True Will Vs. Conscious Will: An Exploration Of Aleister Crowley’s Concepts Of True Will And Conscious Will And Its Possible Applications To A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Marison, And Wicked

John Payne, University of Central Florida

Abstract
In our lives we will have to make hundreds upon thousands of choices. The effects of these choices will follow us with varying intervals; some effects may be brief while others may literally last a lifetime. In these moments that we are forced to choose, it ultimately comes down to two options, what we should do, and what we want to do. Essentially, it is a choice between the head and the heart. Playwrights depend on these moments of choice, for it is the basis of almost all plays. At some point, the protagonist must make a choice, even if the choice is not to choose. In the early part of the 20th Century, a religious philosopher by the name of Aleister Crowley helped to define these choices, or as he referred to them, Wills. In essence, he stated that everyone has a True Will and a conscious will, and the path that you will ultimately follow is contingent on the choices you make in your life. Following your True Will, the path of the heart will lead you to a sense of Nirvana, while following your conscious will, the path of the head leads to a life unfulfilled. While some called him demonic (he occasionally referred to himself as The Beast With Two Backs) others saw him as a sage someone to esoterically explain the chaotic and industrial world of the early 1900s. Aleister Crowley seemed to be one of those few men that you either loved, or hated, or hated to love. At the dawn of the 20th Century, he was an English philosopher and religious guru that made a call to arms to the general populous to start living a better life. His theories will be explained fully in Chapter One, but ultimately he wanted everyone to achieve their True Will and leave their conscious wills by the wayside. He felt that this process could be achieved through what he referred to as his theorems on magick. It is unknown exactly how the idea came to him to add the k to the original magic; however speculation reveals he might have taken from the original Greek word magikE. Contrary to the modern definition of magic (the art of producing illusions by sleight of hand), Crowley felt that his magick was significantly more complex. Pulling on philosophies from the Egyptians and the Celts along with basic Buddhist principles, he defined his magick within his twenty-eight theorems. Ultimately, he philosophized that magick was a way to enlighten a person, or, for the purposes of this thesis a character’s True Will and to avoid following their conscious will. In layman’s terms, Crowley saw it as an argument between the head (conscious will) and the heart (True Will). While the main focus of this thesis is on the tension and outcome of the decision of a character to follow their True Will or their conscious will, it is impossible to talk about these two concepts without discussing, at least in part, magick. Crowley saw magick as the practice and process to achieve True Will. This study, therefore, involves both homonyms, magic and magick. By applying this process as defined by Crowley in his self-named theorems to plays and musicals that have been defined as strictly magic, I am looking for not only the exact moment in which the main protagonists in each play define and execute their decision to follow their True or conscious Wills, but also to critically examine their journey to that fatal decision. I describe it as such because I feel that a character’s fate may truly depend on the choice that they make. These philosophies are not new to the philosophical world. Other theorists such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and their relation to Crowley’s theories will be discussed later; however I felt that because Crowley is the one who is responsible for rejuvenating the word magick from the Greeks in the 20th Century, I...
should be able to use his theories as a modern lens to examine A Midsummer Nights Dream, Marisol, and Wicked. I plan to take plays that cross both genre and era and consider not only (1) what can be illuminated using this Crowlean lens, but I also to highlight (2) any universal truths, by which I mean any ideological or philosophical ideas that appear in all three plays, that can be found in works as diverse as the ones that I have chosen. While their connection to True Will may be tangential in nature, if there are things in common in these plays that are brought to light using Crowley’s lens, then I feel it is worth noting. By examining these two factors I will be able to see if critics have accurately defined these plays. My goal is to add the Crowlean lens to the already existing approaches to critically examining a theatrical piece. This lens, as defined before, is simply taking Crowley’s concepts of True Will and conscious will and their link to the progression of magick within a character to illuminate the characters choices leading up to their breaking point in which they must ask themselves Do I chose what I should do, or what I want to do? The three plays I chose were done for specific reasons. The basic criterion was to choose on a basis of (1) chronology, (2) genre, (3) and magical reference. I took three plays that entertained the religious, philosophical, and fantastical nature of what I felt best applied to Crowley’s theories. Keeping in mind that Crowley interpreted his magick as a philosophy, a religion, and a way of life to ultimately achieving True Will, I felt it pertinent to explore these aspects of each play as well. In the musical Wicked, the philosophical nature of the piece asks the question Are people born wicked? Or do they have wickedness thrust upon them? This question can be answered through a variety of subjects. By exploring these issues within the context of its main character, Elphaba (pronounced EL-fa-ba), and a variety of themes throughout this musical (including behavior, appearance, deception, honesty, courage and labeling) we find that True Will and conscious will in the land of Oz are flowering. Defining our True Will, according to Crowley, takes constant affirmations and diligent calculations of our feelings and utilizing those to aid in making the right choice for that specific moment. In this fashion, Marisol marries the idea of what the author calls magical realism in a post-apocalyptic New York City with a fervent religiosity all while underscoring the political nature of the 1980s indigent cleanup initiated by then mayor Ed Koch. Through the character of Marisol Perez, we find that not only is the choice between True Will and conscious confusing, but it can be potentially lethal. Within the structure of this play is also where Crowley’s spiritual views on True Will and conscious will become highlighted. The Lovers (Helena, Demetrius, Hermia, and Lysander) in Shakespeare’s fantastical A Midsummer Night’s Dream is the perfect backdrop to explore Crowley’s more eccentric philosophies on magick and how these philosophies relate to True and conscious will. In essence, I plan to not only explore the choices that these four individuals make due to acts of both types of magic(k), but their ultimate consequences as well. It also must be noted that during the process of this thesis, the one overarching theme throughout all three plays dealt with Crowley’s theory of self-preservation. I feel that this is innately tied into the idea of True Will. By achieving True Will, we are inherently attempting to make the best choices for ourselves. This inherently keeps alive the innate human instinct of survival. At the end of this thesis, I hope to defend that Crowley’s concepts of True Will and conscious will, when applied in tandem with Crowley’s concepts of magick, can be a valid lens to examine theatrical works, old and new alike.

Notes
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Aleister Crowley. Thelemic Prophet and the Wickedest Man in the World. Share. Crowley studied a number of different religious and magical belief systems including Buddhism, yoga, Kabbalah, and Hermeticism, as well as Judeo-Christian magical systems, even though he outright rejected Christianity and published multiple anti-Semitic statements, as was a common outlook of his time. "Wickedest Man in the World". Crowley's embrace of the concept of Baphomet, commonly confused with Satan. The fact that Crowley did write about summoning and commanding of demons, which he considered an exploration of the self rather than a working with literal beings. Connection with Other Religious Figures. - The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography, Aleister Crowley. Science is always discovering odd scraps of magical wisdom and making a tremendous fuss about its cleverness. - The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography, Aleister Crowley. Every man and every woman is a star. - The Book of the Law, Aleister Crowley. I hardly ever talk- words seem such a waste, and they are none of them true. - Magical and Philosophical Commentaries on The Book of the Law, Aleister Crowley. It is necessary, in this world, to be made of harder stuff than one's environment. - Moonchild, Aleister Crowley. Your friends will notice at once that glib vacuities fail to impress, and hate you, and tell lies about you. It's worth it. - Magick Without Tears, Aleister Crowley.