This is the Prologue and Introduction to a book that has just been published, only in Kindle format, by Frank Julian Gelli, who frequented Evola in the years before his death.

« PROLOGUE

In Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, The Approach to al-Mu’tasim, the nameless protagonist, a fugitive Muslim student, searches for a remote person, a man – or more than a man - called al-Mu’tasim. A messiah, perhaps, or a magus, or the master of an arcane, heavenly fraternity. The way the young man has intuited al-Mu’tasim existence is problematical, as it befits its enigmatic subject. Borges writes of “the subtle reflections” the person of al-Mu’tasim has left on others, even the lowest, most despicable characters. And yet, such trifling traces are enough to make the hero set out on his quest. Years go by. After an odyssey of vertiginous adventures in the Indian subcontinent the searcher does at last attain his ineffable goal, although the reader remains tantalisingly ignorant as to the precise nature of the murky al-Mu’tasim. The hero, or anti-hero - take your pick - of this book is not quite like the elusive character conjured up by Borges’ fantasy. His identity is all too well-known. Unlike the hidden al-Mu’tasim, Julius Evola’s friends and disciples found it easy to approach him, confined as he was to a wheelchair in his attic in central Rome. Nonetheless, I believe this very exposure has tended to obscure Evola’s true meaning and character. As opacity and distance blurred and concealed the person of al-Mu’tasim, so proximity and publicity have obstructed Evola’s genuine recognition. In a nutshell, he was misunderstood. That is why this writer feels a bit like the searcher in Borges’ tale. One difference is that the figure searched for is not generally considered saintly but satanic. For so many, Evola’s reputation is indeed so infamous that my task is beset with dangers – I am fully aware of that. I also realise how some will perhaps judge me as blameworthy as my subject. (Indeed, like the runaway student I too have long been in flight, I too have trodden the paths of infamy...) But at least I can claim to know the extraordinary figure I write about. The innumerable reflections he has left on my soul have led me to pen these Erinnerungen. I have done so in order to put the record straight. To tell the truth – or what I believe to be the truth – about Julius Evola. I owe it to the man whom, in hindsight, I have come to regard almost as a mentor – and whom, I believe – or I like to believe – considered me like the lost son he never knew. Julius Evola. Not quite the tenebrous magus mythologised and maligned by his many enemies, but, like Borges’ al-Mu’tasim, an intriguing, spellbinding teacher. To paraphrase Rene’ Guenon, verily Evola was an implausible but actual Roi de Rome.

INTRODUCTION

Julius Evola was, like me, a Roman, a Roumi, to use the Arabic for it. Unlike me, Evola’s name has become a byword for things, ideas, orientations that are heretical, loathsome and abominable to our Zeitgeist. He was accused, like Socrates, of being a corrupter of youth. That was because of a cult following amongst young men on the far right, including even a few terrorists. But that was not all. Equally outrageous is Evola the occultist, the magician, the sinister figure endowed perhaps with supernatural power to kill at a distance, as even Mussolini believed. He had known Himmler, and had lectured in the castles of the Schutzstaffel Order. Evola, a man under a curse. The very mention of his name brings danger. It might make you suspect, bring you discredit and disgrace, cause you to lose your job, be prosecuted, physically attacked... und so weiter. Yet the thesis of this book is that Julius Evola’s deeper, true ideas were somewhat disguised in his works. Or, rather, openly displayed, so that the discerning reader might surmise the joyful truth. Like the stolen missive in Edgar Allan Poe’s The Purloined Letter, Evola’s true, unknown personality and beliefs are hidden - hidden in plain view. Indeed, that is the best hiding place, as most people are dazzled by the obvious. To my knowledge, I am the first one who has divined this. Is this presumptuous? Maybe, but I believe it is true. Evola was a Sufi. Or, better, a crypto-Sufi. A hidden, self-concealing follower of the path of Tasawwuf. A mystical, if heretical, master in the Islamic tradition. Rene Guenon, that occult French writer and convert to mystical Islam, had secretly initiated him into a Sufi fraternity. Evola came close to admitting that at times. Like many Sufis, he often taught not directly but by hints, allusions and suggestions. The clues to his authentic views are disseminated through his writings, and more openly and blatantly in the conversations he had with me. He took a wicked pleasure in upsetting right-thinking, conventional and dull people, both of the Right and of the Left. Yes, he enjoyed being contrary, perverse, also shocking his admirers and friends. Of course, it was a dangerous game. It meant exclusion, alienation from intellectual circles and spheres of power. Indeed, even during Mussolini’s regime, one that perhaps approximated his outer views, Evola was barred from having any real influence. I suspect that was intentional. It was a daring strategy, one that courted contempt, rejection and persecution, but it was his own way. Sufis are a large, confusing and mixed bag of tricks, some quietist and contemplative, others activist, fierce and war-like. Evola, I believe, belonged to perhaps the most outrageous, far-out type of all. The malamatiya, the people of blame. No detailed knowledge of what such sect teaches is extant because the available source material is sketchy and contradictory but this is clear: the malamatiya deliberately flaunt conventions. They indulge in conduct that brings them shame. That has nothing to do with things pathological, such as masochism. Rather, it is the outcome of a genuine spiritual vocation. There are analogies in Christianity, amongst the Desert Fathers of Egypt, for example. Sufi mystics desire to draw close to the Divine – even to annihilate themselves (fana’) in God. Because of that, they live dangerously. So did Evola. But the seeming paradox posed by some of the more atrocious of his outer teachings, such as certain racial views, I hope can be reconciled when we see it for what it really was: part of a self-chosen, arduous Sufi spiritual path. A selfabasement, a lowering of oneself in the service of what was a higher, necessary stage, he felt, in the journey towards immortality. Of course, he hardly ever used the word ‘God’ positively in his teachings, because of the crudely personal connotations that term has acquired in popular monotheism. He preferred to speak of Transcendence, of ‘what is higher’ - surely a different way of expressing the same thing. Despite his exaltation of the military caste, Evola was not a man of overt action. Hence his malamatiya posture was conveyed largely through his works and private talks. In the books the reader finds frequent references to secret Sufi circles. At times he gestures towards the Shia strand of Islam. I am morally certain he had had direct experience of Sufism through Rene Guenon and through another, nameless master. Meetings during my trips to Cairo were a confirmation of that. He told me again and again of his admiration for the esoteric teachings of Twelver Shiism, and the figure of the Imam al-Mahdi. Before he died, he also prophesied an imminent resurgence of Islam. As we know, he was right. Evola the heretical Sufi. Evola the Islamic initiate. A thesis that will annoy many people, I am sure. Especially among the Right, in whose ranks Evola’s disciples are still not insignificant. The reason is that the European Right has made anti-Muslim agitation one of its main political planks. I believe Evola would say that they are wrong in that. I also believe the evidence for Evola’s unorthodox Sufism is overwhelming. This book sets out to show it. »

Without having read the whole book yet, and without going so far as to say that you can judge a book by its cover, the following short review seriously supports the impression I have that you can judge a book by its title (Julius Evola: The Sufi of Rome):

« How do you critique a book whose aim is to reveal the true identity of such a subversive figure? The first question I asked myself was whether the author really succeeds in showing us that Julius Evola was a Sufi initiate.

Then the answer is clearly no. Certain elements lead us to believe that he had some knowledge of Islam: the fact that he is called by Johan Van Leers (a German SS Muslim convert in Cairo) "the second Roman"; that he mentions the Qarmatians or that he cites the Koran to talk about the involution of Man.

Beyond this aspect, the book is a good gateway to understand who Julius Evola was and how he was perceived by people (he was scary). Apart from his personality and figure, there are two major themes that stood out for me in this book:

Islam and his praise of it.

Firstly, he says that Islam in its most violent form is bound to reappear (I think he even gives the example of Turkey). In the second part he exploits a quote from Nietzsche (from The Gay Knowledge if I remember correctly) which is too often overused and shortened and where he says that the shadow of God will always have to be fought, despite his death. Finally, his predictions and thoughts on Islam are for the most part confirmed, especially on the Uighurs, who will never abjure their true faith and will always oppose the Chinese regime.

His criticism of hedonism and the suspicious behaviour of Nietzsche (aya [sic] Lou Salome and the photo with the whip).

Philosophers like Netzsche or Bentham are also criticised by Evola. Nietzsche is frontally humiliated with remarks about his sexuality and Bentham is criticized for having "introduced hedonism into legislation" and contributed to its institutionalization as a guiding principle in society, all under the aegis of abandoning spirituality for "dogmatic rationalism." » (<https://www.senscritique.com/livre/Julius_Evola_The_Sufi_of_Rsme/critique/240533609>)

According to the author, this is what Evola told him about Bentham: « Modern experimental behaviourism owes much to Bentham. Rats in a maze, reacting to electric shocks or to a bit of cheese. You understand? Pleasure and pain as bates, as means to shaping, controlling the conduct of human beings...And all in the name of democracy, free trade, liberalism and so on. Of course, Bentham conceived his philosophy of domination under the aegis of reform and progress. He belonged to the misnamed ‘age of reason’. Dogmatic rationalism would be a better word. Tradition, religion, authority were his targets and he knew how to drag them down, to knock them off their pedestals...Unlike the French philosophes, staunch enemies of revealed religion, he paid lip service to Christianity but his anthropology was materialistic, mercantile...Allegedly, he believed in a deity but in practice his god was rather like one of Epicurus’ gods. Useless deities, dwelling intermundia, between planets, and caring not a jot for human affairs. For a consistent materialist, God can only be like an absentee landlord... It goes back to another disastrous Englishman, Hobbes [In « Modernità di Hobbes? », Lo Stato, X, n° 1, January 1939 [p. 24-33], p. 31, Evola still stated : "This Leviathan [is] [...] the involutive phase; the survival of the old traditional state"]. For him reality consisted only of matter in motion and its modifications. Bentham, like Hobbes, abominated spirituality... His calculus of felicity, how to balance power and pain in a pseudo-scientific manner, is pretty droll... even his disciple, the far more consistent – and dangerous – J.S. Mill [the author of the risible book called The Subjection of Women, 1869; the link that Evola establishes here between the designer of the Panopticon and that servant knight of women is certainly worth exploring] had to give that up. But the panopticon idea thrives on. I am told there are many prisons around the world built on that design [so Evola noticed it before Foucault did, who also noted that Bentham wanted to turn the world into a p-reason]. And, as I said, Bentham’s hedonism is a true hallmark of modern society. He plotted well, you have to recognise it. But I am reminded of that sentence in the Qur’an. It refers to the schemes, the plots of the wicked against the Prophet but it goes on to state: "Allah is the best of plotters." » - Is « he »?

The account of the author's first meeting with Evola deserves to be quoted in full, if only for the reason emphasised:

« I got to know Evola in this way. A friend, Bruno, invited me to the gatherings of a student club, the Solstice. We met at various venues – the main one being in Prati district - but occasionally in central Rome, near Via di Pietra, a little alley off the trendy, shopping Via del Corso. Via di Pietra was different. A haunt of prostitutes and louche characters. The Solstice boys were students and fogeys deep into conservative thought. The circle’s soul was Adriano Romualdi, a bespectacled young man with a mop of fizzy, gingerish hair. I remember his perennially quizzical, ironic look and his precise, finicky manner of speaking. Amusingly, Adriano was rumoured to be Mussolini’s grandson, because his father, the far-right MP Pino Romualdi, apparently boasted of being the Duce’s natural offspring. Fact or fiction, Adriano was one of Evola’s intellectual followers. I do not think he particularly liked me – I was not from his social set of Roman snobs – but when Bruno asked if I could also be allowed to visit the guru, Adriano grudgingly agreed.

It did not go well. There were four of us sitting around Evola. The host, black-haired and, despite his age, still handsome, acknowledged all the others but I might as well have been invisible. He totally ignored me, not honouring me with a single glance. As no one likes rejection, especially from a famed teacher of wisdom, I left feeling somewhat depressed. Next day the phone rang. It was Adriano. ‘Evola would like to see you again’, he said. I could feel the ill-concealed annoyance in his voice. I was taken aback – I thought the Baron had disliked me - but of course I agreed. So, days later I returned with Adriano to the flat in Corso Vittorio. This time Evola was friendly - I cheered up. Another call from Adriano followed. Evola wanted to speak to me. ‘Where shall I meet you?’ I asked Adriano. ‘Just you’, Adriano said, acidly. ‘You go by yourself.’ He must have been just as stunned as I was, though not as pleased.

That was the start of a long relationship. I would not call it a friendship. The age difference was too great. I was also too much in awe of him. But I was flattered. Also, to be honest, a bit worried. As many insecure young men, I was suspicious of gays – then disparagingly called froci in Italian. There were many froci among far right militants. It was a paradox: officially homophobic, even engaging in occasional gay-bashing, the far right abounded with people preferring their own sex. Pretty youths were not safe. There were rumours about Evola. Under the fascist regime his elitist and aristocratic ideas had earned him attacks from the brain-dead side of the regime’s activists. “Miss Evola, a pederast”, they mocked him. Utterly untrue. Evola’s sexuality was straight. I can vouchsafe that. Nonetheless, on my way to see him, I was a little bit apprehensive. I should not have worried. Evola displayed none of the mannerisms attributed to a certain type of gay man. Not a single time, for example, do I remember any attempt at physical contact, even the slightest and more innocent. Unlike Englishmen, Italians touch each other all the time but Evola was different. He regarded tactile tendencies as a sign of low extraction. All right, there was an element of aristocratic, even religious disdain in that. Noli me tangere – “don’t come near me”, as the risen Christ told Mary Magdalene. However, with me he behaved perfectly naturally. Over time, I grew to regard him as a mentor, but with qualifications. His avowed racialism, for instance, ‘spiritual’ and misunderstood though it was supposed to be, bewildered me. I could not make sense of it. Only much later I found out the secret behind the views that had made him notorious. » (emphasis mine)

The book is full of quotes from conversations the author had with Evola. I will quote only one here, about the Italian people:

« ‘Yes, you know what I think. It is not fascism that failed Italy, it is the Italian people – I should say, a certain type of Italian, the lowest element, the majority, alas - who let down the regime’s ideals...Yes, there were exceptions, like the heroic charge of that cavalry regiment in Russia – you must have seen the film, Carica Eroica, I am sure – like the boys of the Decima (Navy Commando Units). Still, you can see what Mussolini meant when he said that you could not win a war with merda. Too many Italians were merda. Their conduct in the war showed they had no stomach, no guts, no balls. Therefore they took their revenge on their leader, the one who had tried to forge them into another people, into what they were not. For a while they had believed it. I mean, they had thought of themselves as something different, heroic, hardy, a people of steel, so they were all the more enraged when they realised what they actually were – ballless, spineless, invertebrates. So they transferred their self-hatred on their fallen leader. The scapegoat, a Hebrew myth, comes handy here. And the Jews had taken their religion from the Egyptians, as Dr Freud claimed. Seth, again, obviously... »

Gelli's prodigious - the word is not too strong - memory, however, fails him on the racial question. All he can remember is that : « There is no question in my mind that, however stoical, the Baron in his dark moods felt bitter about the extent of his reputation as a racist. » In his mind.

All things considered, it is a pity that the author - a British priest apparently not unknown to the British media - does not say what prompted him to publish his recollections of his discussions with Evola almost fifty years after these took place.