

# FOREWORD

*by Joscelyn Godwin*

Like the music which he composes and records under the name of "Allerseelen," Gerhard's writing does not easily fit any ready-made label or category. While the majority of people are content to travel the iron tracks laid down by their religion, politics, peer pressure, or brand-name culture (no matter that they are always crashing into each other), he follows a mercurial path: quick, elusive, and a little mischievous. When I first met him at a conference in Vienna, I was immediately attracted by his friendly persona and lack of posturing. As I got to know him and his writings better, I admired the way he was following his own star wherever it led, with no possible financial or professional gain.

This book records some of the explorations that Gerhard made in the 1990s, partly in this world through interviews and travel (though travel for him is always pilgrimage), and partly in the iridescent world of the imagination, without whose aid such research is merely academic. These "tracts" first appeared in twenty issues of Aorta and nine of Ahnstern. They were home-made bilingual booklets done with typewriter, copying machine, and stapler. The print was cramped, the illustrations blurred or blackened, and the English translations extremely quaint (in contrast to Gerhard's beautiful German). Nowadays this kind of activity would take the form of a website or a "blog," but back in the twentieth century it was still a kitchen-table industry that left physical evidence, some of it now collectors' items. The name of Kadmon, alluded to the Kabbalistic idea of "Adam Kadmon," universal man, the archetype of all humanity. The titles, too, referred to sources. The aorta is the main artery leading from the heart, the spring of our life-blood from birth until death. Ahnstern I interpret as "ancestral star," reminding us that we are all made from star-dust, filtered through our ancestors. To those with their antennae tuned to the esoteric, these were clues to look beneath the surface, entertaining and fascinating as it was.

The earliest issues of Aorta announced one of its main themes: that of shamanism. Never mind the terminological wrangles over what shamanism

is and what it isn't. For Gerhard, it is a hard path that leads through suffering to contact with spiritual realities, and thence to the healing of self, others, and the earth. He encountered this line of ideas in the 1980s, after a concert by the musician Z'ev had inspired him to take up music instead of poetry ("Z'ev"). Z'ev, who like Gerhard bore a Hebrew pseudonym, acknowledged the dual influence of shamanism and the Kabbalah, thus opening up to his young admirer not only a new conception of music and its purpose, but the esoteric tradition in general.

I was astonished to find the stigmatic Therese Neumann ("Konnersreuth") in this company, but shamanism does indeed hold a clue to what might otherwise seem a religious pathology. Gerhard writes with great sympathy of how Therese's voluntary acceptance of excruciating pain and debility became a source of healing and faith for others. A more predictable figure is Joseph Beuys, the father of "performance art," whose personal mythology included a quasi-shamanic initiation after he crashed his Stuka in 1943. Gerhard describes Beuys's re-enactment of the event in preparation for spending three days in a cage with a live coyote ("Anubis"). Beuys may have been sincere, but he opened the floodgates to a whole movement of performance artists, including the unfortunate Rudolf Schwarzkogler, who seems to have been driven through obsessions with bondage and suffering to his own suicide ("Schwarzkogler").

Gerhard has avoided the excesses of this path, but he describes some kindred experiences of his own in "Night of the Stigmata," where he joins a Spanish penitents' procession and drums through the night until the drum is soaked with his blood; in "Feathered Dreams," where in time-honored fashion he eats psychedelic mushrooms and finds himself in a parallel and paradisaical universe of peacock colors; and in his wormings through claustrophobic tunnels delved by who knows what dwarfish race ("Hidden World"). His pilgrimage to the home of an Italian snake cult ("Angizia") shows how the Catholic Church, always on the brink of polytheism, has been able to sanctify and preserve some of the ancient pagan traditions: in this case, the typically shamanic one of healing with the help of dangerous animals.

Several other figures in this gallery of extremes were subjected to painful initiations. The writer Ernst Jünger ("Baptism of Fire") was wounded fourteen times in World War I and emerged to become one of Germany's major literary figures. The painter Leonora Carrington ("Leonora") suffered the outer terrors

of war and the inner ones of madness, as did Wiligut-Weisthor, the self-proclaimed master of the runes (“Karl Maria Wiligut”). The Romanian founder of the Legion of the Archangel Michael (“Corneliu Codreanu”) developed his militant Christian asceticism during the first of his prison sentences.

Many of Gerhard’s subjects, including the four just mentioned, lived through the most traumatic years of the twentieth century. Sensitive souls, all of them, they were forced somehow to come to terms with the brutality they saw around them. For some, including Jünger, the film-maker Leni Riefenstahl (“The Blue Light”), and the Grail mythologist Otto Rahn (“Katharsis”), this resulted in a pact with the Third Reich that probably drove Rahn to suicide, and haunted the others throughout their long lives. Viktor Schauberg and Andreas Epp (see the issues under their names) lent their talents as inventors of flying discs to the German war effort, though it does not seem to have done it, or them, any good. The painter Fidus tried to interest the Nazis in his Jugendstil fantasies, and was crushed in the attempt (“Fidus”). For those of us who have lived our lives in the free countries of the world, it would be presumptuous to say how we would have behaved in their situations. But if tyranny should ever descend upon us, there are lessons to be learned from them.

Another of Gerhard’s themes is that of artists who push the limits, whether to attract attention, to shock the bourgeois, to exorcise some personal demon, or deliberately to use the energetic potential of explosive materials. The two essays on Kenneth Anger’s film-making (“Lucifer Rising” and “Lucifer Rising Part II”) belong in this category, as do those on the early activities of Michael Moynihan (“Blood Axis”) and on the Norwegian Black Metal cult (“Oskorei”) that Moynihan and Söderlind chronicled in their book *Lords of Chaos*. There is a connection here with the essay on scatology (“Brown Magic”), namely that an alchemist can find something of value in the most despised material, whether literally in excrement, or in people and movements that are universally repudiated. I also note that in earlier times, the way to cause outrage was to defy religious and sexual norms, whereas the brutality of life (judicial torture, public executions, cruelty to animals, regular war-making) was taken for granted, as it still is in parts of the world. Now that in sex and religion anything goes, a sure way to annoy the *bien-pensants* is to exalt the warrior mentality and embrace the fact (evident enough in the media but greeted with crocodile tears) that violence is exciting.

Why should this be so? Perhaps it reflects the shamanic principle described above: that for a certain spiritual type, the way to transcendence is not a primrose path but a thorny and agonizing one, willingly accepted. And while most people are only spectators, rather than actors or creators, those who correspond to this type like to taste vicariously the white-hot extremes of human experience.

Those who dwell exclusively on violence and darkness, or make themselves deliberately repulsive, soon become a bore to me, and probably to Gerhard too, for he balances his explorations of the shadow side with more positive ones. One of the most beautiful of these is the early Riefenstahl film, The Blue Light, which is an allegory of the outsider who possesses a spiritual treasure (Junta's crystal cave) that the collectivity can only see in material terms, exploit, and destroy.

In the Middle Ages, the treasure was called the Grail. According to one myth, the Grail was the emerald that fell from Lucifer's crown when he was driven out of heaven. Rahn, Fidus, Anger, and Gerhard himself are firmly on the side of Lucifer, whose name, they remind us, means "light-bearer." For them, it was Lucifer who wanted to give mankind the treasure of self-knowledge, against the will of the god of monotheism. This is the familiar Gnostic myth, revived by modern esotericists as various as H.P. Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, and Aleister Crowley. It appeals to those pagans who see the hegemony of the Christian churches as having been more or less a disaster for Europe. Like the deliciously decadent Alfred Schuler ("Blutleuchte"), they long for the restoration of polytheism and the return of the ancient gods and goddesses. They make pilgrimages to pagan sanctuaries like Stonehenge or the Externsteine, or seek out vestiges of the ancient mystery-religions, which they wish still existed ("Mithras"). They admire those who defied the Church, like the fourteenth-century Emperor Frederick II ("Castel del Monte") and the Cathars, the heretical "pure ones" ("Montségur") whom Otto Rahn believed to have held the secret of the Grail.

All of this does not necessarily lead to gnosis, but at least modern pagans have disavowed the two rivals that enjoy an uneasy truce as the established "religions" of the West: the exoteric Christianity of the churches, and the materialist dogma sanctified by science. Pagans live, or try to live, free from both of them, in an enchanted world from which the local gods, spirits, and fairies have not been exorcised. Perhaps it was these entities who made the

first crop-circles (“Field of Force”), which fascinated Gerhard; perhaps they answered the summons of the English witches to repel the Luftwaffe in 1940 (“Storm Songs”), which Gerhard describes both from the point of view of the enchanters and from that of a German pilot caught in their magical snares. Not only here, but in almost every subject he writes about, there is a feeling of the spiritual world being close at hand, whether passively invited by placing oneself at its sites of power, or stormed through the exercise of the will.

Those heathen divinities, if they exist, would certainly approve of my favorite essay, “Heidnat.” Here Gerhard makes a moving declaration of his own faith, a “deep green” faith in Nature and in our rootedness in her; a folkish love of the *genius loci*, the spirit of our own ancestral earth. It is an assertion of identity, but at the same time a rejoicing in diversity. Everywhere he goes on his travels, Gerhard celebrates the local genii and readily participates in the traditions inspired by them. Cheerful by nature, he seldom airs his dislikes, but as a child of much-invaded Middle Europe he has good reason to loathe what he calls *Panzermaterialismus* (“materialism enforced by tanks”). Like others who have studied the tyrannies of the twentieth century, he has no trust in politicians of any kind, nor in those who think they know what is best for everyone else. Above all, Gerhard is an artist, and *Blutleuchte* is a creative as well as a documentary work, with aspects of a portrait gallery, a travelogue, a meditation on history, and a collection of curiosities. As he takes you through its kaleidoscopic episodes, these introductory words may help you to see the sense and the wisdom behind it all.

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