



Saluator ab origine perenni

(In memoriam Algis Uzdaviny's (1962 04 26 - 2010 07 25))

"Wo gehen wir hin?" "Immer nach Hause"
(Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*)

Algis Uzdaviny's, Head of the Department of Humanities at Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, Kaunas Faculty, art critic, philosopher and intellectual very well known in Lithuania for his books on Ancient Near East, Egypt, Islamic and Hellenic traditional mythology and metaphysics, suddenly died in his sleep of an apparent heart attack on July 25 in his own native village of Kabeliai. He was 48.

Uzdaviny's from childhood grew up in Druskininkai, a rather tiny, but of substantial and vibrant cultural gravity, spa town on the Nemunas river in southern Lithuania. Precisely in this city, close to 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

vicinities of Druskininkai, graced by such picturesque landscape as Raigardas valley, in which according to folk legends once upon time stood great city later swallowed up by the earth, Uzdavinys was not only fascinated by the pristine beauty of the nature, but also was inspired to write school age novels about Native Americans Indians. Only after some few decades he would realize that visionary traditions of the Indians of the Great Plains and Sioux dream seekers as also the immaculate Nature are integral and inherent part of the metaphysics of Religio Perennis as interpreted by Frithjof Schuon, Swiss Sufi Traditionalist and founder of the Alawiyya (later the Maryamiyya) order.

After a secondary-school he moved to Vilnius and in 1980 entered the former *State Art Institute of Lithuania* (later Vilnius Academy of Art). Although Soviet Union in the last years of Leonid Brezhnev was anything but depressing place nevertheless there were a lot underground cultural activities. At that time almost every day everyone can come upon Uzdavinys in the capital's Old Town café society. He lived not only a heavy 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 some Rajneesh's volume about Sufism in other. Uzdavinys also was immersed in Carlos Castaneda, Herbert Günther, Tarthang Tulku and many other spiritual and academic books, about which nobody even dear to hear a word in the official institutions of higher education but which in spite of everything went from hand to hand.

Preparing to write the Graduate Research Paper about symbolism of the Persian carpets Uzdavinys stumbled upon book of Laleh Bakhtiar *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest* which became his first serious encounter with the Traditionalist thought. In this elegant album of Seyyed Hossein Nasr American disciple of Persian origins he met with ideas about inner dimension of Islam, expressing hidden archetypes in concrete symbols, and such Sufi themes 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 of Frithjof Schuon, Titus

Burckhardt, Martin Lings, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and other luminaries of Maryamiyya, as also 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 mazar of Khwaja Naqshband Bukhari, was unsuccessful. This was beginning to his sailing to Byzantium and recovering of the monuments of unageing 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 a social cataclysms and no less disturbing *noches oscuras del alma*.

In the first years of the last decade of the 20th century Uzdavinys has reached the ultimate station of his journey and at last has obtained, in the poet words, 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 Traditionalist in the West and at least few of letters reached Martin Lings, who by chance before the World War Two after graduating from Oxford went to Vytautas Magnus University, in Kaunas, where he was teaching Anglo-Saxon and Middle English.

In one of these letters Uzdavinys clearly expressed his wish to kiss the hand of Frithjof Schuon though at that time he didn’t know that this remarkable Swiss visionary have the preeminent position in Maryamiyya as a founder and a shaykh. By this pneumatic gesture of self-humiliation Uzdavinys in some mysterious way praying for “the hand of Allah over his hand” made as it were an oath of allegiance to the shaykh (*bay’ah*) and as a reward get respectable position of having a “footing of truth” (*qadam sidq*, Qu’ran 10, 2).

This cathartic process was also bestowed Certainty (*al-yaqin*), or rather *haqq al-yaqin*, Certainty as supreme truth, a possibility of being in the immovable center of circle.

Shortly after that Uzdavinys converted to Islam and as neophyte Uways 'Abd al-Hakim made the Hajj to Makkah, where he participated in *umrah*, or lesser pilgrimage, but he was not much enthusiastic about his experiences in the Holy Center of Islam. As his new name suggests he was named in remembrance of Uwais al-Qarni, a muslim resident of Qaran who converted to Islam during Muhammad's lifetime, though they never met in person. After him in the vocabulary of Sufism was named form of spiritual transmission between two individuals without the need for physical interaction between them.

Uzdavinys was also more *in occultis decretis toto anima se submittere*, as is said about Islam spirituality in *Nostra Aetate* and more Perennialist in Schuonian sense and somewhat less Islamic. And Schuon's conviction was "that Islam was not so much an end in itself as means to an end, that end being the Perennial Philosophy or the *religio perennis* (perennial religion)" as remarked in his book *Against the Modern World* Mark Sedgwick. Shaykh himself confessed that he "was always painstaking in questions of holy rules, but on the other hand I stood above all on the ground of the Religio Perennis and did not allow myself to be imprisoned by forms that for myself could have no validity".

Uzdavinys also believed that exoteric framework of esoteric practice was less important. Besides by naming his order Maryamiyya Schuon indirectly implied that by Maryam name he embraces all the three monotheistic religions and religion in general giving by this to his opponents opportunity to say that he moving from Islam toward a superficial and facile universalism" ignoring the need for "genuine Muhammadan faith.

After this initiatic encounter Uzdavinys could choose some more usual traditionalist career, but he rather have been pushed to embark on mainstream academia voyage. To this not least contributed his first visits to London and opportunity here to make the acquaintance with latest Neoplatonic lore, especially important was coming into contact with such luminary of Plotinus study as A. H. Armstrong. But he has entered into this

somewhat dry-as-dust territory of word-study not by the normal academic grounding in Classical Philology but by back entrance of spiritual quest. And that delivered him from all that mysosophical dichotomies of mythos versus logos, of Athens of the Reason and philosophical discourse and Jerusalem of the Faith and religious practice, all that questions of the binary of noetical contemplation and strict adherence to scholarship, infected by the Age of Enlightenment orthodoxy.

To be engaged in the 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. Intuition that sensible and intelligible worlds are intimately related by the Divine Mercy which provides a correspondence between these two realms allowed Uzdavyns to look to our work not a refuge of demons trying to corrupt and seduce soul but as “a sacral 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 not only Neoplatonic framework of remaining, procession, and return (*mone, proodos, epistrophe*) of Islamic mysticism, but chronologically even more archaic seeds of such theorizing in wider context of sacral traditions of Ancient Near East traditions of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Beyond the grand cultural narratives of Classical antiquity anagogic path of Platonic tradition has unfolded the vast Mediterranean Sea of most different interlocking civilizations ultimately deriving from “the 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 union with the noetic Sun. And faithful to the meaning of a second part of his name ‘Abd al-Hakim – Slave of the Wise - and

also to The Prophet's commandment to "seek knowledge even in China" (*'Utlub il 'ilma wa law fis-Sin*) Uzdavinys more and more played the vocal persona of Hermes who in diverse hypostases is incarnation of plethora of Mediterranean wisdom tradition.

Among his books we could mention *Versmių labirintai: Proklo hermeneutinė filosofija* (2002), *Helėniškoji filosofija nuo Numenino iki Sirijano* (2003), *Egipto mirusiųjų knyga* (2003), *The Golden Chain. Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy* (2004), *Hermio Trismegisto išminties kelias* (2005), *Simbolių ir atvaizdų interpretacijos problema senovės civilizacijose* (2006), *Sufizmas Islamo civilizacijoje* (2007), *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth. From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism* (2008), *Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity* (2010).

Uzdavinys is survived by his wife Virginija, his most devoted assistrix 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