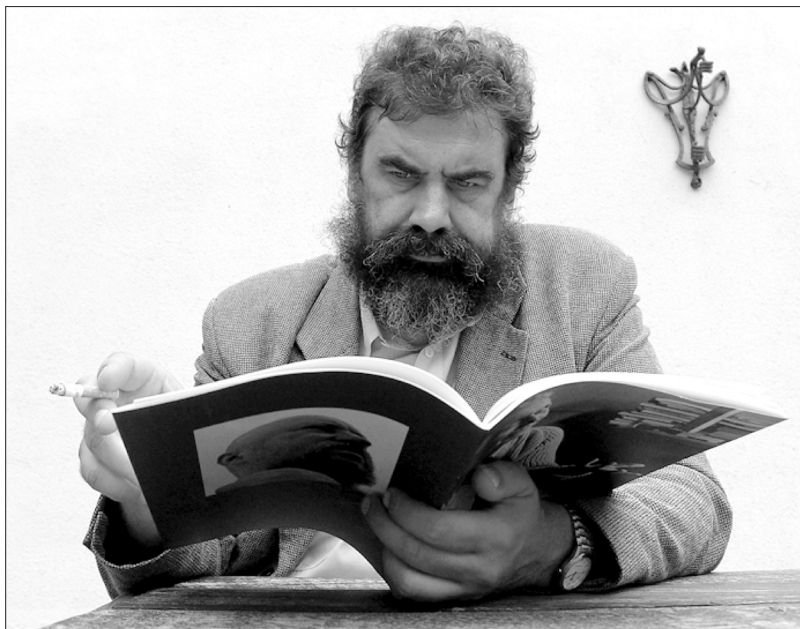


In memoriam Algis Uždavinyš

26 April 1962 – 25 July 2010



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‘Wo gehen wir hin?’

‘Immer nach Hause’

(Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*)

Salutator ab origine perenni

Professor Algis Uždavinyš, an active member of the editorial board of the journal *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*; the head of the Department of Humanities at Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, Kaunas Faculty; and art critic, philosopher and intellectual famous in Lithuania for his books on the Ancient Near East, Egypt, and Islamic and Hellenic traditional mythology and metaphysics, died suddenly in his sleep of an apparent heart attack on July 25 in his native village of Kabeliai. He was 48.

Uždavinyš grew up in Druskininkai, a rather small spa town on the Nemunas River in southern Lithuania, but a substantial and vibrant cultural centre of grav-

ity. Precisely in this city, near the borders of Belarus and Poland, lived and worked Lithuanian fin de siècle visionary painter and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Playing as a schoolboy in the vicinity of Druskininkai, which is graced by picturesque landscapes such as Raigardas Valley, where according to folk legend there once stood a great city later swallowed up by the earth, Uždavinys not only was fascinated by the pristine beauty of nature, but also was inspired to write school-age novels about Native Americans Indians. Only after several decades would he realize that the visionary traditions of the Indians of the Great Plains and Sioux dream seekers as also the immaculate Nature are an integral and inherent part of the metaphysics of Religio Perennis as interpreted by Frithjof Schuon, Swiss Sufi traditionalist and founder of the Alawiyya (later Maryamiyya) order.

After secondary school, he moved to Vilnius and in 1980 entered the former *State Art Institute of Lithuania* (later renamed the Vilnius Academy of Art). Although the Soviet Union in the last years of Leonid Brezhnev was nothing but depressing, there nevertheless were a lot underground cultural activities. At that time, anyone could come upon Uždavinys almost every day in the capital's Old Town café society. He not only lived a serious bohemian live, but also was deep in books: one day I met him with George Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* in one pocket and a Rajneesh volume about Sufism in the other. Uždavinys was also immersed in Carlos Castaneda, Herbert Güenther, Tarthang Tulku, and many other spiritual and academic books about which nobody even dared to hear a word about in official institutions of higher education but which in spite of everything went from hand to hand.

While preparing to write his graduate research paper about the symbolism of Persian carpets, Uždavinys stumbled upon a book by Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, which became his first serious encounter with Traditionalist thought. In this elegant work of Bakhtiar, a disciple of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, he met with ideas about the inner dimension of Islam, the expression of hidden archetypes in concrete symbols, and Sufi themes such as the descending arc of Creation, the foundation of the human soul, and its return through the ascending arc of the Quest. Then he found books by Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr and writings of such founding fathers of Traditionalism and implacable enemies of the Modern World as Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy and René Guénon. He also traveled to Uzbekistan but his attempt to visit the mausoleum of Khwaja Naqshband Bukhari was unsuccessful. This was the beginning of his sailing to Byzantium and recovering of the monuments of unaging intellect. He became a wanderer through a foreign country who returns to his origin and forthcoming apocalypse of the collapse of the Soviet Union but hasten his anxious *Morgenlandfahrt* to the goal through social cataclysms and no less disturbing *noches oscuras del alma*.

In the first years of the last decade of the 20th century, Uždavinys reached the ultimate station of his journey and at last obtained, in the words of the poet, that 'island, grown into the current's foam'. Trying to break the then unassailable boundaries of a constrained society, he began to write letters to some of the Traditionalists in the West, and at least a few of his letters reached Martin Lings, who by chance before World War II and after graduating from Oxford went to Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, where he taught Anglo-Saxon and Middle English.

To this not least contributed his first visits to London and the opportunity there to make the acquaintance of the latest Neoplatonic lore. Especially important was coming into contact with such a luminary of the study of Plotinus as A.H. Armstrong. But he entered into this somewhat dry-as-dust territory of word-study not by the normal academic grounding in classical philology but by the back entrance of spiritual quest. And that delivered him from all those mysosophical dichotomies of mythos versus logos, of Athens of Reason and philosophical discourse and Jerusalem of Faith and religious practice and all that questions of the binary of noetical contemplation and strict adherence to scholarship infected by Age of Enlightenment orthodoxy.

To be engaged in scholarly study was for him not some banal fideistic interpretation or exegesis, but a real hieratic returning or Islamic *al-ta'wil*, leading from a periphery to the source from which the former gets its reality. The intuition that sensible and intelligible worlds are intimately related by the Divine Mercy which provides a correspondence between the two realms allowed Uždavinys to look to our work not as a refuge of demons trying to corrupt and seduce the soul but as 'a sacred space of theurgic symbols leading to the knowledge of our own solar self'.

This solar theology of metaphysical reversion and ascent into the solar world have disclosed to him both the Neoplatonic framework of remaining, procession, and return (*mone, proodos, epistrophe*) of Islamic mysticism and the chronologically even more archaic seeds of such theorizing in the wider context of the sacred traditions of the ancient Near East. Beyond the grand cultural narratives of Classical antiquity anagogic path of Platonic tradition unfolded the vast Mediterranean Sea of most different interlocking civilisations ultimately deriving from 'perennial themes common to the ancient Near Eastern, Mesopotamian, and especially Egyptian religions'.

As ancient hieratic philosophy was inseparable from the rites of purification and served as a means of spiritual reintegration and unification to be engaged in, it means to become more and more same as it and by that resemblance to regain wings leading to a union with the noetic Sun. Uždavinys more and more played the vocal persona of Hermes, who in diverse hypostases is an incarnation of the plethora of the Mediterranean tradition of wisdom.

Among his books we could mention *Versmių labirintai: Proklo hermeneutinė filosofija ir mistagogija* (2002), *Helėniškoji filosofija nuo Numenino iki Sirijano* [Hellenic

Philosophy from Numenius to Syrianus] (2003), *Egipto mirusiųjų knyga* [Egyptian Book of the Dead] (2003), *The Golden Chain. Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy* (2004), *Hermio Trismegisto išminties kelias* [Hermes Trismegistus: The Way of Wisdom] (2005), *Simbolių ir atvaizdų interpretacijos problema senovės civilizacijose* [Understanding the Symbols and Images of Ancient Civilisations] (2006), *Sufizmas islamo civilizacijoje* [Sufism in Islamic Civilisation] (2007), *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth. From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism* (2008), *Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity* (2010).

Uždavinys is survived by his wife Virginija, his most devoted assistant and artist, and their two daughters. And what remains now is that eternal divine calm and transcendental peace (*sakinah*). *Inna li-llahi wa inna ilaihi raji'un* (Truly, to Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return, *Quran*, Sura Al-Baqara, verse 156).

Kazimieras SEIBUTIS

Vilnius, 2010, Laylat al-Qadr—Eid ul-Fitr