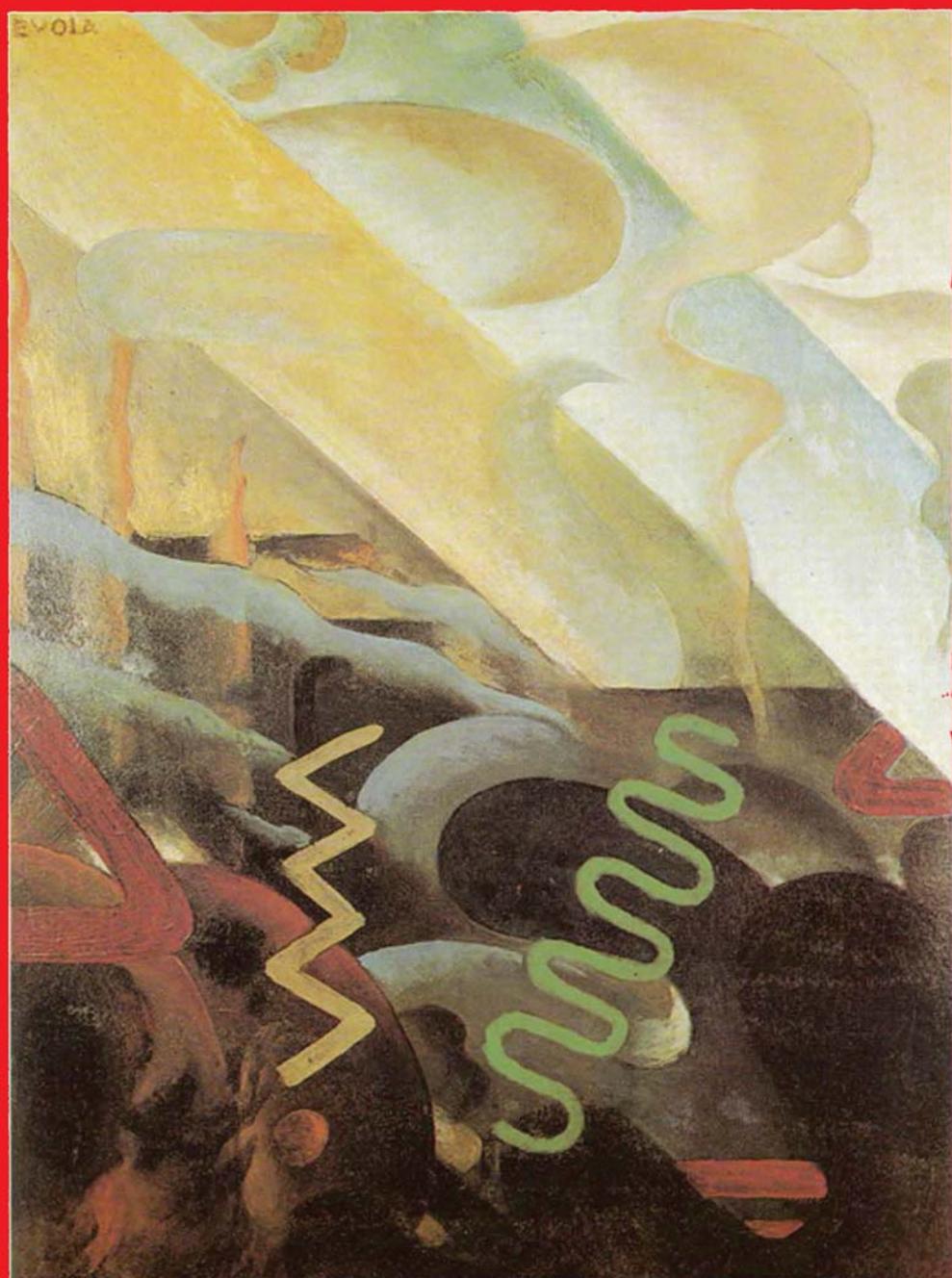


# EVOLA & DADAISM



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**BOOKS**



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\*Cover illustration: *Abstraction*, oil on canvas (393 x 300), 1921.



**Composition**, 1919 Ink drawing.

## BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF JULIUS EVOLA

Julius Evola was born in Rome on 19 May 1898 into a family of ancient noble origins. From his early youth, he was attracted to the most anti-conformist culture of his time: Marinetti and Futurism, Papini and Lacerba, Tzara and Dadaism.

Evola maintained correspondence with Tristan Tzara and embraced Dadaism by painting several pictures which, for some, reveal him to be the most interesting exponent of Italian Dadaism. Evola signed the nearly twenty articles that appeared between 1927 and 1929 in the magazine of the *Ur* group with the pseudonym EA. Ea, who in ancient Akkadian mythology was the god of water and wisdom, is a symbol that also appears in his early Dadaist poem *The Dark Word of the Inner Landscape*. Thus, from the outset, he felt a longing to transcend the merely material condition of existence, linking his own image with that of an entity superior to his individuality. For Evola, art thus acquired its traditional meaning, without the mediated and commercialised aspect it took on in the 20th century. Art is the objective communion between the soul of the artist and the spirit that inspires it. Water, wind, the beauty of ice, are transfused into its essence as an avatar of tradition in a way that can only be appreciated from the doctrine of the multiple states of being.

Evola was driven by an original longing for transcendence; he had within him the intimate disposition of *the kshatriya*, the warrior, which led him to action. In 1917, at the age of nineteen, he took part in the First World War as an artillery officer. Evola was not a nationalist, and was rather attracted to the imperial states against which he had to fight. He was assigned to front-line positions where he had to climb the slopes of Mount Aciago. From then on, he began his meditations on the peaks, as well as his love of mountaineering, which would continue throughout his life. He considered climbing mountains to be an inner experience.

Evola, who did not participate in any significant military actions, returned to Rome at the end of the war. The following years were marked by a dramatic and decisive existential crisis. He felt the need to achieve greater introspection.

, beyond the limits imposed by the five physical senses: he began to use narcotics to somehow mitigate his thirst for the absolute. But this did not solve anything, and the situation worsened until it reached a dead end; he was 23 years old, the age at which Weininger and Michelstaedter committed suicide. He then decided to end his life. But something happened. Reading a text on the origins of Buddhism, he experiences a kind of enlightenment, fundamental to undergoing an internal transformation that will arm him with a strength capable of withstanding any crisis. Evola will not renounce these experiences, but he will be emphatic in clarifying that drugs never enslaved him and that, after that period, he no longer felt the need or lack of those substances. Thus ended one stage of his life. In fact, by 1921 Evola was fully devoted to painting, and although he abandoned it in 1922, he wrote poetry.

He then began his philosophical period. In 1917, he had begun writing *Theory and Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual*, a work he completed in 1924 and which was published in two volumes in 1927 and 1930. In these two books, Evola links his interest in philosophy with the doctrine that treasures the supra-rational, the sacred and gnosis. The aim was to overcome the duality of self/non-self: the subject who perceives the world must feel that what the world evokes is himself; that the confines of his being are more extensive than the consciousness of waking experience; and he must understand that the world is a 'crystallised hypnosis from which he escapes, and that he awakens from the world of the senses through mental discipline'.

In Evola's theorisation, this is the influence exerted by Tantric wisdom which, as is well known, denies any dualism between God and Nature, between man and the world. The world that surrounds him is divinity itself and is no different from the definitively liberated self. Reality is captive under the 'veil of Maya' that makes it dense, but once the veil is removed, the eye perceives that the entire universe is nothing more than an expression of one's own Being.

These were the years when Evola began to frequent Roman spiritualist circles: he came into contact with the *Kremmerziani*, theosophists and anthroposophists. From 1924 to 1926, he contributed to

magazines such as *Ultra*, *Bilychnis*, *Ignis*, and *Atanor*. Between 1927 and 1929, he developed his experience within the *UR Group*, of which Evola was the coordinator, and created a series of pamphlets that would be compiled into a three-volume anthology published by Bocca between 1955 and 1956, under the title *Introduction to Magic as a Science of the Self*.

In 1934, Julius Evola's main and fundamental work appeared: *Rebellion Against the Modern World*. In thirty-seven chapters, he paints a grandiose fresco of the morphology of history, outlining the traditional cyclical scheme of the four ages (gold, silver, bronze and iron in the Western tradition; *satva*, *treta*, *dvapara* and *kali yuga* in the Hindu tradition), common to both East and West.

The book is divided into two parts. The first deals with

a doctrine of the categories of the traditional spirit: royalty, law, the state, empire, ritual and patriciate, initiation, caste and chivalry, space, time, earth, and also sex, war, asceticism and action.

The second part contains 'an interpretation of history based on tradition, starting from myth'. It deals with topics such as: the decline of the superior races; the doctrine of the four ages; the Golden Age; the 'pole' and the Hyperborean seat; the Nordic-Atlantic cycle; North and South; the civilisation of the mother; the cycles of decline; the heroic cycle; tradition and anti-tradition; the Western heroic-Uranian cycle; the syncope of Western Tradition; early Christianity; the translation of the Empire; the Ghibelline Middle Ages; the collapse of the medieval ecumene; nations; unreality and individualism; the regression of castes; nationalism and collectivism; and, finally, the cycle closes: Russia and the United States.

The book is based on the dialectic between the modern world and the world of Tradition: the modern world bases its criteria on utility and time; the world of Tradition, on the value of the sacred and eternity. Under the current Iron Age—the *Kali Yuga*—order gives way to chaos, the sacred to matter, man to animality; the demon of the masses and sex, money and technical violence predominates. It is an age without mercy, without light, without love.

For Evola, it is the spirit that shapes the body:

The concept of race depends on the image one has of man... As a solid basis for my formulation, I take the traditional conception that recognises that man is a being composed of three elements: body, soul and spirit. A complete theory of race must therefore consider these elements.

During this period, he made several trips, especially to Germany, where he gave numerous lectures. In 1943, in an Italy convulsed by war, his book *La dottrina del risveglio (The Doctrine of Awakening)*, an essay on Buddhist asceticism, was published by Laterza. During the last year of the war, Evola was first in Germany and then in Vienna. In April 1945, he was caught in a bombing raid while walking through the streets of Vienna. Evola was thrown into the air, causing a spinal cord injury that paralysed his lower limbs. Despite all the surgical interventions, the paralysis was permanent.

In 1948, thanks to the International Red Cross, he was transferred to Bologna. In 1951, he returned to his home in Rome. He spent five years of true personal torment in hospital beds, with poor care and barely edible food. Evola considered this a test of self-improvement. Nothing or almost nothing remained of the past, and he felt the absence of Vienna and the mountains, of the world of aristocracy and the solitude of the peaks.

In 1953, *Los hombres y las ruinas (Men and Ruins)* was published, a book that was Evola's last attempt to promote a genuine political formation capable of forming an elite forged under the sign of Tradition, that is, of authority, hierarchy and the highest spirituality; men endowed with a fighting spirit, devoid of selfish impulses and marked by action illuminated by the sacred fire of duty to an Idea. Evola envisions an organic state based on the values of quality and personality.

Meanwhile, in 1958, *The Metaphysics of Sex* appeared, one of Evola's most thought-provoking books, in which he reveals the fundamental, magical and extremely powerful force of sex, the last remaining in a desecralised world which, together with the experience of

love, can give life a sacred character. The metaphysical force of sex is capable of illuminating, with a flash of transcendence, and tearing the veil of ordinary consciousness, both for men and women.

In his Roman apartment on Corso Vittorio Emanuele, Evola lives on his income and a war disability pension, translates books, writes articles for various publications and receives friends and curious visitors.

In 1968, while his thinking is being contrasted with that of Marcuse at the university, Evola suffers a severe heart attack. The same condition recurs in 1970. On this occasion, he recovers in a hospital with a doctor who is his personal friend. But annoyed by the extensive care provided by the nuns who attend to him, he threatens to report the doctor for kidnapping.

Although his body was failing, Evola's spirit remained strong and combative: he continued to write and give interviews. But his health steadily deteriorated, he lost strength, his body weakened and he had breathing and liver problems. He contracted trivial infections and ate little and reluctantly. Towards the end of May 1974, he felt increasingly weak and aware that his physical body would no longer sustain him.

On Tuesday, 11 June, in the early afternoon, when he felt death approaching, Evola asked to be taken to his desk in front of the window overlooking the Gianicolo. At three o'clock in the afternoon, he passed away. In his will, he had stipulated that his body be cremated and that no Catholic funeral be held or obituaries published.

His ashes, in accordance with his last will and testament, were entrusted to Eugenio David, his mountaineering companion from years ago. A relative of David's and a group of followers placed part of Evola's ashes in a crevice on Monte Rosso. The rest were scattered in the wind.

## THE LEGACY OF A EUROPEAN TRADITIONALIST. JULIUS EVOLA IN PERSPECTIVE

Guido Stucco \*

This article is a brief introduction to the life and central ideas of the controversial Italian thinker Julius Evola (1898-1974), one of the most important representatives of the European right and the "traditionalist movement"<sup>1</sup> in the twentieth century. This movement, together with the Theosophical Society, played a fundamental role in promoting the study of ancient Western wisdom, as well as esoteric doctrines and spirituality. Unlike the Theosophical Society, which championed a democratic and egalitarian vision, as well as an optimistic outlook on progress and a belief in spiritual evolution, the traditionalist movement adopted an elitist and anti-egalitarian stance, a pessimistic view of everyday life and history, and a drastic rejection of the modern world. The traditionalist movement began with René Guénon (1886-1951), a French philosopher and mathematician who converted to Islam and moved to Cairo in 1931 after the death of his first wife. Guénon revived interest in the concept of Tradition, that is, the teachings and doctrines of ancient civilisations and religions, emphasising their perennial value over and against the 'modern world' and its illustrious offspring: humanitarianism, individualism, relativism, materialism, and scientism. Other important traditionalists of the last century include Ananda Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon, and Julius Evola.

This article is aimed at people who consider themselves conservative and right-wing. It is my intention that Evola's political vision will help the American right wing to acquire greater intellectual relevance in order to escape its provincialism and narrow horizons. The most frequent criticism that the European "New Right" levels at American conservatives is that the ideological poverty of the American right lies in its attachment to a conservative agenda, as well as its inability to appreciate things in the light of a broader scheme <sup>(3)</sup>-By showing readers the validity and value of the world of Tradition,

Evola emphasised that being on the right involves much more than taking a stand on civic and social issues such as abortion, the death penalty, military strength, free enterprise, tax cuts, government downsizing, fierce patriotism and the right to bear arms, but rather towards more crucial issues concerning race, ethnicity, eugenics, immigration, and the nature of the nation-state.

Secondly, readers with a keen interest in metaphysical and spiritual matters may find Evola's profound thinking and his exposition of ancient esoteric techniques very rewarding. Furthermore, his positions, although sometimes appearing discriminatory, have the potential to become catalysts for personal transformation and spiritual growth.

To date, Evola's work has been the subject of a deliberate silencing. When not ignored, it is generally defamed by left-wing scholars and intellectuals, who demonise him as an evil teacher, a racist and a rabid anti-Semite; as the mastermind behind right-wing terrorism; as a fascist guru or as a racist so vile that it is repugnant to even mention him. The writer Martin Lee, whose knowledge of Evola is extremely superficial, calls him a "Nazi philosopher" and claims that "Evola helped draft Italy's late racist laws towards the end of the fascist regime"<sup>4</sup>. However, others have downplayed his contribution. Walter Laqueur, in his *Fascism: Past, Present, Future*, does not hesitate to call him a "well-versed charlatan; an eclectic, not an innovator," and suggests that "there are elements of pure nonsense in his later works" Umberto Eco sarcastically nicknamed Evola "Othelma, the magician."

The most valuable summaries of Evola's life and work in English have been written by Thomas Sheehan and Richard Drake<sup>6</sup>. Until such time as a biography or autobiography of Evola is published in the English-speaking world, these articles will remain the only source of reference for his life and work. Both are highly knowledgeable scholars of Italian culture, politics, and language. Although they do not sympathise with Evola's ideas, they were the first to introduce the Italian thinker's vision to the public.

American. Unfortunately, their interpretations of Evola's work are very limited. Sheehan and Drake succumb to leftist propaganda according to which Evola is a "bad teacher" because he allegedly provided ideological justification for the bloody campaign of right-wing terrorists in Italy during the 1980s<sup>7</sup>. Regrettably, both authors have underestimated Evola's *spissitudo spiritualis* as an esotericist and traditionalist, and have written about Evola simply as a case study in their respective fields of expertise: philosophy and history, respectively<sup>8</sup>.

Despite his many detractors, Evola has experienced something of a revival over the last twenty years. His works have been translated into French, German, Spanish and English, as well as Portuguese, Romanian, Japanese, Arabic, Hungarian and Russian. Lectures devoted to some aspect of his thought are spreading throughout Europe<sup>10</sup>. Thus, to paraphrase the title of Edward Albee's novel, we might ask: "Who's afraid of Julius Evola?" And more importantly, why?

### **The life of Julius Evola**

Julius Evola died of cardiac arrest in his apartment in Rome on 11 June 1974, at the age of seventy-six. Before he died, he asked to be seated at his desk to receive the sunlight coming through his window. In accordance with his wishes, his body was cremated and the urn containing his ashes was placed on the summit of Monte Rosa in the Italian Alps.

Evola's career as a writer spans more than half a century. Three periods can be distinguished in his intellectual development. First came an artistic period (1916-1922), during which he adhered to Dadaism and Futurism, wrote poetry, and painted in an abstract style. The reader may recall that Dadaism was an avant-garde movement founded by Tristan Tzara, characterised by a desire for absolute freedom and rebellion against all prevailing logical, ethical and aesthetic canons.

Later, Evola turned to the study of philosophy (1923-1927), developing an ingenious perspective that could be called "trans-idealist," that is, a solipsistic development within the mainstream of

idealism. After learning German in order to read the original texts of the leading idealist philosophers (Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel), Evola assimilated their fundamental premise: that being is a product of thought. Even so, he attempted to overcome the subject's passivity towards "reality", typical of idealist philosophy and its Italian followers – represented by Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce – and outlined the path that led to the "Absolute Individual", the state enjoyed by those who achieve it and become free (*ab-solutus*) from the conditioning of the empirical world. During this period, Evola wrote *Essay on Magical Idealism, Theory of the Absolute Individual*, and *Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual*, an enormous work that uses values such as freedom, will, and power to expound his philosophy of action. The Italian philosopher Marcello Veneziani wrote in his doctoral dissertation:

Evola's *absolute self* was born from the ashes of nihilism, with the help of his intuitions derived from magic, theurgy, alchemy, and esotericism, and ascends to the highest peaks of knowledge in search of the wisdom he discovered in the paths of initiatory doctrines<sup>11</sup>.

In the third, or final, phase of his intellectual development, Evola became involved in the study of esotericism and occultism (1927–1929). During this period, he co-founded and led the so-called *Ur* group, which published monthly monographs dedicated to presenting the teachings of esoteric and initiatory disciplines. "Ur" derives from the archaic root of the German word "fire"; in Teutonic it also means "primordial" or "original." In 1955, these monographs were compiled and published in three volumes under the title *Introduction to Magic as a Science of the Self* <sup>12</sup>. In the nearly twenty articles he wrote for the *Ur* group, under the pseudonym "EA" (*Ea* in ancient Akkadian mythology was the god of water and wisdom) and in the nine articles he wrote for *Bylichnis* (a name meaning "two-wick lamp"), an Italian Baptist journal, Evola laid the spiritual foundations of his worldview.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Evola wrote for various newspapers and published several books. In the Fascist era, he sympathised with Mussolini and Fascist ideology, but his deep-rooted sense of independence and his detachment from human affairs and institutions prevented him from becoming a *card-carrying* member of the

Fascist Party. Due to his belief in the supremacy of ideas over politics and his aristocratic and anti-populist views, which sometimes brought him into conflict with government policy—such as his opposition to the 1929 concordat between the Italian state and the Vatican, and Mussolini's "demographic campaign" to increase Italy's population—Evola escaped the fascist reprisals that silenced *La Torre*, the fortnightly publication he had founded, after only ten issues (February-June 1930)<sup>(13)</sup> .

Evola devoted four books to the subject of race, criticised National Socialist biological racism, and developed a doctrine of race based on the teachings of Tradition: *The Myth of Blood*; *Synthesis of a Doctrine of Race*; *Three Aspects of the Hebrew Problem*; *Elements for a Racial Education*. In these books, the author outlined his tripartite anthropology of body, soul, and spirit. The spirit is the principle that determines one's attitude towards the sacred, destiny, life and death. Thus, according to Evola, the cult of the 'spiritual race' must precede the selection of the somatic race, which is determined by the laws of genetics and with which the Nazis were obsessed. Evola's anti-materialist and non-biological perception of race won Mussolini's enthusiastic approval. For their part, the Nazis were very suspicious—and even critical—of Evola's "nebulous theories," accusing him of promoting an abstract, spiritualist, and semi-Catholic view of race to the detriment of the biological and empirical element.

Before and during World War II, Evola travelled and lectured in various European countries and, in his spare time, practised mountaineering and spiritual exercises. After Mussolini was freed from his Italian captivity thanks to a daring German operation led by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Otto Skorzeny, Evola was among the loyal followers who welcomed him at Hitler's headquarters in Rastenburg, East Prussia, on 14 September 1943. Although he sympathised with the newly created fascist government in northern Italy, which continued to fight alongside Germany against the Allies, Evola rejected its republican and socialist agenda, its populist style and its anti-monarchist sentiments.

When the Allies entered Rome in June 1944, their secret services attempted to arrest Evola, who was living there at the time. While his elderly mother slept, Evola slipped out of his house unnoticed and headed north across the peninsula, eventually making his way to Austria. Once in Vienna, he began studying the secret archives confiscated by the Germans from various European Masonic lodges.

One day in 1945, while Evola was walking through the deserted streets of the Austrian capital during Soviet air raids, a bomb exploded a few metres away from him. The explosion threw him against a wooden fence. Evola fell on his back and woke up in hospital. He had suffered a spinal cord injury that paralysed him from the waist down. Common sense tells us that someone walking through the deserted streets of a city during an air raid is either crazy or suicidal. But Evola liked to flirt with danger. Or, as he put it, to follow the rule of not avoiding dangers but, on the contrary, seeking them out and facing them, which is an 'implicit way of questioning destiny'<sup>(14)</sup>.

This did not mean that he believed in a 'blind' destiny. He once wrote:

There is no doubt that we are born with certain tendencies, vocations and predispositions that are sometimes very obvious and specific, although sometimes they are hidden and probably only emerge in particular circumstances or in certain attempts. We all have a margin of freedom with regard to this innate, differentiated element<sup>15</sup>.

Evola was determined to question destiny, especially at a time when an era was coming to an end<sup>16</sup>. But what he had sensed during the air raid was his death or the attainment of a new perspective on life, not paralysis. He struggled for a long time with this peculiar outcome, trying to make sense of his "karma":

Remembering why this had happened to me [i.e., paralysis] and understanding its deeper meaning, the only thing that ultimately mattered was something much more important than simply 'recovering', something to which I had never, in any way, attached too much importance<sup>17</sup>.

Evola had ventured out during the air raid to test his fate, firmly believing in the classical, traditional doctrine that the major events that occur in our lives are not just the product of chance or our efforts, but the deliberate result of our prenatal choice, something that has been ordained by 'us' before we were born.

Three years before his paralysis, he wrote:

Life here on earth cannot be seen as a coincidence. Nor can it be seen as something we can accept or reject at will, or as a reality imposed on us and before which we can only remain passive or display an attitude of obtuse resignation. Rather, what stands out in certain people is the feeling that earthly life is something to which, before becoming earthly beings, we commit ourselves as an adventure, a mission or a pre-assigned task, undertaking a complex set of problematic and also tragic elements<sup>18</sup>.

This was followed by a five-year period of inactivity. First, Evola spent a year and a half in a hospital in Vienna. In 1948, thanks to the intervention of a friend in the International Red Cross, he was repatriated to Italy. He was in a hospital in Bologna for at least another year, where he underwent an unsuccessful laminectomy (a surgical procedure in which part of the vertebra is removed to relieve pressure on the nerves of the spinal cord). Evola returned to his Roman residence in 1949, where he lived as a paraplegic for the next twenty-five years.

While in Bologna, Evola was visited by his friend Clemente Rebora, a poet who became a Christian and later a Catholic preacher of the Rosminian order. After reading about their friendship in Evola's works, in 1997 I visited the order's headquarters to talk to anyone in charge of Father Rebora's archives, hoping to discover some previously unknown correspondence. There was no correspondence, but the clergyman in charge of the archive was kind enough to provide me with a copy of a couple of letters Rebora wrote to a friend in which he spoke about Evola. The following summary of those letters reveals Evola's view of religion, and of Christianity in particular<sup>19</sup>.

In 1949, a fellow priest, Goffredo Pistoni, asked Reborra to visit Evola. Reborra requested permission from his provincial superior; after being granted permission, he travelled from Rovereto to the hospital where Evola was staying in Bologna. Reborra was motivated by the desire to see Evola embrace the Christian faith and become a good witness to the word of God. In a letter to Pistoni, Reborra asked for his assistance so that he would not spoil the "infinite and merciful ways of Love, and if [my visit] is not of much help, at least [may it not be] harmful".

On 20 March 1949, Reborra wrote to his friend Pistoni at the superior chapter of the Salesian Institute in Bologna:

I have just returned from seeing our Evola: we talked at length and affectionately, even though I did not notice any visible change in him, which, of course, I did not expect. I sensed him longing a little to 'join the rest of the army', as he put it, while he waited to see what would happen to him... I noticed his thirst for the absolute, even though he shuns the One who said, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink'<sup>20</sup>.

Reborra's frustration with Evola's reluctance to abandon his opinions and embrace the Christian faith is evident in the comment with which he closes the first half of the letter:

Let us pray that his previous books, which are about to be reprinted, and some new titles that will soon be published, do not chain him in view of their success, and that they do not harm people's souls, leading them astray in the direction of false spirituality as if they were "following false images of Good." [Probably a quote from Dante's *Divine Comedy*: -G. S.]

Reborra concluded his letter of 12 May 1949 by adding the following:

Having returned to the main office, I finally conclude this letter by telling you that a supernatural tenderness towards him is growing in my heart. He [Evola] told me about an inner event that happened to him during the bombing of Vienna, which, he added, is still mysterious to him as he undergoes his present trial. On the contrary, I am confident that I can discover the providential and decisive meaning of this event for his soul.

Rebora wrote to Evola again, asking him if he wished to travel to Lourdes on a special train on which Rebora would serve as his spiritual director. Evola politely declined, and contact between the two practically ended. Evola never converted to Christianity. In a 1935 letter written to one of his friends, Girolamo Comi—another poet who became a Catholic—Evola explained:

As far as I am concerned, with regard to the "conversion" that actually takes place and not feelings or religious faith, I have been fine for thirteen years [since 1922, the year of transition between the artistic and philosophical periods]<sup>21</sup>.

René Guénon wrote to the convalescent Evola<sup>22</sup> suggesting that he had been the victim of a curse or a magic spell cast by some powerful enemy. Evola replied that he considered this unlikely because, given the circumstances (for example, the exact moment when the bomb was thrown, the place where Evola should have been at that precise moment), it would have required a powerful spell.

Mircea Eliade, the renowned historian of religions, who corresponded with Evola throughout his life, once pointed out to one of his students: "Evola was wounded in the third *chakra*, isn't that significant?"<sup>23</sup> For the affective forces corresponding to the third *chakra* are anger, violence and pride, and we wonder if what Eliade meant was that the injury suffered by Evola could have had a purifying effect on the Italian thinker, or if it was a consequence of his arrogance. In any case, Evola rejected the idea that his paralysis was a kind of "punishment" for his "Promethean" efforts in the spiritual realm. For the rest of his life, he endured his condition with admirable stoicism, in strict accordance with his convictions.<sup>24</sup>

For the next two decades, Evola received visitors, friends, and young people who saw themselves as his disciples. According to Gianfranco de Turris, who first met him in 1967, he gave the impression of being a "person of high calibre," even though he was neither presumptuous nor snobbish. Evola wore a monocle held in place on his cheek by a clip, and observed his interlocutor with curiosity. He

disliked the idea of having "disciples" and sarcastically referred to his admirers as "Evolomaniacs." He never sought to recruit followers, and probably followed Buddha's command to proclaim the truth without trying to persuade or dissuade:

One should know approval and one should know disapproval, and having known approval and having known disapproval, one should neither approve nor disapprove, but simply learn the *Dhamma*.<sup>25</sup>

### **The central themes in Evola's thought**

In Evola's literary output, it is possible to identify three major themes, which are closely related and mutually dependent. These themes represent three facets of his philosophy of action. I have designated these themes with terms taken from ancient Greece. The first theme is *xeniteia*, a word that refers to the condition of living abroad, or being absent from one's homeland. In Evola's works, one can easily detect a sense of alienation, of not belonging to what he has called the "modern world." According to the ancient peoples, *xeniteia* was not an enviable condition. Living surrounded by barbaric people and customs, far from one's *polis*, when it was not due to personal choice, was generally the result of a court sentence. We can recall the exile to which undesirable elements of ancient society were condemned, for example, as well as the ephemeral practice of ostracism in ancient Athens; the fate of many ancient Romans, including the Stoic philosopher Seneca; and the deportation of entire families and villages, etc.

Throughout his life, Evola never "fit in" well. During his artistic, philosophical, or esoteric phases, he always felt like a lost soul seeking to join the "rest of the *army*." He denounced the modern world in his masterpiece *Rebellion Against the Modern World*, which in turn took its revenge: at the end of the war, he found himself surrounded by a world in ruins, isolated, marginalised and vilified. And yet he maintained a dignified, steadfast position and continued his self-imposed task as a nocturnal observer.

The second theme is *apoliteia*, that is, refraining from actively participating in the construction of *the* human *polis*. Evola's recommendation was that while living in exile from the world of Tradition and the Golden Age, one should avoid the invasive embrace of the masses and refrain from active participation in ordinary human affairs. *Apoliteia*, according to Evola, is essentially an internal attitude of indifference and detachment, which does not necessarily imply a practical abstention from politics to the extent that one is entirely committed to a detached attitude: "*Apoliteia* is the irrevocable inner distance from society and its *values*: it consists in not accepting to be limited by society or by any spiritual or moral ties"<sup>26</sup>. This attitude is recommended because, according to Evola, today and in this era there are no valuable ideas, causes or goals to which anyone can commit.

Finally, the third theme is *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency. The pursuit of spiritual independence led Evola away from the saturated crossroads of human interaction, to explore and expound the paths of perfection and asceticism. He became a scholar of ancient esotericism and the occult teachings of "liberation," publishing his findings in various books and articles.

### **Xeniteia**

The following words, spoken by the Benevolent Spirit to the Destructive Spirit in the *Yasna*—a compilation of Zoroastrian hymns and prayers—may serve to characterise Evola's attitude towards the modern world:

Neither our thoughts, nor our teachings, nor our intentions, nor our preferences, nor our words, nor our actions, nor our concepts, nor our souls are in agreement<sup>27</sup>.

Throughout his life, Evola lived in a coherent and consistent manner that could only simplistically be described as intellectual snobbery or even misanthropy. But the reasons for Evola's rejection of the socio-political order in which he lived must be sought elsewhere, namely in a well-articulated *Weltanschauung* or worldview.

In truth, Evola's sense of inadequacy in the society in which he lived was mutual. Those who refuse to recognise the legitimacy of the 'System' or to participate in the life of the community that does not recognise them, professing greater obedience and citizenship in another land, world or ideology, are forced to live like the metics in ancient Greece, surrounded by suspicion and hostility<sup>28</sup>. To understand the reasons for Evola's uncompromising attitude, we first need to define the concepts of "Tradition" and "modern world" as Evola used them in his works.

In general terms, the word tradition can be understood in various ways:

- 1) as an archetypal myth (some members of the political right in Italy have rejected this view as a 'paralysing myth');
- 2) as a way of life in a particular era, for example, the Middle Ages, feudal Japan, the Roman Empire;
- 3) as the sum of three principles: "God, Country, Family";
- 4) as an *anamnesis* or historical memory in general; and
- 5) as a set of religious teachings that must be preserved and transmitted to future generations.

Evola understood tradition primarily as an archetypal myth, that is, as the presence of the Absolute in specific historical and political forms. Evola's Absolute is not a religious principle or a *noumenon*, much less the God of theism, but rather a mysterious domain or *dunamis* power. Evola's Tradition is characterised by 'Being' and stability, while the modern world is characterised by 'Becoming'. In the world of tradition, stable political institutions find their place. The world of Tradition, according to Evola, was exemplified by ancient Rome and the civilisations of Greece, India, China and Japan. These civilisations were built on a strict caste system, were ruled by the warrior nobility and waged wars to expand the boundaries of their empires. In Evola's words:

The traditional world knew divine royalty. It knew of the bridge that spans the two worlds, that is, initiation. It knew the two great ways of approaching the transcendent: heroic action and contemplation. It knew of mediation, that is, rites and fidelity. It understood the social foundation, that is, traditional law and the caste system. And it knew of the earthly political symbol: the empire.<sup>29</sup>

Evola asserted that the underlying belief of the traditional world was 'invisible'. He argued that mere physical existence, or 'living', is meaningless unless we approach the higher world or what is 'more than life', so that our highest ambition is to participate in *hyperkosmia* and obtain a final and active liberation from the limitation represented by the human condition.<sup>(30)</sup>

Evola had a cyclical view of history, a philosophical and religious vision with a rich cultural heritage. Although we may reject it, his view deserves as much respect as the linear view of history held by theism, to which I subscribe, or the progressive view championed by Engels' "scientific materialism," or the hopeful and optimistic perspective typical of various *New Age* movements, according to which the universe is advancing in a constant and irreversible spiritual evolution. According to the cyclical view of history expounded by Hinduism, which Evola adopted and modified to harmonise his views, we are living in the fourth era of a complete cycle, the so-called *Kali-yuga*, an era characterised by decadence and rupture. According to Evola, the most notable phases of this "Yuga" (or age) include the emergence of pre-Socratic philosophy (characterised by the rejection of myth and an exaggerated emphasis on reason); the birth of Christianity; the Renaissance; Humanism; the Protestant Reformation; the Enlightenment; the French Revolution; the European revolutions of 1848; the advent of the Industrial Revolution; and Bolshevism. Thus, for Evola, the "modern world" did not begin in 1600, but in the 4th century BC.

## **Evola and Eliade**

Evola's rejection of the modern world can be contrasted with the tacit acceptance of Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), the renowned historian of religions

with whom Evola met personally on several occasions and corresponded until his death in 1974. The two first met in 1937. By that time, Eliade had accumulated an impressive academic resume that included a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Bucharest and a master's and doctorate in Sanskrit and Indian philosophy from the University of Calcutta. Evola was already an accomplished writer and had written some of his most important works, such as *The Hermetic Tradition* (1931), *Rebellion Against the Modern World* (1934) and *The Mystery of the Grail* (1937)<sup>31</sup>.

Eliade had read Evola's early philosophical works during the 1920s and "admired his intelligence and, even more, the density and clarity of his prose"<sup>(32)</sup>. An intellectual friendship soon developed between the young Romanian professor and the Italian philosopher, who was eight years older than Eliade. Their shared interest in yoga led Evola to write *L'uomo come potenza* (*Man as Power*) in 1925 (revised in 1949 with a new title, *La yoga della potenza* (*The Yoga of Power*)<sup>(33)</sup> ) and Eliade to write his acclaimed academic work: *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1933). In his diaries, Eliade recalls:

I received letters from him when I was in Calcutta (1928-31) and he instantly begged me not to talk to him about yoga, or "magical powers" except to point out precise facts that I had witnessed. In India I also received several of his publications, but I only remember a few issues of the magazine *Krur*.<sup>34</sup>

Evola and Eliade first met in Romania, at a lunch to which they were invited by the philosopher Nae Ionesco. Evola was then travelling throughout Europe, establishing contacts and giving lectures, "in an attempt to coordinate the elements that, to a certain extent, represented Traditional thought on the political-cultural level".<sup>35</sup> Eliade recalled Evola's admiration for Corneliu Codreanu (1899-1938), the founder of the Christian nationalist movement known as the "Iron Guard". Evola and Codreanu met on the morning of the lunch. Codreanu told Evola about the effects that imprisonment had had on his soul, as well as his discovery of contemplation in the solitude and silence of his cell.

In his autobiography, Evola described Codreanu as "one of the most valuable and spiritually oriented people I met in the nationalist movements of that period"<sup>36</sup>. Eliade wrote about that lunch

Evola was still dazzled by him [Codreanu]. I vaguely remember the remarks he made about the disappearance of contemplative disciplines in the political struggle in the West"<sup>37</sup>.

But each of the scholars focused on different issues. Thus, Eliade wrote in his diary:

One day I received a bitter letter from him reproaching me for never quoting him, no more than I had quoted Guénon. I replied as best I could, and someday I must give the reasons and explanations behind that reply. My argument could not be simpler. The books I write are for today's readers, not for initiates. Unlike Guénon and his emulators, I believe I have nothing to write that would be of particular interest to them"<sup>38</sup>.

From Eliade's remarks, I must conclude that he did not like, share, or take an interest in Evola's esoteric inclinations and perspectives. I think there are three reasons for Eliade's aversion. First, Evola, like all traditionalists, assumed the existence of a high, primordial, solar, and real esoteric tradition, and he devoted his life to describing, studying, and praising it in all its forms and varieties. He also placed that tradition above and against what was reproduced by modern popular cultures and civilisations (such as that of Romania, to which Eliade belonged). In *Rebellion Against the Modern World*, numerous examples of this association can be found. Furthermore, Eliade refused to place any emphasis on esotericism, because he thought it had a diminishing effect on the human spirit. Eliade argued that limiting the value of European spiritual creations exclusively to their 'esoteric meanings' reproduced, in reverse, the reductionism of the materialist approach adopted by Marx and Freud. Nor did he believe in the existence of a primordial tradition: 'I suspect its ahistorical, artificial character,' he wrote"<sup>39</sup>.

Secondly, Eliade did not accept the negative or pessimistic view of the world and the human condition that characterised the thinking of Guénon and Evola. Unlike Evola, who believed in the prolonged "putrefaction" of contemporary Western culture, Eliade made a distinction:

to the extent that... it believes in the creativity of the human spirit, it cannot disappear: culture, even in a twilight age, is the only means of communicating certain values and transmitting a certain spiritual message. A new Noah's Ark, by means of which the spiritual creation of the West could be saved, is not only to include René Guénon's *The Esotericism of Dante*; there must also be a historical, philosophical and poetic understanding of *The Divine Comedy*.

Finally, the socio-cultural environment that Eliade praised was very different from the one Evola favoured. As India regained its independence, Eliade came to believe that Asia was about to re-enter world history and politics, and that his own people, the Romanians, could "play a decisive role in the future dialogue between the West, Asia and the cultures of the archaic peoples". He recognised the peasant roots of Romanian culture as promoting universalism and pluralism rather than nationalism and provincialism. Eliade wrote:

It seemed to me that this was the beginning of discerning the elements of unity in all peasant cultures, from China and Southeast Asia to the Mediterranean and Portugal. Everywhere I found what I later called "cosmic religiosity": that is, the fundamental role played by symbols and images, religious respect for the earth and life, the belief that the sacred manifests itself directly through the mystery of fertility and cosmic repetition...<sup>42</sup>

These conclusions could not be more opposed to Evola's vision, especially those he formulated in *Rebellion Against the Modern World*. According to the latter's doctrine, cosmic religiosity is a corrupt and inferior form of spirituality or, as he called it, 'lunar spirituality' (the moon, unlike the sun, is not a source of light, but only reflects the light of the sun; it is contingent on God, the Whole and any other metaphysical version of the Absolute) characterised by mystical abandonment.

In his autobiography *The Way of Cinnabar*, Evola describes his intellectual and spiritual journey through different landscapes: religious (Christianity, theism), philosophical (idealism, nihilism, realism) and political (democracy, fascism, post-war Italy). For readers unfamiliar with Hermeticism, we can remind them that cinnabar is a red metal representing *rubedo* or red, which is the third and final stage of inner transformation. Evola explains at the beginning of his autobiography:

My natural sense of detachment from what is human, especially in the emotional realm, and from so many other things that are generally seen as 'normal', manifested itself in me at a very tender age.<sup>43</sup>

### **Autarkeia**

Various religions and philosophies consider the human condition to be highly problematic, similar to an illness that requires a cure. This illness is characterised by many features, including a certain spiritual "heaviness" or gravitational pull that pushes us "down". Humans are prisoners of the insignificance of daily routines; of harmful habits developed through years of drinking, smoking, gambling, and addiction to sex and work, which respond to external pressures; of intellectual and spiritual laziness that prevents us from developing our potential to become vibrant, living beings; and of an inconsistency that is sometimes painfully obvious with New Year's resolutions. How often do we commit ourselves to practising something daily for a period of time, but soon the day comes when we forget, find excuses to abandon the commitment, or simply stop doing it? This is not simply inconsistency or lack of perseverance on our part: it is a symptom of our inability to master ourselves and our lives.

Furthermore, by nature we cannot keep our minds focused on an object of meditation. We are easily distracted and bored. We spend our days talking about insignificant and unimportant details.

Most of our conversations are nothing more than simple exchanges and monologues.

We are busy with jobs that do not interest us, and wasting our lives is our supreme interest. We feel bored, empty, and sexually frustrated by our partners' inability to reach climax. We want more: more money, more leisure, more "toys," and more achievements, things from which we rarely gain anything. We succumb to all kinds of indulgences and small pleasures to compensate for our dulled and damaged conscience. And yet all these things are only symptoms of the real problem that plagues the human condition. Our real problem is not that we are deficient beings, but that we do not know and do not want to be different. Every day we embrace life and call it 'something real,' but slowly and inexorably we suffocate the longing for transcendence hidden deep within us. In the end, this proves our true destruction; we are no different from smokers who, after being diagnosed with emphysema, continue to smoke until their bitter end. The problem is that we deny there is a problem. We are like the psychotic who denies his mental illness, or like the sociopath who, after committing a horrible crime, insists that he actually has a conscience, and cries and displays his remorse to prove it.

In the past, movements such as Pythagoreanism, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Mandaeism, and medieval Catharism posited that the problem limiting human beings was the body itself, or physical matter to be precise. These movements maintained that the soul or spirit is held captive within the material box awaiting its liberation. (Evola rejected this interpretation as unsophisticated and the product of a telluric or feminine vision.) Buddhism prescribed that "contamination" and "lack of mental enlightenment" were the real problem, and over the centuries developed a real science of the mind to attempt to cure the disease at its roots. Christian theism identified the root of human suffering and evil with sin. As a remedy, Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church propose incorporation into the Church through baptism and active participation in liturgical life. Many

Protestants, on the other hand, advocate a living and personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the One Lord and Saviour, which must be cultivated through prayer, Bible study and fellow church members.

Evola considered acceptance of the human condition to be the real problem, and autarky or self-sufficiency to be the cure. According to the ancient Cynics, *autarkeia* is the ability to satisfy one's entire life with the least amount of material goods and pleasures. An autarkic being (the ideal man) is a person capable of spiritual growth even in the absence of what others consider vital necessities (i.e., health, wealth, and cordial human relationships). The Stoics equated autarky with virtue (*arête*), which they considered the only thing necessary for happiness. Even the Epicureans, despite their pursuit of pleasure, considered *autarkeia* to be a "great good, not with the aim of settling for little, but so that if there are many shortcomings, we will be satisfied with little" (44).

Evola endorsed the notion of *autarkeia* out of his rejection of the human condition and the ordinary life that derives from it. Like Nietzsche before him, Evola argued that the human condition and daily life should not satisfy us but rather be overcome: our value lies in being a 'project' (in Latin *projectum*, 'to throw oneself forward'). Thus, what truly matters to human beings is not who we are but what we can and must become. Humans will achieve enlightenment or not depending on whether they accept this fundamental metaphysical truth. It was not out of snobbery that Evola concluded that human beings are "slaves" trapped in *samsara*, just like hamsters running on a wheel inside their cage. According to Evola, this situation is shared by everyone in everyday life, not only low-wage earners, but also co-workers, family members and, especially, people without a formal education. This, of course, is difficult to recognise. Evola was consumed by the longing that Germans call *mehr als leben* ("more than life"), which is inevitably frustrated by the contingencies of human existence. We read in Evola's essays on mountain climbing:

At certain existential summits, just as heat is transformed into light, life itself becomes freedom; not in the sense of the death of individuality or some kind of mystical shipwreck, but in the sense of a transcendent affirmation of life, in which anxiety, endless desire – yearning and worrying – the search for religious faith, human support and goals, all lead to a state of tranquillity. There is something greater than life, within life itself, but not outside it. This heroic experience is valuable and good in itself, while ordinary life is only directed by interests, external things and human conventions.<sup>45</sup>

According to Evola, the human condition cannot and should not be accepted but rather overcome. The cure does not lie in more money, more education or moral rectitude, but in a solid and radical commitment to pursuing spiritual liberation. The past offers numerous examples of the distinction between 'ordinary' life and 'differentiated' life. The ancient Greeks referred to ordinary, material, physical life using the term *bios*, and used the term *zoe* to describe spiritual life. Buddhist and Hindu writings distinguish between *samsara*, or the life of needs, cravings, passions, and desires, and *nirvana*, a state, condition, or extinction of suffering (*dukkha*). Christian scriptures discern between the 'life of the flesh' and the 'life of the Spirit'. The Stoics differentiate between 'life according to nature' and life dominated by passions. Heidegger distinguished between authentic and inauthentic life.

Kierkegaard spoke of aesthetic life and ethical life. Zoroastrians settle the difference between Good and Evil. The Essenes divide humanity into two groups: the followers of Truth and the followers of Falsehood.

The authors who introduced Evola to the notions of self-sufficiency and the "absolute individual" (an ideal, an unattainable state) were Nietzsche and Carlo Michelstaedter. The latter was a twenty-three-year-old Italian Jewish student who committed suicide in 1910, one day after completing his doctoral dissertation, which was first published in 1913 under the title *La persuasione e la retorica (Persuasion and Rhetoric)*<sup>46</sup>. In his thesis, Michelstaedter asserts that the human condition is dominated by remorse, melancholy, annoyance, fear, anger and suffering. Man's actions reveal that he is a passive being. Because he attributes value to things, man

distracted by them or by his desire to obtain them. In this way, man seeks a stable point of reference outside himself but does not find it, and remains an unfortunate prisoner of his illusory individuality. The only two possible ways to live the human condition, according to Michelstaedter, are the Way of Persuasion and the Way of Rhetoric. Persuasion is an unattainable goal; it consists of conquering total and unconditional possession of oneself, and not needing anything else. This means having life within us. In Michelstaedter's words:

The Way of Persuasion, unlike the route of a bus, has no signs that can be read, studied or communicated to others. However, we all feel within ourselves the need to find that; we must light our own path because each of us is alone and cannot expect help from outside. On the Way of Persuasion, there is only one stipulation: not to settle for what we have been given.<sup>47</sup>

On the contrary, the Way of Rhetoric designates the palliatives or substitutes that man adopts instead of authentic persuasion. According to Evola, the path of Rhetoric is followed by "those who contemptuously reject the real possession of themselves, relying on other things, seeking other people, trusting others to liberate them, according to a dark need and an incessant and undefined longing".<sup>48</sup>Or as Nietzsche wrote:

For that, you as a crowd, together with your neighbours, have beautiful words. But I say to you: love for your neighbour is harmful love for yourselves. You flee from your neighbour as you would from yourselves, and you would like to make a virtue of it: but I can see your disinterest... I would rather wish that you could not bear any kind of neighbour or your neighbour's neighbour; then you would have to foster a friend, and your heart would overflow with yourselves.<sup>49</sup>

The goal of self-sufficiency appears throughout Evola's work. In his search for this privileged condition, he laid out the paths that were illuminated at various times in the past by Tantrism, Buddhism, Mithraism, and Hermeticism.

In the early 1920s, Decio Calvari, president of the Italian Independent Theosophical League, introduced Evola to the study of Tantrism.

Evola soon began corresponding with the British orientalist and populariser of Tantrism, Sir John Woodroffe (who also wrote under the pseudonym 'Arthur Avalon'), whose works and translations of Tantric texts he used extensively. While René Guénon pointed to Vedanta as the quintessence of Hindu wisdom in *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta* (1925), emphasising the primacy of contemplation or knowledge over action, Evola took a different perspective. To reject the view that spiritual authority was more valuable than real power, Evola wrote *L'uomo come potenza* in 1925. In the third revised edition (1949), the title was changed to *Lo yoga della potenza (The Yoga of Power)*<sup>50</sup>. This book is a link between his philosophical works and the rest of his works that focus on traditional themes.

The thesis of *The Yoga of Power* is that the social and political conditions that characterise *Kali-yuga* have greatly diminished the effectiveness of intellectual and contemplative purity, as well as ritualistic paths. In this age of decline, the only path open to seeking "great liberation" is resolute action<sup>51</sup>. Tantrism itself is defined as a practice-based system, in which *hatha yoga* and *kundalini yoga* constitute the mental and psychological training of Tantrist followers in their quest for liberation. Criticising the old Western prejudice that Eastern spiritualities are characterised by their escapist attitude (as opposed to those of the West, which promote a supposed vitalism, activism and the will to power), Evola reaffirmed his belief in the primacy of action by pointing to the path followed by Tantrism. Several decades later, a renowned writer and member of the French Academy, Marguerite Yourcenar, paid tribute to *The Yoga of Power*. She wrote about "the great benefit that an attentive reader can derive from an exposition such as Evola's" <sup>52</sup> , concluding that "the study of *Yoga of Power* is particularly beneficial at a time when any form of discipline is clumsily discredited" <sup>53</sup> .

But interest in Evola is not limited to yoga. In 1943, he wrote *The Doctrine of Awakening*, in which he discusses the teachings of early Buddhism. He saw in Buddha the original message of an Aryan ascetic path for "warriors"

seeking liberation from a conditioned world. In this book, he emphasised Buddha's anti-theistic and anti-monistic vision. Buddha taught that devotion to this or that god or deity, ritualism, and the study of the Vedas did not necessarily lead to enlightenment, nor did the experience of the identity of the particular soul with the 'cosmic Whole' called Brahman, for, according to Buddha, both the 'soul' and 'Brahman' are inventions of our deluded minds.

Evola meticulously outlines in *The Doctrine of Awakening* the four *jhanas*, or meditative stages experienced by a serious practitioner of this path leading to *nirvana*. Most of the sources used by Evola come from German and Italian translations of *the Sutta Pitaka*, part of the ancient *Pali* canon of Buddhist scriptures in which Buddha's sermons are found. In extolling the purity and fidelity of early Buddhism to Buddha's message, Evola presented *Mahayana* Buddhism as a later deviation and corruption of Buddha's teachings, although he recognised Zen and the doctrine of emptiness (*sunyata*) as one of the greatest achievements of *Mahayana* Buddhism. In *The Doctrine of Awakening*, Evola extols the figure of *the ahrat* as one who achieves enlightenment. Such a person is freed from the cycle of rebirth by qualitatively overcoming *samsaric* existence. According to Evola, the achievement of *the ahrat* can be compared to that of *the jivan-mukti* of Tantrism, to Mithraic initiation, to Gnostic wisdom, and to Taoist 'immortality'.

This is one of Evola's most insightful texts. Partly because of reading it, two members of the OSS became Buddhist monks. The first was H. G. Musson, who also translated Evola's book from Italian into English. The second was Osbert Moore, who became a distinguished professor of *Pali* and translated numerous Buddhist texts into English. On a personal note, I would like to add that Evola's *The Doctrine of Awakening* sparked my interest in Buddhism, led me to read the *Sutta Pitaka* and seek the company of Theravada monks, as well as to practise meditation.

In *The Metaphysics of Sex* (1958), Evola studied the subject from three perspectives on human sexuality. The first is the naturalist perspective. According to this perspective, erotic life is conceived as an extension of instincts.

or simply as a means of perpetuating the species. This view was recently defended by anthropologist Desmond Morris, both in his books and in the documentary *The Human Animal*. The second view Evola called "bourgeois love": it is characterised by respectability and sanctification through marriage. The most important features of this type of sexuality are mutual commitment, love and feelings. The third perspective on sex is hedonism. According to this view, people seek pleasure as an end in itself. This type of sexuality desperately closes itself off to the transcendent possibilities intrinsic to sexual communion, and is therefore not worthy of pursuit. Evola goes on to explain how sexual communion can become a path leading to spiritual conquests.

### **Apoliteia**

In 1988, a passionate champion of free speech and democracy, journalist and writer I. F. Stone, wrote a provocative book entitled *The Trial of Socrates*. In this text, Stone argues that Socrates, unlike Xenophon and Plato, who vindicated the life of their beloved teacher, was not unjustly put to death by an evil and corrupt democratic regime. According to Stone, Socrates was guilty of many questionable attitudes that eventually led to his downfall.

Firstly, Socrates personally abstained from—and discouraged others from— involvement in politics in order to cultivate 'perfection of the soul'. Stone finds this attitude reprehensible, as he believes that in a city, all citizens have obligations and rights. By refusing to fulfil his civic responsibilities, Socrates was accused of "civic corruption", especially during the dictatorship of the Thirty. At that time, instead of joining the opposition, Socrates remained passive: "the most eloquent man in Athens remained silent when his voice was most needed"<sup>(55)</sup>. In second place, Socrates idealised Sparta Sparta, held aristocratic and pro-monarchical views and despised Athenian democracy; he also spent a lot of time denigrating mediocre men. Finally,

Socrates could have been exonerated if he had not opposed the jury with a certain amusing condescension and had instead invoked the principle of freedom of expression.

Evola recalls Socrates in the attitude towards politics described by Stone. Evola also professed *apoliteia* <sup>56</sup>. He discouraged people from becoming passionately involved in politics. He was never a member of a political party and refrained from joining the Fascist Party during its years in power. Because of this, he was discharged when he tried to enlist in the army at the outbreak of World War II, even though he volunteered to serve on the front lines. He also discouraged participation in "*agoral* life." The ancient *agora* or public square was the place where free Athenians gathered to discuss politics, make business deals, and cultivate social relationships. As Buddha said:

Indeed, Ananda, it is not possible for the *bhikkhu* [monk] who enjoys company and loves society, which he will never enter and dwell in, to enjoy the liberation of mind that is temporary and delightful or the liberation of mind that is perpetual and unshakeable. But it can be expected that when the *bhikkhu* lives alone, removed from society, he will enter and dwell in the liberation of the mind that is temporary and delightful or the liberation of the mind that is perpetual and unshakeable... <sup>57</sup>

Like Socrates, Evola praised the civic values, spiritual and political achievements, and metaphysical value of ancient monarchies, warrior aristocracies, and traditional, non-democratic civilisations. He had nothing but contempt for the ignorance of irascible people, rebellious masses, and insignificant commoners.

Finally, like Socrates, Evola never appealed to democratic values such as "human rights," "freedom of expression," or "equality," and was "sentenced" to what the Germans called "death by silence." In other words, he was relegated to academic oblivion.

Evola's refusal to get involved in the socio-political arena must also be attributed to his philosophy of inequality. Norberto Bobbio, Italian senator and professor emeritus in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Turin, wrote a small book entitled *Right and Left: The Significance of a Political Distinction*<sup>58</sup>. In it, Bobbio—a committed left-wing intellectual—attempts to

identify the key element that differentiates the political right from the left (a dyad that occurs in the non-ideological arena of American politics in terms of the dichotomy "conservatives and liberals," or "mainstream and extremists"). After discussing various objections to the contemporary relevance of the right-left dyad following the decline and fall of the great political ideologies, Bobbio concludes that the juxtaposition of right and left is still legitimate and viable, although it will one day be exhausted, just like other dyads of the past, such as "patricians and plebeians" in ancient Rome, "Guelphs and Ghibellines" during the Middle Ages, and "crown and parliament" in seventeenth-century England.

At the end of his book, Bobbio suggests that "the main criterion for distinguishing the right from the left is their different attitudes towards the ideal of equality" <sup>59</sup>.

Thus, according to Bobbio, the views of the right and the left on "liberty" and "fraternity" (the other two values in the French revolutionary triad) do not differ as much as their position on equality. Bobbio explains:

We can properly call those who, being aware that human beings are both equal and unequal, give greater importance to judging and recognising them according to their rights and duties – which is what makes them equal – rather than making them unequal, 'egalitarians'; while "non-egalitarians" are those who, starting from the same premise, give greater importance to what makes them unequal than to what makes them equal. <sup>60</sup>

Evola, as a representative of the European right, can be considered one of the leading anti-egalitarian philosophers of the twentieth century. Evola's arguments transcend the long-standing debate between those who claim that class, race, education, and gender are what establish the differences between people that generate structural injustices in society, and those who, on the other hand, believe that these differences are genetic. According to Evola, ontological and spiritual reasons are the only ones that matter in differentiating people's lives. In Evola's writings, the dichotomy is between 'initiates and superior beings' on the one hand, and the masses on the other.

The two works that best illustrate Evola's *apoliteia* are *Man and the Ruins* (1953) and *Riding the Tiger* (1961). In the former, he expounds his views on the organic state and deplors the primacy of economics over politics that emerged in post-war Europe and America. Evola wrote this book to provide a point of reference for those who, having survived the war, did not hesitate to consider themselves "reactionaries" deeply hostile to the emerging intellectual and political subversive forces that transformed Europe:

Once again, we can see that the different facets of contemporary social and political chaos are interrelated and that it is only possible to compare them by returning to their origins. To return to the original means, one must simply reject everything on every level—political, economic, or social—that is related to the "immortal principles" of 1789 under the guise of libertarian, individualistic, and egalitarian thought and opposes the hierarchical vision. It is only within the context of such a vision that the value of human freedom as a person is not just a word or a pretext for destruction and subversion.<sup>61</sup>

Evola encourages his readers to remain passive spectators in the process of rebuilding Europe and to seek their place elsewhere:

The Idea, only the Idea, must be our true homeland. It is not being born in the same country, speaking the same language or belonging to the same racial lineage that matters; sharing the same Idea must be the factor that unites us and differentiates us from others.<sup>62</sup>

In *Riding the Tiger*, Evola outlines the existential and intellectual strategies for living in the modern world without succumbing to it. The title is taken from a Chinese proverb and suggests that the way to avoid being devoured by a tiger is to jump on its back and ride it without being thrown off. Evola argues that the non-participation of the 'differentiated man' in the social and political construction of the human *polis* must be accompanied by a sense of empathy towards those who, in different ways, live on the fringes of society, rejecting its conventions and dogmas.

The "differentiated person" feels like a stranger to this society and feels no moral obligation due to societal pressure to

participate in what he considers an absurd system. Such a person can understand not only those who live outside the parameters of society, but even those who are against society or, better yet, against this society<sup>63</sup>.

This is why, in his 1968 book *The Bow and the Club*, Evola expressed a certain appreciation for the "beat generation" and the *hippies*, although he pointed out their lack of a sense of transcendence and the absence of firm spiritual reference points from which they could have launched an effective internal spiritual "revolt" against society.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a good introduction to this movement and its ideas, see: William Quinn, *The Only Tradition*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> The first of the three objectives declared by the Theosophical Society was to promote the brotherhood of all men regardless of race, creed, nationality or caste.

<sup>3</sup> Tomislav Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality: The European New Right*, New York: Peter Lang, 1991; Ian B. Warren, interview with Alain de Benoist, "The European New Right: Defining and Defending Europe's Heritage," *The Journal of Historical Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, March-April 1994, pp. 28-37; and the special issue "The French New Right," *Telos*, Winter 1993-Spring 1994.

<sup>4</sup>Martin Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1997.

<sup>5</sup>Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 97–98. Despite Evola's bad press in the United States, his works have been favourably reviewed by Joscelyn Godwin, "Evola: Prophet against Modernity," *Gnosis Magazine*, Summer 1996, pp. 64-65; and by Robin Waterfield, "Baron Julius Evola and the Hermetic Tradition," *Gnosis Magazine*, Winter 1990, pp. 12-17.

<sup>6</sup>The first to write about Evola in the United States was Thomas Sheehan, "Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist," *Social Research*, vol. 48, Spring 1981, pp. 45-73. See also Richard Drake, "Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy," in Peter Merkl [ed.], *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 61–89; "Julius Evola, Radical Fascism, and the Lateran Accords," *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 74, 1988, pp. 403–19; and the chapter "The Children of the Sun," in *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989, pp. 116–134.

<sup>7</sup>Philip Rees, in his *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right since 1890*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991, devotes barely a page and a half to Evola, and shamelessly concludes, without adducing any evidence, that "Evolian-inspired violence led to the bombing of Bologna station on 2 August 1980". Gianfranco De Turreis, president of the Julius Evola Foundation in Rome and one of Evola's main disciples, suggested that in Evola's case, rather than a "bad teacher", one should speak of "bad disciples". See his *Elogio e difesa di Julius Evola: il barone e i terroristi*, Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1997, in which he highlights the unfounded nature of the accusation that Evola was directly or indirectly responsible for acts of terrorism perpetrated in Italy.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Sheehan's controversial article "Diventare Dio: Julius Evola and the Metaphysics of Fascism," *Stanford Italian Review*, vol. 6, 1986, pp. 279-92, in which he attempts to demonstrate that Nietzsche and Evola reflect each other like mirrors. Sheehan should rather have spoken of Evola's overcoming of Nietzsche's philosophy, rejecting the notion of the "eternal return" as "only a myth," as well as his vitalism because it was closed to transcendence and desperately immanentist. Nor did he accept the "will to power" because "power in itself is amorphous and insignificant if it lacks a foundation given by being, an internal direction, an essential unity" (Julius Evola, *Cavalcare la tigre*, Milan: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1971, p. 49). He also opposed Nietzsche's nihilism, which he described as a project that had been left half-finished.

<sup>9</sup> H.T. Hansen, pseudonym of T. Hahl, is an Austrian scholar who obtained his law degree in 1970. He is a partner in the prestigious Swiss publishing house Ansata Verlag and one of the most important scholars of Evola in German-speaking countries. Hahl has translated many of Evola's works into German and, for the most part, has provided them with extensive introductions.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the topics of the conference held in France on the centenary of his birth: '*Julius Evola 1898-1998: Eveil, destin et expériences de terres spirituelles*' ("*Julius Evola 1898-1998: awakening, destiny and experiences in spiritual lands*") on the website: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/collectif.ea/langues/anglais/acteesf.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Marcello Veneziani, *Julius Evola tra filosofia e tradizione*, Rome: Ciarrapico Editore, 1984, p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> This work was translated into French, German and, almost in its entirety, into Spanish. My English translation of the first volume appeared in early 2003 from Inner Traditions Publishing, under the title *Introduction to Magic: Rituals and Practical Techniques for the Magus*.

<sup>13</sup> Marco Rossi, a leading authority on Evola in Italy, wrote an article on Evola's alleged anti-democratic anti-fascism in *Storia contemporanea*, vol. 20, 1989, pp. 5-42.

<sup>14</sup> Julius Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro*, Milan: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1972, p. 162.

<sup>15</sup> Julius Evola, *Etica ariana*, Rome: Europa, srl, 1987, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> When Evola and some friends realised that the Axis was going to lose the war, they began to draw up plans for the creation of a "Movement for the Rebirth of Italy". This movement was supposed to organise a right-wing political party capable of countering the influence of the left after the war. None of this happened.

<sup>17</sup> Julius Evola, *The Way of Cinnabar*, p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> Julius Evola, *Aryan Ethics*, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of his autobiography, Evola argues that his opposition to Christianity, a religion that never appealed to him, arose from his reading of Nietzsche. He felt that the theories of sin and redemption, divine love and grace were "alien" to his spirit.

<sup>20</sup> Reboria inaccurately quoted from memory what Jesus said in John 7:37. The exact quote is, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let anyone who believes in me drink." (Revised Standard Version.)

<sup>21</sup> Julius Evola, *Letters from Julius Evola to Girolamo Comi, 1934-1962*, Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1987, p. 17. In 1922, Evola was on the verge of suicide. He had experimented with hallucinogenic drugs and was consumed by a fervent desire for extinction. In a letter dated 2 July 1921, Evola wrote to his friend Tristan Tzara: "I find myself in such a state of inner fatigue that even thinking and holding a pen requires an effort that I am not always capable of. I live in a state of apathy and immobile stupor, in which every activity and act of will is frozen... Any action repulses me. I endure these feelings as if they were an illness. I am also terrified just thinking about the time ahead of me and not knowing how to use it. In all things I perceive a process of decomposition, as if they were collapsing internally, turning into wind and sand. *Letters from Julius Evola to Tristan Tzara, 1919-1923*, Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1991, p. 40. Evola

was able to overcome this crisis after reading an Italian translation of the Buddhist text *Majjhima-Nikayo*, the so-called "middle sayings of Buddha." In one of these discourses, Buddha taught the importance of detachment from one's sensory perceptions and feelings, including the personal desire for extinction.

<sup>22</sup> For a brief account of their correspondence, see Julius Evola, *René Guénon: A Teacher for Modern Times*, trans. Guido Stucco, Edmonds, WA: Holmes Publishing Group, 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival*, Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1993, p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> In two letters to Comi, Evola wrote: "From a spiritual point of view, my situation has no greater significance than that of a flat tyre on a car"; and: "The minor issue of the condition of my legs has only placed some limitations on certain mundane activities, but on an intellectual and spiritual level I continue on the same path and maintain the same vision," *Lettere a Comi*, pp. 18, 27.

<sup>25</sup> *The Middle Length Sayings*, vol. III, trans. by I. B. Horner, London: Pali Text Society, 1959, p. 278.

<sup>26</sup> Julius Evola, *Cavalcare la tigre*, p. 175.

<sup>27</sup> Yuri Stoyanov, *The Hidden Tradition in Europe*, New York: Penguin, 1994, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> The Latin word *hostis* means both "guest" and "enemy". This is very revealing of how the ancient Romans viewed foreigners in general.

<sup>29</sup> Julius Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995, p. 6. The first part of the book refers to the concept that appears in the quoted excerpt. The second part refers to the modern world.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> All these works have been translated and published in English by Inner Traditions.

<sup>32</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Exile's Odyssey*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 152.

<sup>33</sup> Julius Evola, *The Yoga of Power*, trans. Guido Stucco, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1992.

<sup>34</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Journal III, 1970–78*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> Julius Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, p. 139.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Eliade, *Journal III, 1970-78*, p. 162.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162–63.

<sup>39</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Exile's Odyssey*, pp. 152. See also Alain de Benoist, who quotes him extensively.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* This criticism was reiterated by S. Nasr in an interview with *Gnosis* magazine.

<sup>41</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Journey East, Journey West*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981-88, p. 204.

<sup>42</sup> Eliade, *Journey East, Journey West*, p. 202.

<sup>43</sup> Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro*, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> Julius Evola, *Meditations on the Peaks*, trans. Guido Stucco, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Carlo Michelstaedter, *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 1990.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>48</sup> *The Way of Cinnabar*, p. 46.

- <sup>49</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 86.
- <sup>50</sup> Evola, *The Yoga of Power*, trans. Guido Stucco, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1992.
- <sup>51</sup> Evola would probably have liked these words of Jesus (Luke 16:16): "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it."
- <sup>52</sup> Marguerite Yourcenar, *Le temps, ce grand sculpteur*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, p. 201.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.
- <sup>54</sup> Julius Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995.
- <sup>55</sup> I. F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, New York: Doubleday, 1988, p. 146.
- <sup>56</sup> Julius Evola, *Cavalcare la tigre*, pp. 174–78.
- <sup>57</sup> Mahajjima Nikayo, p. 122.
- <sup>58</sup> Norberto Bobbio, *Right and Left: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, Rome: Donzelli Editore, 1994. This book was published in English under the title *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1996.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- <sup>61</sup> Julius Evola, *Gli uomini e le rovine*, Rome: Edizioni Settimo Sigillo, 1990, p. 64.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>63</sup> Julius Evola, *Riding the Tiger*, p. 179.

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## EVOLA AND THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

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Lecture given at the meeting  
"Evola, Dadaist and Anti-Modernist," on 25 September 1998, in Rome.

Julius Evola's thinking is certainly little known – at least among the 'official' or academic public – or unfairly overlooked. But over time, it has been the subject of more thorough examination and more complete reconstructions, without – as is inevitable – some succumbing to the temptation to appropriate it, or mutilate it, from various trenches. From this perspective, Evola seems to share the fate of other great thinkers of *the twentieth* century who have only recently managed to emerge from the ostracism of the prevailing culture due to their ideology: Spengler, Jünger, Schmitt, the thinkers of the Conservative Revolution and, first and foremost, Nietzsche and Heidegger. However, with a certain degree of haste, there has been a desire to liberate Evola's thought in order to render it innocuous and museum-worthy, thus forcing it to correspond to an area susceptible to making it (ideologically) more homogeneous: hence the definition of *the incapacitating myth* (Marco Tarchi), the indication of the "solipsistic" danger seen from the "ideal" perspective of Tradition<sup>1</sup>, as well as a kind of censorship coming from the apparatus of the Italian National Alliance Party.

The "reasons" for his marginalisation by the hegemonic culture (with a few notable exceptions) are widely known and no longer justified today, but some of the reasons for the dispute arise from Evola's reading of a non-historicist conception of the world, which we nevertheless consider worthy of discussion. I will mention some philosophical themes that can serve as a roadmap for his interpretation of modernity: the conception of time and the subject, work, and the role of Tradition in the contemporary era.

## 1. Fragments of modernity: the meaning of the avant-garde

Taking into account Evola's notable writings on avant-garde art, his 'choice' in favour of Dada in a strongly D'Annunzio- and Futurist-influenced Italy seems very significant: no supra-mystical or heroic aestheticism, no indulgence towards the decadent vein present in so much literature of the time; this without discounting the Marinetti alignment destined to become the poetics of the regime. Dada *versus* Futurism is more than a merely aesthetic controversy, dictated solely by the avant-garde desire for iconoclastic experimentation. From here, Evola's most inspiring perspective opens up; the scope of his thinking is still underestimated.

In an article published in *La Torre* in 1930, significantly entitled 'Symbols of modern degeneration: Futurism'<sup>2</sup>, Evola asserted that Futurism, rather than being a phenomenon confined to the artistic avant-garde<sup>3</sup>, was 'something terribly present and current' that characterised the essence of a terminal era. He added that 'becoming' connoted modern temporality, which was also characterised by the desire for change and the ultimate innovation of itself, by gratuitous destructiveness that becomes the demolition of any higher spiritual principle, as well as by the mystification of matter and the elemental.

Futurist, that is what modernity is, just like the form taken by modern humanism, which pursues material and physical achievements, records, quantity, acceleration, mechanisation, automatism and an emphasis on instincts and brutality. Futurist rhetoric, beyond the artistic achievements that open up the authentic dimension of avant-garde art, is the aesthetic translation of the movement of the modern era: the acceleration of technical depersonalisation.

The relevance of futurism [...] lies in the fact that it typically reflects and expresses the movement of the spirit which, betraying itself, identifies with the brute force of becoming and matter, mutating its sense of self through the intoxication and vertigo that it draws from its own loss<sup>4</sup>.

Three themes on which he disagrees with Futurism, and which make Evola lean in favour of Dadaism, are of particular interest: instinctiveness, dynamism and primordial vitality and the 'absolute mediation' of Dadaism, which are contrasted with the emphasis on mechanisation, the acute beauty of the machine, the abstract and metallic perfection which, together with Le Corbusier, will be celebrated as the true emancipation – aesthetic, but also ethical – of the modern, the acceleration and simultaneity that make man a mechanism rather than a spiritual being, and the preponderance of political passions ("the uproar, the ode to kicks and fists, instead of mysticism for sporting spirituality and triumph"<sup>5</sup>, but also nationalism and interventionism). All this is opposed to the 'maximum empowerment of the individual principle'<sup>6</sup>, to the absolute formalism in which

"the rhythm of pure inner freedom"<sup>7</sup>, the abstract consciousness similar to "the atonal and coldly ardent interiority of a Ruysbroeck and an Eckhart"<sup>8</sup>. In other words, the futurism is emblematic of the "degeneration" insofar as it destroys visibility, that is, it forms an advertising rhetoric that could well be called the "inverted spirituality" of the modern, culminating in the ideologisation of technology, whose physical features Evola summarised in the elemental (instinctive primordially, mechanicalness, the will to dominate). It is not a question of naively replacing the technical age with the advent of a new world, nor, on the contrary, of going beyond modernity and history as such: "The car instead of the Nike of Samothrace is obviously one humanity instead of another; and that is not overcoming humanity, but the opposite of humanity"<sup>(9)</sup>.

These themes, as well as the aristocratic motifs that oppose 'plebeian' futurism, together with the baseness of the masses and the insistence on individuality as a path to spiritual quest, as opposed to quantitative and material growth, competition and everything that presupposes participation in the collective dimension, are questions of Nietzschean origin that are found, around the same time, deeply meditated upon by German culture (in particular by Spengler, Benn, Jünger and, above all, by Heidegger) and not so much by Italian culture<sup>10</sup>: it is the horizon of nihilism in which

technology unquestionably dominates; it is the affirmation of the Kingdom of Quantity that fulfils the progressive promise of historicism.

Nihilistic – that is, incapable of perceiving the end of an era and the need to overcome it – is, for Evola, therefore, the apology for speed, innovation and consumption. It is similar to Jünger, for whom, beyond the predatory (and ruinous) movement of technology, it is necessary to see the "immobile centre" and place oneself in it<sup>11</sup>. This means combating the Enlightenment's equalisation of any spiritual dimension 'different' from the materiality of the measurable; it means recognising in the elemental the symbol of a civilisation that flaunts itself as if it were totally emancipated from superstitions and nature; it means masking futuristic idols as the aestheticisation of a power that dissolves any transcendence, but also what is properly human.

## 2. The landscape of ruins

The 'overcoming' of the human brought about by technology is what, with clear-sighted vision, Ernst Jünger's *The Worker* foreshadows. The 'figuration' of the workplace in this work has the rough and sharp contours that in *Riding the Tiger* can be glimpsed in New Objectivity: 'everything that is pure reality and objectivity, what seems cold, inhuman, threatening, lacking in intimacy, depersonalised, barbaric'<sup>12</sup>.

It is the Worker, the substitute for bourgeois individuality, who represents the elemental substance of the new world. The elemental has definitively broken through the wall of bourgeois (Enlightenment) rationality, and the irrational has taken root in the heart of Western Reason in the form of its greatest triumph: Technology. But, since, according to Jung, technology is the means through which the Worker mobilises the world, Work is destined to take on unprecedented courses and connotations – the 'modern superstition of work'<sup>13</sup>— as if it had a new and inherent naturalness from which no aspect of existence can escape, and which powerfully standardises the world, making it 'univocal', moulded in the imprint of a single currency, speaking a single 'primordial language' that replaces the idea of rationality, progress and utility. This is modern technology.

In his reading of *The Worker*, Evola radicalises (or *rectifies*) Jünger's position: technology needs to find a limit in an order in which the Type must prevail, moving

towards a world of stability and limits and, therefore, in a certain sense, towards a new classicism of action and domination, where the meanings of a higher order must be explained through the new integrated mechanical language, which has become univocal because it is fixed in a state of perfection<sup>14</sup>.

Evola highlights a certain utopianism in Jünger's perspective, revealed by its lack of realisation and by the growing danger of technical discoveries, whose catastrophic 'titanism' Jünger himself will denounce in his later works.

Even the kind of ascetic discipline that forges the type of the Worker cannot, according to Evola, be valued positively or as overcoming in itself, beyond recognising its very orientation: it is necessary to know whether the dissolution of bourgeois individuality leads to further deepening and elemental disintegration or to supra-personal dimensions.

Jünger's revelation of the growing elementalisation constitutive of a 'futuristic' era, and the archaic and regressive return of modern technology, cannot dispense with an evaluation of the quality of the elemental with which technical work comes into contact, especially in a world devoid of adequate relative knowledge. Anticipating Jünger's later reflections<sup>15</sup>, Evola points out how

the elemental can burst in, retaining its negative, even demonic value; [...] a possibility sufficiently attested to by recent times, including the Second World War<sup>16</sup>.

Any criterion of legitimacy that does not foresee the ability to master this dimension is insufficient, because neither the Worker nor the technocrat – who at best can limit themselves to mastering their means and technical development – appear at the highest point of the tasks of the age<sup>17</sup>. On this point, as on others, there is a significant proximity between Evola's positions and those held in Jünger's work in general (even if we do not consider *The Worker* itself): modern technology and science are

expressions of the will to dominate, of the frenetic activism of the will to power and, as such, are antithetical to any spirituality oriented towards transcendence. For the very idea of limitation is something that repels the Faustian mentality of the West, just as modern technology is necessarily destructive and iconoclastic. If the work of the Worker appreciates the mobilisation of the power of reality, it is problematic how

it can re-reveal and concretely assert a spiritual, sacred or metaphysical dimension of reality in a humanity that conceives of the universe only in the disenchanting terms of modern science and technology<sup>18</sup>.

This "empty spiritual space"<sup>19</sup> is none other than the desert horizon –destroyed by the divine– of technical nihilism, which finds its icon in the constant alquidity of rationalist aestheticisation, which is not coincidentally found in the initial current of the futurist and abstract rebellion against the residues of past traditions. The futurist *tabula rasa* is merely the beginning of the metallic coldness of functional rationalism in its modelling with technology, but it has the merit of revealing, beneath the noisiest and most iconoclastic aspects, the hidden elemental, irrational, dissolving root that remains and acts as if the great capillary systems of order in the world of work had definitively eliminated it. The Enlightenment fills the world with sinister light<sup>20</sup>.

### **3. The enigma of Tradition**

There is no doubt that Evola, with his multiple cultural activities, first attempted to provide *guidance* in an era in which the very idea of reference points and direction was considered obsolete, if not openly dissolved in the name of global emancipation<sup>21</sup>. Guidance is an action distinct from internal movement with accurate reference points, fixed stars in an immutable firmament. It is not that the immutability of the firmament has diminished, but rather that our point of observation has changed, or perhaps we no longer have the ability to see clearly: we do not know where to look. The sky has become the dismal outer space into which the dross that the Earth has been unable to contain is thrown, and the earth is not

other than saturated and depleted soil, and today it is merely a reminder of the proliferation of virtual dimensions. This is the context for the major problem of the relevance of Tradition today, the interpretation of which gives rise to diverse positions which, taken together, make it possible to reconstruct its universal meaning.

It is not my intention to reproduce Evola's interpretation of this question, which has been excellently supplemented from various perspectives<sup>22</sup>, and even the relationship between modernity and Tradition in Evola deserves attention. Marcello Veneziani has written that the danger that lies in Evola's thinking resides in the solipsism resulting from the reference to a Tradition without further efficacy, without rites, without temples, without current references; in this, Evola involves a crisis similar to that of other exponents of the conservative revolution, such as Jünger, Benn and Spengler,

the crisis of a transcendence that has lost God, of a verticalism that has lost its apex, of a heroism that has lost its heroes, of an Olympus that has lost its gods, of a Tradition that has lost its temples<sup>23</sup>.

It is therefore necessary to refer to the idea rather than the actual situation. Hence Evola's tendency towards *apoliteia* or Jünger's figure of *the Waldgang*, the praise of aristocratic solitude that takes place in the place ('the homeland') where one lives.

Others, who assume a certain modernity in Evola, wonder whether Evola's condemnation of the present age is not a contradiction of the traditional doctrine of progressive distancing from the Principle.

The question underlying both is the same: is criticism of the modern world from a traditional perspective legitimate? And does this not paradoxically conflict with the need to take a transformative position? This question runs through Evola's thinking and contravenes all *twentieth-century* thought that has questioned – from a non-historicist point of view – the problem of the destiny of the modern and the need to overcome it, a problem opened up by Nietzsche's great question following the death of God and the collapse into the nihilistic abyss. It is the same question that emerges from the pages of *The Decline of the West*, on the problem

of what behaviour to adopt regardless of the end, whatever it may be, based on an inexorable cyclical law that truncates the progressive and demiurgic illusions of Faustian man.

This reflection is Evola's cultural battle, which exemplifies how one can remain standing amid the fragments of civilisation, in the name of a Tradition that is obscured and prefigured in silence and enigma. Very different from the position of Guénon, Schuon, and Burkhardt, Evola radically assumes the point of view of extreme modernity, of a recorded dissolution without the possibility of finding refuge or the certainty of a valid spirituality. It is possible that this extreme disenchantment inherent in Evola's diagnosis reflects the perspective of like-minded thinkers of the conservative revolution, a kind of German "turning point" in philosophy that certainly does not appear at all in Guénon. In fact, unlike other authors of the Tradition, Evola's thought shows a strong and clear presence of modern philosophical reflection, Nietzsche *in primis*, which interacts with traditional doctrine and helps to clarify its possible meaning for contemporaries. The *kshatriya* connotation that is recognised in Evola's traditional position<sup>24</sup> –and which would explain the difference with respect to the greater

Guenonian or Schuonian "orthodoxy"—perhaps also finds hermeneutical and argumentative tools for a more *human and historical* view of contemporary philosophy. But the most outstanding debt – because it is recorded in two works with a certain structure – seems to be that which leads Italian philosophy (neo-idealism, Michelstaedter) to give the specific tone of Evola's "traditional" meditation, its hermeneutic efficacy in a terminal era, which seems to me to be of greater depth than Nietzsche's philosophy and his diagnosis of modern nihilism in action. This coherently explains Evola's attention to authors who motivated him or introduced him to Italian culture; a kind of 'vehicle' or preparation, a critical exercise and an education in thought where lost 'fidelity' constitutes 'the mystery of decadence', the obscuring of Tradition.

If Tradition is obscured by destiny, if it has distanced itself from us, "the race of man in flight" represents the closure and degradation of a

ferocious humanity, inherent in Nietzsche's "last man"<sup>27</sup>, enclosed within the walls of materialistic hardening, so that the loss of the sacred and the distancing from the divine do not constitute a problem worth considering. A humanity that cannot conceive of its own extreme misery, and for which symbols and rites are, at best, ethnographic and museological repertoires lacking in efficacy and meaning, cannot access the repository of Traditional knowledge, the transformative meditation of its symbols. The modern, by its very essence, can only ignore the traditional legacy, in the dual form of denial and museum embalming.

Attacking its immutability, its interpretative dogmatism, is tantamount, however, to confirming its death, its mummification, and consigning it to the vast museum repertoire that modernity uses as an excuse for its destruction. Furthermore, it would mean failing to recognise the effectiveness of the temporal dimension, despite the distancing from the Principle and its progressive, necessary obscuring. Tradition is not an intact repository of historical forms that can be defined indiscriminately as an epochal position: 'it is not a supine conformism to what has been, an inert continuation of the past into the *present*'; for

nor is it a question of artificially and violently prolonging particular forms linked to the past, despite having exhausted their own vital possibilities and no longer being up to the times<sup>28</sup>.

The principles are immutable, while the historical forms in which they are translated are nothing more than "particular expressions appropriate to a certain period and a certain area"<sup>29</sup>.

If Tradition, in order to be alive and active, must find a suitable historical incarnation again – according to a principle that could be called "geophilosophical"—the despair that keeps it clinging to the remnants of a different action ("traditionalism"<sup>30</sup>) becomes the most nihilistic attitude, something complementary and opposite to those who judge it definitively as "a thing of the past," a dead superstition that is carried on the back with the pride of complete immanence.

To guarantee such continuity, while remaining firm in one's principles, it is necessary to "eventually abandon everything that must be abandoned," rather than stubbornly persisting or rushing headlong into panic and confusedly seeking new ideas when we see that a crisis or changing times are upon us—such is the essence of true conservatism<sup>31</sup>.

If Tradition consists of principles that are both meta-historical and dynamic, which may manifest themselves in different ways but retain a transcendent unity among themselves, what form does Tradition take in recent times, and what does it call us to in the late modern West in an era of globalisation?

This is what, from the Evolian perspective, contemporary non-historicist thought can provide as useful guidance for those who wish to understand the current situation in the direction of a possible spiritual transformation and, therefore, the thought of Tradition.

The situation of contemporary humanity—which traditional knowledge synthesises in the terminal phase of the Kali Yuga—of maximum distancing from the Principle, of materialistic 'solidification', of 'flaking' and disintegration, of satanic inversion of meanings and symbols, is analysed exhaustively in its 'catastrophic' character, or rather of censure—the 'wall of time'—by thinkers who take Nietzsche's maxims, pointing out the character of the 'end' of modernity understood as the culmination of Western rationalism. The terms of technology, work, standardisation, the death of the sacred, the flight of the gods, the extreme de-religionisation in which this arrogant and reckless humanity finds itself, constitute an essential starting point for any reflection that seeks to find orientation in the confused mixture and combination of meanings.

For many paragraphs – even if this statement proves intolerable, both for professional philosophers and traditionalists – the thinking of Nietzsche, but above all that of Heidegger and Jünger, represents the speculative culmination of a vaster constellation of thinkers that took shape in the early decades of the twentieth century – on

everything in the German region—as an expression or propagation of certain strands of the so-called "conservative revolution," and it approaches the perspective of Tradition; it represents something like a philosophical and esoteric translation<sup>32</sup>. From this point of view, then, such a direction of philosophical thought constitutes the most radical diagnosis of the dissolving nature of modernity and its ethical and intellectual references: it is the very form of modern Western Reason that contains, in itself, its own possibility of realisation and dissolution, and it is only by understanding these limits that one can begin to think (and to do so in a different way), bringing this to its conclusion—as Evola desired.

This thought also helps us understand why, taking equally the constitutive act that obscures Tradition, it becomes less frequent or interrupts its *betrayal*; we must not resign ourselves nihilistically or rush into blind action: it is necessary to know how to hide in Tradition, with its ammunition<sup>33</sup>, even if they are kept as such, without becoming disillusioned at not being able to rediscover the transparency of symbols (as *New Age* simplistically does today). As Heidegger has exemplarily demonstrated, the divine, for our contemporaries, occurs only in the form of a distancing, and any attempt to resurrect the ancient gods becomes satanic and parodic; so too is the exhumation of rites and symbols that have no validity, insofar as they belong to a specific geotemporal constellation, and have therefore *necessarily* been eclipsed. Such is the true content of modern technology, which leaves neither gods nor temples standing but hides incessantly under the deceptive appearance of new idols: the extreme distancing from the Principle, extreme precariousness, the landscape of ruins in which simple differences need to remain standing.

This awareness, which has recognised the illusory nature, the mystification and the ruin of historicist thinking, of modern science and technology, of the will to power of Western man, is the essential orientation for any further path, perhaps to return to the mystery which, for moderns, has necessarily become Tradition and which must be safeguarded as the seed of a 'new beginning'<sup>(34)</sup>. This awareness is also a spiritual ski, just as

Evola has demonstrated with abundant analytical detail, observing the degeneration of modern taste and morals, and drawing attention to what would seem to be marginal aspects which, when correctly interpreted, constitute an index of the degree and form of this disintegration.

From this point of view, Evola's uncompromising exploration of the endless landscape of ruins of modernity in his writings is similar to the work of Spengler, Jünger, Benn and Keyserling, and the picture that emerges from combining them is coherent and unified. Evola is perfectly "in tune" with the times and speaks in a philosophical language that often anticipates the culture of working people, entangled as they are in their stubborn ideological prejudices. And, in its speculative results, this philosophical thought converges with the traditional orientation, perhaps as much as Evola himself deserves<sup>35</sup>. This will not be the case if, for both sides, the response of the hegemonic culture becomes heavy, malignant and hostile, a cesspool of silence or denigration, something that has only begun to be understood in recent years by the few who have given "testimony" to Tradition with their orientation:

Let us allow the men of our time to speak—with varying degrees of smugness or impertinence—about anachronism and anti-history. [...] Let us abandon them to their 'truth' and to having only one thing in mind: to remain standing in a world in ruins. [...] Making the values of truth, reality and Tradition visible to those who today do not want "this" and confusedly seek "the other", means supporting the resistance to the great temptation, in which matter seems to be stronger than spirit<sup>36</sup>.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> M. Veneziani, *Julius Evola tra filosofia e Tradizione*, Rome: Ciarrapico, 1984, pp. 122 ff.

<sup>2</sup> J. Evola, *Scritti sull'arte d'avanguardia*, edited by E. Valento, Rome: Julius Evola Foundation, 1994.

<sup>(3)</sup> And "the stupidity of spoiling" a "futuristic" Italy, solely under the spirit of some *fascists*, who reject the idea of replacing the fist with the critical sense that proclaims

culture of sport with classical and aristocratic superiority, boasting with youthful joy" (*Ibid.*, p. 83).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> J. Evola, *A proposito di Dada*, in *Scritti sull'arte d'avanguardia*, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> J. Evola, *Sul significato dell'arte modernissima*, in *Scritti ...*, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> J. Evola, *Arte astratta*, Rome: Julius Evola Foundation, 1992, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup>It may be interesting to compare Evola's 'cultural policy' of importing and disseminating European authors and themes with that of Antonio Banfi, which was a movement with opposing ideological intentions and was destined to have an enormous impact on Italian philosophical and aesthetic culture in the same years. Cf. L. Bonesio, 'L'ombra della ragione. Banfi lettore di Klages', in: Various authors, *Soggetto e verità*, Milan: Mimesis, 1996, for an analysis of the ideologically neutralising strategy of Banfi's reading in which he confronts authors labelled as 'irrationalists'.

<sup>11</sup> 'Alongside the great currents of the world, there are also individuals anchored in *immovable lands* [...]. They preserve the line of the summit; they do not belong to this world'. –scattered across the earth, often unaware of each other, but from now on they will be invisibly united and form an unbreakable chain in the traditional spirit. [...] It is thanks to them that Tradition is still present despite everything. (J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1988, p. 441).

<sup>12</sup> J. Evola, *Cavalcare la tigre*, Milan: Scheiwiller, 1971, p. 113.

<sup>13</sup> J. Evola, *Gli uomini e le rovine*, Rome: Il Settimo Sigillo, 1990, p. 100. Evola returns to the subject of work, as well as the 'demon of economics', particularly in *Rebellion Against the Modern World*, *The Bow and the Club*, and *Men and Ruins*, emphasising its inevitable nature of slavery: 'If there has ever been a civilisation of slaves on a large scale, it is precisely modern civilisation. No traditional civilisation saw such large masses condemned to dreary, discouraging, automatic work: slavery [...] imposed blandly through the tyranny of the economic factor and the absurd structure of a more or less collectivised society. Because the modern view of life, with its materialism, has eliminated any possibility of conferring something transfiguring on one's own destiny, of seeing a sign and a symbol; thus, today's slavery is the most gloomy and desperate of all those known" (*Rivolta...*, pp. 143-144).

<sup>14</sup> J. Evola, *L'Operaio nel pensiero di Ernst Jünger*, Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Cf., in particular, *Junto al muro del tiempo* (which, as is well known, was translated into Italian by Evola under the pseudonym Carlo D'Altavilla for the Volpe publishing house) and, in general, the work that appeared after the Second World War.

<sup>16</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>17</sup> "In this case, it is also necessary to consider that, among the antagonists in conflict, there are those who can represent the elemental itself, with its negative and dark valence, corresponding to the terrible use of any possibility offered by the world of technology to subjugate not only material force, but also man." (*Ibidem.*).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> This refers to the famous opening of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but above all to the profound considerations of S. Quinzio in *Mysterium iniquitatis*, Milan: Adelphi, 1995. On the subject of the sinister light of modernity in relation to the desecralisation of reality, and of nature in particular, cf. L. Bonesio, *La terra invisibile*, Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1993.

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of these terms in relation to the Evolian perspective, see L. Bonesio, *Geofilosofia del paesaggio*, Milan: Mimesis, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> For further contributions on this subject, see J. P. Lippi, *Julius Evola et la pensée traditionnelle*, in *Julius Evola*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme ("Les Dossiers H"), 1997, and G. Ferracuti, *Modernità di Evola*, in *Futuro Presente (Julius Evola)*, 6, 1995; P. Di Vona, *Evola, Guénon, Di Giorgio*, Borzano: SeaR, 1993.

<sup>23</sup> M. Veneziani, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> P. da Lippi, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> With the notable exception of the "second" Heidegger.

<sup>26</sup> J. Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, pp. 132-133. On fidelity as the most transcendent principle of responsibility, cf. *Riding the Tiger*, p. 222.

<sup>27</sup> An explicit reference to Nietzsche's 'last man' can be found in *Cavalcare la tigre*, p. 34 ff.

<sup>28</sup> J. Evola, *Gli uomini e le rovine*, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> On traditionalism, see, for example: *Gli uomini e le rovine*, pp. 198–199.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* This consideration should put Veneziani's concern about Evola's *solipsistic* danger into perspective: "This trap is clearly proposed when Evola indicates the path to follow in order to remain standing among the ruins, and points out, among the existential and metapolitical orientations of the *differentiated* man faithful to Tradition, that what sustains his homeland must be the Idea, not the real homeland in which he lives" (*op. cit.*, p. 122).

<sup>32</sup> Leaving aside the question – theoretically irrelevant – of whether there was effective knowledge (though not necessarily 'initiation') of traditional principles and doctrine. The most interesting case, due to the extraordinary importance of his thought, is that of Heidegger. The case of Jünger is also controversial: for Evola and others (Q. Principe, for example), he had no precise traditional orientations. According to other scholars, Jünger had become acquainted, through Eliade, with the thought of Guénon and Gurdjjeff, and demonstrated a precise traditional and initiatory knowledge (thus, he repeatedly alludes to the figure of the Necromancer). Cf., for example, M. Freschi, *Jünger ed Evola: un incontro pericoloso*, introduction to *L'Operaio nel pensiero di Ernst Jünger*.

<sup>33</sup> Moreover, with a profound interpretation of W. Benjamin, especially in the essay on Franz Kafka (in *Angelus novus*, Italian translation by R. Solmi; Turin: Einaudi, 1962). Evola's *differentiated* man "knows that in a civilisation such as ours it is impossible to restore the structure that, in the world of Tradition, gave meaning to existence" (J. Evola, *Cavalcare la tigre*, p. 211).

<sup>34</sup> The expression is Heidegger's. The essential problem is rather that of the extent to which relations of continuity can exist between the world that is dying and the world that may be born: that is, whether one world can continue in the other. The predominant conception of ancient traditional teaching is that, in fact, a kind of hiatus separates one cycle from another: it would not be a progressive dissolution and recommencement, but a new beginning, an abrupt mutation, corresponding to an event of a divine or metaphysical order" (*Rivolta...*, pp. 440-441).

<sup>35</sup> On the convergence of Evola's investigations with the philosophy of nihilism, cf. G. Maglieri, *Modernità e tradizione. Aspetti del pensiero evoliano*, Rome: Il Settimo Sigillo, 1987.

<sup>36</sup> J. Evola, *Rivolta...*, p. 442.

## EVOLA, FUTURIST AND DADAIST PAINTER

Carlo Fabrizio Carli

Giulio Cesar Evola (1898-1974) always showed an aptitude for design and, at the age of seventeen, was about to begin his engineering studies at the University of Rome. He approached the world of avant-garde art and ventured into futurist manifestations which, beyond the clamour and the scandals that aroused in his moment among the short-sighted "right-thinking" people, took concrete form at the Sprovieri Gallery in Rome, where they were imbued with an international spirit. There, Evola joined the group of young artists—Prampolini, Depero, Marchi, and the two Ginanni Corradini brothers—who gathered at Giacomo Balla's studio. Evola was, as Crispolti has written, "practically a disciple" of Balla, a central figure in Roman artistic life in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Those who have read *The Way of Cinnabar*, Evola's intellectual autobiography, know how the future author of *Rebellion Against the Modern World* soon distanced himself from Marinetti's movement, which he left because of its behaviour ("I was annoyed by its sensualism, its lack of interiority, its whole noisy and exhibitionist side; his crude exaltation of life and instinct, curiously mixed with mechanisation and a kind of Americanism; while, on the other hand, it led to a chauvinistic form of nationalism")<sup>2</sup> and, above all, by the interventionist turn it took against the Central Empire which, despite his youth and the widespread nationalist infatuation of his time, Evola saw it as opposition to old Europe, its traditions and its world primacy (Evola recalls how Marinetti, after reading an article by a young friend in which he more or less expounded this idea, replied: "Your idea is very far from mine, further than that of an Eskimo").<sup>3</sup>

However, in an early period limited to the four years from 1915 to 1918, Evola was strongly influenced by the dynamism of Futurist art and, in particular, by Balla's quest, which was not without connotations of

Orphic spiritualism, which would gradually crystallise in him in an alchemical-magical key.

This first Futurist period (defined by Evola as "sensory idealism") includes works such as the famous *Manojo de flores* (Bouquet of Flowers), splendid for its lively colours and stylistically very consistent; *Fiesta*; *Forja, estudio de los ruidos* (*Forge, Study of Noises*); *Five o'clock tea. Secuencia dinámica* (Dynamic Sequence); and *Tropas envueltas bajo la lluvia* (Troops Enveloped in Rain), which is an extraordinary watercolour.

Perhaps even more original and significant is the work that took shape in the second phase of Evola's painting, which the artist defined as "mystical abstractionism" and covering the three-year period from 1918 to 1921.

With the disappearance of any figurative element, the importance of Balla, who had introduced it into the Futurist pictorial repertoire, which was fundamentally figurative and had also acquired an abstract dimension in the post-war period (one need only think of aeropainting), is better understood, which led to the dispute with Boccioni.

For Evola, his time involved in Dadaism—of which he can be considered the greatest Italian exponent—was a period in which affinities with the establishment of purist constructivism emerged, appearing in an elaborate repertoire of abstract forms with clear symbolic allusions, but always marked by chromaticism, as in the Futurist period. However, there are also undeniable traces of the Viennese section, recognisable by its use of metallic varnishes, especially silver.

It should be borne in mind that the line separating the two moments in Evola's painting is not easily discernible: in fact, for the artist, it must have been a period of intense technical and intellectual learning; which is why we are surprised by its high quality (which at its peak was truly exceptional), because we can appreciate the rapid maturation of the very young artist revealed in the paintings that have survived to this day, of which there are about forty – not counting late replicas from the 1960s and a few new paintings made between the 1960s and 1970s. But we must not be confused by this kind of trial and error, and anyone

of his paintings should probably be carefully researched today.

His Dadaist phase is articulated in a narrow thematic repertoire: *Landscapes*; *Interior Landscape*; *Abstraction*; *Composition*; and *Dada Landscapes*; and shows a surprising harmony with the most advanced movements in the world, although the task of coordinating the Central European avant-garde was postponed due to the pursuits of Schad and Arp, or Richter and Itten.

We know that Evola came into contact with the Dadaist group in Zurich as early as 1918, and that he corresponded with at least Tzara, Arp, and Schad. Unfortunately, the Evola archive is almost entirely scattered; there are important letters from Evola in the Tzara archive in Paris, published a few years ago by Elisabetta Valento, which is the only Italian translation<sup>4</sup>. Other Dadaist documents by Evola were preserved in the Hans Richter archive and can be found in German public archives.

The newspaper reports of his time, and some catalogues that have become a valuable legacy over time, inform us of Evola's activity as an exhibitor, which in the few years he devoted himself to painting was by no means clandestine or marginal: a solo exhibition at the Bragaglia Gallery in Rome in 1920; another in Berlin the following year at Erwart Walden's famous *Der Sturm* gallery; also in 1921, a Dadaist "triptych" with Fiozzi and Cantarelli at Bragaglia; as well as his participation in three major group exhibitions: the Futurist exhibition of 1919 at the Palazzo Cova in Milan; the International Exhibition of Avant-Garde Art in Geneva (1920-1921); and the 'Salon Dada' in Paris (1922). Not to mention the large five-by-three-metre mural that Evola had collaborated on for the decoration of *the Grotte dell'Augusteo* cabaret (1921).

Evola's commitment to Dadaism and, in a broader sense, to the avant-garde, was not limited to painting. His contributions to the magazines *Bleu* and *Noi*, the poetry collections *Raâga-Blanda* and *La palabra obscura del paisaje interior*, the lucid essay *Arte abstracto*, as well as his articles and lectures, serve as a kind of introduction to his work.

Although Evola placed himself in the ideal of the 'constructive' vein of Dadaism, thereby avoiding the subversive and nihilistic slope, he clarified for us the ultimate meaning of the movement founded by Tzara. To the point of being able to reconcile the most arduous understanding in a single person, on the basis of a complex intellectual itinerary, from which he theorises from the zero degree of aesthetic expression to his famous interpretation of the values of Tradition.

Having done so, in 1921 Evola decided to say irrevocably goodbye to the palette and brush. Painting seems to resurface sporadically during the 1960s, when he made some reproductions of his old works, but the theoretical stagnation theoretical in which that could be framed: the interruption of his painting activity continued, in effect, in a substantial way. This was probably due to the consistent success of Dadaism itself, which was later destined to self-dissolution: "true Dada is against Dada". The fact remains that Julius Evola abandoned his activity to undertake various studies and existential experiences, searches and approaches in which others, with a less inexorable and demanding intellectual attitude, would have lived peacefully and remained settled for twenty years.

It is worth remembering that Evola's abandonment preceded Marcel Duchamp's defection from Dada – a purely programmatic position – by four years, in 1925.

For his part, Evola did not seek to separate himself precisely or to oppose himself head-on, as did most of the Dadaist group (Breton, Aragon, and later Tzara himself), who embarked on the surrealist adventure, with its exaltation of the Freudian unconscious, its infrarational instinctivism and even its schizophrenic dissociation, which coincided – on the political level – with a declared communist militancy.

Evola's position was completely different. He retained with interest the radicalism of the Dadaist zero point, not as a nihilistic approach, but as an instrument with which to combat the oppressive materialism that satisfies the bourgeois mentality, and to be able to influence, as before, against the spiritual decadence inherent in the course of modernity.

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- <sup>1</sup> Enrico Crispolti, 'Giulio Evola', published in *La Medusa*, no. 40, November 1963 (publication of the *La Medusa* Contemporary Art Studio in Rome).
- <sup>2</sup> Julius Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro*, Milan, Scheiwiller, 1972<sup>2</sup>, p. 17.
- <sup>3</sup> Julius Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro*, cit, p. 18.
- <sup>4</sup> "Lettere di Julius Evola a Tristan Tzara (1919-1923)" [Letters from Julius Evola to Tristan Tzara (1919-1923)], edited by Elisabetta Valento, *Quaderni di testi evoliani*, no. 25, Rome, Julius Evola Foundation, 1991.
- <sup>5</sup> Julius Evola, *Scritti sull'arte d'avanguardia*, compiled by Elisabetta Valento, Rome, Julius Evola Foundation, 1994. The volume brings together most of Evola's writings on the subject.

## THE ORIGIN OF ITALIAN ABSTRACT ART: THE ROMAN MILIEU

Malva

The first abstract pictorial experience in Rome developed within the sphere of Futurism. In the first two decades of the 20th century, artists abandoned figurative forms and turned to abstract expression.

When we talk about abstract art, we are obviously not referring to decorative splashes or chromatic experiments: an abstract work requires, at the very least, a specific intention or, failing that, adherence to a programme. In 1909, in Rome, there was a renowned Freemason and occultist named Nathan. This helps us understand the importance that research and studies in the esoteric, philosophical and magical fields had in Roman circles.

The first to document themselves in this regard were the brothers Arnaldo and Bruno Ginanni Corradini (later called Ginna – from gymnastics – and Corra – from running – by the painter Giacomo Balla), who devoted themselves mainly to the study of Hindu texts (the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Hatha-yoga* system, the *Hatha-yoga pradipika*, *Raja-yoga*, and the *Gheranda* Sanhita, which were particularly attractive because of their study of psychic development). They practised hypnotism and occultism and were particularly interested in theosophy and suggestive therapy, but they did not venture into philosophical readings.

It was mainly the Futurists who influenced the atmosphere of those years, especially the painter Giacomo Balla and the photographer Anton Giulio Bragaglia.

In 1909, Ginna and Corra wrote a *Method* (published in 1910), which is important because it can be considered the philosophical foundation that preludes the development of art after 1910. In the *Method*, they explicitly discuss their knowledge:

We mention the books on spirituality and occultism by the publishers Diurville and Charcomac. We read the occultist Eliphas Levi, Papus, theosophists such as Blavatski and Steiner, the

Besant, secretary of the Theosophical Society, Leadbeater, and Edouard Schuré.

In his notes, Balla mentions the *Hoepli Manual* (citing as examples Pappalardo's *Spiritism* and Belfiore's *Hypnotism and Magnetism*) and some books on psychiatry, such as those by Lombroso, the famous psychiatrist, some of whose lectures Balla attended at the University of Turin.

### **GIACOMO BALLA**

In 1912, Giacomo Balla went to Düsseldorf to decorate and furnish the Löwenstein House. Düsseldorf was a very active city in that section: from that climate, Balla drew his taste for decorativism and the perspective of applied art in painting. He explored this type of decoration in depth in the series of *iridescent Compenetrations* painted between late 1912 and 1914. These are geometric compositions, triangular in shape, with regular canvases considered to be in-depth studies of colour relationships. According to M. Calvesi, it was an attempt to explore the magical principle of this correspondence:

The idea of interpenetration proposes the 'mercurial' integration or conjunction, fundamental in the hermetic and philosophical sphere, which may be veiled under the very theme of iridium, a symbol of harmony and purity of colours.

This expression reflects the vision of the whole descending to the particular, from the macrocosm to the microcosm.

This 'mercurial conjunction' can be found again, albeit in another painting, entitled *Mercury Passes in Front of the Sun* from 1914 – of which there are several versions – in which Balla reduces the atmospheric phenomenon to a pure representation of simple geometric shapes (triangles and circles). Again, according to Calvesi,

the triangle is the dynamic form par excellence, the penetrating form. Balla's painting does not aspire, therefore, to represent the object, but to convey its essence, its state of revelation; and the essence, which is condensed in the image, is, in the final analysis, sensitivity, lyricism.

The 1913 *Velocity* series is abstract in nature, but without magical implications. Balla achieves these representations no longer through geometric studies, but through the study of movement, a theme clearly derived from Futurism. Speed destroys the image, and only lines, curves and diagonals remain in the memory, highlighting the use of monochrome or two-colour schemes. Essentially, Balla does not think in abstract terms but verifies this concretely.

In 1918, thanks to Julius Evola, Balla became interested in metaphysical phenomena. This interest gave rise to a series of paintings with a particularly significant title: *Transformation of Form and Spirit*, in which we can once again recognise the triangle with its tip pointing upwards and a beam of yellow lights that symbolise transformation. At the top, it is possible to find the lower correspondence of the form in spirit. After 1920, Balla continued his search for an abstract dynamism that coincided concretely with the background of his paintings, while in his painting there is a return to figurative language.

#### **ANTON GIULIO BRAGAGLIA**

Bragaglia's Casa del Arte became a veritable magnet for Roman artists. Around 1910, Bragaglia began to take an interest in experimental photography, and in 1911 he proposed a new type of photography. With this intention, he freed photography from natural realism in order to convey the sensation of gesture and movement. He also wanted to demonstrate the objective difference between spiritual photography and dynamic photography, as his intention was to document the phenomena of psychic condensation that he had studied previously.

Bragaglia's experiments (reminiscent of those of Marey and Muybridge) greatly influenced Balla's painting. Suffice it to recall the famous painting *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* from 1912, which corresponds perfectly to an equally famous photograph by Bragaglia.

## **Futurist reconstruction of the universe**

It is in a manifesto dated 1915, signed by Balla and Depero, that 'abstract futurism' is defined. In this manifesto, they seek to reconstruct the order of the universe in abstract terms.

We will give flesh and bones to the invisible, the intangible, the imponderable, the imperceptible. We will find the abstract equivalents of all the forms and elements of the universe, and we will combine them according to the whim of our inspiration to form plastic complexes that we will set in motion.

## **ARNALDO GINNA**

He is the first Italian abstract painter. In him we find the courage to have opened a new path for art, in the sense of raising awareness of the state of mind.

In 1908, he suffered from severe nervous exhaustion that confined him to his bed for some time. It was during this period that he frequented the Academy of Fine Arts in Ravenna and wondered "what was the emotional relationship that linked, for example, Leonardo's pictorial art with Byzantine mosaics". He finally understood that

the subject is not important, nor is the medium used; everything depends on the harmony and expression of colours, on chiaroscuro, as if it were chromatic music.

All this comes together in a painting, *Neurastenia*, from 1908, which Ginna himself defined as the 'first truly abstract painting', in which he expresses a state of mind using only colours. And it is interesting to note that the title itself is formed by an abstract noun, something that cannot be said of his *Paseo romántico*.

In 1910, Ginna and Corra wrote the aforementioned treatise, *Method*, which was intended to be a rigorous code of conduct, bringing together thousands of quotations and exercises that should be seen as a conquest of the self.

consciousness. This is because art considers that the artist must know how to control their passions in order to express them better in their paintings.

Such considerations became more precise in the 1910 volume *Arte del futuro* (Art of the Future), in which Ginna deals only with art and artists, but relates all the arts. His theory is expressed in a confusing manner (and the same thing happens later with his 1915 book *Pittura del futuro* (*Painting of the Future*)), but he succeeds in giving a definition of art:

This defines the work of art: passions with such mutual relationships that they form a system—a system identical to those that rotate in the sky or to the molecules of matter, nothing more, nothing less. (...) Such is the condition of the artist: internal feelings; colours, shapes, lines, sounds, strong words; relationships between these and those. (...) Here the key concept emerges: the essence of art is one, and the means of expression are many. (...) We must imbue the things of nature with our passion, because that will make us feel them intensely.

And later he states: 'through all the arts there is a parallelism and a correspondence in form'.

Years later, in 1915, Ginna wrote *Painting of the Future*, a book in which he restricted the scope of his observations to painting alone. His rejection of traditional painting is evident, but then, what will the painter of the future paint? "Everything plastic and chromatic will be constituted by mixing and merging it again with the same elements."

In short, the object is broken down into simpler parts that must be considered the true primordial elements capable of reconstructing the new artistic reality. The object gives this sensation because it contains within itself the relationships of line and colour. For the new abstract form, such requirements are capable of producing moods. Thus, these abstract forms better explain this sensitivity because they are states created expressly for that purpose. The artist develops his own subconscious (which is not unconsciousness but the ability to abstract). He fishes in the 'universal substratum' or 'conscious subconscious' for the form that served him to express his passions. Ginna will call this art 'occult painting'.

which comes from deep within and will maintain that he was the first to profess this theory.

### **Compendium of abstract works by Ginna**

- 1908 Neurasthenia
- 1909 Romantic Walk
- 1910 I wake up with the window open
- 1912 Dance music
- 1913 Lust
  - Intoxication
  - Paganini
  - Edgar Allan Poe
- 1933 Total Spring
- 1935 Spiritual Portrait of a Lady
- 1941 Spiritual portrait of a girl
  - Spiritual self-portrait
  - Otherworldly music
  - Mozart's Requiem Mass
- 1942 Subconscious
  - Abstract research
- 1943 Bach's Prelude in B minor
  - Wagner's Music
- 1949 Evil Wave
- 1950 Mutual Dialogue
- 1960 The Lonely Self
- 1961 Death on Earth, Life in the Cosmos

### **JULIUS EVOLA (1898 - 1974)**

His artistic career began in 1915, but the first work we know of dates back to 1917-1918. His activity can be divided into two phases:

- 1) 1915-1918, a tendency towards sensory idealism (linked to sensory activity);

2) 1918-1922, mystical abstractionism.

The year 1918 can be considered a certain *impasse*, as it marks the end of the First World War and Evola's return home.

Evola was influenced by his reading of Nietzsche, from whom he drew the concepts of will and rebellion. But he was interested in spiritual problems: the search for interiority derived from symbolism, something that was very much in vogue in those years. Then Evola met Ginna at Balla's house. It is interesting to note that there was an important difference between the two. Both sought to explore interiority, but while Ginna attempted to represent passion, Evola sought to show the totality of being. Evola also had points of interest and convergence with Futurism (thanks to Balla, who was his friend and disciple), even though he was never a true Futurist because he always displayed his own personality.

In 1915, Evola went to the front. This experience was not fundamental from a pictorial point of view, but it was from a spiritual one: it was at the front that the existential crisis that led him to use drugs (the 'corrosive water') began, which chronologically coincides with the beginning of the period of 'mystical abstractionism', dated by himself in 1918. This abstractionism has its roots in the anthroposophical, theosophical and philosophical milieu of the time; he met Decio Calvari, president of the Independent Theosophical League of Rome. It was during this period that Evola created a series of interior landscapes (called *Dada* landscapes), which cannot be assimilated either to Ginna's landscapes or to Boccioni's moods.

They are representations of an intense individuality such as the immortal human ego. The Absolute is the conquest of the being who has known how to rise above. Man can regenerate himself through a precise technique, an art (the *Ars Regia* or alchemy); he can attain perfection and reach the Absolute. Therefore, it is necessary to change one's nature in order to reach perfection: in alchemy, this is equivalent to the transformation of base metals into alchemical gold. But it is necessary to awaken the sleeping god in man, to unite the internal with the external, annihilating any dualism.

A significant painting that can be related to this discourse is *Fragua. Estudio del ruido* (1917-18). Metals are worked in the forge, and therefore it can be thought of as an allusion to alchemy. It should also be noted how the colours Evola uses are ostensibly artificial because they are the colours of the spirit and of creation, and have nothing to do with those of nature.

The fundamental alchemical symbols that can help us understand Evola's work are as follows:

- The Sun corresponds to gold. It represents the One and the Whole, and the masculine.
- The Moon corresponds to mercury (or quicksilver) and represents the feminine.
- Lead is the opposite of gold, an impure element because it is composed of several elements.
- Salt defines man, the body.
- Sulphur corresponds to the sun (under the colour yellow), to the soul.
- Mercury corresponds to the Moon (silver colour), representing the spirit.

The first thing that must be liberated is the Spirit in order to communicate with the soul, and it must reach the body to make it part of the immortal nature. This journey is complete when the regenerated body is achieved (in alchemy, this is the Philosopher's Stone).

And this is why Evola's work, which falls within the realm of mystical abstractionism, can be considered alchemical, because it presents its internal character and is intense as a product of the spirit.

Following this line of thought, we can look at three paintings: *Composition No. 19* (1919), *Interior Landscape. Illumination* (1919) and *The Fibre Ignites and the Pyramids* (around 1920). They do not form a triptych, but we present them as such in an ideal way. In fact, it is possible to give an alchemical interpretation to any of them, as they represent an alchemical operation: cooking, mercury, sulphur.

## Composition No. 19

The transformation takes place in the *athanor* (alchemical furnace) (the dark-coloured globes). Here, tongues of fire and thick smoke appear. In the background, a blue 'A' is clearly visible. The 'A' corresponds to the One because it is the first letter of the alphabet and, in Hebrew writing, it is kabbalistically equivalent to the will.

### Interior landscape. Illumination

*Hg* is the chemical symbol for mercury. There is no dynamism; the context is geometric. The white, the colour of the Moon, stands out; the *Hg* is red, as is the wavy line, which completes the union of the two (focus and light) for regeneration.

### The fibre ignites and the pyramids

Here, the interesting thing is the alchemical symbol of coral-red sulphur. In *The Hermetic Tradition*, Evola writes that sulphur, symbolised by this hieroglyph, should not be considered pure, as it is presented as a cause of corruption because it is flammable. The painting depicts mother-of-pearl coloured metal tubes: this indicates the transition from white to red, which is the fulfilment of the Work of the Red in the alchemical phase. Stylistically, it should be noted that this work is in keeping with the mechanical theme of Futurism.

From 1918 onwards, Evola painted pictures that he entitled 'interior landscapes'. There is no dynamism here because the external has been eliminated. The landscape is interior; it is active because it is the Self that carries out the transformation. In some landscapes, Evola also gives an indication of the time: he reveals the desire to remain internal without losing sight of the external. For example, in *Interior Landscape. Hour 3 a.m.* (1918-19), he maintains figurative elements in the background and places abstraction in the centre of the painting. The landscape is nocturnal, for it is at night that fantastical activity flies over everyday reality.

The *Interior Landscape. Interval* (1919) is the representation of a figure as if seen from behind. At the bottom of the painting are two symmetrical semicircles evoking the Sun and the Moon. But why?

"Interval"? Because it presupposes the transition from one state of being to another, whose ultimate goal is the realisation of the absolute individual (freedom, will, power).

However, at the beginning of the 1920s, Evola abandoned any reference to the object. This gave rise to his painting *Abstraction* (1919-20). Abstraction is achieved by eliminating the elements left to the senses and moving towards the deep core of the being that enjoys it.

Evola was part of the editorial staff of the magazine *Noi (We)*. This brought him into contact with Tristan Tzara, whom he asked for information about Dadaism, about which he knew practically nothing. 3 January 1920 was a pivotal date for Evola, because he read the 1918 *Dada Manifesto*. He then wrote:

I enthusiastically adhere to your movement, which, without knowing it, I have been approaching for some time with all my work; and I declare it to be the most important and most profoundly original that has appeared in contemporary art.

The publication of *Abstract Art* dates from 1920. Although it went almost unnoticed, it can nevertheless be included among the observations that emerged about the new spiritual dimension that founded modern art and found its best representative in Kandinsky.

In 1921, Evola ended (or half-abandoned) his artistic activity, probably obeying the impulse of his declared nihilism, although it can also easily be classified as a simple act of Dadaist rebellion.

**Works of mystical abstraction by Julius Evola exhibited at the A. G. Bragaglia Art House from 20 to 31 January 1920.**

Composition No. 1

Composition No. 2

Composition No. 3  
Composition No. 4  
Composition No. 5  
Composition No. 7  
Composition  
Interior Landscape. Hour 3  
Interior Landscape. Hour 10  
½ Interior Landscape.  
Interval Composition No. 19  
Composition No. 20  
Composition No. 21  
Interior landscape. Hour  
16  
Interior landscape. Lighting  
First composition  
Celebration

**Definitions taken from P. A. Riffard, *Dictionary of Esotericism*, Genoa, ECIG, 1987.**

### **Alchemy**

One of the three occult arts (along with astrology and magic) whose purpose is the real or symbolic transmutation of metals into gold and the salvation of the soul; this is achieved through various operations on external and/or internal matter.

### **Anthroposophy**

Doctrine and School (1913) by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), a brilliant man of German origin who embraced theosophy but remained a Christian. His system encompassed philosophy, pedagogy, aesthetics, art, gymnastics, agriculture and epistemology from an esoteric perspective.

"In our age, when materialism is triumphant, anthroposophy takes on the task of deepening cultural life in the sense of spirituality, of drawing people's attention back to the

spiritual reality, which is the basis and principle of our entire psychic life" (R. Steiner, *L'enfant et le cours de la vie*, 1908).

### **Athamor**

A slow-burning alchemical furnace used to heat the philosophical egg of Hermes, which is the vessel in which the philosopher's stone is cooked. The *athamor* is the mirror of the macrocosm and the microcosm, and unites the two. Like gold, it has three parts: the upper part (where reverberation occurs), the central part (where the egg is located) and the lower part (where the fire burns and air enters).

### **Cinnabar**

Cinnabar is the natural sulphide of mercury, vermilion in colour. In Western alchemy, it appears both as a raw material (initial state) and as the Philosopher's Stone (final state).

### **Hermeticism**

European Hermeticism is identified with alchemical philosophy. Doctrine of Hermes Trismegistus; theory of minerals, plants and planets. Art of alchemical operations. Speculations on the Philosopher's Stone and Nature (see J. Evola, *The Hermetic Tradition*, 1931).

### **Philosopher's Stone**

In classical alchemy (from the 12th century onwards), the red powder used to prepare:

- a) On the physical plane, the powder of transmutation.
- b) On the spiritual level, the universal medicine that provides health and longevity.
- c) On the spiritual level, salvation or liberation.

### **Transmutation**

Alchemical term. It is the arrival of a body that changes substance, passing from a "base nature" to a "noble nature" (gold, spirit).

thanks to technical (alchemical transformation) and/or spiritual (initiatory) operations. The transmutation of base metal into gold is called *chrysopoeia*, and that of base metal into silver, *argyropoeia*.

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- F. Tedeschi, *Futurism in the figurative arts (from the Divisionist origins to 1916)*, Milan, I.S.U. Catholic University, 1995.
- E. Valento, *Homo Faber. Julius Evola fra arte e alchimia*, Rome, Julius Evola Foundation, 1994.

We also recommend reading the following texts (any edition):

- J. Evola, *El camino del cinabrio (The Way of Cinnabar)*; trans. by Marcos Ghio; Buenos Aires: Ediciones Heracles, 1998, 225 pp.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Hermetic Tradition: In Its Symbols, Its Doctrine, and Its Royal Art*, trans. Carlos Ayala; Collection "La Otra Ciencia," no. 17; Barcelona: Ediciones Martínez Roca, 1975, 270 pp.
- Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy*.
- Rudolf Steiner,  
*Anthroposophy*.
- Blavatsky, *Introduction to Theosophy*.
- M. Calvesi, *Art and Alchemy*.
- Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy. Meaning and Image of the World*; trans. by Ana M<sup>a</sup> de la Fuente; "Realismo Fantástico" Collection, no. 2; Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1976, 253 pp.
- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Alchemy*.

## EVOLA: FROM DADAISM TO THE CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION (1919-1940)

Carlo Altini

Patricia Chiantera-Stutte's\* book aims to analyse the thinking and cultural activity of Julius Evola, an artist, philosopher and esoteric author who spent his youth under Italian fascism. Despite the dissemination of Evola's writings in radical and extreme right-wing circles (or perhaps because of it), his work occupies a marginal position, as explained in the introduction to the book: firstly, because of his rejection of academic culture and even modern science, and secondly, because of the absence, towards the end of the 1980s, of serious and ideologically uncompromised studies on this author.

The author has three objectives in this book: to outline the political position of certain intellectual circles on the European right in the 1920s and 1930s, with which Evola was associated; to clarify the interrelationships and links between the *Konservative Revolution* movement and traditionalist doctrine, following Evola's trajectory; and, finally, to contextualise the author's work and political-cultural activity, invalidating the interpretation of Evola as an apolitical and non-racist author.

The author proceeds to reconstruct – in line with the studies of Franco Ferraresi, Christoph Boutin and Pierre-André Taguieff – Evola's intellectual trajectory, freeing it from distortions due both to apologetic interpretations and to the reduction of the author to a mere fascist or Nazi thinker. To achieve this result, Chiantera-Stutte uses an interdisciplinary method: the linguistic analysis of Evola's texts and the study of his sources is accompanied by the historical-political reconstruction and micro-history of the period in question, and concludes by placing the author in the artistic and intellectual circles in which his thinking matured. To achieve this purpose, she employs the method developed by historian Jean François Sirinelli, which has since been used in the field of political and social sciences.

The book is divided into four parts, corresponding respectively to the macro-historical reconstruction, Evola's biography, the analysis of the historical-cultural background in which his work takes shape, and finally, the study of the author's thought and political position. The fourth part, in particular, deals with Evola's political commitment and returns to the level of macro-historical analysis developed in the first part, linking it to Evola's intellectual journey. This approach constitutes an additional original aspect of the work, which reconstructs the conception of political history and the internal contrasts of fascism with the trajectory of intellectuals, firstly through the political guidelines on groups of authors; secondly, through the fracture in the political and intellectual fields; and finally, through the pressure of political events on intellectual circles. In particular, this chapter analyses the section of *the Diorama Filosófico*, edited by Evola, which was a supplement to Farinacci's magazine *Régimen Fascista*: here we find articles and essays by leading figures in traditional thought—Guénon and Di Giorgio—as well as those by exponents of the so-called conservative revolution, from Spann and Kreis in Vienna—Othmar Spann and Walter Heinrich—and the Hamburg circle of Wilhelm Stapel and Albrecht E. Günther, to the Prince of Rohan. Their vision was to create a European fascism or, better still, a European right-wing culture that would rectify fascism and give it unity and spiritual meaning.

The thematic aspects discussed by the author, which constitute the crux of Evola's connection with the conservative revolution, are: the condemnation of positivism and materialism; the traditional method; the conception of the superiority of metaphysical reality over visible reality; the doctrine of tradition as an ahistorical principle; the decadence of the modern age; the apology for hierarchical order defined as natural and just; the justification of the caste system—which for Evola is, in turn, equivalent to race—; the organic state; the elitist and 'esoteric' conception of knowledge understood as a process of transformation and empowerment; and the imperial project. In this way, the author develops her considerations through a sharp thematic and comparative analysis, in such a way that the similarities, but also the

differences and conflicts between the authors are contextualised and depend on their overall theoretical conception. Evola's thinking is fragmented in its fundamental idea, and is analysed and confronted with its ideal references in order to reconstruct it later.

The conclusions of the research seek to establish Evola's position on real political forms, even if they are 'ideal'. Thus, Evola's opposition to the 'ideal' state of Actualism, to the ethical state and also to the corporate state is analysed, as is his ambiguous attitude in the confrontation between fascism and National Socialism, as well as his full identification with the non-Nazi right of the *Konservative Revolution*. Hence, Evola's image of fascism is similar to that found in some writers of the *Konservative Revolution*: fascism

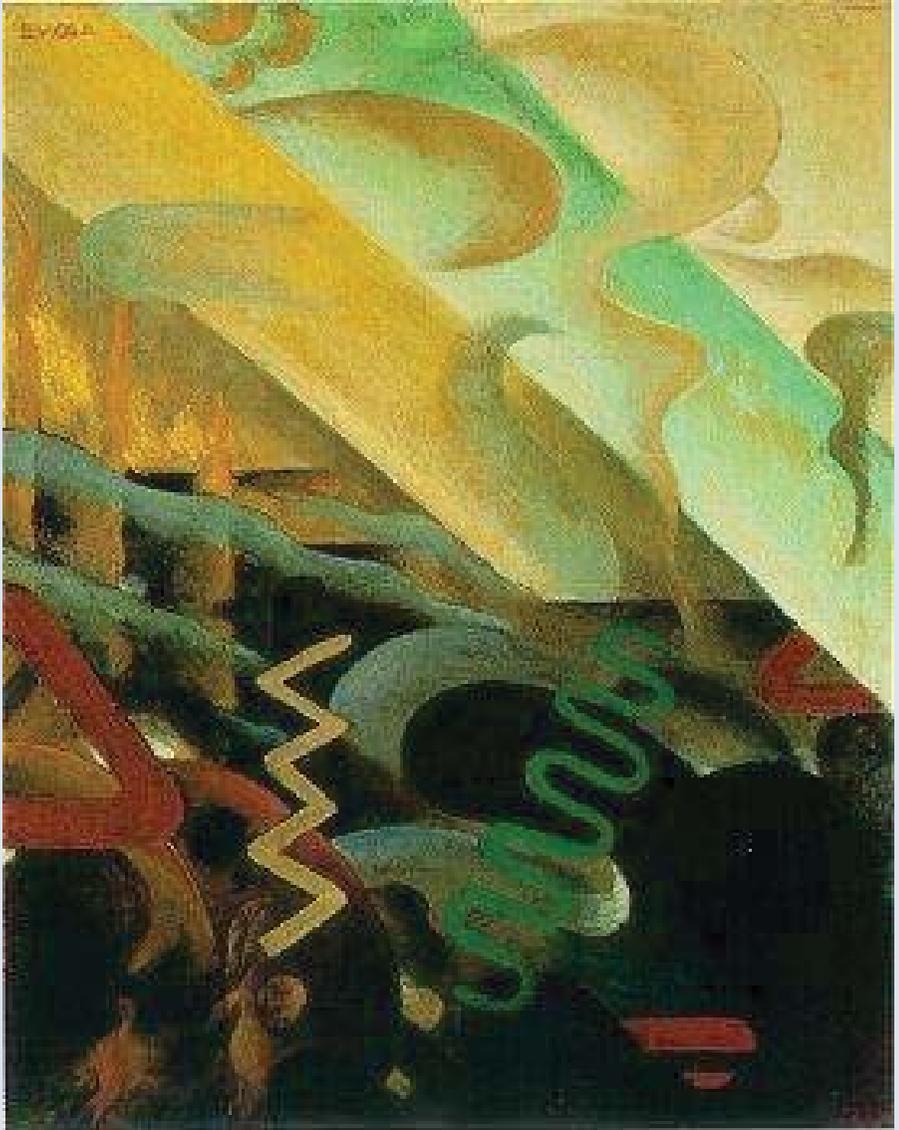
"ideal" as a means to achieve an ideal society and a hierarchical order, but one that does not fully identify with real fascism. However, Evola is not consistent in his opposition to real fascism, as he frequently accepts and exalts it. Another issue addressed in the conclusion is Evolian racism: in this regard, the author clearly denies that Evola had a non-racist position. Racism, as the exclusion of the other based on attributions of unchanging and negative characteristics, is present even in Evola's conception of caste. Furthermore, Evola's anti-Semitism, evident in his introduction to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1937), is based on Weininger's conception of the so-called 'essence of the Hebrew', which Evola calls the "corrupting action of Hebraism," which becomes a negative natural force, independent—perhaps—of the will of the Hebrews alone.

Patricia Chiantera-Stutte's text is, however, very well articulated and rich in detail: the reconstruction of the political and intellectual field in which she correctly places his thinking and from which Evola comes is accompanied by an exhaustive interpretation of his person and his entire work, both artistic and intellectual and political. Evola is a complex and contradictory author. It is therefore not surprising to find in the conclusions all the significant results of the complete research, which are scattered throughout the four preceding parts. However, perhaps the

countless threads could have been taken up again with greater composure in the writing. In any case, this work undoubtedly constitutes a systematic and original contribution that generates new tools for the scientific understanding of Evola and his relationship with his time and ours.

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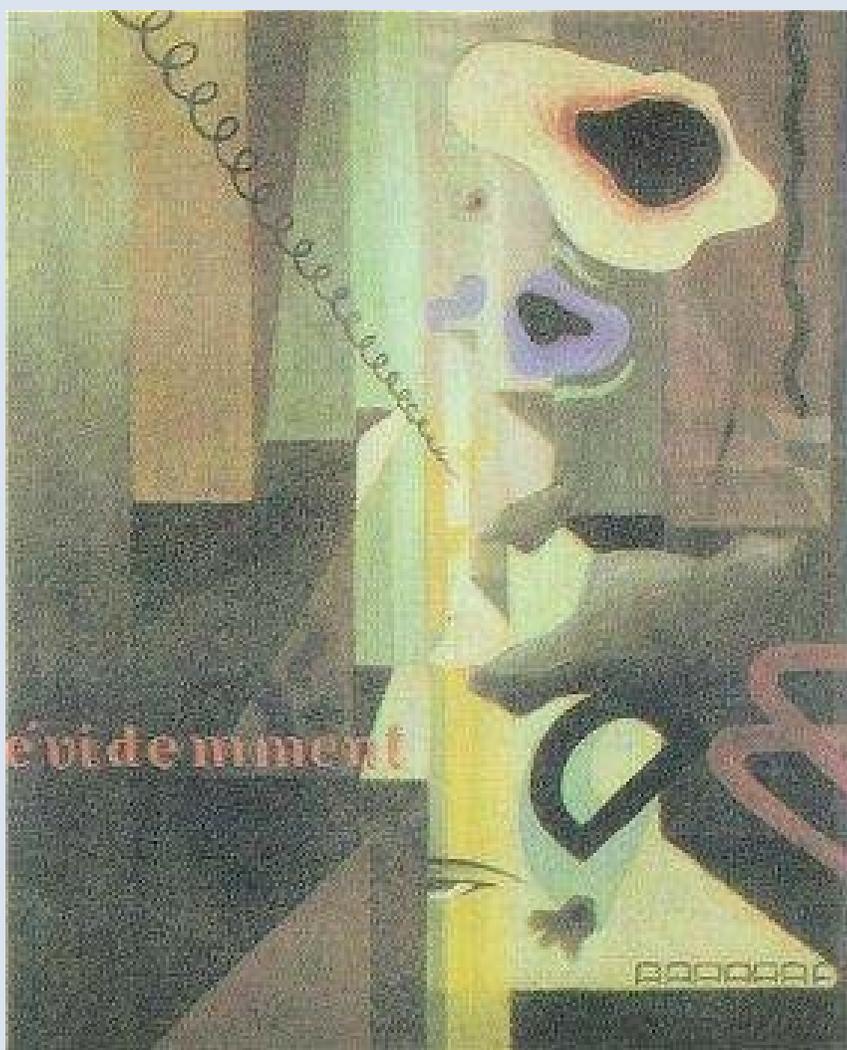
\* Patricia Chiantera-Stutte, *Dal dadaismo alla rivoluzione conservatrice (1919-1940)*, Rome, Aracne, 2001.



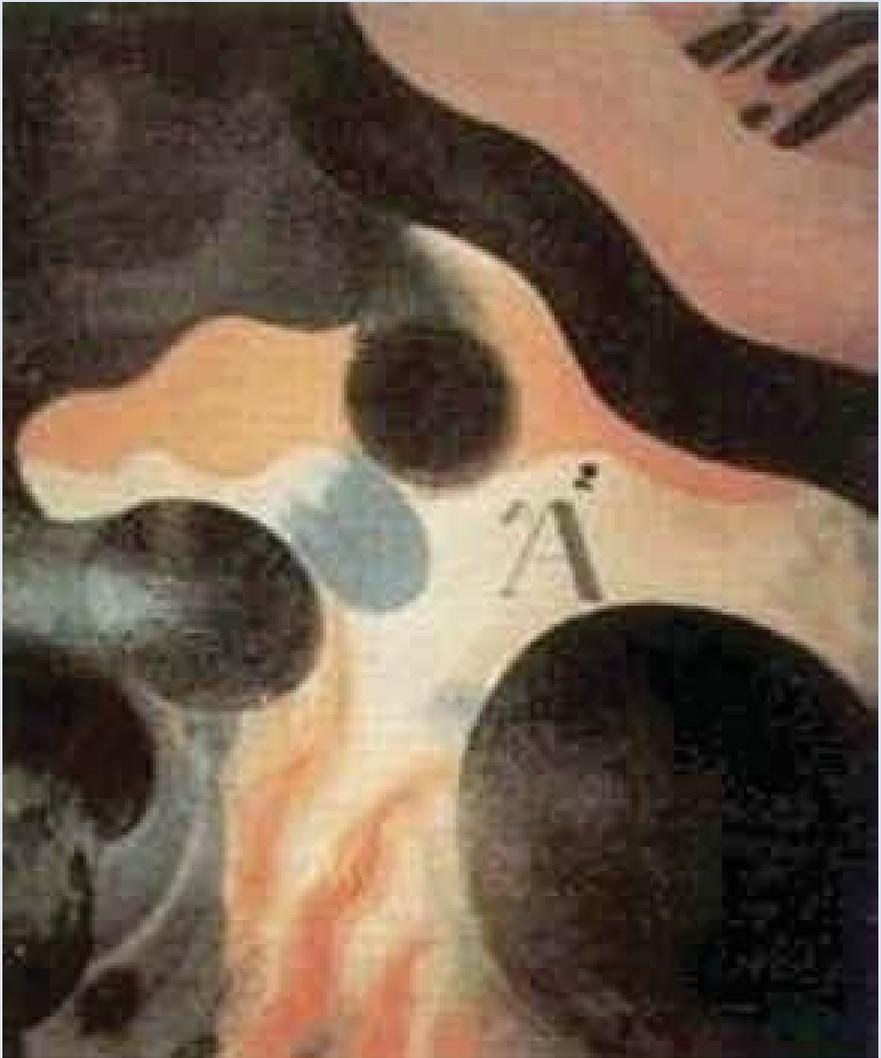
**Abstraction** [circa, 1920]  
Oil on canvas (630 x 500) Private  
collection



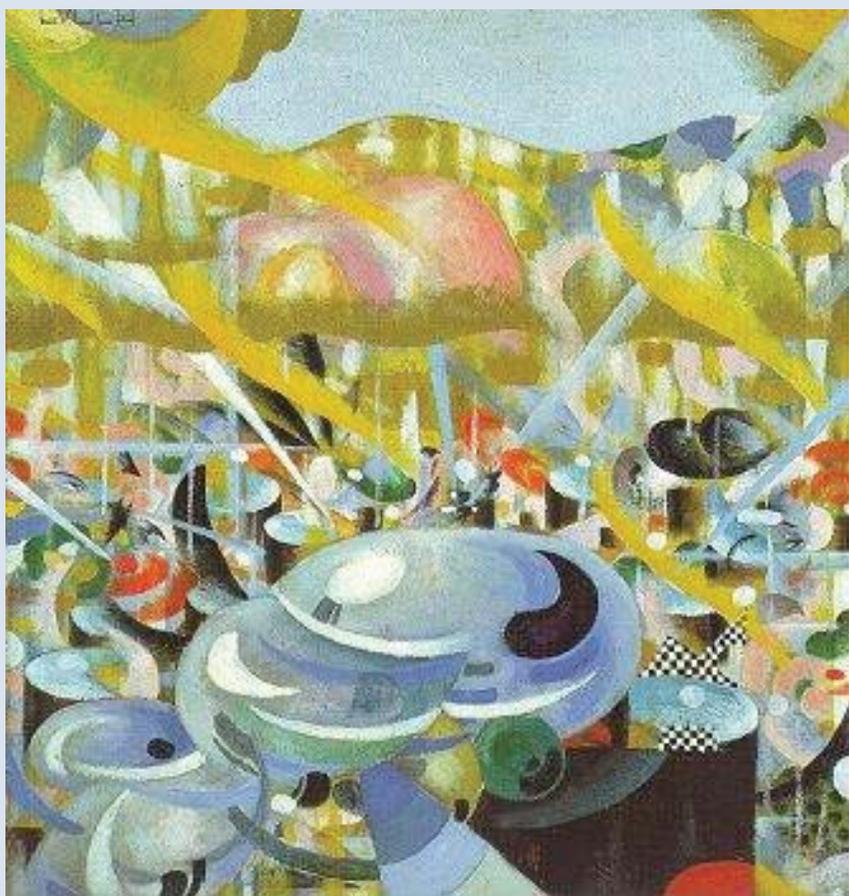
**Abstraction** [circa, 1920]  
Oil on canvas (393 x 300) Private  
collection



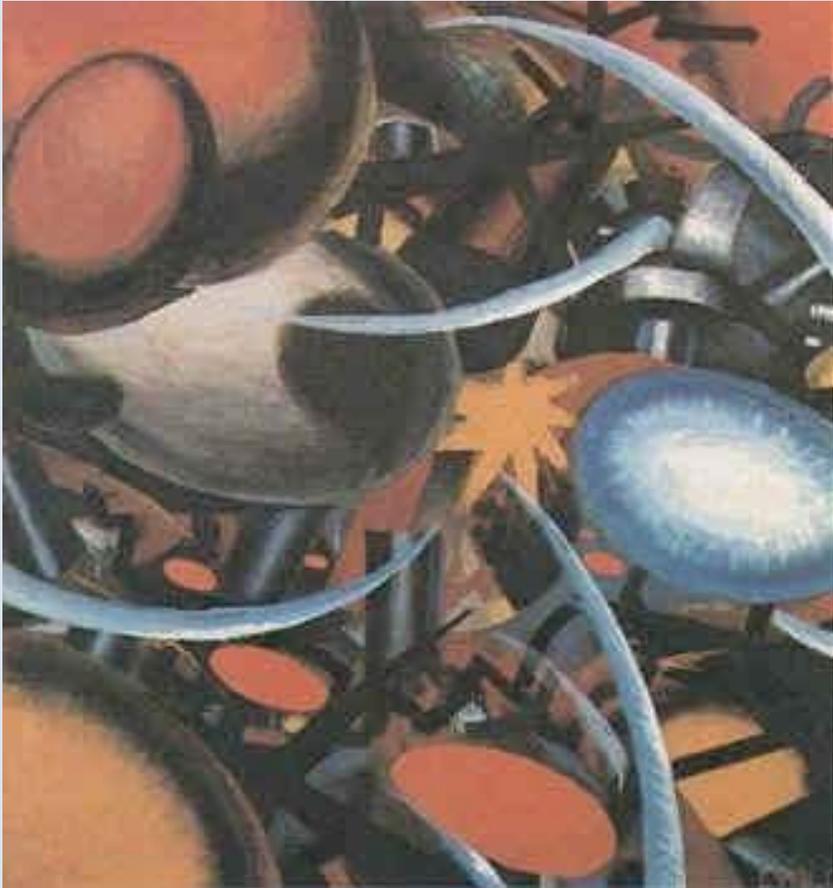
**Dada Composition (Landscape)** [circa,  
1920] Oil on canvas (955 x 775)  
Private collection



**Composition No. 19** [1918-20]  
Oil on paper (800 x 700) Private  
collection



***Five o'clock tea*** [1917] Oil  
on canvas (950 x 900)  
Civic Museum of Art and History (Brescia)



**Forge, study of noises** [1917-18] Oil on  
canvas (850 x 800)  
Civic Museum of Art and History (Brescia)



**Bouquet of Flowers** [1918]  
Oil on paper (500 x 505) Private  
collection



**Small table** (top view) [1920]  
Painting on wood (800 x 800 x 400)  
Private collection



**Untitled** [circa, 1921]  
Tempera on paper (570 x 560)  
Private collection



**Dynamic Sequence (Ether) [1917–18]**

Oil on paper (280 x 410) Private  
collection



**Trend towards sensory idealism [1916-18]**

Oil on canvas (285 x 475)

Private collection



**Tendency towards sensory idealism**

[1918] Oil on canvas (280 x 350)  
Private collection

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