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or her immediate followers. In addition, the journal is also receptive to related movements (including pre-Blavatskyite Theosophy, Spiritualism, Rosicrucianism, and the philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg to give but a few examples) that have had an influence on or displayed an affinity to modern Theosophy.

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Book Notes

Witness for the Prosecution: Annie Besant's Testimony on Behalf of H.P. Blavatsky in the N.Y. *Sun*/Coues Law case. Theosophical History Occasional Papers, Volume I, presented and with an introduction by Michael Gomes. Fullerton, Ca.: Theosophical History, 1993.

Any reader of *Theosophical History* who has not yet gotten Michael Gomes's latest discovery is missing a primary document about one of the most interesting sidelights of H.P.B.'s later career—the *Sun* libel case. Mr. Gomes is well known to those with an interest in the history of Theosophy from his book, *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* (Wheaton, IL: THP, 1987) and from his illuminating articles in the *Canadian Theosophist* and his contributions to this journal. Mr. Gomes is the master of the primary documentation on the career of H.P.B. and on the early years of the Theosophical Society, and his latest find is an extremely valuable addition to our knowledge. He has unearthed the sworn deposition of Mrs. Besant, given in the *Sun* case in New York in May 1891 just before her return to England.

Some legal background may be of interest in connection with the deposition, especially since the state of the law in the 1890s was considerably different from that obtaining at present, both substantively and procedurally. Libel and slander are both subsets of the larger tort of defamation, the difference lying primarily in whether the

offending communication is written (libel) or oral (slander). The gist of each is the tendency of the writing or statement to injure the reputation of a person or to disgrace him before the community. Libel began originally as a sin, became in time a crime punishable before the Star Chamber, and by the nineteenth century it had become a tort—a civil wrong for which an individual could sue the offender for monetary damages. More than any other area of the law, defamation was (and is) filled with odd quirks and exceptions, many of which can be perceived at work in the *Sun* case and in Mrs. Besant's deposition.

Libel is essentially a tort of strict liability. All that must be proved is the defamatory nature of the statement and its publication. Malice, evil purpose and even negligence are irrelevant, though their presence may increase the award of monetary damages. In the *Sun* case, publication was admitted and the defamatory nature of the statements made could not be denied. Professor Coues had dredged up and reprinted in the article excerpts from a letter from D.D. Home to W.E. Coleman in 1882 in which Home had placed H.P.B. "in Paris in 1857 or '58 as a demi-monde in liaison with the Prince Emile de Wittgenstein, by whom she had a deformed son, who died in Kieff in 1868." In lawyers' jargon, this is defamatory "as a matter of law"—the jury would be directed by the judge at trial to consider the statement libellous.

Under the law of England and of New York at

the time, specific instances of actual harm to the reputation did not have to be pleaded in libel actions or proved at trial. The mere fact of the publication of a libellous statement entitled the offended person, without more, to recover monetary damages. This was true even if no one in fact believed the statement. The amount of damages, however, could be increased substantially by proof that the community in which the plaintiff (H.P.B.) had a reputation was a large one (in H.P.B.'s case it was worldwide) and that the libel had in fact been widely promulgated and either had been believed or had been used to diminish the plaintiff's reputation.

What hope of success then did the *Sun* and Professor Coues have in the lawsuit? They used three approaches to defeat or minimize H.P.B.'s claim. First, they tried an old legal ruse that had already been rejected both in England and in New York. They argued that what Professor Coues had printed in the article was quite literally true—the excerpt of the letter from D.D. Home in fact said precisely what Coues said it said. The court rejected this meretricious argument on basis of clear precedent that the repeating of a libellous statement even with attribution to its source was itself a libel. This left the defendants with the ultimate defense of truth and with the claim in mitigation that H.P.B. had no reputation to lose.

It was at this juncture that Mrs. Besant arrived in the United States for a series of speaking engagements—apparently without prearrangement so far as the *Sun* case was concerned. Under the law as it then existed in New York, there was no automatic right to take the sworn testimony of anyone before trial, but such statements could be taken by court order and H.P.B.'s lawyers seized the chance to preserve Mrs. Besant's testimony for use at trial. In reading the deposition it is well to

keep in mind the legal niceties of the situation. Unlike the usual case where opposing counsel takes a deposition of a hostile witness to discover evidence or to reveal weaknesses or bias, H.P.B.'s lawyers were deposing a friendly witness and had undoubtedly conferred with Mrs. Besant about her testimony in advance and knew her answers before they asked the questions. Because the deposition was intended for use at trial, the questions had to conform to the rules of evidence for such use and in the preliminary statement to the transcript the lawyers for both sides made the customary agreement that all objections to the admissibility of Mrs. Besant's statements at trial were, with minor exceptions, reserved for the trial itself. The admissibility of each statement then would have to be judged on its own merit as to relevancy, hearsay and the like. H.P.B.'s attorneys could basically ask what they liked in the deposition, but the use of the answers at trial was quite a different matter.

Mrs. Besant's testimony was directed almost entirely to H.P.B.'s worldwide reputation as a writer—that is, to establishing the wide community in which H.P.B. had a good reputation that could be harmed by the *Sun* article—and to proving that, while of course no member of the T.S. believed the truth of the statements, others had been prejudiced by the article against H.P.B. and her work. Mrs. Besant instanced questions she had been asked at her lectures in the United States and letters received in London about the article. She singled out for comment the use made of the article in France where H.P.B.'s old sparring partner "Papus" (Dr. Gérard Encausse) had republished parts of it in his *L'Initiation* the preceding fall and had sent it on to the Abbé Roca as grist for his crusade against H.P.B. Mrs. Besant also stressed the moral quality of H.P.B.'s work, citing

as examples her own change of position on birth control and the comfort and uplifting effect on the poor of the T.S.'s teachings on karma and reincarnation—which she obligingly defined for the record.

The cross-examination by the *Sun*'s lawyer was poor and reflects either his lack of preparation or his judgment that the case was unimportant. While he had obviously heard a few rumors about H.P.B. (he asked whether she was a smoker “or addicted to any other vice or habit of that kind”) he brought out nothing of importance and neglected Mrs. Besant's life and activities before she joined the T.S.—material which would have stood the *Sun* in good stead at trial. As a parting shot, he tried to get Mrs. Besant to admit that she knew nothing whatsoever about the actual truth of the central allegations of the case—H.P.B.'s supposed liaison and illegitimate child—and he was obviously surprised when Mrs. Besant replied that she knew the allegations to be false, basing her knowledge on the famous certificate that H.P.B. had obtained from Dr. Oppenheimer of Würzburg in 1885. Mrs. Besant's answer, interesting as it was, was of course inadmissible as hearsay—as indeed the certificate itself would have been if H.P.B.'s lawyers had tried to offer it into evidence at trial.

H.P.B.'s part of the *Sun* case abated on her death and we shall never know what would have happened if the case had gone to trial. With Mrs. Besant's testimony and the probable testimony of any number of others who knew H.P.B.'s work, the extent and character of H.P.B.'s reputation would easily have been established, and the monetary award should have been considerable. The *Sun*'s case rested on its claim that the allegations were true and that H.P.B. had no reputation to lose—and on both of these the *Sun*

had the burden of proof. On the latter issue the *Sun* could at least have expected to find a few witnesses. There was no shortage of people with a poor opinion of H.P.B. and under the rules of evidence they would have been permitted to speak generally on what they thought H.P.B.'s reputation to be. The issue of the truth of the allegations was a different matter entirely, and the *Sun* was in an unenviable position. Prince Emile de Wittgenstein was dead as was D.D. Home. In addition, as Mr. Gomes has shown conclusively elsewhere, Home, the source of the libel, had never even met H.P.B. in any case. Whatever Home had thought he knew was thus hearsay and inadmissible. In this situation, it is impossible to believe that H.P.B.—who was the sole living person with knowledge of the facts—would not have been required to attend and testify, or at least to give a deposition in England, on the events of her life, naming dates, places and names. The loss of that testimony is yet one more reason to regret H.P.B.'s death shortly after the deposition.

Mr. Gomes's discovery is an essential document for the history of Theosophy, and he has supplemented it with a valuable introduction that places the *Sun* libel case in its proper setting. Professor Santucci's selection of this piece for the first volume of the Occasional Papers of Theosophical History bodes well for the series.

John Patrick Deveney¹

¹ Mr. Deveney is a practicing lawyer in New York City. He is preparing a book on Pascal Beverly Randolph and, with Joscelyn Godwin and Christian Chanel, has just completed work on a documentary history of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light.

The Eliade Guide to World Religion. By Mircea Eliade and Ioan P. Couliano with Hillary S. Wiesner. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991. Pp. 301. \$22.95.

The volume bills itself as “an authoritative compendium of 33 major religious traditions.” It consists of that number of major entries ranging from African Religions to Zoroastrianism in Part I (the “Macro-Dictionary”) and an Annotated Index or “Micro-Dictionary” in part II with short entries on some topics and simple references to the Macro-Dictionary on others.

The book contains an amazing amount of quite detailed information about almost all of the world’s religions, past and present. It stresses historical and doctrinal dimensions but pays some attention to the scriptures and religious holidays of each tradition. The bibliographies at the end of each major entry are valuable. Although considerable technical terminology is employed, it is clearly written overall and conveniently organized into sections and sub-sections. It is, however, a reference volume, not something to assign students in a beginning world religions course, or to give to someone wanting a non-technical overview of religion.

One of the book’s weaknesses is an occasional tendency to judge the worth of a given belief within a religion. For example, the authors label as “absurd” the debate between the Eastern and Western wings of the Christian Church over the relationship in the Holy Trinity of the Son to the Holy Spirit.(p.73) The Zoroastrianism belief in one God and two contending spirits—one good, the other evil—as an explanation of the problem of evil, is described as an “interesting solution” “no matter how inadequate.” (p.248) Such judgments are inconsistent with the book’s claim to be

a factual compendium.

Another weakness is the spotty quality of the Micro-Dictionary. It contains, for instance, a concise and enlightening entry on Mormonism; but it has nothing at all, for example, on Coptic Christianity, Quakers, Seventh Day Adventists, Christian Scientists or the Theosophical movement (though Helena Blavatsky is mentioned).

Though it would have been impossible to cover every facet of these 33 religions in a 300-page book, some of the authors’ decisions about what to cover and what to bypass are puzzling. For example, about half a page is devoted in the “Judaism” article to the seventeenth-century false messiah Shabbetai Tsevi, but only one sentence to the Holocaust, and not a word about the founding of Israel, the Jewish state, in 1948.

Finally, there are small inaccuracies that detract from the book’s credibility. For instance, the authors claim that it is “beyond doubt” Jesus had links with the Zealots, “fundamentalist terrorists” who sought an end to Roman rule in Palestine.(p.59). Yet, this opinion runs contrary to the view of most New Testament scholars. Also, the authors state that eucharistic communion became a daily practice in Catholicism after the Second Vatican Council. In fact, the practice was very common before the Council.

Despite these reservations, the *Eliade Guide* is a valuable and reasonably-priced reference that anyone with an interest in the immense impact of religion in human affairs ought to own.

Benjamin J. Hubbard

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Communications

COLONEL OLCOTT MEETS THE BROTHERS: AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER

Presented By Joscelyn Godwin

This letter comes from the same source as the one from H. P. Blavatsky to William Stainton Moses published in IV/6-7: the Irwins' "Rosicrucian Miscellanea" manuscript in the United Grand Lodge of England Library, Freemasons' Hall, London. It is published here with the kind permission of the Librarian and Curator, Mr. John Hamill.

The Irwins note that Olcott's letter was addressed to "C.C.M. and W.S.M.," *i.e.*, to Charles Carleton Massey (1838-1905),¹ the London barrister and clubman who was present in New York at the Theosophical Society's first meeting on 13 October 1875, and who headed the London Branch of the T.S. until the scandals of 1884; and to the Rev. William Stainton Moses (1839-1892), writer on Spiritualism and philosophy under the name of "M.A., Oxon.," and a writing medium under the control of "Imperator +" and other spirits. *TH* IV/6-7 carried H.P.B.'s first letter to Moses.

The present letter was evidently sent to Massey, enclosing a specimen of John King's writing to be given to Moses. By an extraordinary chance, Mr. Leslie Price, founder of this journal, has discovered the actual specimen in another London archive, from which it is reproduced here.

Olcott wrote a large number of letters to Moses (knowing that he would share them with Massey),

from which nine excerpts were published in Moses' journal *Light* in July 1892. They date from 10 April 1875 to about February 1876. Probably more would have appeared, along with some promised comments, if Moses had not fallen ill and died before the end of the year. The present letter was not included in the series, presumably in obedience to Olcott's desire to keep this occult experience confidential, pending the advice of his correspondent. It must date from after the end of November 1875, when Olcott and H.P.B. took the pair of apartments, one above the other, at 433 West 34th Street, New York City, which is the scene of this story. The *terminus post quem* is August 1876, when they left those apartments. However, the letter seems to predate the last communication published by Moses, dated March-April 1876, by which time Olcott sounded far more worried about H.P.B. going to India than he does here: he casually remarks at the end of this letter that perhaps the Lodge could send a replacement! What exactly he meant by "the Lodge" is an interesting question.

The unique value of this letter is that Olcott names one of the Brothers who visited him in New York, and describes another. The two Brothers are: (1) a man of about fifty with dark skin and a gray beard, who speaks French and shows Olcott visions in a crystal; (2) a younger man whom Olcott has met before, who resembles an Indian but is actually a Cypriot named Ooton

¹H.P.B.'s first letter to Massey has been published recently in *Light*, Spring 1993: 19-26.

Liatto. He speaks English and produces flowers and rain. It is tempting to recognize in these visitors the “Atrya” and “Hilarion” whom H.P.B. noted as passing through “New York & Boston; thence thro’ California & Japan back”² The note in H.P.B.’s Scrapbook referred to their arrival in May 1875, necessitating a rather lengthy “passing through” if we are to identify them with Olcott’s visitors. However, it was in late November that H.P.B. published the story “An Unsolved Mystery” which she noted privately as being from Hilarion’s narrative.³ In between, we have Olcott’s account in the *New York Tribune* of 23 August 1875 of a visit from a stranger, seemingly a fair-skinned Hindu, who spoke English fluently and showed the Colonel a remarkable *maya*.⁴ It was this man whom he names here as Ooton Liatto, and in whom we may choose to see a portrait of Hilarion Smerdis. Olcott also names the evil “Signor B_____” mentioned in *Old Diary Leaves*⁵, confirming Leslie Price’s surmise that he was Signor Bruzzesi⁶; and refers to the armchair phenomenon described there.⁷

In transcribing this letter, I have added a very few punctuation marks in order to separate the sentences that are evidently intended but not marked by periods. Every paragraph in the original ends with a dash, which I have replaced by a period. The address, date, and salutation are absent in the copy.

²BCW (*H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings: 1874-1878*), I, 90.

³BCW I: 161-162.

⁴See *Old Diary Leaves*, First Series (Adyar: TPH, 1941), 110-112.

⁵ODL I, 61-65.

⁶See *Theosophical History* I/5 (January 1986): 114.

⁷ODL I, 350.

Wonder treads upon wonder—after years of patient waiting I am beginning to be more than rewarded. Things crowd upon me too fast if anything, for what with my duty to tell all—and my fear to tell what I know—will only make me regarded as either a liar or a lunatic, I don’t know what to do—I wrote an account of my interview with the Bro. I took for a Hindoo Brahmin, and was sorry enough afterwards I had said a word about it, either in letter or lecture.

I heard that a prominent Spiritualist in Boston, who heard me—told Emma Brittan [*sic*] that he had read Monte Christo—and heard Olcott—and both were intensely interesting fictions.

I began to doubt my own senses—and fancy the scene had all been an objective hallucination—my exaltation rose to such a state that it began to create doubt—but I have seen him again yesterday—and another man was with him.

I must tell you all about it—and then ask your brotherly advice—tell me what you would do were you in my place—I will be guided by your decision. Other persons have seen this man in New York—he is not a Brahmin but a swarthy Cypriote—I did not ask him before of what country he was—well! I was reading in my room yesterday (Sunday) when there came a tap at the door—I said ‘come in’ and there entered the Bro with another dark skinned gentleman of about fifty with a bushy gray beard and eye brows.

We took cigars and chatted for a while—I asked him if he knew Madam B—he turned the subject—thus giving me to understand that the first duty of a Neophyte is to ask no questions of a personal nature, but take what comes.

He said that I had made the mistake of fancying that the Bros needed the wand to effect their phenomena. I ought to have remembered what I had heard, seen, and read. Everything is done by will power—applied according to prescribed formulas. Wishing to draw a figure for me on paper, he took out of his breast pocket the very thing I had thought a wand—but it was only a long pencil and pen combined—made apparently of bamboo—and painted with rings.

He said nothing about it—but evidently wished to give me a chance to correct the impression I had got, in the hasty glance I had cast at the instrument at the previous interview.

He said he would show me the production of flowers as the adepts do it, at the same time pointing to the air, fancy—the shadowy outlines of flower after flower and leaf after leaf grew out of nothing, there was no vapour, the room was perfectly light—in fact the sun was shining in—the flowers grew solid, a beautiful perfume saturated the air—they were suspended as the down of a thistle in the air—each separate from the other—then they formed themselves into boquets [*sic*] and a splendid large one of roses—lillies of the valley—Camelias—Jessamine—and carnations floated down and placed itself in my hand.

Then the others separated [*sic*] again and fell in a shower to the floor—I was stupified [*sic*] with the manifestation, so much more marvellous than I had expected to witness before the years of my Initiate [*sic*] were finished—But I have not told you the half yet.

He asked me if I recollected an instance last summer when I unintentionally left a stuffed armchair out on the balcony, of my being awakened in the night—by a heavy thunder shower, and of my amazement in the morning to find that the chair was as dry as paper while everything

around it was soaking wet—I recalled the circumstances—he said that was a phenomenon made to sharpen up my intentions, to set me to realize some of the powers that could be exercised by man—as he spoke raindrops began pattering around us in the room—and positively a drenching shower was falling about us—the carpet was soaked and so were my clothes, the books on the table, and the bronzes, and clock, and photoes, on the mantel piece—but neither of the Bros received a drop.

They sat there and quietly smoked their cigars, while mine became too wet to burn, this ‘beat my time’: I just sat and looked at them in a sort of stupid daze—they seemed to enjoy my surprise, but smoked on and said nothing—finally the younger of the two (who gave me his name as Ooton Liatto) said I needn’t worry nothing would be damaged.

The shower ceased as suddenly as it had begun, then the elder man—took out of his pocket a painted lacquered case—and asked me if I wanted to see “an Eastern bonhomiere” (his conversation was in French, the other’s in English). Upon opening the case a round flat concave crystal was displayed to view—he told me to look in it—holding it a few inches from my eye and shading my eye from the light or that there might be no reflected rays cast upon the glass—the box exhaled a strong spicy aromatic odor—much like sandalwood—but still not just that—whatever I wished to see—he said I need simply think of— only taking care to think of but one thing at a time—I did as directed.

I thought of my dead mother as she used to sit with me twenty years ago—talking about my then fresh spiritualism and warning me not to depart from the faith of my fathers—I saw as it were a door in the far distance—in prospective it came

nearer and nearer, and grew plainer until I lost consciousness of external objects—and seemed to be in the very room I had in mind—details long forgotten—pictures furniture &c came into view—my mother sat there, and the conversation of twenty years ago was renewed.

I thought of a landscape—lo! I stood upon the very spot—and mountain, valley, river, and buildings, lay smiling before me—I was there—not in my room in 34 Street. So for more than an hour, the thing went on. I seemed able to flit from one clime to another with the speed of thought, and to call up any spirit I wished to talk with—things too—that had occurred to me when out of the body, all recollection of which had been obliterated—upon the return of my spirit to the flesh—were shewn me—but these were only a few and unimportant, for when I seemed to be growing inquisitive some power prevented my seeing anything.

Was I hallucinated? no sir, I was not—at least I cant imagine a person being hallucinated and still be in such a state of mental activity as I was in—I have never been psychologized—I am like cast iron—so far as sensitiveness to mesmeric influence is concerned—while I used to be a strong mesmerizer myself.

But this is not all—dear no—not by a d-d sight—listen.

When I saw Liatto before I tried my best to pump Madam B about him—I might as well have tried to draw milk out of a stone—the infernally tantalizing woman would not tell me a word—but just looked blank.

She has sworn that she will not show me a thing, or tell me a thing except about the book—and when that is done she is going to India to stay I fear for ever—if you are vexed to get so little at the distance of 3000 miles—what do you think of

my state? when I am with her every evening and can't get a word even about things like these that were shewn to me, and then on top of that be abused like a pickpocket for printing her name in my book which she says has caused all her suffering and mortification.

Damn the Book!⁸ I wish I had never written it—and d-n her childish sensitiveness and her secretiveness, she can gabble by the hour when the fancy takes her—but when she chooses to keep quite [sic] no oyster can close up tighter—o yes—but I felt so mad and disgusted with her—that I forget the two men in my room.

The seance being over as I supposed I asked Liatto if he knew Madam B—he stared too—but as I thought he ought to know her, since her flat was in the same house—I went on to descant on her character—her virtues—her intellectuality &c &c—until the elder Bro asked me—to present their compliments to Madam, and say that with her permission they would call upon her.

I ran downstairs—rushed into Madams parlour—and—there sat these two identical men smoking with her and chatting as quietly as if they had been old friends. Madam motioned to me as if I had better not come in—as if they had private business to talk over. I stood transfixed looking from one to another in dumb amazement. I glanced [sic] the ceiling (my rooms are over Madam Bs)—but they had not tumbled through.

Madam said what the Devil are you staring at Olcott? Whats the matter? you must be crazy—I said nothing but rushed up stairs again tore open my door and—the men were not there—I ran down again, they had disappeared—I heard the front door close, looked out of the window—and saw them just turning the corner—Madam said

⁸*People from the Other World*. Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co., 1875.

they had been with her for more than an hour—and that is all she would tell me about them.

When I shewed her my wet clothes and the bouquet of flowers that remained in evidence, that I had not been hallucinated, she only said, that's nothing remarkable—you'll see some day—ask me no questions for I shall tell you nothing—let the Bros do what they please for you, I shant have my name put out again as a medium. Now isn't this exasperating?—Isn't it an infernal shame? just when I need her advice I can't get it.

And the worst is that I know two ladies here who have offered to pay all her expenses for two years if she will go to India with them—and I am afraid she will do it—as soon as the book is out.

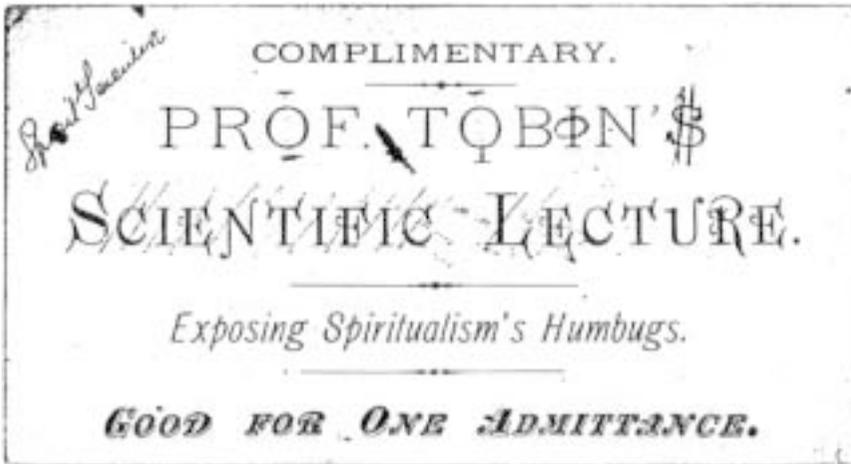
Now what shall I do about this—I have made so much trouble for my best friend already by innocently publishing what I did about her, that now I am afraid to say a word—I shall not breathe this adventure to a soul—until I hear from you—I wish you would ask the Hindoo member of your psychological society⁸ if he has ever seen anything like this, and watch his face closely when he answers you—try to read his thoughts—you may or not, mention my name as you think best—I don't care—I am ready to face the world—there's no holding back, or backing down to me—but will anyone believe me? Is not society so steeped in prejudice and scepticism that no impression can be made upon it—still if my saying what I have seen and may see will provoke thought or do good in the slightest degree I will do it—though I stood alone—and had to face a file of loaded muskets, or a mob of howling catholics.

What I have said in public is said, and cannot be recalled—so I shall repeat it—but shall I say more?

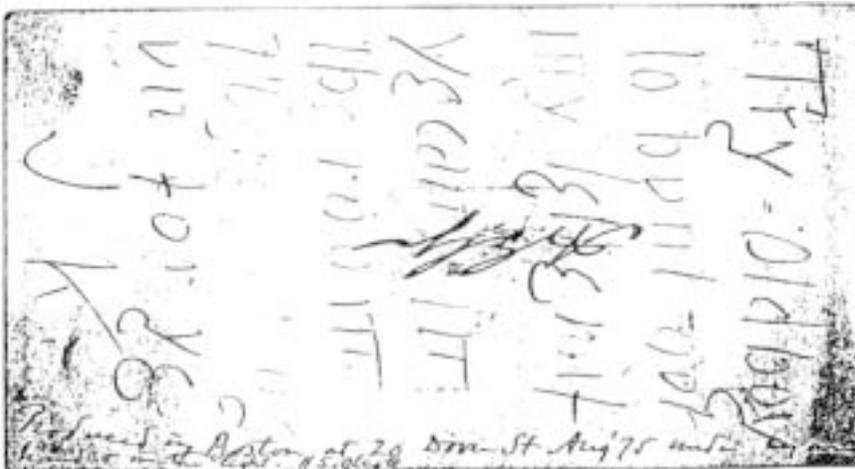
I have seen Bruzzesi again in the street. He looks about the same as when you were here—he is a Necromancer—sure—he bitterly resents Madam B's turning him out of her company and as he incorrectly thinks setting me against him—he evidently has some influence over or connection with you two fellows in England for he shewed me he knew the state of your minds—and from what I have learned of the power of black magic, as well as white—I have no doubt but that he has had more or less a hand in your doubts and depressions and perhaps has sent his atulus [padlatus] to egg Home on to this marvellous insane bitterness of his against Madam B—When I was seeing him last summer I felt his depressing influence myself—and I received in a letter from the lodge—a warning against him.

The card enclosed is for Oxon—it is a sample of J Ks writing done while I was scribbling on the face of the card one evening last summer—you see he refers me to a letter to be found in the room. I hunted high and low for it, and finally found it in the cup ornament around the pipe of the chandelier. It was a letter of two pages of foolscap all in John's handwriting and was about a number of business matters I had in hand then—this card I took out of my pocket to ask Madame if she wished to hear the lecture, and as she did not, I did not care to go alone, I began scribbling on it—John said—"Hold your hand still Harry" I stopped my pencil—immediately he said look at the other side—I did so and found what you now see—(Madam had not touched the ticket) the words are "try old boy to hunt out my letter if you can in the room, there's a long one for you."

⁸Possibly the lawyer G. M. Tagore.



Admission ticket for Prof. Tobin's Scientific Lecture



John King leaves his visiting-card

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO JULIUS EVOLA

H.T. Hansen¹

(Translated from the German by E.E. Rehmus)

Julius Evola (1898-1974) is still relatively unknown to the English-speaking world, even in the traditional circles surrounding René Guénon, of whom he was his leading Italian representative. The major reason for this is that until now little of Evola's work has been translated into English. In the book trade can be found but a single work, *The Metaphysics of Sex* (titled "Eros and the Mysteries of Love" by Inner Traditions, New York 1983). Within a few months, however, Inner Traditions' president, Ehud Sperling, will be publishing two of Evola's most important works, *The Yoga of Power* on the Tantric teaching and *The Hermetic Tradition* on Alchemy.

Evola recently received considerable attention in the periodical *Gnosis* (No. 14, Winter 1990 in an article with the suggestive title, "The Dark Side"), where Robin Waterfield attempted to present a well-balanced picture of him, which

drew immediate protest. Evola's known sympathies for Italian Fascism and National Socialism, to which we will return in this article, were recalled. There is also Richard H. Drake, who contributed a great deal to Evola's negative image in the English-speaking world with his "Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy," in Peter H. Merkl ed. *Political Violence and Terror; Motifs and Motivations* (Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 1986) and Thomas Sheehan, "Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist" (in *Social Research*, vol. 48: 45-73). That Evola, on the other hand, had been from his youth in constant personal contact and correspondence with Mircea Eliade and the famous Tibetologist, Prof. Giuseppe Tucci, is less well known.

But who actually was Julius Evola?

A philosopher? He belongs among the leading representatives of Italian Idealism. A painter and poet? He is counted as one of the founders of Italian Dadaism. A cultural historian and critic of our times? See his major work: *Revolt Against the Modern World*, whose English translation is also planned by the Vermont based publishing house Inner Traditions. But he also translated O. Spengler's famous *Decline of the West*, as well as Bachofen, Weininger and Gabriel Marcel. A patron of literature? (He was the publisher and

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translator of E. Juenger and G. Meyrink, whom he introduced into Italy. A “gray eminence” in politics? Mussolini apparently wanted to implement some of Evola’s thoughts to create more freedom from the restrictions of National Socialism. And today as then, right and even some left wing groups adopt him against his intentions. Or was Evola simply an “Alchemist” and “Magician”? His important activities in the UR Group and many of his works could point to that. Of Mussolini it is reported that he stood in considerable awe of Evola’s “magical powers.”

No clear answer can readily be given, for Evola was apparently (to others) all of those things and yet (to himself) none of them. He saw himself as a member of the *Kshatriya* or “warrior” class, who goes his way heedless of the praise or blame of others. He simply wanted to do “what must be done, without thinking of success or failure.” Only one thing was of primary importance: the “Above.” For him transcendence was the be-all and end-all. From above derived all reasons for what happens below and everything below must be aligned to the above. Every thought and thing had to be judged as to whether it led upward. Only this unceasing striving for the true foundation of things, which resolutely embraces everything, can explain Evola’s many nearly incomprehensible judgments and outlooks. His first aim was to turn toward transcendence and to be liberated from Earth. Hence his constant attacks on “chthonic” (that is, the earthly) religion, because they are *terrestrial* cults and not *celestial* religions. The Earth is the “Great Mother” and she alone has priority in these terrestrial cults, since she gives protection and help. Heaven, which in practically all cultures is regarded as male because it makes the womb of the earth fertile through the sun and rain, is therefore in those cults nearly

insignificant beside her. And if you worship the earth, then striving upward for heavenly transcendence is of no avail. Evola’s path, however, is not a search for consolation, nor an abandonment of the self to the mother goddess and the consequent loss of the self. For Evola the earthly is not the path that leads to active liberation, to “awakening.” On the contrary, it strengthens the “sleep” in which one gropes to return to the mother’s womb. Evola values only the continuum of consciousness, the enduring presence, the wakening of the thousand eyes, as essential to achieve liberation.

That which one of the most significant historians of the esoteric, Joscelyn Godwin, writes of René Guénon in *Gnosis* (no. 7, Spring 1988: 23-24), goes also for Evola’s esoteric work:

. . . Mystical experience and religious devotion are certainly intrinsic elements of the spiritual path, but as Guénon never tired of emphasizing, the ultimate realization of a human being is through knowledge.

Some may find this whole approach too intellectual, but they cannot deny that the Traditionalist’s discipline of metaphysics cuts like a razor through the sloppy thinking and sentimentality prevalent among “New Age” types. It sets standards of integrity against which other spiritual teachings either stand or fall. It assumes from the outset that absolute truth has always been there for the finding, so it has no time for the fumbings of western philosophy, so-called, nor for a science whose basic dogma is that man is still searching for the truth. And it incidentally forces a revaluation of all the modern ideals that most North Americans take for granted, such as individualism, equality, evolution and progress. One looks at the world with new eyes once one has passed through a Traditionalist re-education.

Since the chthonic or “Earth” religions go hand in hand with mother cults and their feminine leadership, Evola must have seen every matriarchal culture as further evidence of “deterioration.” Nor was it misogyny or “patriarchism” that led him to this, but simply that intense striving of his for liberation from earthly bondage. In his eyes this is all that matters, everything else is meaningless alongside it. To achieve this goal, no sacrifice is too great for him. Even one’s own death becomes a “triumphal death,” insofar as one is aware of it as sacrifice undergone for this liberation. Who perishes in battle in this spirit, is “godly,” because for him the outer struggle is merely a symbol for the inner struggle against enslavement to earth. It is only from such a viewpoint that today we can grasp Evola’s acceptance of the Hindu practice of suttee. He sees it as the highest of devotions, precisely because it places perfect purity of purpose ahead of mere greed for life.

So asceticism is for Evola not a woeful and painful stifling of un-lived passion, but simply a “technique” for setting the self free, a conscious step to be undertaken, because one is aware of the Higher. He does not trust in grace and waiting, but wants to liberate himself through his own power. Consciousness therefore precedes unconsciousness, and to avoid any misunderstanding, Evola sharply differentiates the idea of “higher consciousness” from “*lower* consciousness.” A crystal clear wakefulness characterises the first, and surrender and self-sacrifice the latter. This is why Evola so often warns us about spiritualism and the usual “occult streams.” These he maintains, quoting René Guénon, are even more dangerous than materialism. “Because of its primitivity and intellectual short-sightedness,” materialism protected men from their own unconsciousness. Guénon pointed out in this regard that

rationalism, materialism and positivism at first blocked the way for men to what lay *above* them, whereupon the occult streams now open them to what lies *below* them. And of course, this is why Evola also fights against psychoanalysis, against S. Freud *and* C. G. Jung, both of whom demand that one open oneself to the unconscious, allowing it to act, so as to receive clues for the meaning of unconscious phenomena. Here we must emphasize that Evola’s path is not intended to be psychotherapeutic. On the contrary, his path demands the absolute mental health of a person who has already reached “individuation.” He puts it in these words: “In most cases today the personality is an exercise, something not yet in existence, which one must first strive to acquire.” If we cannot overcome the problems of this life, how can we hope to be ready for the much greater problems of *Life* beyond life?

Such emphasis on the “above” and on “reaching upward,” explains Evola’s constant reference to “high” and “low,” “pure” and “impure.” Higher is simply that which bears “more transcendence” in itself or strives towards it. This is the only thing that justifies his positive evaluation of authority and the original priest-kings. Since they stood in immediate touch with the “Overworld,” it was only natural that they should command others who were more earth-arrested. The entire Indian class system, according to Evola, from *Brahmin* to *Shudra*, was based *in ancient times* on this hierarchy of participation in the Absolute. And in aristocratic Rome, the Patricians, who were in charge of the rites pertaining to the overworld, therefore ruled the plebeians who worshipped earthly gods and mother goddesses.

That ideas of “high” and “low” are relative and ultimately invalid, is clear enough. Nor does Evola endorse dualism. Such “hierarchical” evaluations

may be necessary in our world, which demands clear-cut ideas, if we wish to express ourselves clearly, but for Evola the key to Life beyond life, to initiation—that is to the beginning, to the origin—is precisely the ultimate oneness of above and below, spirit and matter (as well as spiritual and worldly power), subject and object, myth and history, inner and outer and, thereby, also word and deed. This unity, that does not recognize “other,” was according to Evola the sign of the original, the “godly” man. For this man looking inward was the same as looking outward, and every “word” through the “magic imagination” was simultaneously the fulfillment of the imagined. As it was said of the ancients: They still knew the “true names” of things. Thought was visually perfect and hence one with the will.

Let us turn to another striking aspect of Evola’s *Weltanschauung*, with which we are already acquainted from Hinduism: namely, the idea of involution in contradistinction to evolution. Not upward development but downward disintegration characterises Evola’s picture of history. We are engaged not in climbing but in sliding. For most of us this thought is so strange that an immediate “instinctive” negative reaction is rather natural. Just as Darwin’s theory of evolution which originated the belief in progress in the first place, was “instinctively” rejected in the last century, so we now reject the idea of involution. These thoughts of involution Evola took over completely from R. Guénon’s traditional world view. The fundamental key to understanding this is quite clear, for here again Evola sees the struggle between “above” and “below,” between “higher” or “Uranian” (Uranus in Greek mythology being the personification of heaven, is the principle of divine origination) and “lower” or “chthonic” peoples, whereby in the course of time

the matter-bound “sons of the earth” became stronger and stronger and the “portion of transcendence” became ever more trivialized. So it is only a question, then, of choosing from which “ideological” standpoint one is to consider history, whether to regard it as Evola does, as involution—or as evolution along with the moderns, for whom scholarly and material achievements are more important than spiritual liberation.

For this reason Evola’s thinking goes very much against our spirit of the times, which sees it as a challenge and naturally declares war on it. Are not many of our most cherished beliefs and universally unquestioned opinions about democracy, monarchy, the caste-system, the emancipation of slavery and women unequivocally attacked by it? Before countering that attack, however, we should remember to cast an eye over exactly the same attitudes that have prevailed for millennia in a great many societies (in Japan up to 1945!). Even Dante’s *De Monarchia* breathes this spirit.

Evola’s rebukes spare no one—not even those who would be his bravest disciples. Since he does not regard himself as master, he can recognize no student. His thinking cannot be considered a teaching because he did not invent it. No one invented it. The tradition has a transcendental origin. Evola wants only to lay down a “testimony” written for those who are “different”—“*l’uomo differenziato*”—those who are of the type that does not belong to this time.

Evola especially rejects “intellectuals,” who, to be sure, frequently treasure his work, but for the wrong reason: that is out of pure intellect and therefore limited to the superficial. The understanding that Evola wants requires a fundamental inner change before anything else. Only then will

understanding become an inner experience and with it at the same time knowledge *and* power. He was well acquainted with the dangers of intellectualism, for he himself had been an engineering student, acquitting himself with the highest grades. He broke off just before his doctorate, however, because he “did not wish to be bourgeois, like his fellow students.” He said again and again that he valued qualities of character much higher than abstract intellect or “empty,” i.e. non-transcendental, artistic creativity. Both are but pretexts to distinguish the ego.

Nor was it of great importance, for Evola, whether the perfect world that he described had ever existed or would exist. The idea behind it, the principle, which the traditional world is always striving for was enough for him. That in practice this was fulfilled only in form, or not even that, was immaterial, for as long as the principle remained recognizable, at least the possibility of self transcendence for men continued to present itself. In this sense one can speak of a “Utopia,” in which the idea is worth more than its puritanical realization. And this argument is valid not only for the traditional world, but also for the modern. For religion, neighborly love and democracy are likewise “Utopias” in this sense. Nor has “Utopia” here any negative overtones, for without its incredibly strong suggestive power no one would strive for a hyperbiological goal.

Later on Evola also rejected the idea of involving himself in recreating this traditional world today. He wanted, as we have said, only to transmit a “testimony,” so that some, who “stand outside this world,” could have a fixed point.

Nor can we reproach him for not mourning the past. For past and future are much the same to him. Only the traditional principles are important, which stand clearly outside time and space. That

those were lasting principles he has never doubted in the least. Therefore in his main book for the “others,” those “who are different,” his *Cavalcare la Tigre* (“Ride the Tiger”), he stressed that this “different” person should NOT turn his back on the world. On the contrary, he should seat himself on the very back of this all-tearing predator (the tiger) and rush forward with him. For as long as you keep sitting on top of the running beast you need not fear his claws and teeth. When the beast then becomes tired and weak from its wild running and lies down, you overcome it. “Manage so that what you can do nothing against, also can do nothing against you,” and “you can do anything, as long as you are sure that you can do without it,” were his expressions.

We can correctly ascribe one danger to Evola’s work, which however is not necessarily his fault. Since he is always talking about the grandiose, that which is stirring and noble, and never of the bondings of compassion and love, he could easily be mistaken for a seeker of the superman and the Titans. But that is exactly what Evola wants to avoid. He distinguishes quite carefully the path of the hero from the path of the titan. It is not the thought of power derived from the strengthening of the ego that Evola preaches, but, on the contrary, the transcendence of the ego. Ordinary individuality must be dissolved. That is what is necessary in the struggle for freedom from bondage and the overcoming of passion. As long as one continues to strive for (true and unsurped) power (*śakti*), one neither has it nor can use it. In order to acquire it, one must be able to put oneself beyond it, to be free of it. Power, says Evola in his major three volume work on magic (Introduction to *Magic as a Science of the Ego*), is feminine. She comes to the strongest. Just as the waters around the bridge piles thrust and accumulate, so power

collects around those who stand independently and are unconcerned about it. The power-greedy ego must be conquered and turned to something infinitely much greater than itself.

Now as to some of the forces that shaped Evola spiritually. He was born on May 19, 1898, the son of a noble Sicilian family and had as his original background a strong dogmatically Catholic upbringing. But that seems to have exercised no essential influence on him. When he was still very young he joined the rebellious poets' circle of Marinetti (founder of Futurism) and Papini, who fascinated him with their iconoclastic, revolutionary outlooks. Papini brought him into contact with all the new directions of art and streams of fashion, but also with oriental wisdom and especially with Meister Eckhart. After voluntary war service as officer candidate in the artillery, which left him untouched because of lack of any significant military action, Evola began to occupy himself ever more with occult teachings. Drug experiences (to which he never returned later on) certainly gave him new ideas, but also strengthened an already present crisis so that he voluntarily planned to end his life.

His urge for the absolute had crossed over to an urge for disintegration. In this he seems to have been influenced by his greatest models, namely Otto Weininger and Carlo Michelstaedter, for both had committed suicide early in their lives. Michelstaedter, in particular, had demonstrated both the insignificance and illusion of this world and this life, which always longs for something that can never be satisfied. Here also is the origin of Evola's striving for self-sufficiency, for independence from everything, for self-liberation. But a passage from the Buddhist Pali Canon saved him from the catastrophe. This passage (*Majjhimanikāya* I, 1) says, to wit, that whoever

believes that extinction is extinction, understands extinction as extinction, thinks of extinction, truly believes extinction to be extinction and rejoices in extinction, that person does not know extinction.

Evola's involvement with Dadaism goes back to his relationship with its founder Tristan Tzara, who wanted much more to establish a new vision of the world than merely an avant garde art movement. His aim was absolute liberation through the complete turning around of all logical, ethical and esthetic categories. He sought the union of order and disorder, of ego and non-ego, of yea and nay-saying. Evola saw Dadaism therefore as the self-liberation of Art into a higher freedom.

A "philosophical" period followed, which lasted until 1927. It led to the writing of three main works. These works follow the track laid down by the strong influence of Nietzsche and Stirner and were mainly directed against the then fascist "court philosophers," Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile.

But contacts with Theosophy, which he soon sharply condemned², and especially John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) also fall in this period. And an especially profound influence on him was Arturo Reghini, who was in fact the one who introduced him to the Western tradition. This led to the famous "UR Group," with its "Magic as science of the ego." "Magic" was understood to be the active taking up of a traditional initiation practice, and profound studies of Alchemy, Buddhism and Taoism complemented his practical experiences in the UR Group.

But along with these interests Evola was also looking for "an arena open to more opportuni-

² A comprehensive and detailed study of Evola's involvement with Theosophy is planned as an article for *Theosophical History*.

ties,” namely that of politics. He wanted to create a spiritual foundation in the prevailing climate of the New Order, Fascism, and to strengthen what in his eyes were the positive possibilities of bringing back the idea of the ancient Roman Empire and to avert its negative trains (totalitarianism, the emphasizing of the masses). He set about doing this by first creating the periodical *La Torre*, which after ten issues had to be put on the shelf. By order of Mussolini no print shop was allowed to print it any longer. Evola’s criticism therein had been belligerent. He wrote, for example, after being reminded that Mussolini in a certain case thought otherwise in these words: *Tanto peggio per Mussolini* (“Too bad for Mussolini”). At this time, therefore, in spite of his sympathies for Fascism he was obliged to move about Rome with bodyguards.

And here we find ourselves in the middle of the key question: why Evola is afflicted with a negative image—and not only in the English-speaking world—despite his opponents’ appreciation for his esoteric works. There is his undoubted sympathy for Fascism, National Socialism and racism—although we do have to make some distinctions. First there is the then spirit of the times to take into consideration, under whose spell more famous authors than Evola, such as Ezra Pound and Knut Hamsun, also fell. And then on no account must we forget the numerous critical newspaper articles written by Evola during the entire Fascist epoch, inclusive of wartime an accomplishment which under a totalitarian regime demanded personal courage by anyone’s standards. Of course a comprehensive study of this question is not possible here. But a couple of original quotations from those times should suffice to indicate the direction of Evola’s criticism. (A study conducted to that end is the 100 plus

page introduction to the German edition of Evola’s major political work: *Uomini e rovine* (“Men amidst Ruins”), Hohenrain, Tübingen 1991). Evola’s criticism naturally consisted mainly of the fact that he failed to see in Fascism any spiritual root or direction towards transcendence. The “plebeian,” the “bourgeois,” the “bureaucratic” elements were simply too strong.

As early as 1925 (Fascism in Italy was by then already in power), Evola had written in the political magazine *Lo Stato Democratico* No. I/7 in reference to Fascism: “... if one considers the type of (our actual) ruler and state that should truly embody the principle of freedom, then they present themselves as mere caricatures and grotesque parodies. ...” And he makes his attitude clear in the already mentioned magazine published by him, *La Torre*, in the very first issue under the title “Identity Card”:

Our magazine was not created to “whisper” something to Fascism or into the ear of M.P. Mussolini, for neither Fascism nor Mussolini would know what to do with it. Rather, our publication was created for the purpose of defending *principles*, which for us will always be the same absolutely, independently, whether we are in a communistic, anarchistic or republican regime.

Then Evola brings forward the principles of hierarchy, of anchoring everything in the transcendental and of spiritual imperial thought. Upon which he goes further—highlighting in italics: “*To the extent that Fascism follows these principles and defends them, to exactly that same extent can we consider ourselves to be fascist. And that is all.*”

We have still failed to mention that Evola was never a member of the Fascist party. But exactly because he did not see his ideas fulfilled in Fascism, he turned to National Socialism, which in his opinion seemed much more consequential as it continued to speak, rhetorically at least, of its own spiritual roots, of holy runes, etc. But here as well Evola failed to find what he sought, for it was precisely the masses which stood at the center of Nazism and not the state or the empire, as a transcendental point of reference. A quote from the newspaper *Lo Stato* from the year 1935 (pp. 22-29) under the title “Orizzonte Austriaco” states this unequivocally:

National Socialism has clearly renounced the ancient, aristocratic tradition of the state. It is nothing more than a demi-collective nationalism that levels everything flat in its centralism, and it has not hesitated to destroy the traditional division of Germany into principalities, lands and cities, which have all enjoyed a relative autonomy.

Evola was at that time repeatedly on lecture tours in Germany, wherein he was observed by the SS, who even kept a dossier on him in the Correspondence Administration Department of Reichsfuehrer SS Heinrich Himmler’s personal staff. In this dossier, document number AR/126 says of him: “The ultimate and secret goal of Evola’s theories and projects is most likely an *insurrection of the old aristocracy* against the modern world which is foreign to the idea of nobility.” Thus, the first German impression, that he was a “reactionary Roman,” was correct:

His overall character is marked by the feudal aristocracy of old. His learnedness tends towards the dilettante and pseudo-scientific.

Hence it follows that National Socialism sees nothing to be gained by putting itself at the disposal of Baron Evola. His political plans for a Roman-Germanic Imperium are utopian in character and moreover likely to give rise to ideological entanglements. As Evola has also only been tolerated and hardly supported by Fascism, there is not even a tactical need to assist him from our side.

It is therefore suggested:

1. Not to give any concrete support of Evola’s present efforts to establish a secret international order and a special publication intended for that purpose.
2. To stop his public effectiveness in Germany, after this lecture series, without deploying any special measures.
3. To prevent him from advancing to leading departments in party and state.
4. To have his propagandistic activity in neighboring countries carefully observed.

A short letter of August 11, 1938, listed as letter No. AR/83 puts it laconically: “Reichsfuehrer SS Heinrich Himmler has taken note of the opinions expressed in the report on Baron *Evola*’s lectures and strongly agrees with the ideas and proposals set forth in the final paragraph.” (i.e. the one quoted above.)

To put a period to the question of Evola and Fascism there is an important impartial voice:

Renzo de Felice, the most prominent authority on Fascism and Mussolini, writes in *Der Faschismus: ein Interview* (Stuttgart 1977, 97 f.): “Who is Evola? It was no accident that he was an outsider during the entire era of Fascism, that he never held a position in the Fascist party ..., and the Fascists themselves, at least many of them, criticized and mistrusted him.”

In Evola’s comments on the racial question we must also make distinctions. In particular he

introduces a new classification of race, which is threefold, distinguishing between race of body (which is the usual bare bones notion of race), race of soul (the character, style of living, emotional attitude towards the environment and society) and race of spirit (type of religious experience and attitude towards the “traditional” values). Therefore, as Mussolini expressed it on the occasion of an encounter with Evola, this classification was comparable to Plato’s pattern of the three population groups: the broad masses, the warriors and the wise men.³

Because the race of the spirit is the one that is most difficult to understand and even Evola himself did not always define it the same way, we will quote from his article “L’Equivoco del Razzismo Scientifico” (“The Misunderstanding of Scientific Racism”), in the magazine *Vita Italiana* (Sept. 1942), where he says the following:

We would like to make it clear that to us spirit means neither frivolous philosophy nor ‘Theosophy’, nor mystical, devotional withdrawal from the world, but is simply what in better times the well-born have always said were the marks of *race*: namely, straightforwardness, inner unity, character, courage, virtue immediate and instant sensitivity for all values, which are present in every great human being and which, since they stand well beyond all chance-subjected reality, they also dominate. The kind of race, however, which differs from this as a construction of “Science” and a piece out of the anthropological museum, we leave to the pseudo-intellectual bourgeoisie, which continues to indulge in the idols of 19th Century Positivism.

³Mussolini had asked Evola to his office wanting to counter-balance the Nazi pure body and blood racial idea of the Germans against Evola’s soul-spirit view, which was more in line with his own thinking.

Evola’s race representations made him really known in Italy for the first time, but they also brought him great opposition. No less than Guido Landra, the most powerful leader of the race studies section of the Folk Culture Ministry, co-publisher of the official newspaper *La difesa della Razza* (“The Defense of Race”) and co-author of the official Fascist “Race manifesto” of 1938 criticized Evola sharply: e.g., in the magazine *Vita Italiana* (XXXI, No. 359, of Feb. 1943, p. 151 ff.)

... And that is the weakest point in Evola’s teaching: that an Aryan can have the soul of a Jew or vice-versa. And that therefore unfair measures could be taken against a Jew, even though he might possess the soul of an Aryan—this seems to us theoretically untenable. The practical acceptance of such a principle would have terrible consequences for racism, and certainly be of exclusive benefit to the Jew ...

This highest official Italian race theoretician leads another sharp attack on Evola again in his own newspaper *La Difesa della Razza* (VI/1, November 1942, p. 20), when he writes: “... (and) that article “The Misunderstanding of Scientific Racism” by Evola, which is the outstanding document of and monument to the present campaign, which has been unleashed *against* Racism in Italy”

And in another quotation, clearly defining his racial thinking, Evola writes in the periodical *Vita Nova*, July 1931:

The error of certain extreme ‘racists’ who believe that the return of a race to its ethnic purity *ipso facto* also means rebirth for a people, rests exactly on this: they deal with men as if they were dealing with the racially

pure or pure blood caste of a cat or a horse or a dog. The preservation or restoration of the racial unity (taking its narrowest meaning) can mean everything when you deal with an animal. But with men it is not so ... it would be far too easy if the simple fact of belonging to one race that has been kept pure, already conferred, without being or doing anything else, some "quality" in the higher sense.

But let us examine Evola and Judaism.

On the one hand, there are really incriminating statements of Evola's concerning Jews individually, and he even, among other things, republished the infamous "*Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,"⁴ whose spurious character he must have known. In this regard he is quite in step with the style of the times. Evola was judging thereby not the Jewish people as such, whose spiritual attainments, such as the cabala, etc., he esteemed highly, but only "Judaism" as a "spiritual direction" alleging that it was from that we had been led to the despised modern times.

But even here Evola does not go blindly

⁴[*Editor's note.* There has recently appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* (Sunday, November 28, 1993: A3 and 11) an article entitled "Russia Rules Anti-Semitic 'Protocols of Zion' a Fake" stating that this is the first time that such a verdict has been arrived at in a Russian court. Although courts around the world have condemned the document, the ruling in Russia is significant since this is the land of the document's origin and because there are still organizations that apparently consider it to be genuine. The court case that instigated such a ruling was initiated by the publisher of the *Jewish Gazette*, Tancred Golenpolsky, who charged that the nationalist group Pamyat (Memory) was printing anti-Semitic remarks. The article further states that the *Protocols* was indeed a forgery of the Okhranka or Czar Nicholas II's secret police in 1903 with "as much as 60% of the document... a bald plagiarism from an anti-Semitic tract published in France about that time." (p. 11) The *Protocols* describes an agreement among a group of Jewish elders meeting in Switzerland in 1897 to plot Jewish hegemony through the destruction of Christian civilization.]

ahead, he makes a distinction. For example, in his booklet *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico* ("Three Aspects of the Jewish Problem," Rome, 1936) e.g. he writes:

... in the concrete course of development of modern civilization the Jew can be seen as a power, who collectively with others has worked to create our "civilized," rationalistic, scientific, and mechanistic modern decadence, but on no account can he be marked as its single, far-reaching cause. To believe such a thing would be very stupid. The actual truth is, that one would rather fight against personified powers than against abstract principles or universal phenomena, because you can also fight them practically. So the world has turned en masse against the Jew, as he seemed to show in his being a typical form which one finds however in much wider regions and even in nations that are practically untouched by Jewish immigration.

Even in his introduction to the "*Protocols of the Elders of Zion*" he says on page xix, "We must say at once that in this matter we personally cannot follow a certain fanatical anti-semitism, especially that which sees the Jews everywhere as *deus ex machina* and by which one finally leads oneself into a kind of trap."

And in 1942 he writes in his above-mentioned article "The misunderstanding of scientific racism" again clearly:

For it is useless to try to conceal it from ourselves: this very day, people are asking themselves if, in the end, the Jew is not being presented as a kind of scapegoat, because there are so often cases, in which the qualities, that our doctrine ascribes to the Jew, also impertinently pop up in 100% "aryan" stock market speculators, profiteers, price-hikers,

parvenus and—why not—even journalists, who do not hesitate to use the most twisted and treacherous means purely for polemics.

And there is also the impartial keynote of Fascist historian Renzo de Felice, who in his *History of Italian Jews under Fascism* (Milan, 1977) confirms the above (p. 465):

... we see ourselves compelled to state in the cultural sector, as well as in the political, that from a certain point of view, the most worthy of respect were those who were confirmed racists. Thereby, however, we do not mean—let this be clearly understood—a Landra or a Cogni, those pallid and obsequious vestals of Nazi racism, but an Evola, an Acerbo, each of whom had his own way which he followed to the very end, in dignity and even in earnestness. And that, contrary to the many who chose the way of the lie, abusing and smoke-screening each and every cultural and moral value... Evola for his part also completely refused any racial theorizing of a purely biological kind, which went so far as to draw to himself the attacks and sarcasms of a Landra, for example. This does not mean that the “spiritual” theory of race is acceptable, but it had at least the merit of not totally failing to see certain values, to refuse the German aberrations and the ones modeled after them and to try to keep racism on a plane of cultural problems worthy of the name.

These few quotations should suffice to shed some light on Evola’s outlook.

In 1945, while Evola was living in Vienna, working through SS confiscated archives and documents of freemasonry and magical groups, he was so severely wounded in a Russian bombing attack that he remained paralyzed to the end of his life (1974). During air attacks, Evola had the habit of not going to the bomb shelters but instead

went on working in his office or walked about the streets of Vienna. He wanted, as he said, “calmly to question his fate.”

After several years’ hospital stay in Austria and then in Italy (the war had ended in the meantime) Evola returned to his native city, Rome. Apparently he left his dwelling only once when in 1951 he was arrested by the police. The charge was “Glorification of Fascism” and “Intellectually inciting secret combat troops.” The trial ended however after several months of examination with a complete acquittal. In his famous self defense (published by the Fondazione Julius Evola, Rome, undated) he had indicated that his incriminating statements could also be found in Aristotle, Plato and Dante, who would also have to be charged.

Nevertheless he still continued to be visited by right wing young people and addressed as “Maestro.” But Evola always declined to occupy himself with everyday politics and wanted to concern himself only with fundamental principles. His late work *Cavalcare la Tigre* (Rome, Milan, 1961) calls even for an “apoliteia”—an attitude which goes against politics by placing itself spiritually above it. Further productions include his work on original Buddhism, *The Doctrine of Awakening*, which appeared in London in 1951 by that publisher specializing in Orientalia, Lucac & Co. (First edition, Bari 1943). Evola wrote this strongly ascetic work amidst the chaos of WWII, which proves his withdrawal from the politics of that time. In 1958 his *Metaphysics of Sex* appeared in Rome. A book criticizing Fascism and Nazism (*Il Fascismo*, Rome 1964, a critical analysis from the point of view of the Right), a further one on the German poet Ernst Juenger, as well as collections of essays and finally his autobiography *Il Cammino del Cinabro* (Milan 1963) marks the limit of his work.

In this article, although we have been able to provide only a few details, it can be seen that an evaluation of Evola, who published in all 25 books, approximately 300 longer essays and more than 1000 newspaper and magazine articles, is not very simple. Lately it has been pointed out (e.g. Giano Accame, *Il Fascismo immenso e rosso* Rome, 1990) that Evola's thinking bears a strong resemblance to the fundamental observations of Herbert Marcuse (Evola was much earlier, however), which may explain the new interest in Evola in leftist circles. In most recent times a number of dissertations in various universities in Italy and France have also been written about him. As a conclusion I'd like to mention a description given by the Austrian poet Joseph Roth of Franz Grillparzer, which seems to be quite fitting for Evola too:

“An anarchistic individualistic reactionary.”

Veritas Mystica Maxima

(Part III of the OTO)

P.R. König

In 1913 a certain Professor Emil Schaub of Basel (German speaking Switzerland) and a John Daniels Reelfs from Geneva (French speaking Switzerland), both asked the 33°, 90°, 95° and X° for “Great Britain and Ireland” Aleister Crowley for charters. Crowley replied in March of that year: “I shall be obliged to divide Switzerland” according to the different native languages.¹ But the Englishman Crowley was not prepared to give away European grades and so he put Schaub and Reelfs forward to Edoardo Frosini, the 33°, 90°, 96° and VII° of Italy.² Associated with Frosini (heir to Michele de Majulli, 33°, 90°, 95° and VII°³) were G. Di San Fortunato and Arturo Reghini. The latter made Crowley a honorary member of his “Rito Filosofico Italiano” on 20/10/1913. Reghini in 1927 switched his allegiance to Julius Evola’s (1898-1979) group called “UR.”

The unanswered question arises of why Crowley did not refer Schaub and Reelfs to Reuss as OHO. “The Present Standing of the MM” dated 1914 shows Reelfs having the duty to remind the other members, unwilling to pay, of the empty

coffers: Schaub is not mentioned. Crowley’s “Golden Book” which contains data only from 1912 to 1917, lists Reelfs among the VI°s, but also makes no mention of Schaub.⁴

In 1914 Reuss published the by-laws of the British section⁵ (which were later used by Crowley for his 1919 Constitution⁶ in the German magazine *Oriflamme*⁷) and the “Outline” and “Elements” of the OTO.⁸

In 1917, while distributing his translation of Crowley’s Gnostic Mass⁹ on Monte Verità, Reuss published a revised OTO Constitution¹⁰ (a revi-

⁴ *Nuit-Isis* (Oxford) 1/2 (1987): 21.

⁵ Already published by Crowley in 1912. *Crowley Cross Index* (Avon, 1976), 26.

⁶ *The Blue Equinox* (Detroit, 1919), 195.

⁷ *Oriflamme* (Schmiedeberg) (July 1914): 17.

⁸ *Parsifal und das Enthüllte Grals-Geheimnis* (Schmiedeberg, 1914) and *AHA* (Bergen) 6 (1992): 14. Integral version soon to be published as “Kleiner Theodor Reuss Reader” (Munich, 1993).

⁹ *Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae*, printed later in Schmiedeberg 1918.

¹⁰ Schmiedeberg, 1917 and *AHA* 5/92: 20.

¹ Which would be four.

² *Mysteria* (Paris) 2 (1913): 179.

³ *Mysteria* (Paris) 1 (1913): 83 and *Initiation* (January 1911).

sion of the 1906 Constitution¹¹). Between 1917 and 1919 Crowley devised his own version of OTO initiation-rituals, which were never used by Reuss or any deriving Reuss-OTO-group.

Anarchy in Switzerland

The Czech dancer Rudolf de Laban (1879-1958) opened a branch of his Dance School (of Munich) in Ascona (in the Italian speaking Swiss canton of Tessin), on Monte Verità—the Mountain of Truth. In subsequent years this was to be the site of many noteworthy events¹², but only the OTO related ones will be mentioned here. In the Spring of 1916 de Laban's collaborator Mary Wiegemann opened a branch of the school in Zürich (the German speaking part of Switzerland), where in April of that year contacts were established with the Dadaists. Sophie Täuber for example, soon to be wife of Hans Arp, attended the Zürich school.¹³

The Austrian piano teacher and Theosophist Ida Hofmann and Henri Odenkoven, living in an open relationship, were the financial base of the vegetarian community on Monte Verità. It was Ida Hofmann, who in 1916 introduced Theodor Reuss to the community who immediately started OTO-activities: the Lodge "Verità Mistica."

Hans Rudolf Hilfiker-Dunn (1882-1955) received his I° on 2/12/1916. However he had

already appeared under the name of Nothung (the sword in Wagner's *Parçival*), with the sexo-magical meaning of "Ur-Phallos"¹⁴ among other "Inactive Grand Officers" in the 1909 Oriflamme.¹⁵ Hilfiker's lover, Clara Linke (1875-1923) came to the community as a patient but stayed to become an important organiser. While Ida Hofmann led the social life, Clara Linke controlled the restaurant. In 1918 Frau Linke established a kindergarten there.

On 24 October 1917 was founded the lodge "Libertas et Fraternitas" in Zürich, under Reuss and de Laban. Some days before,¹⁶ de Laban and Hilfiker had paid Reuss handsomely for their own OTO charters. On these papers the OTO was equaled with the Memphis and Misraïm Rite. On 3 November 1917 the constitutional assembly took place: de Laban becoming the first Grand Master. On 11 November Hilfiker became Lodge Master. The women¹⁷ from de Laban's dance group, headed by Mary Wiegemann, had been rushed through the ceremonies in "Verità Mistica" lodge. Amongst the six men and ten women¹⁸ of the Zürich lodge was a certain Baron Herbert von Bomsdorff-Bergen—said to be the leader of the

¹¹ London 1906 and *AHA* 5/92: 18.

¹² Robert Landmann, *Ascona Monte Verità* (Frankfurt, 1971), Harald Szeemann, *Monte Verità* (Milano, 1978), Martin Green, *The Mountain of Truth* (New England, 1986), and *Antologia di Cronaca del Monte Verità* (Locarno, 1992).

¹³ Bolliger et alii, *Dada in Zürich* (Zürich, 1985).

¹⁴ Theodor Reuss, *Parsifal und das Enthüllte Grals-Geheimnis* (Schmiedeberg 1914), 12 (re-printed in *AHA* (Bergen) 6 (1992): 14. Hilfiker's manuscript of 9 September 1919, page 6. Here Hilfiker speaks of the "Erection and the Coitus" in their holy sense.

¹⁵ Schmiedeberg (December 1909): 1.

¹⁶ 20 October 1917.

¹⁷ Elga Feldt, Suzanne Perrottet, Käthe Wulf and Frau Lederer.

¹⁸ Besides Hilfiker, de Laban, Bomsdorff-Bergen and his wife; Oscar Bienz, Imre Schreiber, Heinrich Friedländer, Herr Reiser and Turnibuca; Frau Beraly, Coleman, de Montcabrie and Ruckeschell.

Zürich opera.¹⁹ Oscar R. Schlag (1907-1990), a man later to become involved with people from several OTO groups, had his first OTO contact with the above Baron. Herr Schlag remembers that the Baron interpreted his scarf upon the nose as a sign of Baphomet.

“Baphomet” was the term used by the person who held the office of OHO. It was the founder of the OTO, Carl Kellner, who first assumed this term.

On 14 November 1917 Grandmaster de Laban wrote to his mother that he had closed “Verità Mistica,” expelled the unworthy members Odenkoven and Hofmann and moved headquarters to Zürich. Reuss left the Mountain of Truth before November 1918.²⁰ Despite the forgoing there exists a strange, maybe faked document dated 10 November 1918, apparently signed by a “Peregrinus” (Reuss’ OTO name), which authorizes Frau Hofmann and Frau Linke to act as 33°, 97° and X° for Switzerland “in generale,” that is “Veritas Mystica Maxima.”²¹

A quarrel was brewing in Zürich and the women left. Although Frau Wiegemann had got permission to found a female lodge of her own, she left the OTO on 16 November 1918 to found

her own dance school in Dresden in 1920. De Laban also left Zürich in November 1918 to dance in München and Stuttgart (Germany) and Hilfiker became his heir as Grandmaster.

Most members of “Libertas et Fraternitas” wanted to get rid of Reuss. On 1 February 1919 the description “OTO” was dropped and on 26 April 1919 the lodge officially left MM and OTO and continued with only the Rite of Cerneau—for which Reuss still sought payment. The rich merchant Hilfiker paid Reuss off with 3000 in Swiss francs, a considerable sum in those days! However there were still some members faithful to Reuss and on 10 May 1919 Reuss signed a charter for Hilfiker relating to AASR 33° (on sight:²²). On 24/4/1919 Reuss (33°, 90°, 97°, X°) and Ida Hofmann (33°, 90°, 95°, IX°) ritually (!) initiated Hilfiker to the 30° and VI°. On 10/5/1919 Hilfiker was made 33°, 95°, VII°.

Hilfiker had to support his lover in Zürich, H. Walder and their illegitimate child, by buying her a knitting shop. In 1920 Odenkoven and Frau Hofmann left Switzerland and traveled to Spain and Brazil. Frau Hofmann died in Sao Paolo in 1926.

Reuss was granting OTO grades to members of “Libertas et Fraternitas” although this was disapproved of by others. “Whether Papa Reuss is advancing people in private only concerns the OTO, not our Rite” lamented Pargaetzi (once a 30° and VI°) to Hilfiker on 4 April 1920, not realising that Hilfiker was at the very least an VIII°.²³ On 12/

¹⁹ Although the relevant files no longer exist for this to be confirmed, this is based upon a letter of the Zürich Opera dated 22 June 1990.

²⁰ The reason for Reuss’ departure is discussed in Howe/Möller *Merlin Peregrinus* (Königshausen, 1986) but it must be pointed out that these authors did not have access to the information upon which this article is based.

²¹ Can Reuss, a 97°, appoint another 97°? The signature on this charter has more similarity to H.J. Metzger’s signature than to Reuss’. On this charter the Latin term for “Switzerland” is “Helvetia”, while Reuss ALWAYS used “Elvetia” in his other Swiss charters. Comparison of signatures in AHA 3/91:7.

²² Except the grades 1-3°, 18°, 30-33°, all freemason-grades are given *per communicatio*.

²³ Hilfiker’s archive also contains the secret pass words, grips and signs for the IX° and X°. See AHA 8/91, p. 13.

5/1920 Joanny Bricaud (1881-1934) made Hilfiker a 33°, 90°, 95°.

World Alliance of Freemasons

Remembering the esoteric congress of Paris in 1908 (where Arnold Krumm-Heller for example, received high MM degrees), Reuss convened a world congress of freemasonry in Zürich in 1920. Whilst in 1908 Reuss, Encausse (Papus, 1865-1916, 33°, 90°, 96°²⁴), Blanchard and Détré (1855-1918, 33°, 97°, X°²⁵) eagerly exchanged titles, offices and maybe consecrations,²⁶ this time Reuss was sent by the Patriarch of the Église Gnostique Universelle, Joanny Bricaud (33°, 90°, 96°), to make Aleister Crowley's Gnostic Mass the "official religion for all members of the 18° Scottish Rite."²⁷ "In Memphis-Misraim the 18° has no Christian references but mystical-gnostical ones...only the VII°, VIII° and IX° know about its proper meaning."²⁸

There was also being distributed literature publicising the "Set up of the Neo-Christians called OTO"²⁹ which presented a utopian OTO society. However at the same time Reuss was distributing flyers defending himself against accusations of sexual scandals³⁰—possibly references

²⁴ Initiation (October 1908).

²⁵ Only on a facsimile-document of 1918 in S. Clymer, *Rosicrucian Fraternities in America*. Vol. II (Quakertown: Rosicrucian Foundation, 1935), 317; while "Mysteria" from January 1913 only speaks of 33°, 90°, 95°.

²⁶ K.R.H. Frick, *Licht und Finsternis* (Graz) II (1978): 478.

²⁷ Invitation dated January 1920, page 2.

²⁸ Speech to the 33°, no date no place, page 2.

²⁹ Schmiedeberg 1920 and *AHA* 2/92: 13.

³⁰ Published in *AHA* 1/92: 21.

to alleged homosexual attacks committed around 1915.

Hilfiker and Rolf Merlitschek (30°, VI°) welcomed Reuss on 17th July 1920 in the temple of "Libertas et Fraternitas" where the freemasonic congress was held. England's X° Crowley³¹ and America's soon to be X° Charles Stanfield Jones (Achad, 1886-1950) were invited but did not attend.³² Reuss, Gnostic Legate of Bricaud only stayed for one day and the mood of the congress went against the OTO, the minutes for example do not even mention the Gnostic Religion. On 3 October 1920 the rosicrucian chapters (18°) in Tessin demanded that "every connection to Reuss and his so-called Gnostic Church must be excluded and treated as a thing of the past."

On 17 May 1925 "Libertas et Fraternitas" became member of the Swiss Grand Lodge "Alpina" which meant dispensing with High Degrees and "Grand Orient." Its History has nothing to do with OTO matters, anymore.

Fading out

Alice Sprengel (1897-1947) one-time collaborator of Rudolf Steiner switched her allegiance to Reuss in 1915 when she found out that Steiner had married Mlle Siviers in 1914. She had a grant to found OTO lodges³³ and in 1921 belonged to the

³¹ "Reuss...disregarded Crowley's claim to occult supremacy in America." Francis King, *Sexuality, Magic and Perversion* (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 143.

³² Crowley's diary: 6 June: "I should not go to Zurich," in *The Magical Record of the Beast 666* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 148 (also 132).

³³ Heinrich Wendt to Gerald Yorke, letter dated 24 November 1957.

“Executive Council of Three (Supreme Council)”³⁴ of OTO, Anational Grand Lodge and Mystic Temple Verita Mistica, Orient Ascona” (although de Laban had closed the lodge earlier). Associated with Frau Sprengel were Frau Hardegger and Frau Jantzen (of whom more below).

In his first will of 1922 Reuss declared Clara Linke (Hilfiker’s lover) as heir, but she died shortly after. His last will of 27 June 1923 was in favour of his wife and his housekeeper without provisions relating to OTO, MM or Gnostic Church.

Already on 27 November 1921 Aleister Crowley wrote in his diary: “I have proclaimed myself O.H.O. Frater Superior of the Order of Oriental Templars” and after Reuss’ death on 28 October 1923, he told Heinrich Tränker, X° of Germany, “I wish to obtain control of all existing movements.”³⁵

Hilfiker described the situation to Constant Chevillon (1880-1944, heir to Joanny Bricaud): Yarker’s (1833-1913) original charter to Reuss (which empowered the latter to found lodges) was intended to be sent to Hilfiker as the authorised successor. However the lady (his lover Clara Linke?) who was supposed to deliver the charter, died on route, almost immediately before Reuss. The Yarker/Reuss paper extant in Hilfiker’s archive is dated 24 September 1902, confers only the 33° and is void of any MM-authorities. Nevertheless this date is referred to by Reuss in his charters.

Hilfiker wrote to the Gnostic Patriarch Chevillon: “Despite the fact that Heinrich Tränker proclaims himself OHO...the OTO died together

with Reuss”³⁶ and regarding Aleister Crowley, Hilfiker suggested they “consider the OTO non-existent.” In 1936 Hilfiker revoked the authority of the Swiss MM under Chevillon, who was independent of the “Libertas et Fraternitas.”³⁷ Chevillon in 1939 consecrated Krumm-Heller a bishop and in 1944 was murdered by the Gestapo. Hilfiker became active again in 1947 when together with Swinburne Clymer (1878-1966), he tried to create a worldwide alliance of rosicrucian orders. This was particularly successful in Rio de Janeiro where Clymer merged his organisation with Krumm-Heller’s. Hilfiker and Clymer actually met each other on 7/5/1947 and also on 5/6/1948 in Zürich.³⁸

Marguerite Faas-Brunner-Hardegger (1882-1963) in whose papers was found a Wagner libretto with Reuss’ Ex-Libris stamp, lived after 1919 on Monte Verità. Also known as Sister Hyazinthe, she was after the death of Alice Sprengel in 1947 a rival with Genja Jantzen for the office of Lodge Master of the Swiss OTO lodge in Ascona. Control of the lodge had been the cause of previous disputes between Frau Hardegger and Frau Sprengel. Hilfiker’s lover, H. Walder, together with a Frl. Billwiller distanced herself from Genja Jantzen.

Close by Ascona resided a certain Frau Appia, together with Eugen Grosche’s lover and secretary Hanne Wildt, although the latter spent some of her time with Frau Hardegger. Eugen Grosche, founder of the sexmagical oriented Fraternitas

³⁶ Letter dated 13 June 1936.

³⁷ Serge Caillet, *Franc-Maçonnerie* (Paris: Cariscript, 1988), 110.

³⁸ Swinburne Clymer, *Book of Rosicruciae* III (Quakertown: Rosicrucian Foundation, 1949), xxxi and 224.

³⁴ Howe/Möller, *Merlin Peregrinus* (Königshausen 1986), 241, 244.

³⁵ December 1924.

Saturni spent his exile in sunny Tessin and in 1937 he visited the local OTO lodge.

In Zürich, the main people associated with the fairly well-known Felix Lazerus Pinkus (1881-1947) were Herr Struppeler and Thomas Egloff, both very interested in the Abramelin working, the latter allegedly died in 1969 in the Brazilian jungle from the consequences of an Abramelin invocation.³⁹ C.G. Jung also was interested in Abramelin maybe during the time he was a member of Oscar Schlag's "Hermetische Gesellschaft." There were also people associated with Pinkus who were more concerned with OTO-matters. For example Karl Brodbeck, guardian of Leopold Engel's "Weltbund der Illuminaten" during WWII; Herr Baumgartner, Herr Merlitschek, Herr Bader from Germany and of course Hilfiker and his adlatus Herr Reichel.

Oscar Schlag, who was not particularly liked by Hilfiker, recalls that Hilfiker saw himself as a prophet and chosen-one and agrees with my hypothesis that Hilfiker secretly considered himself Head of the OTO, but influenced by Reuss' and Crowley's bad reputation, held it incommunicado. It is Schlag's supposition that Pinkus came to the OTO either through Frau Sprengel or Hilfiker. It was Pinkus who founded the "Psychosophische Gesellschaft" in 1945 which later was to become the roof organisation for H.J. Metzger's compilation of Orders.

H.J. Metzger

Hermann Joseph Metzger (1919-1990) a baker and ex-communist, had grown up in the Tessin canton and in 1943 was initiated into the OTO by

³⁹ Metzger's *Oriflamme* (Zürich) 96 (1969): 1062.

Genja Jantzen and Alice Sprengel.

In Zürich Pinkus visited the Theosophical group which at that time had no particular leader. Although Pinkus held several lectures he was not accepted by most of the members and soon organized his own group. Through Pinkus, Metzger visited two or three times this "lodge" but as he only was propagandising his horoscopes and was accompanied by people without any "real" interests he and Pinkus rather soon never appeared in that Theosophical group again. It was common knowledge that Pinkus intended Metzger to be his magical successor and to that effect gave him his crystal ball.⁴⁰

Following the death of Pinkus in 1947, the Swiss OTO split up and Metzger took control of what was left, even though most of the senior members did not recognise him. Frau Gundula Bader (daughter of the previously mentioned Herr Bader) who assisted at Metzger's initiation in 1943 is not sure if Metzger even took over any of the original papers.⁴¹ Indeed there is reason to believe that these papers never reached the Abbey of Thelema in Stein. Metzger himself wrote to Karl Germer (heir of Crowley's OTO) "Frau Jantzen knew neither of the position of Pinkus nor myself."⁴²

In 1951 Metzger tried to become a regular freemason but this was blocked by Hilfiker who felt that Metzger had to be considered as an

⁴⁰ Interview on 12 August 1992 with Frau Alice Herder, born 1902.

⁴¹ Letter dated 23 April 1988.

⁴² 12 June 1951.

esoteric careerist.⁴³ In 1948 Germer was advised by Gerald Yorke that any branch of Reuss' OTO had more authority than Crowley's OTO.⁴⁴ 1951 was the year in which Metzger's Reuss-style OTO received a certificate from Germer's Crowley-style OTO—although Germer accepted Metzger as Reuss-OTO.⁴⁵ In his OTO-initiation-rituals (void of any Crowley-reference), Metzger used the term "Veritàs Mystica Maxima,"⁴⁶ which was later exchanged with "Loge Thelema."

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An early version of this article appeared in the British magazine *Nuit-Isis* (Oxford) 10 (1991), with the help of Clive Harper.

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⁴³ Hilfiker to G. Imhof, letter dated 17 July 1951.

⁴⁴ 3 July 1948.

⁴⁵ Facsimile in *AHA* 9/91:9.

⁴⁶ "Orient Thuricensium O.T.O.," 14.

Book Review

ANNIE BESANT: A BIOGRAPHY.

By Anne Taylor. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Pp. ix + 383. £25, \$59. ISBN 0-19-211796-3.

Just a century ago Annie Besant's life had passed its mid-point and her career was taking its most important turn. With the deaths of her mentors Charles Bradlaugh and Helena Blavatsky in the spring of 1891, and her attendance at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago and her first trip to India in the fall of 1893, she attained a new freedom from her past and began to establish the pattern of her future, which would be intimately connected with the Hindu traditions and nationalist aspirations of India. Beginning a review by taking note of this transitional phase of her life provides us with the convenient vantage point of a century of perspective. And it also illustrates a fundamental problem of her biographers: how best to organize and interpret the voluminous materials and repeated redirections of her life—how to explain one of the most extraordinary careers of modern times.

What, in brief, were the stages of that career? Born Annie Wood in London in 1847 of Anglo-Irish parents, she lost her scholarly father at an early age but was well-educated, partly in Paris, by capable teachers. She had intense early religious interests. In 1867 she married the Rev. Frank Besant, an Anglican vicar, and they had a son and daughter; but his overbearing demand for obedience led to their bitter separation after six years.

They never divorced, and the children remained in his care after agonizing legal proceedings. Her deep questioning of Christian doctrines soon became outright rejection and a search for alternatives. She tested and turned away from Auguste Comte's Religion of Humanity, Charles Voysey's Theism, and Moncure Conway's eclectic rationalism, finally committing herself to Freethought—in effect, atheism—as preached by Charles Bradlaugh.

She developed a powerful lecturing style that made her famous before she was thirty, and she gave all her remarkable energies to Freethought, becoming vice president of the National Secular Society and co-editor of the *National Reformer*. Soon she was notorious for her advocacy of birth control and was rumored to be intimate with Bradlaugh. Her consuming passion for reform led her beyond Bradlaugh's radicalism to socialism and nearly into a romance with the disreputable Edward Aveling. She joined the Fabian Society, rapidly rose to its executive council, and was elected to the London School Board. In her intense involvement with labor union causes, including the match girls' strike, she moved still further to the left and joined H. M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation. With Bernard Shaw and then with W. T. Stead she pursued infatuations that came to nothing. At the height of her fame as a crusader for radical causes in the early 1890s, she discovered Theosophy and resigned her positions with the secularists and the socialists.

Helena Blavatsky brought Annie Besant into Theosophy, but she soon became an independent advocate and interpreter of its teachings and was soon made head of its Esoteric Section of elite adepts. Under Gayenenda Chakravarti's influence, she accepted the doctrines of reincarnation and karma, the Theosophical interpretations of nature and history, the guidance of the Masters, and the caste system. After she visited India and the Theosophical center at Adyar, she began to champion the nationalist cause and became embroiled in continuing political controversies. Yet her Theosophical work continued, and she was voted president of the Theosophical Society in 1907 after the death of Blavatsky's successor, Henry Olcott. She defended the Theosophical leader Charles Leadbeater despite morals charges against him.

After 1909 the Brahmin boy Jiddu Krishnamurti became the focus of her devotion as she brought him to England to be educated to undertake the role the Theosophists claimed for him: the World Teacher predicted by the Masters. She pursued Indian nationalist politics with fearless energy at the same time, engaging in repeated confrontations with the British authorities and rival nationalist factions. For three months in 1917 she was interned for agitation in wartime and was viewed by many as a traitor. The next year she was elected president of the Indian National Congress and played a major role in the turbulent politics of resistance and reform, but gradually lost influence to Nehru and Gandhi. After twenty years of international activity promoting Krishnamurti's mission, she was crushed when in 1929 he renounced the role the Theosophists had prescribed for him and abandoned their doctrines. Her intense activity ceased only in her last three years, spent in India. She died at Adyar at eighty-

six in 1933 and was cremated in Hindu fashion. Had not such a life actually been lived, it would have been deemed incredible.

Can it be made credible and intelligible by any biographer? Two serious attempts have appeared: Arthur Nethercot's two-volume study, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (1961) and *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant* (1963); and Anne Taylor's *Annie Besant: A Biography* (1992). Nethercot's work was groundbreaking, comprehensive, and opinionated; Anne Taylor's is inevitably less original, more compact by design, but no less interpretive and judgmental. While it has the disadvantage of competing with its masterful predecessor, it has the advantage of thirty years' opportunity for marshaling new sources and re-assessing the historical setting. At some point in this review we must ask what benefits the passage of thirty years have actually yielded, and whether another biography of Annie Besant is needed. Although it is not this reviewer's purpose to engage in an extended comparison between two admirable studies, but rather to assess the new work on its own terms, a few more references to Nethercot are necessary.

It is difficult to understand how Anne Taylor could have written so well-founded and so well-articulated a book without conscientiously explaining its debts to, and divergences from, Nethercot's work. Her acknowledgments never mention it, and this seems inconsistent with her generosity in giving due credit to libraries, organizations, publishers, and individuals. In her bibliography, Nethercot is simply listed along with some ninety other authors, and he is cited in nine out of a total of 1,126 endnotes. This neglect can hardly have been accidental. It inevitably gives rise to unpleasant speculation about the author's or publisher's reluctance to call attention

to the only other similar study, or an intention of borrowing from it inconspicuously, or a contempt for it so complete that it was not deemed worth serious mention. Such speculations are all surely incorrect and unjust, but why even invite them? It would have been prudent to discuss Nethercot's strengths and weaknesses in an introduction and in the relevant endnotes, and to explain what sources unavailable to him were used and their significance. As it is, the only mention of new material and interpretation appears cryptically in the last paragraph of the jacket front flap, which most readers of library copies will never see. Oxford University Press bears final responsibility for permitting this lapse.

When a subject's public persona is integral to achievement, it is important that good photographs supplement literary portraits. Yet the only high quality portrait of Annie Besant is on the book's jacket but is not found inside. Most of the rest, even those of her in her "lecturing dress" and white Indian robes, are grainy and lifeless, suggesting little of the subject's vibrancy. (Nethercot has many more photographs but no better ones.) The fact that the same few images keep reappearing in all the literature relating to Annie Besant leads one to ask if there has ever been a real search for the studio portraits that would have been taken for publicity purposes world wide in the course of half a century.

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The most obvious question about Annie Besant concerns her conversion from one all-consuming cause to another—again and again and again and again and again over forty years—and her virtual domination of each in turn. It was an astonishing performance of will and intellect, unprecedented

for a woman but also unduplicated by any man. What made her so domineering, so self-assured, so ready to live all her life in controversy and contradictions? One way to describe, though not perhaps to explain, her career was that of Bernard Shaw, who was always her most astute critic:

Like all great public speakers she was a born actress. She was successively a Puseyite Evangelical and Atheist Bible smasher, a Darwinian secularist, a Fabian socialist, a strike leader, and finally a Theosophist exactly as Mrs. Siddons was a Lady Macbeth, Lady Randolph, Beatrice, Rosamund and Volumnia. She saw herself as a priestess above all. That was how Theosophy held her to the end.

(And this leaves out Krishnamurti and Indian politics!) She had indeed to be able to *be* an actress to succeed in her missions; but the love of the drama of role-playing is far from an adequate explanation.

Bhagavan Das, who knew Annie Besant well, saw two contending qualities dominating her life: altruism and egotism. He believed the first prevailed before 1907 and the second after, when she became president of the Theosophical Society. But every displaced or competing male leader of a group she mastered and manipulated would be likely to complain of her egotism even though he might concede her humane motives in the past.

Anne Taylor has used to good effect, and apparently for the first time, Annie Besant's letters to W. T. Stead, the crusading journalist, which are in the library of Churchill College, Cambridge. They reveal a warm if brief working partnership in behalf of a quixotic scheme of local vigilance committees monitoring the misuse of authority during the heated labor agitation of 1887-88. They also portray a woman of forty rather boldly

pursuing an intimate involvement with Stead to which he did not respond. This revelation of urgent but unfulfilled emotional needs expressed in social policy and in personal relations represents another formulaic explanation, something of a paradigm for Annie Besant's life as a whole. These letters express in her own words a longing for sacrificial labor in a great cause, for a strong man to work with, for a father lost when she was young and perhaps also when she abolished an unjust God. In some mixture, these themes can be discerned throughout her later life.

Another approach to explaining Annie Besant, based upon her deep early religious experience, is that of substitutions: her social passion was a displaced religious passion; her militant atheism and then her Theosophy were alternative ways of being religious; her later love of Theosophical mystery, Indian robes, and co-Masonic rituals were revivals of her early High Church enthusiasm. For some, her anti-Christian trajectory at mid-career seemed likely to bring her eventually back to the Church: she would end as a Catholic, possibly even as a nun.

Though she was never a feminist—"having struggled free from Frank Besant, Annie ceased to think of herself as an oppressed female"—she seemed to some to use her womanhood against men in competitive triumphs as well as by seductive appeal. Were her successes achieved in spite of her gender or because of it? Certainly her status as a powerful woman was unsettling to many men. Such an amalgam of Aimee Semple McPherson and Margaret Thatcher was a problem for the male Victorian mind with deep implications still to be explored.

Finally, Anne Taylor suggests that what drove her was not only sacrifice in a cause in which Right and Wrong were clearly identifiable, but

martyrdom in that cause: not the martyrdom of death, but of total submission of self to something higher. The world's resistance, rancor, and ridicule were both the price and the proof of being in the right, and they could be borne if so understood. Martyrdom not only was required by, but validated the cause. These and the other attempts at deep explanation of motivation are of course in the domain of psychobiography, which tries to show that extraordinary actions imply extraordinary motives, that public life must be connected to inner life, early causes to later effects. Psychohistorians and psychobiographers, whether they be Freudians or proponents of the newer Ego Psychology, still have opportunities for new interpretations of Annie Besant, and none is likely to prove final.

In the matter of Krishnamurti, Anne Taylor's narrative tells the familiar story, from the discovery of the two Brahmin boys on the beach at Adyar in 1909 up to Krishnamurti's renunciation of his mission in 1929, all within the last thirty-five pages of the book. And in these few pages she devotes more attention to Annie Besant's Indian nationalist politics than to her tutelage of the coming World Teacher. The primary and secondary materials for Krishnamurti's early career are copious—witness the books of Lady Emily Lutyens and her daughter Mary, and of Nethercot—so Anne Taylor's compression of it perhaps suggests a waning interest in this phase of Annie Besant's life. Indeed, the first twenty years of her Theosophical career, 1890-1909, which centered on Blavatsky, Leadbeater, and the Theosophical factions, are far more fully and engagingly presented than her last twenty years. The author's portrayal of Krishnamurti is consistent with the familiar image of the dreamy, compliant, yet somehow charismatic youth; but she makes the most of his

sense of play-acting and of the eager adulation of his entourage. Annie Besant fares no better than the rest of them: still trusting the Masters, debating the signs of the coming revelation, in her old age she is left distraught and confused by the collapse of her certainties. (We may note, though Anne Taylor does not, how much this puts Annie Besant in the tradition of disappointed Christian millenarian prophets.)

Did Krishnamurti's abandonment of the mission Annie Besant defined for him vitiate her Theosophical teaching? How much of it was an elaboration of Blavatsky's ideas, and how much was new? What was the position of the conservatives who called her teaching "Neo-Theosophy," and how did she respond to them? These are a few of the questions about Annie Besant as a Theosophical thinker that are not seriously discussed by Anne Taylor. But perhaps the requirements of a readable biography do not include much more analysis than she has provided. For Annie Besant's thought, no better book exists than Catherine Lowman Wessinger's *Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism (1847-1933)* (Lewiston, N. Y. & Queenston, Ontario: the Edwin Mellen Press, 1988). Ideally, Taylor and Wessinger should be read in conjunction, the literary skills of the first supplemented by the earnest analysis of the second.

The answer to the question raised earlier, "is this book necessary?" is a definite Yes. Although Anne Taylor offers far less detail than Nethercot, and skims somewhat too lightly over intellectual issues, she draws upon several new sources, helps to bridge the Western and the Eastern experience in Annie Besant's life, emphasizes the process of transition between her causes, and provides a solid sense of their social, political, and intellectual context. She has gone a long way

toward making Nethercot's nine lives into one life. A fully satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon of Annie Besant has yet to be provided, but several plausible ones have been offered in this competent, well-written, and attractive volume.

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