

*Politica Romana* pro and contra Evola

Joscelyn Godwin

Though one would not guess it from the title, *Politica Romana* is one of the most significant esoteric periodicals of recent decades. Since 1994 eight numbers have appeared under the imprint of the “Associazione di Studi Tradizionali ‘Senatus’,” formerly based in Rome, now in Lucca. This “Association of Traditional Studies” blends several currents, including the revival of classical paganism and Neoplatonic philosophy as a way of life, in the spirit of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), the Roman Academy of Pomponio Leto (1425-1498), and Thomas Taylor (1758-1835); Arturo Reghini’s (1878-1946) and Amedeo Armentano’s (1886-1966) blend of Pythagoreanism and spiritual Freemasonry; Giuliano Kremmerz (1861-1930) and the Hermetic School of Naples; and the Theosophical revaluation of Eastern wisdom for the spiritual benefit of the West. The Association evidently respects the esoteric substratum of all religions, but like Theosophy it shows more sympathy for monistic philosophies (Platonic, Vedantic, Taoist, Buddhist) and polytheistic religions (Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Hindu, Shinto) than for Christianity and Islam. As Jean-Pierre Brach remarked, on reviewing the first numbers of *Politica Romana*, its traditionalism is at the antipodes of that of René Guénon (1886-1951) and Julius Evola (1898-1974).<sup>1</sup>

While the study of Western esoteric traditions establishes itself in academia, *Politica Romana* maintains the style of an earlier time, in which this field was dominated by independent scholars from other walks of life. It appears irregularly, anonymously edited and varying in length from 123 pages (no. 1) to 428 (no. 6). The contributors include Amelio, Elysus, Horus, Observator, Vates, Victor, and Vindex, and if any of them are academics, they do not mention the fact. Though yielding nothing in the way of erudition, they have no concern with theoretical, methodological, or postmodern issues. Nor are they bashful about their personal commitment to ancient philosophies and even neopagan practices. They invoke the *numi*, *manes*, etc., and the issues are dated with reference to the foundation of Rome: thus 2009 is “Dies Natalis MMDCLXII.”

This all sounds rather precious, but it does not affect the scholarly integrity of the project, which is especially high in the case of three contributors who sign with their own names and seem to be its prime movers. Foremost is Piero Fenili (born 1936), a retired magistrate (equivalent to a judge in the U.S.), whose writings are the foundation of this article. The co-founder Marco Baistrocchi (1941-1997), a career diplomat, specialized in ancient Roman religion. Before his premature death, he contributed a complex and monumental article, “*Agarththa*: una manipolazione guénoniana?” that has recently appeared in English.<sup>2</sup> This was presumably the basis for Brach’s verdict, for Baistrocchi argued the serious charge that René Guénon manipulated the myth of *Agarththa*, the rumored underground kingdom in Central Asia, in order to divert the elites of the West away from Buddhism and into Islam.<sup>3</sup> The third principal contributor is Dana Lloyd Thomas (born 1954), a California-born author and bilingual translator, whose recent book on Evola is also part of our source material. Other contributors include two prominent figures of the Roman neopagan scene: Roberto Sestito (reviver of Reghini’s journal *Ignis*), and Sandro Consolato (editor of the journal *La Citadella*).

A general political profile emerges from a mass of allusions and polemics throughout the eight numbers of *Politica Romana*. It stands for Roman republican values such as family, social, and state solidarity; not for Empire but for a cooperative hierarchy of Senate and People; for the unity of Italy as begun by the Risorgimento (1848-70) and completed with the regaining of its northeastern territory from Austria after World War I; for a Europe of strong nations respectful of each other, not of regional identities clamoring for autonomy. Regarding the problems of contemporary Italy, *Politica Romana* warns against legalizing Austrian influence in South Tirol, and abhors the Lega Nord (Northern League), which wants prosperous “Padania” (Northern Italy) to split from the feckless South. It opposes the temporal power of the Church, the Vatican’s involvement in politics and finance, and the efforts of the Catholic Integralists to impose their brand of fundamentalism, while on spiritual and aesthetic grounds it regrets the reforms of Vatican II. Naturally it holds Marxism in contempt, along with any political philosophy based on a materialistic outlook and the primacy of the economy, but this has more to do with the “metaphysical Right,” of which more below.

Shortly before the foundation of *Politica Romana*, Piero Fenili contributed three articles provocatively titled “The Errors of Julius Evola” to *Ignis*, the short-lived revival of Reghini’s journal of initiatic studies.<sup>4</sup> They are subtitled “The Incomprehension of the Romano-Italic Tradition,” “The Wrong Choice of Traditions,” and “The Alienation from the Ancestral Tradition.” He took up the thread in *Politica Romana* with three more articles,<sup>5</sup> two of them titled “Julius Evola and the Culture of the Catholic and Neopagan Right,” the third “The Evolian Myths of Blood and Crusade and the Metaphysical and Masonic Right.” The six articles together form a book-length treatment that I shall regard as a whole, citing them for brevity as “Errori 1-6,” with page numbers.

Fenili makes it plain that although his charge is to examine Evola’s errors, “we must state, loudly and clearly, that the most important part of Evola’s creative oeuvre consist[s] of the works of *esoteric, orientalist, and philosophic* character...” (Errori 3, 46, italics in original) Among these, he singles out *Il mistero del Graal*,<sup>6</sup> calling it:

a most beautiful book, belonging to the “greater” Evola, the grand esoteric author of equally important works such as *La dottrina di Risveglio*, *La Tradizione Ermetica*, *Lo yoga della potenza*,<sup>7</sup> etc., which contain far weightier conceptions than the historical-traditional or, if one prefers, “metapolitical” works, which in our opinion belong to the “lesser” Evola, and which moreover are the only ones affected by our criticisms in the present article. (Errori 2, 146, n. 102)

The spiritual kinship of writer and subject is patent in the many positive remarks scattered throughout Fenili’s articles. They point to the two essential components of the “greater” Evola: the example of his own spiritual quest, and its ability to inspire others in theirs:

The quest for the Sacred is no mental curiosity for Evola, but a vital question that sees him existentially compelled to follow that “impulse towards transcendence.” (Errori 6, 30-31)

Evola's traditional vision, lived and communicated with the grandeur of an epic poem, guards and transmits the flame of an inner revolt against the darkness of materialism, in a sort of sacrament of fire of which he is the hierophant.

Evola's best side consists precisely in this *igniferous* character of his work, able to light the fire of a spiritual awakening, and far beyond the problematic dimension of his Sorellian myths, historically conditioned and fallible as they are. (Errori 6, 26)

"Sorellian myths" alludes to Georges Sorel's (1847-1922) concept of "social myths" as ideas that can be manipulated to bring about political results. It makes no difference that such myths are baseless or that the beliefs behind them are demonstrably illogical: the point is that they can be used to sway the collective mentality.

Some secondary aspects of Evola's thought congenial to *Politica Romana* are his rejection of the theory of evolution and its denial of intelligent design; his criticism of psychoanalysis for thinking that the psyche can be healed without a spiritual discipline; his hopes for physics as it moves away from materialism into a more idealistic, almost Pythagorean domain; his condemnation of historicism and historical materialism as leading to a "collectivized sub-humanity"; and a similar attitude to the tyranny of the economy. These aspects are beyond the politics, but show an allegiance to the "metaphysical Right." (Errori 6, 27)

The concept of a metaphysical Right was apparently formulated in 1973 by another *Politica Romana* contributor, the Egyptologist Boris de Rachewiltz.<sup>8</sup> In brief, it refers to the universal principles known to the Far East as *yin* and *yang*, and to the Pythagorean development of them into pairs of opposites that include Right and Left, Male and Female, Light and Dark, Good and Bad. Fenili extrapolates from Evola's work five fundamental traits of the metaphysical Right:

- 1) It wears a spiritual character based on transcendence but not confessional, in that it is not identified with any existing religious confessions and therefore in no way bound by the relevant dogmas, beliefs, etc.
- 2) It refers to the categories of the Sacred wherever they occur, in West and East, in past and present, with a clear call to universality.
- 3) It is not limited by a philosophical position, because beyond arguments of a rational nature it appeals explicitly to symbols and myths as expressions of a higher order of reality.
- 4) For an archetypal structure, able to symbolically encompass and order the variety of data under consideration, it uses an astral mythological language. Pride of place in this context goes to the two great luminaries (Sun and Moon) and then to Mars and Venus, while the other protagonists of traditional astral mythology (Jupiter, Saturn and Mercury) do not have a particular typological profile. Instead, a general and important role is played by the couple Heaven and Earth.
- 5) The entirety of its principles translates into a value system that allows judgments to be made on historical events and consequently to take positions regarding them, including political ones. (Errori 6, 29-30)

The first three criteria, Fenili adds, are common to Guénon, Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), and other Traditionalists. This leaves the fourth, whose consequences include the categories of male (solar, heavenly, positive) and female (lunar, earthly, negative). But therein lies the fatal deviation: Evola saw these not as complementary principles but as antagonistic, which affected the way he applied the fifth criterion to historical judgments and political choices. (Errori 6, 30, n. 50)

With this we come to the “Errors of Julius Evola” and their consequences. In Fenili’s judgment, Evola’s empowering of the myth of Blood and the myth of Crusade have “provided a strong support for two perilous ideological orientations: that of the reactionary Catholic Right, which feeds religious fundamentalism, and that of the neo-pagan Right, which can degenerate into neo-Nazism.” (Errori 6, 14)

It may help to explain these errors to view them as consequences of Evola’s personal equation, whose salient terms, as he was well aware, were the impulse to transcendence and the *kshatriya* nature.<sup>9</sup> (Evola favored this Hindu term for the regal and warrior caste, which in the traditional hierarchy is second to the brahmins, the caste of priests and scholars.) In his early twenties, when most young men are finding themselves, he formulated a philosophical system that gained the patronage of Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) and was published in two volumes.<sup>10</sup> This system developed some of the concepts of the German idealist philosophers, especially Novalis (1772-1801) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), in a radically subjective direction. Not only are ideas prior to their material manifestation, but the ultimate arbiter of reality is the “Absolute I.” The rare individual who has achieved this can exercise the power to make reality conform to his will; as Evola puts it, “error is nothing but a feeble truth, truth but a potent error.”<sup>11</sup> This is the rationale behind Evola’s “magical idealism,” in which the adept decrees that things be so, and (hopefully) they obey. Fenili reminds us that such an attitude is completely contrary to the hard-won metaphysical objectivity of Plato and Aristotle, in which there is an objective, noetic order of truth. Moreover, “The greatest danger consists in closing the circuit of the I, which turns in on itself rather than opening itself to the Higher, thus exposing itself to that titanic *hybris*, feared and execrated in the classical world.” (Errori 1, 47-48 and n. 7) He also points out that of all the *siddhis* or supernormal powers gained through yoga, the highest one is *samadhi* or formless contemplation. (Errori 6, 67, n. 165) Evola was no stranger to all of this, but he defied tradition by according priority to the *kshatriyas* over the brahmins. Much of his subsequent thought flowed inexorably from this reversal of the hierarchy, for in the *kshatriya*’s scheme of things, Power trumps Wisdom. (cf. Errori 4, 48-49, 60)

Into Evola’s solipsistic universe came the baleful influences of a number of thinkers whom Fenili calls “obsessive,” (Errori 5, 37) including Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887), inventor of the gendered interpretation of prehistory; Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882), proclaimer of the inequality of races, Otto Weininger (1880-1903), precocious author of *Sex and Character*, and the Tibetologist Albert Grünwedel (1856-1935), later joined by the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946) and the mythomaniac Herman Wirth (1885-1981). They all fed Evola’s Manichean appetite for ranging opposites such as the archetypal ones of male and female, north and south, spirit and matter, and even the contingent ones of blond and dark, tall and short, under the subjective categories of good and bad. From this arose the first error, “the incomprehension of the Romano-Italic tradition.” As Fenili explains it, with a wealth of

references and details too intricate to summarize here, Evola failed to appreciate the integrity of the Roman people and their religious traditions. Instead, he saw them as a mixture of a superior, virile race of Nordic origin with soft, inferior ones such as the Etruscans and other indigenous Italic peoples. Fenili vigorously defends the latter and their contributions, especially the Etruscan element in Roman religion, complaining that Evola's conception "introduces pernicious rifts into the unitary texture of Roman Italy." (Errori 1, 56) There is dark comedy in Evola's belief that the real Romans, being of Germano-Nordic origin, were tall, and Fenili's demonstration from literary sources that most of them were short, yet more than a match for the gangly barbarians in hand-to-hand combat. (Errori 1, 52)

Time and again, Evola seems to have been careless of historical fact, so keen was he to see what he wanted to see in the past. In fact it was not carelessness, but a natural consequence of the philosophy of the Absolute Individual and the primacy of power over truth. Just as the Absolute Individual decrees present reality (or so he would have us believe), he arrogates the right to manipulate past events by an act of will, operating from a super-temporal domain to mold them to his mythic vision. (Errori 6, 22-23)

Evola's exaggerated respect for the Germano-Nordic world and its unnatural child, the Holy Roman Empire, led to a second error, the "wrong choice of traditions." Fenili points out that of the four protagonists who were left at the end of the Western Empire in 476, only the Roman Senate and the Eastern Empire had authentic Roman roots. The other two players were the Church, whose origin was in the Near East, and the Germanic peoples from the north, and it was with these enemies of Romanity that Evola chose to align himself. (Errori 2, 135) Fenili then enters into a long catalogue of the ignoble characteristics of the barbarians (*pace* Evola's exaltation of them), the atrocities of the Celts (also among his favorites), the empire founded by Charlemagne in 800 without consent of Senate or People, and the persecution of heathens and heretics by a Church that arrogated imperial powers to itself. Why should Evola have seen any virtue in this medieval confection that, as everyone knows, was neither holy, Roman, nor (after Charlemagne) an empire? It seems to have been one of the many unfortunate consequences of his Germanophilia, and doubly unfortunate, given the influence of his Sorellian myths on Italian politics.

Here Fenili returns to the crux of Italian history, the Risorgimento or unification movement, and Evola's unforgivable hostility to it. Thanks to the Holy Roman Empire, Italy had become nothing but the playground of foreign powers:

kept for centuries in a weak and divided state to suit the temporal interests of the Chiefs of a Religion of salvation that gave them no legitimacy (and could not do so, belonging as they did to a different Tradition) in usurping the role of Caesar, but which tried to persist in this error until the providential intervention of the King of Italy, who, as they used to say in the last [=19<sup>th</sup>] century, finally disarmed the Pope and sent him back to his prayers. (Errori 2, 155)

The third Evolian error of "alienation from the ancestral tradition" (literally "the tradition of the ancient fathers") concerns his want of appreciation for the survival of Romanity after the fall of the Western Empire. Tradition, as Fenili defines it here, signifies first "the conservation and transmission in time of a sacred Archetype." (Errori

3, 19) In this sense, the Romano-Italic tradition was carried onwards by such figures, ignored by Evola, as Symmachus (c.345-402) who protested the Christians' removal of the Altar of Victory from the Senate and edited Livy's history of Rome; Boethius (480-524/5), the statesman scholar who worked under a Gothic emperor to preserve all he could of Greco-Latin learning; Michael Psellus (1018-1078 or after), the Byzantine Platonist; the early Humanists from Petrarch onwards, whom Evola dismissed as merely safeguarding the "decadent forms" of Antiquity; Ficino, who continued Boethius's project by translating the works of Hermes, Plato, and the Neoplatonists; Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) with his defense of the dignity of man: an impulse that the philosopher of the Absolute Individual censured for its "rhetorical exaltation of individuality." (Errori 3, 33)

One of the most telling moments in the evolution of Evola's thought comes between the publication of the first edition of *Imperialismo Pagano* in 1928, and its reissue in 1933 in his own German translation. The original subtitle read: "Fascism in the Face of the Euro-Christian Peril," and the remedy proposed was the restoration of a Mediterranean tradition, pagan and anti-democratic. Evola took the idea from his then friend Reghini, for whom the Mediterranean tradition rested on the secure esoteric foundation of the Mysteries (Egyptian, Orphic, Pythagorean, Hermetic, etc.) and who hoped for a while that Fascism might favor a neopagan revival. Evola's work was intended to be provocative, coming as it did during the run-up to the Concordat (1929), Mussolini's strategic pact with the Catholic Church.

For the German edition, Evola deleted all reference to a Mediterranean tradition and substituted the words "primordial Nordic tradition." By now he was writing his masterwork, *Revolt against the Modern World*, in which he set out his Manichean view of history and prehistory. The founding myth is that of a noble, virile, Olympian, Uranic, solar race whose original home was in Arctic Hyperborea, driven south by climate change and encountering the ignoble, lunar, chthonic, matriarchal, orgiastic races that populated the other land masses. Evola had concocted this myth from the Theosophy of H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), well known in Italian esoteric circles, and the more recent works of Rosenberg (*Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*) and Wirth (*Der Aufgang der Menschheit*). Rosenberg gave him the notion (quite out of keeping with the Theosophical one) that the last emigrants from Hyperborea were the Nordic peoples: hence the Germans were among the most direct descendants of the latter and potential heirs to the primordial tradition of Hyperborea.<sup>12</sup>

Once Evola had adopted the Nordic-Germanic myth, he grafted onto it an idealized Middle Ages dominated by the "Holy Roman Empire of the German People," to give it its full and significant title. His medievalism had been encouraged by that of Guénon, who likewise spurned the classical world and its philosophies, Humanism, the Renaissance, and the Scientific Revolution that emerged from the latter.

Instead of the Mysteries, it was the myth of Blood that now preoccupied Evola, as it did his comrades in the new Germany. Fenili has no patience with Evola's threefold theory of race (that there is a race of the body, a race of the soul, and a race of the spirit, and that they do not necessarily coincide in the individual). All racism is physical, Fenili says, thus to apply the term "race" to the other levels is totally improper. (Errori 5, 31, n. 151) Nevertheless, as we have noted, a myth does not need to be true in order to work. Fenili concludes after a lengthy weighing of evidence that Evola's carefully calibrated

racial doctrine was intended to sway Mussolini's mind on the subject, and that it succeeded. In Spring 1932, the Duce was saying that race is "95% sentiment"; by March 1937, after Evola's racial writings had come to his notice, he proclaimed: "I'm a racist." In July 1938 he passed the *Manifesto della Razza* that declared that the Italians are Aryans and stripped Italy's Jews of their citizenship.

Evola took no part in the fighting, either in Spain, Ethiopia, or World War II, but it was just as risky to be an ideologist of the Axis. (Rosenberg, after all, was executed at Nuremberg.) If Evola had been in Italy when the war ended, the secret agents of the Allies would have shown him no mercy. As it was, his crippling injury kept him in an Austrian sanatorium long enough to be out of danger. (Errori 5, 64, n. 250) When he resumed public activity around 1950, the myth of Blood was no longer available: even if he believed in it, the Nazis had forever discredited it. There remained the myth of Crusade. Evola's whole political life had been a crusade against liberalism, modernism, secularism, and the "Jewish-Masonic conspiracy." Now he found a new and surprising ally in Catholic Integralism.

In his autobiography, Evola stated that "As someone born in a Catholic family, I had always felt utter indifference to the Christian religion."<sup>13</sup> His pre-war writings had established him as a thorough-going heretic by Catholic standards. Beside the blatant challenge of *Imperialismo pagano*, he had stated that belief in a personal God is an obstacle to metaphysical realization; that immortality is conditional, not automatic for every soul; and that Adam's disobedience was a praiseworthy and heroic act. (Errori 4, 53) His rosy picture of the Middle Ages ignored the predominance of Catholic theology in that period and the Church's use of the secular arm for imposing its dogmas. (Errori 4, 47) Nor was he sensitive to what Fenili appreciates as the mysterio-soteriological center of Christian orthodoxy: the Fall of Man, Original Sin, the descent of the divine Principle, and a bhaktic devotion to that Principle. (Errori 4, 55) Evola preferred a de-Christianized version of the Grail, a myth that better fitted his concept of kshatriya spirituality and the empire built upon it.

Given the fantasies, blind spots, and sheer contempt that had characterized Evola's treatment of the Christian tradition, it came as something of a shock when after World War II he started alluding in approving terms to Catholic supremacists of the most reactionary type such as Juan Donoso Cortés (1809-1853) and to the hyper-dogmatic *Syllabus* of Pius IX (1854). It was the more curious because Evola believed nothing of the sort, nor was there even a sentimental return to the Church of his birth. That much is obvious from Evola's last Will, in which he forbade all religious rites, specifically Catholic ones, and demanded to be burned. Fenili's explanation follows, together with his own position on the matter which recalls the cautious tolerance of ancient Rome:

The authoritarian idea, which he recognized as incarnated in the Catholic regimes of the *ancien régime*, induced Evola to concede too much to Catholicism. According to the limpid classical conception, free from all medieval mystification, Catholicism is a *religio licita* and as such should be respected and if need be protected, but should not be allowed to intrigue for the foundation or support of intolerant and repressive regimes such as the reactionary Catholics

long for, and therefore must be rigorously excluded from the ambitus of political power, which in Italy can boast a more ancient legitimacy. (Errori 4, 58)

He adds, in an ironic note, that the crematorium of Spoleto in which Evola's body was burned had been founded in 1870, the year of the liberation of Rome. Before that, cremation would not have been permitted, Spoleto being a fief of the Church. "Among the many liberties that the Risorgimento allowed Evola, it gave him the ultimate gift of his death: to be cremated, thus avoiding detestable burial." (Errori 4, 59, n. 73)

It must occur to any objective reader of Evola's works, as of other Traditionalists like Guénon and Schuon, that for all their nostalgia for authoritarian regimes and theocracies, they enjoyed a freedom of thought and expression that would never have been permitted had they been born into one. One of the pillars of such freedoms in modern times has been Freemasonry. Beside its philanthropic side, there is a spiritual and initiatic side to the craft of which Evola was well aware. With its heritage from Rosicrucianism and its kinship with spiritual alchemy and the Grail quest, Freemasonry could have been a natural ally of his transcendent interests. Instead he blamed it as the perpetrator of revolutions and a mainspring of the democratic subversion. After World War II this brought him tidily into line with Catholic Integralism. All of this Fenili explains with much detail, and answers the suspicious reader in a footnote by saying no, he is not himself a Mason, but instead something much worse: "an incorrigible and inveterate devotee of Neoplatonism and Hermetism, moreover faithful to the arcane Divinity of ancient Rome!" (Errori 3, 50, n. 206)

In the end, Evola's greatest error may have been not being true to himself, for his personal equation was written from the start on the page of liberalism. His philosophy of the Absolute Individual arrogated perfect freedom to the "differentiated man," and his formative period was a series of free choices made against the current of his class and milieu: not to be a Catholic, not to complete a university degree, not to marry or have a family, not to take a regular job. Instead he chose to experiment with drugs and magic, to risk his life mountaineering, to have free sexual relations, to play at Dadaist poetry and painting, and almost to commit suicide (from which he was deterred by reading a passage of Buddhist scripture). In his spiritual quest he showed the utmost openness of mind and freedom from dogma, which should have saved him from falling into line with rigid and repressive systems. Fenili quotes an illuminating passage from one of Evola's late articles (1968) on "The Two Faces of Liberalism":

In England there still survives this healthy and basically apolitical aspect of liberalism: liberalism not as a politico-social ideology but as the demand that the individual, irrespective of the particular form of political regime, should enjoy a maximum of liberty, that the sphere of his personal and private life should be respected and that no extraneous and collective power should interfere with it. In principle, this is an acceptable and positive aspect of liberalism, which should be distinguished from democracy. For in democracy the social and collectivizing pressure predominates over that of individual liberty.<sup>14</sup>

To this Fenili adds: "In these lines we recognize the true spirit of Evola, the spirit that inspired his free activity as a thinker throughout the whole span of his life. We are

certain that Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei would have agreed with him.” (Errori 4, 65) Of his own work, he writes in conclusion:

It has not been an easy task to unravel certain aspects, the erroneous results of the context of our research, from the complex of the distinguished work of a high intellect to whom, among other things, one owes gratitude for the profundity of his research, the originality and scope of his culture and his impressive style. He has rekindled within the oblivious and decadent European consciousness certain unquestionable values: the solar potential of a consciousness awakened by the ascetic fire; the transcendent virility of the Spirit and the ordered, aristocratic hierarchy of the beings composing the Cosmos. And this together with a constant summons to a demanding ethical responsibility, which has made Evola’s work a providential bulwark against the atrophy and degeneration of a civilization that shows alarming signs of spiritual decline. (Errori 3, 55)

Fenili’s “Errors” had repercussions in the hothouse world of Italian esotericism. Some single-minded Evolians used the pages of their own obscure periodicals to mount whatever counter-attack they felt necessary. A first sally came after the three articles in *Ignis*, which Fenili answered in *Politica Romana* no. 2<sup>15</sup> with a lawyer’s attention to detail and sardonic humor. A second wave followed the completion of the six-part series of articles, whose weight and erudition demanded a period of digestion, and these were not all negative.<sup>16</sup> Piero di Vona, an eminent professor of the history of philosophy, wrote that consideration of Fenili’s material would at least raise the level of polemic about Evola, though this seems not to have been the case. Other criticisms served Fenili as a springboard for digressions on Evola’s anti-Platonism, his association of Jesus with donkeys (sacred or otherwise), his sympathy for Aleister Crowley,<sup>17</sup> his indifference to the fate of the Jews in World War II, his military demotion<sup>18</sup> and its implications for a self-proclaimed kshatriya. The same number of *Politica Romana* also carries two separate reviews of Marco Pasi’s book on Crowley, “Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics,”<sup>19</sup> one by Fenili and a longer one by Roberto Sestito on the contrasts between Crowley, Evola, and Reghini. These are among the many minor Evolian items to be found in *Politica Romana*, which space prevents us from treating further.

In replying to his critics, Fenili was able to draw on Dana Lloyd Thomas’s discoveries in the Central State Archives, which would plug many gaps in our knowledge of Evola’s activities. Thomas took up the thread himself with three articles:<sup>20</sup> “Evola’s Filogermanism: the Reaction of the Fascist State,” “The Temple under Assault. Introduction to the Study of the Anti-Esoteric Campaign in Fascist Italy,” and “The Evola-Reghini Quarrel: When Philosophy Goes to Law.” Thomas’s object was documentation, and he included many facsimiles and transcriptions, plus newspaper reports of the Evola-Reghini dispute, the laughable secret service report of Evola’s affiliation to “Sir” Aleister Crowley’s OTO, and Evola’s handwritten Will.

The first and second of these articles, with their supporting documents, help to clarify the ambiguous relationship between Evola and Mussolini, and the question of how much influence the former really had over the latter. The discomfort of the Fascist authorities over Evola’s activities in Germany and Austria makes fascinating reading.<sup>21</sup> The Germans reported his public lectures in newspapers read by millions, and when word

of their contents reached the Italian side there was consternation. The Italian Consul in Vienna reported to the Minister of External Affairs that beside denigrating the Italian Renaissance and the Risorgimento, Evola had “concluded by hoping that the new type of Italian would fully realize the original Romano-Nordic quality, thus finally forgetting certain types of Italians that our history has produced, which he defined literally as ‘Mediterranean monkeys’.”<sup>22</sup> After learning of this insult to the national character, the Ministry withdrew Evola’s passport, against which he vigorously protested. Mussolini himself reversed the decision.

Thomas shows that the suppression of occultist groups was largely due to the antipathy towards Freemasonry on the part of the Catholic Church and the growing influence of the latter within Fascism. Starting with the law against association of 1925, any group with a demonstrable or imagined masonic link was quashed and its leaders harassed. Spiritualism was treated more gently, and Anthroposophy was tolerated, surprisingly enough, until 1941.<sup>23</sup> Reghini, as a prominent Freemason, neopagan, and occultist, was an inevitable victim of the anti-masonic campaign. After their six-year collaboration, Evola felt that it was endangering his own flourishing career (he had recently joined the journalists’ union).<sup>24</sup> Thomas sees this as the motivation for Evola’s scurrilous attack in *Roma Fascista* (May 3, 1929). Reghini replied, furiously accusing Evola of libel. When the case came to court, ex-Freemasons and anticlerical Fascists testified for Reghini, while Evola was supported by a Protestant editor, an Anthroposophist, and a Theosophical professor.<sup>25</sup> The judge talked the contestants into withdrawing their accusations and apologizing to one another. Thomas’s verdict is that neither benefited. Reghini’s career as a high school math teacher was ruined by the publicity about his masonic past, while Evola’s violent rejection of Reghini’s ideas on Italian and Mediterranean traditions propelled him into the philo-Germanic and conspiratorial ideologies that he would henceforth cultivate.<sup>26</sup>

The full extent of Dana Lloyd Thomas’s researches emerged with the publication in November 2006 of his book *Julius Evola e la tentazione razzista. L’inganno del pangermanesimo in Italia* (Julius Evola and the Racist Temptation. The Lure of Pangermanism in Italy).<sup>27</sup> Since Piero Fenili wrote the Foreword and the dedication is to the memory of Marco Baistrocchi, it can hardly be dissociated from *Politica Romana*’s program. If interest in Evola in the Anglophone world should ever reach the necessary level of sophistication, it would be among the foremost candidates for translation. I have reviewed the book elsewhere<sup>28</sup> and given away some of its surprising revelations, so will not repeat them here.

Thomas’s research took him to the Italian State Archives in Rome, the U.S. National Archives in College Park, Maryland, the British National Archives in London, and the German Bundesarchiv in Berlin. The other source from which he drew material unnoticed by previous scholars was Evola’s journalism: hundreds of articles in newspapers and magazines, in which he was much freer and more aggressive than in his books. Thomas treats his subject as a political biography, tracing the stages by which Evola moved from his solipsistic and magical philosophy to an obsession first with medieval empire, then with the Nordic-Germanic myth, at each stage circulating among different acquaintances and collaborators. This much was familiar ground to students of his biography, but not the degree to which Evola became a veritable apostle of Nazi racial policies. His sanitized theory of three “races” crumbles in the face of the anti-Semitism

expressed in his journalism and memoranda to the regime. Far from being a Fascist in Mussolini's sense, Evola kept company with the violently anti-Semitic Roberto Farinacci (1892-1945) and Giovanni Preziosi (1881-1945). After Mussolini's fall in 1943, there was only one place to go. In the American and British archives Thomas found lists compiled by the Allied secret service which named Evola as an agent of the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, German secret service) and a collaborator at the highest level with the German occupation.<sup>29</sup>

Thomas chronicles all this with perfect objectivity. Only at the end, and then without emotion, does he point out the consequences for Italians of today. He begins:

Many elements come together to support the thesis of the "anti-Italian" direction of Julius Evola's thought and political action during the Fascist period, pointing to their most emblematic manifestation in the proposal for a "racial inquiry." This was supposed to separate the "superior" elements of the Italian people from those held to be "inferior" in the physical and soul sense; thus the methods adopted in Germany by the *Ahnenerbe* would have been introduced into Italy.<sup>30</sup>

After Germany's defeat, Evola needed a new myth to promote. For a while he tried "Italy's betrayal of Germany," which Thomas analyzes with a fine sense of the political undercurrents of the time. But this did not suit the need for the Italian Right to emancipate Fascism from the stain of its collaboration.

Thus was born an eclectic current which, stemming from a reading of *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*,<sup>31</sup> drew inspiration from the German military expansion, from mid-European Catholic Nazism, from the Waffen-SS (conveniently ignoring the somewhat un-warrior-like activity of Himmler's men in the extermination camps), from the RSI [Repubblica Sociale Italiana] as a "faithful ally," from the mysticism of the Grail and of the Nordic race. Given the persistence of Nordic racism and the thesis of the Risorgimento as "Judeo-Masonic," there was born the paradox of a certain current, almost devoid of any nationalist reminiscence in the usual sense and perhaps wrongly defined as "neo-Fascist."<sup>32</sup>

Next came Evola's compromise with Catholic Integralism, and his hopes (in *Uomini e rovine*<sup>33</sup>) for a new movement of European unity and a new order of chivalry. In *Cavalcare la tigre*,<sup>34</sup> too, "he affirmed the need for a type of 'traditional' State based on a type of 'loyalty and fidelity that could transcend the naturalistic fact of nationality'; a criterion that recalls the Hapsburg model or even that of Himmler's Europe."<sup>35</sup> All of this is anathema to Thomas, who shares the allegiance of his Italian-born colleagues to a united Italy. He too has harsh words for the Sorellian myth of Padania and political calls for an Alpine region beyond national borders. What is his solution? Not a "rational" politics, he says, for everyone claims that his own politics is rational, though diametrically opposed to others. To avoid the dual traps of the universalist myth, which leads to totalitarianism, and the particularist myth, which leads to ethnocentricity, Thomas counsels a moderate use of national mythology and symbology, citing the United States, Japan, and Britain as examples. "In this regard it would be helpful in a democratic society to revalue the concept of national identity in such a way as to create a type of

citizenship that has national and ‘living’ roots, not merely bureaucratic and theoretical ones, yet without falling into ethnocentrism.”<sup>36</sup>

*Julius Evola e la tentazione razzista* is a work of history and documentation, and when at the end Thomas speaks his own mind, it is strictly within the language of politics. I suspect that he could have said much more, for as mentioned at the outset, *Politica Romana* is an esoteric periodical and virtually all of its contributors are aware of that dimension.

*Politica Romana* opened its eighth number with an editorial entitled “Missione compiuto” (Mission accomplished), and indicated that this would probably be its last issue. As a closing gesture, Piero Fenili answered further criticisms from the former contributors Sandro Consolato and Gennaro d’Uva, and from the Evola specialist Renato del Ponte.<sup>37</sup> Some of these criticisms were evidently made in an excess of Evolian zeal, and contained careless or ignorant statements that Fenili skewers without mercy. As in his earlier replies, he takes the opportunity to expatiate on topics familiar to those who have followed this polemic, drawing on a seemingly omniscient command of political and cultural history. The topics include Evola’s triple theory of race, the prophecy of Ekatlos<sup>38</sup> and its relevance to Mussolini, the question of who betrayed whom in World War II, the height and coloring of ancient Romans, the slaughter of the Roman legions by Arminius, the “Black Athena” thesis of Martin Bernal, the definition of Guelphs and Ghibellines, the missed opportunity offered by Reghini and Armentano, and the folly of an uninformed dismissal of Theosophy.<sup>39</sup> He develops new ideas on the feminization of Italy, Evola’s painting and its connection with alpinism, the honorable symbol of the fasces, and the nature of divine love in Christianity and Buddhism. He educates his Italian readers about the French Evolian Jean Parvulesco and the Russian Alexander Dugin, unveils several of the pseudonyms under which he himself has published, and adds anecdotes about his medieval ancestors, his father’s wartime activity, his own meetings with Evola, and his intellectual progress since then. He loyally defends Dana Lloyd Thomas and the present writer, inasmuch as they were touched by criticism.

This extraordinary outpouring, which fills two thirds of the volume, gives the subject its quietus, for Fenili declares that henceforth he will not participate in any form of debate. But the subject in question is, as we know, only the “lesser” Evola, and there may be better things to come:

From these meetings with Evola (unfortunately few, thanks to my youthful and blameworthy thoughtlessness), in which we did not speak of politics but of much more important things, I acquired a certain knowledge that spurred me on to immersion in the work of the “greater” Evola, which I reserve for separate treatment. This will give evidence of its foundation and lasting interest, raising it above the ravages of time connected with the change of epochs and political seasons, to which the fans of the lesser Evola prefer to expose it. And I have good reason to hope that this intention of mine will not be hostile to the Manes of Julius Evola.<sup>40</sup>

With the possible exception of Crowley, there is no more divisive figure in twentieth century esotericism than Evola. Yet in both cases there is room—indeed there is a crying need—for a dispassionate approach that accepts what they have to offer

without falling under their spell, and that rejects their shadow side without hysteria or self-righteousness. To put it in Hermetic terms, the work of *Politica Romana* is the *nigredo* of Evola's *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, and those ardent laborers who have accomplished it deserve our gratitude.

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Pierre Brach, [review of *Politica Romana* 1-2], *Politica Hermetica* 10 (1996), 247.

<sup>2</sup> Marco Baistrocchi, "Agarththa: una manipolazione guénoniana?" *Politica Romana* 2 (1995), 8-40; *Agarththa: A Guénonian Manipulation?* tr. Joscelyn Godwin (Fullerton, CA: Theosophical History, 2010; Theosophical History Occasional Papers, vol. 12).

<sup>3</sup> Baistrocchi had in mind such distinguished figures as Frithjof Schuon, Michel Valsan, Titus Burckhardt, Charles le Gai Eaton, and Martin Lings, who all emulated Guénon by becoming Muslims.

<sup>4</sup> Piero Fenili, "Gli errori di Julius Evola. I – L'incomprensione della tradizione romano-italica," *Ignis* n.s. 1 (1991), 46-63 [here referred to as "Errori 1"]; "Gli errori di Julius Evola. II – La scelta sbagliata delle tradizioni," *Ignis* n.s. 2 (1991), 135-55 ["Errori 2"]; "Gli errori di Julius Evola. III – L'allontanamento dalla Tradizione degli antichi Padri," *Ignis* n.s. 3 (1992), 19-56 ["Errori 3"].

<sup>5</sup> Piero Fenili, "Julius Evola e la cultura della destra cattolica e neopagana. Prima parte," *Politica Romana* 2 (1995), 41-68 [here referred to as "Errori 4"]; "Julius Evola e la cultura della destra cattolica e neopagana. Seconda parte," *Politica Romana* 3 (1996), 15-73 ["Errori 5"]; "I miti evoliano del sangue e della crociata e la destra metafisica e massonica," *Politica Romana* 4 (1997), 13-69 ["Errori 6"].

<sup>6</sup> English edition: *The Mystery of the Grail*, tr. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> English editions: *The Doctrine of Awakening*, tr. H. E. Musson (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1996); *The Hermetic Tradition*, tr. E. E. Rehmus (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995); *The Yoga of Power*, tr. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> The source given is Boris de Rachewiltz, "Destra e Sinistra," *La Destra* 3/2 (1973), 5-11.

<sup>9</sup> See his autobiography, *The Path of Cinnabar*, tr. Sergio Knipe (n.p.: Integral Tradition Publishing, 2009), 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> *Teoria dell'Individuo assoluto* (Turin: Bocca, 1927); *Fenomenologia dell'Individuo assoluto* (Turin: Bocca, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> *Teoria dell'Individuo assoluto*, 308.

<sup>12</sup> I analyze the use of Hyperborean and Atlantean myths by Evola, Guénon, Rosenberg, and Wirth in chapters 5 and 6 of *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> *The Path of Cinnabar*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Errori 4, 64-5, citing *Il Borghese*, October 10, 1968.

<sup>15</sup> Piero Fenili, "Alcune risposte," *Politica Romana* 2 (1995), 177-86.

<sup>16</sup> Piero Fenili, "Controevolomane ed evoliano dimezzato," *Politica Romana* 6 (2000-2004), 327-44.

<sup>17</sup> See also Piero Fenili, "Fu Evola affiliato all'ordine magico di Aleister Crowley?" *Politica Romana* 4 (1997), 294-95. The short answer is: Maybe, but only in a low grade of the OTO.

<sup>18</sup> On this episode, see Dana Lloyd Thomas, "Quando Evola fu degradato," with a reply by Gianfranco de Turris, "Né venduto né vigliacco," *Lo stato delle Idee*, March 24, 1999, 10-13.

<sup>19</sup> Marco Pasi, *Aleister Crowley e la tentazione della politica* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1999); *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, tr. Ariel Godwin (London: Equinox Publishing, 2011). Reviews in *Politica Romana* 6 (2000-2004), 401-16.

<sup>20</sup> Dana Lloyd Thomas, "Il filogermanesimo di Julius Evola: le reazioni dello stato fascista," *Politica Romana* 4 (1997), 263-93; "Il tempio assalito. Introduzione allo studio della campagna antiesoterica nell'Italia fascista," *Politica Romana* 5 (1998-1999), 253-300; "La querelle Evola-Reghini: quando la filosofia va in tribunale," *Politica Romana* 6 (2000-2004), 353-75.

<sup>21</sup> See also the important documentation from the German side in Bruno Zoratto, ed., *Julius Evola nei documenti segreti dell'Ahnenerbe* (Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Report transcribed in *Politica Romana* 4 (1997), 284-85.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas, "Il tempio assalito," 255.

<sup>24</sup> Sindacato Regionale Fascista dei Giornalisti di Roma.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, "La querelle," 355.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas, "La querelle," 357.

<sup>27</sup> Dana Lloyd Thomas, *Julius Evola e la tentazione razzista. L'inganno del pangermanesimo in Italia* (Mesagne, Brindisi: Giordano Editore, 2006).

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- <sup>28</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, "Julius Evola: the Light and the Dark," *Tyr* 4 (forthcoming).
- <sup>29</sup> Thomas, *J.E. e la tentazione razzista*, 232-33.
- <sup>30</sup> Thomas, *J.E. e la tentazione razzista*, 241.
- <sup>31</sup> English edition: *Revolt against the Modern World*, tr. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995).
- <sup>32</sup> Thomas, *J.E. e la tentazione razzista*, 245.
- <sup>33</sup> English edition: *Men among the Ruins*, tr. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002).
- <sup>34</sup> English edition: *Ride the Tiger*, tr. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003).
- <sup>35</sup> Thomas, *J.E. e la tentazione razzista*, 247.
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas, *J.E. e la tentazione razzista*, 249.
- <sup>37</sup> Piero Fenili, "Il numero otto gli piacerà di più (Spunti polemici per un più ampio discorso)," *Politica Romana* 8 (2008-2009), 93-173.
- <sup>38</sup> Ekatlos, "La 'Grande Orma': La scena e le quinte," in Gruppo di Ur, *Introduzione alla magia quale scienza dell'io*, vol. 3 (Rome: Fratelli Melita, 1987), 408-11.
- <sup>39</sup> See also Piero Fenili, "Rendiamo giustizia a Helena Blavatsky," *Politica Romana* 2 (1995), 149-56.
- <sup>40</sup> Fenili, "Il numero otto," 165.