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To Dr. Michel Pharand
for over 40 years a man
I have known as a friend

Nature, pleased with the customs of friendship,
Invented tools so that those absent could be united:
The reed-pen, paper, ink, person's handwriting,
Token of the soul that grieves far away.
— Palladas 4th Century CE

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PREFACE

The German-American George Sylvester Viereck and the English writer Aleister Crowley were both so eccentric, so involved in a variety of artistic, cultural, religious, political, and philosophical pursuits, that one might suspect the two men believed the late Victorian world they were born into was immensely restrictive in terms of new concepts of religious doctrine, moral behavior, literary freedoms, and both men soon garnered reputations for being amoral—and unpublishable. Nevertheless, both were determined to publish privately or in small, less fashionable journals until their "sordid" reputations began to grow.

Eventually, the Englishman and the hyphenated American were brought together in New York during the early years of the Great War. Their common ground was supposedly writing propaganda literature of all sorts supporting the Germans and Central Powers and discrediting the Allied cause in order to ensure that the American government and its military might remain neutral during the conflict raging in Europe.

One purpose of this book is to examine the literary writings of both men in the years leading up to the Great War in order to set the stage for examining their literary outputs during that war. There is no doubt this book is a literary history, but it cannot avoid dealing with history, politics, religion, propaganda, sexuality, that deals with spies, deception, famous people, Vaudeville Icons, money laundering, murder, and even the Statue of Liberty. After all, how did "the most evil man in America" and the wickedest man in the world live, write, and work together for over three years without controversy, scandal, and mystery?

INTRODUCTION

The most often reported explanation of their meeting is that the forty-year-old British poet and magician had arrived in the United States aboard the *Lusitania* with some of his antique books to sell. Aleister Crowley, for that is the name of our poet, also carried fifty British pounds along with a certificate claiming his membership Honorous Magus in the Societas Rosicruciana in America. According to John Symonds, in his biography of Crowley, *The World Magazine* had recently published a vivid account of his leadership role among a group of devil-worshipers in Crowley's London studio on Fulham Road (200). Less than two months after his arrival, *The World Magazine* published a second article regarding his impact in New York:

> Aleister Crowley ... is the strangest man I ever met. He is a man about whom men quarrel. Intensely magnetic, he attracts people or repels them with equal violence. His personality seems to breed rumors. Everywhere they follow him. (Symonds, *Beast*, 225)

Crowley was residing at the center of the Ordo Templi Orientis in New York and had not sold as many books to the American lawyer John Quinn as he expected. He was reduced to giving lectures concerning the occult to earn money while continuing his mystical quest for arcane knowledge and power. He was successful enough to prolong his stay, and in April 1915, while traveling on a local bus, his luck changed for the better. Supposedly, a man on the bus tapped his shoulder and asked him if he favored "a square deal for Germany and Austria" (Symonds, *Beast*, 226). Crowley answered in the affirmative, and the man offered him a business card and asked the baffled Crowley to drop by his office. When Crowley called on Mr. O'Brien a few days later, he was absent. However, Crowley discovered he was in the offices of a weekly newspaper called *The Fatherland.*

Crowley described the person who first took charge of his visit as a "little amniote—half rat, half rabbit" (*Confessions*, 746). In fact, his host was the Romanian Jewish writer Joseph Bernard Rethy, whose first collection of poems, *The Song of the Scarlet Host, and Other Poems*, was

about to be published. Ironically, Rethy's collection would be reviewed by Crowley a few months later under the title "The Lyrical Work of Joseph Bernard Rethy." Crowley's review, which noted that Rethy was the managing editor of the journal, is a not very subtle example of his strategy while later writing German propaganda for *The Fatherland*.

The review mocks Rethy's collection of poems in a manner that could be read by the general reader as sincere praise. However, on closer inspection, it becomes apparent that Crowley's British irony is busily at work and not always grasped by the more literal American reader. For example, he opens the review praising the young writer as being far more favorable than that fifteenth-rate poet, Oscar Wilde. Crowley then proceeds to mock-praise how "beautiful" Rethy's line, "Appalled by some gigantic gloom," reads: "It has all the force of some titan of another element, another plane" (273). But it is in mocking Rethy's reference to the American evangelist preacher Billy Sunday that Crowley is at his best. He solemnly announces after faint praise that Rethy has "demolished" Sunday with intense dramatic power and "a fullness of scorn as such poets rarely attain to express" (273). Crowley continues his double entendre when he later compares Rethy favorably to Shelley. The final line, in its clever ambiguity, is a fair judgment of Rethy's work: "He may yet do much to create a reputation for American Literature" (273).

Eventually, Rethy introduced the visiting dignitary to his boss. Here is Crowley's rather unkind description of the event:

> To my surprise, this master of his recognized me and came forward with extend [sic] hands, bulging eyes and the kind of mouth which seems to have been an unfortunate afterthought. The name of this person was George Sylvester Viereck. (*Confessions*, 746)

Viereck was familiar with Crowley's face because the two had met in London three years earlier when the editor of the *English Review,* Austin Harrison, had introduced them. Though a number of Crowley's biographers appear to find his *Confessions* believable, this chance meeting and Viereck's subsequent hiring of Crowley to write for both *The Fatherland* and later *The International* are questionable at best. One possible connection may be that in January 1914, Crowley's poem about Russia, "The City of God," appeared in *The English Review*. In the same issue there was an advertisement for *The Works of George Sylvester Viereck* along with his *International* journal. One wonders if this connection with the journal might have led the newly-arrived Crowley to Viereck's office.

Apparently, the two men adjourned to Viereck's private office and no doubt discussed the war and the aims of *The Fatherland.* As a writer,

Crowley immediately envisioned a place for himself amidst all this propaganda creation in addition to using *The International* as a venue for his own writing. In fact, by August of 1915, his powerful short story "Lieutenant Finn's Promotion" was duly published in *The Fatherland.*

This interview led to a three-year literary cooperation much discussed by critics, historians, and biographers. Clearly, despite Crowley's first impression of Viereck, he later described him as a man of considerable talent:

> He knew the world well, being undeceived by the humbug of public men and the prostitute antics of the Press; his point of view possessed the sanity which came from the second-raters' perception of the necessity of compromise. He was a man of suave insinuating manners and address, a man of considerable political experience and immense intellectual capacity. (Regardie and Stephenson, 108)

Crowley later went on to suggest that Viereck trusted him because he never really understood Crowley's duplicity or the moral paradox that ran so deeply through him. This observation has a ring of truth to it, but Crowley somewhat under-estimates his boss here. Viereck recognized that Crowley was a risk to the German cause that he valued, but he felt that the risk was worth the chance, but he decided to keep his eye on this new recruit. However, Viereck's evolving connection with the German propaganda cabinet in New York forced him to spend more time overseeing *The Fatherland* and leaving the job of literary editor of *The International* in the questionable hands of Crowley.

CHAPTER 1

SYLVESTER VIERECK: BEGINNINGS

When the Great War began, there was little doubt as to where the thirty-year-old successful writer and literary magazine editor George Sylvester Viereck stood politically. Despite having lived in the United States since he was twelve, his roots were deeply German, largely because of his rather tentative belief that his father Louis Viereck was an illegitimate son of Kaiser Wilhelm I. His father became a Marxist in the 1870s, but eventually became disillusioned with Marxist doctrine and immigrated to the United States, where Sylvester was educated.

Albeit his formal education was in America, Sylvester attended a German Gymnasium as well. As an eleven-year-old working as a gardener in Baltimore, all he apparently spoke about was poetry. Six months later, when his family moved back to New York, he attended a public school where he was an average student, but because of his rather limited English vocabulary, he spent a good deal of time alone reading in English, especially the poems and stories by Swinburne and Edgar Allan Poe.

According to his biographer, Phyllis Keller, he published a poem celebrating Otto von Bismarck in a German newspaper in Baltimore and the following year a poem justifying the American entry into the Spanish-American War in the Hearst newspaper *Das Morgen-German* (124). His own motto, "Still so Young and Already so Poetic," provides an insight into the precocious young Viereck. By fourteen, he had published several poems in two German-language newspapers, and his reputation grew along with his subject matter. He wrote poems attacking Tammany Hall and began to translate English poetry into German (which greatly helped his English skills). But his true love was the Decadent Movement. His dedication to Baudelaire was equal to the other aesthetes who were "preoccupied with carnality, gloom, and an art for art's sake ethos" (Szefel, 87). The works of Nietzsche influenced him to sympathize with both aestheticism and atheism, but he also found inspiration in the works of Whitman, Poe, Byron, and Shelley.

However, it was the life of Oscar Wilde that provided the ideal model for artistic behavior. In Viereck's "Youthful Diary 1899-1903," an emotive passage captures how essential Wilde's image appealed to the romantic-minded Viereck:

> Wilde is so splendid. I admire, nay, … I love him. He is so deliciously unhealthy, so beautifully morbid, I love all things morbid and evil. I love the splendor of decay, the foul beauty of corruption. What I hate is the inquisitive, cold, freezing rays of the sun. Day is nausea, day is dullness, day is prose. Night beauty, love, splendor, poetry, wine, scarlet, rape, vice, and bliss. I love the night. (Szefel, 87)

Viereck's "Diary" also focuses on Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, whom he briefly met in New York in 1901 when he was only seventeen. Douglas praised Viereck's work, which proved an impetus to his literary ambitions.

In August of 1902, a German-American English doctoral student at Columbia University, William Ellery Leonard, opted to rent a room in the home of Viereck's parents. While working on his dissertation (on Byron's reception in the United States), Leonard recognized that the then seventeen-year-old Sylvester had some literary talent and befriended him. Neale Reinitz, in his study of Leonard, claims that the graduate student compared young Viereck to Goethe (Reinitz, 53). During the time Leonard was researching his Ph.D., he also often hosted Ludwig Lewisohn, a Jewish, Berlin-born student at Columbia. The three students became a trio of literati and often edited each other's writing (53). When, in 1903, Leonard decided to return to Germany, which he sorely missed, Viereck encouraged him—with perhaps an ulterior motive. Not long after Leonard's departure, Lewisohn moved into his vacated room where a sexual relationship developed with Viereck (54). The year after their liaison, Lewisohn wrote, in German, a favorable critical study of his lover entitled *George Sylvester Viereck: An Appreciation.*

The relationship with Lewisohn opened the floodgates of Viereck's repressed sexuality, and he began to regularly publish poems in German that reflected his sympathy with classical and erotic themes. As will be seen, Crowley, like Viereck, fell under the influence of the same two Victorian icons of decadence: Wilde and Swinburne. For the next ten years, both of these literary icons would direct Viereck's poetic trajectory. His work celebrated the art for art's sake philosophy and made no concessions to traditional moral values: they were clearly inferior to aesthetic ones. In effect, Viereck's philosophical stance never significantly changed throughout his life; neither was his belief in his own genius called

into question. Even in the post-World War II period, after years of incarceration as a Nazi sympathizer, Viereck would write novels such as *All Things Human* (1950) and *Gloria: A Novel* (1952) in which he continued to praise Eros as the primordial force which, along with art, gave ultimate meaning to existence (Johnson, 6).

In her exceptionally perceptive book *The Gospel of Beauty in the Progressive Age*, Lisa Szefel points out that many editors returned Viereck's submissions because they found his work too racy for publication in their genteel magazines: for example, "William Marion Reedy's *The Mirror*, which played a sizable role in supporting new poets along with William Randolph Hearst's publications (38). Szefel observes that many of the German daily papers, the *Abendpost* for example, only wanted genteel poems that did not deal with decadent themes. What Viereck saw as their inability to realize the true condition of humankind eventually led him to attempt playwriting. The result was *A Game at Love and Other Plays*, the first book he published in English.

The plays received mixed reviews, understandably so considering their subject matter and the manner in which the characters respond to the plot situation. Further, in his Preface, Viereck noted that none but the last play, "Morality," taught a lesson. What he claimed to have done was to take the climaxes "of imaginary novels and … embodied them in dramatic sketches" (*A Game*, ix). Here Viereck attacked the lengthy, overblown novels of the early twentieth century and claimed his short plays saved the reader a good deal of time reaching the climax, as his plays are devoid of empty trappings.

Since his plays appeared risqué by the standards of Roosevelt's America, Viereck in his Preface defended his use of the terms "Man-Animal" and "Woman-Animal": "The expressions … may jar on sensitive souls, who rather than confront a problem of erotics would follow the time-honoured policy of the ostrich; but I know of a combination of words equally decisive and indicative of my meaning" (x).

Before reading his plays, his audience was made aware that the author was not going to compromise his artistic stance that the current romantic depiction of love in literature had no validity. Instead, he would examine the true nature of relationships with an eye to the primitive nature of men and women. An example of what Viereck envisions as the primitive essence of a love story can be found in the opening play "From Death's Own Eyes," which relates a love affair between forty-year-old Mildred and an effeminate nineteen-year-old man named Alfred, who is enamored of her beauty and experience. The climax of the tale occurs when Alfred visits her after attending a party where he met a young

woman. The discussion of the tryst sends shock waves through Mildred, and she spends the rest of the evening demeaning their relationship and telling Alfred that he will soon grow weary of his ageing temptress. He, of course, protests, but she informs him that she has poisoned his wine because she does not want him to see her grow old or to love another woman. Alfred responds by thanking Mildred for bringing true love into his life. His language is replete with decadent clichés, as he feels the lifeblood draining from his body. He observes that Mildred is growing paler, and he desires a glorious death pact—but then Mildred reveals that she alone has drunk the poisoned wine in order to test his faithfulness, and that now she can die knowing she looked beautiful and that her lover will always remember her in his life and his artistic endeavors.

"From Death's Own Eyes" shows Mildred as the play's true heroine because she sacrifices herself for art over life's mundanity. In "The Mood of a Moment," Viereck teaches the reader how another heroic figure should act and think in light of the true nature of love. This play opens with a middle-aged pair, Alfred and his current love interest Marion in a small sitting room also occupied by "An Old-Fashioned Person." Their discussion concerns marriage and fidelity. Alfred "half approaches the Aesthete, half the Blond Beast of Nietzsche" (25). He argues that love and fidelity cannot be measured by fixed criteria, but rather that "love is a survival from times primaeval, and therefore it has the impatience and love of liberty that wild things have" (25). In true Nietzschean fashion, Alfred argues that he takes whatever he desires, for "Is not the complete enjoyment of a single moment better than a lifetime of pleasure in homoeopathic doses?" (27). Marion is clearly excited by this freedom cry and tells him with admiration that although he looks like a normal society member, "you do not permit its conventional stiffness to fetter your soul as others do" (29). Marion admits she has read in Nietzsche and Max Stirner (another German philosopher) about men like Alfred, and that she adores him.

Primal urges consume them in this scene, and Alfred can no longer bear the pain and begs Marion to flee with him at once. She draws back and argues that she cannot leave the party for fear of polite society's reaction. She also rebuffs his promise to come that night due to her husband's presence. The act closes with their agreement to meet the next morning when she will be alone. The final act opens with Marion in the same drawing room having read many times over a letter from Alfred declaring his everlasting love. She is exquisitely dressed but is restless for his arrival and lost in dreams of what her life will be like with this amazing lover.

When Alfred finally arrives, she stands in expectation of his embrace, but instead of rushing toward her, he freezes when she thanks him for the intoxicating letter. Standing motionless, he finally utters, "Had you only consented yesterday" (32). Marion is stunned, but he continues with a brutal harangue claiming he has lost all attraction toward her. He turns to leave, but she begs him to explain his abrupt change of heart. He informs her that the previous evening "there was the illumination ... the light in your hair and in your eyes ... the cream-coloured lace ... and between your slender white fingers, like drops of blood, the petals of a rose" (34). Alfred concedes she is beautiful in the morning light as well, but it was "the atmosphere, the mood" (35) that made him fall in love. Desperate, Marion tells him she has an idea and begs him to stay in the drawing room while she recreates last night's mood. When her servants depart and having darkened the room, she reappears dressed exactly as she had been the night before. Alfred is stunned at this apparition and falls at her feet. She caresses him passionately, but he unexpectedly draws back:

> The mood is not the same. It is like a bell that is cracked. Why had you not more daring! Had you repulsed me coldly... cruelly... at the moment when I lay at your feet … everything would have been possible… I trembled after it… hoped for it…. There is love in your eyes. Last night you did not love me…. The moment a woman begins to love me, she has ceased to interest me…. And would you love me if I were different?" (37-38).

At this, Marion's head droops and the play ends.

As with the early poems of Aleister Crowley during the same period, Viereck's plays have little if any moral to deliver to their audiences. Clayton Hamilton, in his review for *Bookman,* claimed that Viereck's female characters "were barren-souled, the men emasculated in mind" (426). He criticized Viereck's characters as "not alive enough to be immoral; but their toying attempts at exoticism were to any sane and healthy reader nauseating" (426). Both writers were protesting the Edwardian avoidance of any writing that might be deemed salacious and disturbing or offensive to the reader's sense of rectitude. But more importantly, both were comfortable with the Decadent dictum that celebrated the body: erotic arousal is necessary for an authentic existence. Simply put, for both men the body was a beautiful creation and rapturous experience—whether via the mind, such as various contemplations of beauty and truth (Keats's legacy), or via the act of sexual and physical attraction, such as that of Baudelaire for Jeanne Duval—was "simply a silent instrument that, by touching all the living strings of it, the male awakened to a music that is all his own" (Symons, *Beast*, 2). Still, even

John Quinn, the American art and music critic to whom Viereck's book was dedicated, felt strongly that such a young man should be warned against challenging the sensitivities of an American audience. The eminent critic H. L. Mencken, who found the collection interesting, felt duty-bound to inform Viereck that he found the plays contemptible with regards to depicting what held civilization together (Gertz, 50).

Much of Viereck's time between 1904 and 1906 was spent studying for his degree at the College of the City of New York, from which he graduated in 1906. During this period, he was working on an English translation of his German works along with writing a novel entitled *The House of the Vampire.* Both enterprises were published the following year, the translated poetry collection as *Nineveh and Other Poems*. Both works contributed to bringing national attention to the young writer.

Not all responses were positive, however. Some critics complained of his being of the Uranian School (the well-known tag for 'homosexual'); others claimed he was immoral and decadent, and almost all progressive American critics felt his writings were pessimistic and devoid of a positive message. Still, several important critics considered Viereck's work groundbreaking, including the very influential James Huneker, the now-appreciative critic of his poetry Clayton Hamilton, and the Irish American poet and critic Shaemas O'Sheel. Most importantly, the poetic volume's obsession with physical passion challenged the Puritan moral preaching in hackneyed American poetry. Viereck's mindset was influenced not only by the Decadent poets but also by his readings of investigations into sexual behavior by such luminaries (in their day) as Krafft-Ebing, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Havelock Ellis. A glance at *Nineveh* might prove instructive here.

Nearly half the poems in *Nineveh* were translated from his 1904 German-language volume *Gedichte.* What is seldom mentioned by critics, however, is that very likely Viereck's work was translated into English by his former lover Ludwig Lewisohn, who is acknowledged in a "note" which mentions the previous publication of two translated poems. However, promoting his image as the wunderkind, the 1907 edition of the collection printed by Moffat, Yard claims the following: "The Englishing, for this volume, of the German poems which brought him his original world-wide celebrity was done personally by the poet." Yet this statement is contradicted in a letter written by the English critic Arthur Symons to Viereck dated 29 September 1906: "Mr. Lewisohn has I see not only read but translated you with admirable skill" (Beckson, 181). Not only is Lewisohn's excellent translation ignored, but it is English writer Richard Le Gallienne who is the dedicatee. Viereck's ego had grown considerably

since his college graduation. When interviewed by the *New York Times* regarding his sudden leap onto the American literary scene, the twenty-three-year-old responded without humility: "I sometimes feel … as if I were a sort of Colossus of Rhodes, with one foot in Europe and with one other foot here…. I, George Sylvester Viereck, would rather have written *Nineveh* … than be the German Emperor" (Rowley, xiv).

In his "Preface" to *Nineveh,* Viereck not only omits mentioning Lewisohn's translation contribution, but assures his readers that his poems have lost virtually nothing in translation (xiii). He wants his work judged as it stands. Further, "Viereck wished to … extend the borderline of poetry into the domain of music on the one side, into that of the intellect on the other. The new form, new in that it has never been before consciously applied, brings into play hidden possibilities of speech, and enables the authentic poet to multiply rhymes and rhythmic effects without straining the sense" (*Flesh*, 360).

With his book of verse, Viereck had greater plans than simply creating a new form of poetry. Like many Decadent writers, he wanted to *épater le bourgeois*, to disturb their safe complacency and force them to observe the real world around them. "The Empire City" a "prelude" to "Nineveh," is one of his earliest English poems. The sonnet exposes New York as experienced by the young poet compared with ancient Nineveh. Here, the former and current capitals of corruption are depicted as one. The personified "city's life-blood throbs" as

> ... the fevered pulses fly,
> Immense, defiant, breathless she stands there
>
> And ever listens in the ceaseless din,
> Waiting for him, her lover who shall come,
> Whose singing lips shall boldly claim their own
> And render sonant what in her was dumb:
> The splendour and the madness and the sin,
> Her dreams in iron and her thoughts of stone. (*Flesh*, 21)

For Viereck, New York is the pulsating future of his today, and despite the aroma of Decadence—which was nearly extinguished in Europe by this time—the poet does capture some of the images of the "modern impulse" which Pound and Eliot would embody in less than a decade. Where Viereck's work deviates from the Modernists, of course, is that for him the forces of metaphorical evil are at work here. Above the "smoke of thousand fires, / Life throbs and beats relentlessly!" sit "Two lemans: Death and Leprosy" (17). The two illicit lovers rule over the city

of sin and wanton lust and watch decay and sin destroy any hope of redemption:

> Thy course is downward; 'tis the road
> To sins that even where disgrace
> And shameful pleasure walk abroad
> Dare not unmask their shrouded face! (25)

The poetry collection is largely an examination of the temptations and failures of humankind to grasp the essence of the world it inhabits. When occasionally a rare flicker of hope does manage to appear, the next dozen lines dowse it with the cold reality of failure and ineptitude of those who wander amidst the doomed avenues of Nineveh.

If one were to attempt to thematically categorize the most important issues in this varied collection, one might include Viereck's working out of his own sexual preferences. There are over two dozen poems in the collection which struggle with this issue. Curiously, Aleister Crowley was also unable to decide where he stood on the issue and remained a bisexual throughout his life. However, at this point, prior to their first meeting, both men were haunted by the issue of gender ambiguity.

One of the central poems in *Nineveh* is "Kakodaimon," which in Greek translates as 'evil spirit'. Crowley will deal with this same demonic problem in several Thelemic studies, in particular the "Liber Samekh" section of *Magick.* Viereck's poem opens with an invitation for the beautiful but cruel evil spirit to possess him. He describes the spirit's "glorious body," which in a religious procession drives its followers into "Sin and Shame, and black Disaster" (38). Even after Kakodaimon's worshipers fall prostrate in front of the spirit, he ignores their meagre offerings. But the speaker has no such illusions: he stands "boldly fronting this my destiny," which is the loss of redemption for his sin of sodomy. The final stanza demonstrates the speaker's inability to escape his lust for Kakodaimon:

> Thine is the blame if o'er my head shall roll
> His thunderous wrath: yet if one spake :"Disown
> Thy love, or bid farewell to Mary's Son!"
> I should not grasp the priest's absolving stole,
> But, choosing, at thy worshipped feet lie prone.
> O Splendid evil genius of my soul.
> Kakadaimon! (39)

The struggle of the physical against the spiritual, what Viereck calls "the ancient contest between Eros and Jesus" (*Flesh*, 70), cannot but have

one result. The speaker must give in to the power of physical beauty and worship its male form above all else. This uncompromising worship is also exacerbated by Kakodaimon's ignoring the depth of the speaker's sacrifice: masochism is very much part of Viereck's character at this period in his life.

In "Love Cruel" the reader follows the trajectory of a sadistic homosexual relationship from its hopeful beginnings to its bitter end. The poet teaches the reader that once "love's bacchanal had spent itself … passion slept, that unrelentingly / I heaped upon you, bitterness, and all / That sears the heart and kills it" (*Nineveh*, 102). The sadistic lover feels immense joy in tormenting his masochistic lover and is sexually aroused by the endless stream of the tears flowing from his lover's "perfect crystals" (102).

The final poem from the *Nineveh* collection is one of Viereck's most tender. "For Antinous in his Old Age" is a particularly dispiriting poem lamenting the death of the Roman Emperor Hadrian's Greek slave and lover, the stunning Antinous. The two were together for many years, and the relationship was well known and tolerated in Roman society. In the year 130 CE, while boating on the Nile, Antonius fell into the river and drowned. Speculation is ongoing as to whether it was suicide, accident, or murder. The poem laments how over time the corpse's "boyish" smile becomes a leer: "Thy lips are swollen and thy vision blinks" (88). The grave has decomposed the physical beauty of the man. His tragedy has been repeated in the celebrated lovers of Shakespeare and Michelangelo. The great calamity of human existence is that the putrefied corpse becomes "a thing of horror at the last" (88). Here Viereck rails against the destructive and senseless aspect of nature in its raw form using as an example the decay of Antinous's alluring form. Even artistry falls short of capturing the exquisiteness of physical beauty, and this truth must shake the foundation of worshipping that which will rot and decay.

To claim that *Nineveh* was a major breakthrough in Viereck's career is an understatement: his reputation went from minor to significant overnight. In order to take advantage of the publicity, Viereck agreed to publish his novel, *The House of the Vampire*, in the same year.

In recent years, *The House of the Vampire* has been exclusively advertised as a gay vampire novel, hoping to cash in on a niche audience. Nevertheless, perhaps labeling it the first psychic vampire novel would be more exact. The irony in this commercial labeling is that *The House of the Vampire* is neither a vampire novel nor a gay novel; rather, it concerns the substance of artistic endeavor—with a touch of Nietzsche tossed in for spice.

The plot is compelling, and the novel is a page-turner. Viereck's charismatic vampire Reginald Clarke is a famous writer and artist who is revered and praised by the bourgeois intellectual society to which he belongs. The obscene secret of Clarke's success, however, is his ability to suck the creativity and the soul out of people of talent. His modus operandi is to somehow engage younger and less experienced men and women in some form of impassioned relationship where he is able to slowly suck their minds and souls of their creative ideas and poetic renderings and use them to create his own various art forms.

Early in the novel, we see an example of his vampiric ability when Clarke enters a tawdry music hall to hear Betsy, the Hyacinth girl, sing a love song. She shows little talent, but there are moments when her voice effectively conveys sadness. Clarke begins to show interest in those moments and stares intensely at her:

> She grew nervous. It was only with tremendous difficulty that she reached the refrain. As she sang the opening line of the last stanza, an inscrutable smile curled on Clarke's lips. She noticed the man's relentless gaze and faltered. When the burden came, her singing was hard and cracked: the tremor had gone from her voice. (6)

Clarke has sucked the emotional energy from the poor girl and left her unable to sing with feeling. On a much smaller scale, the same will happen to the hero of the novel, Ernest Fielding. A later meeting between two victims of Clarke's vampirism offers the reader an opportunity to watch what lies ahead for the innocent young writer.

Fielding has shown creative talent, so Clarke invites him to come and live with him and slowly begins to steal his ideas. About a third of the way through the novel, Fielding has an idea to write an Oriental play "interwoven with bits of gruesome tenderness." He spends over a month working on plans for his play and is just about to begin when Clarke invites him to a reading of his own new work. As soon as Clarke begins to read, Ernest realizes that this is his own play, and that Clarke has somehow plagiarized his ideas. Ernest confides in his best friend, Jack, but, of course, since Ernest has never written a word of the play, Jack dismisses his friend's claim. Ernest is now convinced he is delirious and heads for a rest cure to Atlantic City, where he meets Clarke's former lover, the artist Ethel Brandenbourg. The two begin to flirt, Ernest promising her he will write a novel called *Leontina* that will capture this summer spent with her.

Ernest's promise awakens many reflections of Ethel's former relationship with Clarke, and she realizes that he will surely ruin the young writer just as he ruined her own artistic career. Fearing for Ernest's well-

being, Ethel decides to confront Clarke directly. The pair eventually go out for dinner, and Clarke willingly explains the philosophy behind his actions:

> In every age … there are giants who attain to a greatness which by natural growth no men could ever have reached. But in their youth a vision came to them, which they set out to seek. They take the stones of fancy to build them a palace in the kingdom of truth, projecting into reality dreams, monstrous and impossible. Some succeed. They are the chosen. Carpenter's sons they are, who have laid down the Law of a World for millenniums to come; or simple Corsicans, before whose eagle eyes have quaked the kingdoms of the earth. But to accomplish their mission they need a will of iron and the wit of a hundred men. And from the iron they take the strength, and from a hundred men's brains they absorb their wisdom…. In art they live, the makers of new periods, the dreamers of new styles…. They concentrate the dispersed rays of a thousand lesser luminaries in one singing flame that, like a giant torch, lights up humanity's path. (62)

Ethel is overwhelmed by the idea that her artistic flame had been extinguished by an ego such as Clarke's, and she decides to save Ernest from a similar fate. The contemporary reader would no doubt recognize the similarities between Clarke's defense of his vampiric sucking of other people's minds for the betterment of the world and Nietzsche's discussions of the Übermensch. Viereck portrays Clarke as a character who must achieve greatness at any cost, for it is the only way a civilization can continue to move forward toward some form of Darwinian evolution. In Viereck's reflections, the genius has a different mindset than the common person—different values. Clearly, Clarke is convinced that people like Ernest and Ethel should be thankful for being chosen to sacrifice their meager output to a genius such as himself: "I carry the essence of what is cosmic…. Of what is divine" (34).

The rest of the novel is somewhat predictable. Ethel alerts Ernest to what she has discovered, but Ernest remains under the spell of Clarke's charismatic trance. It is not until Ernest discovers a manuscript copy of his own novel, *Leontina*, that he fully accepts that Clarke has stolen his ideas and turned them into his own artistic production. "It was true, then—all, his dream, Reginald's confession. And the house that had opened its doors so kindly to him was the house of a Vampire!" (89).

Despite Ethel's warning to leave the house immediately, Ernest stays on to confront the vampire and steal his own novel back from Clarke. Unfortunately, the confrontation is an uneven fight. Clarke reveals to Ernest that

> I am the light-bearer…. I point the way to the future. I light up the abysses of the past. Were not my stature gigantic, how could I hold the torch in all men's sight? The very souls that I tread underfoot realize, as their dying gaze follows me, the possibilities with which the future is big…. Eternally secure, I carry the essence of what is cosmic … of what is divine…. I am Homer … Goethe… Shakespeare …. I am the embodiment of the same force of which Alexander, Caesar, Confucius, and the Christos were also embodiments…. None so strong as to resist me. (97-98)

His speech concluded, Clarke slowly sucks all life from the powerless Ernest and leaves him "a gibbering idiot" (100).

What is the reader to make of this novel and how does it offer a glimpse of the Viereck who will be editing *The Fatherland* in 1914? Firstly, Viereck was a student of Nietzsche and was very influenced by the theory posited in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* concerning the importance of the Übermensch in humanity's quest for greatness. This issue will prove to be the subject of various essays and creative works in his career. His interviews with Hitler in 1923 and Einstein in 1929 offer a sympathetic portrait of the Übermensch, which had its genesis in *The House of the Vampire.* What is common to all his "vampires" is their ability to absorb whatever is needed to move the generations they represent forward in their scientific, cultural, or political milieu.

The "great man" is not a negative force; he can be constructive as well. Out of the thoughts and ideas of others, he can manufacture through his own energy and vision something unique and powerful. Nothing can stand in the way of this will power, and the "great man" will stop at nothing to have a project completed. In this case, the ends do justify the means. What is difficult for most modern readers to grasp is that this philosophical stance overlooks individual needs and desires at the expense of the higher cause. Sucking the essence of Ernest in order to produce great art is crucial to Clarke, as individuals are simply fodder to genius in much the same way as the drone works for the Queen in the beehive. Clarke recognizes and understands that he is of the lineage of Shakespeare, Balzac, and Napoleon, whose busts adorn his study. More disturbingly, he believes he is a servant of the Lord, and feels no guilt concerning the actions he takes to achieve personal greatness. However, Clarke makes it clear to Ernest that his desire for greatness is not personal: Ernest is merely a vessel for genius to pass through on its way to greatness. Moreover, descriptions of Viereck at this time emphasize his absolute certainty of his own genius.

The year after the publication of *The House of the Vampire*, there appeared *The Metropolis*, admittedly not one of the finest novels by the

very successful author of *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair. *The Metropolis* was a caustic study of the extremely wealthy elite, the type of people with whom Reginald Clarke would have been familiar. Sinclair attacks the wastage of money on luxuries that reflect lives devoid of meaning and values. He examines the use of alcohol and drugs, sexual experimentation, adultery, falsehood, and criminal actions deemed necessary to exist in this emptiness. One scene, particularly relevant to this study, depicts the arrival at a dinner party of a young poet of Diabolism whose works are very popular in Metropolis. Strathcona is described as a "tall, slender youth with a white face and melancholy black eyes, and black locks falling in cascades around his ears" (284). The poet reclines on an oriental chair in the corner with a manuscript of delicately scented paper tied in "passionate purple ribbons." A young girl dressed entirely in white sits by his side with a candle while he reads aloud.

Between the readings, Strathcona drones on about himself in beautiful, poetic imagery. The hero of Sinclair's novel, Montague, cannot make sense of the poet's ideas and takes umbrage with his view that virtue is outmoded, and men should do as they please. The passionate utterances and certainty with which Strathcona speaks are exceedingly powerful for a twenty-year-old. He claims he understands the nature of all the achievements of human existence, including depravity: "he had been lost in the innermost passages of the caverns of hell" (285). Most importantly, he looked forward to new experiences, such as "unrequited love which would drive him to madness" (285).

Finally, Strathcona outrages his audience by singing the praises of both Oscar Wilde and homosexuality without any sense of how scandalous his words sound to a polite audience. Sinclair, however, saves his most damning criticism of Strathcona's dogmatic literary and philosophical visions for his summation:

> The new generation of boys and girls were deriving their spiritual sustenance from the poetry of Baudelaire and Wilde; and rushing with the hot impulsiveness of youth into the dreadful traps which the traders in vice prepared for them. One's heart bled to see them, pink-cheeked and bright-eyed, pursuing the hem of the Muse's robe in brothels and dens of infamy!" (287)

Of course, Upton Sinclair was a political reformist and had written his famous muckraker novel *The Jungle* a year prior to *The Metropolis*. A socialist and political progressive, he would not have had much in common with the Decadent Movement and the advocates of their aesthetic

beliefs. Still, his depiction of Viereck mirrors others who knew him after he achieved fame for his 1907 publications.

The following year, Viereck made a trip to Germany that would result in a best-selling travelogue *Confessions of a Barbarian.* When it appeared in 1910, it stirred up controversy in the United States, largely because of its strong bias toward the German lifestyle and its criticism of the American one.

In discussing the University of Iowa's acquisition of the Viereck papers in the early 1980s, Niel Johnson made an astute observation: "Viereck was also becoming increasingly involved in German-American social and political movements. Prodded by his father, encouraged by prestigious friends like Hugo Münsterberg, and probably subconsciously goaded by his kinship to the ruling family of Germany, he eventually turned into a Germanophile between 1907 and 1912" (www.lib.uiowa.edu/scua/bai/johnson.2.htm).

Confessions of a Barbarian is a fascinating read even today. In Lisa Szefel's study *The Gospel of Beauty in the Progressive Era*, relying heavily on Viereck's "Preface," she skillfully summarizes the content of the book, which she labels as a "Baedeker of European Culture," culled from his recent travels to Germany, "which he hoped would help guide his adopted country out of Puritanism" (95). Certainly, as will be seen, that is part of Viereck's aim in the book, but it was also written to awaken American writers and artists to throw off the chains of conformity and be willing to risk censure for the sake of beauty and truth.

One of the more outrageous claims in the book is that Americans (no doubt white professionals) were largely Germanic and not from Anglo-Saxon stock. After all, according to Viereck, the Norsemen arrived long before Columbus, the Pennsylvania Dutch played an essential role in winning the Revolution, Germans were key players in the argument to free the slaves, and both Presidents Taft and Roosevelt clearly demonstrated a liberal Teutonic spirit. He does, however, skillfully avoid discussing Hessian troops' involvement in the revolution.

The book contains fifteen chapters that compare and contrast various aspects of both American and largely German morals, cultures, behavior, and reactions. Examining a few of those chapters will expand our vision of the kind of man and artist Viereck had become in the second decade of the twentieth century. The chapter "The Morals of Europe" (74-84) considers an issue that reappeared during the Bill Clinton administration. Viereck appears puzzled that Americans can overlook high-ranking government officials exposed for political corruption but are incensed when an indiscretion is committed with a female. In Paris or Berlin, a

sexual indiscretion is shrugged off with a smile. Viereck wryly reminds his readers that Christ drove the money changers out of the temple but forgave Mary Magdalen. He points out that Americans on the whole are rather proud of their robber barons but take great umbrage at the immorality of sexual infidelity. Again, Viereck wryly inquires, where is the book that will question the morals of Wall Street!

Viereck attacks American journalists for having no principles, and for writing what the owner of the newspaper or magazine finds politically expedient. Finally, in this section, Viereck returns to a point raised in *The House of the Vampire*, which seems slightly out of place here. He observes that Americans rank men who steal another man's invention or concept more highly than the inventor himself. "Logically, we should worship the devil because he gets away with such a large part of God's creation" (84).

In his "Adam and Eve" chapter, Viereck attempts to discuss the nature of European versus American visions of love, but his discussion often wanders into the subject of sensitivity to beauty rather than the difference between how Europeans and Americans respond to love. Initially, Viereck calls the Europeans the gourmets of love because they enjoy it fully, whereas the American come to the banquet stealthily: they feel they are doing something immoral. According to Viereck, Americans "sin, but they sin against our principles; the Continental youth sins on principles" (86). Americans feel that flesh is somehow indecent and despised, whereas for Europeans it is spiritualized and beautiful: it turns frailty into strength.

Viereck observes that Americans cannot be wicked without being coarse. The consciousness of sin "dwells in the American hearts like a worm" (86). He sees nothing of the Classical Greek in Americans, whereas Greek influence is everywhere in German culture; their poets harken back to Hellenic themes: Hofmannsthal's Oedipus confronts the Sphinx, Electra wails in the music of Strauss. "Nudity, the weapon of Phryne, is raised to an art by Olga Desmond. The voice of Dionysus is heard in Nietzsche" (86-87). Viereck is willing to admit Germany is still not purely Hellenic, but there are indications that this joyful day is near.

Clearly, Americans are not prepared for Hellenic ideals, but at least Walt Whitman was a great singer of spiritualized passion (one might be justified in asking how closely Viereck read *Leaves of Grass*). The real problem with love in the United States, however, is that the male of the species is governed by women. Men are "like slaves, we talk evil behind her back. And we adore her in false and hysterical fashion" (88):

> We deify women because we bestialize passion. We place her on a pedestal, we forget she has a body, so as not to despise her. We worship

> her as a goddess, because we fear to degrade her as a mate. We protect her by preposterous laws, because we distrust ourselves and her. We have not yet learned to love the body purely. We fail to discriminate between passion and vice. So distorted is our vision, that sex in itself seems debasing. But the instinct of sex is ineradicable. The goddess topples from the altar, if she does not descend voluntarily…. We yield to temptation surreptitiously, like bad monks. We dare not make sin beautiful. We make it ugly and coarse. And every time we react against our own vulgar trespasses, we prostrate ourselves before the Good Woman, who doesn't exist, and doesn't want to exist. We glory in groveling in the dust at her feet. We give expression to the unhealthy sentiment that no man is good enough for a woman. When a prostitute slays one of her lovers, she is beatified in the press. We refuse to admit that a woman can be truly bad. (88-89)

Viereck rounds out his discussion of the American woman by offering a backhanded compliment that she is more male than European woman, but he is willing to suggest that perhaps the balance of power is about to change. Some intellectuals have already officially become a matriarchy swayed by the "mother rite of primitive races." He warns his readers that "unless a radical adjustment takes place, the world may see the spectacle of an American Amazon Queen ruling a henpecked nation" (90). It is perhaps ironic that Angela Dorothea Kasner Merkel became Chancellor of Germany in 2005 while the United States still awaits its first female president.

In his chapter on drama, Viereck claims the art form in the United States has been totally compromised by moralism, and he strains to write even a page and a half of muted praise for American practitioners. According to Viereck, the only decent living dramatist is Clyde Fitch, whose *The City* was "almost Elizabethan in its terror and its strength" (130). Fitch wrote over thirty plays and was, indeed, a popular dramatist. Viereck's judgment of the play was considerably overblown, however, and *The City* was never again produced on Broadway after its 1909 run.

Finally, in his "Things Literary" chapter, Viereck makes his summation of the domination of German writers over the paltry Americans who have attempted to write literature. He does admit that "most distinguished German writers would be sadly deficient from the point of view of the manufacturers of lingual patterns. Their style is individual, not academic" (135). American writers are unfortunately forced to write down to the mediocre level of an imaginary public, and as a result remove the essential truths of life. For Viereck, American literature is "as sick as a torpid goose" (136). He goes on to praise the German prose writings of Otto Bierbaum, Hans Ewers ("he is Poe plus sex and minus style"), and

Heinz Tovote. He praises the Hauptmann brothers and the voluptuous writings of Marie Madeleine in her youth, especially her *Auf Kypros.* He partially blames literary critics in the United States for lacking the convictions of their trade, while continental critics are "swift to recognize counterfeit values" (143).

Americans should realize that Europeans find their primitiveness somewhat endearing. In fact, American "awkwardness is to her a symbol of masculine robustness. We exert upon her the fascination of a Caliban" (178). The European is awed by the vitality of the Yankee energy force, and the cultured and effeminate Europeans can only wish they shared the dynamism of this grotesquely vulgar creature. This distinction of masculine and feminine is never truly developed, and one wonders how the novelist Henry James, for example, could be judged masculine and Emile Zola regarded as feminine. Still, this basic contention is at the root of a great many of Viereck's literary values.

Phyllis Keller's article concerning Viereck's militant mind-set is informative and enlightening, despite being at times slightly too dependent on Freudian analysis. Nevertheless, one of her particular speculations is that when Viereck traveled to Germany in 1908 with the intention of observing life there, he found himself surprised by the countless virtues of German culture. In fact, his reportage took on an almost erotic flavor, with the two nations personified as seductive women using their charms to win male affection and loyalty. Clearly, he was most seduced by the German offerings (Keller, 74).

Whether admired or despised, by the end of 1910, Viereck's name was on the lips of most American writers, critics, publishers, and literary people. His reputation as a genius, a boaster of his meager talents, a flamboyant decadent, and the young poet of Diabolism never seemed to bother him. He simply moved from one genre to another with ease. In 1909, his adaptation of Friedrich von Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans* played to excellent reviews, and his new poems, which would be collected in *The Candle and the Flame* (1912), were being published in prestigious journals and magazines throughout the world.

His love affair with Germany in particular, but also to a lesser extent with western European lifestyle and culture, partially explains the shift in the young writer's literary career from creative writing to a more political engagement with the world around him. By 1910, Viereck was editing *The International,* a magazine that sought to bring the diversity and originality of European culture to North America. Lisa Szefel mentions that during this period he was considered a flamboyant egoist. Greenwich Village writers such as Hutchins Hapgood felt that Viereck was too