'Riding the Tiger'

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IN HIS BOOK entitled Calvacare la Tigre,1 Julius Evola seeks to show how

the 'naturally traditional' man, the man who is aware of an inner

reality transcending the plane of individual experiences, may not only

survive in the anti-traditional ambience of the Modern world, but may

even use it for his own spiritual ends, according to the well-known

Chinese metaphor of the man tiding a tiger: if he does not let himself

be unseated, he will end by gaining the advantage over it.

The tiger, in the sense envisaged by Evola, is the dissolving and

destructive force that comes into play towards the end of every cosmic

cycle. In the face of this, the author says, it would be vain to maintain

the forms and structure of a civilization that is already played out; the

only thing to be done is to carry the negation beyond its dead point, so

that, by a conscious transposition, it may end up, not in nothingness,

but in a 'new empty space, which may perhaps be the premiss of a

new formative activity'.

The world that is to be negated because it is doomed to destruction, is

above all the 'materialistic and bourgeois civilization' which in itself

already represents the negation of an earlier and superior world. On

this point, we are in agreement with the author, but we note

immediately that he does not distinguish between the forms pertaining

to this 'bourgeois' civilization and the sacred heritage which survives

within it and despite it. Likewise, he seems to include in the fate of

this civilization everything that remains of the Oriental civilizations,

and here too he makes no distinction between their social structures

and their spiritual kernel. We shall return to this later.

Let us first refer to another aspect of this book, with which we can

agree almost without reservation. This is the author's critique, often

masterly, of the various currents of Modern thought. Evola does not

1 Milan, Scheiwiller, 1961.

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place himself on the ground of philosophical discussion, for the

Modern philosophy in question is no longer a 'science of the true'it

does not even claim to be so. He considers it as a symptom, as the

mental reflection of a vital and existential situation, essentially

dominated by despair: since the dimension of transcendence has been

denied, there can henceforth only be impasses; there is no longer any

exit from the vicious circle of the mental element left to its own

devices; all that remains is a description of one's own defeat. As

starting-point of this analysis, the author chooses the 'philosophy' of

Nietzsche, in which he detects a presentiment of transcendent realities

and as it were an attempt to go beyond the purely mental order, an

attempt foredoomed to failure by the absence of a spiritual doctrine

and discipline.

With the same acuity, the author analyzes the foundations of modern

science. From this chapter, we will quote the following passage,

which replies pertinently to the pseudo-spiritual illusions of certain

scientific circles:

From this latter point of view, the most recent science offers no advantage

over the materialistic science of yesterday. With the help of atoms and the

mechanical conception of the universe, one could still imagine something

(albeit in a very crude way); the entities of the latest physico-mathematical

science, on the contrary, are absolutely unimaginable; they amount to

nothing more than the holes in a network constructed and perfected not in

order to know in the concrete, intuitive, and living sense of the termin

other words, according to the only mode that has any value for a still

undegenerate humanitybut solely in order to exert a control, ever greater

but always exterior, over nature which, in its essence, remains closed to

man and more mysterious than ever. For its mysteries have in fact merely

been 'covered over'; our gaze has been diverted from them by the

spectacular achievements of technology and industry onto a plane where it

is no longer a question of knowing the world, but only of transforming it

for the ends of a humanity that has become exclusively worldly...

Let us repeat that it is a hoax to speak of the spiritual value of recent

science because in it one now speaks of energy instead of matter, because

it peers inside the mass of coagulated irradiations,

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or because it envisages a space of more than three dimensions... These are

notions which, when they have been substituted for those of earlier

physics, can in no wise alter the experience which the man of today can

have of the world... When people say that there is no matter, only energy,

that we do not live in a Euclidean space of three dimensions, but in a

'curved' space of four or more dimensions, and so on, things remain as they

were before, my real experience changes in nothing, the ultimate meaning

of what I seelight, sun, fire, sea, sky, plants that flower and beings that

diethe ultimate meaning of every process and phenomenon has in no way

become more transparent for me. There is no justification for speaking of a

knowledge that goes beyond appearances, or that knows in depth, in the

spiritual and truly intellectual meaning of the term ....

No less pertinent are the author's remarks on the social structures and

the arts of the contemporary world. We must nevertheless express a

reservation regarding the thesis of the 'enslavement of the negative

force', as he applies it to certain aspects of Modern life. Let us quote a

typical passage:

The positive possibilities (of the reign of the machine) can only concern a

tiny minority, namely those beings in whom the dimension of

transcendence pre-exists or in whom it c be awakened... They alone can

give a completely different value to the 'soulless world' of machines,

technologies, Modern cities, in short, of everything that is pure reality and

objectivity, which appears cold, inhuman, menacing, devoid of intimacy,

depersonalizing, 'barbarous'. It is precisely by entirely accepting this

reality and these processes that the differentiated man will be able to

realize his essence and form himself according to a valid personal

equation...

In this connection the machine itself and everything, in certain sectors of

Modern life, that has been formed in terms of pure functionality

(especially architecture) can become symbol. As symbol, the machine

represents a form born of an exact and objective adequation of means to an

end, excluding everything that is superfluous, arbitrary, dispersive, and

subjective; it is a form that realizes with precision an idea (that of the end

to which it

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is destined). On its level, it thus reflects in a certain way the value which,

in the classical world, pure geometric form (the number as essence)

possessed, just like the Doric principle of nothing too much...

Here the author forgets that the symbol is not a form that is

'objectively' adequate to just any kind of end, but a form that is

adequate to a spiritual end or to an intellectual essence; if there is a

coincidence, in some traditional arts, between conformity to a

practical end and conformity to a spiritual end, this is because the first

does not contradict the second, something that cannot be said of the

machine, which is inconceivable outside the context of a desacralized

world. In fact, the form of the machine expresses exactly what it is,

namely a sort of challenge offered to the cosmic and divine order; it

may well be composed of 'objective' geometric elements such as

circles and squares, but in its relationship or rather nonrelationshipwith the cosmic ambience, it translates, not a 'Platonic

idea', but a 'mental coagulation', or indeed an agitation or a trick.

There are certainly some border-line cases, like that of a machine that

is still close to a tool, or like that of a modern ship whose shape

espouses to a certain degree the movements of water and wind, but

this is no more than a fragmentary conformity and does not contradict

what we have just said. As for 'functional' architecture, including

modern urbanism, it can only be called 'objective' if one accepts that

its purpose is objective, which is obviously not the case: all

architecture is co-ordinated to a certain conception of life and of man;

now Evola himself condemns the social programme underlying

modern architecture. In reality, the apparent 'objectivity' of modern

architecture is merely a mysticism in reverse, a congealed

sentimentality disguised as objectivity; moreover one has seen often

enough just how quickly this attitude is converted, in its protagonists,

into the most changeable and arbitrary of subjectivisms.

It is true that there is no form that is totally cut off from its eternal

archetype; but this entirely general law cannot be invoked here, for the

following reason: for a form to be a symbol, it is necessary that it be

situated in a certain hierarchical order in relation to man. In order to

be as precise as possible, let us distinguish three aspects of the

symbolism inherent in things: the first is simply the very existence of

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the form concerned, and in this sense, each thing manifests its

celestial origin; the second aspect is the meaning of a form, its

intellectual interpretation, either within a given system or in itself, by

virtue of its more or less essential or prototypical nature; the third

aspect is the spiritual efficacy of the symbol, which presupposes, in

the man who uses it, both a psychic and a ritual conformity to a given

tradition.

We have emphasized this point, because Julius Evola fails to

recognize the crucial importance of a traditional attachment, while

admitting the possibility of a spontaneous or irregular spiritual

development, guided by a sort of inborn instinct that may be

actualized by accepting the crisis of the present world as a liberating

catharsis. For Evola, this is almost the only perspective remaining

open for the 'differentiated man' of our time, for adherence to a

religion, in Evola's view, amounts to integration in a more or less

decadent collective milieu, and the possibility of a regular initiation is

dismissed.

We conclude that in our day this possibility must be practically excluded,

as a result of the almost complete non-existence of the respective

organizations. If organizations of this kind have always had a more or less

underground character in the Westbecause of the nature of the religion

which succeeded in gaining dominance there and its repressive and

persecuting activitiesthey have completely disappeared in latter times. As

regards other pans of the globe, especially the Orient, these organizations

have become more and more rare and inaccessible, even if the forces of

which they were the vehicles had not withdrawn from them, in parallel

with the general process of degeneration and modernization, which has

finished by invading even these regions. In our day, even the Orient is no

longer capable of supplying anything but offshoots or a 'régime of

residues'; one is already forced to admit this when one considers the

spiritual level of those Asiatics who have begun to export Eastern wisdom

and to divulge it amongst us.

The last argument is absolutely inconclusive: if the Asiatic in question

were true representatives of Eastern traditions, would they divulge

them? But, even if Evola were right in his judgement of the traditional

organizations as human groups, his way of seeing things

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nonetheless involves a serious error, for as long as a tradition

preserves its essential forms intact, it continues to be the guarantor of

a spiritual influenceor of a divine gracewhose action, if not always

apparent, immeasurably transcends anything that is in the the power

of man. We know full well that there exist methods or ways, such as

Zen, which are founded on the 'power of one's self' and which thereby

distinguish themselves from other ways founded on the 'power of the

other', that is to say making an appeal to Grace; but neither the ones

nor the others are situated outside the formal framework of a given

tradition. For example Zen, which perhaps offers us the most striking

example of a non-formal spirituality, is completely, and even

especially, aware of the value of sacred forms. One transcends forms,

not by rejecting them in advance, but by integrating them in their

supra-formal essences.

Moreover, Evola himself defines the mediating function of form when

he speaks of the role of the spiritual 'type', which he opposes to the

individual or the 'personality' in the profane and modern sense of the

term: 'The type (la tipicità) represents the point of contact between the

individual and the supraindividual, the demarcation line between the

two corresponding to a perfect form. The type de-individualizes, in

the sense that the person then essentially incarnates an idea, a law, a

function ...' The author says rightly that the spiritual type is normally

situated within the framework of a tradition, but apparently this does

not lead him to believe in the 'typical'or supraindividualnature of all

sacred forms, doubtless because he does not take into account what

the monotheistic religions call revelation. Now it is illogical to accept

the 'transcendent dimension' of the beingin other words the effective

participation of the human intellect in the Universal Intellectwithout

also accepting revelation, that is to say the manifestation of this

Intellect or Spirit in objective forms. There is a rigorous relationship

between the supra-formal, free, and undetermined nature of the Spirit

and its spontaneousand thus 'Heaven-inspired'expression, in forms

necessarily determined and immutable. In their origin, which is

unlimited and inexhaustible, the sacred forms (although limited and

'arrested') are the vehicles of spiritual influences, and thus of

virtualities of the infinite, and in this regard it is completely improper

to speak of a tradition of which only the form remainsthe spirit

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having withdrawn from it like the soul from a dead body: the death of

a tradition always starts with the corruption of its essential forms.

According to all the prophecies, the sacred deposit of the integral

Tradition will remain until the end of the cycle; this means that there

will always be somewhere an open door. For men capable of

transcending outward shells, and animated by a sincere will, neither

the decadence of the surrounding world, nor belonging to a given

people or milieu, constitute absolute obstacles.

Quaerite et invenietis.

Let us return for a moment to the title of Evola's book: the adage that

one must 'ride the tiger' if one does not want to be torn to pieces by it,

obviously contains a tantric meaning. The tiger is then the image of

the passional force which one must tame. One may well wonder

whether this metaphor really corresponds to the spiritual man's

attitude regarding the destructive tendencies of the modern world: let

us note first of all that not just anything is a 'tiger'; behind the

tendencies and forms that Julius Evola envisages, we shall find no

natural and organic force, no shakti dispensing power and beauty;

now, the spiritual man can use rajas, but he must reject tamas; finally,

there are forms and attitudes that are incompatible with the intimate

nature of the spiritual man and with the rhythms of every form of

spirituality. In reality, it is not the particular, artificial, and hybrid

characteristics of the modern world that can serve as spiritual

supports, but that which, within this world, is of all time.