup>

Here we encounter the five *kleshas*, a term often translated as *agony, plague, pain, suffering, complaint, or evil*. As Chögyam Trungpa has pointed out, these five suffering-inducing qualities arise from the same mother soil of existence (*alaya*) from which all worldly and spiritual phenomena arise. Their qualities are therefore identical to those of the five Buddhas. However, the radical difference in their negative effects is due to the excess of creative energy with which they arise and flow into us.<sup>28</sup>

The suffering or *klesha* corresponding to *Buddha Vairochana* is called *dvesha* in Sanskrit. The keywords given by Chögyam Trungpa to describe this particular quality of *alaya* are *white, east, dvesha, water, flowing, and peace in the alaya*.<sup>29</sup>

In the first four stages of the process of separation from the Divine Source, the developing individual wraps themselves in the delusion (*moha*) of their separate selfhood and forgets the Mother Ground. Then,

---

avoided here, since in the following we are not talking about religious-philosophical concepts, but about practices whose terms are equally common across all these three systems.

27 Albert Grünwedel (ed.), *Die Legende des Naropa – des Hauptvertreterers des Nekromanten- und Hexentums*, Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1933, p. 122, translation by the author

28 Chögyam Trungpa, *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, Volume Six, Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2004, p. 551-554 — Of interest to the student of cross-cultural spiritual systems is the parallel to the breaking of the vessels (*Schvirat ha-Kelim*) in Lurianic Kabbalah, which also speaks of an excess of divine power at the moment when the divine essence flowed into the vessel of *Geburah* (strength).

29 Trungpa, 2004, p. 552





*Donde vá mamá?*

finding themselves entirely alone and exposed to a storm of fear, they leverage pride (*mana*) to erect their ego. Once this is accomplished, the ego needs to be further fortified by an armour of paranoia (*irshya*) that feeds self-defence. Thereupon, in the fourth stage, the ego becomes imbued with the addiction to security, which leads to an eternal stream of passion (*raga*). Only in the final and fifth stage does the ego, thus constructed, shielded and addicted, yield to the quality known as *dvesha*. This Sanskrit term is often translated as *hatred*, but it can also be given as *aversion*, *disgust*, or simply *not liking*. Interestingly, Chögyam Trungpa gives us a precise description of this quality that avoids the attempt to forge it into a single English term:

*Finally, [dvesha] arises, which is the development of extreme self-assertiveness, where one leaves no room for doubt about one's motives or actions and allows no relaxation in one's attitude.<sup>30</sup>*

Our previous reflections on disgust have shown how *dvesha* – in the sense of anger and hatred – represents the activated human response to disgust. Disgust demands distance, disgust demands taboo, we wrote above. So the urge to assert oneself is the instinctive first reaction of the ego in confrontation with disgust. Now, there are several tantric techniques that take advantage of this tense dynamic of disgust and *dvesha*. Common to all is that the practitioner consciously exposes themself to disgusting phenomena and learns to avoid the instinctive knee-jerk reaction of falling into *dvesha*. Again, we have to emphasize that all five *klesha* arise from an *excess* of intelligence, emotion, or simply power, and thus represent a *radical overdose* in a Paracelsian sense. What such tantric practice aims to enable therefore is not a reversal, eradication, or purification, but a reduction, diminution, and regulation of the experienced forces. All to with the intent that the practitioner's consciousness is no longer washed away in their riptide, but can stand firm and steady in their more shallow current.

---

<sup>30</sup> Trungpa, 2004, p. 553

Such tantric exposure training is best facilitated through the “yoga of continual relaxed awareness of all experience”, “dream yoga”, and “yoga practiced at the moment of death and beyond”.<sup>31</sup> The parallels with other practices such as *dzogchen* or the devotional path of the *aghoris* are obvious.

What we want to note here is that we are not dealing with the radical overcoming of disgust. We are not dealing with techniques that respond to confrontation with combat. The ego’s victorious stand over the assault of disgust is precisely not the goal. Rather, we encounter exercises in human learning of how to dose, regulate, and adapt ourselves. In this sense, these techniques can be understood as profoundly Paracelsian. More important than their historical definition by Western or Eastern teachers, however, is the recognition that they are, by their very nature, exercises designed to teach us to lower the protective barrier of our emotions in order to enter into conscious relationships with aspects of *Radical Otherness* in the world around us.

The surgeon is not disgusted when they touch the internal organs of a human, as what they see is an organic artwork with which they are in a powerful relationship of healing and recovery. The experienced biologist studying parasitic maggots has long since ceased to feel disgust, for they witness under the lens of their microscope nature’s greatest miracle: the wonder of all-encompassing recycling. And the visitor to Teresa Margolles’ installation *Vaporización/Verdampfung* in Berlin in 2002, who sat long enough in the room filled with vapour, may also have overcome their initial disgust, triggered by the sign informing them that the vapour stemmed from water which had previously been used to wash numerous corpses. Now they sit quietly in the room, breathing in the water particles and wondering how soft and gentle the physical proximity of death can be...

Responding to irritants with calm composure is the art for whose mastery we depend upon the continuous exposure to disgust.

---

31 Trungpa, 2004, p. 553



*Si amanece ; nos Vamos.*

# III. The *Vetula* We Are

In his studies on the history of disgust, Winfried Menninghaus argues that already in antiquity the body of the *vetula* or crone<sup>32</sup> was the archetype of disgust. Her existence on the threshold between the waning of life and the onset of decay has often been portrayed as obscene and as an epiphany of the taboo.

*Almost all the defects of the discourse of disgust [...] regularly coalesce in a single phantasm: the image of the ugly old woman. This image unites wrinkles, folds, warts, larger mouth and abdominal openings, sunken hollows instead of beautiful swellings, foul odours, disgusting practices, and proximity to death and decaying corpses.*<sup>33</sup>

Such imagining feeds on two main streams. First, from a literary tradition shaped by the fantasies of male authors who for centuries have projected their fears onto the opposite sex. Second, from the ancient notion that “man is marked by decay from the beginning, he dies when the inner rot penetrates the no longer closed body shell.”<sup>34</sup> That is, from the idea that sickness, old age, and death are indeed outbreaks of one’s inner septic rot.<sup>35</sup> Against this background, the image of the *vetula*, often drastically distorted to the extreme, became the archetype of every human’s impending decay. In the sense of the previous chapter, it represents the ideal image – for the male gaze! – that provokes disgust. Since it attacks one’s ego both from the *outside*

---

32 Latin: *vetula* with a connotation towards *witch*; for the etymology of the term see: Reiß, 2009, p. 38

33 Winfried Menninghaus, *Ekel. Theorie und Geschichte einer starken Empfindung*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999, p. 132, translation by author

34 Birgit Richard, *Todesbilder. Kunst, Subkultur, Medien*, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995, p. 54, translation by author

35 Philippe Aries, *Geschichte des Todes*, München: dtv Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999, p. 156

in its stark iconography as well as from the *inside* in the helplessness against one's own inexorable aging process.

The literary *vetula* thus allows us to encounter not only a creature of the threshold that represents the living boundary between this world and the next, but also the *necromantic body* as such. Horace (died 8 BCE) already shows us that this body simultaneously arouses disgust and desire, and thus had to serve as a projection surface for wide-ranging sexual male fantasies.

*That you still ask what weakens my power of love, you who are already musty with age! When you have a black tooth and old age plows furrows into your forehead, and your ugly asshole gapes between your scrawny cheeks like that of a skinny cow! But maybe your bosom could excite me, but your tits are limp like a mare's udders. Your belly is soft, and a thin thigh is attached to your fat calves. May you be blessed with all goods, may your funeral procession be led by triumphant ancestors, and may there be no woman who proudly struts along with rounder pearls: what? Because stoic little books lie complacently among silk cushions, shall my power, which cannot read, be less paralyzed, and the cock less drooping? [...] In order for you to bring this one up from my proud lap, you have to make an effort with your mouth!*<sup>36</sup>

Such drastic depictions of the over-sexualized old body had many literary functions, an essential one being wanton male humour. Far from such a superficial reading, however, one also recognises here a fully degenerated echo of the once mighty *magna mater*. The powerful primordial mother is here distorted into harmlessness, mocked and ridiculed, made compliant and subservient to male potency.<sup>37</sup> As such, the literary *vetula* is at once an instrument of male lust, transgression

---

36 Horace, *Epode VIII – The Ancient Whore*, quoted after: Reiß, 2009, p. 39/40, translation by author

37 Reiß, 2009, pp. 40

into taboo as well as an image of unconscious fears and longing.

How deeply such a disgust-driven and degenerate view of the female sex, especially after it has passed its youthful prime, also underlies Western magic may be selectively illustrated by the following quotation from Giordano Bruno.

*I want to say that women [...] should not be given divine honours and homage. I want women to be honoured and loved as women ought to be honoured and loved: for the reason and in the measure that befits their insignificant beauty, their splendour while it lasts, and their destiny when it is fulfilled. For they possess nothing but virtue given by nature, that is, beauty, splendour, and that destiny, without which they must be considered more useless in the world than a poisonous fungus that covers the whole earth to the detriment of better plants, and more troublesome than any poisonous plant or viper that sticks its head out of the ground.*<sup>38</sup>

In her thesis *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?*<sup>39</sup>, Sherry Ortner slightly exaggerated the tendency that female (witch) images in antiquity are always associated with the wild and corporeal, while male (hero) images tend to be associated with culture. Her consideration, however, is still very useful as a jumping off point that only requires slight expansion for our context: Let's imagine then the image of the daemonic *vetula* within the triangle of *wilderness, corporeality, and death*. All we have to do now, is to shift the image of the *vetula* from a misogynistic distortion of femininity, to a cultural cipher for disgust par excellence. Surprisingly, what we now hold in our hands is a mini-grimoire, a condensed grammar, or, more simply put, a *map* whose markers we can follow and which will lead us deep into the landscape of

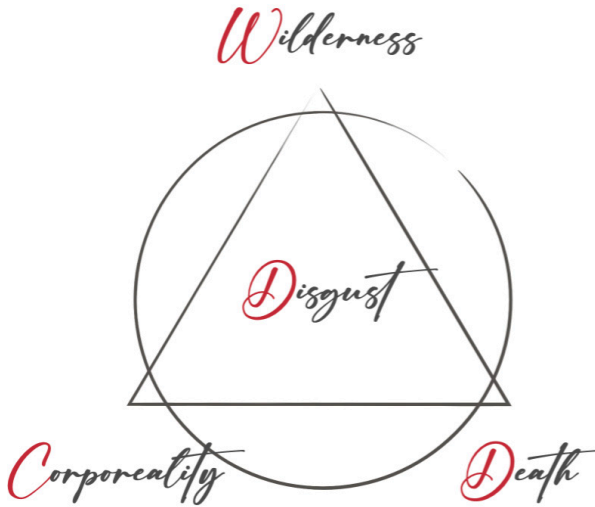
---

38 Giordano Bruno, *Von den heroischen Leidenschaften*, (1585). In: Christiane Bacmeister (ed.): *Giordano Bruno – Von den heroischen Leidenschaften*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1989, pp. 5

39 Sherry B. Ortner, *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?*, in: Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, Louise Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture, and Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974, 67-87

*goêteia*. The central role of disgust as an Ariadne's thread in a landscape marked by wilderness, corporeality, and proximity to death has no moral-psychological function. Rather, following the trail of disgust into these liminal spheres means breaking out of the framework of official culture, transgressing the boundaries of what is socially codified and accepted. What interests us here is not *disgust as fetish*, but *official culture as barrier* and obstacle to contact with the daemonic and often ferocious forces that await us beyond the sphere of the cultured *polis*.<sup>40</sup>

Let us take a step back from where we have arrived. We now stand at the intersection of three paths – wilderness, corporeality, and death.



At the crossroads of these paths springs forth the phenomenon of disgust. I recommend you allow yourself to see this scene in vision... Choose whatever comes to mind as the object of disgust. Can you see

---

40 The understanding of the term *polis* as the ancient Greek city-state is critical for a proper contextualisation of the idea of original *goêteia*. The latter was considered a practice that found embodiment in stark opposition to the *citadel of culture*, the *community of the civilised*. See the root word of the Greek term *ptolis* from PIE *\*pōlh-* "citadel; enclosed space, often on high ground, hilltop".





*Aguarda que te rinten.*

your vision of this nocturnal crossroads? Can you sense its qualities and presences... Good. Then you have opened your self to an important signpost of your own goëtic path.

Disgust is not an experience to be overcome on this path, but to be learned to appreciate. The healthy response of the *goês* to disgust is not attack or entrenchment behind the bastions of ego, but serene contemplation. The *goês* does not want to transgress the taboo or even to exploit it in the course of their colonial expansion of power. Rather, as *goês* we want to occupy a quiet place in the presence of disgust, so we can begin to relate and work with the very forces that originate *on the other side*. As such, we settle at the intersection of these three paths, aware of our own existence as *vetula*. We are now this liminal being – half alive, half dead, half cultured, half monstrous, half proliferating cell, half daemonic spark.

As magicians in a Christian context, we are called not to worship Christ, but to become Christ. Not to become the saviour of all mankind, but to realise his qualities within ourselves. Not to kneel before him, but to get up off our own asses and march toward our own vision of a being worth living for. As *goês*, the same applies to our relationships with the gods of the night side of this world. Not to worship Hecate, but to realise her spirit in the magic of our own withering, sinking, infinitely hybrid bodies.

As long as the shapes and assemblages that our own bodies produce in the process have to be aseptic, mainstream, and aesthetically legitimised, we have no chance of taking even one meaningful step on the goëtic path.

With this in mind, let us turn to two final sources. The first is the better known and comes from that daring tightrope walker between wisdom and lie, between machismo and ego-transcendence, Aleister Crowley. In his *Book ABA*, he writes explicitly about the power of disgust and how we should approach it. In his usual oscillating writing style, he mixes many different hints into even short sections of text. Here we might misinterpret the beginning of the excerpt as a call to colonise

and subjugate *evil*, and thus *disgust*; as the text progresses, however, it becomes clear that it is our instinctive emotional response to seemingly disgusting phenomena that must be overcome.

*The Magician should devise for himself a definite technique for destroying 'evil'. The essence of such a practice will consist in training the mind and the body to confront things which cause fear, pain, disgust, shame and the like. He must learn to endure them, then to become indifferent to them, then to analyze them until they give pleasure and instruction, and finally to appreciate them for their own sake, as aspects of Truth. When this has been done, he should abandon them, if they are really harmful in relation to health and comfort.*

*Also, our selection of 'evils' is limited to those that cannot damage us irreparably. E.g., one ought to practise smelling assafoetida until one likes it; but not arsine or hydrocyanic acid. Again, one might have a liaison with an ugly old woman until one beheld and loved the star which she is; it would be too dangerous to overcome the distaste for dishonesty by forcing oneself to pick pockets. Acts which are essentially dishonourable must not be done; they should be justified only by calm contemplation of their correctness in abstract cases.*

*Love is a virtue; it grows stronger and purer and less selfish by applying it to what it loathes [...].<sup>41</sup>*

Crowley's suggestions are never to be taken uncritically. So it is in this case. His recommendation of engaging in an intentional relationship with a *vetula* seems misleading in two ways. First, it objectifies and instrumentalises a relationship. The liaison with the "ugly old woman" is merely a means to an end, and the person behind it is completely absent. As human beings, we are neither simply *ugly* nor a *star*; we are

---

41 Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Paris: Published for Subscribers Only, 1929, p. 339

all the entire cosmos between these two extremes, in our very individual expression. The other misleading point is that Crowley here contrasts the old woman's ugly outer body with her inner quality as a star. A closer study of Austin Osman Spare's work would certainly have helped him here. In the sense of Horace, it is not a matter of charging the tabooed old body with exaggerated male sexual fantasies. Rather, we would have liked to see Crowley take the whole *goëtic* path from his initial disgust at the body in decay to perceiving the unique beauty in that same flesh. It might not be *the star beyond* the old flesh that requires magical training to see, but the silver light within the old flesh itself.

Our second and final quotation stems from a much older source; these are tantric traditions that can be traced back to the Tibetan Buddhist master *Nāropa* (1016-1100).

After *Nāropa*, following the instructions of his teacher *Tilopa*, has ritually dismembered himself and arranged his body parts as magical offerings, the teacher touches his injured body with his hand, and "immediately the one who had collapsed awakened again."<sup>42</sup> The teacher then speaks the following words to *Nāropa*:

*Corporeality, having no heart left to suffer, worthy of such bliss Nā-ropa, look into the mirror of the recognised in-betweeness (antara-bhāva), into the mysterious womb of the witch.*<sup>43</sup>

What a wise instruction to sink our heart like a stone into the field of our body, so that it can no longer flutter, buzz, and enchant us with its desires and sufferings.

The kind of corporeality we might achieve at *Hecate's* crossroads is equally enlivened by beauty and disgust, life and death, daemonic and human presences, without holding on to anything. The *mirror of in-betweeness* that *Tilopa* then refers to is precisely that state between

---

42 Grünwedel, 1933, p. 118, translation by the author

43 Grünwedel, 1933, p. 119, translation by the author

life and death that is neither one nor the other, but participates in both. And from here – one foot in the valley of disgust, one foot on the mountain of beauty – we find our way back into the womb of the witch.



*Obsequio á el maestro.*

# IV. Black Fire upon White Fire

As a final element of these brief considerations, I would like to include here a magical practice taken from my book *INGENIUM*. There it can be found at the end of the last chapter, as a conclusion to the book. The inspiration for this work comes from my own practices, as they arose from Nāropa's writings in collaboration with my holy daimon. There, in Nāropa's instructions, a daemonic *vetula* appears who gives the disciple instructions and sets him on his magical path. Here is the description of her first appearance:

*When he looked around, there was an old woman who seemed like one who had all the thirty-seven signs of ugliness, with red, hollow eyes, her hair tangled and foxy-red, her forehead protruding and large, shriveled into numerous wrinkles, her ears elongated by a coarse neck swelling, her nose a festering sore, her beard yellowish-white like stubble, her mouth open crookedly, the teeth gaping and decayed, the tongue whipping at the lips when chewing, the snout thrusting forward when licking, the yawning throwing out rejections, the weeping with dripping tears, the talking panting, the color black-blue, the skin rough and plump, the body bent and crooked, the neck bent, the torso crooked, afflicted with such physical defects, she leaned on a stick. And she said, 'What are your views?'*<sup>44</sup>

The image of the old woman in the text is now integrated into the Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal system: Her gruesome appearance is followed by an explanation of how Nāropa should interpret the "thirty-seven signs of ugliness" with which she is afflicted as the thirty-seven punishments of the cycle (*samsara*). This, in turn, leads to a lengthy

---

44 Grünwedel, 1933, p. 60, translation by the author

meditation text on those very qualities. Such an orthodox decoding of the initially disgusting appearance of the witch will be left out here. Rather, we are interested in the fact that the old woman appears as a shadow from an open book while Nāropa is meditating on it in a temple. Perhaps the daemonic *vetula* of the following exercise can rise for you in a similar way, as a shadowy figure from these pages? Perhaps we can avoid deconstruction and intellectual analysis of the pure experience of her presence. And perhaps we will have the courage, instead of abbreviating her as a symbol, to give ourselves completely to her touch. To follow that touch. And to meet the fire that flows from her encounter.

### May your practice succeed.

- Make sure you are sitting in a safe place.
- Whatever your usual practice is, meditate calmly, until you feel centred, grounded and undistracted.
- Now you hear footsteps approaching from your right.
- An old, ugly woman appears in your sight. You cannot imagine she has ever been young, nor beautiful. She seems frozen into old age, a corpse walking in her last days. And yet her eyes are piercing and alive.
- The old woman comes up in front of you and gives you a measuring glance.
- She steps close up, and with a bony finger touches you in the central space between your collar bones, where your chest and neck become one. You feel the light touch of her hand.
- She pulls back, and nods, not so much at you but at her work. Then she turns and walks on, disappearing out of your sight to your left.
- You sit again in silence, calmly breathing. No sounds disturb you, nothing intrudes in this moment.
- Then you realise the spot where the crone touched you is *ablaze*. There is



no pain, and yet you can clearly sense it: White fire is gushing forth from your jugular notch, stretching out over your collarbones.

- The fire does not hurt you, neither are the white flames surrounded by smoke or do they seem to burn anything. And yet there is a white fire growing over your body.
- Your collarbones are set aflame now, and the fire is spreading towards your neck. It crawls over the back of your head, over your scalp, onto your chin, your cheeks and eyes, until your entire head is set alight.
- Now the flames spread downwards over your shoulders, over your chest, your arms, your belly and legs.
- Until your entire body, from feet to crown, is engulfed in a blazing cloud of white fire. You still sit calmly. No longer in a human body, but in a flickering, lambent white fire.
- Then a benevolent presence appears from behind. You do not turn or glance. You continue to sit in the white fire that you are, while giving space to the powerful presence behind you.
- A hand stretches out from the presence behind you. Holding something, reaching into you, and placing it into your heart-space from behind. As the hand withdraws you see it is a black flame that now burns in your white fiery heart-space.
- As quickly as it appeared, the being behind you fades away. And yet its presence still resonates in the flame in your heart-space. Within you, black fire is now burning upon white fire.
- Slowly you begin to see, the touch of the white fire is changing the black flame: It transforms it. It does not burn nor mix with it. Instead the white fire transubstantiates the black fire. Slowly the black light that was placed into your heart-space, transforms into a golden flame.
- You sit unmoved by the process which is happening all by itself: The white fire transforming the black fire into gold fire.

- Once all the blackness has transformed, the golden fire is illuminating the flickering cloud of fire that you are. You can no longer sense any boundaries between the white and golden fires, between what is you and what was placed into you.
- You sit calmly again, meditating silently in the fire. You are giving presence to the white-golden cloud of fire that you are.
- You are sitting still and silently aware in this presence for as long as you wish.
- When its time to end, bow deeply. As you move your physical body to bow, your senses are picking up on both realities at once: Your white-golden burning fire-body still in vision, and your physical body in the outer realm. Like a double exposed photo, both of them are present at once. Both of them doing their job, in the realms assigned to them.
- Finally, say a prayer of Thanks, sing a song to Divinity, or perform a kabbalistic Cross, whatever is most comfortable for you to close your vision.
- As you get up, do a few moves to stretch yourself. You will realise, as you activate your physical body, the vision of your white-golden body will slowly drift into the background, where it will keep on shining, irrespective of where your everyday consciousness is going to go next.



# Bibliography

- Acher, Frater, *INGENIUM - Alchemy of the Magical Mind*, TaDehent, 2022
- Aries, Philippe, *Geschichte des Todes*, München: dtv Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999
- Bruno, Giordano, *Von den heroischen Leidenschaften*, (1585). In: Christiane Bacmeister (ed.): *Giordano Bruno – Von den heroischen Leidenschaften*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1989
- Crowley, Aleister, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Paris: Published for Subscribers Only, 1929
- Crowley, Aleister, *The Book of the Law*, Maine: Weiser Books, 1976
- Eming, Knut, *Zur Bedeutung des Ekel-Affekts in der Antike*, in: Hermes A. Kick (ed.), *Ekel. Darstellung und Deutung in den Wissenschaften und Künsten*, Hürtgenwald, 2003
- Grünwedel, Albert, (ed.), *Die Legende des Naropa – des Hauptvertreters des Nekromanten- und Hexentums*, Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1933
- Liessmann, Konrad Paul, *Ekel! Ekel! Ekel! – Wehe mir! Eine kleine Philosophie des Abscheus*, in: Enzensberger, Hans Magnus (eds.), *Kursbuch Ekel und Allergie*, Heft 129, 1997
- McGinn, Colin, *The Meaning of Disgust*, New York : Oxford University Press, 2011
- Miller, William Ian, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997
- Menninghaus, Winfried, *Ekel. Theorie und Geschichte einer starken Empfindung*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999
- Naylor, A.R., (ed.), *From the Inferno to Zos: The Writings and Images of Austin*

*Osman Spare*, Volume 1, Seattle: First Impressions, 1993

- Ortner, Sherry B., *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?*, in: Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, Louise Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture, and Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974
- Richard, Birgit, *Todesbilder. Kunst, Subkultur, Medien*, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995
- Reiß, Claudia, *Ekel. Ikonografie des Ausgeschlossenen*, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie im Fachbereich Kunst und Design der Universität Duisburg-Essen, 2009
- Rosenkranz, Karl, *Ästhetik des Häßlichen* (1853). In: Dieter Kliche (ed.), *Karl Rosenkranz – Ästhetik des Hässlichen*, Leipzig, 1996
- Symonds, John, *The Great Beast - The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley*, Frogmore: Mayflower Books, 1973, p. 300
- Trungpa, Chögyam, *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, Volume Six, Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2004
- Tucker, Kevin, *The Disgust of Daily Life*, s.l.: The Anarchist Library, 2001









