

THE SHIP

A MYSTERY PLAY

BY

SAINT EDWARD ALEISTER CROWLEY, 33°, 90°, 96°, X°
P.G.M., U.S.A., etc. etc. etc.

*To
Theodore Reuss*

THE EQUINOX

PERSONS OF THE MYSTERY

JULIA *a priestess*

JOANNA, *a virgin*

JOHN, *high priest of the Sun*

JULIAN

JOVIAN } *His wardens*

A CHINAMAN

AN ARAB

A ZULU

NU, *a seafaring man*

THE YOUNG JOHN

Chorus of men, women and children

THE SHIP

SCENE I—*The Temple of the Sun.*

BEHIND a veil is a column, on which are poised two intersecting disks, terrestrial and celestial, the cut-off part forming a true Vesica, fitting which is a shrine, capable of being opened and removed at will. The column is of gold and ivory. The veil is of azure blue. Before this column, but without the veil, is a single candle by whose side stands the high priest John. He is of mature age, and has a black beard. He is dressed in robes of gold and scarlet embroidery. A crown is on his head; in one hand he holds a sceptre, in the other an orb. In front of him are two thrones, right and left, each with column and candle. In the first sits a youth in white garments, his head bare; his left hand holds a dagger. In the second sits a grown man in black garments, his head covered with a hood, and in his right hand a coin.

Steps covered with seaweed lead up to the stage from the orchestra (or auditorium), and the edge of the stage gives the appearance of a wharf. In the north are trees; in the south a heap of builder's refuse.

Within the veil, one on each side the shrine, are two women, one (Julia) in a low-cut robe of green, brodered with roses, the skirt much slit, with a girdle of rose and gold, the other (Joanna) in a deep full robe of blue, covered completely with a thick veil of lace or silver gauze. This woman is slight and young, the other mature and robust.

Within the veil is heard a sixfold chime of bells. The warders spring to their feet.

JULIAN. Hail, Brother! Wake thy chorus of young voices,
That men may know how innocence rejoices.

JOVIAN. So mote it be. And thou in turn devise
Response of slumberous antiphonies.

1st Semi-chorus.

Night is nigh; the velvet veil
Drawn on day the faery-frail!
Sleep, O sleep, our angel eyes
Woo thy kiss with symphonies
Hushed to lowlier Lullabies!

2nd Semi-chorus.

Brethren, was the battle long?
All's assuaged for evensong.
Here the God is in his shrine:
Here the golden Bough divine;
Here the dove incarnadine!

1st Semi-chorus.

Dream shall hint what manifold
Mystery our life may hold.

2nd Semi-chorus.

Dreamless sleep shall arm the fray
Fated for the future day.

JOANNA [*Within*]. Here is corn!

JULIA [*Within*]. Here is wine!

JOHN [*Within*]. Life reborn! O deed divine! [*A pause.*]
Till the morn I close the shrine.

JULIA [*Within*]. Softly splendid, to his rest
Steals the godhead—to my breast!

JOANNA [*Within*]. Mute, magnificently male,

Hidden in the holy veil,
Thou and I prepare the rite
Of this night of his delight.

JOHN [*Within*]. Every brother to his ward!
Every hand to hilt of sword!
Every buckler to its arm,
Lest the Holy One take harm!
[*Without, a clash of steel.*]

Chorus. The warrior lords are wake and ware,
Three hundred blades of steel are bare.
Their threescore corporals stand steady.
Five captains, all alert and ready,
Watch, lion-hearted, against surprise,
As each man had an hundred eyes.

[*Again, the clash of steel. Then music played (JULIA and ORCHESTRA), growing ever softer. As it fades away, enter from the trees three men: a CHINESE armed with a scourge and a rope, a red man, like an ARAB, with a hammer and three nails, and a warrior chief, like a ZULU, with an assegai. They move somewhat furtively, and as if afraid. The CHINESE accosts JOVIAN.*]

CHINESE. I am the dragon brother of your priest,
And we are come from north and south and east
To build your god a new and nobler shrine.

JOVIAN. Give me the sign. [*Done, each gripping the other's throat.*]
The sign is strict, averred.
Hast thou the holy word? [*Whispered.*]

The word is rightly spoken.

Hast thou the secret token? [*Given, each extending the forefinger and striking it against that of the other.*]

The token is in order.
Pass to my brother warder!

[*They pass over to JULIAN.*]

ARAB. I am the camel brother of your priest,
And we are come from north and south and east
To build your God a new and nobler shrine.

JULIAN. Give me the sign. [*Done, each striking his breast five times with clenched hand.*]
The sign is strict, averred.
Hast thou the holy word? [*Whispered.*]

The word is rightly spoken.

Hast thou the secret token? [*Given, each making a wide sweep with the arm, clapping hand to hand, and then clasping.*]

The token is right. All Hail!
Pass to the veil!

[*They pass on. The black man enters, his companions pulling aside the veil.*]

ZULU. I am thy brother, priest.
From north and south and east
We come to build a shrine
Nobler and newer than thine.

CHINESE. These ropes can bind; this scourge
My myriad slaves can urge.

ARAB. This hammer and nails suffice
To strike forth fire from ice.

ZULU. I raise my spear, and fifty kings accord
Their service to their warrior liege lord.

[*JOHN remains silent and does not move.*]

CHINESE. Come, let us enter to rebuild the shrine!

JOHN. Give me the sign. [*Done, the ZULU moving his hand to the priest's knee. JOHN makes no motion.*]

The sign is wrong.

ARAB. Not strict averred?

I have the word. [*Whispers.*]

JOHN. The word is wrong.

ZULU. Not rightly spoken?

I have the token. [*Gives it by raising his hand and lowering it, then seeking to grasp JOHN'S hand. JOHN does not move.*]

JOHN. The token is wrong.

Ye may not pass.

CHINESE. Thou must, alas!

[*The CHINESE strips JOHN of his robes, all but the white under-robe, and binds him to the column. He scourges him to the music of JULIA until the white robe is red with blood.*]

CHINESE. Give me the secret of the shrine!

JOHN. It is not mine.

[*The ARAB impales JOHN by hands and feet with his three nails.*]

ARAB. Give me the secret of the shrine!

JOHN. It is not mine.

[*The ZULU drives his spear into the body of JOHN.*]

ZULU. Give me the secret of the shrine.

JOHN. It is not mine.

[*He dies.*]

Chorus [Without]

As it was spoken of the earth,
And as the ocean witnesseth,
That which the winter brought to birth
Finds in the spring its death.
Now that the word is come to pass
That bone is dust and flesh is grass,
Let us mix our acclamations
Of jubilation and lamentations!

Are not good and evil one
Before the challenge of the sun?
Shall necessity relax
The brazen fury of her features,
And her steel scimitar turn to wax
For the complaining of her creatures?
The Lord is slain; let us lament
The Word made void, the Work in vain.
Fulfilling their obscure event,
Let us rejoice; the Lord is slain.

ZULU. [*To the warders*]. Take down the body.

[*JULIAN and JOVIAN put out their candles and come forward and unloose JOHN, laying him between their columns. JULIAN covers him with a cloth, and JOVIAN throws a sprig of acacia upon it.*]

(*To the women*) Open us the shrine!

JULIA. The secret is not yours or mine!

[*She and JOANNA pull open the doors of the Vesica. A blaze of light sends the three ruffians reeling forth. They fly distracted and blinded about the Temple, and ultimately sink down among the rubble in the south.*]

[JULIA and JOANNA have let go the doors at once. These spring back and leave the stage lighted only by the single candle of the high priest.

A voice from the shrine.

Avenge the rape!

Let none escape!

A voice from the extreme west behind the audience.

The heavens have let loose the fountains

Of flood upon the mountains!

JULIAN [*At wharf*]. Ho, Nu! Ho, Nu!

Let no man leave the quay

Without the tokens of the true degree!

NU [*Below*]. I hear and I obey.

What cargo for to-day?

Chorus. There is no gold upon the earth

To pay an hundredth of its worth.

There is no treasure of sapphire,

No hidden ruby to compare;

No diamond hath illustrious fire

Beside the burden that we bear;

Nor where the waves of ocean whirl

Hath any cavern such a pearl.

Not heaven in all its happiest hours

Hath such a gracious gift as ours.

In it all principles inhere;

To it all elements conspire;

From it all energies revere

Of it the inscrutable desire!

Mankind, matured from myriad wombs.

Is but the garden where it blooms.

JOVIAN. Oh, but too precious is the burden we bear.

It is the God's own priest, the shrine's sole heir,

Whose corpse must fare into the nether air.

NU. [*Mounting the steps*] I have no ship worthy of such a freight.

The voice from the shrine.

Ay, but thou hast.

NU. Most ancient is her date.

And many a sea hath battered her, and time

Hath eaten her, I fear; corrosive crime

Of the wild on. Ho! thou wife o' the waters!

Our three strong sons and our three stalwart daughters.

Bid them discover if the old ship's sound!

The voice from the west.

Beware! Beware! the Lords of Heaven confound

The cities, and their habitants are drowned.

JULIAN and JOVIAN. We go; our master's body must be tended.

[*They go to the body and occupy themselves with it.*

CHINESE. O that our miserable lives were ended!

ARAB. Curse this right hand the hammer that extended!

ZULU. This damned spear that holy heart that rended!

CHINESE. They hunt us for our lives.

ARAB. The soldiers search.

Now our fate laughs and leaves us in the lurch.

ZULU. Can we not hide across the sea?

CHINESE. Who will give aid to such as we?

ARAB. Come, let us grope eternity!

ZULU. Hate and despair and guilt still dog our path.

CHINESE. For misery is murder's aftermath.

[Fearful and obscure music. They grope as blind men about the stage on all fours, and reach the wharf.

The voice from the west.

Still on the mountains pour the avenging rains.

And still the fierce flood swallows up the plains.

The voice from below.

Father, O father Nu! O father Nu!

What miracle is this—tremendous-true!

The old ship is grown new!

The voice from the shrine.

How should a ship grow old

Whose virgin timbers hold

Mine awful ark of gold?

ZULU. Do I hear one speak of ships?

CHINESE. Listen, my lord, to these, no lying lips.

ARAB. Take us aboard; we sail where hunger grips

No more three poor blind beggar men.

NU. *[Aside]*. May be

These are the assassin three!

[Aloud] Have ye the tokens of the true degree?

[They cower.

CHINESE. Ah, then, hope fails for ever!

ARAB. Let us hide

Beyond the borders of this treacherous tide;

Or it may steal upon us as we sleep.

ZULU. Would we were dead! Yet life is worth a leap.

CHINESE. O God, eternally to grope

This desert without hope!

ARAB. Oh, but this flight without faith

Is an eternal death.

ZULU. Hate is a hell sharper and deadlier

Than all the weapons of the torturer.

[They regain the heap of rubble.

JULIAN. All is prepared. Seek then once more with me

The traces of the fatal three!

[He finds the CHINAMAN.

Here is the first of the villains. *[To shrine]* Speak

What vengeance we shall wreak!

JOVIAN. Foulest phantom flowers of fear.

From his soul like serpents shoot!

The voice from the shrine.

Cut his throat from ear to ear!

Tear his tongue out by the root!

Throw the body in the dark

A cable from high-water mark!

[This is done, the body being thrown from the wharf.

The voice from the west.

The trees are covered: the rain streams

Upon the screees, and screams!

The voice from below.

The water kisses the ship's keel!

JOVIAN. Out with the steel! [*He seizes the ARAB.*]
Here is the second ruffian: [*To shrine*] Say
What price his deed must pay!

JULIAN. Hear the tongue that was so glib
Stammer, spit its crazy wrath!

The voice from the shrine.

Cut his breast from rib to rib!
Tear his heart out, fling it forth
Where the vultures may enhearse
Its horror from the Universe.

[*This is done in the west, but above wharf.*]

The voice from the west.

The hills are covered; the rain shrieks
Yet fiercer on the peaks.

The voice from below.

The water lifts the ship; she rights.

JULIAN. Ah! Foulest of foul sights!
Here is the third and greatest villain. (*He seizes the ZULU.*) [*To shrine*] Saith
Our God the manner of his death?

JOVIAN. Black to green grows horror's blank
Sickening from the stinking soul!

The voice from the shrine.

Cut his navel, flank to flank!
Tear the bowels out; be the whole
Burnt to ashes on the centre!
Black oblivion blot him! Ban
Every trace that might re-enter
Any memory of man!

[*The sentence is executed.*]

The voice from the west.

The mountains are all covered; the rain roars
Now on a sea that hath no shores!

The voice from below.

Haste! the ship slips into the foam.
Haste! leave the hapless home!

[*JULIAN and JOVIAN bear the body of JOHN down the steps of the wharf, and so out, either into orchestra or at the back of theatre. They are followed by JULIA and JOANNA, who bear the sacred Vesica in their arms.*]

NU. Cast off! three sons bend to the larboard oars,
And three strong daughters man the starboard thwart.
My wife shall spy, while I shall steer for, shores
Worthy to welcome home our Argonaut.

[*JULIA plays music. The wind is heard to rise and the waves to wash, until a gust blows out the last candle on the stage, when the curtain falls. The bell tolls twelve strokes. In the distance one hears the chant of the sailors, at first strong and near, gradually dying away.*]

Through the tempest, toward the dark,
Ploughs the fate-fulfilling bark,
Laden with the sacred ark.

All the earth is drenched and drowned.
Every other ship's unsound:

We alone are homeward bound.

Harnessed to eternity,
Life's sole sanctuary, we
Breast alone the winter sea.

We shall sight the surging shore,
Slack the sail and ship the oar,
Hear the anchor rattle and roar.

Through the tempest, toward the dark,
Ploughs the fate-fulfilling bark,
Laden with the sacred ark.

[JULIA'S music, which has grown fainter and more distant, now finally fails.

SCENE II

[A woodland scene: Springtime. On a mound in the midst is the barren tree, with two main branches right and left. On each side of the same a flat stone.

[The scene is in darkness; after a little slow and very faint and hesitating music, the voices of women are heard. They are seated on the stones, their attitudes expressing woe and anxiety.

JOANNA. Sister, we touch the hour of fear.
The midmost murk is near.

JULIA. There is no sign, no mark
To sunder dark from dark.

JOANNA. There is no mark nor sign
Of our lost shrine.

JULIA. Persuasion of the pit
Made us abandon it.

JOANNA. Nay, by inscrutable
Law of all Life it fell.

JULIA. Is that the light?

JOANNA. The boon
Of the pure moon?

[Far above glimmers a crescent, and sheds a wan light. A horrible discord arises: the howling of wolves, the moaning of dogs, the wailing of cats, the crying of jackals. And in the half light appear first marsh-lights wandering, then giant illusions of gods and men, all of which disappear in turn, their evanishment awaking a peal of mocking laughter. The women shrink into themselves, clinging to the tree, and mingling their lamentations with the hellish concert. Suddenly Joanna, drawing herself up, points to the front of stage, where is a circular pool, whose waters become perturbed. The noises die away. There is a noise of chanting.

Chorus from beneath.

Dreams diluvian daunt the daring daughters
That, devout in the hour of wastrel waters,
Hither bore from its house of eld the shrine.
Dreams, and devils, and things of death together,
Chorus glorious, wild as wind and weather,
Mocking; Shine, O our God! Lord God, now shine!

Is the symbol of Life indeed departed?
Hath the augur indeed found bloodless-hearted
Firstling lamb, and the dove without entrails?
Is the hope of the world for ever sunken?

Was the dream of us dark, demented, drunken?
All in vain are we vowed before the veils?

Were we false to the faith? Did hope desert us?
Was not leonine love the grace that girt us?
Why then bore we the shrine across the sea?
Wait! the moment of midmost murk discloses
Dawn, deep laden the winds of March with roses.
Groans of travail announce the babe to be.

Now the waves of the pool are stirred; the ocean
Labours; Earth is awake; a murmured motion
Marks the end of the tragic theme. Behold
How the garden of Pan with subtle laughter
Shakes, how Bacchus and Ceres, leaping after,
Link extravagant limbs of rose and gold!

*[In silence, lastly, a great Beetle emerges from the pool, holding in his mandibles the sacred Vesica!
He advances, while the women prostrate themselves, and affixes it to the Tree, just above the
fork of the boughs.*

[JULIA plays a music still slow and sad, but with a central core of faith, hope and love.

JOANNA. Eternal home of light and love,
Of life and liberty,
Thou shrine of seraph, dome of dove,
Soul of the sacred Tree,
Ark of the sanctuary, Cup
Wherein God's blood is treasured up!
From the abyss thou reappearest,
Thou the divinest and the dearest!
Moon of our love, most wondrous womb,

Mount of the Cave, red rose—
Mighty as light, transcend the tomb,
Thou tomb of all our woes!
White moon, pale moon, chaste moon, arise
Upon our smitten sanctuaries!
Thou hast passed through the aquarian rages,
Thou ship of all the sages!

[JULIA'S music swells to a paean. Above the tree is seen a rainbow.

JULIA. The seven colours glow upon the murk.
This is the midmost moment of the Work.

JOANNA. Hark! Now the warders bring the bier
Of their dead Master here.

[Chorus of unseen guardians, as in SCENE I. The clash of steel accompanies this chant.

Blessed are they that bear the bier
Unto the house of rest;
Through tempest toil and flooding fear,
From the wild waves o' th' west!
Blessed are they whose strength and faith
Pilot the ship whose name is Death!

Advancing ever to the east,
The holy pilgrims pace.
To the live God comes the dead priest
To front Him face to face,
If haply He reverse the doom
And tear its trophy from the tomb.

[The warders now approach and lay the body of the priest, still in its shroud, at the foot of the Tree.]

JULIA. Now be ye witnesses of Truth!
Here let love's lust yield youth!

[She raises her hands to heaven.]

JOANNA *[Comes forward and invokes at the shrine]*.
Now let my lord declare His power
This equinoctial hour!
If there be virtue in the dance,
And life abide within the lance,
And if the wine within the cup
Be the right draught for gods to sup—
Then be my sister's music dowered
With answering song, and roses showered!

[JULIA dances and plays around the corpse. The orchestra joins after the first few bars, and innumerable roses fall from heaven. A pause, while they watch.]

JULIA. Alas! no life reposes
Beneath the rain of roses!

JOANNA. Oh then, beneath the vaulted
Dome be our priest exalted!

[The two women and the warders lift the corpse, and stand it against the tree, its arms extended on the boughs.]

JOANNA. Now be ye witnesses of truth!
Here let love's lust yield youth!

JULIA. Uncover, uncover the face of our lover!
He sleeps, but the woe of the winter is over!
With tears let us water the root of the tree!
With laughter be bold to awaken the stem!
Thy darling, thy daughter is calling to thee!
Thy warders uphold thee, make answer to them!
Let the bud thrill with blood. Let the force of the flood
Of the sap thereof lap every anther unseen!
Let the shower of our power bring rebirth to the flower,
And the one light of sunlight break scarlet and green!

JOANNA. Alas, he does not stir!
Sorrowful, sinister
Is this day's name,
The hour of shame!

JULIA. Behold! Behold!
Rose breaks, and gold! *[Dawn breaks in the wood.]*
And see the cold white pall
Funereal fall!

[The wrappings fall from the corpse, and the youth John is seen beardless and smiling. He is dressed in the crown and robes of his father.]

THE YOUNG JOHN. I am that I am, the flame
Hidden in the sacred ark.
I am the unspoken name
I the unbegotten spark.

I am He that ever goeth,
Being in myself the Way;
Known, that yet no mortal knoweth,
Shewn, that yet no mortal sheweth,
I, the child of night and day.
I am never-dying youth.
I am Love, and I am Truth.

I am the creating Word,
I the author of the aeon;
None but I have ever heard
Echo in the empyrean
Plectron of the primal paeon!
I am the eternal one
Winged and white, the flowering rod,
I the fountain of the sun,
Very God of very God!

I am he that lifteth up
Life, and flingeth it afar;
I have filled the crystal cup;
I have sealed the silver star.
I the wingless God that flieth
Through my firmamental fane,
I am he that daily dieth,
And is daily born again.

In the sea my father lieth,
Wept by waters, lost for ever
Where the waste of woe replieth:
"Naught and nowhere!" "Naught and never!"
I that serve as once he served,
I that shine as once he shone,
I must swerve as he has swerved,
I must go as he has gone.

He begat me; in my season
I must such a son beget,
Suffer too the triple treason,
Setting as my father set.
These my witnesses and women—
These shall dare the dark again,
Find the sacred ark to swim in
The remorseless realm of rain.

Flowers and fruits I bring to bless you,
Cakes of corn, and wealth of wine;
With my crown will I caress you,

With my music make you mine.
Though I perish, I preserve you;
Through my fall, ye rise above:
Ruling you, your priest, I serve you,
Being life, and being love.

JOANNA. Here is corn!

JULIA. Here is wine!

THE YOUNG JOHN. Life reborn,
The Deed Divine!

[He consecrates, and partakes of, the sacrament. The two warders, kneeling, clasp his knees, and the two women support his arms. A sixfold chime of bells. He invokes the God in the shrine.]

THE YOUNG JOHN. Thou, who art I, beyond all I am,
Who hast no nature and no name,
Who art, when all but thou are gone,
Thou, centre and secret of the Sun,
Thou, hidden spring of all things known
And unknown, Thou aloof, alone,
Thou, the true fire within the reed
Brooding and breeding, source and seed
Of life, love, liberty, and light,
Thou beyond speech and beyond sight,
Thee I invoke, my faint fresh fire
Kindling as mine intents aspire.
Thee I invoke, abiding one,
Thee, centre and secret of the Sun,
And that most holy mystery
Of which the vehicle am I!
Appear, most awful and most mild,
As it is lawful, to thy child!

Chorus. So from the Father to the Son
The Holy Spirit is the norm:
Male-female, quintessential, one,
Man-being veiled in Woman-form,
Glory and worship in the Highest,
Thou Dove, mankind that deifiest,
Being that race—most royally run
To spring sunshine through winter storm!
Glory and worship be to Thee,
Sap of the world-ash, wonder-tree!

1st Semi-chorus.

Glory to Thee from gilded tomb!
Glory to Thee from waiting womb!

2nd Semi-chorus.

Glory to Thee from virgin vowed!
Glory to Thee from earth unploughed!

1st Semi-chorus.

Glory to Thee, true Unity
Of the eternal Trinity!

2nd Semi-chorus.

Glory to Thee, thou sire and dam
And self of I am that I am!

1st Semi-chorus.

Glory to Thee, beyond all term,

Thy spring of sperm, thy seed and germ!

2nd Semi-chorus.

Glory to Thee, eternal Sun,
Thou One in Three, thou Three in One!

Chorus. Glory and worship be to Thee,
Sap of the world-ash, wonder-tree!

[He raises his hands to the shrine, and opens it. A rosy light streams thence and fills the holy place, while the white Dove that was enshrined therein descends upon his head. The tree blossoms into leaf, flower, and fruit.]

(The curtain falls)