



EAST VERSUS WEST

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This is Chapter XVI of my book, A Marcha dos Abismos. A Dupla Tragédia da Utopia (The March to the Abyss. The Double Tragedy of Utopia), which I have not yet been able to finish for publication. Written in 2017, this is one of innumerable writings and class recordings that prove, to the supreme disappointment of [Ninguens](#) [the nobodies, ordinary folk] and Ninguensists [those that claim to stand for the nobodies], the insurmountable critical distance that separates me from all [Guenonian-Schuonian](#) "perennialism."

The destruction of the West, however, would not even be conceivable if the real and supposed evils of the targeted civilization were opposed only by criticism, however corrosive it might be. Thus, it was necessary to raise on the horizon the image of an alternative, an anti-model, invested with all the virtues that the civilization under criticism lacked. Only in this way would criticism lose its air of mere theoretical objection and become practical guidance toward a real goal. This goal, in turn, could not be reduced to the embellished image of a future socialism, which, precisely because it was only a hypothetical ideal, lost half of its attacking force.

This is how the accursed West ended up being opposed, almost automatically, by the most obvious and easiest alternative model whose simple location in space seemed to predestine it to that role: the East.

The invasion of Eastern ideas began in the 19th century with Madame Blavatski's [Theosophical Society](#), university orientalism, and the fashion for Eastern themes in the fine arts and music. It soon underwent a considerable upgrade at the hands of Carl-G. Jung, the erudite Romanian historian Mircea Eliade, and numerous scholars of the first order, such as [Heinrich Zimmer](#), [Count Dürckheim](#), and [Ananda K. Coomaraswamy](#).

But until then everything was nothing but the rescue of spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic heritages of genuine value, which could in no way harm Western civilization. On the contrary, the fact that it opened itself to these values only showed the authenticity of its universalistic pretensions and its capacity to absorb, without prejudice, all kinds of knowledge.

The cult of the East only took on the features of a bellicose confrontation through the works and influence of a personage considered to be one of the greatest incarnations of reactionary traditionalism

in the 20th century, whose decisive contributions to the "[spirit of '68](#)" are still the best kept secret the world has ever seen.

I refer to the French doctrinaire [René Guénon](#) (1886-1951), who ended his days in Egypt as a devout Muslim. His 1924 book [East and West](#), under the appearances of a mere comparative study, is a veritable declaration of war, culminating in the outline of a plan for the cultural and even military occupation of the West by Eastern forces, especially Islamic ones.

Whether through genuine ignorance or cunning, Guénon reduces the civilization of the West to a mixture of capitalism, scientific materialism, and popular pseudo-religions. The last residues of spirituality he sees in it are the decadent Freemasonry and Catholicism reduced to an "exoteric" perspective, no longer in touch with the "sources of the primordial Tradition." Sources located, of course, in the East, more specifically in the regions of Central Siberia, Malaysia and Tibet, which [Ferdynand Ossendowski](#) visited in 1920, according to the narrative in [Bêtes, Hommes et Dieux](#), where the famous explorer says he entered the underground sanctuary of the "King of the World" himself. Coincidence or not, these regions are the same where most of the "Seven Towers of the Devil" are concentrated, irradiating centers, according to Guénon himself, of diabolical influence over the entire planet.

Of all the signs of the Catholic spiritual boom at the time—the apparitions of Fatima, the miracles of St. Padre Pio, the flourishing of Catholic intellectual life in the first half of the 20th century—Guénon wanted nothing to do with any of it. For him, anything that did not have a direct channel with the unknown temples of [Agartha](#) and [Shambhala](#) was at most exotericism, if not antitradition, pure and simple.

From this one-sided picture of a spiritually devastated West, Guénon saw only three possible ways out: the ultimate fall into barbarism, the restoration of the Catholic Church under the secret guidance of Islamic spiritual masters, and the occupation of the West by Islam, either by cultural invasion or *manu militari*.

In contrast to the cartoonish reductionism of his vision of the West, his image of Eastern civilizations was so charmingly idealized that he even proclaimed that Bolshevism would never penetrate China, so solid were the "spiritual defenses" of the Chinese tradition. Not only did it penetrate, but it installed a lasting genocidal tyranny whose violence far surpassed that of the Soviet Union and satellite countries.

A powerful magnet in the vicinity must have disoriented for a moment the needle of the "infallible compass" that [Michel Valsân](#) believed he saw in René Guénon.

The next generation of Guénonians did not change their rhetoric. [Seyyed Hossein Nasr](#), in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (1981), describes the entire intellectual history of the West as mere preparation for the advent of the Savior, René Guénon, and, in *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (1966), only confronts the beautiful ideals of Islamic civilization with the sad realities of the West, without it occurring to him that this comparison of the virtues of the one with the defects of the other might well be reversed.

For decades Orientalist devotion was a private cult within groups of intellectuals and wealthy aficionados, inspiring innumerable pilgrimages in search of "wisdom" and the creation of centers of meditation and spiritual retreat such as [Monte Verità](#) in Ascona, Switzerland, Hermann Keyserling's "School of Wisdom" in Darmstadt, Germany, and Georges Gurdjeff's famous chateau at the [Prieuré des Basses Loges](#) in Avon, France.

From the 1950s on, however, promoted in large part by the show business industry and by celebrities in letters and the arts, the fashion for oriental doctrines and practices expanded to huge swaths of the population in Europe and especially in the U.S., constituting a phenomenon that can only be correctly described as mass de-culturation—surely the heaviest blow suffered by Western civilization before the Islamic invasion that was to come in the 1990s.

The contribution of the Beat generation poets to the popularization of Eastern fashion was not small:

"The Beats not only adapted the wisdom teachings of the East to a new, specifically American terrain; they also articulated these teachings in a vernacular, jazzy, street rhythm, opening to the popular audience what had been the domain of stifling academics and pompous translators...The voice of American poets retold the teachings of the Buddha to the general public for the first time."

By 1962, with the founding of the [Esalen Institute](#) in Big Sur, California, the "spiritual" revolt against the modern West had reached the dimensions of a unified, self-conscious movement. The Institute quickly became the agglutinating center of what would later come to be called the New Age.

To make matters worse, in America as in Europe, the Orientalist wave came together with a new style

of cultural criticism that spread rapidly in the media and in universities, represented by the Frankfurt School and by the likes of [C. Wright Mills](#), [Margaret Mead](#), and [Saul Alinsky](#), among others, from whose writings modern Western civilization emerged, at best, exactly as René Guénon had described it: an anomaly, a deviation from the universal human pattern, a disease that had to be eliminated at all costs. Although operating in seemingly distinct fields, culturally New Age and the New Left were working toward the same end. In fact, without the concomitant contribution of New Age, the New Left would have been limited to the superficial field of politics *stricto sensu*, without support in the tremendous revolution of customs, feelings, and lifestyles that marked the 1960s-1970s.

Here the strictly observant Guénonian or Schuonian may claim that his masters, as well as all "authentically traditional" esoteric organizations, abhor New Age and therefore can have nothing to do with the vulgar Orientalism of Esalen and the Beats or with any other form of "pseudo-initiation" or "counter-initiation." But this argument is innocuous, for, as one of René Guénon's most eminent disciples and interpreters observed,

"Hostile on principle to a world governed by that metaphysical 'Newton's law' which goes by the name of 'cyclic degeneration,' initiatory organizations and secret societies can only play a double role, apparently contradictory but, in re, complementary: to restore, for each 'qualified' individual, the original level of consciousness, designated as the primordial or adamic state, and, less avowedly, to accelerate in a 'subversive' mode the process of collective decadence which alone will allow the advent of a new cycle."

A more explicit confession of the discrete partnership of "initiation" with "pseudo-initiation" and "counter-initiation" cannot be asked for.

Olavo de Carvalho (1947-2022) was a Brazilian philosopher who lived in the United States. His books cover a wide array of topics, including Aristotle, Descartes, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Christian philosophy. For his work, he was honored with the Grand Cross of the Rio Branco Order, Brazil's highest award, by President Jair Bolsonaro. His most recent book in English is [Machiavelli or the Demonic Confusion](#).

Featured image: "Le Rapt" ["the Abduction"], by Henri Félix Emmanuel Philippoteaux, painted in 1844.

