

Rene Guenon and other Romantic, Paranoid Histories in the 20-21st Centuries

Part I: Reign of Quantity and Paranoid Literature

_____ "irrationality
leaves open the door to anything, hence in particular
to the worst forms of authoritarianism" (13 Dec. 1994).
Noam Chomsky. ¹

In what follows I will show the tacit assumptions, erroneous logic, magical thinking and multiple errors of Guenon's most important book the Reign of Quantity, arguably the most important book of the traditionalists. But first I will discuss my relation to this book and its ideas as well as how these ideas relate to poetry and other paranoid literature. Such poets as Blake, Novalis Dante or Jack Hirschman shed considerable light on the tradition of romantic myth making. I will question this.

Rene Guenon, little known arcane metaphysician, absolutist, imperious charlatan, theofascist, monarchist, created quite a cult following behind him. It is amazing really, that so many apparently intelligent people fell for Guenon's work. Discredited now, except in smaller and smaller circles of followers with a chilling willingness to believe the Guenonian fictions. Why so many fell for him is an interesting question? Part of it, certainly, is political. Guenon writes to the sensibility of far-right and reactionary people who hate science, evolution, left-leaning religion and democracy. This is an appeal to the undereducated and ignorant, what might be called the superstitious intelligentsia. There are many

¹ Noam Chomsky: a Life of Dissent <http://cognet.mit.edu/library/books/chomsky/chomsky/3/10.html>

such people. Guenon also appeals to those who feel themselves both to the far right and underappreciated or outside the narrow confines of corporate culture and he offers them nearly instant elite status. 'Read my books and instantly be among the elect', he promises. Of course, Guenon is an impresario who speaks of the transcendent, and the transcendent, like the metaphysical, was just so much hot air. So Guenon was an impresario of hot air, and there are people who like hot air.

So, let us consider this a little more closely. Part of the attraction of Guenon is his rhetoric, which is convincing if you don't know anything about what he is talking about. Guenon studied with con-men and women like Gerard Encausse (Papus) and Helen Blavatsky and knew how to tell a phony tale as if it were true. He was not like Mark Twain who told brilliant tall tales to tell the truth about his life. Guenon told false tales to hide the truth about his life. Guenon admired theoreticians like Thomas Aquinas and Hindu writers, who could split hairs about matters that were total fiction, and had no reality at all, and make it sound like it was something real they were talking about. He could count more angels on the heads of a pin, more than all the Shambhalas that never existed. Guenon had a prohibiting and scholastic mentality and learned to make 'distinctions without a difference' and to draw analogies between inferences that had no basis in evidence at all. He combined this devotion to scholastic rhetoric with a theofascist passion to bend the truth to serve an irrational will to totalistic system making. He devotes his reason to the unreasonable and pretends to know far more than he actually does. He restyles himself as 'sacred' and nearly everyone else as "profane", indeed, he talks about the "profane" as the Nazi's talked about Jews. As an esoteric impresario, he was able to act humble when required but was most happy when others thought he was the sublime prophet at the end of time, which is where Schuon got his particular brand of delusions of grandeur..

Uncritical and fawning followers write a lot of nonsense about Guenon, treating him and his works as divine writ. Jean Pierre Laurant, a French academician who is a self-appointed protector of the Master's Oeuvre or works,

writes that Guenon's works circumscribe an "an area without borders in time and space, that is about everything, from antiquity to the modern world " ². This romantic hero worship is high sounding but completely without basis in fact. Guenon is a stultifying writer whose imperious irrationality means to oppress and limit, overbear and tyrannize. It is true that Guenon writes nonsense about many things as if he wrote from some fictional space outside space and time, but the scope of Guenon's writing is really limited to Fin de Siecle orientalism and reactionary romanticism. He is so laughably wrong on so many issues. If anyone actually read Guenon's books, carefully, they would see that, in fact, they are myopic texts built up around a few simple and unprovable, undemonstrated fictions and myths. He applies these mythic fictions uniformly across huge areas of knowledge without the slightest proof that his mythical constructs have any grounding in reason, evidence and fact at all. When he does employ facts he often gets it wrong.

Moreover, there is no indication that Guenon really studied or gained any real insight of any depth of understanding based on any experiment, experience, testing or real inquiry. Guenon's claim to have transcended science has no evidence to support it whatever. Indeed, when he says that he possesses a "super-rational, intuitive metaphysical knowledge" he is merely asserting the status of prophet and proves himself an utter liar and charlatan. We are supposed to believe he was born with huge understanding, present and unearned in his brain and heart. He is the elite of the elite and the last remnant of the wise. The "area without borders in space and time" that Laurant claims his work is supposed to be about is really just Guenon's penchant for empty generalizations and meaningless abstractions, pretend spiritual spaces, and vast fictional times made out of thin air and that do not exist except in an addicted brain, seduced by trickster of make-believe. Laurant's gullibility is really what is at issue here.

What Guenon calls metaphysics is merely speculations based on

² http://www.cesnur.org/2006/plz_laurant.htm Quoted in this review by another rather cultish follower of Guenon, Zoccolelli

evidence about things which do not exist. What he knows about religion has nothing to do with the actual facts of religion but rather he synthesizes a few outmoded, caste obsessed, hierarchic and misogynist mythic system like Hinduism, Dark Age Christianity or Islam into a crude transcendental hypothesis that really does not transcend anything. He merely mashes together the forbidding and the improbable. He clogs up young brains with useless speculations about non-existent“ questions that have nothing to do with reality..

What careerist writers like Laurant have accomplished is to ossify the uncritical scholarship surrounding Guenon into a cult. I love scholarship, but it is a real danger when scholars attach themselves to any irrational thing and begin to spin their scholarly webs of dogma and rhetoric around it. The reality of Guenon’s actual writings is that his texts are now very dated and full of exaggerations, fictions, false analogies, lies, paranoid fantasies, and wild claims to know things that Guenon didn’t know at all. Guenon’s works are collapsing in an embarrassment of irrational occult romanticism, religious nostalgia and theofascism. The few that still regard Guenon’s work with high repute stroke each other’s egos, in minor Yahoo groups chat rooms and university religious studies departments few ever visit or cultish scholarly journals no one reads. Various professors, mostly French, support Guenon and have university positions that should have been abolished years ago. They write a lot of nonsense about Guenon which appear in academic conferences or on the backsides of books published by World Wisdom, the propaganda publishing company of the Schuon cult, which is neither worldwide nor wise.

A brief look at one of these books published by Schuon’s publishing company in Bloomington Indiana in 2009, is quite revealing. I’ll quote a few of the comments about Guenon on this book. The book called The Essential Rene Guenon, and has various quotes of the back cover. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a follower of Schuon’s who pretends to be a Shaykh in Washington D.C. says of Guenon that he is “one of the colossal figures of the century”. Yes, Nasr is right for a change, Guenon is inflated to oversized proportions with a good deal of

metaphysical hot air. He is colossal in the sense of grossly inflated. Indeed, Guenon merely wrote many questionable books, Reign of Quantity being the most famous and the most ridiculous, which is why there are virtually no reviews of it. The one you are reading now is one of the first. Huston Smith, another follower of Schuon, who was incapable of any sort of objectivity about Schuon, says that Guenon is “one of the greatest prophets of our time”. He doesn’t say prophet of what. None of the predictions of Guenon have come to pass and his diagnosis of the problems are so ridiculous that only a few fringe groups pay attention to them at all. Huston Smith was not about to be confused with the facts of the matter, however. Smith was a narrow minded man who had little respect for evidence.

There is a cult of an individual going on here, not a real inquiry or exercise of academic freedom. Those who adulate Guenon are cult followers--not men who can be trusted because they have weighed evidence and employed critical thinking in the domain of religious studies. Mark Sedgwick’s book Against the Modern World pretends to be a biography of Guenon. Sedgwick’s has only one or two sentences to say about Guenon’s most important book, Reign of Quantity. He writes ---“it is about time and quantity and quality and Aristotle about Gog and Magog and the coming end of the world. It is a worrying book, and I found it hard to dismiss” Guenon only mentions Aristotle tangentially and misunderstands his ideas. Sedgwick did not notice this. Here we have a man with no critical insight into Guenon’s work at all, writing a long book about him. Sedgwick’s insights into him do not deepen after 370 pages of text. There are no decent critical appraisals of Guenon Reign of Quantity that I have been able to find, anywhere, Again, this one you are reading appears to be the first full length critical review of the book.³

My view of Guenon in the past was very different than it is now. I read him

³ Actually, there is a very brief but interesting review written by David Fideler in Gnosis magazine many years ago. I will mention that further along. “Rene Guenon and the Signs of Our Times” by David Fideler spring 1988
http://www.gnosismagazine.com/issue_contents/contents07.html

first when I was only in my early 20's and didn't really know what I was reading, But, like Sedgwick I was troubled by him from the beginning. But didn't have the intellectual and educational means to critique what I read. The book sent me into a period a profound questioning which only emerged from when I turned Schuon to the police and testified against him in court.

I came across Guenon's book, the Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times, in 1982 or 83. I could not find it anywhere in print so I had to go into the rare book section in the White collection up high in a back room of the Cleveland Public library to find it. I was shocked and fascinated by its bleak air of authority and seemingly vast knowledge of other cultures. I had no idea how unverifiable and phony all his claims to knowledge really were yet. He seemed to know what he was talking about but the sweep of his rhetoric really carried me along. I didn't realize that that air of authority was a prideful and elitist pose, an exercise of cunning rhetoric and the pretence of a con-man. I had no way of knowing that Guenon's notion of "superior principles" really amounted to nothing but a principle of his own superiority. He was obsessed with superiority in a way that only could indicate mental illness.

Even the title of his most important book, is odd. What he hates most is democracy and he equates "quantity" with democracy, even though, if fact, they have little to have little to do with each other. So why call the book "Reign of Quantity", why not 'Congress of Quantity' or 'Assembly of Quantity'? Why "quantity" at all--- it is such a neutral concept and carries no harmful meanings at all, in itself. Four chickens are not harmful nor are four hammers or six million stars. Why this hatred of numbers?

Guenon was a reactionary theocrat who saw democracy as having usurped the 'divine-right of kings' to subjugate the poor and rule over the land. Human rights means nothing to him compared to divine rights. He is definitely on the side of the Sheriff of Nottingham and not Robinhood. Quantity for him really means masses of people who have power that is not exercised by the theocratic priests—and the mass of people is the quantity he fears was a source of paranoid fear and deep anxiety. As Umberto Eco notes in this

“Eternal Fascism:

Fourteen Ways of Looking at a Blackshirt”

For Ur-Fascism, however, individuals as individuals have no rights, and the People is conceived as a quality, a monolithic entity expressing the Common Will. Since no large quantity of human beings can have a common will, the Leader pretends to be their interpreter. Having lost their power of delegation, citizens do not act; they are only called on to play the role of the People. Thus the People is only a theatrical fiction. ⁴

In Guenon “quantity” is theatrical fiction--- the evil democratic mass and “quality” is a mythologized substitute for the ideology of god, also a theatrical fiction. Quantity—which is the actual world that we live in--- is the realm of evil and the only real interpreter of Quality is Guenon himself or those of his high “caste”. This anyway is the mythology he has imposed on these terms, in violation of the actual meaning of these terms as used in Aristotle

As I will show later in this chapter, Aristotle use of the words quality and quantity, unlike Guenon, are related to realities. Guenon’s paranoid view of quantity and quality is deeply disturbing and properly insane. I could not see this when I was in my 20’s. I could not imagine a man who feared numbers to such an extent and turned them into fictional carriers of terrible horrors and profound personal feelings of metaphysical threat. Back then, in my early 20’s I could not yet assess him or have wide enough a view to be critical of him. But that said by way of introduction to looking and the specificities of this book, I need to consider the larger picture.

He is such a dark and brooding writer. Where did the dark in Guenon come from? There was something dark, brooding and sinister in Guenon, like

⁴ “Eternal Fascism: Fourteen Ways of Looking at a Blackshirt

Edgar Allen Poe or Baudelaire⁵. Guenon is insane with the after-life poetry of Masonic paranoid conspiracies, gravestones, apocalyptic corpses rising out of the earth, zombies, feared judgments hurled from imaginary saints. Guenon reminds me of 1950 horror movies. There is also something high and mysterious in Guenon, I mean high in the sense of snobby and effete, high like Egyptian mummies lurid in gold foil and lapis lazuli, high like Fin de Siecle decadence: a Gustav Klimt view of decadent history. His was a dream of a total truth that exists nowhere, as if Edgar Poe had become a Sufi in exile, Niffari in chains,⁶ a vampire Sufi in a land of numerical and Kabbalistic conspiracies.

⁵ A helpful French correspondent tells me that Baudelaire can be shown to have had tendencies toward the "theofascist". One of Baudelaire's most admired writers was De Maistre. Baudelaire praised De Maistre's for "his hatred of the religion of progress". IN his "Intimate Papers LXXIV Baudelaire thought that "De Maistre and Edgar Poe taught me to reason." But then he negates it and says "There is no long work but that which one dares not begin. It becomes a nightmare." The reasoning that he learned was a nightmare. So it is hard to take the later Baudelaire seriously about anything except himself, and he is himself on the shakiest ground. It appears that Baudelaire just liked to shock people and he put on a front of being a reactionary later in life. Earlier he was a friend of Courbet and a socialist and they wrote a revolutionary pamphlet together in 1848, when all Europe was in a revolutionary mode. When he was older he would write instead that "I am bored in France, especially as everyone resembles Voltaire." And thus his attraction to De Maistre seems to be out of boredom, as was his pretence of being anti-Semitic. Hating Voltaire had become a psychological game for him, born of perversity and boredom. Baudelaire is not really a theofascist, but an actor and a dandy. He is play acting a part for an audience and trying to follow De Maistre to both ape him and shock others. But this again reinforces the thesis in this book that romanticism and some romantic poetry tends toward an inflated and reactionary point of view, even if it does so with bad faith in Baudelaire's case.. Sartre thinks that Baudelaire's interest in De Maistre has to do with his fascination with evil. Sartre quotes Baudelaire "In Politics, the true saint is the man who uses his whip and kills people for their own good." He has the idea right, but it is phrased as a joke. The idea expressed well sums up De Maistre in a nutshell, as well as Krishna and Arjuna, Khadir and Guenon too!! Poe called this sort of perversity the "imp of the perverse". But when one looks closely at Baudelaire such a statement suggests a pose or satire and is hard to take seriously, in the way De Maistre was clearly serious in his endorsement of slavery and the Inquisition, or Krishna does advocate killing to save people in the Gita.

⁶ Niffari is really the ultimate in decadence in Sufism. His philosophy negates itself at every turn and self-destructs in the ideology of the incomparable god idea. Since god is beyond everything, all must be negated. Those who wish to find the ultimate dead end of religion would do well to seek into the depth of Niffari, there is absolutely nothing there, but the nothing pretends to be everything, rather like the abstract art of the 20th century. This is not humility but delusional grandiosity posing as nothing. But since the god idea is a delusion to begin with, Niffari's ultimate affirmation of god ends up being an affirmation of total nothing. Like most arguments in favor of the existence of god Niffari is ultimately fallacious, since he argues in favor of what is not. The ontological argument is as irrational as Niffari. God is the greatest thought one can have he must exist, since to be perfect is to exist, therefore he exists. The absurdly circular argument is typical of the inferences that are so common in religion. A similar one is one where a person might say to themselves 'witches exist, they must because if I deny that they exist they might

Guenon was Rumi and Dracula in one person, acting out a crazy scenario in a 1950's horror movie.

Before I knew much about them I thought I liked the Sufis. They seemed outsiders, whirling dervishes, people of rare insight, dancers of inner ecstasy. Members of the romantic periphery to borrow Immanuel Wallerstein's phrase, they seemed to offer hope. Rumi dancing with his hand up to the diamond sky, like Bob Dylan's Tambourine Man. Little did I know. I had been deceived by Rumi and Islamic carpets, which I loved and still love for purely aesthetic reasons. Rumi I no longer love. Back then, I liked Poe's oddness, giving Guenon a chance was natural, since Guenon is nothing if not odd. Guenon was a wacky outsider too, as was Poe, and me. I did not want to believe what Guenon said was true, but what if some of it was true? I did not realize he was a disciple of De Maistre, who I had never heard of. Baudelaire was merely play acting at being a theofascist, but Guenon was the real thing. But I found Guenon profoundly depressing without being able to answer why.

I was accustomed to reading material by French writers such as Baudelaire, Antonin Artaud, Rimbaud, Lautremont and others who were thought "insane" or outsiders from the mainstream. Indeed, my loose relationship with Jack Hirschman led me into the domain of romantic rebellion against Europe and this probably prepared me for Guenon. Guenon seemed to be part of the outsider romantic tradition. I wanted to know: I was very serious about such questions and needed to know the answers. How does Guenon or religion stack up against Bertrand Russell, Noam Chomsky, Plato or Richard Rorty? Of course it would turn out that writers based in science were far to be preferred to those who were not. But I did not know that then. I was entering my period of deep philosophical inquiry and these were very live questions. I ended up traveling very far to find the answers. I remember sitting on the floor in Foley's bookstore in London trying to decide, should I read Rorty or one of the traditionalists. I liked reading about science, that was the way I wanted to

attack me". This twisted, even paranoid logic got many women killed three or four hundred years ago. Magical thinking depends on slippery logic of just this kind

go. But I decided I had to explore religion and find out if it is true or not. That was in 1984. By 1991 I knew it was not true. I had wasted some years on a fruitless search. But I am still here to write about it and save others the bother of doing this research. Religion is a dead end, do not enter into that door, or if you must, do so briefly, you will soon find out what I am saying in this book is true.....

One of the reasons I picked up Guenon's Reign of Quantity is that I had studied poetry and culture with the post-modernist beat poet Jack Hirschman a few years before, in San Francisco.⁷ I spent every day and most evenings with him for six months in North Beach. We went to poetry readings, Jazz concerts and in and out of our minds and imaginations. We hung out in cafes like the Savoy Tivoli and I watched and listened for six months. It was not just Jack I was watching but the whole scene and all the people who came and went. I learned a great deal from this Jack was a kabbalistic communist and prone to question our culture from a radical point of view. I liked that. Jack was deeply paranoid too, as was Guenon, though Jack became aware of the exaggerations that his tendency to paranoia made him tend, whereas Guenon never did. I wanted to understand paranoia. I wanted to understand the far left wing of the New Age. There was so much paranoia on the streets with homeless people in many cities. Bombs being dropped on Vietnam or Afghanistan. I wanted to grasp this and studied street people and poets like Hirschman. In Jack, I wanted to understand the species of romanticism that could be attracted to both Stalin's Marxist fascism as well as new age cults and Hitler's nasty sadism. Jack was one of those that Walter Benjamin feared when he said that "the struggle against ideology has become a new ideology".⁸ In 1979, Jack

⁷ I had also read Thomas Pynchon's V and Gravity's Rainbow, in which paranoia is a major theme. Both Pynchon and Hirschman used paranoia as a metaphor for the madness of the 20th century.

⁸ The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932-1940
edited by Gershom Gerhard
<http://books.google.com/books?id=M1JQA66rxsEC&pg=PR13&lpg=PR13&dq=counter-history+scholem&source=bl&ots=YL4rJPDA&sig=A9trfSV2NvrQSx8NuOqd3bZBBWo&hl=en&sa>

couldn't see around all this—around his own political/spiritual confusion and his ideological hatred of ideology and I needed to know why.⁹ Jack claimed in an esoteric long poem, one of his first “Arcanes”, to be the Comte de Saint Germain, who was certainly a fraud, and who many claimed was immortal, but when died, in fact in 1784. Giacomo Casanova claimed meetings with the celebrated and learned impostor in his memoir. Jack liked to identify himself as Saint Germain and was only partly kidding that he was himself the Comte. He also thought at different times that he was Wandering Jew, or the Golem, or any figure that seemed immortal, martyred or powerful, from Stalin to various cult leaders.¹⁰ In a later book he tries to identify himself as a Vietnamese

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⁹ The evidence for this is in Jack Hirschman's magnum opus, The Arcanes, in which Jack tries to tell the story of our times from his point of view. In a thousand pages, he created an exalted, romantic point of view where he claims to be a sort of prophetic over-man. His struggle with fascism ends up being a struggle not just with historical fascism but with an entity inside him, part of his Stalinism perhaps, or a frustrated will to power. The poet Jack Micheline told me once when he was in Cleveland that Hirschman may have become so ridiculously far to the Stalinist left because Micheline and others in Jack's neighborhood used to beat Jack up. I doubt that is accurate as Micheline was not the most trustworthy source. But Jack's fascination with fascism appears to have had a sexual character, judging by his use of this imagery in the Arcanes. Jack's Russian Jewish heritage seems to have inclined him toward a need of revenge for the world war and the pogroms. Jack's Stalinism has its complement in his fascist tendency in a way similar to Israel, which moved far to the far-right partly in revenge for Auschwitz. Jack's sympathy with cults of all kinds appears to have grown out of an extreme kind of individualism that seeks its own negation in a collective rebellion against capitalism. Cults were to be preferred to capitalism. I learned a great deal about the psychology of politics from Hirschman, not all of it flattering about either psychology, poetry or politics. For Jack, cults were truncated efforts to be communist. Cults were better than corporate capitalism but worse than his Marxism. He wrote about such cults as the Jonestown cult and the Heaven's Gate cult. Jack was one of the most religious people I have ever met, and his religion was Marxism. He could not see outside the construction of his particular poetic cadre in which he enclosed himself and his poetry. Instead of liberating him poetry became a jail of sorts, closing him into a quasi-religious irrationalism of his own making. Something similar occurred with Chomsky who ended in seeing left leaning religion in Sufism or Christian liberation politics as a useful thing to help him to realize his anarchist dreams.

¹⁰ Jack's use of the Stalin image always had a certain flavor of self-projection in it. I think he liked to scare people with the specter of Stalin, like a schoolboy uses a frog, or as Tibetans use images of scary Mahakalas to scare obedience to Lamas. He once did a collage called “Is He Resurrected?” which had a picture of Stalin rising up. Jack had paranoid tendencies and Stalin was hard and served to protect Jack from the world to some degree. Also Jack was a scholar at root and Stalin's writings were what appealed to him, and he did not want to admit the historical facts about his merciless abuse of others, his prison system or his murder of so many. This is true of many “true believers”, and I have often seen it in Christians who could not admit the destructiveness of Christianity, or Zen Buddhists who deny the ruthless samurai origins of Zen.

practitioner of Voodoo.¹¹ Jack was using religion as I would later see Guenon doing the same thing, as a metaphor for our alienation. He also identified himself in his later years with Heidegger, which was a mistake as big as his love of Stalin. Emmanuel Faye has shown conclusively that Heidegger was a Nazi and favored the extermination of all Jews. Jack's fascination with both Hitler and Stalin points to a bifurcated self in the romantic mind, a waffling between two forms of totalism. I don't think Jack every quite resolved this, or understood that this divorce of mind grows out of a romantic prophetic tradition itself, which is not adequate to reality and this turns upon itself in a gyre of contradictions as Yeats would have said. But Jack at least began to question it in himself, as his Arcanes show. This is far beyond what Guenon, Schuon, and other romantics were able to do. Fascism is really a part of human nature, what Hannah Arendt awkwardly called the "banality of evil". It is a will to power as Nietzsche called it, again without really understanding

¹¹ Jack's book on Vietnam was actually written earlier in 1973, and then worked on further in 2013 or so. It is an amazing poem, and the only long poem I can think of that takes the Vietnamese point of view against the Americans. The Viet Arcane (2014) shows Jack at his best and his worst. It is full of accurate identifications with the Vietnamese people on the one hand and how much they suffered. It does this remarkably well. One poem, is a brilliant protest piece is about a person tortured by Americans. Another discusses young Vietnamese lovers and flowers. Other poems talk about Vietnamese rituals, not so different from American rituals. On the other hand, the poem fails, as all such war poems fail, in taking one side over the other. Jack's communism became a religion and one that is quite as objectionable as the religio/politics he hates. Actually the whole Vietnam war—really any war--- on both sides was one of the most insane ever fought. Those who die are the victims of the leaders on both sides. It was a war of ideology and though the Americans were more at fault in starting the whole thing, it was an atrocity for both sides, and the suffering to those who were left behind was not diminished. Jack foolishly declares victory for the Vietnamese. But given that between 1-3 million Vietnamese died and nearly 60,000 Americans as well as many French, died, it is impossible to see how anyone won. While Jack's undoubted humanity shines through for the Vietnamese, it does not for the other side. My problem with Jack was always his one-sidedness, and his willingness to support killing the other side that he did not like. It is this mentality that makes all wars so ridiculous. In the end it is always the leaders of such conflicts that are most at fault and who should pay the price of what is done. But they never do. They always have young men fight and die for them. Jack would like to inspire others to fight a such a war, but you would never see him out there doing it himself. It is this hypocrisy that is at the root of all wars, and unfortunately, most poems about war. I've always admired Jacks humanism, but his intelligence could be deeper and his awareness of the futility of all war could be less shallow. In the end it is the religion of his politics that fails his poetry. It is fanatical obtuse and emotional irrationality this that speaks loudest in his poetry this that makes it akin to religion, both in this the earliest of his Arcanes and in later ones too.

what he was saying. Jack was on the verge of questioning this power, but he could never really question the religion he made of Marxism, unfortunately.

Jacks' fascination with cults was interesting. He thought cults were an outgrowth of California individualism, and that they were really unconsciously longing to be communists, like Jack. This is not a point of view that is entirely wrong. Many cults do indeed question capitalism which ought to be questioned. But the answer they came up with, like Jack's Stalinism, are so unworkable that cults tend to self-destruction or cause more human rights violations than they do anything else. This is not a justification of capitalism, but a reasonable questioning of cults. The cult mentality is partly due to the effort to escape the depredations of capitalism but often ends in creating something even worse. Jack never dealt with this fact and tends to romanticize cults. This is unfortunate, and suggests again that many critics of capitalism do not have a real alternative to it and endorse some ideology or other that is equally as bad.

I learned a lot about human psychology as well as cult leaders, as Jack was a bit of a charismatic charlatan himself. Indeed, I think Jack was my first real introduction to the lie of religion and how close religion, poetry and politics really are. Later teachers of mine like Schuon or Chomsky were likewise flawed and very problematical. But they posed answers, and even if their answers were flawed, they did ask questions. In Schuon's case, however, even his questions were mangled, but with Jack and Chomsky, they got many things that were right, even if I rejected their systems in the end. In any case, they are all part of the fabric of the world we live in and this book is about the world we live in, and I use them all as foils against which I can discuss our lives.

Jack's Marxist/Kabbalist/Hiedgerrean and rather Luddite position was largely based on romantic fictions combined with some objective dislike of the obviously unjust treatment of people by corporate and monied interests. I had sympathy with his concerns for the workers and the poor. I admired his journalistic tendency and in one sees his Arcanes are a Poetic Newspaper. He was inspired by Mayakovski, the Russian poet and Amiri Baraka, and

interesting African American poet who died in Jan. 2014.¹² He thought his surreal and 'automatic' "voice" was sacrosanct. Whatever arose in him is what mattered. This meant his romantic subjectivity became the criterion of truth. Like other romantic fanatics I have known he could not question this claim to prophetic status. The claim to be a prophet is so deep in romantic poetry he could not see the presuppositions involved or get out of it and look back at it. It is all about myth making and deceit in order to win power over others. "Poetry is propaganda on the street level", Jack used to say as a sort of mantra, and indeed, that is what it was too him. Religion and poetry are forms of ideology, to varying degrees, flip sides of one coin. Jack's Marxism was a religious faith, You either had to be with him or he automatically put you in the category of those against him. He wrote me in a letter for Instance that

"when you join a communist chapter in your area we can understand each other better. the rest is personal opinion insight, intellect, blah blah/ ...put your writing in the service of the revolution and forgetting about me you'll find me." (10/2009)

This is pretty typical 'Them verses Us' thinking that Robert Jay Lifton has studied so well and which is characteristic of both Marxists cells and religious fanatics of all kinds and faiths. To be a real person worthy of respect I must be like Jack,---I must be reborn as a "born-again" communist, and until that happens, I am merely one of the profane, the non-entities. I read Marx in my teens and though I had a certain regard for his early work as a social protestor, and with Engels, I disliked what was done with these ideas and the later Marx

¹² I saw Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka do a poetry reading at the Cleveland public library and he was incendiary and pugnacious, advocating open rebellion against racism. He was very good and made his audience think and had a large following. I was impressed. Poetry at its best raises such questions. The issue of the "color line" in America does indeed go to the heart of what America is and the ways it has failed and in a few cases succeeded, as W.E.B Dubois said.

is partly responsible for a lot of death.

The same mentality cramped and closed mentality one finds in Marx is in Guenon, which is why I discuss Hirschman and Guenon together in this chapter, even though they are at opposite sides of the political fence. (I will discuss Chomsky later for the same reason). The allusion in the last line is, (“you will find me”) of course, to Jack now evoking Joe Hill, as in one of Jack’s favorite folk songs “I dreamed I saw Joe Hill” last night”. This was a song Jack used to sing in full voice when he had too much to drink in North Beach café’s where we used to hang out together. It was lovely to be with Jack when he sang like this. He called North Beach the “village soviet of the heart”. He could make North Beach seem some nights like it was really Chagall’s village of Vitebsk with violinists dancing on the roofs.. While there is romance in this form of magical thinking, it is very close to spiritual superstition or Sufi fairy tales. I certainly can identify with the longing in such songs to be free of corporate repression. But when one moves over to delusion, as Jack so often did, it became problematical.

Early on, along with David Meltzer, Wallace Berman and others, Jack was influenced by Kabbalism, his favorite books was Tract on Ecstasy by Dov Baer and the works of Abulafia and later this text was replaced Stalin’s collected works and by Heidegger’s Enowning. Jack had this need of quasi-sacred texts like this . Indeed, Jack was my first teacher and mentor. He was extremely religious, though he would deny this in the typical mode of American culture, where “spirituality” is great but religion is not. At one point I called him the Red Rabbi, which is true, he was a sort of village beat-Rabbi, updated into decadent New Age San Francisco.

Like Alexander Dugin, Jack is a kind of decadent end to the romantic tradition. Poetry for Jack was politics. He used to say that I must learn to see that “wisdom is the map of the world and I must “learn to see the “Other” inside myself”, combining Kabbala and Marx. He said he had seen the “other” inside himself and it was the communist other, which he equated with the Shekinah of the Kabbalah as well as with the Marxist “other”-- the female who

would “stand arm in arm in love” with him in the Barricades. The Marxist Shekinah was someone he often drew in the drawings he would hand out for free in cafes and on the street. This is the woman in all his poems. He made this archetype of the Divine Feminine, which I would later deny. Love for Jack had become love of all men and women through love of the imaginary other, or Shekinah. This is similar to Rumi’s notion of the “you” or his lover/spiritual master Shams-Al Tabrizi as the infinitely loveable “other”. What all these images are in fact, is romantic or sexual images deformed by ideologies, and made into extreme idealizations, or symbols. Jack was a religious Marxist, who made an idiosyncratic religion out of poetry and politics, lost in the abstract confusions of surreal language.

It is a fine thing to see others are part of oneself, in a Darwinian sense of seeing all of us, on earth, from salamanders to eagles and people as being related and deserving of care. But Jack did not mean this, he meant that one must see only with Marxists eyes, Just as Guenon and Dugin thought one should see only from the point of view of the abstract fiction of gods or metaphysical idealizations—indeed, these men are very similar.

I learned from Jack, or rather because of Jack, to doubt the validity of poetry, though I have never been able to quite give up the bad habit, naively thinking that poetry can somehow be squared with science. I am not terribly good at it, and I feel I have yet to find a real way to do it responsibly, since so much of its basis is questionable. A poetry that serves Marxism or capitalism, Buddhism or Sufism seems inherently flawed, hard to take seriously¹³ Indeed, I have largely rejected poetry, with many provisos and exceptions. I have gone through phases of disliking poetry, and condemning it as being inherently flawed and prone to spiritual magnifications. Indeed, I think I dislike poetry more than I ever have. Yet I return to it now and then, never quite satisfied. I should add that I also love it, and keep doing it, though I am probably not a

¹³ See a film about Jack here. The Red Poet:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWHTzYbCypc>

poet at all. Indeed some of my critics have said as much and there may be truth to that. I tried to write poetry for many years, and too often failed at it. Or rather, it never quite struck me as true, even though I tried very hard, as language seems to be a very flawed medium. Prose is at least less subjective and able to be checked against fact.

That said, I hasten to add that I think Plato disliked poetry for all the wrong reasons. He wanted to banish the poets because he wished to safeguard reactionary and oppressive religious doctrines against questions and criticisms. Plato believed in the infallibility of the state and wants a system of total control of expression, free speech, the arts and all the behavior of the citizens of the state. In particular Plato argues that Homer in the Iliad committed a serious error in showing Achilles as being fallible and having weaknesses, because the youth of the ideal state would only be shown positive, infallible images of wars and warriors. In short, Plato wants poetry to serve only as propaganda for totalistic power a poetry of theofascism. I dislike poetry because Plato's theory triumphed. Poetry does serve power, with a few exceptions.

Sure, there are few poets who question power, but most artists and poets end up serving it. Poetry is largely reactionary. Mayakovski ended up serving Stalin. Dante served the Church. Ezra Pound served Mussolini, Barks served Rumi and the Koran and Muhammad. Ginsberg served a form of anti-rational Guru centered Buddhism. My friend Jack Hirschman thought Stalin was grand. I know poets who serve Zen or Christ or the Goddess, Stalin or the Communist state. In all these cases, they want to go back to a reactionary and archaic world view. They want to lie to serve the truth and what kind of truth can be founded telling lies?

Poets love superstitious, leaps away from logic, words and the myths they serve and are unable to question them in the interest of facts and things, without fictional adornments and flourishes. Richard Dawkins is quite right in the book Unweaving the Rainbow, where he takes poets to task for being woefully unscientific and pandering allot of absurd nonsense and ignorance. It

is true that there has yet to be a poet of the“ scientific era. Most poets would agree with Poe that science is the enemy of poetry. Poe, in his "Sonnet, to Science" says that

Science! True daughter of Odd Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee?

This foolish and reactionary hatred of science is quite common among poets. Blake has the same hatred as do most of the romantics and their followers down to the present. This is unfortunate, and to the degree that poetry is anti-science, I think it well ignored. The subjectivism of romantic poetry is what makes it easily serviceable to the most reactionary and violent regimes and systems of knowledge. It's refusal to look at facts renders it available to any system of make believe and it easily falls into the theofascism, as can be seen from the Bhagavad Gita or the Ramayana to Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. The most poetic events of the last 500 years are scientific insights and accomplishments. Dante and Shakespeare pale in comparison to the finding of the Americas or the discovery that the earth revolves around the sun. The awareness of the human body that Da Vinci achieved makes Marlowe's or Goethe's paeans of praise of the beauty of Helen look rather silly. The human body in its actuality is far more poetic than idealized stereotypes.

In the last 10 years I have been delicately taking apart the person I was in the 1980's-- What I have been taking apart is the old 'gnostic' tendency as I call it—the tendency to abstract poetic mystical efforts and transcendence. I do not accept that the world is "fallen" or that it is a "veil" behind which is a higher better reality. I did accept the idea of the Veil, as I have showed in an

earlier chapter. I managed somehow to embody and explore many of the basic themes of religion and romanticism. Without having ever read him, I expressed or came to understand many of the basic ideas expressed in Novalis, for instance. I had assimilated so much of Rimbaud, Hirschman or Ginsberg I hardly needed to read Novalis, who I first heard of from Eddie Woods in Amsterdam. But even Eddie Woods greeted me in a green Nepalese bathrobe at the door of his 16th century house, and we spent half a day together and then met in Paris.¹⁴ His effort, as well as that of Biron Dyson, to bring about a mystical derangement of the senses, did not interest me. But I have dismantled all this mystical veil stuff, with great difficulty and some hardship over some 10-15 years.

In the end I gave up the search for the grail behind the veil, as it were. I gave up the wish to pass through the Veil or enter the Utopian golden age. I began to unravel the intimate effects of these gnostic beliefs upon my mind and body. It took me a long time to realize the myths were fairy tales and the poets and seers were not prophets but sad and lonely men and women desperate to give life another meaning than the one governments, business and industry imposed. I understood their need for this. I had longed for a voice to speak through me. I wanted to be a vehicle of transcendent fervor. It was a noble desire once upon a time. I was willing at times to die for such a voice. But when I looked at the reality of it, what was it really about? I loved these mythic stories of transcendence too. Christ supposedly resurrected, Mayakovsky with clouds in his trousers, Buddha, protected in youth and then exposed to all the grossness of sickness and death and then have overcome all suffering and

¹⁴ Eddie Woods was apparently present when William Burroughs murdered his wife. I did not know this when I met Woods. I would have asked him about it. He excused Burroughs on the grounds that it was an "accident" since Burroughs was drunk. But Woods did not strike me as a man whose opinion seemed entirely reliable. For years I have avoided Burroughs writings as he seems to be a man with something important missing from his heart. Indeed, I found many of the Beats to have something missing. I spent enough time around them to want to leave them and never wished to return. They turned me against the poetry and fiction of our time in various ways, which like so much modern art, seemed to be a dead end. They were too interested in drugs and often had a sort of moral insanity. The "scene" struck me as a "zoo of egos", though I later thought that metaphor too unkind to animals..

existence, this is great fiction. This is high ‘bread and circus’ nonsense to stupefy and soothe the masses. But I saw that religious ecstasies, and I was one of those for a time, are not humble people at all, but rather people who long to be the voice of an absolute power. Transcendental magnification and bogus humility are learned as behavioral and ideological gestalts. Giving up transcendence is giving up the drive for power, giving up the desire for the ultimate voice, giving up fiction. This is not easy. I do not mean one should become the dupe of anybody or anyone's victim. We must accept life as it is and try not to invent an imaginary, gnostic, reality to rule over us.

I have largely, if incompletely, unraveled the notion of the philosopher or poet as prophet. Once I began to take apart the gnostic ideology behind romantic idealizations, I began to see that the whole ideology of prophets and seers is really just a form of social magnification of an individual who claims power for a certain set of ideas. For instance, Moses in the Bible is a Prophet who claims power for Judaism. Muhammad claims power for Islam. Jesus is a fiction created in the first two centuries C.E. Jesus was a poet for the Roman Empire as Muhammed was poet for the Arab empire. Whitman tries to be the prophet of the American Empire. Such claims can no longer be taken seriously, except by increasingly disjointed and small groups of religious people, cranks and dreamers. These are poets of death and I reject them.

... Identifying oneself with some degree of spiritual or secular prophetic status is a natural thing for a young poet, since anyone sensitive is likely to be in opposition to the horrors and injustices engendered by a corporate society. This is reasonable. Poetry involves a certain receptivity to one's own mind and experience and sometimes writing can take on an aspect of having almost been “received” from another voice other than oneself. But really, is it true? Sometimes aesthetic elation can go afoul of both reality and ethics. It is a tragic fact of my own life as a young poet that I really thought I could achieve some final completed vision and like Rimbaud claim that “ I will possess the

truth in one body and soul". But this is exactly the problem of gnostic inflation. The drive for total knowledge creates atrocities, both in Rimbaud's life and in history. The same is true of Guenon. His early desire to be a poet came true and the Reign of Quantity is his masterpiece of deluded horrors,, a piece of utter devastation even as he seeks to go beyond the world. The desire to possess the total truth is a vain desire that hides behind it a will to power.

That is partly why poetic claims to be a seer or prophet should not be exaggerated. It is tempting to exaggerate creative work as having an invisible source, coming from gods. It gives the imprimatur of stern authority. Even Noam Chomsky, a few years ago, tried to suggest that he is like Socrates or some of the biblical prophets in his opposition to American corporate and governmental abuse both in the U.S. and abroad. Edward Said, who was a student of Chomsky, calls "intellectuals" ¹⁵ prophets out of the same tendency. While I love Chomsky for his admirable opposition to corporate power, his comparison of himself to the biblical prophets was embarrassing.

Why does the idea of the prophet, which interested me so much in my youth, now seem embarrassing?

It is important for those in opposition to unjust powers of not to become inflated with such missionary delusions. To some degree Chomsky has encouraged a cult about himself. Identifying himself with the biblical prophets encourages an identification by his followers with the cult leader. A cult of personality develops that is independent of Chomsky's otherwise interesting insights about corporate society. The reason this occurred is complex and has to do with Chomsky trying to attach himself to a symbolic form of power and knowledge. The image of the prophet is a ready-made form that an intellectual, at odds with the powers of his age, can invoke to bolster himself. It is all about self-magnification. I object to this sort of gnostic inflation because it connects Chomsky, or anyone else, with a system of knowledge and power and helps create a cult. If Chomsky simply remained a public intellectual without any

¹⁵ Said, Edward *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (1994),

claim to a prophetic mandate, there would be nothing to object to. I don't object to most of the content of Chomsky's social analysis, which I often agree with. I object to his encouraging a cult like atmosphere around himself.

The claim to be a prophet is a claim to a special authority or peerless access to the "truth". It is basically a way of trying to inflate oneself and confer on oneself divine power and authority. I studied examples of the desire to be a prophet that were so ridiculous and inflated that I finally realized that the prophetic and Romantic tradition must be questioned. In Schuon and Guenon this reached pathological, delusional and paranoid proportions. He claimed to be an "avatara" or a "manifestation of the logos". But I saw similar manifestation of this in Hirschman, Chomsky and many others, both in people I knew in my own life and others in books and accounts.

The presence of claims to prophethood in modern poetry go back to the 19th century and are part of the romantic rebellion against scientism and rationalism. One can see the notion of prophethood developing in Holderlin, Goethe, Rilke, Heidegger, Nietzsche and the traditionalists, as well as in 20th century poets from Crane to Ginsberg. There are also hints of this in Marx and in a different way, in Hitler and Stalin.

The gnostic myth proclaims the true poet is a prophet, creating an utterance which serves a rejuvenating function by giving people new vision of their lives. Prophetic gnosticism combines the expectation of radical change of the world in a violent cataclysm, the overthrow of human conditions as they exist, the establishment of a glorious kingdom of God, a new state, as in Marx, or the attainment of some kind of salvation for some and punishment for others, after death. The claim to be a prophet is a claim to be a spokesman for something larger than oneself, a god, a state, an ideology. It is a claim to power, as Nietzsche claims power in his Zarathustra, or Mao Tse Dong claims a certain kind of Marxist prophetic power in his apocalyptic "Red Book". Prophets usually end up giving sanction to large scale murder. Mao and Lenin are

theofascists too, in a certain sense. The claim to ultimate power and vision and a willingness to violate others in characteristic of all theofascism.

This effort to create or invoke a supra-individual being which others can identify with involves a kind of gnostic inflation. Novalis speaks of this inflation. He writes that Poetry is “the exaltation of man above himself” and that the “poet is all knowing, he is the actual world in miniature”. This gnostic inflation, or need to identify man with totality and the transcendent is what I have rejected as the basis of my own poetics. There are different sorts of gnostic inflation in poetry. Dante for instance, magnifies the image of the poet in accord with catholic doctrines and teachings, relegating to hell those that do not follow such teachings. Chinese poetry tends to favor the “son of heaven” mystical inflation of Taoist/Confucian themes, the often trying to inflate nature as symbolic of concepts dear to the Taoist/Confucian state or world view. In modern poetry there is a similar inflation, though the terms of the inflation tend to be secular, as in Rilke and his Angel, a secular vision further inflated and magnified by Heidegger in his essays on Rilke and poetry.

There are various reasons why I have rejected the image of poet as prophet. The most obvious reason is that inflated poetry serves systems of knowledge and power. But the reason for this is somewhat complex. The problem is that most systems of power and knowledge define humanity as fundamentally lacking and in need of radical improvement. Only the Church, capitalism or the revolutionary party can right what is wrong with humanity. It is assumed that only force, violence or radical change can right the alienated universe and return humanity to the ideal state. It is this that I reject in myth and systems of knowledge/power. The religious expression of this is theofascism, but there is another sort of fascism, closely connected, which might be secular and I have no name for that. Perhaps transcendofascism or totalist-fascism or MaoStalitlerism, or even more convoluted would be TorqaMaoInnoStalitlerism, combining three of the 20th century tyrants, or

combining all five of the bad men of the last thousand years of religious and secular mega-tyrants.

The notion of a transcendent overman, prophet or seer had many negative consequences in history as well as on my own life“ One can see fairly clearly, for instance, how the prophetic claims of a poet like Mayakovsky transformed his secular poetry into a quasi-religious panegyric made up of ecstatic verses for the virtually sainted Vladimir Lenin. This iconic hero worship, so akin to Byzantine authoritarian worship, ignored all the people that were dying in the procession of the Marxist ecstasy that flowed subsequent to the revolution.. I desire no such crucifixions or the ecstatic trances that go with such upheavals of purity. I do not long to be a prophet of absolute or total truth. I want to spend what time I have left on a real earth, trying to honor such things as I can love, children and leaves, my house and the woods, ducks and the clouds, air and space, and trying to do what little I can to make earth a little safer and less threatened.

’ Blake states somewhere that being a prophet is really about nothing more than looking with one's eyes, being aware of the tendencies of the times that one lives in. Blake states that "Every honest man is a Prophet: he utters his opinion both of private and public matters.". This makes the whole idea of prophethood rather democratic and logically, makes the whole notion fo prophethood rather silly, which it is, in fact. For Blake, at least at some point in his life, everyone is a prophet who looks at the world as it is as much as one can. This is rather like Ed Said's notion of the public intellectual. One can oneself see what is going on all around. If everyone is potentially a prophet merely by means of opening one's eyes, there is no need of prophets. To understand why Blake himself did not follow his own insight in the matter is fairly complex. But to give a simple answer without writing a dissertation about it. I must explain a few things.

Blake was writing just after the American and French revolutions, and his

poetry is decidedly with the revolutionaries in these battles. In order to justify the new regimes of power, Blake tried to create a system of poetic thought that could address the new world being created by the overthrown kings of England and France. Indeed, Blake's effort to turn aristocracy and religion on its head is very interesting. We don't really need prophets or religion to do this, but Blake himself was not yet ready to take this step. He lived nearly 200 years ago and we can take this step easily. We know far more than he did about how systems of power and knowledge operate. Some like to quote Blake as being against "reason", and yes, he was opposed to impersonal intellectual dogmatism, rationalistic tyranny, as he saw it. He specifically cites John Locke and Isaac Newton as being examples of this tendency. But is wrong to condemn Newton. Locke is a complex case I will leave to the side.

Blake himself wrote one the most complex intellectual "systems" in 19th century literature and he justifies this, in his words, on the grounds that "I must create my own system or be enslaved by another mans". Scholars are still trying to figure out what Blake was talking about in his later works. They are hopelessly obscure, particularly his last great poem, Jerusalem,--- despite its marvelous illustrations. Certainly Blake did not deny using his mind, he only denied exclusive dependence on the mind. But I object to Blake's increasingly arcane use of symbolism and part of this is due, I think, to Blake not admitting that prophecy, after the over throw of kings and aristocrats, was no longer needed. All that was needed was a clear eyed exposition of what the facts are about power and human rights. In his earlier work is much clearer and incisive on these matters. Later Blake claims in a letter to his friend Butts that, "I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven Daily and Nightly". This is silly posing for an audience, like Baudelaire. Blake came increasingly to have this sort of paranoid delusion as he got older and was neglected and scorned by his contemporaries. But there can be no doubt that Blake was an early champion of human rights, or what his friend Tom Paine called the Rights of Man. He points the way to a poetry without religion and ultimately to a poetry based on nature and human rights. But Blake did not achieve this

himself. He was still attaching his poetry to a very odd form of heretical Christianity. To go beyond Blake's mistakes is to accept reality and deny prophethood and transcendence. Painters like Millais, Herkomer, Holl, Courbet or Vincent, especially in his earlier work, begin to see beyond Blake

Blake's claim to a prophethood and the accompanying paranoid delusions of grandeur would haunt various poets and artists in the 19th and 20th century. When one comes to understand that such inflated discourse is a reaction to political forces and unjust powers, one can begin to appreciate the human drama that is present in so much literature after Blake. Blake is an early example of the tendency of literature to take the place of religion in a "society orthodox religion has been largely discredited by science.

I can see in Blake and many poets who came after him, a struggle between rational and irrational elements in the 20th century culture. There are various ways to look at the allegedly rationalist and irrationalist tendencies of 19th century 'prophets' like Blake. The tendency to irrationalism in 19th century poetry is quite strong, and no doubt justified at the time, when early industrialization was then raging destructively across the world. It is also true, as Bertrand Russell shows in his essays on the Romantics in his History of Philosophy, that the irrationalism of Byron and other romantics led strait to Hitler. To untangle the mess of relations between poetry, philosophy and political regimes is not always easy. But it becomes clear to me over ten years ago that poetry can indeed bolster, inflate and sing hymns for destructive causes. This is obvious in the case of the Bible and Koran, which are fiction and thus literature or poetry, which have justified blood baths. But this is less obvious in the works of Homer. I wrote in an essay called "Deconstructing the Great Books: Homer, Plato and Gnostic Traditionalism" that

Plato wanted to strip Greek mythology of its local color, of its background in the tribal city-states with their Shamanistic values, and to replace the religion of Greece with a universal set of concepts that could apply to anyone, anywhere. The process of turning the symbolic and mythological concerns of Homer into ideological and increasingly sublimated, rationalistic, metaphysical and political explanations in Plato is a process that enormously extends the scope and ambition of Greece. Plato's abstract conceptions can be applied to society more concretely and uniformly than the local mythology of Homer and this allows of a greater degree of precision and control.

Plato hated poetry and banished it from his Republic because it got in the way of his need of centralized and totalistic control of people's minds by the elite. The poetry of Homer made the gods look questionable and did not serve the sort of power Plato wanted to create. Plato's theory of art is as repressive as the Nazis. Plato did not want a poetry that could question gods. He wanted poetry to serve god and the state only. Historically speaking, poetry has not been on the side of the small and the impure. Poetry does serve power, most of the time. Homer's poetry, for instance is also about social control and correct behavior, however Plato might have thought it too liberal. Shakespeare's plays are very conservative and support Christian and monarchist, almost a Catholic mentality. In modern poetry there are similar tendencies at play, though in ways that differ from Plato and Homer. Think of Whitman and paeon to Manifest Destiny, Ezra Pounds fascism or Eliot's affinity with the Nazi anti-Semitism.

This is a valuable insight that the "process of turning the symbolic and mythological concerns of Homer into ideological and increasingly sublimated, rationalistic, metaphysical and political explanations". There is a close relationship between myth and power structures, religion and economics,

symbols systems and ideologies. One finds in the romantic, gnostic and prophetic tendencies in modern poetry a similar service to social control and inflation of power. The secular state too often becomes a vehicle of elite rapaciousness as it has in our day with the corporate state.

Poetry is a negative force in the case Martin Heidegger for instance, who developed his romantic theory of Poetics while being a Nazi. Ezra Pound advocated for Italian fascism and Mayakovsky naively supported a fascist sort of communism but who was ultimately duped by Stalinism. Stalin's rationalism becomes a kind of insane system of control, as Orwell's satire suggested in his 1984, and subsequent historians have demonstrated . Both Neruda and my friend Jack Hirschman devoted some of their poetry to trying to justify Stalinist themes. Though in the case of Neruda, he finally admitted that supporting Stalin was a mistake. Hirschman made the mistake of thinking himself a sort of vehicle of universal self as if he were the embodiment of the 'people'. "Me the people" was what Jack's Arcanes claimed.¹⁶ Of course one man cannot be everyone, and the attempt to become so creates an injustice. The problem here is again symbolist thinking and a tendency to extrapolate to gigantic metaphors. This is due, again, to the transcendent solipsism inherent in romantic thought and feeling.

Transcendental egotism, one of the signal passions of the romantics, inevitably becomes an excuse for killing those who do not conform to the vision of divine or quasi divine order. For instance, Jack imagines his home town, New York city, being wiped out.¹⁷ He wants this for the sake of 'justice', in his "Dodona Arcane" This hatred of the financial sector in New York might be

¹⁶ One has to deconstruct such delusions to make sense of them. Take them apart, look at their parts, understand how they came to be. One thing I did learn from Jack too, is that religion and politics are really the same thing, both being manifestations of power systems and symbol manipulations and they hide behind each other in different times and venues. This is an important insight behind this book (to learn more about Jack see the movie the Red Poet, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWHTzYbCypc>

¹⁷ His fantasy of burning New York is graphic....“For this Manahattan also must go, and the Bronx and Brooklyn too..... it’s all gonna light the rain sulphuric in this here twon gonna buirn, with flames on all five sides, and uptown and down”Arcanes, Ist volume: Pg 220

justified, as Wall street gathers billions at the expense of ordinary people all over the world. But killing people to exact revenge is a different matter, as we saw in the airplanes that flew into the World Trade Centers on purpose. This was one Islamic ideology attacking another which had harmed the first to begin with. Islam attacked capitalism and neither were in the right. The net effect of this crime,- it was not an act of war, as was falsely claimed,-- was to fuel the forces of the very far right and make torture and surveillance allowable and justify wars that were unjustifiable. It also helped reactionary regimes in the Middle East become even more powerful. None of this need have happened, and could have been prevented if states were held back from becoming transcendental systems.

Jack's esoteric communism had destruction in view to achieve his elite and esoteric changes in history as a "sea of fists upraised in the teeming mix" (ibid. pg 221). I had no sympathy with that part of Jack, which I saw as a weakness of his: he wanted death to get revenge for the abuses of the rich, like Robespierre. He identifies with a Palestinian suicide bomber in the "Yakov Arcane". "I am Ali in the dynamite stick in Palestine", he writes These paranoid fantasies are belied by the fact that Jack is mostly a coffee drinker in North Beach Cafes and has been for 40 years. This is the old romance of apocalyptic murders out of which comes the shinning new world order heaven, Marxist paradise. The martyred¹⁸ need of violent transcendence is typical of theofascist ideology. Guenon played on this paranoid theme all his life and the fiction of Jesus's second coming or other transcendent murders happen precisely because of this madness and hate blown up or magnified by religion and ideology..

This process of magnifying motives on the basis of myth and religious images is very ancient and clearly was created to sustain social powers by religions and elites. Killing is nearly always part of this. Kings and Presidents

¹⁸ Pg 836 of the Arcanes has the usual martyrdom complex, "that is why they step on even the memory of my face". Stalin had this martyr complex too.

like to evoke god to justify unjust actions. Variations on this effort are legion. Whitman's effort to identify himself with a kind of magnified, supreme democratic self has some unpleasant feature' too, however it might be wonderful in other ways. Whitman's nationalist grandiose self, Nietzsche's Zarathustra and some of Wager's Heroes have much in common. Such operatic nationalistic, quasi-religious poetry too easily contributes to a kind of spiritual notion of a state or a people and this is a major cause of war. The idea of a prophetic poetry goes back to biblical notion of divine speech. The language of god, or the language of Marx, like the burning coal of Isaiah rammed down the throat of a poet, giving him the authority to voice absolute truth.. Of course the truth is that inflated speech is not thrust upon a poet, but rather springs out of him or her in relationship to a regime of power and knowledge. The prophet is the mouthpiece of social control. Jesus, Muhammad, Krishna, Buddha are all the creations of poets whose word became justifications for illegitimate powers.

So when Allen Ginsberg defends the notion of William Blake as his guru he is invoking a long tradition of poet's claiming to have a certain authority and claim to power. He is going backwards. Ginsberg also tried to make himself a sort of prophet. Ginsberg says of Blake that he is "an eighteenth century vehicle for the Western gnostic tradition that historically you can trace back to the same roots...that gave rise to Aryan, Zoroastrian, Manichean pre-Hindu yogas. ¹⁹ This effort to connect modern poetry to ancient religious systems is disturbing. Ginsberg wants to say that his poetics tie him back to a foundational mysticism. Ginsberg attempts connect himself with Blake as the inheritor of a lost gnostic, heretical tradition which has as its source the same source which created the Eastern religions. This claim to ancient authority is unnecessary and born of a need of power. It is not necessary to claim divine status or inheritance, a noble lineage of poets who have bloodlines of intellectual purity. This mystical history is really just a history of similar delusions had by

¹⁹ (Ginsberg, Partisan Review, 292)

various people over time, Ginsburg being one of the more recent.

As much as the Beat Poets like Ginsberg, Gary Snyder or Jack Hirschman questioned the corruption of capitalism and religion in America,-- a valuable thing in itself--- they made the mistake or not questioning their adopted alternative power. Both Ginsberg and Snyder accepted Buddhism as their final answer. Neither questioned that the basis of Buddhism is founded on a world-denying mysticism and misogyny. Neither questioned the notion of Karma and its roots in caste and denigrations of animals and nature. Hirschman adopted a gnostic form of Marxism, an esoteric humanism unique to him and born of a religious need and a paranoid view of history. My answer to Blake, Ginsberg, Hirschman and Novalis is that there is no need of poets to be prophets anymore, no lineage of great men. Or great women for that matter. Terry Tempest Williams is an example of a gnostic writer with pretensions to being a prophetess.

We need no more speeches delivered from Buddhist, Islamic, Blakean, or Rilkean angels arriving from behind time. The notion of the poet as prophet must be questioned because the very idea of prophethood is about service to a system of knowledge or power. Blake served a strange amalgam of Christianity and Human Rights. Ginsberg served a strange Jewish/Buddhist form of anti-war, left leaning Buddhism. I don't see any reason to retain older or dying systems of power and knowledge as part of a "post-modern" poetry. In Ginsberg, Snyder and Hirschman post-modern poetry becomes a glued together pastiche of undigested bits of contradictory and largely unexamined multicultural bits and pieces. What is odd is that since the 1960's many poets have been trying to re-interpret distant cultures to our own liking, without paying much attention to the context of the ideas we are adopting from China and India or other cultures. There is no analysis of these cultures from a critical perspective. It all gets adopted wholesale into multicultural American stew on sale at the Spiritual Supermarket.

What I want to resist is the whole notion of poets as priests, rabbis, holy

men, shamans, sunyasis, prophets etc. Why not strip poetry of all that loaded over accretions, spiritual pastiche, misquoted pearls of wisdom and begin all over again at the basic facts of existing here in this world of unknowns, the world that science is really trying to reveal, in fact and not imagination? Such anyway is what I have asked myself these last years.

I did not know that I had made a religion out of literature until 1991. I thought for a time that the poet has transcendent function, a secret connection to hidden worlds. Surrealists like Hirschman had taught me that. But I was mistaken. City Lights books was a beacon to a lot of mysticism and self-destruction and in the end I was horrified by both alternatives, and could not help but blame Lawrence Ferlinghetti for some of this suffering and delusion.²⁰ It was impossible to be a young poet in those days and not subscribe to some variant of the poet as prophet idea. I carried Rilke in my pocket, and don't read him anymore. He seems unreal, inflated and drunk on his own feelings now. I read Dante in the old days like he actually knew something, but now I find him absurd, retrograde and cruel. I thought Rumi was an amazing surrealist long before Coleman Barks did his proselytizing using poorly translated texts based on him. I don't read him anymore either, he cannot be taken seriously, it is all dreaming or an unreal kind. Neruda rightly thinks that Rilke is selling the "dead rinds" of mysticism. My earliest teachers and examples, Ginsberg, Hirschman and others all acted like secular prophets. Jack Hirschman still claims a certain global mandate to speak for all of humanity. He derives this mandate from a strange combination of Kabbala, Marx and Heidegger. But I find these ideological aspects of Jack's work to be the weakest aspects of his

²⁰ It is a good thing in some ways to have City Lights, as it is a sort of half way house and citadel for the disaffected of American capitalism. There is much to be disaffected with. But on the other hand it makes the bookstore something of a clearing house for world wide delusions, religions, cults, half baked ideas and alternative anarchisms. While aspects of this are good, some of is not. It has caused a lot of suffering.

Jack Hirschman moved into a small hotel room across the street from City Lights and started trying to reflect all that. Some of what I disliked in Jack, his endorsement of violence and questionable political ideology especially, I also disliked in City Lights. I got tired of it pretty quickly and found the madness and anger hard to deal with in concentrated doses.

poetics. He is still caught in the romantic web of violence and reaction. He is best when he speaks about being human without ideology. There is at least some reality mixed in with all the rest in the “teeming mix” and chaos of his work.

In the early 1980's, writing a long poem called The Nameless One, I thought I was writing one of humanities last poems about what the Last Man on earth might say about who we were. I believed my poem would tell the story of humanities demise in such powerful terms that it would reverse the course of history and stop the nuclear and environmental rape of the earth. A humble ambition, obviously. That was wishful thinking, to say the least. Nuclear weapons and 20th century atrocities scared me into religion, just as they scared Ginsberg and other poets. Other poets were scared into Marxism, which is itself a form of religion-like secular ideology. Maybe I was reacting against Jack Hirschman, whose Marxism was oppressive. Rationality and irrationality became so confused that I could not tell where to turn for the truth. But eventually I saw that I had to deny the kind of knowledge that seeks ultimate power, including the romantic and gnostic forms of poetics that strains after ultimate meanings. I learned eventually that questioning all forms of knowledge and power was the only real option left to me as a poet and artist. I began to grasp that the whole effort of the romantic poets was coming to an end. The world was not going to be remade in the image of an idealized new Jerusalem. The world was itself all that there is, and as a poet or artist I need to turn myself away from dreams and face the reality of what actually is here, present and existing. To use my mind and eyes and heart together to try to make protect an earth being harmed by abstract ideologies.

As a poet, should I retain the idea that I am a privileged seer? I don't think so. I am not interested either in claiming to divine election or to identifying myself with the will of a nation or party. Poets like Mayakovsky of Nazim Hikmet wrote to justify a party line or a state. I'm not sure poets do well to justify states, governments of corporate entities. Merrill Lynch, Burroughs

adding machines, how does James Merrill and his Ouija Board and Burroughs and his cut and snip differ? I do not desire any more hymns to gods, virgins or allegedly perfect men that religions use to make the rest of humanity feel lesser than, as if being a man or woman made one a failure by virtue of birth. I imagine a poetry that is like birds lives, like water over rocks, like my own private thoughts made public. I imagine a poetry of broken down old age, sagging bodies, accepting of the cruelty of time and life. The whole idea of the prophet as bringer of poetry and truth is based on the notion that there is a hidden reality behind our world that the prophet is in touch with. That idea is not true. There is no other reality beyond the earth and thus there is no need of a medium or specially elected channel or interlocutor to read the hidden signs behind time. Average folks have for centuries despised poetry because it is not practical and dreams silly dreams. They are right. I would like to bring poetry back down to burnt trees, broken arrows, hospital hallways, turbulent attempts to educate children. Those who think science is yet another ideology are just wrong. Facts are facts, and women have babies, and animals want to live as much as us, are we are them too. The ancient people already knew this and animals are women are what ancient art is all about.

I like Neruda' poetry of the "impure". But I don't want to base poetry on a negative like the idea of impurity. I want to offer, like Neruda, if that were possible, a defense of the weak. I wish to advance arguments against chauvinists or those who would cloud everything in irrational obscurity. So I have abandoned poetry as prophecy and opted instead for a poetry that seeks the clarity of earth and natural light, clear streams, sun on San Francisco townhouses. A poetry of Plein Air and reason that has not abandoned sympathy. Not wallowing in martyrdom or glorying in shocking the complacent. A poetry that is adequate to being a human who lives in nature and in the world and is not ashamed. Poetry should not fall into spiritual escape, dreams of total fulfillment, gnosticism, subjective elitism, or advocacy of revolutionary violence. The revolution must be inside us, changing how we see nature and other humans. Killing can never be a means to bring about fairness. Prophets

are no longer needed in a time where all that is really needed is to try to open the eyes. But it hard to convince anyone that little birds or learning to change diapers is more important that signaling through the flames.

What excuse will poets have in the 21st century for being elitist or too obscure and arcane? Shall we serve the avaricious markets, the corporate elite in the gated mansions? Shall we serve dictators or tyrants, dictators of Religion, the Cyberscape, the Proletariat or dictators at the tops of skyscrapers. Poetry opposes all dictators, all power mongers, all fake combinations of word games designed to deceive or merely entertain. We have minds, and can use them, and hands to use, and we have hearts too and can use them too. We cannot face off against violators of human rights, logging companies and killers of animals without the use of minds, hands and reason. We reason because we love the forest, not because we want to rape it. We do not reason without care of other beings. We use information when it is necessary to create arguments against those who destroy. We speak of what we love, but we are not irrationalists. I am not a transcendentalist. I want to feel the reality of this earth without gods or sublime beyond. The moon is real, Mars and Jupiter are real, but gods are not. Only this earth and this being, no other worlds or fictive beings. I say NO to life after death. This world alone is what matters.

' The last irrationalist was James Joyce, who wrote the supreme irrationalist text, Finnegan's Wake. This book is the final expression of subjective irrationalism. It might be a great book, if anyone could read it. It was so selfish of him to make it so obscure. No one reads it, much less understands it. He spent 17 years creating an irrationalist Bible no one understands. We do not need to make Joyce's mistake, or Blake's. I use my mind because I love nature, not because I love the min". What does nature itself say about what it is? How does one learn to look at things not just with "reason" and thus with an eye to knowledge that gives power and control, but with what Thoreau called a "sympathy with intelligence". To those who can respond to feeling, one

uses feeling. To those who can only hear reasons, one gives reasons. To those who can have both sympathy and intelligence, one tries to befriend them. Neither love or intellect is complete. Intellect without love kills. Love without reason adores monsters. Poetry that goes to either extreme might be interesting, but it does not go to what we need in this time, which is poetry of deep love and poetry that is intelligent in the interests of those who neither participate in corporate exploitation or institutional chauvinism. Those who claim "purity" have proven to be hypocrites. I take my stand with the poetics of the impure.

I have given up the belief the poets are prophets of the transcendent, speakers of the hidden truth, revealers of the mysteries. It is enough for me that a poet is merely one who celebrates the actual, mourning when he or she needs to mourn, or praising what he or she needs to praise. Listening to the simple realities of how life moves and flows, the actuality of sunlight and planets, plants and animals. A poet needs to separate her/himself the spinners of illusion and technological lies. A poetry that refuses the Heideggerian Leap, and that stays with skin and eyes and the way a child grows with awkward hands. I need a poetry of life, no matter how broken and small, a poetry of the fallibility and fragility of the earth. A poetry that does not deny reason, does not deify, does not worship the irrational and which looks at the world squarely and honestly.

The Beat poets left us with the ability to forge a truly democratic poetry, not based on competition, and which serves no elite ideology. I like that they did that. But I was disgusted with them in other ways, as many were drunks, there was pedophilia in Ginsberg's and Trungpa's circle and many of them died of drugs or excessive alcohol. There was real carnage among them.²¹ Everyone

²¹ I was in art school in SF in 1977 with a student named Richard Irwin, who was an interesting young man, but within a few years, by 87, he had destroyed his health and pushed himself over that edge and died young and foolishly largely under Beat influences. I saw Gregory Corso shoot Herion one day. There are other examples, but this should suffice to make my point.

has the right to be a poet, just as everyone has the right to sunlight and water and basic rights. There is no Orpheus, no poet that leads to a world beyond. I foreswear these pied pipers who would lead us to imaginary heavens that don't exist. I want a poetry that breathes real breaths. I give up and abjure the poetry of breathless abandonment to imaginary worlds beheld in deathless ecstasy. I no longer believe in the poet as transcendent mystic. I wrote in my marriage poem that

I do not dream of being Orpheus anymore.

Birds and animals do not need
to be calmed with my song.

Agitations on earth are nearly all human caused.

It is we who need to be calmed by their songs.

Orpheus had it all upside down.

He sought to calm the wild world
with the civilized songs of his grief
born of the loss of the woman he loved.

How selfish was that?

And what good is the will of Orpheus
t“ conquer wild beasts now?

Let the jungle birds screech,
and the Elk bugle in the mist.

The only "beasts" on earth have two legs.

The song of Orpheus has mushroomed into a
symphony of destruction of nature.

Nature has lost so much more
than humans want to comprehend.

Too busy counting their advantages.

Who is there to offer solace

for the losses of forests and oceans?
Who comforts the Prairie
now calm and empty of 50 million buffalo?
Oh Orpheus, they call you the first poet
but I am not related to you
and renounce the Orphic patrimony.

I long to write non-poem poems. No more sapphire transcendence or love affairs of crystal and diaphanous veils falling into empty voids. No more Zen mountains or Buddhist emptiness. My poetic concerns are much more prosaic and down to earth these days. Old barns are not cliché, they are the past Monsanto destroyed, squirrels in trees, street lights on lonely streets, how can you tell what matters and what does not? I want to write works that are like social histories, or portraits of places, animals, feelings, meditations, investigations, inquires. Let them approach reason, inquiry, prose and science: let them be science if they can be: let them be anti-poetic if that is where the content of the poem leads me. Let them be pictures of a living mind and heart, no longer obeying conventions of formal prosody. Let them seek after the truth and abjure language that is inflated or gnostic.

Poetry must disavow itself of the longing for the divine and authoritative voice. I disavow this aspect of the Romantics, from Coleridge and Blake to Ginsberg, Rilke to Hirschman and others. I am sorry that I used literature as a substitute for religion. I have given up the Rilkean need of ecstatic trance and utopian mystical transport, the Mallarme-like jewel-box, the Rimbaud high dive into the deluge. I do not believe in revolutionary ecstasy, or total transformation, up-ending the world through violence to become pure at last. Revolutionaries do not care much who gets killed in the process. I abjure the desire to remake the world to fit an ideological idealism, be it in religious, Marxist or capitalist forms. I think change comes from inside and cannot be

forced on people by violence. I do not want a violent revolution or markets imposed by sadistic presidents or congresses. I am a failed or lapsed gnostic, a poor candidate for what is now a geriatric revolutionary Avant-guard.

Poetry must find its way in this world---- the only world there is--- without any opening in the clouds at the mountain top. Poetry must come from our ordinary lives, or struggles to face the aging, suffering, birthing, loving and dying and living with other beings in nature and in cities. I want a poetry that does not want to die or sing at the top of its voice in the cataclysm. I want a poetry that wants to live for life, to keep the earth alive. I want a poetry that could save species, that questions and dethrone power, refuses money and other abstract rigged games and defends the rights of the lonely and isolated against the privileges of the many and the elite. I want a poetry of reflection about nature, a poetry born of intricate wonder at birds, colors and lights. I want a poetry of praise of actual beings--- a poetry to protect the fragility of being, a poetry of old women with arthritis in their hands, old men who can't urinate, babies and their diapers or birds not yet able to fly. I like a poetry that cares for people's babies, the poor, lonely old women, cats, goldfinches, water, redbirds, hummingbirds, nuthatches. I want a poetry of bread, daily life, tree bark, crickets, stars behind the moon, in a real sky where I have not pretended that pollution does not matter and those who are sick do not have a right to be cared for. A poetry that sees that the world is overcrowded and the rich are repulsive in their mansions helping themselves to what should belong to us all. What am I to make of men who steal from students to feed rich bankers, people who destroy education because they can steal from the ignorant, doctors and hospital administrators who take from the poor so the rich can be healthy, insurance agents who profit from the fears of sick people who cannot afford higher bills? How could I not protest them?

“ This still sounds a bit inflated I suppose. But it is what I mean that matters, not how it sounds. But that anyway, with all its faults, is my poetics, such as it is. Explaining what I think now helps explain what I thought years ago and how I was mistaken. I got off on this tangent to explain Hirschman in the hopes that that would illuminate Guenon and Paranoid literature in the 20th century as well as the whole tradition of romantic and “prophetic poetry. 35 year” ago my teacher was Jack Hirschman. It is true that Jack Hirschman’s Arcanes are perhaps one of the best poetic overviews of our times, in terms of the conflicts he explores and the depths he goes into. But his paranoid style undermines much of what is good in it. Jack embodies both what is terrible in poetry and what is good. He was really a journalist early on and the best of his poems read like poetic journalism, and journalism is science applied to news writing. He wrote some great things about Hiroshima or the Tsunami that killed so many in Indonesia.

Culture is not meaningless even if it is severely flawed. Jack’s poetry can also be wonderful and is certainly worth reading as an excursion into the mental, social and spiritual disjunctures and insanity of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He is intensely psycho-political. Like Guenon he exists in the leaps out of reason, in the disjunctures of magical and paranoid thinking. Even these delusions have sense in them if you look hard enough. But how much sense? “that kind of sense? I think he is the best poet of his generation and I prefer him to Ginsberg, for instance. Gary Snyder is very narrow and mostly a reprise of Classical Japanese and Chinese poetry. He is good at that, but it is hard to see how that relates to us. Taoism is really a fictional account of nature and much prefer to go into nature itself and learn about it first had then to read romantic Chinese versions of it. What is good in Jack’s poetry was summed up by his daughter Celia when she said in The Red Poet to ‘ignore his Marxism because what is good in Jack is really his humanity or humanness,’ to paraphrase. She is right about that. Jack is a deeply human person, and insofar as his work expresses this, he is a great poet.

So, this is the context of my encounter with Guenon. In the 1970[“] and 80’s I wanted to understand the madness of the times, and had tried to read Thomas Pynchon’s Gravities Rainbow, which is also about paranoia, Masonic conspiracy and crazy wisdom. I was very concerned with the nuclear issue in the early 1980’s and feared the bomb very deeply. This was a common concern at that time because of the fanaticism of Ronald Reagan and the far right Christians, who didn’t mind threatening the whole world as long as the corporate rich got richer. The cold war right-wing hawks in the United states, as well as the apparatchiks of the Soviet Union were all crazy and planning Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) of each other. Fools in power, what are we to do with them. I did not yet understand that the abuse of science by governments and big business was a separate issue than the good or benign use of science by those who wish to help the world be a better place. I did not yet understand that science really grows out of the grass and the trades and comes from potters, birders, weavers and carpenters, sailors and makers of metal and glass. It is closer to crows using tools, that men in labs doing grotesque gene splicing for money Both in my teens and early 20’s and when I lived in England I had read deeply in the literature of science and philosophy, from Ayers to Quine and Chomsky, Feyerabend, Dewey, Russell and Whitehead and William James. My natural bent had been toward these writers in my teens” indeed, William James’s interesting Varieties of Religious Experience got me interested in religions and an anthropological field“ of study.²² But by my 20’s I needed to question the “reductionist” domain of modern philosophy. Was there truth that science was wrong? I later came to understand that the reactions against science were deeply questionable. The problem was not ‘reductionism’ but the opposite. Expansionist Transcendentalism was the problem. But I did not know that yet.

In, 1975 I had read Aldous Huxley’s Perennial Philosophy and was struck

deeply by it. Could it be true? Were all the religions saying the same thing? Was there any objective truth in religion? I now see this book as a hodge podge of false analogies and make believe idealism. It is similar to Whitall Perry's Treasury of Wisdom, which is really neither wise nor worth treasuring. But I did not know anything when I was 17 or 18 and reading widely in many areas.

I was questioning science because of the bomb, Three mile Island and Vietnam. Guenon's attack on science intrigued me and I wished to understand it. So I was willing to look into what might be called outsider literature for response to the troubled times we live in. It seemed clear the answers were not in mainstream culture, which was mostly controlled by corporations. I did not then know that outsider literature was prone to hate science at the same time as it tried to make itself seem 'esoteric' and quasi-scientific. I did not then know that something that posed as highbrow, elite or superior, might actually be false. How could I know? Reading Guenon was merely a momentary exposure to yet another sophisticated fiction.

I was yet unable to realize that the very romantic tradition that still is a major part of the literary and art worlds I had belonged to, was the same tradition that encompassed Guenon--- and that this tradition is exactly what I needed to question. I was fascinated by Guenon for the same reasons I was fascinated by Ananda Coomaraswamy. I read Coomaraswamy years before I read Guenon and loved AKC first. I love art museums and started spending a great deal of time in them beginning at age 15. I was prepared to listen to a curator. I enjoyed the historical scholarship, the air of the antiquarian, the love of symbolism and craft. Indeed. It was my early reading of Coomaraswamy that got me into the traditionalists to begin with. One of my religious studies professors at college had turned me onto Coomaraswamy. I liked reading medieval texts and about such ideas as "substance and essence" as used by Aquinas or comparing such ideas to Hindu concepts of *purusha* and *prakriti*. I think what I liked in him above all was his rejection of modern art, his love of craft and his doubts about capitalism. I was enough of a Marxist then to consider such questions valid. I had no idea AKC was such a reactionary.

I did not grasp, then, that these ideas, such as Purusha, fascinating as they might be, had no real reference to anything in the actual world. These ideas were archaic generalizations based on vague language use, used eons ago to oppress, and now were extrapolated into myth for the modern world, to keep us peaceful and quiet, not asking questions. Magical thinking again. If history is better than legend and legend better than myth, then metaphysics is even worse than myths and religions despite the greatest storytellers. People believe the gospels because they are well written, but in the end what is good writing if it is lies and fictions?

Guenon's The Reign of Quantity is erected on these metaphysical conceits and the whole book is mythic fiction because of this. Guenon is not actually talking about reality. ²³. He is lost in a fabricated lunacy he is sure is utterly real. He is talking about a paranoid world view that grows out of a rather feverish and reactionary brain, magical thinking piled up on paranoid fantasy, myths piled up on facts and all this mixed together into a stew of seeming reasonable discourse..

It was not until 1982 or so that I read The Reign of Quantity. I think I was attracted to its Poesque and gloomy message partly because of a love relationship in my life that had recently taken a downturn. Guenon had that dark bitterness that still strives for an unrealizable beauty, just like Poe had, and I loved Poe when I was 14. Be that as it may, it is a classic in the growing genre of Paranoid Conspiracy literature. Having left New York city in disgust after a few years of living there, I was horrified by many aspects of our times. Guenon's books can be seen as being as much part of the literature of outsiders and the insane as they are a part of the history of 20th century mysticism. Guenon's book differs from the paranoid novels "f Tom Pynchon (Gravity's Rainbow or V), Franz Kafka (The Trial and the Castle), Artaud, and

²³ Chapter 1 of Reign of Quantity is all about the concepts of essence and substance potency and act. I discuss these concepts further in the section below called "Guenon, Wolfgang Smith and Anti-Scientific Irrationalism" ,_Smith uses Guenon's ideas heavily to try to create a bogus interpretation of quantum mechanics. For more on this see the remainder of this chapter and the last chapter of this book.

William Burroughs (Naked Lunch) only insofar as Guenon appears to have believed absolutely in his paranoid theory about the end of the modern world. Kafka was exploring the madness of the world as a somewhat objective and alien observer. certainly a profoundly disturbed and subjective man, Kafka is nevertheless human and profoundly so. His honesty and effort of grapple with the facts of his life are admirable. ²⁴ In contrast, Guenon was in the clutches of a religious seizure of his reason. He was mad. If Kafka explored madness, Guenon was falling into it and never got out of it and tries to push it onto others. Guenon suffered from a classic Paranoid Personality Disorder. He was preoccupied with unsubstantiated "conspiratorial" explanations of events both immediate to himself and in the world at large. He was also suspicious with a pervasive tendency to distort experience by misconstruing the neutral or friendly actions of others as hostile or contemptuous. I have done that on occasion myself, as have most of us, but in nothing like the scale of Guenon. For instance, as I note elsewhere in this book, Guenon imagined that his ill health is caused by magicians in Europe and that there was a worldwide conspiracy to subvert his teachings. When Evola suffered a horrible and debilitating injury during a bombing, Guenon wrote a letter to Evola suggesting that the latter had been the victim of a curse or magic spell cast by some powerful enemy. Magicians could send bombs to blow up someone's legs, he thought. His mind automatically gravitated to fiction and magical thinking. Guenon's mind was prone to delusional and magical thinking of a philosophical sort too. His was a medieval mind locked into bizarre and frightening superstitions which he projected on to the modern world.

This is different than the other writers just mentioned. At least Kafka and Antonin Artaud understood they were sick. Guenon does not have a clue. Like Guenon, Artaud adopts a radically gnostic hatred of the world as a

²⁴ For more on this see Louis Sass', Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought It is a very interesting book about the relation of psychology to creativity and literature_ Guenon should have been discussed in it

central component of his world-view. However, in Artaud this gnostic hatred of the world and existence is an element in a struggle for sanity. In Guenon all question of psychological analysis, Freudian or otherwise, is condemned as “satanic”. Rather than admit his illness, Guenon blames the entire discipline of psychology itself.²⁵ As much as Guenon hated Sigmund I think Freud was objectively correct when he compared religion to a childish delusions.

The books of Guenon differ from those of Pynchon or Kafka in that the latter are ironic satire” written in order to bring the oppressive, Orwellian powers of our time into question. In contrast, Guenon wants to resurrect and support the oppressive, Orwellian powers of old with an apocalyptic vengeance. Kafka was a great writer who wanted to stigmatize and offer protest against the arbitrary power of Church and Monarchist states. Kafka is the bad conscience of De Maistre, as it were, who loved “throne and god”. Kafka’s anti-heroes suffer under the blind injustice of “throne and god”. It is not accidental that a woman Kafka loved was killed in the camps long after Kafka had died. Something in him felt what was coming, not because he was a prophet, but because he could see where the winds of hate blow. Indeed. Kafka’s books and stories offer metaphors that help us question unjust powers. In contrast, Guenon wants to bring back unjust powers such as the Inquisition, the caste

²⁵ Schuon also attacks psychology as discipline. Schuon crated a kind of phony spiritual psychology that combined metaphysical ideas with modern psychological theories, This is evident in various internal cult documents which I can't reproduce here. But Rama Coomaraswamy came up with a similar post-modern psychological theories after he became a psychiatrist. in the middle 1990's. I knew Rama before he ever became a psychiatrist and was aghast when I learned how he was applying his intolerant medievalist ideas to peoples psychology. His effort to label homosexuality as a disease-- is a case in point. Rama as a well-known surgeon but should not have been treating anyone for psychological problems. His way of things was magical and doctrinaire and had little real grasp of the intricate biology of the mind. In any case, Coomaraswamy, Schuon and Guenon wall created a horrific system of psychological analysis that treats anyone who questions spirituality as sick, evil and "profane". But that said, If ever two men needed gentle care by professional psychologists it was Guenon and Schuon. Guenon attacks psychology in the Reign of Quantity. Schuon’s essay the “Psychological Imposture” is also an attack on all of psychology. Psychology as a science has certainly not been up to par with chemistry. But it is improving with time as more is learned about the brain and how it works. The hatred of psychology evidenced by the Traditionalists is unfortunately based on ignorance and prejudice, with little or no understanding of the brain science involved. Also they both hated psychology because where were themselves mentally disturbed an in denial about this.

system and the horrific injustices of the divine rights of kings. ²⁶

Guenon is Kafka's hated father, or the evil kin of the Inquisitor who wants to torture Kafka.

However, on the other hand, Franz Kafka and William Burroughs are very like Guenon in that Guenon was basically writing a Science Fiction novel or rather an Anti-Science fiction novel. When Guenon was a young man he outlined a novel in which the hero would use the occult to gain superhuman powers. Guenon never grew up and remained this bizarre child, a impresario and Occult salesman whose fears play out in his cartoon metaphysics. Reign of Quantity was 19th century equivalent of a modern-day science fiction--- it is a paranoid, arrogant, apocalyptic novel outlining a theofascist message of hate against science, reason and the modern world. Guenon thought he was the superman of reactionary autocrats, an imperious dictator in impotent delusions alone.

Guenon is no Kafka, who was a brilliant writer. Guenon is a charlatan who wants to subvert the modern world as it is and return it to the unjust systems that have rightly been overthrown. There is much wrong with the modern world, but what Guenon thinks ails it is not the problem. He is fulfilling in

²⁶ Guenon resembles Michel Foucault in some ways, in that the Foucault of the Book Discipline and Punish has a certain longing to return to systems of unjust cruelty. Like George Bush Foucault liked torture. This tendency of Foucault is a throwback to Nietzsche's cult of cruelty. Of course Nietzsche derived this from a nostalgia for Prussian aristocratic values, -- and a similar nostalgia would enthrall the Nazis. Foucault is a richer and more complicated thinker than Guenon and there are other parts of his thought that are less sadistic and more concerned with human rights. But Foucault is a sociopathic writer. Foucault endorsed the theofascism of the Iranian revolution briefly, but then lived to regret doing so. But Foucault like Guenon is a romantic reactionary. disciple of Nietzsche, Georges Bataille, and the Marquis de Sade. He resembles Guenon in that also launched assault on the Enlightenment, on liberalism, on the humanist belief in progress. He hates reason and normality and wants to undermine science. He hates humanity and the repressive technical age of reason. He wants chaos and Nietzschean abandon. A devotee of extreme sexuality, Foucault is a leftist fascist who really is far right in his views. He is wrongly lionized by the confused left.. Foucault would rather have torture than imprisonment, madness than sanity, crime rather than normality. His enthusiast embrace of torture makes some of his work highly repulsive, like De Maistre.

fiction his boyhood dream of having world power, at least in a comic book, Napoleonic fashion. Guenon wants to reinstate the monarchical and mythological powers of the far distant past. He can't do it in reality so he does it in a book. He wants to return to the Pantocrator-Christ as judge throwing lightning bolts at poor sinners. Reign of Quantity is a theofascist fantasy.

Like Schuon, Guenon cannot accept that the age of Monarchs, Pharaoh's, Popes, Caliphs, Shaykhs, Avatars, Prophets, Priests, Philosopher-Kings and Emperors with "divine rights" is well gone. He wants to bring Dante's cruelty back to life, since, it will be recalled, Dante wanted to give the monarchy its "divine right". Dante's "De Monarchia" treatise is a vision of an idealist out of touch with political realities who was yearning for an Empire that had passed away.²⁷ For the nostalgic Dante, "justice is at its most potent in this world when located in the Monarch alone". The horrible history of this giving the monarch so much power was lost on Dante. This point of view is that of a theofascist like Himmler or Evola, with echoes of Augustine and Aquinas and de Maistre. Recalling the Roman Emperors, who European aristocrats so wanted to be like. Dante embodies the interdictory, scolding and punishing mentality of the Inquisition very well.

But Schuon shared this view too. Like the stereotypical paranoid, Guenon and Schuon long to erect again the same inflated puppets of power, the Caesars, Torquemadas and Napoleons. The fact is that humanity has barely survived these "great men" of the past, yet Guenon wants to return to the age of mythological deceit, where Kings lord over subjects and swat them down like flies. He wants the Church to be the obstructive control over the thoughts of the population. Guenon wrongly imagines that modern forms of exploitation and injustice are different than the old religious methods of mind control. The ancient forms of power were either as bad or even worse than what

²⁷ Dante's notion of the a transcendent foundation for the empire is exemplified in his cruel and repulsive poem the Divine Comedy, one of the worst poems ever written in my opinion. Dante tortures and kills people so he can erect his absurd Platonist heaven. See the chapter below on Plato, much of what it says also applies to Dante

we have today. The nostalgic and romantic attempt of the Traditionalists is to extol the past as a place of greater justice and peace is a falsification of history. Certainly the horror of Stalin and Hitler were real horrors, But as Christopher Hitchens writes.

Communist absolutists did not so much negate religion, in societies that they well understood were saturated with faith and superstition, as seek to replace it. The solemn elevation of infallible leaders who were the source of endless bounty and blessing; the permanent search for heretics and schismatics; the mummification of dead leaders as icons and relics: the lurid show trials that elicited incredible confessions by means of torture.. none of this was very difficult to interpret in traditional terms.”²⁸

“Extra Ecclesium Nullus salus”²⁹ is a dogma of the Catholic Church. “No salvation outside the church” is what it means. Believe as we believe or we will kill you.’ This dogma, when stripped of denominational partisanship, creates Inquisitions in both Stalinist Russia, Maoist China, the Schuon cult, Jonestown or Rome. The Guenonian system is essentially a system of mind control, modeled on similar systems from the past, not very different that Stalinism in its main outlines---only the doctrines are different. Indeed, R.J. Lifton’s great analysis of mind control techniques had communist China as its main subject. As it turns out, communist China and the Catholic Church, the Tibetan Religion under the Dalai Lama, Islam or Zen Monasteries have a lot in common. They all set up a system of thought control and insider/outsider elitism. They employ certain techniques to control behavior and thought and they teach their adherents to despise there.

“ The Mason, apparently Monarchist, follower of Guenon, Patrick Geay ³⁰

²⁸ Hitchens, Christopher. God is Not Great. N.Y. N.Y. Twelve. 2007. pg 246

²⁹ Wolfgang Smith wrote a ridiculous essay that had this title and tried to justify this hateful dogma of Extra Ecclesium Nullus salus

³⁰ <http://www.libroelibri.com/regleabraham.htm>

recently brought the following quote to my attention. The poet Holderlin suffered from mental illness and wrote that . "le divin n'atteind pas ceux qui n'y on point part". Loosely this means that “the divine or gods do not listen to those who are not believers in the divine”. This rather typical justification of delusory thinking by one who is deluded is noteworthy. It casts a bright light on the cultic nature of Guenon’s world view: In other words gods don’t listen to anyone except deluded followers. Obviously, since there are no gods, only the deluded keep on speaking to gods as if they exist. Only the deluded refuse to listen to those who are not deluded. This is to be expected of those who are ignorant and is hardly virtue. The god’s do not actually listen to anyone, any more than mirror images listen. So what the sentence really says is that believers in the god-delusion are immune to listening because they are narrow minded bigots.

The followers of religions as well as Guenon and Schuon are narrow-minded bigots. Believers fool themselves into thinking they have the ear of a cruel God who likes to shun those that do not believe in their particular make-believe god. True believers like to shun people. Shunning is an act of aggressive social rejection, or mental rejection. This can be a formal decision by a group, meant to increase the power of the in-group. It is common in religious groups and other tightly knit organizations and communities. Targets of shunning can include persons who have been labeled as apostates, whistleblowers, or dissidents, , or anyone the group perceives as a threat. As Eric Hoffer points out the “true believer” justifies all sorts of evil in the name of good. Hoffer writes “When we lose our individual independence in the incorporateness of a mass movement, we find a new freedom—freedom to hate, bully, lie, torture, murder and betray without shame and remorse.”³¹The whole point of esoterism is to erect a fictional elite who look down on everyone. This is classic “them verses us” extremist thinking. The world inside the Schuon cult was a world that sneered at the world outside it. I saw this very clearly, all too clearly.

³¹ Hoffer, Eric. The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements Perennial Classic pg. 100

Those smitten with the intolerance of religion do not listen to anything but to their own delusions. Listening is not part of the cultish makeup of esoterism: they claim they know the “inward truth”, the truth no one else knows. This is the nature of cults and totalistic systems, to only listen to automatic speech, to only attend to those inside the cult and to regard all those outside as the "other"--- the profane, the hated infidel. For many traditionalists those outside the Guenonian orbit are bound for damnation. Those who read Guenon's or Schuon's rather moldy books are the holy ones, at least in their own eyes. The truth is very different, it resides with children, leaves, efforts to love life and be in the Plein Air world of kitchens and bathrooms, birds and salamanders, jobs and hospitals, streetlights and violins, schools and parks, where we all actually live.
