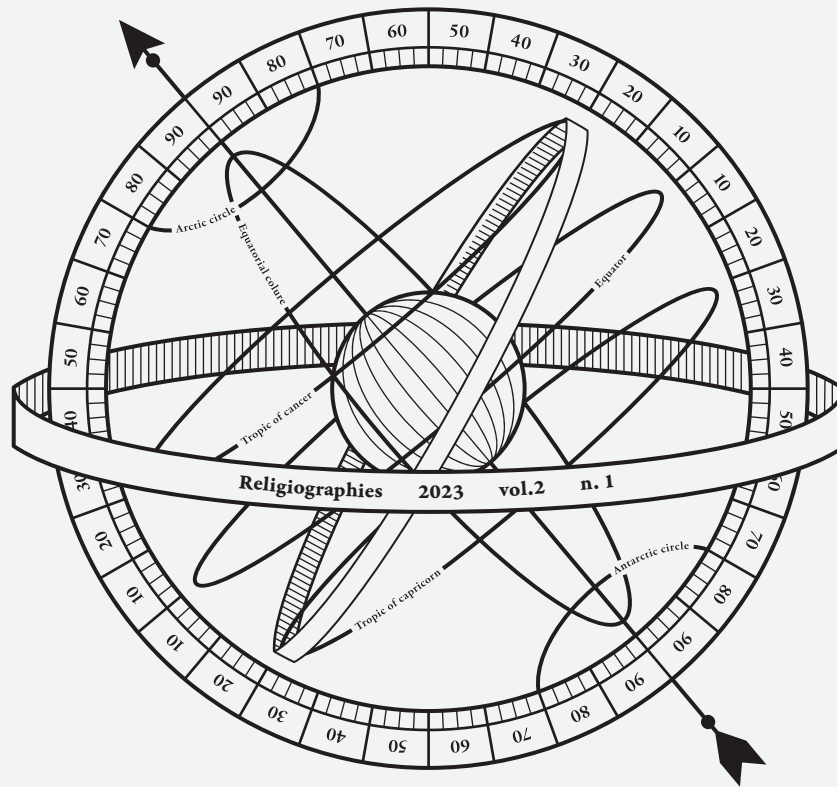


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*The Philosophical Gold of
Perennialism. Hans Thomas
Hakl, Julius Evola and the
Italian Esoteric Milieus*
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CENTRO STUDI
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ
COMPARATE

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the Austrian entrepreneur and scholar Hans Thomas Hakl (born 1947) and the esotericist Julius Evola (1898–1974), the most influential Italian representative of the so-called “Traditionalist School.” Best known as a far-right ideologue, Evola was frequently blacklisted from academia, and received scarce scholarly attention until the 1980s. After translating Evola's main books into German, Hakl has established himself as one of the most reliable specialists of Evola, thus contributing to his international resonance, as well as to his recognition as a legitimate object of academic research. As Hakl has shown in his publications, Evola has been a significant personality in 20th-century cultural history. His groundbreaking contributions on Eastern spiritualities and hermeticism, for instance, have interacted with mainstream culture more than many were willing to admit, which is confirmed by Evola's lasting relationships with famous scholars of religion such as Mircea Eliade and Giuseppe Tucci. Later on, in the context of globalization, Evola's idea of Tradition was seen as a tool for negotiating alternative worldviews, as well as for a radical reshaping of cultural identities. Our research took place mainly in Graz, where Hakl's archives are located. Access to these facilities proved invaluable, enabling the identification and study of unpublished documents.

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His mastery of the language, dating back to his adolescent years, played a decisive role in his first work experiences as a young man, then in the phase of entrepreneurial success with the company HHS (Hakl, Hausheer, Schöbi). The time he spent in Milan during the 1970s (1973–1976) undoubtedly underpinned this connection. See Bernd-Christian Otto, “Hans Thomas Hakl: Three Lives in One,” *Religiographies* 2, no. 1 (2023): 16–38.

Despite his wide-ranging interest in esotericism, it is no mystery that Hans Thomas Hakl has a preferential bond with Italian esoteric culture, which has proved particularly intense and fruitful over time.¹ Most of his publications deal with Julius Evola (1898–1974), whom Hakl met personally in Rome and to whom he has dedicated a huge amount of translations and essays, published in various languages. Over time, however, Hakl's work has come to encompass many other Italian authors and groups who—especially after World War II—have developed two themes crucial to Evola: the striving for magical self-realisation, and a traditionalist and anti-modern understanding of history. All these writers and intellectuals were to configure, in late 20th-century Italy, a new and autonomous discursive field, which constituted among other things a response to an accelerated phase of modernisation processes.

In the following pages, the relationship between Evola and Hakl will be assessed. We will mainly focus on the role played by the latter in the process through which Evola recently gained new popularity outside of Italy, as well as some amount of academic recognition. We will not neglect, however, to point out Hakl's most significant contributions to our historical knowledge of other Italian authors and currents.

The metaphor in the title hints at the throughline we will follow in our analysis. Hakl's endeavours can be likened to an alchemical *opus*: freeing the spiritual core of Evola's thought from its ideological dross. By extracting what he would perceive as the “philosophical gold” of Evolian traditionalism, Hakl intends to show how Evola expressed some deep cultural needs of his time. He also tries to highlight certain lines of thought that have been marginalised or dismissed by the intellectual establishment. This attempt should be seen as part of Hakl's “fight against one-dimensionality” which—as he himself declared—underlies all his scholarly and intellectual work.

Meeting Evola

Hakl had already read Evola in his late teenage years, but without feeling overwhelmingly fascinated. At the end of the 1960s he was delving deep into occultism, in which he sought tools for personal growth, driven by the desire to “become an extraordinary person,” as well as to achieve financial success.² At that time, his interest in Evola was sparked anew by reading the German esotericist Henri Birven (1883–1969), who had a major impact on him. “Through him,” writes Hakl, “I became better acquainted with French occultism (Lévi, Papus, etc.) [. . .]. He also led me to Julius Evola, and thereby indirectly to other representatives of the ‘Italian esoteric school’ (which remains for me one of the most interesting and profound esoteric schools worldwide), such as Giuliano Kremmerz, Arturo Reghini, and Massimo Scaligero—and also Tommaso Palamidessi.”³ Birven, Hakl goes on, “wrote so enthusiastically about Evola, and especially about the Group of Ur and its collection of experience-based essays under the title *Introduction to Magic as the Science of the Self*, that I did everything I could to get my hands on this material, which at that time was long out of print.”⁴ Despite the difficulties, Hakl managed to get hold of the volumes and was quickly won over. As Otto notes, “the experience of reading Evola’s work, especially the first volume of his *Introduction to Magic*, evoked a deep yearning for autarchy and independence in Hakl [. . .]. Through Evola, Hakl realised that he was in search of something extraordinary, the transcending of the regular boundaries of the human condition, or even self-perfection, and that Evola seemed to provide unique insights into and practices for achieving such a goal.”⁵ On the other hand, however, “autarchy” and “independence” were also prerequisites to obtaining success in more mundane realms, such as wealth, friendship, and women. Hakl explicitly recognised his debt to Evola on this point, valuing his recurrent advice to remain neutral in order to be successful in any given domain, avoiding the pitfalls of greed, dependency, and anxiety.⁶

What struck Hakl the most, however, was the direct and extremely matter-of-fact attitude of Evola’s writings toward magic, which he perceived as stemming from a form of honest empiricism. “Evola gave me a completely new understanding of magic with his clear formulations, his sharpness of mind, his arresting images (Evola has been called the ‘master of myths’) and finally his eminently practical advice. One perceived and sensed that here was someone who was genuinely speaking from experience and who was pointing the way to a clear and sensible spiritual path. No foolish circumlocution, no false mystery-mongering, no ‘I may not’ or ‘you have to wait,’ no self-importance, no ‘I am the Master,’ but rather: here are the facts, test them, act accordingly and you will see for yourself.”⁷

This first, bookish encounter turned out to be decisive in Hakl’s intellectual itinerary. Evola—as Otto remarks—is the author who would have the greatest impact on Hakl’s thinking. Inspired by this reading, Hakl soon decided to get in touch with Evola himself and managed to obtain his address through Walter Heinrich (1902–1984), then professor at the College for International Trade (*Hochschule für Welthandel*) in Vienna.⁸

Hakl wrote to Evola three times between 1970 and 1971, receiving two replies. In his first letter, written on the 18th of July, 1970, he expressed his intention to translate “a few passages of [Evola’s] books to make them also accessible to German-speaking readers.” He showed particular interest in the *Introduction to Magic*, envisaging “for the moment a more or less internal publication in a bulletin of the German Illuminati.” In addition, he asked for information about the activities of the Ur

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“I devoured self-help books with [. . .] much gusto, particularly those which allowed me to dream of affluence.” Hans Thomas Hakl, “‘There once was a young man who left home in order to buy lots of books, and even as an old man he hadn’t got any wiser and still diligently kept buying them [. . .].’ The History of a Library and the Personal Reflections of a Collector,” in *Octagon*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 2, *The quest for wholeness: mirrored in a library dedicated to religious studies, philosophy and esotericism in particular* (Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2016), 1–23, 12.

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Hakl, “‘There once was a young man,’” 14.

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“Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl,” accessed August 20, 2021, <https://www.hthakl-octagon.com/interview/interview-englisch>.

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Otto, “Hans Thomas Hakl: Three Lives in One,” 26.

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“Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

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“Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

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On Heinrich’s relations with Evola, see Hans Thomas Hakl, “Walter Heinrich. Una breve biografia,” in Walter Heinrich, *Sul metodo tradizionale: Vico, Bachofen, Guenon, Evola*, ed. Stefano Arcella (Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2017), 33–49. The correspondence between Evola and Heinrich, preserved in Hakl’s own archives, consists of a set of nineteen letters from Evola to Heinrich written between 1948 and 1958, which were found in 2012 in the archives of the “Gesellschaft für Ganzheitsforschung.” Evola asked Heinrich, among other things, to intercede so he could obtain civil invalid status.

Julius Evola, *Lettere 1955–1974*, ed. Renato Del Ponte (Finale Emilia: La Terra degli Avi, n.d. [1995]), 157–58.

On Palamidessi, see Francesco Baroni, *Tommaso Palamidessi e l'Archeosofia. Vita e opere di un esoterista cristiano* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2011) and Baroni, “Occultism and Christianity in twentieth-century Italy: Tommaso Palamidessi’s Christian Magic,” in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (London: Routledge, 2015), 101–20. Palamidessi wrote a letter to Hakl on the 2nd of April, 1971 (Hakl’s archives).

“Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

As Evola had already pointed out in his first letter to Hakl. This however, as Del Ponte notes, was not exact (Evola, *Lettere*, 159, note 3 and 163, note 2).

In a letter sent to Evola on the 29th of October, 1949, Guénon wrote: “This Palamidessi of whom you have inserted some excerpts in your letter is evidently yet another charlatan of the type of those who abound at this time on all sides; but what is more surprising is that he appropriates ideas found in your books and others, to use them in a way that cannot but discredit them; in such conditions, the works that he publishes must not cost him much effort in writing them!” René Guénon, *Lettere a Julius Evola 1930–1950*, trans. Renato del Ponte (Carmagnola: Edizioni Arktos, 2005), 109.

Evola, *Lettere*, 162. Evola’s resentment against Palamidessi was undoubtedly due in part to the fact that the latter had plagiarised Evola in his youthful works (see Guénon’s excerpt in previous note). On the relationship between them, see Francesco Baroni, “Julius Evola e Tommaso Palamidessi. Con una lettera inedita di Julius Evola,” 2007, accessed May 9, 2023, <https://www.fondazionejuliusevola.com/contributi/saggi-su-julius-evola/julius-evola-e-tommaso-palamidessi-con-una-lettera-inedita-di-julius-evola/>; and Baroni, *Tommaso Palamidessi*, 77–79.

Evola, *Lettere*, 162.

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Group, founded by Evola and other Italian esotericists at the end of the 1920s, to study—and practice—rituals gleaned from Western and Eastern occult traditions, with the aim of attaining transcendent states of consciousness and obtaining supernormal powers. From 1927 to 1929, the Ur Group issued the journals *Ur* and *Krur*, the essays of which were later gathered together by Evola in *Introduction to Magic*. Evola replied on the 3rd of August, authorising Hakl to translate his works, but recommending “caution” in making *Introduction to Magic* known to the German public.⁹

A year later, on the 4th of July, 1971, Hakl wrote to Evola with a further project: the publication of a monograph on the “modern esoteric orders of wisdom.” In his letter, he mentioned the Ur Group as well as “Miriam,” the organisation founded by Giuliano Kremmerz (born as Ciro Formisano, 1861–1930)—but also the occultist and astrologer Tommaso Palamidessi (1915–1983), who in 1968 had given birth to an esoteric-Christian school called “Archeosofica,” and with whom Hakl was already in touch.¹⁰ He asked Evola if he had any useful material for this purpose. “Evola,” writes Hakl, “sent me a friendly reply but without addressing my questions in any detail.”¹¹ In fact, Evola’s response about the Italian “cultic milieu” was rather a disenchanted one. In sum, the operative existence of the Ur Group was already over by the end of the 1920s, and its members were all dead;¹² as for “Miriam,” nothing serious was fundamentally left of it. A worse fate was to befall Palamidessi. In the wake of a similar appraisal by René Guénon (1886–1951),¹³ Evola depicted him as “nothing but a swindler (a *Schwindler*) lacking any qualification, except a generic astrology that he professionally exploits for profit.”¹⁴ Evola discouragingly concluded, “I cannot name, unfortunately, any groups or Orders in present-day Italy that are serious and have a tradition.”¹⁵

Hakl, however, was not the slightest bit disheartened by such a sobering response. As soon as the opportunity arose, he visited Evola in his small flat in Rome, at Corso Vittorio Emanuele 197. The encounter took place in 1972.¹⁶

This is how Hakl recalls the meeting with Evola:

“Later I had to go to Rome in connection with the export business dealing in electrical goods, for which I was working. I telephoned him in advance and he immediately agreed to a meeting [. . .]. I was received by his housekeeper, who escorted me to him. I can no longer remember whether he was in bed or in a wheelchair, but at any rate he looked wretched—sick, exhausted and embittered. But mentally he was fully alert. I told him about my high-flown plans to publish the monographs of the Group of Ur in German as soon as my circumstances would permit, and this obviously pleased him. He seemed happy to have the opportunity to speak German again, which we did at his request. Evola complained particularly that, apart from a very few young people, no one wanted to hear or read what he had to say. And even those young people didn’t really engage with his thought on a deep level. Instead they wanted to go out immediately and revolutionize the world without first becoming clear in their minds about their own spiritual orientation. When I asked him which authors I should study, apart from Kremmerz, Guénon and Evola himself, he came out quick as a flash with the name Gustav Meyrink. Meyrink, he said, had possessed a profound grasp of true esotericism. In

response to my further question whether there were any initiatory groups in the present day, he merely shook his head. He knew of none. After perhaps an hour and a half the conversation was over. Evola wanted and needed to rest. It was only much later, remembering the meeting and talking to other people about it, that I realised why Evola had been so well disposed towards me. It was not only because I came from Austria, where he had spent so much time, but also because our conversation was confined to esoteric themes. Politics had ceased to interest him. Weighed down by so much suffering, he wanted at least to preserve some of his metaphysical thought beyond his death. As for politics, he had simply given up any expectations that he might have had in that domain.”¹⁷

In addition to providing us with a vivid portrait of Evola in his later years, these lines offer us at least two valuable pieces of information. The first is that, already in 1972, when he was only twenty-five years old, Hakl had clearly in mind what can be defined as his specific cultural mission: translating Evola into German. Secondly, this encounter corroborated Hakl’s feeling that Evola’s real legacy did not dwell in his political theorisations, but rather in his metaphysics and in his doctrine of self-realisation. This conviction would allow him to move with greater fluidity in his work of “cultural mediation,” avoiding as much as possible the pitfalls of political struggles and bringing the esoteric and spiritual dimension to the fore.

Nigredo, or decontaminating Julius Evola

As Otto recalls, “Hakl’s parallel life as a publisher began around 1978, when he acquired a share in the esoteric publishing house Ansata Verlag.”¹⁸ Based in Switzerland and directed by the bibliophile Paul A. Zemp, Ansata was at that time one of the leading esoteric publishers in the German-speaking world. It was within this broader scope that Hakl undertook his new mission as a translator, dedicating to this activity his evenings and weekends.¹⁹ The main focus of his activity was, of course, translating Evola’s major writings into German.

Hakl was not the first, however, to devote himself to such a task. During the 1930s—the period in which Evola travelled throughout Germany to meet the representatives of the “German conservative revolution”—the volumes *Pagan Imperialism* (1933) and *Revolt against the Modern World* (1935) were translated. Later on, the German editions of *The Mystery of the Grail* (1955) and *Metaphysics of Sex* (1962) came to light.²⁰ However, it would be improper to think, as Hakl himself notes, that these first editions of Evola’s works met with real “success.”²¹ Only two reviews of the German *Rivolta* are known.²² *Pagan Imperialism*, for its part, was monitored with some attention by Himmler’s staff, but it had only one edition, and the print run was low, judging by the copies that can be found on the market.²³ Incidentally, this volume had a specific political intent. Evola tried to convey his own “Ghibelline” ideas, based on the emancipation of political authority from the Church, and on the autonomy of the Empire as “immanent spiritual reality,” ideas that could be applied to both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Neither of these two regimes, however, was particularly keen to adopt Evola’s agenda. Evola was viewed by the *Abne-nerbe* (the SS appendage devoted to the task of promoting racial doctrines) as a “Roman reactionary,” whose theories could only “provoke ideological

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“While Hakl’s original goal was to save the Ansata Verlag from bankruptcy, he retained his share until 1995 and thereby left an imprint on the German esoteric book market that spanned almost two decades.” Otto, “Hans Thomas Hakl: Three Lives in One,” 28.

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Otto, “Hans Thomas Hakl: Three Lives in One,” 22.

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Julius Evola, *Heidnischer Imperialismus*, trans. Friedrich Bauer (Leipzig: Armanen-Verl, 1933); Evola, *Erhebung wider die moderne Welt*, trans. Friedrich Bauer (Stuttgart-Berlin: Deutsche Verl. Anst., 1935); Evola, *Das Mysterium des Grals*, unknown translator (Munich: Barth, 1955); Evola, *Metaphysik des Sexus*, trans. Maria Schon and Hermann Maier (Stuttgart: Klett, 1962).

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Hans Thomas Hakl, “Evola in Germania: fu vera gloria?”, in *Il Maestro della Tradizione: Dialoghi su Julius Evola*, ed. Marco Iacona (Naples: Controcorrente, 2008), 223–34. See also *Studi evoliani 2016. Evola e la cultura tedesca*, ed. Gianfranco De Turreis, Damiano Gianandrea and Giovanni Sessa (Turin: Arktos, 2017).

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One, enthusiastic, by Gottfried Benn; the other, negative, by the philosopher Hermann Graf Keyserling, to which should be added a further critique by Herman Hesse (see Hakl, “Evola in Germania”).

This seems to clash with the author's own perception. Evola, in *The Path of Cinnabar* (1963), considered this translation to be a clear sign of a different destiny of his work in German-speaking countries (*The Path of Cinnabar: an Intellectual Autobiography*, trans. Sergio Knipe [London: Integral Tradition, 2009], 86–87).

Gianfranco de Turrís and Bruno Zoratto, eds., *Julius Evola nei rapporti delle SS* (Rome: Fondazione Evola, 2000), 43.

La crisi italiana e la Destra internazionale, 1974; quoted in Furio Jesi, *Cultura di destra. Con tre inediti e un'intervista* (Milan: Nottetempo, 2011; first edition 1979), 145.

Francesco Baroni, "Riviste italiane e perennialismo (1970–1990): permanenze, evoluzioni e contaminazioni," in *Octagon*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 3, *La ricerca della totalità riflessa in una biblioteca dedicata alla storia delle religioni, alla filosofia e, soprattutto, all'esoterismo* (Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2017), 407–28.

See, in particular, Jesi, *Cultura di destra*.

Julius Evola, *Revolte gegen die moderne Welt*, trans. H. T. Hansen (Interlaken: Ansata, 1982); Evola, *Die Hermetische Tradition: von der alchemistischen Umwandlung der Metalle und des Menschen in Gold; Entschlüsselung einer verborgenen Symbolsprache*, trans. H. T. Hansen (Interlaken: Ansata, 1989).

Julius Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, trans. H. T. Hansen, Band 1, *Praktische Grundlegung der Initiation* (Interlaken: Ansata, 1985); Julius Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, trans. H. T. Hansen, Band 2, *Schritte zur Initiation: Theorie und Praxis des höheren Bewusstseins* (Bern: Ansata, 1997).

As Otto points out, "Hakl actually wanted to translate and publish Evola's works on magic first," but "as he was engaged full time running his thriving company, HHS, he did not have the capacity to take on such a time-consuming task in parallel, and thus decided to publish the 'easier' work, *Revolt against the Modern World* (there was already a German translation from 1935 to provide a starting point for the new version)." Otto, "Hans Thomas Hakl: Three Lives in One," 29–30. In Hakl's words: "Despite Paul Zemp's many contacts and our diligent search for translators, no one could be found who was even remotely qualified to translate Evola. After all these failed efforts I finally decided to undertake the translation myself on top of my work with Ansata and my responsibilities as part-owner of an international firm that was rapidly expanding into thirteen countries worldwide. However, I soon realized that the translation of *Magie* required too much time, energy and research, and was simply not feasible in view of my continual travelling. Therefore I decided to postpone *Magie* and instead tackle something by Evola that would be easier to translate. *Revolt against the Modern World* offered itself as a viable option, as there was already a German translation from 1935.

confusion."²⁴ As for Mussolini, the 1929 Lateran Pacts had already sanctioned the strategic realignment of the Fascist regime with the Catholic Church.

Meanwhile, however, the cultural background had changed drastically. In the second half of the 1970s, Evola's thought was sparking new interest in Italy. This was a time of ideological contestation and political turmoil. Many, both from the left and the right, harshly rejected the value system of contemporary bourgeois democracies, and in particular the domination of the capitalist economy. Those who criticised all this from the right looked to the Evola of *Men Among the Ruins* (1953) as a mentor. This should come as no surprise. Evola's reference to higher metaphysical—and "traditional"—values was very appealing at a time when bourgeois materialism was being criticised. Moreover, Evola was one of the very few Italian intellectuals to anchor an aristocratic and anti-democratic stance in an organic philosophical framework, embracing a metaphysics, a "morphology of civilisations," as well as a philosophy of history, endowed with a wide-ranging vision of the trajectories of Western culture. In 1974, political scientist Giorgio Galli (1928–2020) defined him as "one of the most qualified representatives [of right-wing culture] in this century."²⁵ In those years, throughout Italy—especially in the South—numerous traditionalist magazines flourished, of different quality and impact, which referred explicitly to Evola's ideas.²⁶ At the same time, many started criticising Evola for his connections with the contemporary forms of the radical right, claiming that he had a moral responsibility for supporting its violent manifestations.²⁷

The cultural climate, then, was a heated one when Hakl resolved to bring new attention to Evola's works in Germany. Hakl's translation of *Revolt against the Modern World*, which is commonly viewed as Evola's main work, was published in 1982, followed by *The Hermetic Tradition* in 1989.²⁸ Between these two works, Hakl managed to publish the first volume of the Ur Group trilogy, *Introduction to Magic as the Science of the Self* (1985), the second part of which would not come out until 1997.²⁹ These books were commercially successful and prompted a new, albeit limited, dissemination of Evola's thought in the German-speaking world.

The choice of the works to be translated shows a clear direction.³⁰ In the wake of his own interests, Hakl had selected three texts that placed esotericism, rather than politics, in the foreground. Despite this, his operation came up against cultural resistance, perhaps not unpredictably. Hakl writes: "In 1982 [*Revolt against the Modern World*] was published and immediately sold surprisingly well, but there were repercussions—albeit somewhat delayed—that Paul Zemp and I had not expected. In an address at the Frankfurt Book Fair Umberto Eco complained in thunderous tones that in the Frankfurt bookshops, instead of books by (the Marxist) Georg Lukács, he had found Evola, Guénon and Gurdjieff. Probably hardly any of the journalists present knew who these three people were, but they knew immediately that one was supposed to be against them and very soon they also knew that Ansata-Verlag was exhibiting a book by Evola. I was approached by various journalists and had to explain things. Interestingly, most of these conversations were not unpleasant at all, as soon as I had given them some clarification and preferably also a copy of *Revolt against the Modern World* for them to study."³¹

Umberto Eco (1932–2016), then, thundered against Evola. It would not be the last time. In 1987, in the columns of *L'Espresso*, the semiologist

commented on Evola's preface to the 1937 Italian edition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, imbued with a blatantly conspiratorial anti-Semitism. Here Eco labelled Evola as "a sad and senseless figure that in recent years the New Right has re-purposed as a thinker of rank," the exponent of an "operetta occultism of which the magician Otelma [a popular Italian TV personality] would be ashamed."³² In a lecture held at Columbia University on the 24th of April, 1995, as part of the celebrations for the Liberation of Europe from Nazi-Fascism, Evola was again mentioned by Eco in relation to the latter's idea of "eternal fascism" (which Eco also defined, with some interesting semantic resonance given the context, "Ur-Fascism"). Significantly enough, for Eco the first element of Ur-Fascism is the "cult of tradition," and the second "the rejection of modernism," both typically Evolian traits. "The fascist game can be played in many forms," writes Eco. "Fascism became an all-purpose term because one can eliminate from a fascist regime one or more features, and it will still be recognizable as fascist. [. . .]. Add a cult of Celtic mythology and the Grail mysticism (completely alien to official fascism) and you have one of the most respected fascist gurus, Julius Evola."³³

Eco's reaction at the Frankfurt Fair is therefore symptomatic of an intrinsic difficulty in even naming Evola, branded with the seal of anti-Semitism, racism, and fascism, shortly after the era of right-wing subversion and neo-fascist terrorism. Evola was commonly associated with these phenomena (not only by Italian authors) as a "bad teacher" or even as a "moral culprit."³⁴

Faced with this unexpected pushback, Hakl's projects faltered. "Perhaps on account of my one-sided and rather limited understanding of political matters," he explained, "I was totally unprepared for the subsequent reactions. Prompted by the statements of Eco and others, many booksellers suddenly accused Ansata of propagating Fascist ideas. Furthermore they threatened to stop all sales of Ansata books unless we took this wicked Evola out of our programme. This was a hefty threat for a small publishing house, especially as they demanded an immediate decision from us. But we did not want to give up so easily. So, after considering the situation carefully and assessing our powers of resistance and our bank balance, we decided to carry on. In 1989 there appeared one of Evola's best books—again translated by me—namely *The Hermetic Tradition*, which had impressed both C. G. Jung and Mircea Eliade."³⁵

However, the strong tensions raised by these publications, related to Evola's sulphurous reputation as a political thinker, showed that things needed to change course. To prevent Evola's name from being blacklisted, and to promote a better appreciation of his magical and esoteric *corpus*, his political ideas needed to be overtly and objectively studied, presented as facts, set in the context of their time. In short, they had to be *historicised*, and withdrawn from the discursive battlefield where Evola's apologists and enemies used to clash so heatedly. "If this could not be done," says Hakl, "then the 'esoteric' Evola would also be dead for the foreseeable future."³⁶

The long preface that Hakl appended to the first German edition of *Men Among the Ruins*, published in 1991 by the extreme right-wing publisher Hohenrain,³⁷ acquires crucial importance from this point of view.³⁸ Translated in English in 2002,³⁹ then in Russian in 2009,⁴⁰ this text "has become highly influential and is considered a definitive introduction to Evola's thinking."⁴¹ Here we find explicitly formulated the assumption that would guide Hakl's work in the years to come: Evola above all bears

However, that version could not simply be used as it was, since Evola had twice revised the book extensively, and furthermore the language of the translation was much too turgid. But at least it made the task easier." "Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

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"Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

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Umberto Eco, "La bustina di Minerva," *L'Espresso*, April 12, 1987 (quoted in Filippo Ceccarelli, *Il potere in Italia da De Gasperi a questi qua* [Milan: Feltrinelli, 2018], chap. 7, Kindle).

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Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *The New York Review*, June 22, 1995, accessed August 20, 2021, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism>.

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As an example, see Franco Ferraresi, "Da Evola a Freda. Le dottrine della Destra Radicale fino al 1977," in *La Destra Radicale*, ed. Franco Ferraresi (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984), 13–53 (Ferraresi also published in English: "Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right," *European Journal of Sociology* 28, no. 1, May [1987]: 107–51). In the Anglo-Saxon world of the 1980s see the following studies: Thomas Sheehan, "Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist," *Social Research* 48, no. 1 (1981): 45–73, and Sheehan, "Diventare Dio: Julius Evola and the Metaphysics of Fascism," *Stanford Italian Review* 6, nos. 1–2 (1986): 279–92; Robert Griffin, "Revolts against the Modern World: The Blend of Literary and Historical Fantasy in the Italian New Right," *Literature and History* 11 (Spring 1985): 101–23; Richard H. Drake, "Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy," in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 61–89.

35

"Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

36

"The continuing attacks forced me to engage more clearly with Evola's political thought, which until then had only interested me peripherally. I realised that ultimately I had to defend not only myself but also the good name of the publishing house. It was not a question of defending Evola's political ideas but rather presenting the historical facts and setting them in the context of their time. If this could not be done then the 'esoteric' Evola would also be dead for the foreseeable future." "Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

37

"The Hohenrain publishing house that printed the book belongs to the Tübingen Grabert-Verlag, a leading right wing publisher in Germany particularly proficient in Holocaust denial. Its founder Herbert Grabert was a member of the German Faith Movement and pupil of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer. After the death of his father, Grabert's son Wigbert continued publishing books pointing to a spiritual alternative to the Judeo-Christian model" (Horst Junginger, "From Buddha To Adolf Hitler: Walther Wüst And

The Aryan Tradition,” in *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, ed. Horst Junginger [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 105–77, 168).

38

H. T. Hansen, “Evola’s politisches Wirken,” preface to Julius Evola, *Menschen inmitten von Ruinen* (Tübingen: Hohenrain, 1991), 7–132. “Then I heard of a plan to publish Evola’s political treatise *Men Among the Ruins* in Germany. At first I was greatly alarmed and thought this meant the end of our adventure with Evola. The book in question argued for a state or empire based on distinctly hierarchical, anti-democratic principles. I feared that its publication would inevitably and understandably mobilize our enemies and cause the booksellers to intensify their boycott. True, Evola’s esoteric works were not directly political, but who would be discerning enough to recognize the difference? Then I realized that I had no alternative but to take the bull by the horns. So I contacted the publisher, whom I knew from the Frankfurt Book Fair, and offered to write an explanatory foreword to the book. My intention was to give as exact an account as possible of Evola’s development as a thinker, and to point out how his political ideas flowed from his spiritual perspective, which in turn was influenced by Meister Eckhart, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Tao Te Ching*. All of this I wanted to show from his early writings. In this way the reader would be able to form his or her own judgement about Evola’s political views on the basis of the assembled facts. I knew from my own studies that it was too simple to write Evola off as a ‘Fascist’ and a ‘racist’ on account of his antisemitic and racist judgements, without taking into account his artistic, philosophical and esoteric activities.” “Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

39

H. T. Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavours,” in Julius Evola, *Men among the ruins. Postwar reflections of a radical traditionalist*, trans. Guido Stucco, ed. Michael Moynihan (Rochester: Inner traditions, 2002), 1–104.

40

X. T. Хансен, *Политические устремления Юлиуса Эволы* (Voronezh–Moscow: Terra Foliata, 2009).

41

Junginger, “From Buddha to Adolf Hitler,” 168. “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavours” thus expands on, and completes, Hakl’s previous essay “A Short Introduction to Julius Evola,” *Theosophical History* 5 (January 1995): 11–22 (reprinted as an introduction to Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco [Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1995]).

42

“To Evola, the centre of all things is not man but rather the Transcendent. Regardless of the question that concerns him, he is always searching for the direct relationship to the Absolute—that is, that domain which lies beyond the merely human, because human affairs are one way today but tomorrow may be quite different. According to the view of Tradition, on the contrary, the principles that form the foundation of our world remain forever the same. He is not interested in what is bound to time, but instead in that which is above time, the ‘eternal.’ Therefore, one cannot expect from Evola the now prevalent Western “humanist” values, but must reckon with a

witness to a metaphysical approach to life, rooted in a Tradition incompatible with modernity, and his political reflections represent tangential aspects of his convictions about the world and humankind.⁴²

Having established these general premises, Hakl examines in detail the main influences Evola underwent in the formative phase of his philosophical-political thought—focusing, in particular, on Otto Weininger (1880–1903), Otto Braun (1897–1918), and Carlo Michelstaedter (1887–1910). He also examines the importance of his artistic background, his move towards esotericism, and the development of the concept of “pagan imperialism.” Then he assesses his critical relations with Fascism and National Socialism, his notion of “spiritual racism” as well as his attitude towards the Jews. Towards the end of the text, Hakl tackles the thorny issue of Evola’s current political relevance and his connection with the Italian post-war far right. That was an inevitable topic, since *Men among the Ruins* is, as Hakl notes, “the only ‘practical’ handbook for a truly traditional right wing.”⁴³ Despite Evola’s political past, Hakl argues, the centrality of the esoteric and spiritual theme, and his reference to a spiritual Tradition far removed from the world of current affairs and incompatible with modernity, detract from the possible political applications of his thought. Ultimately, Evola’s doctrine is in no way transferable to today’s world in political terms: “The abyss between the world of facts and the world of Tradition is too great.”⁴⁴ Accordingly, Hakl recalls the paradoxical definition by Marco Tarchi (1952–), the ideologist of the Italian New Right, of Evolian thought as a “politically disabling myth” (*mito incapacitante*): “Indeed, reading Evola has kept many young people from pursuing political activities, because he speaks of a past that is too remote and of which nothing is left, as well as of ideals that are too lofty.”⁴⁵

The fascist, racist, and antisemitic Evola is thus “sterilised,” circumscribed to a well-defined and distant historical period: the 1930s and 1940s. The image that one gets from these pages—stemming from Evola’s self-depiction—is that of the survivor from another world, from another universe of values, paradoxically useless for contemporary right-wing circles and, in the final analysis, politically untranslatable in the broadest sense. From today’s perspective, this is clearly a somewhat partial portrait. Hakl himself some years later admitted, “My foreword brought much more objectivity into the whole debate surrounding Evola [. . .]. Having said that, I would now formulate certain parts rather differently. In the meantime so much new literature about Evola has appeared in Italy—most of it well-formulated criticism—that I have changed my position on certain issues.”⁴⁶ It is not difficult to guess which ones. His article did not describe, for example, Evola’s deep involvement in the Italian neofascist magazines of the 1960s, nor his enduring racist theorisations of the same period. This time Evola’s racism did not only target the traditional Jewish enemy—seen as a symbol of material greed and rapacious individualism—but extended to peoples of colour and racial mixing, threatening the prestige of the white European race (Hakl later explicitly rejected Evola’s “numerous unambiguously racist outpourings”⁴⁷). Also unexamined are Evola’s references to a “traditionalist path to violence,” rooted in a “metaphysics of warrior heroism,” whose contiguity with certain subversive movements of the 1970s, if only as a possible theoretical premise, cannot be minimised.⁴⁸ It was, perhaps, the price to be paid to let the other Evola come through: the Master denouncing the distortions of materialist modernity, and peering into its reversals and unspoken aspects; the prophet who, from a decentralised position, indicated the other world—which perhaps can

only be glimpsed through the myths and symbols of the sacred. Evola thus embodied his own myth: the traditional and “differentiated” man, heroic, contemptuous of ordinary humanity and turned towards the transhuman, standing upright, stoically, in a “world of ruins.”

Albedo, or connecting the dots: Julius Evola as a European intellectual

Translating the esoteric Evola into German and historicising his political thought—to neutralise what Hakl perceived as merely ideological and ill-informed criticism—represent, therefore, the first steps of Hakl’s work in the 1980s, up to the beginning of the 1990s. In a second phase, Hakl would broaden his scope, aiming to stress the connections between Evola and 20th-century cultural history, and to highlight his role as a “European intellectual.” One of the key aspects of this operation was to show how Evola’s comparative inquiry into Eastern and Western traditions, as well as his reflection on the decadence of the modern world, became intertwined with the thought of important representatives of mainstream culture, forming a thematic basin from which the religious studies of the second half of the century would draw.

Two main publications reflect this new phase. The first is a study that Hakl dedicated, in 1998, to Evola’s relations with the circles of the German “Conservative Revolution,” until then poorly studied.⁴⁹ But far more relevant in this sense is an essay, also published in 1998 in German, on Evola’s relationship with Mircea Eliade (1907–1986).⁵⁰ The two had been in touch since the late 1920s, when Eliade was in Calcutta. There, the Romanian scholar had received the collections of the journals *Ur* and *Krur* from Evola himself. Subsequently, he was greatly impressed by *The Hermetic Tradition*—which turned out to be an indispensable source for his own works on alchemy—and by *Revolt against the Modern World*. In 1935, he described Evola as “one of the most interesting minds of the war generation,” even declaring that he had undertaken “a study of his magical philosophy that remained at the manuscript stage.”⁵¹ Evola even appears as a character in several of Mircea Eliade’s novels and short stories.⁵² In the post-war period, Evola translated *Le chamanisme* (1951) into Italian under the pseudonym of Carlo d’Altavilla and reviewed Eliade’s most significant publications.⁵³

The connection between Evola and Eliade has been under investigation since the end of the 1980s, first within traditionalist circles,⁵⁴ then in academic milieus.⁵⁵ The results of these studies soon began to appear in the international scholarly literature on Eliade. In a seminal book on Tantra published in 2003, for instance, Hugh Urban (1968–), a student of Eliade’s former colleagues and disciples at the University of Chicago, pointed out, in a rather alarmed tone, the possibility that Eliade had suffered a regrettable Evolian contagion in his works about Indian religions.⁵⁶ As for Mark Sedgwick (1960–), in his 2004 key monograph on the Traditionalist movement—a book in which, incidentally, Hakl’s studies are extensively cited—he clearly stated that “Romanian Traditionalism derived not from Paris or Cairo [*scilicet* from Guénon] but from Rome,” since “the earliest identifiable Romanian Traditionalist, Mircea Eliade, was a distant follower of Evola’s [. . .] Ur Group.”⁵⁷ Here Sedgwick defined Eliade’s as a “soft traditionalism,” reaching the conclusion—perhaps oversimplified—that “Eliade’s general model of human religiosity is in effect the Perennial Philosophy dressed in secular clothes.”⁵⁸

Indeed, while Eliade never was a Traditionalist *stricto sensu*, it is rather

total inversion of the standpoints that one is used to.” Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavours,” 2.

43

Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavours,” 89.

44

Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavours,” 94. “But if one wants to speak of Evola’s actual political influence, one must keep this in mind: Evola’s traditionalism cannot be used by modern political movements. Even Evola himself saw this: his teachings are too aristocratic, too demanding, and too much directed against progress and modernity. It is unimaginable how these thought patterns could be successful in the industrialized democracies of the West.” Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavours,” 93.

45

Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavours,” 93.

46

“Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

47

“Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

48

Francesco Cassata, *A destra del fascismo: profilo politico di Julius Evola* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), see in particular the chapter “Il lungo razzismo,” 432–89. On Evola’s racism, see also Francesco Germinario, *Razza del Sangue, razza dello Spirito: Julius Evola, l’antisemitismo e il nazionalsocialismo (1930–43)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001).

49

[H. T. Hansen], “Julius Evola und die deutsche konservative Revolution,” *Criticón* 158 (April–June 1998): 16–32 (Italian trans. “Julius Evola e la ‘Rivoluzione Conservatrice’ Tedesca,” in *Studi Evoliani 1998*: 144–80; French trans. *Julius Evola et la ‘Révolution conservatrice’ allemande* [Montreuil: Les Deux Étendards, 2002], with a preface by Philippe Baillet and a bibliography of Evola’s German writings by Alain de Benoist).

50

H. T. Hansen, “Mircea Eliade, Julius Evola und die Integrale Tradition,” in Julius Evola, *Über das Initiatische* (Sinzheim: H. Frietsch, 1998), 9–50.

51

Mircea Eliade, review of *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, by J. Evola, *Vremea* 8, no. 382 (March 31, 1935): 6. See Paola Pisi, “I ‘tradizionalisti’ e la formazione del pensiero di Eliade,” in *Confronto con Mircea Eliade. Archetipi mitici e identità storica*, ed. Luciano Arcella, Paola Pisi and Roberto Scagno (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998), 43–133, 45.

52

Marcello De Martino, *Mircea Eliade esoterico. Ioan Petru Culianu e i “non detti”* (Rome: Settimo Sigillo, 2008), 235–316; Claudio Mutti, “Evola-Eliade. Un bilancio culturale,” introduction to Julius Evola, *Lettere a Mircea Eliade 1930-1954*, ed. Claudio Mutti (Naples: Controcorrente, 2011; new edition *Sacro, mito, religione. Lettere a Mircea Eliade 1930-1962* [Rome: Pagine, 2018]), 21–34,

53

See Evola, *Lettere a Mircea Eliade*.

54

See Philippe Baillet, “Julius Evola et Mircea Eliade (1927–1974): Une amitié manquée, avec des extraits de deux lettres d’Evola à Eliade,” *Les deux étendards* 1 (September–December 1988): 45–55; Claudio Mutti, *Mircea Eliade e la guardia di ferro* (Parma: Edizioni all’insegna del Veltro, n.d. [1989]), esp. 38–55; Gianfranco De Turrís, “L’‘iniziato’ e il Professore. I rapporti ‘sommersi’ tra Julius Evola e Mircea Eliade,” in *Delle rovine ed oltre. Saggi su Julius Evola*, ed. Mario Bernardi Guardi and Marco Rossi (Rome: Antonio Pellicani Editore, 1995), 219–49.

55

Pisi, “I ‘tradizionalisti’”; Pisi, “Evola, Eliade e l’alchimia,” *Studi evoliani* 1999, 62–92; Natale Spineto, “Mircea Eliade and traditionalism,” *Aries* 1 (2001): 63–87. Cf. also Liviu Bordaş, “The difficult encounter in Rome. Mircea Eliade’s post-war relation with Julius Evola – new letters and data,” *International Journal on Humanistic Ideology* 4, no. 2 (Autumn–Winter 2011): 125–58; Giovanni Casadio, “Eliade contro Evola,” preface to Evola, *Lettere a Mircea Eliade*, 7–19; Enrico Montanari, “Eliade ed Evola: aspetti di un rapporto ‘sommerso,’” in *Mircea Eliade. Le forme della Tradizione e del Sacro*, ed. Giovanni Casadio and Pietro Mander (Rome: Mediterranee, 2012), 93–111 (also in Enrico Montanari, *Storia e tradizione. Orientamenti storico-religiosi e concezioni del mondo* [Rome: Lithos Editrice, 2016], 119–44).

56

“In any discussion of Eliade’s view of Tantra,” Urban wrote, “we must face the difficult and troubling question of whether Eliade’s vision was a kind of crypto-fascism, tainted with the same sorts of repugnant right-wing political interests as Evola’s [. . .]. As Wasserstrom, Strenski, and others have argued, Eliade’s reactionary, antimodernist ideals were in many ways carried over into his later scholarship as a troubling shadow that haunts his entire oeuvre. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Eliade’s conception of Tantra, which inherits both Zimmer’s romantic vision of Tantric sensuality and Evola’s fascist notion of Tantric violence.” Hugh Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religions* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 186.

57

Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 109.

58

Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 112.

59

Pisi, “Evola, Eliade e l’alchimia.”

60

Spineto, “Mircea Eliade and traditionalism,” 68.

61

Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 112.

safe to state that the Romanian scholar’s discourse incorporated, since the beginning, some crucial notions found in Evola’s (and Guénon’s) publications. Not only was Eliade inspired by Evola’s works on yoga, not only did he adopt his idea of alchemy as both a cosmological and spiritual discipline;⁵⁹ he also borrowed, and reassembled, other fundamental hermeneutic insights of the Traditionalist School about the “archaic worldview,” insights that were to shape the theoretical framework of his famous 1948 *Treatise*. Among these, Spineto mentions “the concepts of anthropo-cosmic correspondence, of the symbol, of the sacred center, of the ‘cyclical’ quality of traditional time, of human construction as a repetition of cosmogony, of sacrifice as a reintegration, and of the archetype.”⁶⁰ More broadly speaking, it is true that Eliade’s project of constructing “a general model of human religiosity, as expressed in universally valid myth and symbol”⁶¹ is inextricably linked to the doctrines of the leading theorists of the “Tradition,” namely Guénon, Evola, and Coomaraswamy—who were trying, as Eliade wrote in 1937, “to stabilise the unity of the traditions and symbols” of the various civilisations.⁶² Yet it is to be noted that this model, according to Eliade, might aid human self-understanding and so “provide the means for cultural renewal.”⁶³ This testifies to an utterly different conception not only of the modern world and of its destiny, but also of the salvific epistemic potential of *modern* religious studies.⁶⁴

Hakl makes some original contributions to this topic. The 1998 article on Eliade is, in fact, an introduction to the volume *Über das Initiatische*, where Hakl had collected five essays previously published by Evola in the German journal *Antaios*. This was a bimonthly cultural magazine issued from 1959 to 1971 by publisher Ernst Klett (1911–1998) and edited by novelist and philosopher Ernst Jünger (1895–1998) together with Eliade. As Hakl’s ground-breaking research on the subject has shown,⁶⁵ the history of the magazine is as follows. In the 1940s, Klett and Jünger decided to found a conservative cultural journal, which was to include names as prestigious as physician Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976), writer Friedrich Georg Jünger (1898–1977), and philosophers Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). The project initially foundered. It was then resumed in 1957, when Jünger offered Eliade the role of co-director, as the journal’s fields of investigation were to be myth, symbolism, and archetypes, against the materialism and rationalism then prevailing. Eliade accepted the proposal and Philipp Wolff-Windegg (1919–1991), Klett’s nephew, became the editor-in-chief of the periodical.⁶⁶ The journal had a circulation of 2000–3000 copies. It ceased publication in 1971 at the behest of the publisher.

In his works about *Antaios*, Hakl’s particular contribution is, again, his ability to grasp Evola’s little-known relations with the German cultural world. Hakl, in effect, restores five “submerged” Evolian texts, published in *Antaios* between 1960 and 1970.⁶⁷ But more generally, he succeeds in showing the existence of a hidden gap in 20th-century intellectual history. Having acquired an important part of the correspondence between Wolff and the contributors to the journal, Hakl was able to offer an authoritative inside view of this original publishing venture, in which leading intellectuals like Eliade and Jünger collaborated with explicitly perennialist authors such as Evola, Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) and Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984), as well as with renowned academics such as Henry Corbin (1903–1978), Pio Filippini-Ronconi (1920–2010), Gherardo Gnoli (1937–2012), and Elémire Zolla (1926–2002). Clearly, it is from a similar line of inquiry that, in 2001, Hakl’s monograph on Eranos had originated.⁶⁸ As Siniscalco

notes, this cultural journal embodied “a counter-philosophical perspective that is at the same time intrinsic to Western speculation [. . .]. I refer here to mythical-symbolic thought [. . .]. This tradition sees reality as a specific kind of totality that allows human perception to take place through the structures of myth and symbols.”⁶⁹ *Antaios*, then, indeed looks like a minor but interesting chapter of an “alternative intellectual history of the twentieth century.”

With regard to Evola’s participation in *Antaios*, Hakl’s private collection provides us with some interesting details. From a 1958 letter conserved in his archives, for instance, it appears that it was Mariano Imperiali (1905–1994) who indicated Evola to Wolff as a possible contributor to the journal. At the time, Imperiali was Secretary General of IsMEO (Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East), the public body founded in 1933 by Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944), former minister of education under the Fascist regime, and the noted orientalist Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984), to strengthen the political and cultural ties between Italy and Asia. In a previous letter Wolff, who had tried to solicit Tucci’s participation in *Antaios*, asked Imperiali if he knew “any other contributors in Italy who would fit the general pattern of our venture.”⁷⁰ In his reply, on the 20th of November, 1958, Imperiali mentioned Evola within a list of “outstanding Italian scholars, specialised in the field of history of religion,” including the names (and addresses), in addition to Evola’s, of Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883–1959), Alessandro Bausani (1921–1988), Raniero Gnoli (1930–), and Massimo Scaligero (1906–1980).⁷¹ However, Eliade himself, as Hakl deduces from the correspondence in his possession, was in no hurry to publish Evola’s essays in *Antaios*. He was worried that the journal would take on too reactionary a profile, fearing possible repercussions for his academic career in the United States. In that regard, he was certainly not reassured by the racist and antisemitic tropes of Evola’s discourse.⁷² Moreover, their personal relations had become increasingly tense in the 1950s, to the point that Eliade stopped writing to Evola in 1955, and definitively broke off the relationship in 1964.⁷³ Yet, on the 5th of September, 1964, in a diary note, Eliade wrote, “Out of all the modern occultist authors whom I have read, only R. Guénon and J. Evola are worthy of being taken into consideration. I’m not discussing here to what extent their assertions are ‘true.’ But what they write makes sense.”⁷⁴

It may be surprising that Imperiali, secretary of IsMEO, considered Evola as an “outstanding scholar” in the field of religious studies. In fact, this recommendation is easy to explain if we bear in mind Evola’s collaboration with the periodical *East and West*, the journal of Oriental studies of Giuseppe Tucci and IsMEO. Once again, it was Hakl who brought the attention of the international public, with a series of articles in French, to the enduring relationship between Evola and Tucci, setting it in the context of Evola’s orientalist activity.⁷⁵ The latter’s publications on Tantra, Taoism, and Buddhism were indisputably pioneering in the Italian cultural panorama of the first half of the 20th century. This explains the contact between Evola and the main Italian religious scholars, from Raffaele Pettazzoni to Angelo Brelich (1913–1977). As for Tucci, Evola first met him in 1925 at the Independent Theosophical League in Rome (Tucci’s first wife, Countess Nuvoloni, was a theosophist), whose leader, Decio Calvari (1863–1937), acquainted Evola with Tantrism. In 1950, Tucci founded *East and West*. Evola collaborated with this journal from the first issue until 1960, despite the fact that he was not looked upon favourably because of his political past. Moreover, Evola understood Buddhism not only as a

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Mircea Eliade, “Folclorul ca instrument de cunoaștere,” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* 4, no. 4 (1937): 137–52, reprinted in Mircea Eliade, *Insula lui Euthanasius* (Bucharest: Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, București, 1943). Quoted in Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 112.

63

Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (London: Routledge, 1998), 295.

64

Pisi, “I ‘tradizionalisti,’” 72.

65

Hans Thomas Hakl, “L’effetto, pur non esteso, è stato profondo come quello d’una sonda. Breve storia della rivista ‘Antaios,’ curata da Mircea Eliade ed Ernst Jünger (1959–1971),” in *Cenacoli, circoli e gruppi letterari, artistici, spirituali*, ed. Francesco Zambon (Milan: Medusa, 2007), 247–70; Hakl, “Den Antaios kenne und missbillige ich. Was er pflegt, ist nicht Religio, sondern Magie! Kurze Geschichte der Zeitschrift ANTAIOS,” *Aries* 9, no. 2 (2009): 195–232; Hakl, “Julius Evola e Antaios,” *Studi Evoliani* 2011, 79–89; Hakl, “Presentazione: Julius Evola e ‘Antaios.’ Una storia editoriale,” in Julius Evola, *Antaios (1960–1970)*, ed. Luca Siniscalco (Rome: Fondazione Evola-Pagine, 2019), 7–17.

66

He was the real *deus ex machina* of the publication—an “autarch,” as Hakl calls him—since, for different reasons, both Jünger and Eliade took no interest in the realisation of the magazine, reserving the right to publish in it their own contributions on a regular basis.

67

Julius Evola, “Das Symbol, der Mythos und der irrationalistische Irrweg,” *Antaios* 1 (1960): 447–58; Evola, “Geistige Männlichkeit und erotische Symbolik,” *Antaios* 3 (1961): 283–97; Evola, “Über das Initiatische,” *Antaios* 6 (1964): 184–209; Evola, “Zeitlichkeit und Freiheit,” *Antaios* 9 (1967): 86–100; Evola, “Vom Abendland-Mythos,” *Antaios* 11 (1970): 30–47. These texts have recently been collected in an Italian edition (see above, footnote 65).

68

Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013); or the German version: *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos. Unbekannte Begegnungen von Wissenschaft und Esoterik. Eine alternative Geistesgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Bretten: scientia nova, 2001].

69

Siniscalco, “Antaios,” 123.

70

Letter from Philipp Wolff to Mariano Imperiali, November 8, 1958 (Hakl’s archives).

71

Letter from Mariano Imperiali to Philipp Wolff, November 20, 1958 (Hakl’s archives).

72

Hakl, “Presentazione: Julius Evola e ‘Antaios,’” 15–16.

This happened after the publication of Evola's autobiography *The Path of Cinnabar* (1963), mentioning Eliade's past sympathy for the Iron Guard, the revolutionary fascist movement created by Corneliu Codreanu in 1927.

Quoted in Bordaș, "The difficult encounter," 138.

Hans Thomas Hakl, "Giuseppe Tucci entre études orientales, ésotérisme et Fascisme (1894–1984)," *Politica Hermetica* 18 (2004): 119–36 (expanded version in *Archæus* 10, nos. 1–2 [2006]: 231–50); Hakl, "Julius Evola et l'histoire comparée des religions," in *Études d'histoire de l'ésotérisme*, ed. Jean-Pierre Brach and Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 83–96 (Italian trans. "Julius Evola e la storia comparata delle religioni," *Arthos* 16 [2008]: 30–43). In "Julius Evola et l'histoire comparée des religions," Hakl observes that outside Italy, Evola is known first of all "as an esotericist of perennialist orientation, then as a leading representative of Dadaism in Italy, and finally, above all, as the author of political treatises of fascist and racist tendency (*sui generis*)" (83), noting: "Less well known, however, is his contribution to the comparative history of religions. Although he was not a specialist in this field, and never considered himself as such, Evola was linked to numerous famous representatives of this field, of whom he studied the then available literature, both primary and secondary, and contributed with his books and articles to a knowledge, albeit one-sided, of Asian religions and worldviews" (83). In support of these assertions, Hakl recalls Evola's early study on the *Tao-te-ching* (1923); *The Man as Power* (1925), the first book on Tantric yoga published in Italian; the references to Hindu and Islamic themes present in *Revolt against the Modern World* (1934); and, finally, Evola's description of Buddhism in *The Doctrine of Awakening* (1943), defined by Anagarika Govinda (born Ernst Lothar Hoffmann; 1898–1985), the first European to receive the honorary title of lama, as "the most intrinsically true book on this subject" (quoted in Sandro Consolato, *Julius Evola e il buddhismo* [Borzano: SeAR, 1995], 217).

Hakl, "Julius Evola et l'histoire comparée des religions," 92.

Quoted in *Eliade e l'Italia*, ed. Marin Mincu and Roberto Scagno (Milan: Jaca Book, 1987), 253.

Mircea Eliade, *Jurnal*, December 20, 1964. Quoted in Bordaș, "The difficult encounter," 139.

Bordaș, "The difficult encounter," 139.

The proceedings of the conference were published in the first volume of the journal *Politica Hermetica* (1987).

metaphysical and initiatory path, but as a truly "aristocratic" and "warrior" doctrine. These views did not match Tucci's opinions at all.⁷⁶

Rubedo, or the alchemical success: Evola in academia

In spite of his enduring connection with the aforementioned scholars, Evola never had a particularly peaceful relationship with academia, and always complained of unpleasant ostracism from the institutions. From his standpoint, universities represented the epistemic embodiment of the modern world, and thus by their very nature were impervious to traditional methods and truths. At best, one could hope to allow some pale metaphysical glow to penetrate their opaque halls. Thus, in a famous letter sent to Eliade in 1950, Evola applauds the idea of "introducing some Trojan horse into the university citadel," convinced that his interlocutor's intention was to bring the founding ideas of perennialism into academic discourse, after suitably clothing them in scholarly terms.⁷⁷

Indeed, Evola did not receive much academic recognition during his lifetime. The reasons for this are effectively described by Eliade himself in a diary note written in 1964: "Abroad, poor J. Evola is viewed as an ultra-fascist."⁷⁸ Eliade goes on to provide a detail, as anecdotal as it is revealing: "The copy of the English translation of his book on Buddhism in Swift Library is disfigured with polemical annotations (written in indelible lead!): they say (even on the cover) that Evola is a fascist and a 'racist,' that his theories about 'Aryans' were borrowed from A. Rosenberg," "Evola," concludes Eliade, "tries to appear indifferent to such criticisms, although he prefers them to the 'conspiracy of silence' of which he claims he has suffered all his life."⁷⁹

Yet this alleged "conspiracy of silence" that so irritated Evola was destined to end after his death. Already in 1986, an important conference took place at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, which had hosted since 1979 a chair of "History of Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe," held by Antoine Faivre (1934–2021). The title of the conference was "Métaphysique et politique: R. Guénon et J. Evola."⁸⁰ This event also included presentations by critical scholars, such as sociologist Franco Ferraresi (1940–1998), and stands out as a first important example of a "secular" and historically-oriented examination of Evola's thought. Later on, the interest for Evola would grow. In this process of disclosure, Hakl's publications indeed played a significant role. With his translations in the 1980s, but above all with his subsequent articles in German, English, and French, Hakl had contributed to presenting Evola to an international readership in a different light. In spite of his inescapable political "distortions," Evola had clearly been a significant personality in 20th-century intellectual history. His theoretical contributions—those concerning Eastern spiritualities and hermeticism in particular—had interacted with mainstream culture more than many were willing to admit. This was confirmed by his intense and lasting relationships with personalities such as Eliade and Tucci, and by his contributions to journals like *East and West* and *Antaios*.

Obviously, this enterprise was not destined to convince everyone. Broadly speaking, however, Hakl largely succeeded where Evola's Italian apologists had failed. The fact is that he had chosen a different approach. Instead of trying to blur, or to minimise, Evola's relations with the far right, or (conversely) to show the intrinsic topicality of his political

thought, Haki had trodden a more pragmatic path. On the one hand, he had presented Evola non-apologetically; he had identified with greater precision the sources of his thought, and retraced meticulously its formative process. On the other, he had skilfully captured the resonances between his discourse and that of some sectors of 20th-century humanities, bringing to light previously unknown information. By this factual approach, enhancing Evola's *relational* and *contextual* importance (in fields other than the recent far-right Italian politics), Haki had managed to draw a more complete, objective, and scholarly profile of Evola and to show his relevance within the cultural history of the 20th century. Of course, publishing in languages other than Italian helped Haki's strategy in no small measure. In addition, a more general ideological and cultural shift that took place during the 1990s and the 2000s (see below) also played a role. Yet, no matter how successful it might have been, this strategy suffered some further (and inevitable) setbacks and reactions.

A significant moment in this process occurred in 2005. That year Haki wrote two important encyclopaedic entries on Evola, both in English. The first was published in Brill's *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (DGWE), whose programmatic value cannot be overestimated.⁸¹ Edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1961–), professor of “History of Hermetic Philosophy” at the University of Amsterdam, then President of the newly created European Association for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), together with Antoine Faivre, Jean-Pierre Brach, and Roelof van den Broek, the DGWE was the first scholarly attempt to organise, in a coherent encyclopedic form, knowledge about Western esotericism from antiquity to the present day. This volume thus represented a perfect calling card for a new academic field: the history of Western esoteric currents. The second publication is in some ways even more striking. Here Evola is placed in a wider context: the monumental *Encyclopedia of Religion* in fifteen volumes, published by Macmillan as the second edition of Mircea Eliade's classic *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987).⁸²

While the first article focuses on Evola as an esotericist, the second retraces Evola's entire intellectual itinerary. Once again, Haki emphasises Evola's ties with the cultural networks we have already mentioned and, in particular, with Mircea Eliade, then assesses his orientalist writings. After mentioning Evola's “efforts in popularizing Asian religion,” Haki correctly points out that “his work in comparative religion was more about revealing paths that could extract modern humans from rampant materialism and lead them to spiritual freedom.”⁸³ Consequently, “Evola's religious-historical works examine only selected aspects corresponding to this quest, and they are unsuitable as surveys.”⁸⁴ Haki does not omit Evola's closeness to the fascist establishment, nor his sympathy for Nazism and the SS. Such a sobering and matter-of-fact biographical and intellectual sketch, however, did not fail to provoke fierce reactions. In the collective volume *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism* (2008), German scholar Horst Junginger (1959–), a specialist in anti-Semitism, subjected both Haki and the editors of the *Encyclopedia* to a violent indictment for having given space to Evola, defined—quite generously, in a sense—“today's most important right wing intellectual in Europe” and “the most influential post-war fascist.”⁸⁵ Junginger criticises, among other things, Haki's strategy, consisting in artfully “connecting [Evola] with prominent historians of religions such as Raffaele Pettazzoni, Karl Kerényi, Angelo Brelich, Giuseppe Tucci, Franz Altheim, and, above all, Mircea Eliade.”⁸⁶

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Hans Thomas Haki, “Evola, Giulio Cesare,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, in collaboration with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek and Jean-Pierre Brach (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 345–50.

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Hans Thomas Haki, “Julius Evola,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd edition, ed. Lindsay Jones (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 2904–7.

83

Haki, “Julius Evola,” 2906.

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Haki, “Julius Evola,” 2906.

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Junginger, “From Buddha to Adolf Hitler,” 169. “What calls more attention,” writes Junginger, “are the reasons compelling the editors to include such an article. It remains unclear on the basis of which sort of accomplishments (religious, scientific, or political) they decided to reserve six columns for today's most important right wing intellectual in Europe [. . .]. Since Evola had nothing produced in terms of ordinary scholarship, Haki's aim must be to connect him with prominent historians of religions such as Raffaele Pettazzoni, Karl Kerényi, Angelo Brelich, Giuseppe Tucci, Franz Altheim, and, above all, Mircea Eliade. Even if the editors had no knowledge of the real identity of the author it is scandalous to honour one of Europe's most influential postwar fascist, someone who has written the preface of the heinous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, with an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Having achieved such an excellent opportunity of advertising Evolian thoughts, Haki correctly refers to this sort of self-fulfilling prophecy in writing: ‘Academic circles have become increasingly interested in Evola.’ ” Junginger, “From Buddha to Adolf Hitler,” 169.

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Junginger, “From Buddha to Adolf Hitler,” 169.

On this point, see for instance Eliade's own remarks in *La prova del labirinto. Intervista con Claude-Henri Rocquet*, trans. Massimo Giacometti (Milan: Jaca Book, 1990), 99–100.

David M. Wulff, review of *Encyclopedia of Religion*, by Lindsay Jones, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 1 (March 2007): 133–5, 133.

Urban, *Tantra*, 173. The italics are mine.

Hans Thomas Hakl, review of *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, by Paul Furlong, *Politica Hermetica* 28 (2014): 185–95, 185.

Stéphane Oppes, "Julius Evola," in *Nuovo Dizionario di Mistica*, ed. Luigi Borriello, Edmondo Caruana, Maria Rosaria Del Genio and Raffaele di Muro (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016), 778–80. On this topic, see *Studi Evoliani* 2016.

These arguments, however, seem to utterly miss the point. The connections between Evola and the scholars cited above, though not all of the same nature and relevance, constitute a real and significant historical fact, not an arbitrary whim of Hakl, who helped provide information on such matters for the English-speaking audience. All this casts a good amount of light, in particular, on the occult origins of a scholarly paradigm—Eliade's phenomenology—that represented a pivotal point in contemporary religious studies, especially in the United States.⁸⁷ On another level, we can also note that the *Encyclopedia* contains entries on Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), Annie Besant (1847–1933), and René Guénon, belonging to the same cultural galaxy from which Evola's thought sprang. The presence of these entries, dedicated to some of the leading figures of 20th-century esotericism, gives rise to a further observation. Evola can undoubtedly be considered as a *producer* of historical-religious discourse—albeit mostly incompatible with current academic approaches—but also, in turn, as a historical-religious *object*. There is nothing anomalous, then, about the fact that such a “mega-encyclopedia, which stands at the pinnacle of complexity and comprehensiveness,”⁸⁸ devotes space to some relevant manifestations of 20th-century alternative spirituality, such as the so-called “Traditionalist School” or the New Age. In view of all this, one can seriously doubt that Evola's political orientations, although understandably disturbing for many, can alone constitute a reason for censorship.

Alchemia denudata, or the philosophical gold

Despite the resistance, the breach was now open: Evola had become, for all intents and purposes, an object of academic study. In 2008, Hugh Urban made a momentous statement: “To this day, Evola remains *one of the most enigmatic, poorly understood, and yet influential figures in the scholarship and politics of modern Europe*. Not only has he been described as ‘arguably the most important thinker of the right radical Neo-Fascist revisionists,’ and even the ‘guru of the counterculture right,’ but he has also been very influential in the development of the history of religions.”⁸⁹ There is no doubt that Urban had in mind Eliade here. Three years later, this assessment was confirmed by the publication of *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (2011) by Paul Furlong of the University of Cardiff. Published by Routledge, this was, according to Hakl, “the first book in English by a political scientist devoted entirely to Evola.”⁹⁰ Furlong's analysis does not linger on the esoteric dimension, but definitively sanctions the international recognition of Evola's relevance in the reactionary political universe of the 20th century. On a smaller scale, in 2016 an entry devoted to Evola appeared—quite surprisingly—in the *New Dictionary of Mysticism* by Libreria Editrice Vaticana, a publisher whose fundamental aim is to issue official documents of the Roman Catholic Church. This event was promptly hailed by Italian Evolian followers as the sign of a more positive appraisal of Evola among the ecclesiastic milieus.⁹¹

We will not follow in the wake of Evola's late and controversial “fortunes” in academia over the last ten years. Instead, we will focus on the further evolution of Hakl's scholarly path in this same period (2010–2020), the third phase of his trajectory. Here, Hakl could finally dwell on what for him, according to all the evidence, is Evola's main legacy: his endeavour to elaborate a “traditional” spiritual discipline, based on a comparative re-reading of Eastern and Western philosophical, religious, and occult traditions. Having contributed to a better understanding of his thought

outside of Italy, and to his international academic recognition, Hakl could now tackle the esoteric Evola head-on.

We can ascribe to this phase several essays published in academic journals, or in prestigious collective volumes, between 2010 and 2020.⁹² In order not to disperse the focus, we will immediately point out the work which—according to the author himself⁹³—is the most important of his contributions of this period: the essay “Deification as a Core Theme in Julius Evola’s Esoteric Works” (2018). Here one has the feeling that Hakl finally goes to the heart of the matter by enucleating what he deems to be the fundamental theme of the esoteric Evola: the tension towards a lived self-transcendence. Such a tension does not only take the form of a theoretical reflection on the notion of the “absolute individual,” inspired by philosophical idealism and subsequently by Indian doctrines, but equally aims to provide the practical means to achieve liberation. These means, explains Hakl in his text, are “practically always the same: purification; identification with higher states of consciousness (i.e., with the various gods, and spheres = liberation from the material world); and finally identification with the highest principle, which entails absolute freedom and spiritual immortality, that is, salvation.”⁹⁴

At the heart of Evola’s esoteric thought, therefore, Hakl sees the attempt not only at describing abstractly, but at recognising in *history*, an experiential path toward liberation. This path rests on the one hand on a precise self-transformative tension and attitude, based on will; on the other, on the knowledge (transmitted by a tradition) of the occult constitution of man, and of his relations with the cosmic powers that innervate his spiritual physiology. Active posture and esoteric knowledge are both traits that Evola, especially in his early works, polemically contrasts with passive Christian spirituality, lacking, in his opinion, a truly initiatory backbone. Inversely, these traits constitute the core of a spiritual science which can be found in all authentically “traditional” doctrines: Tantra, spiritual alchemy, and Buddhism as described in *The Doctrine of Awakening*, which is “a detailed and long-time proven system to achieve initiation into higher realms of being through asceticism and spiritual exercises.”⁹⁵

Moved by a radical disdain for modernity, Evola thus possesses the ability to peer into ancient Eastern and Western traditions—Hakl also points to his studies of the Mithraic mysteries—and to intuit within them a procedural structure for the attainment of higher and transpersonal states of consciousness, the unalterable pattern of an experiential transcendental psychology. Evola’s approach, as depicted by Hakl, can then be seen as a *pragmatic religious comparativism*, light years away from academic methods, which by delving into the past and by weaving meaningful connections among different traditions, aims to theorise a universal praxis of self-transcendence.

Beyond Evola: Hakl and the Italian esoteric milieu

While Hakl has mainly focused on Evola in his writings, it should not be forgotten that over time he devoted studies to other exponents, currents, and traditions of Italian esotericism. The first author to be mentioned is Giuliano Kremmerz, founder of the Therapeutic Brotherhood “Miriam.” Being in close contact with Kremmerzian circles, Hakl was probably the first to publish on the subject in German and English, with a particular interest in Kremmerzian practices of sexual magic.⁹⁶

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Hans Thomas Hakl, “Julius Evola and the UR Group,” *Aries* 12 (2012): 53–90 (German version: “Julius Evola und die Gruppe von UR,” *Gnostika* 46, [December 2010]: 51–65 and *Gnostika* 47 [April 2011]: 41–59); Hakl, “The Symbology of Hermeticism in the Work of Julius Evola,” in *Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism*, ed. Peter J. Forshaw (Leiden: Brill 2016), 334–62 (German version: “Die Hermetische Symbolik bei Julius Evola,” *Gnostika* 52 [May 2013]: 31–55); Hakl, “Deification as a Core Theme in Julius Evola’s Esoteric Works,” *Correspondences* 6, no. 2 (2018): 145–71.

93

Personal communication.

94

Hakl, “Deification,” 154.

95

Hakl, “Deification,” 164.

96

In a review, Hakl wrote: “Kremmerz [. . .] is very little known in German-speaking (but also English-speaking) countries, and the little information available in either language was mainly provided by me. I wanted this interesting magician, who despite his limited influence beyond the borders of Italy I consider a more important spiritual master than e.g. Aleister Crowley, Éliphas Lévi or Papus, not to fall into total oblivion.”

Hans Thomas Hakl, review of *La Pietra Angolare Miriamica*, by Anna Maria Piscitelli, part of “Bücher-Blick über die Sprachgrenzen hinweg,” *Gnostika* 57 (December 2015): 28–33, 28. To our knowledge, the first scholarly research about Kremmerz is to be found in the texts by Massimo Introvigne *Il Cappello del mago* (Carnago: SugarCo, 1990), 298–308; “De l’hypertrophie de la filiation: le milieu kremmerzien en Italie,” in *Ariès-Association pour la Recherche et l’Information sur l’Ésotérisme, Symboles et Mythes dans les mouvements initiatiques et ésotériques XVIIe et XXe siècles: Filiations et emprunts*, (Paris: Archè-La Table d’Emeraude, 1999), 148–56, available online at https://www.cesnur.org/2001/archive/mi_kremmerz.htm, accessed January 30, 2022. As for Hakl, see his article “The theory and practice of sexual magic, exemplified by four magical groups in the early twentieth century,” in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter Hanegraaff and Jeffrey Kripal (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 445–78, as well as the review mentioned above (Hakl, “Bücher-Blick”).

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See for instance Donald Sewell Lopez Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 132.

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On the relations between Filippini-Ronconi and Tucci, see Enrica Garzilli, *L’esploratore del Duce. L’avventura di Giuseppe Tucci e la politica italiana in Oriente da Mussolini a Andreotti. Con il carteggio di Giulio Andreotti* (Milan: Memori–Asiatica Association, 2012), 1:100–108.

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“In all probability, it was precisely the energy released by Evola’s laborious *opus* that enabled me to find my true path, which was revealed to me by someone who had acted in the Ur environment.” Pio Filippini-Ronconi, “Julius Evola: un destino,” in *Testimonianze su Evola*, ed. Gianfranco de Turris (Rome: Mediterranee, 1985), 120.

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The magazine, founded by Gaspare Cannizzo (1938–2006), was conceived as a vehicle for a cultured traditionalism, directly inspired by the thought of the “incomparable Master” Julius Evola, whose contributions were published regularly in the review until his death in 1974. As for Filippini-Ronconi, he was often entrusted with the task of opening the magazine with an essay on his favourite topics, that is, Indo-Iranian cultures and spiritualities, or with general reflections on philosophical and epistemological issues from a perennialist perspective.

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On the ITAS, see Nuccio D’Anna, “Aure,” and Fabrizio Frigerio, “Un ricordo degli anni dell’Istituto Ticinese di Alti Studi (1970–1973),” both in *Viator. Annuario del G.E.R.* (monographic issue entitled *Elémire Zolla. From Death to life*, ed. by Grazia Marchianò) 9, no. 1 (2005–2006): 158–63 and 164–65; Riccardo Bernardini, “Figure della trascendenza nelle culture dell’immanenza (II): Zolla all’Istituto Ticinese di Alti Studi,” *Hiram, rivista del Grande Oriente d’Italia* 1 (2015): 65–87. See also https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istituto_ticinese_di_alti_studi, accessed January 30, 2022.

His most relevant contributions, however, deal with the academic ramifications of Italian perennialism. In 2004, for example, he devoted an important article in French to Giuseppe Tucci, a major figure in Italian orientalism (and beyond: Tucci is often viewed as the greatest 20th-century Tibetologist⁹⁷). Hakl describes Tucci’s complex and gifted personality, combining an insatiable curiosity and erudition with an interest in experiential mysticism and, in particular, Buddhism (he was convinced he had been Tibetan in a previous life). Hakl notes that Tucci did not disdain to include esoteric intellectuals such as Scaligero or Evola among his close collaborators. In the same vein, Hakl was interested in Pio Filippini-Ronconi (1920–2010). First a student and then assistant of Tucci himself, Filippini-Ronconi was eventually appointed full professor, holding the chair of Indian Religions and Philosophies at the University of Naples.⁹⁸ After seeing in Evola his first spiritual teacher in his youth,⁹⁹ he had been very close to the Italian anthroposophical circles in the 1930s, and then enlisted as *Obersturmführer* (“superior assault commander”) in the Italian Waffen SS, in which he recognised “a vein of esoteric teaching.” Later he collaborated with the traditionalist Evolian journal *Vie della Tradizione*, founded in 1971.¹⁰⁰ In addition, he was among the contributors, between 1970 and 1973, to the conferences of the Istituto Ticinese di Alti Studi (ITAS) of Lugano, founded by the philosopher Elémire Zolla (1926–2002), the Egyptologist Boris de Rachewiltz (born as Luciano Baratti, 1926–1997), and the Swiss-Italian theologian Romano Amerio (1905–1997). The Swiss city was where Zolla’s journal *Conoscenza religiosa* was launched.¹⁰¹ Hakl rightly points out that Eranos provided an obvious “prototype” for this initiative.¹⁰² As for Zolla, Hakl defined his *Conoscenza religiosa* as “one of the most interesting journals in the field of religion and esotericism in all of Europe.”¹⁰³ Filippini-Ronconi and Zolla are interesting as exponents of a “transitional perennialism,” acting as a link between the ideological core of Evolian traditionalism and university circles.¹⁰⁴

Finally, Hakl devoted numerous essays to some minor but significant strands of Italian esotericism, all directly or indirectly connected to Evola. In 2012, in particular, he dedicated a crucial article—in English—to the Ur Group.¹⁰⁵ This is the first text, to our knowledge, to bring this important esoteric experience to the attention of the international public. Moreover, Hakl wrote articles on Ercole Quadrelli (1879–1948), a little-known Kremmerzian member of the Ur Group, and on the Traditional Roman Movement.¹⁰⁶ Still in the wake of this interest in Evola’s legacy, Hakl devoted a short but interesting article to the “Group of Dioscuri,” until recently shrouded in relative secrecy.¹⁰⁷ This initiatory organisation, founded in 1969 within the traditionalist Roman circles of Ordine Nuovo, had inherited themes and operative practices already in use in the Ur Group. Hakl, who claims to know some of its members personally, reconstructs the aims and methodologies of the group, which is probably still active.¹⁰⁸

We cannot conclude this overview about Hakl, the Italian milieu and their interest for esotericism without sharing one final anecdote, which seems to possess a revealing value. We have already mentioned Umberto Eco’s polemical reactions to Evola’s first translations into German during the 1980s. Now, as anyone who has read *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1988) knows, Eco was far from being immune to a fascination towards esotericism, although in his writings he would not easily depart from his habitual critical, ironic, and disenchanting stance. Moreover, he was a notorious bibliophile and was married to a German—his wife, Renata Ranke, was born in Frankfurt—which explains his particular affection for the Frankfurt Book

Fair. Given the circumstances, it appeared inevitable that he would meet Hakl again in the future. Indeed, as Hakl himself reports in his “Contradictory Obituary” published after Eco’s death, another “encounter” took place in the 1990s.

“Since I also collect old books,” writes Hakl, “[Eco and I] used to shop at the same antique dealers, because there are not many specialists in the esoteric field. At the Leipzig antiques fair in 1995, one of the best-known specialists, Wolfgang Kistemann from Berlin, was present. Eco came by and wanted to buy a beautiful antique anthology of the Rosicrucian Sincerus Renatus with early prints. Unfortunately, I had already bought that volume and paid for it, and since I was (am) Mr. Kistemann’s friend, I had gladly allowed him to exhibit it at the fair. This did not interest in the slightest Mr. Eco, who insisted on buying this book, which Mr. Kistemann, despite the author’s fame, could not do for understandable reasons. At that point Eco left the stand and declared that he would never buy anything from Kistemann again. He wanted to return the next day to get a positive response. He came back the next day, but how could Mr. Kistemann sell a book that had already been sold? Umberto Eco was angry and had to leave the fair without the book. Mr Eco’s agitation was so great that it led to an article entitled ‘Rosicrucians already taken’ in the special edition of the local newspaper published especially for the book fair.”¹⁰⁹

The book that sparked Eco’s interest, and which is now part of Hakl’s library, is a volume collecting Johann Erhard Neithold’s *Alchymia denudata* (1723) together with three treatises by Sincerus Renatus (*alias* Samuel Richter; † about 1722). Renatus was a Silesian Pietist pastor who in 1710 revived Rosicrucianism in Central Europe by founding the secret order of the Golden Rosicrucians (Gold- und Rosenkreuzer).¹¹⁰ After this incident, Hakl wrote to Eco, asking if he would be interested in receiving photocopies of some sections of the book, but received no reply. Interestingly enough, the name “Sincerus Renatus” had explicitly appeared in Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*, whose main character, Causabon, worked for a publishing house located in “Via Sincero Renato.” Later on, Eco admitted (could we possibly doubt it?) that the reference to the Rosicrucian author was anything but accidental.¹¹¹

Concluding remarks

“What the eyes perceive in herbs or stones or trees is not yet a remedy; the eyes see only the dross. But inside, under the dross, there the remedy lies hidden. First it must be cleansed from the dross, then it is there. This is alchemy, and this is the office of Vulcan; he is the apothecary and chemist of the medicine.”

Paracelsus

Over time, Hakl has undeniably emerged as one of the leading experts on Evola. His publications have certainly played a role in fostering a renewed interest in Evolian thought in the last three decades (1990–2020), especially outside of Italy. Through this process, many cultural taboos have been lifted. Within the academic community, it has become possible to assess Evola’s relevance in contemporary culture, as well as to gain a better understanding of how his works interfered and resonated with the surrounding field of religious studies, especially in the decades that followed the Second World War. Evola’s

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Hakl, *Eranos*, 275–77. In addition to this, see Hakl’s double review: “Omaggio a Pio Filippini-Ronconi, *La Cittadella X/40*,” *Politica Hermetica* 31 (2017): 154–8.

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Grazia Marchianò, *Elémire Zolla: il conoscitore di segreti. Una biografia intellettuale* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2006; then Venice: Marsilio, 2012), reviewed in *Politica Hermetica* 30 (2016): 199–203.

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See Baroni, “Riviste italiane e perennialismo.”

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Hakl, “Julius Evola and the UR Group.”

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Hans Thomas Hakl, “Das Neuheidentum der römisch-italienischen Tradition: von der Antike in die Gegenwart,” in *Der andere Glaube. Europäische Alternativreligionen zwischen heidnischer Spiritualität und christlicher Leitkultur*, ed. René Gründer, Michael Schetsche and Ina Schmieid-Knittel (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2009), 57–75; Hakl, “Italianische Esoteriker: Ercole Quadrelli,” *Gnostika* 63 (December 2018): 40–46 and *Gnostika* 64 (May 2019): 43–48.

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Hans Thomas Hakl, “I Dioscuri,” *Gnostika* 66 (October 2020): 54–59.

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The group was founded in Rome under the auspices of Evola, but soon formed independent offshoots in Naples and Messina—the latter was a locality whose traditionalist milieu gave rise to important developments. As we can read in Hakl’s paper, the purpose of the Dioscuri was to perpetuate “eternal Rome,” i.e., the heroic spirit of the ancient spiritual world with its deities, including the patron gods of home and family (Lares and Penates), by performing the prescribed rites on a regular basis. A temple was founded for this purpose from the beginnings. The methods of the group included breathing exercises, “magic chains,” the use of elemental symbolisms (earth, water, air, fire, and ether), and operations aimed, among other things, at opening individual chakras (Hakl, “I Dioscuri”).

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Hans Thomas Hakl, “Ein zwiespältiger Nachruf auf Umberto Eco (1932–2016),” *Gnostika* 58 (April 2016): 49–55, 51–52.

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On the Golden Rosicrucians, see Susanna Åkerman, *Rose Cross Over the Baltic: The Spread of Rosicrucianism in Northern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 242; Christopher McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 30–33; Renko Geffarth, *Religion und arkane Hierarchie. Der Orden der Gold- und Rosenkreuzer als Geheime Kirche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007); Hereward Tilton, “The Urim and Thummim and the Origins of the Gold-und Rosenkreuz,” in Hakl, *Octagon*, 2:35–70.

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“Via Marchese Gualdi, where the Manunzio publishing house is located, takes its name from an adventurer of the same name, a figure similar to Cagliostro; and

Via Sincero Renato refers to a German clergyman of the 18th century who played an important role in the reorganisation of the Rosicrucians.” Thomas Stauder, *Gespräche mit Umberto Eco aus drei Jahrzehnten* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 50.

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“Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

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As said above, a chair devoted to Western esotericism, held by Antoine Faivre, already existed in Paris in 1979. But a major step was the publication of a seminal book by the same Faivre, *L'ésotérisme* (Paris: PUF, 1992), offering the first historically-based definition of “esotericism” as an academic construct. Undoubtedly, *L'ésotérisme* played a major role in promoting the international recognition of this field of research. Another breakthrough event was the creation in 1999, at the University of Amsterdam, of the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP), which is today the world's leading institute for academic research in this field. See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 355–67; Marco Pasi, “Esotericism Emergent: The Beginning of the Study of Esotericism in the Academy,” in *Religion: Secret Religion*, ed. April D. DeConick (Farmington Hills: Macmillan, 2016), 143–54.

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“Hakl was involved in this process in various ways, including through his book-collecting endeavours, his activities as a publisher, his contributions of articles to novel scholarly journals such as *Aries* and *Politica Hermetica*, his personal networking, and, not least, his involvement in the so-called Palladian Academy.” Otto, “Hans Thomas Hakl: Three Lives in One,” 31.

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Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

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Bauman, *Retrotopia*, 6.

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Hans Thomas Hakl, “Julius Evola and Tradition,” in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: OUP, 2019), 54–69, 66.

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“Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

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Eliade, *Jurnal*, November 11, 1966; quoted in Bordaş, “The difficult encounter,” 144.

wider recognition, thus, began posthumously in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as Hakl himself notes.¹¹²

It is fair to say, however, that Hakl's efforts were helped by a few circumstantial factors. The first is of course the rise, throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, of “Western esotericism” as a new domain of scholarly research in the humanities.¹¹³ This field provided a specific academic framework for studying movements and authors—including Evola—that were previously simply relegated to the ghetto of irrationalism, heresy or religious extravagance. Hakl had been in touch with the academic milieus working in the field since the early 1990s, and—as Otto points out—actively took part in this process, which helped the recognition of esotericism as a crucial dimension of modernity.¹¹⁴

The second factor—contributing particularly to Evola's fortune among the “general public”—is a broader cultural shift that took place after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, with the end of the Cold War and the accentuation of globalisation processes. One of the consequences of this change was the rising feeling that ingrained within globalisation were profoundly threatening aspects—cultural homogenisation, loss of traditions, capitalist economy as the only global overarching narrative—and, by contrast, a yearning for deeper values and cultural roots, on which to found more solid identities. This search often took the shape of what Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) would call political—and spiritual—“retrotopias.”¹¹⁵ “Retrotopia,” Bauman argues, is the outcome of a dramatic U-turn in the public imagination: “From investing public hopes of improvement in the uncertain and ever-too-obviously un-trustworthy future, to re-investing them in the vaguely remembered past, valued for its assumed stability and so trustworthiness.”¹¹⁶ While the dominant climate of the “utopian” spirituality of the 1970s and 1980s, shaped by the optimistic expectation of a New Age to come, did not resonate very much with the fundamental aspects of Evola's thought, with the advent of this new, “retrotopic” phase, his traditionalism quickly gained the attention of an international audience. His books were composed, says Hakl, in an “almost ‘magical’ writing style, which is on the one hand precise and logical, and on the other hand able to evoke ‘eternal’ myths.”¹¹⁷ Based on a sophisticated and polemical counter-narrative, Evola's idea of “Tradition” could serve as an ideological anchor in today's chaotic transformations, and as a matrix for new identity constructions.

Talking about “myths,” in an interview we have often quoted, Hakl made a very insightful remark about Evola's appeal. “Merely confronting his work,” he said, “has the effect of setting off certain powerful thought processes,” since he “knows how to speak to unconscious levels in his readers.”¹¹⁸ If this is the case, then Evola's work *as a whole* should probably be looked at, more than as a doctrine, as an artistic attempt—or as a “mythological creation,” as Eliade suggested as early as in 1966 in a significant diary note. “What Guénon and the other ‘hermeticists’ say about ‘Tradition,’ ” Eliade wrote, “must not be understood on the plane of *historical* reality (as they claim). These speculations constitute a universe of systematically articulated meanings; they are to be compared with a great poem or novel [. . .]. All these global and systematic interpretations constitute, in fact, *mythological creations*, very useful for understanding the World; but they are not, as their authors believe, ‘scientific explanations.’ ”¹¹⁹

The *mythological dimension* of Evola's work may explain its success in a time like ours, characterised on the one hand by a lack of coherent and

meaningful narratives,¹²⁰ and on the other (as we have said above) by a widespread longing for a distant, idealised past, seen as a remedy to the unintelligible turbulence of the present. Yet there is another aspect to consider. Deeply-seated in Evola's discourse, there is also what Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) calls a “hermeneutics.” Since modern rationality has severed links with the sacred, says Ricœur, interpretation is the only instrument through which today's individuals, incapable of believing, can retrieve some of the spiritual power of the symbols of old: “We can believe only by interpreting. It is the ‘modern’ mode of belief in symbols, an expression of the distress of modernity and a remedy for that distress.”¹²¹ By delving into the lore of ancient religious and esoteric traditions, Evola was able to give new meaning to a rich array of symbolic contents—cogently woven together within the overarching texture of his mythology—thus offering an original *hermeneutics* to those who experience the “distress of modernity.” If, as Ricœur puts it, “hermeneutics, as an acquisition of ‘modernity,’ is one of the modes by which that ‘modernity’ transcends itself, insofar as it is forgetfulness of the sacred,”¹²² we can say that in spite of all appearances Evola *did* fulfil his original mission: transcending modernity.

However, as most readers of this paper know, Evola's legacy is far from being all sunshine and rainbows. Still today, this author can be said to be subject to three distinct types of stigma. The first stigma is an *epistemic* one, and feeds on the dichotomy between rationalism and irrationalism. For many readers Evola's thought is undermined by too many fallacies to be seriously taken into account—and is thus rejected *en bloc* without further investigation. The second stigma is—obviously—*political*. According to this perspective, Evola should simply be banned from public discourse because of his political agenda, resting on a reactionary mindset and tending to legitimate—although from a highly idiosyncratic point of view—some of the most dreadful experiences of 20th-century political history, such as Fascism, Nazism, racism, and antisemitism. The third stigma is of a *religious* nature. Even within many esoteric milieus, Evola is sometimes regarded as a sort of dangerous heresiarch, because of his relentless emphasis on individual affirmation and of his misogynistic and reactionary stances (not to mention his radical disdain for Christianity, which is not made to please all those who feel, in one way or another, still connected to the Christian tradition). Despite the relative success that Evola has recently enjoyed, therefore, a certain mistrust persists—underpinned as it is by sound historical and moral reasons.

As historians, we can consider both the success of Evola's discourse, and the strong reactions to it (going hand in hand with different marginalisation and exclusion strategies), as the markers of a *cultural novelty* to which society reacts ambivalently. This set of polemical and apologetic reactions allows us to glimpse the perimeter of a new discursive field—we can call it “esoteric traditionalism”—formally distinct from those already existing in early 20th century Italy; a field whose emergence was to disrupt the existing cultural patterns. While presenting themselves as “traditional,” their representatives steered away not only from the typical discursive regimes of modernity (for instance, those of “official” philosophy and science), but also from those of *premodern* ones (those defended by the Churches, as a device for regulating beliefs on an authoritarian basis). The new space was forged by bringing together ancient materials (comparative mythology, symbolic hermeneutics, narratives of civilisational decline) within a new epistemic and discursive framework, made available by early 20th century

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According to sociologist Hervieu-Léger, for instance, modern societies are “amnesiac,” that is, characterised “by a growing inability to sustain a meaningful collective memory” (Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le pèlerin et le converti. La religion en mouvement* [Paris, Flammarion, 1999], 68). On the mythological nature of perennialist discourse, see also Francesco Baroni, “Mito ed esoterismo: il perennialismo in Guénon e Evola,” *Philosophy Kitchen. Rivista di filosofia contemporanea* 3, no. extra *Mito. Mitologie e mitopoiesi nel contemporaneo* (2016): 77–86.

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Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 352.

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Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 352.

European occultism and operating on its own principles. Through these dynamics, alternative worldviews as well as a radical reshaping of collective memory were negotiated. This unprecedented attempt, in Italy as elsewhere, was destined to leave its mark on contemporary societies, and has not yet finished generating cultural alternatives.

By presenting Evola outside the habitual dualistic and polarising frameworks (for/against, apologetic/polemic), Hakl helped us focus on the general needs that underlie this cultural novelty: the yearning for new myths (whose function, to quote Ricœur again, is to “embrace mankind as a whole in one ideal history”¹²³); the experience of symbolism as a specific cognitive tool; and the urge of self-transcendence as a fundamental unspoken aspect of modernity. Becoming aware of these needs *per se* sets us on the path of a richer, or to employ Hakl’s phrasing, less “one-dimensional,” understanding of life.