FOREWORD

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Now that we have passed the end of Evola's century, his voice is being heard more widely than it ever was in his lifetime. This is the ninth of his books to appear in English translation; many more have appeared in French and German, while in Italy even his innumerable journalistic writings are seeing the light again, and several periodicals are dedicated solely to his ideas.

This revival of an obscure Italian thinker is a remarkable phenomenon. At the present rate, it will not be long before Evola begins to receive the tribute of doctoral dissertations, scholarly articles, and academic conferences, prior to being established in whatever place is eventually accorded to him in the history of ideas. But two things will always act like gravel in the cogs of the academic machine, which is usually able to reduce any historical subject to a pure and emotionally anodyne state. The present publication is an attempt to deal with, though not to remove, one of these obstacles.

Evola is a rare example of universality in an age of specialization. He was universal not only in the horizontal domain, as philosopher, engineering student, artillery officer, Dadaist poet and painter, journalist, alpinist, scholar, linguist, Orientalist, and political commentator—not a bad record of achievement before his fiftieth year—but in the vertical dimension as well.

It is this vertical dimension that constitutes one of the obstacles to the modern, agnostic approach, but which from Evola's own standpoint gave sense and value to what otherwise might appear as the thinly spread talents of a "renaissance man" or dilettante. One might call it a spiritual dimension, if that adjective were not so exhausted and if it did not carry connotations of a religiosity that Evola despised. His was not the spirituality of piety and mysticism, but the aspiration to what he understood to be the highest calling of man: the identity of Self and Absolute. His route to it led initially not through religion (he soon discarded his strict Catholic upbringing), but through philosophy, not just book learned but also lived with a white-hot intensity comparable to that which left

Nietzsche a burnt-out wreck. Soon after this, Evola plunged into a particularly esoteric form of occultism, again not of the literary or armchair type, but one that entailed trials, asceticisms, and a mastery of terrors that most of us can barely imagine. As a consequence, his character and ideals were fully formed before he was out of his twenties, and he remained true to them for the rest of his life. All that changed was a gradual refinement and a tireless filling-in of the steps on the ladder, from the heights of the Absolute (so beautifully expressed in *The Doctrine of Awakening*, Evola's book on Buddhism) down through the mysterious intermediate realms treated in his essays "Magic as a Science of the Self," to the dirty world of politics, where Evola the journalist, as a fearless critic of the Fascist regime, seemed to lead a charmed life.

This brings us to the second and far more serious obstacle to the appreciation of Evola's thought in a social-democratic society: his extreme right-wing views. One might argue that his reputation would be best served by suppressing them, and especially by not publishing the present work in which they are given such blatant form. *Men among the Ruins* is, by any standard, far from being Evola's best work, and it should never be the gateway to his thought: that function belongs to his masterwork, *Revolt Against the Modern World.* However, if Evola is to be studied and understood even by those—and this is increasingly the case in the United States—who cannot read him in the original language, it is academically dishonest to suppress anything.

The virtue of the academic approach resembles that of a bomb-disposal unit. That is to say, it can handle explosive materials at arm's length, without harming either itself or others. It does this with the tools of rationality and scholarship, unsullied by emotionality or subjective references. At least, that is how it is supposed to work, and why there is such a concept as "academic freedom"—that is, the freedom to work on controversial topics and to come to one's own conclusions without political interference.

The bomb-disposal unit in the present publication consists of the exhaustive introductory study of Evola's politics by Dr. H. T. Hansen. This first appeared as a preface to the German language edition (*Menschen inmitten von Ruinen*, Tübingen, Zurich, Paris: Hohenrain-Verlag, 1991). It provides the factual and intellectual-historical basis that is essential for anyone who sets out in a serious spirit to criticize Evola's political ideas, because it will disabuse them of hearsay and prejudgments, and allow for the informed and open debate that such matters deserve—one can scarcely call them controversial, since there is

virtually no controversy to be had about them. Those who react to Evola's text only on an emotional level are, unfortunately, beyond such assistance; it would be better for them to save their blood pressure by not reading him at all.

The value of such reading and debate lies, naturally, in their educative function, but also, in the present case, in the self-knowledge that one gains from the dispassionate handling of explosive material. Evola is a great teacher in this regard. If he were a mere right-wing fanatic, he would be as tiresome as any other person enslaved to an ideology. The difference between him and the fanatics, intelligence aside, is that he writes always with the vertical dimension in mind. Those who do not know his writings on esotericism must take this on trust until they have discovered them. They will then find in works such as *The Hermetic Tradition* and *The Yoga of Power* one of the keenest minds in the field, whose personal experience—and there is no other explanation for it—gave him the key to the mysteries of self-transformation and self-realization. The challenge to esotericists is that when Evola came down to earth, he was so "incorrect"—by the received standards of our society. He was no fool; and he cannot possibly have been right . . . so what is one to make of it? If one can cross the *pons asinorum* represented by these questions, then one has passed the first initiation, and can begin to learn the serious business that Evola has to teach.