

ZANONI, A ROSICRUCIAN TALE

IT HAS TAKEN THE REVIEWER nearly thirty years to read a book that was first called to his attention in *Rosicrucian Philosophy in Questions and Answers* (“Each neophyte must face this gruesome specter as Glyndon did in Bulwer Lytton’s novel *Zanoni*”—Vol. 2, p. 160), and then in Max Heindel’s October 20, 1911 letter to Probationers, where, referring to his first initiation and receiving instructions on how to leave his body at will, Heindel “met the dreadful creatures which I, myself, had generated. They beggar description (such as attempted by Bulwer), and fear jumped at my throat; but encouragement from the teacher sustained me through that awful ordeal...”

Bulwer did “attempt” to describe the Dweller in *Zanoni* (Garber Communications, Hudson, N.Y.) and his descriptive powers, challenged to the hilt, stand him well. Why did it take so long to read this novel?

Perhaps because it is a novel: Too much fiction and not enough fact, I presumed. Just another gothic romance, I opined.

Well, having read it, I can recommend it not least on the grounds that it is a compelling read—intelligent, a dramatic narrative in full dress, rhetorical, impassioned, in the grand manner, which, regrettably, is not in vogue these days, where language is pared down to the skin of strict sight, reduced to expletives and juvenile idioms, and conscripted to serve mercantile interests and instrumental economy.

Lord Lytton, born in 1802, was an active member of Parliament, a scholar, editor, dramatist, and a highly popular novelist. That he was a Rosicrucian, at least in the old sense (not one of “the Compassionate Ones,” who have passed the four Greater Initiations but declined to move to higher spheres that they may assist their younger brothers and sisters in their spiritual development), is a mat-



Edward Bulwer
1st Baron Lytton
(1803-1873)

ter of historical record. In a letter of July 3, 1870, Bulwer-Lytton wrote: “There are reasons why I cannot enter into the subject of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, a Society still existing, but not under any name by which it can be recognized by those outside its pale.”

Bulwer is definitely familiar with both historical Rosicrucians and those inspired by them, including Goethe, Shakespeare, Van Helmont, and Solomon Trismosin (teacher of Paracelsus), quotes from whose writings serve as epigraphs to chapters in *Zanoni*. The author characterizes his book as “a truth for those who can comprehend it, and an extravagance for those who cannot.”

Until the turn of the twentieth century it is true that “the masters of the [Rosicrucian] School have [n]ever consigned, except by obscure hint and mystic parable, their real doctrines to the world. And I do not blame them for their discretion....Who but a Rosicrucian could explain the Rosicrucian Mysteries! And can you imagine that any mem-

bers of that sect, the most jealous of all secret societies, would themselves lift the veil that hides the Isis of their wisdom from the world?”

Zanoni is, in part, about the intemperate effort to lift that veil. It is also about one who has passed beyond the veil but who is not immune from the tensions and temptations of fleshly experience. The novel is divided into seven parts whose titles suggest a sevenfold path of spiritual development. The fourth section, entitled “The Dweller on the Threshold,” is a highly plausible and wonderfully dramatic expression of an occult fact incident to initiation. In this case, an English artist, Glyndon, demands entrance into the desire world, thereby conjuring a dread embodiment of his own unpurged lower self.

Who, then, is *Zanoni*? He is an Initiate of some degree. He has real knowledge and powers that

only initiation can confer. He also has heart. His heart does not yet beat exclusively for the world as a whole, wholly dispassionately. He is yet open to the influence of personal, and therefore partial, love. "But thou, Zanoni—thy pulse still beats with the music of mortal passion—thy kind is still to thee something warmer than an abstraction." Zanoni's "kind" is at the precipice of the bloody anarchy unleashed by the French Revolution. At this point in walks the blithely confident Glyndon, who wants what Zanoni has, and will do anything to get it. Zanoni can, of course, "read" Glyndon's heart and rejects his overtures for instant initiation because the Englishman is too green, he has not suffered and delved deeply enough to know the difference between real and merely apparent truth. Glyndon is not to be put off. Rashly he attempts to "lift the veil of Isis." His desire for knowledge, however, is "but petulant presumption." The terrible specter he raises "thou thyself must exorcise." Having awakened faculties that will not sleep, Glyndon finds the "restless influence" in all he undertakes. As for thoughts: "Dread them most when thou beholdest them not." If, as Heindel writes, every lie is both a murder and a suicide in the desire world, it is because "every thought is a soul."

Bulwer-Lytton writes with great flair. His narrative glows and flares with the gold of deep-mined truths and well-wrought sentences. Here follow some examples:

● "Though all earth were carved over and inscribed with letters of diviner knowledge, the characters would be valueless to him who does not pause to inquire the language, and meditate the truth."

● "It is labor itself that is the great purifier of the mind." Labor *and* retrospection.

● "Thou mayst be master of the Cabala and the Chemistry; but thou must be master also over the Flesh and the Blood—over Love and Vanity, Ambition and Hate."

● "The extension of our existence robs us of a country and a home." So did Christ Jesus say that the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. If Thomas Paine's home is the entire world, it is his home away from home, for the extension of our existence to encompass the worlds of spirit makes us here below pilgrims and wanderers and prodigal

sons and daughters.

● "It needs a soul tempered, and purified, and raised, not by external spells, but by its own sublimity and valor, to pass the threshold and disdain the foe." The "foe" being our composite lower nature for whom this world *is* home.

● One must have "full and entire experience of the illusions to which the knowledge that is without Faith climbs its Titan way."

Bulwer employs an effective parallelism whereby the French Revolution figures as both backdrop and a magnified equivalent to the unpurged passions and uncontrolled powers forcibly summoned in a single person's psyche. Once unleashed, the Revolution had a mind of its own. The freedom (Liberté) sought by the French citizens was not principled or ordered by self-knowledge, self-discipline, and selflessness. The specter of the Guillotine terrorizing the French soul has its individual counterpart in the haunting presence of the Dweller summoned by Glyndon.

How is the Dweller mastered? By self-mastery, by complete self-understanding, by invincible impersonal love: "I approach thee—I look, dauntless, into thine eyes. The soul that loves can dare all things. Shadow, I defy thee, and compel." It is the "sacrifice of self to another" that brings the course of ages to its goal.

In a concluding "note," the author rejects the notion that *Zanoni* is an allegory; nevertheless, beneath the narrative, "typical [as in prototypic] meanings are concealed." While his characters are not personified virtues or qualities, they can be viewed, by Lytton's admission, as exemplifying Ideals, which he spells out for the interested reader in an addendum.

Leaving room for a degree of bias, a Preface to *Zanoni* by Paul Allen, who has made many Rosicrucian documents more accessible to the general public, ends with the contention that "*Zanoni* stands as one of the great pioneer landmarks of profound esoteric value, of lasting interest and importance for our time." He may well be right.

A closing thought: "The excesses and crimes of Humanity are the grave of the Ideal." A grave from which Humanity, in time, resurrects. □

—C.W.