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SACRED DISCOURSE AND SECULAR SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE LIFE NARRATIVES OF PARAMHASA YOGANANDA AND ACHARYA RAJNEESH

by

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I will remain a source of inspiration for my people. Acharya Rajneesh

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ABSTRACT

SACRED DISCOURSE AND SECULAR SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE LIFE NARRATIVES OF PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA AND ACHARYA RAJNEESH
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Spiritual autobiographies on the one hand reflect a unique experience, and on the other hand they are a mirror of the society and culture that constitute their background. In this dissertation I examine the differences between Paramhansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) and Osho Rajneesh's *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* (1984) in order to show the difference between the sacred outlook of Yogananda and the secular spiritual perspective of Rajneesh. The movement from the cultural moment of 1946 to 1984 reflects the modernization of the Indian tradition.

Key Words: Paramhansa Yogananda; *Autobiography of a Yogi*; Osho Rajneesh; *Glimpses of a Golden Chldhood*; life writing; spiritual enlightenment; self-realization; modernity; from hierarchy to individualism; sacred outlook.

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KISA ÖZET

PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA VE ACHARYA BAJNEESH'IN HAYAT ANLATILARINDA KUTSAL SÖYLEM VE LAIK RUHSAL PERSPEKTIF
Mauro De Matteis

Maneviyat merkezli otobiyografiler, bir yandan eşsiz bir deneyimi yansıtırlar; öbür yandan da arka planını oluşturdukları toplumun ve kültürün aynaları işlevini görürler. Bu çalışmamda, Yogananda'nın kutsal bakışı ile Rajneesh'in seküler bakış açısı arasındaki farkı göstermek için Paramhansa Yogananda'nın *Bir Yogi'nin Otobiografisi* ile Osho Rajneesh'in *Altın Bir Çocukluğun Göze Çarpanları*'nı inceliyorum. Bu hareket, 1946'nın kültürel hareketinden 1984 kadarki Hint geleneğinin çağdaşlaşmasını yansıtır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Paramhansa Yogananda; Bir Yogi'nin Otobiografisi; Osho Rajneesh; Altın Bir Çocukluğun Göze Çarpanları; Yaşamı Yazmak; Manevi Aydınlanma; Kendini Keşfetme; Modernite; Hiyerarşiden Bireyselciliğe; Kutsal Bakış

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INTRODUCTION

TWO INDIAN SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES IN AN AGE OF GLOBAL CHANGE

> At this point in his story, Shree Yukteswar turned his gaze fully on mine. "My son," he said, smiling in the moonlight, "you are the disciple that, years ago, Babaji promised to send me." (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 326)

> People are becoming enlightened all the time. But to find a man like me – who has travelled thousands of ways, in thousands of lives, and has gathered the fragrance of millions of flowers like a honeybee – is difficult. (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 23)

In his seminal work about contemporary life writing, James Olmes intimates that a person's self is not a monolithic phenomenon, because all the people and the events of a man's life contribute to create his identity, which eventually consists in the sum total of his experiences. When an author writes his autobiography, he is not merely delineating a character he can identify with, or stating actualities about himself: he is giving expression to a whole world made of the involvement with individuals like him and with shared ideas, because on the one hand nobody exists in isolation, and on the other hand in *any* human being's life there are neither facts nor relationships without emotional attachments, interpretations, and meanings.

This holds all the more true for the spiritual life-writing of a contemporary self realized author and guru such as Osho – which is exemplary both because it captivatingly conveys an outstanding individual experience, and because it represents a crystal clear mirror of its time and of the society that constitutes its background. More in general, however, *all* "enlightened" autobiographies (including a traditional and stereotypical one such as that of Yogananda) are primarily concerned with the message the writer seeks to deliver, which is intrinsic to his way of being and is colored by a persuasive strategy that reflects the quality of his compassion, the power of his mind, and (most importantly) his peculiar *Weltanschauung*. Accordingly, in this dissertation I examine the exemplary aspect I have pointed out above as far as two Indian spiritual autobiographies are concerned: Paramhansa Yogananda's

celebrated *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1945) and Osho Rajneesh's *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* (1984), which is less known to the average reader. These works were published at the peak of their authors' careers as spiritual teachers, and they sum up their life experience. Apart from their artistic merit, their interest lies in the fact that they belong respectively to the beginning and to the end of a period of global change in which the process of decolonization came to fruition, and the non-Western world (in this case, India) took a stance with regard to the scientific and individualistic outlook that I describe in the first chapter as constitutive of "secular modernity."

Indeed, Yogananda wrote his masterpiece just a few years before his death, at the end of World War II, while Osho talked extensively about his life in 1984 and then disappeared in 1990, on the eve of the fall of the Berlin wall, shortly before the USSR collapsed and the political *status quo* of the Cold War was broken. At that time, contrary to Francis Fukuyama's expectation that history would soon end, what the Hindus call "the wheel of karma"[1] was again set in motion on a planetary scale. Today the notion that individual identity is paramount and independent from what Charles Taylor calls sociocultural "embedment" is called into question. Consequently, collective-oriented views such as religious fundamentalism and nationalism take center stage, and assert themselves once more as forces to be reckoned with in a new globalized international context.

Although many things have changed since Osho left the body, his message is far from appearing superseded when we appraise it through the living example of the protagonist of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* and through the ideas he fights for: his teaching is still inspirational and fully relevant in the present situation. Indeed, Rajneesh shows that all collective identities are fictitious and foster division, and only aware human beings can find creative ways to bridge the cultural differences that obtain between them, without necessarily controverting each other. A willing cooperation between people and nations and a creative synthesis between different worldviews are both a necessity for everybody's survival and a moral (and esthetic[2]) imperative; and they become possible only when mature *individuals* resolve to take

[1] In this context, "historical change" is a fitting equivalent Western terms for the same idea.

[2] War is primitive and *ugly*; cooperation, peace, and creativity are civilized and *beautiful*. Indeed, Osho states in his autobiography that the artistic experience comes close to the religious experience.

responsibility for the world they live in. In fact, writes Osho,

> We are fortunate that the world is now so small that you cannot be local, you have to be universal. In spite of yourself, you cannot be local. You have to think of Confucius, you have to think of Krishna, you have to think of Socrates, you have to think of Bertrand Russell. Unless you think of the world as one single unit, and all the contributions of different geniuses, you will not be able to talk to the modern man. The gap will be too big […] almost impossible to bridge. The only way to bridge it is that the person who has come to know should not stop at his own knowing, should not be contented with giving expression only to what he has come to know. He has to make a tremendous effort to know all the languages. (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 78)

Based on these assumptions, in the following chapters I do a close reading of the autobiographies of Yogananda and Rajneesh and I compare them from an angle that is meant 1) to underline the difference of their perspectives about cultural and political change, and 2) to pronounce on their rhetorical effectiveness. Accordingly, I consider but do not emphasize their similarity, which is due to the fact that self-realized writers authored them, and that they are associated in the Indian context. Consequently, in my work I privilege Osho Rajneesh's cross-cultural and "Westernizing" ideational viewpoint, and I use it as an interpretive key along with that of authors such as Jiddu Krishnamurti, Camus, and other writers whose ideas bear either an implicit or an acknowledged similarity with Rajneesh's secular/spiritual outlook.

So far as traditional wisdom is concerned, the life narratives of Paramhansa Yogananda and Acharya Rajneesh (also known as "Bhagwan" and "Osho") exemplify the import of an ancient Indian saying: the paths to enlightenment and the teachings of self-realized gurus are like rivers – which differ from one another because they adjust to the lands they are crossing, but ultimately lead to the same oceanic experience. In conclusion, it bears underscoring that both works aim at disseminating a distinctive spiritual message, but while one has a pre-modern character and belongs to a sacred spiritual context, the other reveals an original synthesis between spirituality and secularism, and it is best framed against the background of the cultural and historical process known as "modernization of the Indian tradition." Accordingly, this dissertation analyzes and explains them in a comparative perspective by pointing out the features that place them apart from the

vantage points of self realization and modernity (chapter one); power, politics, individualism, and conformity (chapter two); the meeting between East and West, heroism, the images of death (chapter three); and innovation and continuity (chapter four).

Yogananda's work gives voice to a hierarchical outlook rooted in the Holy Scriptures: in an age of global change, it advocates a return to the past. Conversely, Osho's autobiography shows that meditation joined with the unconditional affirmation of one's individuality is the spiritual path that best answers to the changed circumstances brought about by modernity, and he assimilates the views of Western psychoanalysis and contemporary political theory. Correspondingly, *Autobiography of a Yogi* reflects an enlightened devotee who belongs to the sacred tradition of a *guru-shishya*, a line of masters, while *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* highlights a guru who claims he has attained self-realization only through his own efforts and maintains he represents a totally new beginning.

In the way of a final remark about the import of the central themes that characterize Yogananda's autobiography and Rajneesh's memoirs, I surmise that they point to diametrically different existential directions. In the former work the main tropes are old age and immortality, and the protagonist's virtues are obedience and occult knowledge, in accord with the primacy of the ancient sacred scriptures that Paramhansa advocates. Conversely, the latter celebrates youth as a personification of new spiritual beginnings and modernity, and its hero is a spiritual anarchist and a rebel. As it happens, the account of Osho's way to enlightenment suggests that life eternal is possible only in the vertical dimension of the present moment[3] – which opens up only the moment one accepts death and lets go of the ego.

When all things are considered, in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* a human horizon takes the place of the supernatural one that we find in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and a new message of self-realization with rebellious overtones is passed on from a fresh source not to followers, but to the free and self-centered fellow human beings who will be bold enough to receive it – in an age of political change and social reform where the need for increased collective awareness is most urgently felt.

[3] Jiddu Krishnamurti is in agreement with Rajneesh on this point. In *The First and Last Freedom* he writes: "The eternal or the timeless is now" (Krishnamurti 2013, 301).

CHAPTER ONE

THE "AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SELF-REALIZATION" IN CONTEXT

> This is not going to be an orthodox, conventional autobiography. It is not an autobiography at all, just fragments of a life reflected in a thousand of mirrors. (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 237)

> Yogananda is the first Hindu sannyasin to have written an autobiography – *Autobiography of a Yogi* – otherwise, the sannyasins have always insisted that they don't have any past. They efface their past. They have only the present; the now is all they have – hence the freedom, the absolute freedom, of the sannyasin. Because he has no past he is not imprisoned anywhere. He has no autobiography. (Osho Rajneesh 1977, 216)

1. 1 Abstract

In this chapter 1) I present a short biographical outline of the authors I study; 2) I examine the key feature of their autobiographies, which is that self-realized authors have written them; 3) I adopt a culturological approach; and 4) I describe the background of my dissertation in terms of cultural change in India. More specifically, I propose that with his life writing Rajneesh gives us an idiosyncratic reinterpretation of the Indian spiritual tradition. This new development is best understood as part of an overall cross-cultural process known as "modernization," which I define in the context of related concepts such as "individualism" and "secularism." Likewise, I set off in contrast the two autobiographies in order to point out both the innovative relevance and the rhetorical value of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*.[4]

In short, what I call Osho Rajneesh's "autobiography of self-realization" a) differs from Paramhansa Yogananda's life writing; b) is politically progressive; and c) appeals to a contemporary reader, inasmuch as its author draws the most radical spiritual consequences from the modern notion of the individual. The main sources I

[4] Most of the published autobiographical episodes concerning the author's life are included in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*: this book is the transcription of the series of talks in which Osho first talked extensively about his life. *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* was published later, and it includes additional periods of Rajneesh's life. Several additional episodes can be found in other published records of Osho Rajneesh's lectures.

make use of are *Modernization of the Indian Tradition* by Yogendra Singh, *Memory and Narrative* by James Olmes, *Homo Hierarchicus* by Louis Dumont, and a selection of works written by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Charles Taylor about hierarchy, modernization, and secularity.

1.2 Biographical Details

The biographical material about Osho and Yogananda that we find in published books and Internet sources is vast, and here I give just the essential information that are directly relevant for the points I make in this dissertation. Paramhansa Yogananda (1883-1952) was near to Gandhi's political and religious positions, and followed in the wake of the pre-independence reform movement known as Indian Renaissance. In the course of his life he was a witness to the technology-based spread of industrialization at the turn of the last century, the end of colonialism, and the outset of the Atomic Age, and conceived his divinely appointed mission to be that of bringing the meditation technique of Kriya Yoga to the West. Other Indian spiritual masters had been to the U.S. before him, but he was the first ever to spend the better part of his life there, and to leave a permanent mark on the American imagination. A disciple of Swami Sri Yukteswar, his teaching centered on the principles of Patanjali's Yoga, on the essential unity of Hinduism and Christianity, and on the need to reconcile religion with science.

Acharya Rajneesh (1931-1990) received enlightenment in 1953, a year after Yogananda's death, but he was never the disciple of any guru, and the flowering of his spiritual teaching coincided with that of the student movements of the 1960s and the '70s in the U.S. and Europe. A brilliant academician and a philosopher by training, he was also a very prolific and original writer. From 1966 to 1990 he gave initiation to a growing number of disciples and delivered lectures that sparked controversy for the outspoken and unorthodox views they propounded on spirituality, politics, and society at large. Unlike Yogananda, who sympathized with the Hindu renunciation tradition, he argued that *sannyas*, one of the oldest practices of asceticism and spiritual discipline in India, was based on sexual repression and needed radical reformation. In a similar vein, he maintained also that the true mystic is a rebel against the vested interests of institutionalized religions and the political establishment – which he unsparingly criticized, and epitomized as "the priest and the politician."

Far from showing disinterest for worldly matters or behaving like detached intellectual observers, Yogananda and Osho were first and foremost charismatic religious leaders who commanded a vast following and founded religious organizations that survived them. They agreed (at least in principle) on the idea that a spiritual person renounces *attachment* to the world, not the world itself ("meditation in the marketplace" was Osho's rendering of this ancient wisdom)–so the words they spoke and wrote were matched by decisive action and had a social impact that the people in power considered disruptive, and often met with open hostility. Attempts were made on their life, and lawsuits were filed against both of them, but while one confronted opposition with equanimity, the other deliberately provoked it.

Rajneesh (who now appears with Yogananda in the Hindu Website list of the most important Indian spiritual figures of all time) was a far more scandalous figure, and caused a sensation that is beginning to be put into perspective only now, many years after his demise, when India has proceeded a long way along the path of modernization. Not only did Osho earn the appellation of "sex guru" for allowing free sexual relationships inside his ashram, and of "guru of the rich" for the Rolls-Royces he owned and for his declaration that material affluence is the prerequisite of an authentic spiritual search, but after founding an International Commune in Oregon in 1981, he was deported for breaking immigration laws and was refused an entry visa in twenty-one countries, until in 1985 he had to return to India. In the event, he was also accused of complicity with the criminal activities that his secretary Sheela had been convicted for, although this allegation was not substantiated.

1. 3 The Autobiography of Self-Realization

When we examine the texts that have been published as autobiographies under the name of my authors, we notice a paradoxical situation: Osho's account of his life is more humanly convincing than Yogananda's, and therefore it is nearer to what in the West today we recognize as life writing. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by comparison, is stereotyped, and artificial. Yet, while Yogananda asks us to believe in the actuality of what he writes (however outlandish that may be), Rajneesh, who is far more plausible, undermines any notion of his own veracity by declaring that an enlightened person *cannot have an autobiography*, because his ego has disappeared. The past cannot exist for a self-realized narrator who lives moment-by-moment, like a small child: that is why Osho considered Yogananda's autobiography a fairy tale and a

hoax. Paramhansa's position is didascalic and unproblematic, and rests on the pre-modern bedrock of memory: "'I remember' gives the strongest sort of belief support available to what is being said"–writes James Olmes in his seminal essay on autobiography and memory (Olmes 1998, 298).Conversely, in Rajneesh's life writing we don't have the conception that recollections are "things" to be found in the mind, but the insistence on the *experience* of remembering; we are not confronted with an author made omniscient by some arcane knowledge, but with a narrative participatory performance and a happening; we are not mystified by an "enlightened" autobiography, but challenged instead by the paradox of an autobiography *of* (not only *about*) self-realization. In *Autobiography of a Yogi* the main tropes are physical immortality, and the ancientness of the scriptures – symbols of a past that refuses to go, and that takes ontological precedence over the present. In *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, youth is sacred, not old age: indeed the past is existentially subsumed by the present, and the narrative acts as much as a vision than as a story.

In fact, the paradoxes I have mentioned have several implications. Silence is one of the metaphors that have represented spiritual enlightenment down the ages. A man who becomes totally silent, maintains Osho, loses all boundaries, all definitions. If he were to write an autobiography, it would be the story of the whole existence, and it would have no beginning and no end. Moreover, an unenlightened author may *want* to say the truth about himself, but he *would not be able to*, because he would lack the awareness to do that; while an enlightened writer would have an experiential understanding of his being, but not the desire to make use of it. The Eastern tradition makes clear that a person is self-realized when he/she is no longer identified with his/her memories and desires – a fact that in principle abolishes both the motivation and the substance of an autobiography. Traditionally, in India, even an ordinary pious man (not to mention a saint) would refrain from talking about himself and drawing attention to his person: it would be considered *ashistata*, bad manners. Yet Rajneesh is not afraid of being considered an egoist and he authors a life writing that centers on his own unrestrained and exceptional individuality, while Yogananda does all he can to erase himself, show his humbleness, and fulfill a reader's conventional expectations.

By looking at what motivates these contradictions, we understand why today Yogananda is likely to look dated to a modern (and particularly to a Western) reader, while Osho has what is needed to appeal to the potential disciples and the seekers he

addresses. Rajneesh is far from being the speaking or writing subject of an autobiography in the traditional sense. What we read in his pages is as much about the implications of being a self-realized author as it is about the meaning that the attainment of spiritual enlightenment acquires, when it takes place in the new circumstances brought about by modernization. Two aspects are worth considering: 1) the protagonist fulfills his potential by challenging society and becoming a true individual; and 2) self-realization deconstructs[5] the author as a fixed and stable entity. The former aspect is familiar in the modern European *Bildungsroman*, but appears innovative in the Indian autobiographical context of the 1970s and '80s. The latter points to the affinity between Osho's standpoint and the modernist dilemma about selfhood. In fact, from James Olmes' *Memory and Narrative* we learn that the self-centered works that Modernism has produced (Samuel Beckett's are a prime example) are premised on the notion that the ego is an illusion which memory can no longer keep together and uphold: "Not I!" cries out one of Beckett's narrative alter-egos. In Modernism the very notion of selfhood is in question, and contemporary Western self-centered narrative shows a subject that has lost all the ontological stability it used to enjoy when it was grounded in a sacred worldview. Three quotes from *Memory and Narrative* will help clarify this point, and show its connection with the argument I am advancing.

1) On one occasion, the German Modernist novelist and essayist Christa Wolf is reported to have said about one of her novels: "The book is autobiographical, but I do not feel any identity with my character" (Olmes 1998, 259). Rajneesh intimates exactly the same thing with very similar words in his autobiography, although he is not pointing to estrangement or alienation, but to the fact that to be self-realized means to lose definition and character. An enlightened person's memory may keep functioning well as far as practical matters are concerned, and yet may no longer necessarily provide a sense of continuity between past and present. 2) On another occasion, Wolf affirms that "What is past is not dead, is not even past. We cut ourselves off from it; we pretend to be strangers" (Olmes 1998, 257). As I have said above, in Osho's autobiography of self-realization only the present *really* exists, and

[5] "Deconstruction" is the translation and reinterpretation of *Destruktion*, a concept from Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* that Derrida applied to textual reading. Heidegger's term referred to a process of exploring the categories and concepts that tradition has imposed on a word, and the history behind them.

the past endures merely as a part that belongs to it: it exists *as* mind. An unenlightened albeit exceptionally gifted writer like Wolf will feel that the past is not past because she is identified with her mind: *any* identification, however painful, is better than the vertiginous freedom entailed by living totally in the present, without memories or expectations. 3) In "The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel" (the first of the critical essays that make up Theodor W. Adorno's *Notes on Literature*), the author writes: "In fact the contemporary novels that count, those in which *an unleashed subjectivity turns into his opposite* through its own momentum, are negative epics. They are testimonials to a state of affairs in which *the individual liquidates himself*, a state of affairs which converges with the pre-industrial situation that once seemed to guarantee a world replete with meaning" (Olmes 1998, 281, italics added).

In Rajneesh's life writing we do find plenty of evidence of "unleashed subjectivity": "Wrong or right, he declares, "I have never asked anybody whether I am right or wrong. Wrong or right, if I want to do it I want to do it and I will make it right. If it is wrong then I will make it right, but I have never allowed anyone to interfere with me. That has given me whatsoever I have – nothing much of this world, no bank balance, but what really matters: the taste of love, of truth, of eternity… In short, of oneself " (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 78). This statement is just one of the many examples I could make, and indeed it speaks volumes: it comes hardly as a surprise that some of Osho's critics have labeled his attitude "pathological narcissism."

The end result of so uncompromising a self-affirmation, though, is not pathological solipsism, and a sense of psychological disintegration and despair – outcomes that Adorno identifies as the negative epics of contemporary narrative. Meditation makes all the difference. Unleashed (or rather fearless) subjectivity turns into its opposite in the person of the blissful self-realized narrator, who proclaims he has become a non-ego because he has stopped identifying with his body and with his mind. Western individualistic secularism and Eastern spirituality merge in Osho to suggest a different conclusion to the negative socio-cultural trends adumbrated by Modernism; while the pre-industrial world replete with meaning that Adorno mentions belongs to the past, and constitutes the traditional background of Yogananda's autobiography.

To be sure, Rajneesh's autobiographical stance does resonate with a feeling of existential emptiness: on becoming awake and aware, an enlightened person finds that he has nothing to say or to write about himself: it was all a dream. Crucially,

though, in the perspective of self-realization, when the lie of the ego is exposed also despair vanishes, and gives way to a great longing to love and to share. For Gautama Buddha, compassion is the ultimate flowering of love and spiritual enlightenment, and it motivates the last desire that keeps a realized person from leaving the body: to do *all he can* to help others. This desire, in Osho, has both an autobiographical and a political impact: on the one hand it becomes "enlightened" self-narrative; and on the other hand it turns into an all-out militant attitude – which resembles the existential revolt of Camus' *The Rebel*, and is at odds with Yogananda's well-wishing and ideologically tame social reformism.

In the next chapters I will say more about Yogananda's attunement with a pre-modern Christian outlook, which is particularly evident in his discourse on miracles. Here I point out that, in a cross-cultural perspective, his naive assuredness in tackling the task of writing an "enlightened" autobiography mirrors St. Augustine's trust in the perfect correspondence between the inner world of memory and the outer world of the cosmos and of society that surrounds the subject: both are God's creation. Both remembrance and language (the two wings of autobiography) can be absolutely trusted, and the author finds inspiration and guidance in the knowledge of the Scriptures: individual and collective memories are essentially one and the same.

Given that spiritual autobiographies are defined by their rhetorical intention (to persuade and lead to salvation in the West; to show the path to self realization, and win disciples for a guru in the East), today Rajneesh's strategy looks more up-to-date and effective than Yogananda's, because it addresses individuals, and is in tune with the changes in collective awareness that are brought about by modernization. Yogananda (who appears as Sree Yukteswar's disciple in the first part of his book, but then hints at his own enlightenment by talking about his experience of samadhi[6]) is not aware of any psychological complexity, so he does not consider the implications of his being a self-realized writer – but we can learn much from what Osho has to say on this matter:

[6]According to the definition given by Diener, Erhard & Fischer-Schreiber, "*Samādhi* is a non-dualistic state of consciousness in which the consciousness of the experiencing subject becomes one with the experienced object" (http://www.blavatskyarchives.com).

> No biography can penetrate to the depths, particularly the psychological layers of a man. Especially if the man has come to the point where the mind is no longer relevant to the nothingness hidden in the center of an onion. You can peel it layer by layer, of course with tears in your eyes, but finally nothing is left, and that is the center of the onion; that is from where it had come in the first place. No biography can penetrate to the depths, particularly of a man who has known the no-mind also. I say "also" consideredly, because unless you know the mind, you cannot know the no-mind. This is going to be my small contribution to the world. (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 235)

The mind is made by memory, the Muse of autobiography. When one transcends the mind, memory remains only as a useful mechanism. While describing the nature of his autobiographical project, Rajneesh also imparts to his disciples a lesson about watchful detachment – the path that leads to emotional freedom. From this viewpoint, existential recollection is a meditative emotional catharsis that the guru performs as a teaching: how to relive consciously in the present the pains (and the joys) of the past, and in so doing, drop the burden of their emotional charge. "I want to unburden myself totally before I leave," says Rajneesh, "so that I can leave just as I have come – with nothing, not even a memory" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 192). The disciple is implicitly invited to do the same with his own life.

According to a conventional image, this process is compared to the peeling of an onion: in the end you are left with the nothingness that is your true nature, your original face. To get to no-mind and have a taste of no self, maintains Rajneesh, you must first know your mind, and face the discomfort of this encounter. The whole *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* shows the implications of aiming at real psychological depth in the context of a spiritual autobiography in which Eastern mystical insights, and Western psychological sophistication complement each other. You cannot crystallize an authentic self if you don't transcend the false identity you borrow from society, and if you don't stop living in the past – the scriptures are not a help, but an obstacle. The task is not easy: true individuality is risky; a fearless attitude is needed. That is why Osho often quoted Gurdjieff's saying that man is born without a soul, and that his life's task is to create one through his own conscious efforts.

At the level of style, the link between past and present on the one hand, and the narrator and his audience on the other hand, can be profitably examined in the light of the dichotomy between oral and written forms that our two authors exemplify.

Yogananda's prose is repetitive and formulaic, and fits entirely in the rhetoric scheme of the *exemplum* validated by a preexisting tradition. His English draws on the prose of the Bible, his models are the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*, the images he uses are stereotyped, and the written form predominates in a highly organized text that leaves little s*pace* to authenticity. As a matter of fact, the real protagonist of the book is not the young Mukunda, but the ancient Hindu scriptural tradition itself. Throughout the book, the context of religious erudition (a collective and sacred element that the author tries to present as "scientific") more often than not prevails on the strictly narrative text. The incidents Yogananda relates may have been originally triggered by real experiences, but are then represented in an utterly conventional way. The conflict between the wish to tell the truth, and the desire to regulate it is uncritically resolved in favor of the latter, because veracity does not reside in the individual, but only in the collective and in the archetypal. The author addresses a reading public with whom he communicates exclusively through the medium of his mind, firmly rooted in a sacred and a-temporal perspective; the message he conveys is one of words, not of silences.

On the contrary, all Rajneesh's books are transcriptions of lectures, and also in his life writing (in which crucially the present moment takes center stage by the side of the past) the flavor of orality can be distinctly felt. *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is the record of a series of *talks* given in 1984, which appear also in *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic*, published in 2000 and edited by Sarito Carol Neiman under Rajneesh's supervision. The latter compilation adds to the former the account of Osho's experience of enlightenment. The recollection of the past is intimately interwoven 1) with the author's pronouncements about himself, truth, religion, culture, and society; 2) with a dialogic dimension, and a live interaction with the disciples who listen and ask questions; and 3) with hints to the factual circumstances of the lecture: "Nothing is in my hands except the arms of my chair," says Osho, for instance, "and you can see how I am clinging on to them, feeling them to see if I am still in the body" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 152).

Rajneesh does not tire of repeating that his real message is not carried by the meaning of his words, but by the moments of silence that happen between them. He emphasizes that he does not plan in advance and that he is spinning his tale in a deep let go: "Each moment opens up many ways. Whichever you choose you will repent" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 302). The plot of his story is not linear, with a beginning, a

middle, and an end, but goes round in circles. The very word *glimpses* that we find in the title makes us aware of the flowing and unsystematic character of the reminiscence: a chance gathering of past moments, which come back into existence in front of a captive audience as if they were animated by an independent volition – as we can see from the returns (in remembrance) of the author's friend Hari, drowned as a boy while swimming across a river in flood. Osho's account of the origin of his narrative mastery reminds one of Yaşar Kemal's apprenticeship as a novelist, when he started his career of narrator by recounting the popular anecdotes of the Turkish brigand lore before rustic listeners:

> I love stories, and all this started with my Nani. She was a lover of stories too. Not that she used to tell me stories, just the contrary; she used to provoke me to tell her stories, all kinds of stories and gossips. She listened so attentively that she made me into a storyteller […] She is responsible: all credit or blame, whatsoever you call it, goes to her. I invented stories to tell her just so she would not be disappointed, and I can promise you that I became a successful storyteller just for her sake. (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 168)

Unlike Yogananda's written word, which comes from the mind and is addressed to the mind, Osho's utterance comes straight from the heart and aims at creating a shared space of attention that love – not intellectual effort – keeps together: while you are thinking you cannot really listen, your thoughts will be too much of a disturbance. Yogananda wants to impress, and aims at persuading the readers with his display of erudition. Osho, on the contrary, speaks like the child he once was, anxious to entertain his grandmother, and basks in the affection of his disciples – who in turn learn the art of meditation by paying undivided attention to the sound of his voice. A quote from Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language* helps explain the rhetorical reasons that motivate Osho to prefer the oral to the written form:

> Writing, which would seem to crystallize language, is precisely what alters it. It changes not the words but the spirit, substituting exactitude for expressiveness. *Feelings are expressed in speaking, ideas in writing*. In writing, one is forced to use all the words according to their conventional meaning. But in speaking, one varies the meanings by varying one's tone of voice, determining them as one pleases. Being less constrained to clarity, one can be more forceful. And it is not possible for a language that is written, to retain its vitality as long as one that is spoken. (J.-J. Rousseau 1966, 21-22, italics added)

Osho speaks, Yoganada writes. The former is interested in feelings, in real human beings, and in the message of the here-and-now that only silence can convey. The latter aims at expressing timeless ideas through codified authoritative words. Indeed, the difference between the two authors' oral and written autobiographies is the same that we find between an alive and a dead language: the former is more vital because it is less self-referential, more in tune with its audience, and is made more effective by the live (and in a guru's case, charismatic) presence of the speaker – that is why Rajneesh always refused not only to write, but also to tape his talks without having a public before him. Yogananda's language is far removed from contemporary usage, it bears the stamp of its sacred models, Sanskrit and Latin, and it is meant to create an awe and a distance from ordinary reality which only suspension of disbelief will be able to bridge. Osho's language is underpinned by a diametrically opposite rhetorical strategy. As a matter of fact, all Rajneesh's lectures are peppered with jokes (more often than not, quite outrageous ones). Their purpose is clear: to stigmatize sanctimony and seriousness, to encourage a fresh and unconventional outlook on life, and to provoke laughter, which diverts vital energy from the mind to the body, and therefore helps one to be more awake and relaxed.

1. 4 Knowledgeability and Experience

The works I examine have in common the structural characteristic that their narrative episodes are set against a philosophic or ideational background. What Arnold and Blackburn call an author's "version of truth" is part and parcel of that writer's autobiographical project, and complements it with a distinctive worldview and a persuasive intellectual dimension. In this section I give a preliminary assessment of this structural aspect in order to reflect on the general relationship obtaining between the autobiography of self-realization and erudition, while in the next chapters I will be more detailed in terms of cultural contents and specific intellectual influences.

Paramhansa was not an intellectual. His temperament was basically devotional, so much so that as a student he needed his guru's supernatural help in order to pass his exams (as he himself admits). Accordingly, his knowledge is second hand, it is not a personal discovery: yet he considers it a primary source of spiritual and intellectual legitimation. In spite of his declarations to the contrary, as we shall see later on the yogi's stance towards the Hindu mythology and scriptures is inherently pre-modern

and a-critical; and his appeal to experience and to science is merely instrumental to the preservation of his sacred outlook. Yogananda's position is epitomized by the account he gives of his encounter at Karapatri with a young wandering sadhu, "noted for his intelligence," "an enlightened soul." First he extols the man's virtues, and describes him as "a pundit unusually learned in the *Vedas*," "a master of scriptures," "a true representative of this land of giants." Then he asks the sadhu about the source of his extraordinary knowledge: does it come from scriptural lore, or from inward experience? The answer is significantly noncommittal: "fifty-fifty" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 388-89).

Any percentage of dogmatism (let alone a flat fifty per cent) is incompatible in principle with a true experiential approach – would argue Rajneesh – both in the inner and in the outer domain. Osho was a gifted academician, and published much more than Yogananda. Though his scholarship is an original synthesis of Eastern and Western knowledge, he subordinates it to his own experience of spiritual enlightenment, and refuses to comply with any kind of consistency or logic. In spite of his modest origins (he was born the son of a small cloth merchant), by his own efforts and merit he gained access to the post-independence Indian Westernized intellectual élite, but he always went against the grain of academic correctness. Seriousness, according to Rajneesh, is a disease of the ego. A serious mind is bound to be consistent and knowledgeable, but a consistent person will never be free, because he/she will feel obliged to conform to his/her own past actions and ideas: indeed in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* the author claims that logic belongs to the textbooks, while contradictions are the very fabric of life.

Gautama Buddha (to make just one of a few examples) is extolled on one occasion for his compassion, and in another is condemned as "chauvinistic" because he hesitated before beginning to initiate women into sannyas. Krishna is praised for his enlightenment, musicality, and joy, but also blamed as a militarist for cunningly talking Arjuna into waging war and committing murder: the episode is taken from the *Bhagavat Gita*, where it is meant to illustrate the law of *karma*, but Rajneesh presents it in a totally different light. To be sure, Osho's dislike for coherence goes beyond a mere declaration of principle, and extends by implication to all systematic knowledge. If we bear in mind that dogmatic and comprehensive intellectual systems have had their heyday in the Middle Ages, we can see how that aversion qualifies Rajneesh's modern secular perspective as much as a mythic and scriptural inflection

characterizes Yogananda's sacred standpoint. Two aspects of the ideational framework of Osho's autobiography are worth considering: 1) Rajneesh exhibits a primacy of rhetoric over logic; and 2) unlike Yogananda (who bows to the scriptures), he claims that the real source of his knowledge is *entirely* experiential.

1) In Aram Veeser's *Edward Said: the Charisma of Criticism*, the author gives a description of Said's polemic strategy as Menippean satire, which applies well to Osho's outlook. "Menippean satire" writes Veeser, "deals less with people than with mental attitudes […] and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent" (Veeser 2010, 64-65). Osho Rajneesh, like Edward W. Said, was a charismatic controversialist, a master in the art of exposing the contradictions of his opponent's position without trying to present a coherent standpoint, which could be criticized on the same grounds of inconsistency. In all his books, including his autobiography, he assumes an approach that is similar to Said's, but professedly adopts it to achieve a spiritual end: to show that existence cannot be apprehended through reason, that the mind must be set aside, and that life is not a problem to solve, but a mystery one should surrender to. Intellectual coherence is not only a blunt polemic tool, but also an existential blunder. 2) In *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, Rajneesh is quite outspoken about his interpretive approach. The interpretations he gives of the great masters of the past, and of the great intellectual figures of the present are guided by his own intuitive understanding of reality, not by scientific objectivity; his readings are subjective and creative: a trait that reminds one of Emerson, but is far more controversial. Osho claims that the knowledge revealed by a truly self-realized guru is entirely experiential in the most radical sense possible: he can talk about Buddha because he *is* Buddha; he can talk about truth because he *is* truth – any academic claim to the contrary notwithstanding.

To sum up what I have said until now in this chapter, the rhetoric and structure of Osho's life writing differs from Yogananda's inasmuch as 1) it has an oral flavor, 2) it carries modern existential implications, 3) it embraces contradictions, and 4) is structured on the Rousseauan assumption that feelings have the potential to convey a deeper message than ideas. In spiritual terms, the heart is closer to our true identity than the mind: it is easy to reach the silence at the centre from the emotional layer of our being. The communion between the guru and his audience begins with emotional empathy, and comes to fruition with meditative silence – while the mind is entertained with intellectual arguments that in the end will prove to be utterly futile.

Moreover, a) the unsystematic and ideological character of Osho's life narrative shows a modern awareness of the nature and the limitations of memory and of language that is alien to *Autobiography of a Yogi*; and b) Beckett's declaration "there is no I" reflects the most fundamental insight of Eastern spirituality, and can be found both in Yogananda and in Osho. However, while in the former it is an abstract declaration of traditional wisdom addressed to a distant reader, in the latter it is a live experience that the master shares with his audience.

1. 5 The Secular and the Sacred

In this section I problematize the title of my dissertation, and I define what I mean when I set off in contrast the terms "secular" and "sacred." A clarification is needed because in *Some Spiritual Autobiographies in English* G.K. Sandhya has interpreted *Autobiography of a Yogi* as a secular and political work, in the context of post-colonial discourse, and although this reading is based on premises that I do not share, it has a bearing on the argument I advance, and it will help me clarify the angle I give to this paper. According to Shandya, Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* is 1) *political* in the sense that it can be read as a nationalist work, because by divulging Kriya Yoga it shows the modern relevance of the Hindu worldview, and counters Western cultural hegemony; and 2) *secular* because it "demystifies" miracles. Through Einstein's Theory of Relativity, Yogananda would allegedly debunk the mechanistic view of the universe characteristic of pre-Einsteinian physics, which is seen as a colonial ideological prop.

Conversely, I postulate that: 1) Yogananda's discourse is *sacred* inasmuch as it is functional to a society that I call *traditional* since it is holistic and hierarchic, and it has scriptural religion as its cultural/ideological foundation; 2) Rajneesh's spiritual perspective is *secular* because it is *individualistic*, and does not rely on the authority principle; 3) therefore, according to this individualist definition of modernity, it is *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, and not Yogananda's *Autobiography*, which can be read as a *political* work in the modern sense of the word. Besides, I postulate that the nature of secularism and of the sacred may be generalized in a cross-cultural perspective, and I refer to the definitions that Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Charles Taylor have given of these terms.

In *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner writes that an epochal change takes place with the advent of the industrial society, which replaces the agricultural society first

in Europe, and then, gradually, in the rest of the world. The industrial mode of production relies on *individuals*, not on hierarchically stratified classes or castes, so for the first time in history we have a society that is dynamic and not static. Individuals are empowered by state education and, to an extent, by the electoral representative system: a new *secular* intellectual élite is born as an alternative to the clergy, which it eventually supplants. In the political field, the nationality principle supersedes the dynastic principle; aristocracy disappears as a social entity, and gives way to a middle class.

Traditional societies were based on the alliance between feudal and ecclesiastic power, (think of Dante's worldview, of the situation described in Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, or of brahminical power and the caste system in India): as the new mode of production undermines them, we have *nationalism* and the advent of *modernity*. In sum, Ernest Gellner explains secularism and individualism in socio-economic terms, as inter-related phenomena that are due to industrialization and that help define the meaning of modernity – and brings nationalism into the picture. This notion of secularization serves the purpose of my dissertation inasmuch as it highlights the decline of institutional religious power (and the sacred discourse attached to it), and links it with the rise of modernity and individualism.

Benedict Anderson emphasizes the connection of secularization with nationalism, rather than with individualism. *Imagined Communities* begins with a description of the pre-modern worldview that reflects my angle on Yogananda: traditional societies presented a worldview characterized by the sacred time of the scriptures and of myth, not by chronological time. In those societies culture was codified in sacred languages like Latin, Classical Arabic, and Sanskrit – which were the monopoly of the clergy and the source of their power. The focus, however, is on decolonization, the epochal shift that brings about nationalism in most extra-European countries (and, in our case, the Indian national/religious version of modernity). Nationalism supplants dynastic power and the worldview that this power implies: it begins with American independence in the eighteenth century, and then it spreads to the rest of the globe.

That's how this trajectory is described: from industrialization in Europe, to colonialism in the rest of the world, to nationalism as a reaction to colonization, to decolonization – via, of course, the two world wars that decisively weakened the European powers. Anderson's theorization fits countries like India at the time of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, when the old *status quo* based on caste still obtained, even

though it was in the process of giving way to nationalism and democracy. Yogananda's autobiography was published on the eve of India's independence (1947), and therefore is influenced by Gandhi's nativist and traditionalist take on modernity. Anderson does not emphasize the notion of individualism – which is central in my paper, and is explained in terms of Western cultural influence. *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* was written in 1986, at a time when (according to Singh) in independent India Gandhism was no longer a cultural force with a dimension of mass mobilization, and modernization was advancing.

Lastly, in *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor outlines the process by which a society comes to be seen as a collection of individuals, and no longer as an organic entity. An archaic world is characterized by the concept of *embedment*: the boundaries between human beings, the society they live in, the cosmos, and the gods are virtually non-existent. In the Axial Age (the period from the eight to the third century BCE) things begin to change, but only for the intellectual and religious élites, not for the masses. The reform movements of traditional Vedic Hinduism (Buddhism and Jainism) appear at this time, as well as Taoism, Zoroastrianism, the great prophets of Judaism, and Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Greece. We have here what Charles Taylor considers a first and partial *disembedment* – a minority phenomenon that does not influence common people and society at large.

By the same token, the prevalent perspective that obtained in Europe in the Middle Ages can be still understood through the notion of *enchantment*: people believed in miracles, in forces and in supernatural beings. They thought that the supernatural could manifest itself in magic objects, in places, and in persons. Religious ritual and belief did not primarily concern the individual, but were a factor of social cohesion. In this sense, Taylor's description of embedment applies not only to the archaic world, but also to Christianity before Luther: "Human agents are embedded in society, society in the cosmos, and the cosmos incorporates the divine" (Taylor 2007, 152). Belief in God is no longer taken for granted only after the Reformation, and disembedment takes place on a much larger scale. The disciplined and ordered society created by Protestantism makes all individuals less dependent on the collectivity, and the self acquires rational boundaries, together with a more definite and stable identity.

In Taylor's words, the *porous self* of the enchanted outlook gives way to a disengaged *buffered* self: the modern individual. While the pre-modern world is

organized around the concepts that social hierarchy is sacrosanct because it is willed by God, and that it corresponds to a spiritual hierarchy in the cosmos, the new outlook is shaped by "exclusive humanism," *i.e.*, the notion that 1) God the world; 2) He relates to us primarily by establishing a certain order of things; and 3) we obey Him by following the demands of this order – the Modern Moral Law (Taylor 2007, 221). Indeed, one of Taylor's central assertions is that Deism represents a pivotal moment in the genesis of modernity and secularism.

The understanding of God goes through different stages: first there is the idea of a supreme being with powers of agency and personality; then we have the concept of a designer God in the early modern period; and lastly we arrive at Feuerbach's assertion that "the potentialities we have attributed to God are really human potentialities" (Taylor 2007, 251). God is an illusion, maintains Feuerbach – a statement that Osho emphatically agrees with. For Charles Taylor the cultural revolution of the 1960s is the last stage of the process of secularization in the West. Moral and spiritual individualism begins then to be complemented by "expressive individualism," which centers on the widespread conviction "that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own" (Taylor 2007, 475).

A Secular Age helps delineate the angle of my dissertation on two counts: a) it defines useful interpretive terms like embedment, enchantment, and the new moral order; and b) gives an explanation of the sacred outlook and of the modern concepts of secularism and individualism which can be transposed to the Indian context of my authors, with the necessary adjustments. In fact (as I will show later on), in *Modernization of the Indian Tradition* Yogendra Singh writes that holism and hierarchy are structural traits that Medieval Europe and pre-modern India have in common. With its abundance of miracles, amulets, and saints endowed with supernatural powers *Autobiography of a Yog*i provides ample evidence of embedment and enchantment; and it is set against the naïve background of taken-for-granted belief, which Taylor considers a distinctive trait of the traditional worldview. Indeed Yogananda discredits criticism toward his own "enchanted" sort of spirituality by portraying the skeptics in the most unfavorable light, as we can see from the examples of Mukunda's elder brother, or of the protagonist's physician brother-in-law. Disbelief is portrayed as shallow and unreasonable, and it invites supernatural retribution. Contrariwise, the belief in a personal God is one of the

Rajneesh's prime polemic targets, and in *Glimpses of a Modern Childhood* the young protagonist comes through as a perfect model of expressive individualism.

1. 6 Modernization in India

I will now define the background of my dissertation in accord with the meaning of the terms "sacred" and "secularism," which I have given above. I will draw mostly on Yogendra Singh's *Modernization of the Indian Tradition*: a work of seminal importance that was published in 1973, roughly at midpoint between the appearance of *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) and *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* (1984), and is therefore well suited to serve as a guide to that cultural and historical period. In brief, modernization is the process by which a traditional culture based on a sacred outlook becomes secular, *i.e*., more centered on the individual. Under the impact of a foreign power, the main attributes of traditional Hinduism integrate with, or give way to, a parallel set of attributes of the Western post-Enlightenment civilization: there is a shift from hierarchy to equality, from holism to individualism, from continuity to historicity, and from transcendence to rationalism and secularism. The overall picture, however, is complex, since a) cultural change was happening in India also long before the arrival of the English, and b) the modernizing trend is only one of the two main patterns of cultural transformation that have been caused by the encounter between Hinduism and the European foreign influence.

As far as method is concerned, my angle coincides with the main approach that underpins *Modernization of the Indian Tradition*: Yogendra Singh analyses social change along the lines of a *culturological*[7] conception, in fundamental agreement with the French sociologist Louis Dumont. In this perspective, what matters most is not *reality per se*, (*i.e*., the structural aspect of change) but the subjective *representation of ideas* of reality. The relevant domains of investigation are the customary standards that rule the activity of men, and (most importantly) the symbolic system, which functions as a collective integrative element. The focus is on how Indian minds have adapted to the revelation of Western culture: *Autobiography of a Yogi* and *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* are important examples of adaptive reaction because they represent the viewpoints of pivotal figures of the Indian

[7]The Merriam Webster on line dictionary defines "culturological" as: "of, relating to, or applying a methodology that regards culture as an autonomous self-determined process and explains human behavior in terms of that process."

tradition: the gurus. Accordingly, in the next chapters I will interpret Rajneesh's and Yogananda's autobiographies, respectively, along the lines of what Yogendra Singh calls "modernization" and "traditionalization."

Singh writes from the vantage point of a diachronic and trans-cultural perspective: by looking at medieval Europe we can understand traditional India; the way modernization took place in the former foreshadows a *similar* development in the latter. As it happens, on the one hand modernization shares in some common characteristics in different ages and everywhere in the world; on the other hand it is also affected by the idiosyncratic historical circumstances in which it comes to pass – as the post-colonial school of thought to which G.K. Shandya belongs takes pains to emphasize. "Modern society" – we read in *Modernization of the Indian Tradition* – "has evolved from that of the Middle Ages, which at first sight certainly appears to be a society of the traditional type, more like the Indian than like the modern. The conception of the *universitas* […] is certainly akin to the Hindu conception of *dharma* and the hierarchical interdependence of the several social statuses" (Singh 1973: 3). According to the *Glossary of Hinduism Terms*, *dharma* is actually "the order that makes life and universe possible, and includes duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and right way of living," [8] while the related meaning of the Latin word *universitas* is "the whole," "the total," "the universe," and "the world."[9]

To be sure, in the West the feudal hierarchic system collapsed under the impact of the Reformation, the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution; while nothing of the kind paved the way for modernization in India before the arrival of the English. The flaws of the caste system began to be addressed only at the time of the Western-inspired social reform movements, but when Yogananda and Rajneesh composed their life writing, caste was still very much alive. Today (as we learn from Jamshed Ansari) it has adapted to the new political situation, and has undergone profound changes: in this renewed form, in India it remains a major factor of social cohesion (Ansari 2014). In the past, however, Western culture was as holistic and hierarchic as any other traditional culture: "The medieval political life" – writes Singh – "depended on the link between hereditary and spiritual rank in society, control over land as the principal economic resource, and the exercise of

[8] See definition in: Blavatsky Study Center. http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/wikehinduism.htm

[9] See definition in: *Latin Word List*. www.latinwordlist.com

public authority. The group and estate-based rights were similar to caste-based rights as acknowledged by the Hindu tradition" (Sing 1973, 114).

Before I proceed with my outline of the Hindu tradition, though, I will examine hierarchy and the caste system by taking Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* into consideration. In fact this work problematizes the individualist point of view, and throws useful light on my argument inasmuch as Yogananda and Rajneesh were in different ways influenced by Western thought, and wrote their autobiographies primarily to address foreign readers, and prospective Western disciples. The cardinal principles that the West has embraced from the eighteenth century's "Age of Reason" are equality and liberty, which are both underpinned by the modern idea of individuality. Egalitarianism, however, is an ideology; it does not state an actuality: "*qua* political and moral ideal is a declaration of faith beyond dispute," but "*qua* adequate expression of social life is a naïve judgment" (Dumont 1970, 4).

In defense of the hierarchical outlook, the author warns us that caste should not be considered a totally alien reality: on the contrary it is a fact of life, and it should be accepted as such. Indian civilization is a form of the universal, because subordination and conformity are intrinsic to human nature; and individual consciousness originates in social training. Indeed, *Homo Hierarchicus* claims that self-sufficient individuality is a myth, that a truly individualistic society has never existed, and that man is best conceived as "a more or less autonomous point of emergence of a particular collective humanity" (Dumont 1970, 5). The "emergence" of the individual from society is partial and fragile: it does not (and cannot) have deep roots; nowadays no less than in the past it depends on contingent external circumstances. In point of fact, in the West the modern individual has come into existence as the rational bearer of political rights, that is, as the normative subject of representative institutions.

In the sub-continent a similar process began when the British introduced the modern rule of law; it came in part to fruition in 1949, when the new Constitution created the premises for a comprehensive change of Indian society; and it continues to this day. Democracy and universalism, though, ultimately break what Dumont calls "the social chain of hierarchized interdependence," and "traditional particularism," which give man embedment: a sense of rootedness, stability and meaning. Political freedom makes one both more responsible and more vulnerable: "Democracy throws man back upon himself alone" (Dumont 1970, 18). That is why modern individualism has no place in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and about thirty years later is still a matter of

defiance on the part of the protagonist of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, who admits to being a dropout from his society, and takes pride in his aloneness.

As it happens, the most pointed political novels of the last century show that the gregarious instinct has such deep psychological roots that true individuals are still hard to find *anywhere* in the world. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (to name but one of them, which was published in 1948, shortly before Yogananda's death and Rajneesh's spiritual enlightenment) brings home the notion that conformity is to blame no less than external coercion for all kinds of authoritarian governments. In fact the dystopian world that the author describes is a modern-day Western society based on caste, in which personhood is a scandal and dangerous anomaly.

We have seen above how Modernism foreshadows the deconstruction of the individual, and we see now that according to Dumont the very concept of an independent individuality is misleading. This, however, does not necessarily mean that political and existential freedom is impossible, nor does it imply that Yogananda's sacred discourse (based on the scriptures, on hierarchy, and on holism) is the only answer to the existential crisis of the West that we can find in Indian spirituality. Yogendra Singh affirms that Hinduism is not a monolithic system, but offers "different images of society and many different schemes of thought:" it *concentrates* on the ritual theme, but it is not *exhausted* by it. Crucially, only individuals can get spiritually enlightened, not the masses. Among the many collectivistic institutions of the Indian tradition (which we shall examine in the next paragraph), one of the most important is *sannyas*, which has a distinctive individualistic orientation: "The traditional Indian social system did recognize the legitimacy of social and cultural innovation through the institutionalized role of the renouncer or *sannyasin*, who was liberated from the norms of social hierarchy or caste through spiritual transcendence, and also authorized to re-interpret the meaning of tradition and thereby change it" (Singh 1973, 21).

Yogananda (as we have seen above) tries to balance himself between the *experience* of meditation on the one hand, and *faith* in the scriptures on the other hand, which is dogmatic and grounded in a collectivity-oriented outlook. Rajneesh brings to fruition a potentially revolutionary seed that lies at the core of Hinduism, by declaring the primacy of *personal* spiritual experience as a transcendent foundation to the self: "To be an individual," says Osho, "is to be liberated, is to be enlightened" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 179). In fact, what in *Autobiography of a Yog*i is affirmed as the

doctrinal knowledge that "all is one" (non-duality), in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is lived as an immediate and empowering existential realization: since all is God, when you trust yourself you trust God.

1. 7 Patterns of Cultural Change

Modernization in India has always taken place along peculiar *patterns of cultural change*, and has advanced through slow, adaptive growth rather than through structural breakdown. The Hindu tradition has remained throughout the ages the most important source of cultural identity and social cohesion, and in spite of the many foreign invasions that have taken place in the subcontinent (from the Aryans, to the Moguls, to the English), it has shown remarkable resilience and adaptability. Singh affirms 1) that the cultural structures of a society crystallize or evolve in response to historical contingencies, either to address internal value conflicts and power struggles, or to adjust to external influences; and 2) that this process happens in India at two different levels: at the level of the "little tradition" (the common people), and at the level of the "great tradition" (the élites and the intellectuals) – which is the one that most interests us, since the distinctive character of the "little traditions" is that they are sub-cultural, and do not develop a systematic world-view.

Accordingly, the causes of change are defined as "orthogenetic" (thorough indigenous evolution), and "heterogenetic" (through contact with other civilizations): they bring about the transition from the pre-Sanskritic stage, to Sanskritization, to Modernization, and eventually to a prospective final stage of "global, universalized pattern of culture" – a trajectory that roughly describes the main historical-cultural moments in India. Endogenous mutation gives rise to two cultural structures: a) Sanskritization or Traditionalization, at the level of the little tradition; and b) the Cultural (or Indian) Renaissance, at the level of the great tradition. Exogenous mutation originates the cultural structures of c) Primary Westernization (level of little tradition); and d) Secondary Westernization or Modernization (level of the great tradition). Also Primary and Secondary Islamization are examples of heterogenetic cultural change, but I will not take them into account here because they represent the meeting of two traditional cultures, Hinduism and Islam, and therefore do not have a direct bearing on the argument I am advancing in this dissertation.

a) "The cultural movement called 'Sanskritization' presents a form of integration between the little and the great traditions," writes Singh, "and reflects the latent

tensions in the Indian society caused by the structural rigidity of the systems of stratification and power" (Singh 1973, viii). Sanskritization is innovation drawn from the primordial tradition itself, and, paradoxically, amounts to a kind of change that threatens the sacred foundation of the caste system. If truth be told, caste is embraced only as far as exteriorities are concerned, and hierarchy is reasserted not for spiritual reasons, but as a means to an end. Subaltern groups, castes, and communities protest against their position in a closed social structure, and demand upward mobility within it. They aim at bartering the formal acceptance of the stricter norms of conduct of the higher castes with the recognition of a higher social status, but they succeed only when the balance of economic and political power begins to tip in their favor. In the process, customs, deities, and rites that often hark back to the pre-Sanskritic stage are replaced with equivalent but orthodox forms of the Great Tradition.

The Indian Renaissance and Westernization exemplify respectively a resistant and an accepting encounter of Hinduism with foreign models. The Renaissance includes Dayanda Saraswati (1824-1883), Vivekananda (1863-1902), and (on final account) Gandhi (1869-1848), and centers on the synthesis of Eastern and Western themes in terms of the Great Tradition: it focuses on maintaining the traditional values by *marginal* adaptations to Western culture. Yogananda (who held the Mahatma in great esteem) can be included in it. Primary and Secondary Westernizations c) and d) include respectively Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) and Nehru (1889-1964): they aim, in different ways, at the institution of a new Great Tradition of Modernization comparable to the Hindu Great Tradition.

Rajneesh (who in his autobiography makes no mystery of preferring Nehru to Gandhi) can be ascribed to the modernizers' fold on account of his political, spiritual, and philosophical views. Renaissance and Sanskritization have in common the discrepancy between the principles they proclaim and the overall results they attain. The former pays lip service to secular values, but in reality it minimizes the impact of the Western cultural influence by explaining it away in terms of Hindu spirituality. The latter professes adherence to tradition, but actually brings about modernizing outcomes by changing the spirit of the caste system beyond recognition, once political democratizing reforms have made it unnecessary to hold on to it in actuality: the caste system is strengthened by modernization, but only as a solidarity network, not as a sacred institution.

1. 8 A Diachronic Appraisal of the Indian Tradition

"A unified principle of consciousness" – we read in *Modernization of the Indian Tradition* – "has contributed to the identity of India's inner structure. This inner structure lies in the religious principles and their interpretation" (Singh 1973, 28). Hinduism is more than a religious creed: it is also a way of life, a multi-faceted worldview, and a cultural complex, in which the rigidity of the normative system is mitigated by a more tolerant common sense attitude in practice. Nevertheless, a distinctive diachronic pattern is clearly discernible: it goes from its primordial Vedic origins to the nineteenth and twentieth century cultural reformation movements, and rests on the overarching principles of hierarchic order, continuity, and cyclical change – which we find essentially reaffirmed in their sacred formulation by *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and innovatively reinterpreted in a secular spiritual perspective by *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*. Indeed, the *Vedas* are the revelation and the cornerstone of Hinduism.

In the Vedic age, when the Indo-Aryans settled in northern India, the caste system (the most controversial feature of Hinduism) did not yet exist, but by the end of the sixth century BCE it had already been established, and it acquired its definitive character from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, during the Muslim invasions. In the post-Vedic age (which spans from 900 BCE, the time of the Mahabharata war, to around 800 AD, the fall of the Gupta empire), the ideal-typical attributes of the Great Tradition underwent a significant change. In fact, we witness the end of the Vedic humanistic emphasis on life-affirming values, and the ossification of an ascetic way of life: "The material realm was in principle subordinated to the spiritual realm," writes Yogendra Singh, "the twice-born castes[10] ceased to be functional groups and turned into *jatis*, endogamous castes" (Singh 1973, 39). Hierarchy was no longer justified by practical reasons, and became a systemized religious phenomenon.

The most important surviving text of the Sanskrit tradition, Manu's law book, is a testimony to this major orthogenetic mutation: variously dated between the second century BCE and the third century CE, it provides a theorization of caste that Nietzsche emphatically approved, Yogananda and Gandhi justified, and Rajneesh abhorred. It was then that the law codes (*Dharmashastras*), the epics, and the books

[10] The Brahmins were called "twice born" because by consciously embracing the vocation they had been destined to by birth, they were thought to have been born again to a spiritual life.

of tradition (*Puranas*) began to enforce a more ascetic world-view, probably due to the impact of Siddhartha Gautama (c. 480-400 BCE) and Mahavira (c. 497-425 BCE), the founders of Buddhism and Jainism. These new religions originated from within Hinduism mainly as a reaction to the institution of untouchability, and began to assert themselves as parallel Great Traditions in the subcontinent as from the fifth century BCE.

In the post-Gupta period, Sri Adi Shankaracharya (788-820 CE), founder of the Vedanta school of thought, played an important part in the unification of the Hindu tradition, which showed signs of disintegrative pluralism, by composing an unsurpassed intellectual exegesis of its most significant philosophical ideas. Nor was the refashioning confined to the elitist intellectual aspect. As from the fifteenth century, the Great Tradition was again reformed in a more popular and devotional direction by saints like Ramananda (1380-1475), Kabir (1440-1518), Nanak (1469-1539), Chaitanya (1486-1534), and Ramdas (1608-1681). This liberal reformation movement originated from the South, were the lower castes were (and still are) numerically predominant, and was crucially important for the preservation of orthodoxy, at a time when Muslims ruled the country, and Buddhism had great appeal for the untouchables: as a matter of fact, devotionalism (*bhakti*) helped bridge the gap between great and little tradition, and complemented the world-view of Hinduism with egalitarian and non-hierarchical values. Kabir's and Nanak's importance is highlighted by the fact that they introduced into religious belief purely mystical and humanistic ideals, which contrasted sharply with the formalism of the established Hindu and Muslim orthodoxies.

The British set foot in India at the beginning of he seventeenth century, and colonization was completed by the end of the nineteenth century. The Western cultural tradition was characterized by a "rational-utilitarian orientation in behavior and thought," and it upheld individuality and civil liberties. It was therefore at odds with the essential characteristics of Hinduism inasmuch as it "[…] recognized a contractual-individualistic relationship between man and society. In matters of legal justice and civil rights, it encouraged the values of equality, equity and universalism, and not those of status and hierarchy" (Singh 1973, 86). In the beginning, Westernization had a limited impact as an exogenous source of change, since it did not amount to a mature and self-conscious *Weltanshauung*, but consisted at best in the reformulation of foreign external forms of culture on the part of a minority of

Indian intellectuals – if not in the plain xenophilic imitation of all that was Western. Its chief representative was Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), who advocated radical Westernization, and founded the Brahmo Samaj – a movement that promoted an apolitical synthesis of rational humanism with Hindu monotheism and Christianity, and which played a key role in the social reforms of the first part of the nineteenth century, albeit its importance was more qualitative than quantitative.

The Mutiny (the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 against colonial rule) created a new political situation in which nationalism was foregrounded and marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of the Brahmo Samaj – when the society became more progressive and dynamic under the leadership of Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-1884), and made itself known to the West. The universalist and assimilative traits of Hinduism made it possible to work out a selective synthesis with Western influence, which eventually resulted in the Indian Renaissance on the one hand, and in the transition from Primary to Secondary Modernization on the other hand. Both the Renaissance and Modernization acknowledged Indian heritage, but each one of them – as we shall see – implied a quite different understanding of secularism. From the social and the cultural points of view, the post-Mutiny legislation constituted a powerful instrument of modernization, and caused the beginning of a breakdown in the principles of hierarchy and holism that Mahatma Gandhi did his best to prevent.

More radical legislation, however, came about only after 1947, with political independence, a year after the publication of the first edition of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and prepared the ground for the revolutionary affirmation of the principle of individualism that we find about thirty years later in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*. The Constitution of 1949/1950, by abolishing untouchability, actually began sapping the structural base of the caste system. Yogendra Singh underlines the role played in those years by progressive legislation in the spreading of liberal ideas: "The impact of change is magnified since individualism in legal normative structure is also coupled with values of rationalism and universalism, rendering it specially modernizing in its significance" (Singh 1973, 101). The establishment of the rule of law on a pan-Indian scale had two notable effects: 1) it reinforced a rational economic system, which is a prerequisite of modernization; and 2) it educated people in a new cultural tradition that was incompatible with hierarchy and holism.

It must be noticed, however, that the modernizing process was slow, partial, and did not advance without meeting setbacks and opposition. The Gandhian declination of

modernity was certainly tolerant and non-communal, but was also very different from Western individualist secularism, and depended on Gandhi's personal charisma: it lost momentum after the Mahatma's assassination, and the partition of the country along communal lines, in 1947; and it was never revived as a political force that should be really reckoned with. The truth is that in spite of his proclaimed universalism Gandhi was more popular among the Indian masses than Nehru exactly because he associated his program of egalitarian reforms with traditional symbolism, drawn mostly from the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Gita*. Secularism, as it was understood by the great figures of the Indian Renaissance, meant above all religious tolerance in the spirit of Hinduism itself, and hardly had an individualist connotation.

In the Constitution that the father of the Indian nation inspired, writes Jamshed Ansari, article 15 prohibited discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, and religion; and article 17 abolished untouchability. Articles 29 and 30, however, made it clear that *continuity* with tradition was a most fundamental principle, and the freedoms enshrined in article 19 (which were meant to ensure that the personality of the individual should be developed to its fullest) in those years were still far from having been fully implemented. As late as 1973, the situation that obtained in India could be authoritatively described along these lines: "The cultural pre-requisites of a comprehensive modernization necessitate adaptive changes in the systems of values, which come into direct confrontation with tradition. Secularism, untouchability, non-parochialism are some cultural demands of modernization in contemporary India which its traditional value system continues to resist" (Singh 1973, 101). Significantly, the word "secular" was only added to India's constitutional definition in 1976.

Lastly, I conclude by remarking that *Modernization of the Indian Tradition* is a sociological study that investigates modernization in India not only from the ideal-typical angle that I adopt, but also from a structural point of view. Among the structural transformations that the author mentions, the changes concerning the formation of new political and intellectual élites are relevant also in the context of this paper, and can be ascribed to three different historical phases. 1) Before the beginning of colonization, the Indian élites had a traditional and charismatic character, and were mostly constituted by Brahmins: their worldview was rooted in the search for the esoteric and in abstract ideals. No antinomy between the individual and the state was conceived, and political institutions bowed to spiritual power. 2) In

the early twentieth century the members of the *intelligentsia* attained high intellectual standards, were educated in top Western universities, and actively engaged in political and social discourse by combining the role of demagogues and scholars. These modernizing nationalist élites had an ambivalent attitude toward the West, as they were divided between a quest for cultural identity and cultural synthesis. 3) After independence, political and intellectual leadership separated: the new political-populistic élites were less Westernized than their intellectual counterparts, and more critical of Western influence.

As writer and protagonist of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda fits the description of a member of a traditional élite, since he never got directly involved in politics, and he prized esoteric knowledge. Like other traditionalist Indian saints of his time, he engaged in a quest for cultural/religious identity mainly in order to offset the threat posed by Christian missionary proselytism to orthodox Hinduism. Contrariwise, in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* Rajneesh tells us about his active involvement with the Indian political scene from an unconventional and indeed revolutionary angle (which I shall examine in detail in the next chapter); and he also relates how he ran afoul of the populist élite that ruled his country.

Moreover, he privileged cultural synthesis over religious identity, and the range of the Western erudition that he brings to bear in his work is far more comprehensive and innovatory than Yogananda's. For all these reasons, Osho was an independent and isolated figure within the influential modernizing minority of the Indian educational system and academic establishment. His "autobiography of self-realization" not only is important in a cross-cultural perspective, but also represents the voice of a forerunner of an important future cultural advance. In short, he is an author who (many years after his demise) may still help shape a new secular/spiritual identity both in India and in the rest of the world.

CHAPTER TWO
POLITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND REBELLION

> That day I began my life as a rebel, and I will continue to be a rebel to the very last breath, or even after it. Who knows? Even if I won't have a body, I will have thousands of my lovers' bodies. I can provoke them, and you know I am a seducer; I can put ideas in their heads for centuries to come. That is exactly what I am going to do. With the death of this body my rebellion cannot die. (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 51)

> What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. (Albert Camus 1956, 10)

2. 1 Abstract

In this chapter, I further contextualize Osho's secular/spiritual outlook, I examine the political consequences of the "autobiography of self-realization," and I highlight the meaning of rebellion within *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*. Accordingly, I elaborate on the innovative relevance of Rajneesh's life writing in comparison with *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by examining the former work diachronically, in the framework of Indian autobiography. Osho's autobiography 1) prefigures the new emphasis on the concept of self that we find in contemporary Indian life writing; 2) shows continuity with the pre-existing autobiographical tradition; and 3) presents a distinctive character with respect both to what precedes and what follows it. In fact, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is unique in that it does not posit the convergence of spirituality and politics merely in social or ideological terms, but within the perspective of self-realization. As far as Yogananda's life writing is concerned, I examine his *Autobiography of a Yogi* with a view not only to what the author says, but also to what he implies, and to what he ignores. Indeed, Arnold and Blackburn outline a similar interpretive strategy, in *Telling Lives in India*, where they write that the two most influential Indian political autobiographies of the XX century, that of Gandhi (1929) and that of Nehru (1936), "[…] deserve to be treated as partial texts, in need of interest as much for what they omit as for what they declaim" (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 10).

Moreover, I maintain that Rajneesh conceives politics as a struggle for power that takes place at all levels of society, and which is motivated by the desire of self-affirmation that derives from our identification with the ego. Indeed, for Osho power is not corrupting in itself: rather on the contrary, unconscious (and therefore "corrupt") people choose to become politicians. *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* has a political connotation in the sense that it points to rebellion as to the only existential stance that can free both the individual and the society one belongs to. Therefore, it presents a modern, secular, and individualistic quality, which is at odds with all kinds of hierarchical thinking and is pitted against both institutionalized religion and the political élites of the time. In this chapter I also elucidate my interpretation of Osho's work as a "political autobiography" a) in the context of Robert Boyer's delineation of the link between politics and narrative and b) with regard to Bertrand Russell's description of the relation between politics and desire. To sum up, I study the autobiographies of Rajneesh and Yoganada from the vantage point of power, casteism and hierarchy, in relation to Gandhi's autobiography and to Camus's theorization of metaphysical and political rebellion.

2.2 A Spiritual/Political Utopia

A reference to *Telling Lives in India* (Arnold and Blackburn's recently published outline of modern Indian self-centered narrative) will provide a fitting contemporary background to the "political" argument I develop in this chapter about the trope of rebellion in Osho's memoirs. In their introduction, the two authors point out that in recent years much has changed with respect to the past. When studying Indian culture and society, scholars used to concentrate on hagiographies, and paid little attention to the life history genre, because they assumed that "individual agency and a sense of selfhood were marginal to South Asian thought and behavior, as caste and religion were paramount" (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 3). In rigid compliance with the tenets of post-colonial literary criticism, autobiography was considered by academics a foreign literary form. As such, it was supposed to have little relevance to the Indian context, in which the exemplary accounts of the lives of "exceptional individuals" still held sway. Now these-long-held assumptions are being questioned, as modernization – the far-reaching socio-cultural change that started with the arrival of the English – takes root in the sub-continent, while acquiring an idiosyncratic connotation, in accordance with the specific situation in which it takes place.

In fact, we witness both a keen interest in Indian autobiographical studies, and the publication of politically militant works (Kancha Ilaiah's *Why I am not a Hindu* is a suitable example of this trend) which deal with the lives of ordinary people, are unwilling to compromise with what they consider an oppressive chauvinistic ideology, and are outspoken in their defense of the rights of outsiders, women, and the oppressed sections of society. A new cultural approach has arisen in India, which finds expression in life writing, is prepared to address the problem of power not only *among* different nations and cultures, but also in intra-cultural terms, and helps cast a retrospective light on the authors I examine. Rajneesh's spiritual secularism is the forerunner of this contemporary outlook, in that it prefigures a modern anti-authoritarian and self-centered awareness.

It would be misleading to assume that Osho's life writing is one-sided or lacks ideational complexity; or that it completely disconnects itself from the past. "Modernity" – explain Arnold and Blackburn in this regard – "did not replace traditional life histories so much as recast them" (Arnold and Blackburn 2004: 8). As it happens, in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* we find two key ideas that complement each other, by suggesting both cultural continuity and change: a) today no less than yesterday, authentic religiousness consists in saying an unconditional yes to the whole existence – yet for a modern individual "*yes* has intensity and meaning only in the background of *no*" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 197); and (b) exemplary and charismatic figures are still needed, since it is easier to learn from the living example of a spiritual master than from the dry doctrinal explanation of the scriptures–but the guru must take into account the new circumstances in which he operates and writes about his life.

To be sure, Rajneesh's autobiography does present a heroic and exemplary quality, which suggests its connection with an autochthonous hagiographic tradition. At the same time, an important element of cultural change expressed in ideal-typical terms is clearly discernible in it, and concerns not only the power issue, but also the portrayal of the "wondrous" element in spiritual life writing. The gurus and the yogis described in *Autobiography of a Yogi* are exceptional in every sense of the word: Yogananda, however, tries to gloss over this fact by maintaining that their powers are "ordinary" inasmuch as modern science is able to explain them, and *anyone* willing to practice Kriya Yoga can attain them. Forty years later, this hagiographical bias is further modernized and integrated by Osho in the narrative episodes of *Glimpses of a*

Golden Childhood: although his memoirs are the account of a journey to spiritual enlightenment, nothing awesome or truly unbelievable happens in it; on the contrary, the author depicts Raja, the young protagonist,[1] as exceptional *because* he is not a demi-god, but a true and authentic human being, whose most admirable qualities are rebelliousness and courage.

In Chapter One, I have written about Yogendra Singh's theorization of change: according to *Modernization of the Indian Tradition*, the new can hardly be considered a *tabula rasa*, since it consists in the creative reworking of the existent. Also, Osho's autobiography shows that cultural change implies continuity with the past and therefore it lends itself to be appreciated A) in the overall historical framework of Indian spirituality, and B) in the context of a more circumscribed cultural/autobiographical perspective. As for point A), many scholars (Shandya and Singh are among them) have written to the effect that India is a cultural mosaic with religion at its core, and survived the test of time with an abiding identity because it was able to accommodate transformation by reconciling élitist trends (which prioritized stability and continuity), with popular trends (which emphasized change and social justice). Indian gurus, not unlike the reformer saints of many other religious traditions, have given voice through the ages to both tendencies.[2] Accordingly, the two autobiographies I examine in my paper show that the lack of any reference to the power issue qualifies Yogananda as a pre-modern and moderate (if not *de facto* conservative) reformer: far from challenging the Hindu tradition, he "modernizes" its rhetoric and its language in order to uphold it. Conversely, Rajneesh is in tune with the Western anti-authoritarian political trends of his time, and he belongs to a spiritually revolutionary avant-garde to the extent to which the power issue is central in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, as everywhere else in his lectures and books.

With respect to point B), Rajneesh's work validates the basic assumption that *Telling Lives in India* shares with Singh's work: the rhetorical shifts in Indian life writing of the last two centuries are a consequence of cultural change, which increased its pace

[1] "Raja" means "king", and is the nickname that Osho's beloved maternal grandmother gave to the author of *Glimpses* when he was a child.

[2] As far as Christianity is concerned, Saint Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) and Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/1182-1226) are well-known cases in point of what I say about the role played by outstanding spiritual reformers *vis-à-vis* the religious establishment.

after India's independence. *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, though, is particularly interesting as an *extreme* example of "heterogenetic" modernizing development, since it presents self-realization as an original political solution to the dichotomy of individual and society. The uncompromising rebellious stance that we find in it is an attempt to provide a radical answer to a seemingly insurmountable problem, by raising the stakes. Individualism, in the way Rajneesh conceives it, does not imply only political commitment, and the emergence and empowerment of a modern self; but also awareness, transcendence of the ego, and self-realization. Nothing will ever change as long as *individual consciousness* does not evolve to begin with. In the present historical moment, rebellion and conflict are a phase of the process of spiritually coming of age that cannot be bypassed. In fact, they are a token of hope for a future in which social intercourse will not be a limitation of individual freedom in the interest of collective survival, but a flowering of human potential.

That helps explain why Rajneesh considers tradition (and those who incarnate it) to be the main obstacle on the path to self-realization, which he points out for the disciple and the reader, while *Autobiography of a Yogi* implicitly postulates the acceptance of India's collective identity, and of the sacred outlook which used to underpin it. The very idea of *belonging* to a specific culture or a religion is in itself a problem, since *all* identities, from the standpoint of spiritual enlightenment, are past-oriented, foster conformism, and make us dependent on the recognition of others. Indeed, as we shall see in the next pages, chauvinism and populist politicians are harshly criticized in Osho's autobiography. The need to emphasize cultural difference is rooted in the identification with the ego: it comes from the outside, and disappears when meditation takes its place. At a collective or "political" level, it pits different societies against each other, and promotes religious intolerance and nationalism.

The *pars destruens* of the perspective that we find in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is mandated to the rebel, and ultimately consists in doing away with the past: it takes precedence over the *pars construens* of creating a better world in order to allow complete freedom to the ongoing process of cultural and existential change.[3]

[3] In his *Novum Organum* (1620), Francis Bacon shows the inductive method to include 1) a *pars destruens*, *i.e*. the negative part of criticizing views, and removing errors; and 2) a *pars construens*, *i.e*. the positive part of stating one's arguments, and gaining true knowledge. Socrates's maieutic method and Nietzsche's genealogical

A healthier society will not be the result of "enlightened" social engineering a) spiritual equivalent of Marx's "scientific" materialist approach, which is explicitly rejected), but the natural consequence of the very appearance of liberated individuals, whose example (like the one set by Raja in Osho's memoirs) will inspire more and more like-minded human beings. Accordingly, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is characterized by a groundbreaking utopic position: "The present" says the author, "must be offered to the future, and if an enlightened person cannot see into the future, then he is not enlightened at all" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 215).

Rajneesh makes clear that the legacy he leaves behind is not a religious creed or an ideology, but a provocation to risk all for freedom's sake, and a *vision*.[4] His autobiography, while being clearly connected to the wider Indian context, has all the hallmarks of a libertarian spiritual utopia that transcends it, and is meaningful for East and West alike. As such, *Glimpses* differentiates itself both from what it immediately precedes and what follows it. When considered in a diachronic perspective, it presents an original, and indeed subversive, convergence of spiritual, political, and existential themes, which deserves to be further investigated. "Autobiographies," we read in *Telling Lives in India*, "are viewed as valuable sources for understanding the emergence of a modern sense of self, of individualism and self-consciousness as opposed to collective identity" (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 8). This statement not only relates to contemporary self-centered narrative, but extends *a fortiori* to *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, and stands in stark contrast to the situation that Naipaul's *Indian Autobiographies* highlighted in 1965. "Naipaul" – writes Selwyn Cudjoe in *V.S. Naipaul. A Materialist Reading* – "saw the autobiographical statement as the expression of an *incomplete person*" (Cudjoe 1988, 131, italics added). Like G.K. Shandya, Cudjoe follows a post-colonial logic: consequently, he is far from concurring with so controversial a designation, or with the attendant definition of India as a "failed civilization." Yet Naipaul expresses a view that coincides with Osho's indictment of India's sacred outlook, and exactly captures the spirit in which Glimpses *of a Golden Childhood* was written.

The Trinidadian Nobel laureate maintained at the time his essay was published that Indian life writing (and the culture it mirrored) presented mythological traits, was

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method emphasize the *pars destruens* in the pursuit of truth.

[4] All biographical accounts report Rajneesh's last words to have been: "I leave you my dream."

divorced from reality, and lacked real political focus, because integrated individuality was not part of the prevailing cultural equation. In light of what I have said above about Arnold and Blackburn's perspective, a comparison between their essay and Naipaul's work shows not only that 1) today much has changed, since progressive Indian autobiographies have taken stock of the category of the individual; but also that 2) these still differ from their Western equivalents, and they are not mere "mimicry" in the post-colonial sense of the term. As a matter of fact, even now social atomism and anonymity are scarcely an issue, in India, because the social and the individual dimensions remain intimately intertwined. Interpersonal relationships are experienced (and described) as extensions of one's own self in "a continuum of selfhood" that constitutes the defining trait of a "modernized" collectivity-oriented setting, in which identities based on caste, family, and religious affiliation still hold a primary importance, while also addressing the needs of individuals (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 21). Although little known to the general public, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is an important work, for it amounts to much more than mere imitation of an alien cultural model. In fact, it is so original a synthesis of Eastern forms (hagiography and spiritual enlightenment) and Western influences (individualism and political engagement) that it compares favorably with the autobiographies that are studied in *Telling Lives in India*.

It bears repeating that in tradition-oriented Indian spiritual autobiography (which coincides with life writing rather than being one of its subgenres), the private sphere is not simply intertwined with, but essentially *subsumed* by the collective domain. Gandhi's *The History of my Experiments with Truth* is a model for Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* inasmuch as it promotes the Indian nation's spiritual identity, and it exemplifies ways of life premised on the scriptures: in the former work *Karma Yoga* coincides with nationalism; in the latter, *Kriya Yoga* represents India's distinctive contribution to the world. Both autobiographies presuppose the traditional notion of "service" (*seva*):[5] the individual devotes his life, and bows down to something that transcends it. Osho, however, is wary of abstract ideals and

[5] Selfless service is a central idea in many religions, including Hinduism. In the Bhagavad Gita, for instance, we read: "Living creatures are nourished by food, and food is nourished by rain; rain itself is the water of life, which comes from selfless worship and service" (*Bhagavad Gita*, 3.14).

scriptural truths, and he can hardly be considered a traditional mystic. Far from considering individualism a synonym of egoism and a spiritual error, he maintains that individuality is sacred and holy – in fact, it is the only cause really worth dying (and living) for.

"If something is needed," writes Rajneesh, "I am always ready to lose my life at any moment. Not for any national cause, not for any state, nor any race, but for any individual, for anyone whose heart still beats, who still feels, who is still capable of all childish things" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 92). A comparison of these words with lines from William Blake's poems, Jerusalem, "The Holiness of Minute Particular*s*," helps examine Rajneesh's love for individuals and his dislike for moralists and politicians from a cross-cultural vantage point–through the eyes of a like-minded Western poet: "He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars. General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, and flatterer." Blake writes: "The Infinite alone resides in Definite and Determinate Identity. Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falsehood […]" (William Blake 2011, 48-53; 60-66).

Osho used to say that Blake's (and Whitman's) insights came from a poet who had the heightened sensitivity of the mystic. One who could "see the world in a grain of sand" could see also that the individual is more real than the universal, because the universal is a fiction of the mind: it does not exist by itself. From this angle, Blake's criticism of the "generalizing rational power" sounds as an indictment of *all* identities founded on empty abstractions. Consequently, if you want to "do good," start by loving real people: help them to be free, recognize what is truly existential, and open your eyes to the beauty of "minute particulars." Indeed, Blake's "definite and determinate identity" is the individual for Rajneesh. Paradoxically, when it comes to human beings, the moment individuality is completely "defined" or crystallized, it becomes "infinite," *i.e*., divine: the acceptance of finitude brings about its transcendence. That is why both Blake and Rajneesh declare the primacy of the *pars destruens* we have mentioned before: they believe that if you are looking for truth, you should destroy falsehood first. Accordingly, in his memoirs, Osho takes a leaf from Blake's poem by condemning the hypocrites who parade as humanitarians, and by debunking charismatic leaders and "saints" as despicable "scoundrels." These cheats are concerned with abstract ideals such as "humankind" because these are made out of words: they can bend them to promote their hidden agendas and to

manipulate others. By proclaiming that they are serving Truth or "the general good," politicians and priests feel they are morally superior to ordinary human beings. Osho's individualism is the polar opposite of this logic, as he remodels a universal mystic and poetic insight to encompass the political field.

Another remark is in order here to clarify how we can speak of "cultural continuity" in the content of *Glimpses of Golden Childhood*. Rajneesh is in tune with Eastern hagiographic life writing to the extent to which this literary tradition places more importance on timeless truths than on facts, since the latter belong to the realm of the momentary, while the former pertain to the dimension of the timeless and the essential. A clear difference, however, exists between Rajneesh's understanding of the timeless, and the conception of eternal truth that belongs to traditional wisdom. While Yogananda holds that the scriptures mediate truth, Rajneesh maintains that sincere individuality *is itself* truth: his autobiography shows that the singular and the universal coincide in the experience of spiritual enlightenment. "In the end, Osho says, we will come to know who *he* is only when we come to know who *we* are" – comments Sarito Carol Neiman in her foreword to *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* (Osho Rajneesh 2000, *Location* 79).

To conclude, not only does Rajneesh prefigure the modern emphasis on the individual, but he also goes beyond it by giving a different ontological twist to the concept of the "self-in-society" that Arnold and Blackburn have outlined many years after him. He argues that we are at the same time *always* alone and *never* alone. We are always alone because a true individual never compromises on one's principles for the sake of public approval; hence one is often perceived as a rebel, a scandal, and an outsider. Yet, if we look beyond appearances, the Other is not merely outside, but also inside us, because the mind is a social product. Therefore, to be aware of the mind is also to know the world; which allows one to take responsibility for the part one plays in it. Truth be told, Osho is not the only modern guru to have claimed that an existential awareness of the true nature of society goes hand in hand with responsibility and freedom: he is in basic agreement with J. Krishnamurti, the only influential contemporary author whom he recognizes as enlightened in his memoirs.

Indeed, Krishnamurti (whose published works include *Notebook*, an intimist autobiographical diary) declares in *The First and Last Freedom*: "to be is to be related" (J. Krishnamurti 2013, 104). Osho (unlike Krishnamurti, who advocates a more detached, intellectual approach) considers proactive rebellion to be both a

precondition and the consequence of self-realization. For both authors, though, the above statement entails 1) a recognition of the intrinsically interpersonal, dialogic nature of human consciousness; and 2) the choice of relating with other human beings as equals, with love and awareness–which is at odds with power politics, hierarchical thinking, and all ideologies that emphasize collective cultural identity.

2.3 What Political Autobiography?

The choice I have made of a "modern" and "political" reading, as an interpretive strategy, requires not only the definition of modernity I have already given, but also a further exploration of a) the characterization of Rajneesh's memoirs as "political" and "exemplary"; and b) the absence of a modern "political" dimension in *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Consequently, before I elaborate further on the Indian autobiographical background, I shall examine the framework for political narrative that we find in *Between the Lines* (an essay published by Robert Boyer in 2012), in order to clarify my angle on these terms, and the connection obtaining between them. Although novels are the kind of narrative works that Boyer mentions, I consider his template to apply also to political life writing, since (as we have seen in the first chapter) modern autobiography is not organized around memory, but around a constitutive *narrative* dimension. Autobiography and fiction coincide to the extent to which the self consists in the *story* we choose to tell ourselves and others about our life and our experiences; and that tale owes at least as much to purpose and creativity than it does to objectivity and reason: "Autobiography, like other literary forms, is what a gifted author makes of it" – appositely writes Alfred Kazin in his 1964 Hopwood Lecture at the University of Michigan (Alfred Kazin 1964, 210).

In his paper, Boyer lists six generally accepted meanings of the word "politics" when we associate it with "narrative": 1) The term may point to an essentially collective dimension, in line with Bertrand Russel's observation that *politics is concerned with herds rather than with individuals*; 2) it may concern "the activities and the stratagems of a political class," and involve in its essence a struggle for power between parties or movements whose motivations are cast in *ideological* terms; 3) it may require individuals who believe that their actions have a prospect of success, and therefore *"there can be no politics where* it is felt that nothing can be done to effect change or that *the laws that govern society and define reality are fixed and immutable;"* 4) it may suggest that *everything is political*, therefore politics

encompasses much more than "the activities and stratagems of a political class:" rather, it consists in "the intersection of public and private life," a domain where the motives of individuals play a decisive role, which figures prominently in modern life writing; 5) it may amount to "protest fiction," a kind of narrative that either aims at trumpeting its own "virtuous sentimentality" or (alternatively) sets about effecting one or another decisive change in society; 6) it may be a kind of work not meant to be "improving," but to raise difficult questions (Boyers 2012: Vol. V, italics added).

With respect to the last two points of this outline, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* fits the description of a political work inasmuch as it aims 5) at effecting a "decisive change in society" by emphasizing the importance of individual freedom; and 6) at "raising the difficult question" of how far we are prepared to go in order to promote it and defend it. So far as structural change is concerned, Rajneesh's autobiography suggests the notion that in an ideal situation, freedom comes to fruition when a mature individualist stance has become more a tacit rule than a rebellious exception. Indeed, Rajneesh's spiritual/secular outlook is politically meaningful *as a discourse on power* when seen as an extension and a radicalization of the élite theory[6] that flowered in the West at the turn of the XIX century, according to which power should not be the monopoly of a minority, but should be *shared* among a multiplicity of political élites. In a truly civilized world, each individual is an élite in itself. With reference to orthodox Hinduism, Singh describes a diametrically opposite perspective, which constitutes the unspoken political background of *Autobiography of a Yogi*: "Elite structure in India was based on hierarchy, holism, and continuity. […] In the traditional Hindu theory of élite no antinomy between the individual and the state is ever conceived" (Singh 1973, 132). Freedom is not conceived in terms of individual awareness, as the positive outcome of competition or conflict. Rather, it is perceived in terms of collective morality, as the "unenforced" conformity to an ideal, which involves a supposedly "spontaneous" identification with the social whole. Consequently, Yogananda ignores the problem of power relations because in the

[6] The élite theory originates in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Wilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Robert Michels (1876-1936), and Max Weber (1864-1820). John Higley writes, "Pareto postulated that in a society with truly unrestricted social mobility élites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals; but in actual societies, élites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections […]" (J. Higley, *Elite Theory and Elites*. http://link.springer.com/chapter/10).

Hindu social system individuals have no political autonomy.

Osho, on the contrary, values *individual* freedom above everything else, and considers it a prerequisite of spiritual enlightenment. Accordingly, he is against both the caste system, in which authority incarnates an ethical law; and populist elective democracies, in which power is delegated to professional politicians, who are bound to misuse it and monopolize it. From the premise that the ego is non existential, Rajneesh draws the conclusion that *no one* is in any way special, so we are all equal, and power should be equally and universally shared. Pluralism, and the presence of competing élites, constitutes only the minimum requirement of a society made of rebels, which would be conducive to enlightenment. Clearly, the spread of individualism and the existential rebellion that Osho advocates in his memoirs would entail nothing less than a full-fledged and truly unprecedented revolution[7] – which few people would be ready to contemplate as a theoretical possibility, and fewer still would have the audacity to try to implement in practice. Dumont, for one, has no doubts in claiming that "hierarchy is necessary," and that "the ideal of equality is superior, but artificial." In *Homo Hierarchicus*, he writes: "In order to act, man needs values. To adopt a value is to introduce a hierarchy, a certain consensus of values. A certain hierarchy of ideas, things and people is indispensable to social life" (Dumont 1970, 20).

With respect to the second point of Boyer's framework, I note that Rajneesh writes not only about universal truths, but also with an eye on the contemporary political situation. Indeed, Osho's stance has illustrious antecedents since it implies agreement with Aristotle's statement about democracy at the time of its first appearance in Greece. A political system in which plain numerical majority rules is not "virtuous" (or "desirable"), since it depends on the consensus of the masses, which are unconscious and consequently easily manipulated and swayed. Point 2) builds on the notion that modern politics is no longer erected on the sacred foundation of divine right: it presupposes instead the existence of a secular "political class," which asserts its dominance (or aims at conquering it) in the name of a cogent *political ideology*. Any kind of narrative (autobiography not exempted) has a modern political quality whenever A) it describes a situation in which ideology takes center stage; and B) it

[7] Merriam-Webster's definition of the broader sense of the word "revolution" that I intend here is: "a sudden, extreme, or complete change (as in manner of living or working)."

does so in the context of "a struggle for power" that takes place among political movements and/or their leaders. By this token, Osho's life writing is "political" for the intuitive reason that a) it is set against the political background of India after the country had become a democratic republic; and b) elected politicians appear in it, and constitute a polemical target both (or either) as persons, and for the ideas they represent. As a matter of fact, in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* we meet leading politicians such as Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Moraji Desai, as well as the Mahatma; not to mention the fact that the author himself reports to have been considered as a worthy aspirant to the highest positions of political power.

Conversely, Yoganada's life writing is anything but politically "modern" since it shows no trace of such figures but ideally harks back to a time when secular and religious powers were not separate but rested on caste and sacred foundations: significantly, the *Autobiography of a Yogi* is mostly populated by ascetics and traditional saints (apart from Gandhi, who, as we have seen in the first chapter, seeks to "modernize" Hinduism from within). Moreover, the work does present evidence of the "virtuous sentimentality" that Boyers mentions in his framework. This stereotypical approach has a pre-modern political connotation, since it buttresses the conservative holistic ethos of orthodox Hinduism, as well as the vested interests that are allied with that worldview.

For instance, the episode of Roma's death not only points to the quality of "sentimental" ideological blindness that we find in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, but also illustrates Yoganada's omission to recognize the (political) importance of individuals and of private life (point 4). The husband of Yogananda's sister is ill. By virtue of clairvoyance, the yogi knows that his brother-in-law will die soon. In order to prove her loyalty, Roma wills her own death, since it would be "unspiritual" to survive the person whom tradition expects her to worship as a god. This is how she speaks a year before dying of a heart attack, shortly before Satish's demise: " 'Dear brother,' she said, 'I am well, and my husband is sick. Nevertheless, I want you to know that, as a devoted Hindu wife, I am going to be the first one to die. It won't be long now before I pass on' " (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 208).

If we look at its socio-cultural context, Roma's voluntary death is clearly a case of idealized *sati*. In fact, ritual suicide is a practice that persisted in India at the time Yogananda's autobiography was written, in spite of the efforts to eradicate it, which had begun already at the time of the Indian Renaissance. The ritual was more

murderous than spiritual, since it brought overwhelming social pressure to bear on young widows, and obliged them to climb on their dead husbands' funeral pyres, in order to demonstrate their virtue, and uphold an ancient male-chauvinist tradition. Even physical coercion was employed, when the woman's survival instinct was too hard to subdue. For all that, Yoganada gives a sentimental account of a grim social custom that pitilessly suppressed the most basic of all individual rights: the right to live. Indeed Paramhansa conventionally presents this kind of barely disguised *sati* like a "free" religious choice, and an act of love, in accord with his repeated assertions that social reforms are both necessary *and* consistent with the "true spirit" of Hinduism.

Rajneesh, on the contrary, speaks of blatant injustice and misogyny with respect to the inequitable situation, which he stigmatizes in his memoirs. He maintains that the "true spirit" of tradition is reactionary, and that the deeper roots of all crimes against the individual lie in the ideal-typical attributes of Hinduism. As a matter of fact, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* builds on, and takes to its logical extremes, the cultural-political innovations introduced in India by the Brahmos,[8] who, as we read in *Telling Lives in India*, "obliterate the principle that birth and kinship impose the most significant obligations" (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 93). Tellingly, Sudipta Kaviraj's chapter on Sastri's *Atmacarit*, in Arnold and Blackburn's book, bears a title that brings to mind point 4) of Boyer's synopsis: "The Invention of Private Life." The consonance with Osho's highlighting of individuality (and of the political relevance of the private sphere) is clear, since "Sastri thought his life showed the transformation of the most fundamental definition of social conduct. Before individuals can have a private life, the concept of private life has to become common in society" (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 97). In this perspective, Roma's self-sacrifice is neither free nor virtuous, but is induced, unspiritual, and symptomatic of political backwardness. As a matter of fact, it is premised on totally different "expectations about the world," when compared to Sastri's (and to Osho's) rejection of external manifestations, ritualism, and caste. As it happens, the author of *Glimpses* does not tire to denounce the fact that traditional morality is an ideological mask, which hides the reality of unequal (and often also iniquitous) power relations between persons, genders, and social classes.

[8] See Chapter One for the delineation of the Brahmo Samaj as an example of Westernization.

2.4 The Politician Inside

We have seen so far in this chapter that secular modernity is the background of Rajneesh's conception of the rebel. This view is characterized by 1) the straightforward rejection of casteism and hierarchy; and 2) the notion that nowadays an egoistic desire of self-affirmation inspires in different ways politicians, religious leaders, and so-called saints alike. While the Hindu hierarchical outlook is still alive in Yogananda's apolitical "expectations about the world," Rajneesh's innovative stance is articulated in a clear-cut political allegation: at present ideological manipulation has joined forces with centuries-old social injustice. Indeed, even as populist politicians and religious leaders pay lip service to democracy, and to moral ideals, the change with respect to the past is only apparent – although it is important to understand it, if we are ever to be able to climb the ladder that goes from the gregarious instinct of the animal to the clear awareness of the self-realized human being. Rebellion is the only way forward: it empowers the individual *vis-à-vis* the collectivity, which is still by and large unaware and tradition-oriented; and it advocates withdrawing our unconscious cooperation from those who exploit it to remain in power. From Osho's vantage point, a modern politician is one who, being deep down moved by the primitive desire to dominate others, hides his true nature behind an ideological or religious mask: at best, he is one who deceives himself about his real motivations. Priests (no matter what organized religion they may belong to) differ from those we call "politicians" only in terms of the disguise that they wear.

Crucially, however, *everyone* is a politician to the extent to which in everyday life he/she more or less consciously manipulates and exploits others, and is not innocent and bold enough to open his/her heart. *Everyone* is a hypocrite to the extent to which he/she claims that morality alone motivates his/her actions. Accordingly, the polemical leitmotifs that we find in Rajneesh's autobiography are: a) politics consists in prevarication and deception, and stands at the opposite pole of true spirituality because it nourishes the ego (*i.e*. the misconception that we are not one with existence and with our fellow human beings); b) institutionalized religion is more a political than a spiritual phenomenon, since morality is only a poor substitute for awareness: indeed, it is a fabrication devised by the clergy in order to manipulate the masses; and c) politics and hierarchical thinking can be found *everywhere*, and most

importantly *in interiore homine* – no matter what our beliefs and deliberate intentions may be. In *Autobiography of a Yogi* we find no comparable ideological and existential awareness, as the work resonates with the identitarian[9] outlook of the Indian Renaissance, as we see from the different interpretations that Yogananda and Rajneesh give to the figure of Gandhi, to the laws of Manu, and to casteism.

G.K. Shandya's remarks about spiritual autobiographies are apposite to further highlight the "political" argument I advance here in respect to life writing. Indian autobiography – we read in *Some Indian Spiritual Autobiographies in English* – effectively begins with, and bears the stamp of Gandhi's political/religious ideology, and nowadays the distinction between the inner and the outer domains can no longer be considered an irreducible dichotomy. Moreover, while spiritual experience *per se* remains largely independent from external influences, the language, the words, and the forms chosen to express it carry strong socio-cultural messages, and project various dimensions of the cultural moment that informs the subjects of that experience (G.K. Sandhya 2011, 9).

As a matter of fact, explicit and *implicit* assumptions underpin the life writing of both the traditional mystic and the revolutionary religious reformer; they color in distinctive ways the perceptions and the rhetoric of Yoganada and Osho, and substantiate their life writing inasmuch as *all* life histories are social constructs. These assumptions are, according to *Telling Lives in India*, "expressions of some conception of the self or individual personhood" (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 15). In my take, they are also *political in nature*, and central to understanding the "autobiography of enlightenment" since (as I have stated in Chapter One) a changed perception of the self necessarily implies a different manner of transcending it and of writing about it. In the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, ascetic discipline is a cure-all remedy that solves all problems. All the answers are given already by traditional wisdom, and the subject is in harmony with the world around him or her: reality (and the subordination of the individual to the social whole) is indeed "conceived as fixed and immutable" in accord with point 3) of Boyer's delineation. That explains why

[9] I refer here to T.W. Adorno's first definition of the term "identitarian," as Ross Wolf outlines it in the 1st November 2013 issue of *The Charnel House*: "In his late magnum opus *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno seeks to critique ideological representations of society that minimize or suppress real antagonisms and unresolved antinomies that historically persist" (Ross Wolfe, "On the Term Identitarian," *The Charnel-House*. http://thecharnelhouse.org/ 2013/11/01).

power is implicitly presented as a spiritual reward for those who seek it in the ways that tradition prescribes, and is not conceived (let alone made explicit) as a political problem. Conversely, in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* truth is something the individual has to fight for, and experiential awareness opens one's eyes to the reality of injustice and power politics: the self-realized writer identifies no longer the yogi, but the rebel, as an example to follow.

As a matter of fact, "exemplary figures" such as Babaji, Shree Yukteswar Giri, Lahiri Mahasaya are mythical embodiments of sacred authority that suggest not rebellion, but acquiescence to the *status quo*. Completely removed from ordinary life, they are noble and immortal, appear in dreams, and perform supernatural feats. They belong to a timeless dimension where the petty reality of power relations and scheming (let alone brain-washing and Machiavellianism) is brushed aside as illusory and transient.

To sum up: *Autobiography of a Yogi* is concerned with an ideal, not an actual world: the "truths" it assumes are at odds with the modern conception that individual action can have a political impact on society. In a "sacred" perspective, what matters is not the future, but the past, since the past is more influential and real even than the present. In fact, Yogananda's life writing is premised on the Hindu cyclic and devolutionary conception of time and history, which takes up several chapters of the work's doctrinal background. Moral degeneration is to blame for what is wrong with the present, but the Golden Age is bound to return of its own accord, one day: hence the emphasis on the guru as a tradition-bound moral mentor, who appears as the polar opposite of Osho's iconoclastic and rebellious dropout.

Rajneesh's life writing, on the other hand, shows life as it is, and can on first impression be defined as "political" because 1) *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is set against the post-independence Indian political background, in which the kind of power that matters is not the monopoly of scriptural exegesis or miracle working, but real, mundane, and often corrupt political clout; and 2) all the "holy men" we meet in the memoirs are anything but inspiring and saintly: indeed, they fall below any acceptable standard of decency and self-respect, and are accordingly exposed as mediocre and power-hungry deceivers. Significantly, however, although Rajneesh does not spare criticism towards those who hold positions of political or religious authority, he does so not in order to pass a moral judgment, but in order to encourage readers or disciples to become aware of their own unconscious motivations. The politician is presented as a mirror in which we can look at the image of our own

ambition; the priest shows the reflection of our own bogus righteousness.

In a deeper sense, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* transposes the archetypically Eastern desire to attain reality beyond the screen of appearances from the field of mystical experience to the interpersonal and "political" domain. Unlike Yogananda, Osho does not rely on unproven moral assertions to explain what motivates men to action, but brings modern psychology and ideology theory to bear on his interpretation. In fact, he is the first influential Indian guru to have examined Nietzsche and Freud in connection with Eastern spirituality, and to have in that context emphasized the importance of the former's theorization of the will to power, and of the latter's theorization of the unconscious as a blind self-affirmative force. To sum up, in Osho's life writing the search for truth loses its character of collective and codified religious endeavor, and becomes a personal, outrageous, and even dangerous affair. In fact, the little boy Raja is so mischievous and provocative as to have to go around escorted by a bodyguard:

> That was my way during those first years when I lived with my grandfather, and yet I was absolutely protected by punishment. He never said: "Do this," or "don't do that." On the contrary he put his most obedient servant, Bhoora, at my service, to protect me. Bhoora used to carry a very primitive gun with him. He used to follow me at a distance, but that was enough to frighten the villagers. That was enough to allow me to do whatsoever I wanted. (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 30)

Clearly, the autobiographical protagonist of *Glimpses* prefigures Rajneesh as a guru at the time he wrote his memoirs: a loose cannon in the context of the world of spirituality and the world of politics, whose scathing remarks go way beyond the strictly Indian political and religious sphere.[10] In *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, not only is hypocrisy harshly stigmatized, but also conformity and self-deception are met with outright sarcasm. As it happens, well-mannered irony is considered too mild an approach to the problem of social injustice, which is rooted in the unconscious collusion of exploiter and exploited, and is dictated by conformism and fear. In a cross-cultural perspective, we note that Raja is the very opposite of

[10] In 1984 Rajneesh was trying to establish an international commune in Oregon, and was locked in a power struggle with the local residents who opposed his undertaking, and with the American political establishment. Ronald Reagan was one of his polemical targets.

Voltaire's Candide, whose simplistic and misguided belief that we live in a perfect world evokes Yogananda's sugary description of India's traditional ways of life--although Voltaire speaks tongue-in-cheek, whereas the unsophisticated Paramhansa speaks in earnest. Both characters are young and pure at heart, but a meditative quality makes all the difference: while Candide is deceived again and again, and suffers from his naïve trust in lofty moral ideals, Raja sees all too well through the lies of those in power. Indeed, his childhood is so golden that he is able to turn the tables, and make them come to grief for their hypocrisy.

2.5 Individuals and Herds

Glimpses of a Golden Childhood is an intellectually provocative work, which does not court favor with the masses and is declaredly addressed to freethinking individuals – a sadly noninfluential minority. Yet, Russel's pithy statement that politics concerns herds, not individuals, bears out my *prima facie* attribution of a "political" quality to it. In fact, Bertrand Russel is a thinker who advocates a libertarian political creed: therefore he has more in common with Osho the rebel than with Yogananda the saint. His words are as much an implicit indictment of the world as it is, than an objective description of the kind of society we live in. As a matter of fact, in a pre-modern situation Russel's assertion would be all but inconceivable, since the individual *does not yet exist*: it is virtually indistinguishable from the social matrix it belongs to. The individualist perspective that we find in Rajneesh's life writing is made possible in India by the advent of a democratic Western-inspired constitution, which marks a new beginning for two reasons: a) as we have seen in chapter one, in 1947 individual freedoms are institutionalized and begin to erode collective identities and the caste system; and b) political leadership falls into the hands of an elected *populist* élite (the access into which is no longer restricted to Brahmins and the higher castes), which needs to mobilize consensus around a political program, through a recognizable political ideology, in order to remain in power.

Populist ideologies, and the human "herds" that follow them, are the modern replacement for the sacred outlook, and for the castes that prevailed in the past, inasmuch as they capitalize on conformity, and go against the grain of true individuality. "Ideologies, in fact, are one of the methods by which herds are created" – declares Bertrand Russel in his Nobel address in 1950. Ideology has a key role in

politics because by mobilizing the passions of a herd (*i.e*. a collectivity) it makes its members "feel alike" – in other words, it re-creates a sense of belonging to a whole. Russel's choice of words is eloquent (the term "herds" suggests instinct, the opposite of awareness), and shows an inherent attunement with Rajneesh's secular/spiritual perspective. In *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, Morarji Desai and Javaharlal Nehru stand respectively for what Osho considers the disgraceful norm, and the beautiful (albeit rare) exception to it, which obtain in the world of politics. Morarji is harshly stigmatized as "arrogant," as "a cartoon," and as a man "of no value;" while Javaharlal is praised for being "a dreamer," an idealist, and "a poet."

Osho's secular/spiritual approach to politics is detailed by two important episodes. In the first, Masto (one of Raja's older friends and enlightened mentors) procures for the protagonist an interview with Nehru, who was the prime minister of India at that time. Young Rajneesh is called in while cabinet minister Morarji Desai, who is also there for a private meeting, is kept waiting outside for an hour and a half, and takes pettly offence for the preference given to a mere boy. That incident marks the beginning of a lasting hostility, which will blow into a full-scale confrontation when Morarij Desai becomes in his turn the political head of the country.[11] Nehru, on the contrary, takes immediate liking for twenty-year-old Raja, in spite of the latter's odd appearance and straightaway recognizes a spiritual affinity with him. The two talk for hours about meditation, and the charismatic statesman understands that his eccentric interlocutor is an outstanding human being, with a great spiritual and political potential: he has all it takes to become "a Mahatma Gandhi."

Clearly, in this episode Rajneesh presents himself as an exemplary secular figure by citing Nehru's endorsement, and at the same time he points out a basic contradiction as far as politics is concerned: if you desire power, you don't deserve it; if you don't hanker after it, you are qualified to claim it, but you will be neither fulfilled nor given the recognition you deserve. "I was not there to meet a poet, but a politician. I met a poet" – writes Osho – "Jawaharlal was not a politician. Alas, he could not succeed in bringing his dreams to reality […] a poet is always a failure" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 281). Only egolessness qualifies one for the exercise of political authority, but ordinary people cannot understand enlightenment, therefore power-hungry and

[11] Morarji Desai held the office of prime minister of India from 1977 to 1979, at the peak of the flowering of Osho's International Commune in Poona. At that time, Rajneesh attacked him many times during his morning lectures.

despicable sycophants like Morarij Desai are able to take advantage of the blindness of the masses in order to press their hidden agendas. Indeed, at the time *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* was written, the progressive secular élite personified by Nehru had given way to the populist élites who followed in the wake of India's independence.

The negative importance attributed to populism by Rajneesh's life writing is made even more explicit by another episode, in which Masto tells the protagonist about a conversation he has had with Nehru, and relates how the latter has grown to hate the idea that Osho might one day be involved with elections and political parties:

> "Do you know, Javaharlal has been remembering you again and again, particularly in my last meeting with him. He said, 'If you see that strange boy, and if you are in any way concerned about him, keep him out of politics, because I wasted my life with these stupid people. I don't want that boy begging votes from utterly stupid, mediocre, unintelligent masses. No, if you have any say in his life, please protect him from politics." (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 297)

According to the received meaning adumbrated above, politics is a kind of moral prostitution. Point 1) of Boyers's synopsis, which centers on Bertrand Russel's 1950 Nobel Lecture, suggests that this is a necessary albeit deplorable predicament since "all human activity is prompted by desire" (Russel 1950). In the political field, the desire in question is the lust for power. Rajneesh agrees with Russel, and Nehru's example proves Osho right, much to Masto's displeasure, since the old man dreamed of a grand political future for his protégé. There is here, however, a further aspect that is worth looking at. What Russel asserts about the nature of human endeavors in general is intended in this instance to provide a psychological explanation of "political actions" in a secular context--yet it carries a distinctive Eastern flavor. In fact, the basic assumption of all the religions that teach reincarnation is that desire and unawareness are two sides of the same coin: for all their difference, Yogananda and Rajneesh agree that liberation from the wheel of life is attained when desires are transcended. From the statement above, though, Russel draws the deduction that "desires are more politically important than moral duties," which further highlights the discrepancy between the "assumptions about the world" of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* and the unspoken postulations of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. In fact, Russel argues (in agreement with Rajneesh) that moral principle alone cannot be a guide to

action, “not because no man ever acts from a sense of duty, but because duty has no hold on him unless he *desires* to be dutiful” (Russel 1950, italics added).

We have seen before that moral obligation (*dharma*) is the core of the Hindu sacred worldview, and the cornerstone of the caste-based outlook that persisted at the time *Autobiography of a Yogi* was published. Significantly, in the path of Kriya Yoga there is no contradiction between freedom and institutionalized moral rules. For Yogananda, the first step to be taken is to follow Patanjali, and the scriptures: a far cry from Osho’s plea to crystallize individuality by relying on individual experience, *wherever it may lead us*. In a world in which true individuality has not yet arisen, however, it hardly makes sense to speak of freedom the way Paramhansa does. When discussing Gandhi, Yogananda, and other traditional Indian saints, G.K. Shandya begins with a supposedly “self-evident” assertion, which Rajneesh would consider not only unproven and contrary to experience, but also spiritually and politically detrimental: “The fulfillment of duties leads to self-realization. […] While following these paths, the authors of these autobiographies treat scriptures not as prescriptions on ways of life but as descriptions, because they *freely* experiment with these ways of life” (Shandya 2011, 7, italics added). Yogananda presupposes a harmony between man and society that rests on the transcendent foundation of the scriptures, and postulates a similar accord at the level of motivation to action. Nevertheless, a traditional man’s choice is *free* only by virtue of a mere definition: that is, inasmuch as it is thought to be *naturally* restricted to the gamut of spiritually institutionalized ways, and cannot fall away from them.

2.6. Gandhi

Gandhi’s role is of central importance both in the *Autobiography of a Yogi* and in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, and it illustrates well the different worldviews that underpin the two works. Gandhism on the one hand has a decisive influence on Yogananda’s “orthogenetic” adaptation of Hinduism to modernity, and on the other hand represents the polar opposite of Osho’s self-centered rebelliousness. Indeed, the Mahatma’s neo-traditional ideological stance rejects the modern and secular idea that social order is based on power, and therefore it underscores the importance of morality, self-effacement, and duty, *vis-à-vis* rebellious political commitment, and freedom of choice on the part of self-directed individuals. A quotation from Yogendra Singh’s *Modernization of the Indian Tradition* is apposite here to clarify

my angle about this matter:

> Gandhi had realized the significance of the encounter of the Hindu tradition with the West […] He counterposed his philosophy, which was drawn from the essentials of traditional Hinduism, as an alternative system. He reiterated the Hindu concept of social and cultural order based on *dharma*, or moral obligations, which implied a conscious rejection of the Western theory of social order based on 'power.' (Sing 1973, 44)

In a key episode that celebrates the spiritual and cultural affinity between the two luminaries of the Indian Renaissance, Paramhansa tells the reader about his momentous meeting with "India's political saint." The encounter is portrayed as edifying and exemplary, but it presents also an implicit political overtone, as it amounts to a mutual endorsement. The Mahatma's ideology and religious stature are openly acknowledged; at the same time Yoganada's support is reciprocated by Gandhi's respectful request to be initiated into Kriya Yoga.[12] The standard expressions of praise on the part of the yogi are a fitting though hardly essential concession to the new "progressive" cultural climate: "I was touched by the Mahatma's open-mindedness and spirit of enquiry" – declares Yogananda (Paramhansa Yoganada 2005, 428). A less perspicuous focus of attention, though, is the unspoken designation of Gandhi as a symbol of nativist[13] continuity between past and present. The cultural background of such "orthogenetic" conflation of religion and politics is what Shandya describes in post-colonial terms as a "deeper perspective on Hinduism," and as "a rediscovery of the scriptures in the context of socio-cultural cross-currents" (Sandhya 2011, 68).

We can see what such a "deeper perspective" amounts to by considering it against the background of Yogananda's consonance with Gandhi, as far as the caste system is concerned. In the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Manu is called "a great law-giver," and Nietzsche's approval of his "wise social regulations" is cited as corroborating evidence for this appraisal. Similarly, Gandhi is credited with the accomplishment of a great political/religious deed: he has restored "the ancient values of caste, based solely on natural qualification and not on birth" (Yogananda

[12] However, Gandhi's reverence did not go so far as to choose Yogananda as a guru.
[13] Merriam-Webster's definition of the sense of the word "nativism" that I intend here is: "the revival or perpetuation of an indigenous culture especially in opposition to acculturation."

2005, 379). The caste system needs to be reformed, not abolished, because it is not intrinsically unjust, and the pain it has caused down the centuries is due to its perversion, which results from human limitations. In fact, the inclusion in a caste originally depended on the goal of life one elected. One "freely chose" *to be born* in a certain caste: the *sudra* chose to experience the life of the senses, which corresponds to the stage of *kama*, desire, and was therefore "mistakenly" considered the lowest; the Brahmins chose to experience liberation and spirituality, and contributed to humanity through religious teaching, rather than with manual labor. In this perspective, the highest caste does not rule because of the political power it monopolizes, but by virtue of the increased moral responsibility it shoulders. One is reminded here of the claim to civilizational superiority that Europeans used to formulate in order to justify the domination of colonial powers in Third World countries, according to which colonization is not an injustice, but a duty. Ironically, "the white man's burden" argument appears here in a spiritual disguise, and in a post-colonial perspective, since it is applied intra-culturally to castes, rather than inter-culturally to nations. For all that, it is just as reactionary, and hardly defensible, from a rational and egalitarian point of view.

Unsurprisingly, in fact, such a principled defense is accompanied by observations that are completely at odds with any current conception of individuality, social justice, and freedom; and have understandably failed to convince vociferous critics like Kancha Ilaiah: "Where there is a great license or so-called liberty […] the race dwindles away and becomes extinct"--maintains Yogananda, in one of his most controversial statements. The caste system is "the check against license which has preserved the purity of the race" (Yogananda 2005, 379). In general, the distinction between "natural qualifications" and "qualifications based on birth" presupposes that a moral entitlement to spiritual authority (with the political implications it entails) can always be incontrovertible; and that it can be measured against a scriptural yardstick – which leaves open the problem of the fallibility of concrete human agency. Indeed, the defense of casteism is consistent with the same past-oriented outlook, and the denial of the body and of the "animal" instincts, which we find both in Gandhi's and in Yogananda's autobiographies. Accordingly, David Arnold writes in "The Self and the Cell" (an essay about Gandhi's autobiography, which is part of *Telling Lives in India*): "Gandhi's experiences of jail in 1908, in South Africa (…)

show racial repugnance. He remained staunchly opposed to mixing with the *kaffirs*"[14] (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 34-35). His allegation is the same that Rajneesh advances: casteism is essentially a form of socially and religiously sanctioned racism. Exponents of cultural Westernization such as Roy and Nehru were likewise highly critical of Gandhi's denial of the modern world, and of his views on celibacy, which (as we shall see further on) are premised on a perspective that is repeatedly outlined in *Autobiography of a Yogi*: the body must be disciplined and ordered, because it is the seat of "low" and "unspiritual" animal desires.

By contrast, Rajneesh (who also relates how he became acquainted with Gandhi), not only is all in favor of the body, but (crucially) also maintains that reality and ideology are quite different indeed, and he introduces a clear distinction between the individual and the ideas he professes. "He was ugly to the core," – is Osho's irreverent evaluation of the Mahatma's appearance – "in fact, I would say he was uniquely ugly, but his beauty was in his smile; about that I cannot be against him. About everything else I am against him, because except for his smile everything else was just rubbish, rot! He was really a great Bodhigarbage"[15] (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 72). On the one hand Osho explicitly credits Gandhi with being sincere in his experiential pursuit of truth; and on the other hand he describes him as backward looking and affected by ideological blindness. Another incident reported in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is significant in this respect. Raja, who carries a silver rupee in his pocket, meets Gandhi, who is travelling around India by train in third class, on a mission to raise funds to help the underprivileged. The boy is less than impressed by the self-importance of a man that his family and the whole nation have chosen as their leader.[16] He confronts the political saint, and objects to him that the coin should be given directly to the poor, rather than going through the intermediary of his charitable bureaucratic apparatus. Later on, Osho also accuses Gandhi of hypocrisy: his compartment was third class only in name, as it was unusually well appointed,

[14] Dictionary.com defines "kaffir" as "a contemptuous term used in South Africa to refer to a black person" (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/kaffir).

[15] "Bodhi" is usually translated into English with "spiritual enlightenment." The unlikely (and anticlimactic) combination of the words "great," "bodhi," and "garbage" is a deliberate mockery of Gandhi's ideological and religious stance, which is commonplace in Rajneesh's works.

[16] Osho tells us in his memoirs that he was "the only black sheep in a Gandhian family" because he completely disagreed with what he considered to be Gandhi's rejection of modernity and progress.

and entirely reserved for the Mahatma.

It is interesting here to compare Osho's scathing observation (that characteristically debunks the self-professed humbleness of a universally acclaimed political icon) with a passage from *Some Spiritual Autobiographies in English*, which commends Gandhi's righteousness on ideological grounds: "It is with the same spiritual-nationalist zeal that we see Gandhiji undertaking pilgrimages in India travelling third class. […] his intentions for undertaking what he calls a 'tour' in part III of the autobiography, 'through India travelling third class' was to acquaint himself with the hardships of the third class passengers (Gandhi 1927: 199)" (Shandya 2011, 98). Indeed, when charismatic politicians write their memoirs, and academics comment about them, their accounts claim to be "objective," but their purported impartiality is not easily reconciled with authorial self- vindication, and with a self-serving ideological bias. That helps explain why Arnold and Blackburn describe Gandhi's "exemplary" life writing as "a highly selective account" (Arnold and Blackburn 2004, 39). As far as best sellers and popular favor are concerned, hagiography lives on in a modernized cultural garb through the life writings of professional politicians: in India, Gandhi's foundational life writing shows the way in this respect. In the eyes of the layman, power singles out as "special" the few that incarnate it or are acquainted with it. While in the present situation the age-old association between ascetic spirituality and magic prowess (exemplified by Yoganada) no longer obtains, the general public is still interested in what provokes their envy or admiration while exceeding the sphere of their direct experience. In the modern autobiographical context, the charismatic politician has in part replaced the saint endowed with supernatural powers as an object of unconscious identification.

G.K. Shandya's appraisal of *The History of my Experiments with Truth* and of its consonance with Yogananda's work is apposite here to highlight the implicit rejection of post-colonialism that characterizes *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, and contributes to define its individualistic political character. Shandya explains that for Gandhi self-realization is attained by serving the cause of India's political independence, "by pursuing ways of life befitting national character" (Shandya 2011, 25). Accordingly, "decolonizing the mind" coincides with "decolonizing the nation." An imposed foreign identity is to be replaced by a rediscovered, legitimate, and autochthonous one. From this angle, Yoganada's *Autobiography of a Yogi* is political in the same sense in which Gandhi's *The History of my Experiments with Truth* also

has political overtones: it promotes the idea that scriptural revelation makes of India a unique (and indeed exceptional) spiritual *nation*. In fact, for Yogananda as well as for Gandhi, the modernization and reaffirmation of Hinduism overlaps with the rejection of Christian missionary proselytism, and of the post-colonial cultural subordination of India to the West, so that spirituality, nationalism, and tradition coincide: India is "the guru of the world."[17]

Contrariwise, Rajneesh maintains that the mind as such consists in the "colonization" [18] of individual consciousness on the part of society. True "decolonization" is a self-possessed individual's rebellion against *all kinds* of conditionings (the national, religious, and parental ones not excluded), which has by necessity a political significance, and extends to all social institutions. The most daring aspect of Rajneesh's spiritual/secular outlook lies in the postulation that such an all-embracing deconditioning is both possible and desirable as an actual political outcome. So far as "subaltern classes" are concerned, in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* we find many statements to the effect that women and children have suffered most, throughout history, from the violence intrinsic in the process of acculturation[19] and in the enforcement of social conformity. Indoctrination takes advantage of a children's innocence and their need for love and support: as such, it is tantamount to a misuse of power and represents the basic "political" injustice on which all societies have been built down the ages. "That is what is great.... not to indoctrinate" – writes Rajneesh in praise of his grandfather, who brought him up *in loco parentis*, and was crucial in the preservation of his freedom when he was a small child – "It is so human to force a helpless child to follow your beliefs; but he remained untempted. Yes, I call it the greatest temptation. The moment you see someone dependent on you in any way, you start indoctrinating" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 31).

From this perspective, little Raja's rebellion against the sadistic schoolteacher Kantar Master is a political act, according to a modern definition of politics as the

[17] Biographer Swami Kriyananda states that the English considered Yogananda a political threat, since he filled his compatriots "with pride in their own heritage" (Swami Kriyananda 2011, 78).

[18] I use here the word "colonization" as a metaphor for what Rajneesh calls "cultural conditioning."

[19] The Merriam-Webster's definition of the sense of the word "acculturation" that I intend here is: "the process by which a human being acquires the culture of a particular society from infancy."

intersection of the public and the private sphere,[20] in which the individual plays a decisive role. Consequently, the protagonist's first day at school is also an example of a personal (victorious) "anti-colonial" struggle, in which the power relations inherent in society are laid bare, and strenuously fought against in the name of individual freedom: it marks the beginning of a relentless confrontation not only with the Indian repressive educational system, but also with the whole religious and political establishment. "I said to my father, 'no.' " – writes Osho in his memoirs – "That was my first word before entering primary school, and you will be surprised, it was also my last word on leaving university" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 130).

The appreciation of femininity, and the rejection of casteism and hierarchy, which characterizes *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, is just as unequivocal. Indeed, while Yogananda's praise of women never goes so far as to give them real psychological and narrative autonomy, within his *Autobiography*, Rajneesh portrays his grandmother as a thoroughly "modern" and unconventional figure--his most powerful ally in the power struggles he had to face as a child. Moreover, he informs the reader that the ideal-typical importance of Manu's book, which lies at the core of the Hindu tradition (and is defended by both Gandhi and Yogananda), is best interpreted in the context of an incontrovertible historical fact: Hitler loved it, and Nazism was fashioned according to the principles it prescribed.

2.7 The Rebel

The connection between rebellion, modernity, spirituality, and politics, which I investigate in this paper from the standpoint of life writing, is made explicit by V.S. Naipaul, as we have already noted in a previous paragraph. In fact, in *Indian Autobiographies* the author formulates views of overall aesthetic and political relevance, which hold true for an appraisal of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and which vindicate, in an inter-cultural perspective, the theorization of the rebel that we find in Osho's work. About Gandhi's autobiography, the Nobel laureate writes, "We are in fact dealing with the type of society which Camus described in the opening chapter of *The Rebel*: a society which has not learned to see, and is incapable of assessing itself, which asks no questions because ritual and myth have provided all the answers, a society which has not learned rebellion" (Naipaul 29012, 143). "For the

[20] See §3: point 4) of Boyer's synopsis.

first half, Gandhi's autobiography reads like a fairy tale" – explains Naipaul – "He is dealing with the acknowledged marvels of his early life; and his dry, compressed method, reducing people to their functions and simplified characteristics, reducing places to names, and actions to a few lines of narrative, turns everything into legend" (Naipaul 29012, 141).

Indeed, *Autobiography of a Yogi* appears even at first sight to be far more out of touch with actual reality than *The History of my Experiments with Truth*, in spite of the fact that Yogananda is so ambitious as to aim at giving the reader an "objective" account not only of true facts, but even of esoteric truths. The root cause of the "fabulous" quality of this kind of literature, according to Naipaul, is ideological:[21] in Indian life writing, the hard facts of enforced conformity, and social injustice are distorted by "the Indian habit of exclusion, denial, non-seeing." As a matter of fact, Naipaul's assessment validates two key statements of this chapter: first, Yogananda's autobiography exemplifies the pre-modern hierarchical stance of the Hindu sacred outlook; and second, Rajneesh's *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* shows a modernizing "political" change with respect to that very outlook.

Let us consider, in this regard, an example of encroachment of social norms on individual autonomy, which forms a kind of ideal narrative *incipit* in both works: a) Mukunda's clichéd "rebellion" against his father; and b) the authentic, uncompromising rebelliousness that Raja shows *vis-à-vis* parental conditioning. On the one hand we have the protagonist of the *Autobiography of a Yogi*: he has decided to become a renunciate, but his father, who is stereotypically described as "a stern disciplinarian," would rather have him complete his studies and choose a profitable career than become an ascetic dropout. On the other hand, Raja follows a much more individualistic and rebellious calling: he resists any kind of external imposition, does not want to go to school, is deliberately confrontational, and refuses to become a cloth merchant, and take over the family business. The background of this conflict, which flares up only in Osho's case, is "political" in the sense I have given to this term (*i.e*., inasmuch as the family is a social institution): ideally it is premised on the looming critique of patriarchal society that we find in Sastri's autobiography. Indeed, *Atmacarit* reflects on the contrast between the traditional Indian extended family,

[21] The word "ideological" is used here with reference to Merriam-Webster's definition of "ideology:" "a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture."

which upholds collectivist values, and the new nuclear family, which appears with the onset of modernity in India, and is consistent with a more individualistic stance and way of life.

In the first case a), the outcome of the potential conflict between individual choice and social (parental) conditioning is predictable from the very beginning, and plays out within the limits of the Hindu traditional outlook. The book begins with Mukunda's ardent desire to become a yogi. His "stern father" is dutifully worried about his son's material well being, but he happens to be also a disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya, so he will end up by being appeased, by recognizing the superiority of the spiritual over the secular principle, and by granting his permission. Likewise, Mukunda is depicted like a very respectful offspring: his attempted escape to the Himalayas is merely meant to dramatize his spiritual longing, and comes across more like a childish bravado, than like a conscious act of rebellion. In short, in Paramhansa's *Autobiography of a Yogi* the hierarchical principle is never at stake. Family, society, and religious institutions (including renunciation or *sannyas*) support each other, and authority (at all levels) is the preserve of idealized and benevolent rulers.

In the second case b), the meaning of spirituality is redefined in unconventional "political" terms: we have a real power conflict between an older person who tries to enforce his authority (which society supports and recognizes), and a younger one who refuses to acknowledge it, in the name of rationality and individual freedom. The confrontation between the two is harsh: it begins with the adult who drags forcibly the child into school, while the latter cries out that he has no respect for him; and it reaches its peak when Raja emphasizes his contempt for tradition by declaring that he will not fulfill the ritual duty of "giving the fire" to his father's funeral pyre, when the moment comes. Such a contest of wills is unprecedented, and indeed scandalous in the Indian context; and is resolved only when the tables are turned, and hierarchy is reversed: Osho stops being a rebellious son by becoming his own father's guru.

Clearly, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, for all its having been written *after* Sastri's autobiography, ideally precedes it. Conversely, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* not only presupposes the "invention of private life" that I have mentioned in §3, but goes way beyond the cultural innovations introduced by the Indian Renaissance, by advocating a *primacy* of the private over the public sphere, which (as we have seen

above) has a modern anti-authoritarian connotation, and provocatively undermines the sacred foundation of traditional Indian culture. In this context, conformity is out of the question. True spirituality presupposes individualism and intellectual autonomy, not morality and dogmatism: it coincides with rebellion, rather than obedience, and has a potentially revolutionary impact on society at large. Accordingly, in his "Foreword" to *The Rebel*, Herbert Reeds writes:

> […] so this work begins with a meditation on enduring or not enduring—on the implications of the act of rebellion. If we decide to live, it must be because we have decided that our personal existence has some positive value; if we decide to rebel, it must be because we have decided that a human society has some positive value. But in each case the values are not "given"—that is the illusionist trick played by religion or by philosophy. They have to be deduced from the conditions of living, and are to be accepted along with the suffering entailed by the limits of the possible. Social values are rules of conduct implicit in a tragic fate; and they offer a hope of creation. (Camus 1956, 2)

In *Autobiography of a Yogi*, no conflict between father and son can ever arise precisely because all "values are given" -- therefore endurance and self-delusion are the only available options in the face of imposed social limitations. This holds true also for other unacknowledged power conflicts we come across with in the book: see, for instance, the conflict between Bala Gila and her mother-in-law,[22] who accuses her of eating too much. Symptomatically, the confrontation ends with the former "defeating" the latter not by standing her ground, but by becoming a saint: she learns how to live out of thin air, through a secret yogi technique. Once again, moral values and tradition are everything, conditions of living count for nothing: in a pre-modern context, ideological escapism is the name of the game.

On the other hand, in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, the consonance between Rajneesh's and Camus' perspectives is evident in many ways, although the former

[22] The oppression of daughters-in-law by their mothers-in-law is a traditional form of subjugation that continues to this day, and is often due to economic reasons: when the dowry that the bride brings into her new husband's family is deemed insufficient, the woman is pitilessly harassed. "Dowry System" – writes Ankita Mitra – " has its root in the attitude of Indian society towards women. However reverential we may be in our references to the women, […] the society has done very little to end the servility of women to men" (http://www.importantindia.com/10609/problem-of-dowry-system-in-India).

presents mystic, not "tragic" connotations. Real death, for Osho, is not the dissolution of the body, but the death of the ego: a most significant event, which is neither absurd, nor a tragedy, but constitutes the very culmination of a life of love and awareness. As a matter of fact, however, both these authors' outlooks imply a clear distinction between revolution (which sacrifices the present moment, and the individual, in the name of abstract principles) and rebellion (which follows a diametrically opposite individualist logic). Moreover, rebellion is considered by them to encompass not only a political, but also a metaphysical dimension: Osho agrees with Camus (and with Nietzsche) on the central fact that there is no God to provide ready-made meanings, and that man is free only when he has the courage to stand alone. In fact, the belief in the existence of a creator God is the ultimate cause of all kinds of political slavery: it is an unnecessary hypothesis, dictated either by psychological immaturity, or by the fear of death, which I will further highlight later on in this dissertation.

In *The Rebel*, Camus explains that rebellion is unknown where inequalities and wrongs are so great and entrenched that they are invisible, and taken for granted, like in the traditional Hindu caste system. In a sacred environment "There are no more questions, only answers and commentaries" (Albert Camus 1956, 14). Modernity, however, has marked the beginning of a qualitatively different collective awareness. Consequently, in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* the protagonist's rebellion takes the form of an irrepressible and iconoclastic desire to ask embarrassing questions. Osho's message is that the awakening from the deep ideological slumber of tradition begins with discontent in the face of conventional values, and concerns freedom in the whole array of its possible meanings, including the political one. You cannot ask the truth about yourself, he maintains, unless you have learned first how to ask the truth about others. Raja's inclination to cause outrage, and his conflict with figures of knowledge and authority, stem from a deep-seated conviction that all human beings should trust their innate ability to experience and to understand, and that we should beware of those who claim to have a privileged access to truth. Similarly, Camus' rebel is one who "lays claim to a human situation in which all the answers are human – in other words, formulated in reasonable terms" (Albert Camus 1956, 14). Indeed, a quotation from Herbert Reed's "Foreword" to *The Rebel* captures the spirit of Rajneesh's life writing, in a secular and spiritual perspective:

> It is particularly a book that should be read by all those who wish to see the inborn spirit of rebellion inspired by a new spirit of action – by those who understand "that rebellion cannot exist without a strange form of love." Not to calculate, to give everything for the sake of life and of living men – in that way we can show that "real generosity to the future lies in giving all to the present." (Albert Camus 1956, 3)

All things considered, Osho's autobiography shows a singular conjunction of unconventional spirituality and politics, in that it configures a utopic situation in which love substitutes power as the key factor of social cohesion. The kind of passionate yet meditative experience that Rajneesh advocates, though, is not meek and "altruistic" in the sense that it implies self-denial and therefore amplifies all the more the political impact of personal freedom, which remains an ultimate and foundational value.[23] As a matter of fact, the love for others amounts to authentic solidarity when it begins with, and is nourished by, the love for oneself – which lays at the root of a healthy individuality, since it heals the wound that socially sanctioned moral norms create in man's being. Indeed, Osho's rebel is a quintessential present-day secular mystic, a synthesis between the Western existential hero, and the Eastern self-realized master: a) he lives totally, and takes action in the present, so he makes real change possible for the future as well; b) he finds authenticity and meaning inside himself, so he is not limited by any form of external authority; c) he says no, in order to be eventually able to say a deeper yes, which transcends all dualities.

[23] The connection between rebellion and love figures prominently from the very beginning in Rajneesh's literary production. In fact, the first work to be published by Osho in English was *Philosophy of Non-Violence* (Delhi, 1968). Significantly, the pamphlet dealt with fearlessness and courage as for a spiritual life. See: Pierre Evald. *Osho: The Bookman-turned-Mystic* (www.sannyas.wiki.index.php).

CHAPTER THREE

EAST AND WEST, MIRACLES, AND IMMORTALITY

> Yes my child, I am the same. This is a flesh and blood body. […] From the cosmic rays I have created an entirely new body […] I am in truth resurrected – not on earth but on an astral planet. Its inhabitants are better able than earthly humanity to meet my lofty standards. There you and your exalted beloved ones shall someday come to be with me. (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 400)

> Society wants to be the one to decide how people are to transcend death. […] Otherwise there is the alarm of "Anarchy!" (Ernest Becker 1973, 45)

3. 1 Abstract

In this chapter I examine the tropes of meditation and science and the dichotomies matter/spirit and death/immortality in Osho's and Yogananda's life writings, against the cultural background of the encounter between East and West. I argue that Yogananda conceives that meeting as a return to the past, whereas Rajneesh aims at doing away with religion as it has been conceived down the ages. Indeed, while the former equates modernity with materialism, and maintains that the theory of relativity vindicates the truths embedded in all the sacred scriptures of the world, the latter claims that the opposition between matter and spirit is fictitious and motivated by a backward ideology: religion *as belief* should be replaced by religiousness seen *as an existential attitude* based on the meditative experience of the here-and-now.

Moreover, the credence in miracles that characterizes *Autobiography of a Yogi* is meant to buttress the spiritual hierarchy inherent in Kriya Yoga, from which Yogananda explicitly derives his credibility as a knowledgeable author and his authority as a charismatic guru. Paramhansa aims at proselytizing a Western public that is still imbued with sacred Christian values of medieval origin: therefore he emphasizes time-hallowed spiritual tropes such as prophecy and physical immortality. Accordingly, the promise of eternal life that is implicit in his autobiography will be examined from the cross-cultural vantage point of Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death* and of Werner Fuchs' *The Images of Death in Modern*

Society – which belong to Rajneesh's times and are ideally suited to highlight Osho's contribution to the modernization of the Indian tradition. In fact, the exemplary quality of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* and its innovative stance about heroism, death, and self realization are meant to prefigure a new spiritual beginning, since they constitute an original synthesis between the Western emphasis on freedom and individuality on the one hand, and Eastern spirituality on the other hand.

3.2 East and West

Along with the emphasis on power, there is a further fundamental feature that qualifies *Autobiography of a Yogi* as a "sacred" work, and *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* as a modern secular/spiritual account: namely, the way in which the tropes of meditation and science are presented – which is intimately connected with the parallel dichotomies matter/spirit and death/immortality, and with the theme of the miraculous. These topics can be profitably framed in the overarching perspective of the meeting of East and West – a time-honored cultural theme that figures prominently in the life writings I examine, which Yeats brilliantly epitomized in the 1930s in his introduction to Purohit Swami's autobiography: "A converse impregnation has begun with the East as the male spiritually" (Shandya 2011, 28).[1] The ideational and rhetorical importance of this encounter between different and yet complementary *Weltanschauung* is highlighted by the fact that Yogananda and Rajneesh share it in common not only with one another, but also with many of the most prominent Western thinkers and Indian spiritual figures of the modern period. So far as the West is concerned, Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Emerson (1803-1882), and Jung (1875-1961) are only some of the best-known examples in point. As for India, Shandya highlights the importance of Keshub Chandra Sen, who anticipated Yogananda (and Osho) in 1977 by asserting that "Christ is a true Yogi," in 1879; of Vivekananda, who spoke about Hindu spirituality at the World Parliament of Religions in the US in 1893, thus paving the way for Yogananda's dissemination of Kriya Yoga in the West; and of Rammohan Roy – one of the chief exponents of the

[1] In her contribution to a volume of critical studies on Yeats, Margaret Hills Harper writes: "Yeats' final years included a renewed interest in Indian spirituality, led by his friendship and collaboration with Shree Purhoit Swami, whom he met in London in 1931. From 1932 through 1936 Yeats and the Swami collaborated at the translation of the *Upanishads* after the publication of the Swami's autobiography, for which Yeats supplied an introduction" (Richard J. Finneran 1997, 62).

Brahmo Samaj – who in his *Precepts of Jesus* (1920) sought to synthesize Hindu and Christian precepts.

Yogananda and Rajneesh are in line with that important cross-cultural tradition, since they agree on the affirmation that East and West must pool their finest distinctive features in order for humanity to spiritually evolve and to adapt to the changed historical circumstances of our time. From the vantage point of this shared perspective, meditation – which first flowered in India – complements love and devotion as the true essence of religion, and represents the unique gift that Southern Asia has bestowed to the world. As such, it is conceived as the "science of the inner," and is the subject-oriented equivalent of science – the rational investigation of the outer domain that was born in Greece with Aristotle, and which has reached unprecedented achievements in modern Europe and in America. In accordance with a cultural *leitmotif* that runs through the whole history of the East/West encounter, both in Osho's life writing and in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, meditation and science are unequivocally said to be based on experience and to reject dogmatism. In practice, however, in the latter work meditation coincides with the ascetic meditative techniques drawn from Patanjali's ancient code *Yoga Sutra*, while Rajneesh's emphasis is on moment-to-moment awareness – in fundamental agreement with the outlook that we find in *The First and Last Freedom*, Jiddu Krishnamurti's seminal contribution to the understanding of meditation in the West, which was first published in 1975, long after Yogananda's death.

Indeed, as I have mentioned already in this dissertation, Yogananda's choice of a purportedly "modern" standpoint based on experiential enquiry is crucially subordinated to a precondition that used to go unnoticed before the advent of modernity, but which a radical innovator like Rajneesh is far from conceding: *i.e.*, experience cannot conceivably contradict scriptural knowledge and established religious authority. "Autobiography as research," is Shandya's pity statement about this matter, "in Yogananda is research[2] into and interpretation of the truth embedded in the scriptures" (Shandya 2011, 235). Such a remark stands in stark contrast with Osho's contention that while science is a collective and cumulative effort (all new

[2] According to the Oxford Dictionary, research is "the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions." This definition emphasizes objectivity and newness, and is not easily reconciled with Yogananda's use of the term.

knowledge is passed on not only from experts to laymen, but also from one generation to another), religion *as meditation* points to an intrinsically *singular* experience. As a matter of fact, meditation is not a discipline that we learn from the scriptures, but a quality of existential awareness that transcends thoughts and words, which we can acquire only by living with totality and courage – while traditional religion consists in moral norms, beliefs and rituals, and therefore it belongs entirely to the mind.[3]

The example of countless people down the ages (many of whom never made themselves known) shows not only that spiritual enlightenment can happen to one in many different ways, and therefore has a distinctive meaning for each individual; but also that it does not need a social sanction; and that it has nothing to do with being a religious follower or a holy superman. As far as self-realization is concerned, pliability, curiosity and intelligence[4] are as important as one-pointedness and courage – and far more essential than morality or power. Indeed, when you conform to a creed 1) you cling to the mind, so you cannot live in the present, and 2) you are no longer spontaneous and natural – therefore you go against a basic law of existence. In *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic*, the author articulates that the believer cannot transcend the mind for the plain reason that belief is a thought; and he adds also that everybody is unique because existence is a flux: it is always new, and it never repeats itself. Consequently, spiritual enlightenment cannot be institutionalized, and sacred knowledge is by necessity pitted against life and spontaneity: "All holy books are corpses, dead flowers and nothing else," affirms Rajneesh. "Truth, the living truth, has to be discovered by each individual by *himself*. Nobody can give it to you" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 182).[5]

As far as style and emotional impact are concerned, Osho's ability and willingness to wrench free from the past are reflected by the quality of the irony that he shows in his life writing. In *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, humor amounts to the ability of re-contextualizing experience in *unexpected* ways, and it points to an affinity with

[3] Meditation is a "knack," says Rajneesh: it requires neither knowledge nor effort.

[4] Osho often stated that "openness to new experience" is the most important quality of a spiritual seeker.

[5] "Enlightenment is a very individual process," adds Rajneesh, "because of its individuality, it has created many problems" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 75). The way a person expresses his enlightenment is unique because it depends on the *different conditionings* that had to be overcome in order to attain it: that is why a self realized man will never fit anybody's expectations.

Western modernity that is as significant as the narrator's attitude towards meditation and science. Far from being sentimental or moralistic, Rajneesh's kind of compassion is humorously egalitarian and uncompromising: as such, it is an excellent example of a synthesis between the Eastern masters' spiritual practice of "provoking" people out of their unawareness, and the modern Western emphasis on creativity, self-respect, and militant freedom. The protagonist of the memoirs, his friends, and his spiritual advisors are so individual and eccentric as to appear to have lost contact with the shared illusion that society calls "reality."

The oldest of Raja's mentors is exemplary in this regard, as he brings together old age with enlightened madness, rather than with benevolent respectability and spiritual authority. "Pagal Baba was one of those remarkable men I am going to talk about" writes Osho. "He was known just as Pagal Baba. Pagal means 'the mad.' He came like a wind, always suddenly, and then disappeared as suddenly as he had come" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 183). The point Osho makes herewith is meaningful, and it is clearly stated also in many of his other works. Both the mystic and the madman are free from social constraints. They have in common the fact that they have left so-called "normality" behind, but they are different in the quality of their awareness: the first has risen above the ordinary mind, and the second has fallen below it. Indeed, explains Rajneesh, "When you first enter into the world of no-mind it looks like madness" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 24).

The idea that non-conformity is a kind of "madness" that sparks freedom is not new: in ancient times "mad" anti-conformist behavior was tolerated on culturally institutionalized occasions, as it allowed the safe release of pent-up animosities in the context of a repressive and hierarchically compartmentalized society. With the advent of self-centered modernity and with the waning of dogmatism, however, libertarian "madness" began to be conceived as something more than an exception that proves the rule, and it pointed to the possibility of an alternative cultural (and political) model. In his *Praise of Folly* (1511), for instance, Erasmus of Rotterdam maintains that wise madness debunks the real insanity of hypocrisy and ambition – qualities that (according to Rajneesh) make it hard to distinguish a politician from a saint. As a matter of fact, while Osho's charismatic madmen color with spiritual meaning the libertarian motto of May 1968 – "all power to the imagination"[6] –

[6] In French: *l'imagination au pouvoir.*

Yogananda's holy men still believe in respectability, and for them even humor is just an occasional diversion. At the most they indulge in a corny and stereotypical sense of wittiness, which paradoxically reinforces the seriousness of their role, and reminds one of the traditional conception of hierarchical power as *gravitas*.[7] Think for instance of Lahiri Mahasaya, who, having been nagged by his wife for being too engrossed in meditation, humorously "punishes" her by levitating in mid-air and hence hiding from her eyes. Confronted with so wondrous a display of supernatural power, the petty woman is duly humbled – and a spiritual hierarchy is promptly reasserted.

Osho's spiritual crackpots cut a very different figure than this: they are far from reiterating chauvinistic clichés such as the hen-pecked husband or the taming of the shrew, and they suggest instead a modern synthesis of spirituality, individuality, and iconoclastic irony – which has much in common with the outlooks of Eastern Zen on the one hand, and of Samuel Beckett and Surrealism on the other hand. Significantly, the protagonist of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* castigates without mercy both those who flaunt a holier-than-thou attitude and those who diminish themselves through their fawning. "Mild physician, putrid wounds" is a proverb which epitomizes both Rajneesh's conflicts with public opinion and authority figures and his take on irony as compassion, and which can come across to the uninformed reader as insensitive and insulting. As it is often the case, Osho's blunt reports about real confrontational occurrences (which are meant to provoke the reader to question his own attitudes) are paralleled by far less provocative understatements in *Autobiography of a Yogi*: "Straightforwardness without civility is like a surgeon's knife: effective, unpleasant" writes Yogananda. "In the West blunt assaults on the ego are not appreciated" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 122).

Given these observations, we understand why Osho dons the garb of the scholar of religion with the purpose of engaging his audience, but insists on *lived experience* and on the *existential uniqueness* of the self-realized human being while (in spite of all claims to the contrary) Yogananda strikes a basically philosophical and erudite chord by mixing Unitarian insights with medieval exegesis. Statements like "The

[7] In Latin *gravitas* means weight, seriousness, dignity, and importance. It is a virtue the Romans associated with respectability and with the power conferred by society on older men in order for them to promote morality, conformity, and collective welfare. So defined, it is hardly compatible with the modern notion of humor and irony as alternative and viable ways of confronting reality.

time-tested scriptures of the world are essentially one in essence" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 483) have a distinctive Unitarian flavour, and have many parallels also in Osho's life writing. Assertions such as, "Ferventy I implore Christ to guide me in divining the true meaning of his words, many of which have been grievously misunderstood for twenty centuries" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 483), however, go way beyond that. In fact, 1) they come across as a far cry from an open-ended scientific enquiry; and 2) they show that the yogi relies uncritically on faith-inspired intuition and on the *figural interpretation* of sacred texts, in order to "prove" and to teach what he already "knows" about self-realization. In short, Yogananda's life writing is not only rife with biblical images and terms, but it is also underpinned by a typically pre-modern interpretive strategy – which goes a long way toward explaining how its author can put the Theory of Relativity, the *Bible*, and the *Upanishads* on the same plane while giving only vague metaphors as a plausible reason, and how he can claim that both Krishna and Jesus have appeared in flesh and bones before his very eyes.

We see again here (in a different context) what we have noted already in the first chapter. *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) and *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* (1984) are in many respects a mirror of their times: they have been published at a distance of forty years from each other, and each shows a distinct adaptation to the process of cultural change that Yogendra Singh calls "modernization of the Indian tradition." Consequently they reflect dissimilar "assumptions about the world" and persuasive strategies, and an idiosyncratic understanding of the meaning of the East/West encounter – as well as similarities that can be ascribed to their common Indian heritage, among which the asserted remembrance of previous incarnations on the part of their authors is the most significant one. Yoganada (unlike Rajneesh) is a popularizer, not a gifted intellectual: he knows nothing of Surrealism or Modernism, and Positivism[8] is his enemy of choice, as far as philosophies are concerned. In fact, he was born in the nineteenth century, and he still bears its cultural imprint. Significantly, he writes his master work in 1946, a year after the atomic explosion of Hiroshima – at a time in which two world wars appeared to have vindicated

[8] I refer here to the broad meaning that is implied by Shandya's commentary on Yogananda: "Positivism**,** in Western philosophy, is generally any system that confines itself to the data of experience and excludes a priori or metaphysical speculations" (http://global.britannica.com).

Spengler's prophecy about the decline of the West; decolonization was in full fledge; and traditional proselytizing Christianity was perceived both as a reliable interlocutor and as an imminent ideological threat by the Hindu religious establishment.

Osho's temporal frame, on the contrary, is made up by the 1970s and the '80s, when 1) secularism and consumerism have already prevailed in the West, and mainstream Christian values have lost much of their traditional appeal; 2) the great discoveries of the "golden age of physics"[9] in the first half of the twentieth century have been followed through to their theoretical implications, and scientific rationality can no longer be identified with (and hence attacked as) mere mechanism;[10] and 3) the cultural focus of attention (particularly as far as the younger generation is concerned) has shifted in Europe and the US from the ideology of class struggle to the theme of *personal* liberation of the individual in a mass society. As for point 1), I underscore what I wrote before about political autobiographies: in his memoirs Osho pronounces not only against Christian missionaries, but also against *all* institutionalized religions. For him, religious proselytism *as such* is manipulative and unspiritual, and it betrays what religion and politics have in common: they are not interested in human beings, but in the power of numbers.

As far as point 3) is concerned, it is worth reflecting on the contradictory reasons why some contemporary writers have been so critical of the secular/spiritual outlook that Osho advocates as an ideal synthesis of East and West. Hugh B. Urban, for example, gives the title "Osho, from Sex Guru to Guru of the Rich" to his contribution to *Gurus in America* – a collection of essays that deplores the globalization and "massification"[11] of religious ideas. In that book, Urban's chapter gives pride of place to the following passage from *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic*: "I always spend before I get. Just the idea that some money is coming and I tell my people: Spend! Because who knows about tomorrow? Spend

[9] In *The Modern Mind* Peter Watson outlines a theoretical revolution that counts among its achievements Einstein's theory of general relativity, the discovery of the structure of the atom, quantum mechanics, and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.

[10] "Mechanism" and "holism" are usually considered to be characteristic respectively of West and East. According to Merriam-Webster, "mechanism" is "a doctrine that holds natural processes […] to be mechanically determined and capable of complete explanation by the laws of physics and chemistry." "Holism" is "a theory that the universe […] is correctly seen in terms of interacting wholes […] that are more than the mere sum of elementary particles."

[11] According to a broad definition of the term, massification is the process of bringing something to a mass audience.

today. [...] And now I have started believing that existence takes care, even of an expensive man like me" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 160).

As a background to this quotation, the author provides an unflattering interpretation of Rajneesh's life and viewpoint. His remarks discount as empty talk the light-hearted exhortation of the "rich man's guru" to live in the here-and-now and to trust existence, and they implicitly reiterate the well-known traditionalist *cliché* of Gandhian flavor that belongs to the assumed setting of Yogananda's autobiography: if you are in favor of innovation and wealth, and if you are not wary of body and sex, you are a materialist, not a saint. In short, you are neither spiritually nor politically correct. Correspondingly, Osho is presented as the charismatic leader of one of those new religious movements that don't oppose modern Western society, but "sacralize" its exaggerated emphasis on individuality – and therefore he is charged with embodying "the spiritual logic of late capitalism" and with turning spirituality into a (material) commodity.

Urban labors a point that bears a similarity with the argument I advance in this dissertation (namely, he argues that Osho "has created a message that is remarkably well in tune with the present socio-economic situation"); but he gives a depreciative twist to it: New Age cults such as Rajneesh's neo-Sannyas, "[…] often affirm and sanctify many central ideals of individualism, freedom, and progress, providing a kind of celebration of the self and a sacralization of modernity" (Forsthoefel and Humes 2005, 170). From the standpoint of *Gurus in America*, the "unleashed subjectivity" exemplified by Osho's autobiography is not interpreted (how I do) as a daring and innovative experiment with secular spirituality and freedom: on the contrary, it is derogatorily associated with "sacralization" (*i.e.*, a dogmatic sacred outlook) and consumerism (*i.e.*, crass materialism) – and it is therefore cast in a most unfavorable light. In essence, Hugh Urban passes stern moral judgment on Rajneesh's life writing, which (in his perspective) is tantamount to a meeting of East and West that takes the worst from both worlds.

Interestingly, he does so a) by paraphrasing the argument that "religion is the opium of the people" and using it against the *Autobiography* – although Marx's famous statement is in tune with both the letter and the spirit of Osho's work; b) by suggesting that anyway Rajneesh is not religious at all, because to be spiritual means to conform to the principles of a sacred worldview; and c) by overlooking the explicit definition of "rich man" that we find in the *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect*

Mystic: "When I say a rich man I mean one who is rich in intelligence" says Osho, "I mean one who has everything that the world can give to him and has found that it is futile" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 160). The long and the short of it is that Urban's point is proved only if you judge by appearances, and if you forget that from a truly spiritual vantage point what matters is watchfulness and non-attachment – not a merely factual relation with the material world. Osho argues that both material wealth and bodily pleasures can (and should) be enjoyed, so long as you are not identified with them: for a mystic, the dimension of being is paramount, while possessions and deeds provide only a second-hand kind of identity. Indeed, there is nothing to learn from avoiding the material world, or from repressing natural instincts. Gautama Buddha could renounce the world *because* he was born the son of a king and lived like one – and he was intelligent enough to learn from that experience.

In any event, with regard to point 2), I note that the cultural and religious synthesis that *Autobiography of a Yogi* foreshadows can neither claim to be in tune with a deeper and more "scientific" brand of modernity, nor can it hold to be exempt from contradictions. In fact it is basically past-oriented and colored by political motivations, so to a considerable extent it misconceives the true spirit of a consistent experiential enquiry: "Science is important as a metaphor" we read in Peter Watson's *The Modern Mind*. *An Intellectual History of the 20th Century*. "To succeed, to progress, the world must be *open, endlessly modifying, unprejudiced*" (Watson 2001, 6, italics added). Granting that without the background of tradition originality cannot be perceived, the fact remains that modern science owes its moral and intellectual authority to the freedom and the courage it has showed from the very beginning *vis-à-vis* vested interests and the intellectual establishment. Galileo's iconic refusal to submit to the pope and to the received interpretation of the Bible foreshadows Rajneesh's loathing of hypocrisy and compromise: indeed it constitutes a unique blend of heroism and modernity, which to this day keeps inspiring all seekers of truth. Its exemplary power helps explain why modern science is a metaphor that represents an unprecedented evolution in the rules of thought, as Watson points out in his history of contemporary iconic ideas. Therefore it amounts to something far more important than Yogananda's expedient substitution of an old-fashioned narrative about life and reality with a suitably fashionable "scientific" account.

In the following pages I will say more about the "law of miracles," which according

to Yogananda "proves" the veracity of the Hindu mythology and religious lore, and about the archaic frame of reference that underpins the yogic discourse on immortality. Here I underscore that the West that Yogananda takes pains to come to terms with (and that he intends to initiate to Kriya Yoga) is not so much a) the world that bears the imprint of quantum mechanics and of the Einsteinian scientific revolution of the first half of the twentieth century; but rather b) the religious culture that still hinges on the sacred Christian tradition – which constitutes the existential horizon of the medieval "porous self"[12] and is buttressed by ancient beliefs about physical immortality, miracles, and magical powers. Indeed, these two aspects of Paramhansa's life writing are intrinsically joined: the assertion that we can describe the true essence of the physical universe in terms of a "substance"[13] we call "light" is significantly accompanied by the postulation of the immortality of the body of the yogi – a "substance" that can be empowered and perfected through ascetic discipline, and that brings to mind similar orthodox Christian beliefs.[14]

In the way of a concluding remark for this section, I point out the reason that *Some Spiritual Autobiographies in English* gives for Yogananda's popularity as a spiritual guide in the West: Yogananda anticipates Capra,[15] since both authors allegedly prove that Einstein's major contribution consisted in facilitating the interface between science and religion with consciousness at its base. Consequently, the author of *Autobiography of a Yogi* embodies the 'spirit of the time,' and what he calls 'secularism' is "a vision of harmony that enables the perception of science *as a form of religion*" (Shandya 2011, 227, italics added). In the yogi-saint's account, the theory of relativity is popularized from a post-colonial vantage point and is enlisted as a rhetorical help in order to transcribe yoga from an ancient code into a modern one. To sum up, "Yoganada's appeal was to a generation groping in a 'wasteland'

[12] See § 1.5 about the concepts of "porous" and "buffered" self.

[13] I refer here to the following definition: "The meaning of *substance* has evolved over time, yet it has always been related to something sound and solid – from the Latin root *substare*, which means 'to stand firm,' to the Middle English definition as an 'essential nature'" (https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/substance).

[14] Take for instance the raising of the body of Christ after the passion, and the belief in the "resurrection of the flesh" upon Judgment Day.

[15] Fritjof Capra is a physicist who popularized the implications of many recent scientific discoveries. In *The Tao of Physics* (1975), he suggests a consonance between the insights of modern physics and Eastern mysticism, and argues that Western culture should abandon the mechanistic views of Descartes and adopt a holistic approach to the understanding of the world.

created by the destructive powers of science: a bold appropriation of the creative powers of the one by the other was in fact the need of the hour" (Shandya 2011, 250). Yet the spiritual message that the 1921 Nobel Prize for physics hoped his work would convey is not one of subordination of science to religion, but a humbling invitation to accept the *limitations* of both human life and human knowledge: "Neither can I or would I want to conceive of an individual who survives his physical death" (Shandya 2011, 226). Accordingly, Einstein's existential insight has much more in common with Rajneesh's secular/spiritual perspective than with Paramhansa's sacred outlook, whose rhetorical effectiveness consists mostly in the promise of an ultimate esoteric empowerment. As it happens, Nani's words to Raja at the moment of his grandfather's demise reflect Einstein's spiritual legacy far better than Yogananda's appeal to seek immortality and to ignore as morbidity the acknowledgement of death: "Remember, because these are moments not to be forgotten: never ask for more," says the old woman to the protagonist, who is silent and heartbroken. "What is, is enough" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 24).

3.3 Matter and Spirit

Rajneesh's and Yogananda's approaches to the cultural synthesis between East and West are characterized also by the way their autobiographies exemplify the dichotomy matter/spirit: from Osho's vantage point this opposition is a) intellectually outdated and b) detrimental in its moral, spiritual, and political implications, while Paramhansa emphatically underlines it. As far as the ideational aspect a) is concerned, Yogananda's understanding of matter is essentialist[16] and sense-oriented, and therefore it is consonant with a pre-modern outlook. In spite of the *Autobiography of a Yogi*'s stated intentions, a close reading of the text shows terminology and images that have more in common with the atomic theory of the ancient Greeks[17] than with Einstein. Indeed, the author considers the path of knowledge (Jnana Yoga) to be complementary to the path of will (Kriya Yoga): from this ancient Hindu vantage point, imagination and naming are seen as "scientific" approaches that promote spiritual enlightenment by helping one comprehend the true

[16] Merriam-Webster defines "essentialism" as "a philosophical theory ascribing ultimate reality to essence embodied in a thing perceptible to the senses."

[17] Democritus, Leucippus, and Epicurus outlined the earliest atomic theory, and they used analogies from sense experiences in order to give a mental picture or an image of what an atom is.

essence of reality. Accordingly, Paramhansa prompts the reader to *imagine* that essence with the aid of visual similes, and he gives esoteric names (such as "light-atoms," "life-trones," and "etheric particles") to the basic constituents of the physical world.

From a literary comparatist angle, such an approach is suggestive of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, where in Book Four we read that *all* physical perceptions are true, and that *everything* in the world is caused by the movement of extremely small atoms.[18] Yogananda adds to this naïve experiential approach an assertion based on his personal testimony, which is supposed to divest it of its original materialist meaning: the yogi's will can cause those atoms to come into existence and to disappear. Shree Yukteswar, for instance, materializes his body in front of Yogananda, and after speaking with him he dematerializes it again. While the saint's body gradually melts into the air, the protagonist hears "a peculiar rumbling sound," which he explains in a footnote to be "the characteristic sound of dematerialization of bodily atoms." Contemporary Western materialism is *ipso facto* disproved: "I felt the materialist twentieth century world slipping from me," muses the author. "I was back in the ancient days when Jesus appeared before Peter on the sea" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 186).

In a broad interdisciplinary perspective that takes also imaginative science fiction into account, the episode reminds one of the way captain Kirk travels in *Star Trek*. In any case, it is reminiscent of archaic magic[19] methods of gaining ascendancy over the world; and it comes across as naïve and pre-scientific when measured by the standards of many leading theoreticians that were Yogananda's contemporaries. As we read in Peter Watson's *The Modern Mind*, for instance, Ernst Mach (1858-1947) holds that imagination does not help in the field of scientific enquiry: on the contrary, it deceives us by hiding the fact that the ultimate essence of reality is inconceivable. Truth is not an eternal, unchanging thing that we can somehow comprehend. Accordingly, in physics Mach wanted measurement to replace "pictorialization," which is "the inner mental image of things as they are" (Peter Watson 2001, 36).

[18] See Emma Woolerton's short essay in the Guardian, Monday, 18/02 2013 (http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2013/feb/18/lucretius).

[19] Merriam-Webster defines magic as "the use of means (as charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces." Modern anthropology highlights the importance of language in an archaic frame of reference, in which magic coincides with religion.

Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) strikes a similar chord when he claims that it is wrong to visualize what goes on inside the atom: both Heisenberg's Uncertainty[20] Principle and Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem[21] proved conclusively that there are limits to human knowledge – concludes Peter Watson in his essay.[22]

This is precisely the abstract insight that characterizes Osho's appraisal of science as an emblem of modernity: contemporary physics validates that *all* knowledge is intrinsically limited by the nature of the subject/object relationship, hence it follows that the "ultimate reality" of the universe cannot be an object of knowledge, because we are part of it, and the part cannot comprehend the whole. Science can move the frontier between the known and the unknown further and further away, but ultimate reality (which can also be called "God" or "the whole") will remain unknowable. From Rajneesh's standpoint, Heisenberg's Indetermination Principle is far closer to truth than Yogananda's Einstenian metaphor about light being the ultimate foundation of the universe. Moreover, Rajneesh's autobiography shows its attunement with a contemporary worldview in that it states that philosophies are languages, and that languages are only human and arbitrary systems of signs. In fact, giving names may reassure us by creating an impression of order, and by giving us the impression that we know what we have named – but it amounts to a self-deceiving strategy of dominion, not to actual experiential understanding.

Incidentally, one is reminded here also of one of Edward Said's most brilliant chapters in *Orientalism*, which studies the eighteenth and nineteenth century's Western colonialist practice of "cataloguing" and "labeling" the alien culture and *Weltanschauung* of the East in order to assimilate it and to master it. If we bear in mind that in *Autobiography of a Yogi* the polemic against Western rationality and

[20] According to Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976), the aim of physics is only to describe observable data. At a sub-atomic level, however, human observation influences the situation and the velocity of small particles, so that one cannot measure them both exactly and at the same time.

[21] Perry Marshal gives the following intuitive explanation of the theorem: "Gödel proved that there are ALWAYS more things that are true than you can prove. Any system of logic or numbers that mathematicians ever came up with will always rest on at least a few improvable assumptions. Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem applies not just to math, but also to *everything* that is subject to the laws of logic. Incompleteness is true in math; it's equally true in science or language or philosophy" (https://www.perrymarshall.com/articles/religion/godels-incompleteness-theorem).

[22] Watson adds to the list also Ludwig Wittgenstein, who (in the same years) showed the limitations inherent in language.

Positivism is paramount, it is clear that Rajneesh (once again) stands a familiar post-colonial argument on its head in order to debunk the kind of "converse impregnation" that Yogananda advocates. In Said's perspective, Orientalist erudition was functional to Western imperialist power. From Rajneesh's angle, all so-called "spiritual" knowledge is at the service of a spiritual ego. Hence, Yogananda's pretense of being scientific notwithstanding, India's claim to a privileged spiritual status shows hypocrisy and ambition, and it explains away plain deceit – as we shall see in the next paragraph about miracles and frauds.

As it happens, Rajneesh was well acquainted with all kinds of traditional saints because his family adhered to Jainism, one of the most ascetic and life-denying established religions in India. *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* gives ample evidence of the personal dislike and animosity the protagonist felt against them from a very tender age. According to Osho, a fasting ascetic is nothing but a masochist, and masochism is unnatural, self-destructive, and pathologically manipulative – not saintly. "The starving child has to be helped," writes Rajneesh; "the Jaina monk has to be helped more because he thinks he is doing something right" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 286). On close inspection, ascetics are ambitious and greedy for spiritual rewards: by all appearances, Yogananda unintentionally proves Osho right when he writes that "Through gradual and regular increase of the 'foolproof' method of Kriya man's body becomes astrally transformed day by day […]" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 235). As it happens, in the *Autobiography of a Yogi* Yogananda's affinity with Friedrich Nietzsche from the vantage point of hierarchy (mentioned in the second chapter above) is intimated also by the fact that he entices his readers with the unspoken promise that they will become spiritual supermen by dint of effort and through strict adherence to esoteric spiritual teachings. Moreover, the word "faith" is purposely replaced by the word "will" in order to give an aura of fashionable heroic modernity to Paramhansa's book.

All in all, Osho's attitude about this topic is best understood against the background of the appraisal of yoga and meditation that we find in *Yoga: the Alpha and the Omega*. In that work, Rajneesh agrees with Patanjali: meditative techniques may indeed give you *siddhis* (spiritual powers), and awaken your *kundalini*.[23] Against

[23] Kundalini, "in yogic theory, is a primal energy, or *shakti*, located at the base of the spine. Different spiritual traditions teach methods of "awakening" kundalini for the purpose of reaching spiritual enlightenment" (http://www.blavatskyarchives.com).

Yogananda, however, he also maintains that paranormal powers are ultimately detrimental: instead of helping you to drop the ego, they strengthen it. In fact, they give you the idea that you are "getting ready" for spiritual enlightenment (*e.g.*, you are becoming "holier"), while self-realization is a *quantum leap* that you cannot prepare for, because it always happens in the present, and it has nothing to do with effort, with the future, and with the mind. The path of yoga (in the way Yogananda traditionally presents it) is not a shortcut, but a detour, because spiritual enlightenment is always already the case. Indeed, the reasons Osho gives against yoga (seen as a form of postponement) are indicative of the modernity of his outlook and of his deep consonance with Krishnamurti: "Understanding comes into being from the now, the present, which is always timeless." We read in this respect in *The First and Last Freedom*: "Merely to postpone, to prepare yourself to receive that which is tomorrow, is to prevent yourself from understanding what is now" (Jiddu Krishnamurti 2013, 304).

The contrast with Yogananda's dogmatic "evolutionary" spirituality could not be more clear-cut. As it happens, according to *Autobiography of a Yogi*, "The scriptures aver that man requires a million years of normal, diseaseless evolution to perfect his human brain sufficiently to express cosmic consciousness." In a similar vein, Paramhansa describes Patanjali's Kriya Yoga as a discipline that speeds up "normal evolution," and that allows the body "to receive the *power* created by intensive practice" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 234, italics added). Once again, the emphasis is on power, and the words are those of popular science: this time it is the turn of Darwin's Theory of Evolution to be misinterpreted and enlisted as a rhetorical help for the propagation of yoga in the West – in spite of the fact that Darwinism belongs squarely to the nineteenth century Positivist outlook, which J.K. Shandya singles out as Yogananda's ideological foe.

While Paramhansa's saints are concerned with purity and with the fight against "animal instincts," which will allow man to go back to a primordial Golden Age at the beginning of time, the author of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* characteristically describes such an attitude towards the body as stupidity – and as an obsession motivated by sexual repression. Although sexuality is not directly discussed in its relation to the protagonist's life, the indictment of *all kinds* of repression is clear. At the present stage of social development, writes Rajneesh's biographer Anand Subhuti, we can stop suppressing our energy, and drop our

childish subservience to external authorities. A free-flowing energy system is a precondition of spiritual growth because anger joined with awareness becomes rebellion, and sex consciously allowed becomes creativity. (Anand Subhuti 2012, *Locations* 426 and 883). Meditation must include every aspect of the human condition, and nature is the only true school: as it is the case in Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* (a book that Osho praises for its insights in his autobiography), it is the river that teaches Raja the lessons he cherishes most. Sadness itself is a natural experience, and it should be used as a stepping-stone toward self-realization, since intensity of feeling is a precious key to existential understanding – as we can see from the account of Raja's grief at the deaths of his grandfather and of his friend Hari.

Moreover, as far as point b) is concerned, we note that in *Autobiography of a Yogi* matter, death, negativity, body, and sex are all conventionally said to be illusory, but in practice they stand for negativity – so that at a deeper emotional level they become real antagonists that man should fight in order to attain self-realization. Indeed, though dualism is negated in theory, it is also reasserted between the lines. Accordingly, the metaphor of light stands not only for spirit and eternal life, but also for "true essence," goodness, and purity: the author uses it to bridge Einstein and biblical Christianity with the hierarchical outlook of Hinduism and with the notion of modernity peculiar to Gandhi and to the Indian Renaissance. In short, in Yogananda's sacred outlook the condemnation of the body on moral grounds goes hand in hand with the opposition between matter and spirit, and it points to a basic difference with Rajneesh, who maintains instead (in accord with the mystics of all times) that the divine is not separate from nature, but it is intrinsic to it.

The strategic aim of a reconciliation with dogmatic Christianity is evident in the fact that Yogananda relies on a symbolic interpretation of the fall of man in *Genesis* in order to buttress the yogic claim to mastery of spiritual will over material instinct: the serpent in the Garden of Eden represents sex, which keeps man identified with the body. "Reason and feeling remain in a heaven of cooperative joy," glosses the yogi, "so long as the human mind is not tricked by the serpentine energy of animal propensities" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 170). Consequently, Paramhansa pays only lip service to one of the few traditional Hindu maxims that Osho considers significant in a modern context: *e.g.*, meditation is not a goal in itself, but represents merely a stepping stone on the path that leads to the transcendence of all dualities. As

I have noted above, the true rhetorical *foci* of Paramhansa's life writing are 1) the insistence on the *moral* as well as ontological primacy of "spirit" over "matter;" and 2) the exhortation to embrace meditation *as* discipline, because ordinary man (and, I add, the hierarchic society that supposedly best caters to his needs) *is not ready* for a spiritual revolution. The focus is on moral reform and gradual change, not on expressing one's individuality and on living in the present, as it is the case for Osho – who is in sympathy with an innovator of the Hindu tradition of the caliber of Jiddu Krisnamurthi, and emphasizes the concepts of spontaneity and of moment-to-moment awareness.

Rajneesh maintains that a meditative person lives in a state of let go, and says yes to what is natural and existential: our physical body is not a temptation, but a source of joy, and a spiritual man is no less a Zorba the Greek[24] than a Gautama Buddha. Indeed, the pages of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* that describe the physical pleasure that Raja experiences while basking in the sun after a long swim, on the banks of the river near his village, are the best illustration of the author's take on the relationship between mind and body – which is inspired by a vision of gratitude, love, and harmony. For him the opposition matter/spirit cannot be *resolved* by positing a canonic non-dualistic appraisal, in which "spirit" is reality, and "matter" is illusion or *maya*. On the contrary, the dichotomy is *dissolved* by the here-and-now realization that such difference has never existed in the first place, because existential problems are a shadow of the ego, and they disappear the moment one's awareness changes.

Osho explains the reasons of his contempt for what is traditionally known as "spirituality" when he explains that the Indian mind has become materialistic in reaction to the poverty that still prevails in India, and it hides the ugly reality of impotence and envy behind a moral mask. Conversely, "A spiritual mind makes no distinction between matter and spirit; it is undivided" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 170). In the way of a comparison with Yogananda, it bears underscoring 1) that the moralistic outlook of *Autobiography of a Yogi* is tantamount to fatalistic compliance to the *status quo* (as we have see from Naipaul's criticism of Indian life writing); 2) that it exemplifies a pre-modern acceptance of society as it is; and 3) that it condones the

[24] In his autobiography Osho holds that the enjoyment of life exemplified by Zorba in Nikos Kazantzakis's novel is the best complement to Gautama Buddha's emphasis on detached awareness.

caste system; while Osho is against traditional religiousness and integrates in his perspective ideas that belong to the most radical Western secular trends. Indeed, from the assumption that the world of duality is an illusion Rajneesh draws a conclusion that points to an affinity with Nietzsche, and that gives it a distinctive spiritual color: "Existence has no morality as such – it is amoral. For existence there is nothing wrong and nothing right. Only one thing is right – your being alert and conscious. Then you are blissful" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 120). In point of fact, both the spiritual quality of Osho's secular outlook *and* the rhetorical impact of his autobiography stand or fall by the merit of so controversial a statement, which leaves open the problem of to what extent we can trust freedom and we can be guided by individual awareness: an existential and political conundrum which (at least in Rajneesh's case) would be too easily dismissed with mere arguments *ad personam*.

All things considered, in the *Autobiography of a Yogi* the argument in favor of the importance of India's spiritual mission in the world depends merely on exposing naïve materialism – both as far the universe and as far as the human body is concerned. Yogananda's persuasive strategy, however, proves to be simplistic and biased. In fact his naïve understanding of the "true essence" of matter unconsciously strenghtens the perspective it attacks, since to devaluate the material world and body is yet another way of emphasizing (and misconceiving) their importance. Arguably, Paramhansa envisions the meeting of East and West as a return of both worlds to the sacred outlook that they shared before the Western "great disenbedment,"[25] and he chooses outdated scientific theories and discredited ideologies as an expedient polemical target in order to promote a nationalist and traditional religious agenda. Consequently, Newtonian mechanism and Cartesian dualism (which according to Capra dominated scientific thought from the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century) are gathered together and expediently set off in contrast with a spiritually revamped theory of relativity. In the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, explains Shandya, rationalism is presented as a colonial prop, and "The narrative functions as a counterhegemonic exercise by not contradicting but accommodating certain aspects of modernity into the spiritual discourse" (Shandya 2011, 13).

Rajneesh's life writing, on the contrary, shows evidence of an opposite "counterhegemonic exercise" that 1) relies on the very principles of "universal"

[25] See § 1.5 of this dissertation.

rationality that Shandya stigmatizes as peculiar to the West; 2) takes place in the context of a critique of traditional religion and caste; and 3) accommodates far more characteristic aspects of modernity – such as the decline of the belief in a personal god; the existential emphasis on the individual, and the post-modern notion that the self is not a "substance" and it has no stable and definable entity. Indeed, Osho makes no mystery of the fact that he started out as an atheist before becoming a guru, and that he later chose to comment on religious books only because the people who were not involved in religions were not seekers at all. "Then," he writes in the version of his autobiography edited by Sarito Carol Neiman, "it was obvious to me that I would have to play the game of being religious: there was no other way" (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 106). In conclusion, Rajneesh's theorization of the East/West encounter not only advocates rebellion, individuality, and freedom in the context of a modern discourse on political power; but it also does so by promoting the full acceptance of existence in its totality – which includes both "spirit" and "matter;" both man's awareness and the physical body it inhabits. Accordingly, as we shall see in the following sections, Osho equates the final and deliberate acknowledgement of human limitations with their ultimate transcendence. Indeed, he premises his life writing on the unconditional acceptance of death and on the debunking of miracles and of supernatural yogic powers.

3.4 Miracles and Frauds

The pervasiveness of miracles and supernatural feats is as meaningful a rhetoric and ideational feature of *Autobiography of a Yogi* as the focus on political power is a distinguishing trait of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*. Indeed, Yogananda's claim to intellectual originality allegedly rests on his discovery of the Law of Miracles: "The masters who are able to materialize and dematerialize their bodies or any other object […] have fulfilled the necessary Einstenian condition: their mass is infinite" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 266). In spite of the fact that Yogananda's *Autobiography* comes across as a ponderously argued esoteric fairy tale and a quaint mythological thesaurus, Shandya's nativist reading of it endorses its claim to being scientific, and it does so by debunking the view that miracles are impossible, since they contradict the rational notions about reality we usually take for granted. From Shandya's standing point, a determinist and colonialist bias obscures the now recognized fact that natural laws are essentially empirical, as they are entirely derived

from experience: *in principle* everything is possible, however unlikely and outlandish a reported event may appear to the cultural outsider. As a matter of fact, the scholar of religion Robert A. Larmer upholds a similar view in the *Cambridge Companion to Miracles*. In the introductory essay about "the meanings of miracle" that we find in that compendium, he writes, "There is no reason to hold that belief in miracles is unscientific." Methodological naturalism (*i.e.*, "the theory that no event should be explained as directly caused by non-natural agents") is not "a creditable reason to rule out miracles," because "natural laws are about probabilities, not absolute certainties" (Twelftree 2011, 42-48).

For all that, in Part II of the *Cambridge Companion on Miracles* R. Walter and L. Moberly underscore that the obstacles that impede the quest for what 'really happened' do not similarly impede inquiry into the symbolic and existential significance of miracles, though actual events are often impossible to ascertain (Twelftree 2011, 70). In this perspective, Yoganada's very insistence on the factual truth of what he says a) leaves open the problem of the *plausibility*[26] of accounts such as the instant materialization of a whole palace made of gold and gems on top of the Himalayas, and b), even more to the point, it raises important questions about their meaning. Indeed, this issue is worth examining in detail for basic reasons that pertain to the relationships between facts, beliefs, and truth, which are crucial for the "autobiography of self-realization," and which Shandya's post-colonial reading does not take into due consideration. Let us look for example at the implications of the episode of Yogananda's encounter with the godlike millenarian founder of Kriya Yoga: "Until now I have never recounted to anyone the story of my meeting with Babaji" writes the yogi-saint, "But the readers of this autobiography may be more inclined to believe in the reality of the secluded Babaji and his world interests if I relate what I saw with my own eyes" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 337).

The rhetorical importance of the episode is quite clear from a literary standpoint: Babaji is a messianic figure who informs Yogananda about his future in the US – and consequently, he gives mythic legitimacy to the proselytizing mission of the author in

[26] The meaning of the word "plausible" that I intend here is so defined by Merriam-Webster: "*superficially* fair, reasonable, or valuable but *often specious*" (italics added).

a fashion that suggests a direct link with the sacred roots of Western culture.[27] The consonance not only with the Bible, but also with medieval Christian literature, is evident, as we can see both from the emphasis on salvation and as far as literary tropes are concerned.[28] To corroborate this view, it suffices to remember that in a seminal masterpiece of the Western canon such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* there are many similar prophecies, which are likewise meant to highlight Alighieri's political and religious outlooks. Indeed, according to Twelftree, miracles, immortality, and prophecy are common tropes in all the literatures underpinned by a sacred worldview. Significantly, only the last one of these tropes can be found also in Rajneesh's autobiography – in which divining the future is presented as a heightened form of awareness, and is set off in contrast with fatalism and traditional astrological knowledge. As it happens, Babaji is the keystone of the hierarchical framework of *Autobiography of a Yogi*: being directly connected with Lord Krishna himself, he represents a *trait-d'union* between all-powerful yogic masters such as Lahiri Mahasaya and Shree Yukteswar (Yogananda's guru) and the more elusive divine fountainhead of Hinduism. In short, through the above episode I quoted in part, the author hints at his own importance in the spiritual hierarchy of Kriya Yoga – an ascetic discipline that is destined to save Western man from materialism and nuclear self-destruction. However, two further points should be considered in order to contextualize Yogananda's encounter with Babaji, which is an occurrence that fits Larner's definition of "miracle" inasmuch as it points to a direct divine intervention in the world.

1) In the first place, here (and throughout the whole *Autobiography of a Yogi*) the author emphatically expects the reader to *believe* in the reality of something that the reader has not directly witnessed, although he cannot rationally account for it: this disregard for intellectual autonomy has a pre-modern and popular connotation, and it is hardly consonant with a scientific outlook. Significantly, Yogananda's assertion that miracles are intended to *create faith in "blinded minds"* makes perfect sense in a sacred frame of reference in which belief is more at home not only than systematic doubt, but (in the final analysis) also than personal experience. Indeed, the former

[27] In this respect we note also that Yogananda (as reported by his biographers) used to claim he was a reincarnation of William the Conqueror.

[28] Yogananda's use of the terms "Christ-like guru" and "yogi-saint" is significant, in this context.

attitude is an important factor of social cohesion in a hierarchical society, while doubting and experiencing are the basic ingredients of individuality and of critical thinking in a secular "open" society. 2) Second (and contradictorily), Yogananda takes for granted that to appeal to the testimony of his own senses is the best way to convince his readers that the miracles he says he has witnessed did actually happen, and that they were not an illusion or a dream.

This implicit postulation, however, is inconsistent with the fundamental assertions on which the *Autobiography of a Yogi*'s scientific acceptability is supposed to be resting: namely, modern physics "proves" that light is the substance that matter is made up of, and that the world of the senses is an illusion. The reasons that explain this inconsistency are clear: the book addresses an unsophisticated audience, and in everyday life Newtonian physics "holds true" because it answers to practical needs – hence its laws structure the way we perceive our relationship with the world. In short, matter is not a delusion, but a tangible reality we *all* acknowledge: Yogananda and his readers are no exception to the rule. The theory of relativity and quantum mechanics are far more "abstract" (and, in this sense, more "unreal") because they rely on the testimony of the senses only to a very limited extent: in fact, by and large they can be verified and they are useful only in limited experimental situations – as far as laboratory settings, subatomic phenomena, and the speed of light are concerned.

The situation is notably different in Osho's case. Not only is he *consistently* against belief and in favour of personal experience, but he holds also that it hardly makes sense to let meanings depend on facts, especially in the case of the self-realized man, whose only true "essence" is pure subjectivity insofar as he is utterly free. Indeed, *any* person's life is "real" only to the extent that that person is awake and aware. Accordingly, Rajneesh emphasizes 1) that he is not a savior (and much less a divine incarnation or *avatar* like Babaji), because from his vantage point "saving" (or even trying to change) others is nothing short of disrespectful and unspiritual: *nobody* has the monopoly of truth; and 2) that spiritual enlightenment can neither be described nor "proved" through the performance of miracles. All in all, *anything* that takes place in space and in time is accidental and it has no meaning in itself, explains Osho's biographer Sarito Carol Neiman: man's consciousness *is itself* meaning.

What counts is not what we do, but what we are – which is also what we have always been. Accordingly, Rajneesh claims: "I can tell you what happened, but remember

always, nothing has happened to me. I am just as innocent and ignorant as I was before my birth" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 237). In what I called "the autobiography of self-realization" miracles are out of the question because the author conceives his memoirs as "a story of inner happenings" in a most fundamental sense – which reinterprets Nietzsche's motto, "become the one you are" in a secular/spiritual perspective centered on moment-to-moment awareness.[29] Indeed, what the seeker "returns to" in meditation is pure emptiness. Therefore, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* stands at the polar opposite of *Autobiography of a Yogi* in that it claims neither to be an objective account nor to be "exemplary" in terms of conformity to a scriptural model. Moreover, it conveys two distinctive messages: a) with the advent of modernity conscious individuality is the only common ground and the only viable universal spiritual value for humanity as a whole; and b) the truth of spiritual enlightenment is eternal, but not static in its formulation: it keeps finding ever-new expressions according to the changing historical moment.

In general, Yoganada's understanding of the miraculous is that of popular piety, and it has its roots in an archaic frame of mind in which magic overlaps in part with religion, and individual psychological boundaries are not clearly defined. Since God is all-powerful and can realize what human beings long for, but appears beyond their reach, the religious believer has everything to gain in entering a quasi-contractual relationship with Him. Consequently, prayers and codified obedience are bartered for what a pre-modern man needs most: protection, material things, and practical help. In this perspective, Yogananda's "wonders" (like the miracles of all the major traditional religions) impart two simple moral lessons: God should be respected for his power; and man is an imperfect creature that must be grateful for His needed intervention in the world. In his *City of God*, Saint Augustine (354-430 AD) affirms the same moral maxim that we find in *Autobiography of a Yogi*: the purpose of miracles is "that faith may prosper." As it happens, in both these works the word "faith" suggests no less a collective than an individual meaning. On the one hand miracles prove deity in a way that is directly linked with national identity and religious propaganda, and on the other hand they certify the holiness of the spiritual

[29] We have seen before that Osho criticizes Nietzsche for his endorsement of the caste system. Yet he also considers him as one of the deepest thinkers of our age, whose only limitation was that he was confined to the mind, and that he did not know meditation. For further reading see Osho's *In Love with Life: Reflections on Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

man – one who is able to become a perfect vehicle for God's action through devotional prayers or through austerities and meditative techniques. The intra-cultural consonance with sacred medieval Christianity (that I have pointed out many times in this dissertation) is clear: yogic miracles are consistent with the "porous self" of Europe's Middle Ages theorized by Charles Taylor, while the *absence* of outer miracles is consistent with the "buttressed self" of modern man – Osho's free and "crystallized" individual.

As a matter of fact, in the abstract both Yogananda and Rajneesh align themselves with the ancient mystic tradition that privileges the miracles of interiority *vis-à-vis* external miracles: love is the only real miracle there is, and existence itself is wondrous and divine. The substantial difference between them is that Yogananda considers the performance of miracles (in James Carleton Paget's words) as "a necessary concession to those needful of external acts," while Rajneesh considers it a relic of the past, and an ideological obfuscation of what matters most: namely, the inner spiritual meaning on the one hand, and the harsh reality of interpersonal power relations on the other hand. Moreover, the belief in miracles is significant against the background of 1) the credence in a personal God, which is asserted in *Autobiography of a Yogi* and explicitly denied in Rajneesh's life writing; and of 2) the affirmation or the denial of some kind of *personal* immortality – a topic that we shall examine later on in connection with the ways in which the two authors present death and describe the experience of spiritual enlightenment.

In order to further highlight the meanings of miracles in the life writings I compare, however, it is worth pointing out the *fundamental* reason why outer miracles are the hallmark of a sacred worldview: according to Lidia Novarovic "[…] a miracle is always a social event, indeed a social transaction, never private. That is to say, it does not count as a miracle until it becomes socially visible and is registered as miraculous with a given public and in a specific social situation" (Twelftree 2011, 104). The way miracles are conceived changes with time, and is influenced by social conditioning, power issues, and individual desires. In short, in this case no less than in general, people see and recognize only what they are *able*, they are *allowed*, and they are *willing* to see and to understand. Accordingly, we can learn much about the worldview that underpins a spiritual autobiography (and about the power relations implied in it) by considering the relationship between what is described as miracles on the one hand, and what is condemned as magic and fraud on the other hand.

James Carleton Paget ostensibly chimes with Rajneesh when he gives a "political" turn to Lidia Novarovic's argument in the chapter that he authors within Twelftree's anthology of essays: "In some writers," he points out, "there is an obvious relationship between miracles and authority" (Twelftree 2011, 135). In early Christianity, for example, miracles were a way of authenticating the authority of apostles such as Peter and Paul, when their primacy was challenged. Indeed, political and religious power has always defined not only what is allowed, but also what is perceived as "real" – and this holds especially true so far as miracles are concerned. In the West, man has become fully aware of so meaningful a fact only with the advent of modernity. In a key episode of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, for instance, O'Brien explains to the protagonist that if the Party decides that a man can fly, that man *will* fly because everybody will *see* him floating in mid-air.

In the same novel, an emblematic contemporary incarnation of authority such as Big Brother is not content with the monopoly of force: he is also after the monopoly of truth, and he is satisfied only when he manages to annihilate Winston's trust in himself. Simply put, a modern individual is one who is rooted in himself and does not need to be told what he can believe: that is why the waning of a sacred worldview in India has changed the perception of the miraculous in the time span that goes from the publication of *Autobiography of a Yog*i to that of Rajneesh's life writing. More specifically, in many of his autobiographical accounts Osho relates what goes on behind the scenes with respect to the so-called saints that claim to be able to work miracles. Invariably he exposes them as deceivers, and he maintains that an obsession with materiality and power is the only secret concealed by their spiritual and esoteric pretenses. In *The Miracle*, for instance, Osho tells the reader about one of these fake paradigms of supernatural holiness, a respected Indian saint that has built a profitable "spiritual" career on his allegedly miraculous ability to materialize Swiss watches:

> One old Parsi woman came to me in Bombay. Satya Sai Baba used to stay at her place, and she told me, "One day when he had gone into the bathroom, just out of curiosity I looked into his suitcases. They were full of watches! I could not believe that this man was deceiving." She said, "I kicked him out. I told him, 'Never again come into my house! I cannot be a partner to any kind of fraud.'" She told me, "I am an old woman. Nobody listens to me; they think I have gone senile. I have come to you; perhaps you can do something about it." (Osho

Rajneesh 1988, 122)

In Osho's eyes, the man is a contemptible scoundrel: there is nothing worse than exploiting people's need to believe in something "higher" in order to gain recognition and profit from it–and nothing more unspiritual than doing that in the name of religion. As a matter of fact, the old Parsi woman is far more spiritual than Satya Sai Baba because she respects truth, and she is ready to fight for it, even if the stakes are high against her: she has no power, and a whole rotten ideological system supports her opponent. Indeed, Rajneesh's life writing is full of similar accounts, and its protagonist goes on yelling from the rooftops that the king has no clothes: Indian saints are no better than politicians, politicians are but rogues, these two groups are in league with each other, and those who go along with them are either their willing accomplices or they are utterly blind. This being the case, it comes hardly as a surprise that Raja needed a bodyguard, that he was thought to be a dangerous spiritual anarchist, and that the author of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* has gained some kind of recognition only many years after his demise – and that only as an original intellectual figure, not as a sincere mystic and a lover of truth.

The import of the argument I am advancing becomes clear when we compare the above episode with the anecdote of the Mohammedan wonder-worker called Afzal Khan, which we find in *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Yogananda tells the reader that a fakir has gained mastery of "a certain yoga technique that gives him access to an astral plane where any desire is immediately materialized." The man has learnt from an old Hindu guru how to summon an "astral being" called Hazrat and get him to grant his wishes, like the genius in Aladdin's lamp. The fakir, however, is not "spiritually developed," so he uses his esoteric powers to perform roguish miracles. He dematerializes precious objects and money in order to steal them, and quickly becomes the scourge of jewelers, of ticket-sellers, and of the owners of things he decides to appropriate. His fabulously reproachable esoteric career comes to an end only when his former guru appears to him in disguise, and Afzal tries to rob him. The guru is outraged, puts him to shame, and punishes him by withdrawing the occult gifts he had previously bestowed on him. As one would expect in such cases, the story has a happy moral ending: the wonder-worker repents, and the saints forgives him and restores part of the esoteric gifts he has taken back from him:

> "My master regarded me with silent compassion. 'I feel your sincerity,' he said finally. 'Because of your earlier years of strict obedience, and because of your present repentance, I will grant you one boon. Your other powers are now gone, but whenever food and clothing are needed, you may still call successfully on Hazrat to supply them. Devote yourself wholeheartedly to divine understanding in the mountain solitudes.' "My guru had vanished; I was left to my tears and reflections. Farewell, world! I go to seek the forgiveness of the Cosmic Beloved." (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 181)

The story follows well-known and time-hallowed hagiographic conventions, yet it is not meant to be merely entertaining: in fact it is purported to be factually true, and it suggests to the reader 1) that outer miracles are helpful and needed for the teaching of moral lessons; and 2) that they comport mastery over the world of matter. From a secular/spiritual perspective, we should note a) that Afzal Khan is a necessary complement to the old guru's perfect sainthood, since the one cannot be conceived without the other; b) that spirituality is a shield against evil and a kind of white magic; and c) that esoteric knowledge gives access to a primitive "technology" that poverty makes both desirable and indispensable. As a matter of fact, Afzal Khan's repentance reinforces a pre-modern worldview in that it acknowledges the legitimacy of an established spiritual hierarchy. Moreover, it highlights the fact that to focus on the misuse of spiritual powers implies glossing over the problem of their meaning. Indeed, while the Mohammedan fakir is after all a poor devil that the reader is induced to pity and to sympathize with, Osho suggests clearly that Satya Sai Baba cannot be forgiven, since not only is he a rogue, but he also stands for the perpetuation of an ignorant and reactionary past.

As we have seen before, Rajneesh holds that the cultivation of *siddhis* is at best a postponement; and also that the popular belief in the importance of these powers provides a justification and a cover for deceit and exploitation. Sadly, adds Osho, religious believers are often complicit with those who exploit them: they *want* to believe in miracles, because miracles create a distance between people who seek and people who have actually found truth. If the gap between an ordinary man and a true saint is unbridgeable, they have a good excuse to overlook the challenge that spiritual rebellion poses to conformism and philistine passivity: here is the reason why real Buddhas are ostracized, and fake holy men are held in high esteem (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 179). Yogananda adds a remark that casts a very different light about this matter in another passage of his autobiography: "Imposters and hypocrites there are

indeed, but India respects all for the few who illumine the whole world with supernatural blessings" (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 387). The view that hypocrisy can be tolerated in the name of spirituality is understandable only if the latter is identified with scriptural knowledge and is subordinated to a national *ego*, and if respect for truth is dispensed with. De facto, this misguided forgiveness highlights (by contrast) the message conveyed by *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*: truth is universal, it is embodied by individual consciousness, and it can under no circumstances be compromised. In the final account, Yogananda is a traditional saint who absolves sin and leaves the structural causes of injustice unaddressed; while Rajneesh is a modern mystic who respects nothing but truth and is a catalyst of awareness and rebellion.

3.5 Heroism and Immortality

The most important miracles we find in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, however, are the miracles of resuscitation, supernatural longevity, and physical immortality. At a deeper existential and emotional level, the promise of eternal life is the rhetorical trump card of Yogananda's autobiography, in which the ascendancy over life and death is presented as the distinctive hallmark of a "Christ-like guru." Conversely, Rajneesh does not seek to assuage people's deepest fears, and he emphasizes freedom rather than extending consolation or hope. Indeed he affirms that the transcendence of the ego is the only true miracle there is, which is possible only if we face and accept the reality of physical death. Accordingly, in the next pages I shall develop my argument from the vantage points of Ernest Becker's study on the existential and psychological significance of the fear of death; and of Werner Fuch's analysis of the transition from an archaic worldview to a modern secular outlook, so far as the collective images of death are concerned. In short, the yogi in search of physical immortality is Yogananda's "sacred" hero; while Osho presents the protagonist of his memoirs as a rebellious contemporary mystic and as a secular hero who is ready to die any moment, in order to uphold truth and individual freedom – and therefore he constitutes a threat to the religious and political establishment.

Ernest Becker centers his essay on a single fundamental assumption that in Osho's works is reinterpreted and amplified: death is man's greatest anxiety because a human being is made up both by a material body that must obey necessary natural laws, and by a free consciousness that belongs to the cultural (and the spiritual)

dimension. As a result, man longs for eternal life but he is also painfully aware of his finitude: that is why he is the only creature in existence that lives in anguish. He is a *bridge* between an animal and a god, adds Rajneesh: the transition from one to the other is completed only when the mind is dropped and time stops – at the moment of spiritual enlightenment. More generally, the centrality of the theme of man's mortality is highlighted by the fact that we find it not only in all the religions, but also in philosophy and in world literature – and that from a very ancient past.

I mentioned already that according to religious hagiography the beginning of Gautama Buddha's spiritual quest was motivated by the realization that youth does not last, and it is inevitably followed by old age, sickness, and death. As far as epic is concerned, it bears underscoring that one of the oldest recorded literary documents, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, contains the account of a hero' quest for immortality, and it mirrors an anxiety about life's end that is similar in essence to that which we find at the core of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. According to Becker, the heroic striving for immortality is born out of the need to address the despair and the sense of meaninglessness that are inherent in man's destiny. In the heroic worldviews of all the great civilizations, we read in *The Denial of Death*, "One's life is a scenario with which one tries to deny oblivion and to extend oneself beyond death in symbolic ways. One is untouched by the facts of one's death because he has been able to surround it by larger meanings" (Ernest Becker 1973, 105). In other words, heroism is a search for significance that lies at the heart of every culture: Becker calls it an archetypal "life-project" that changes in accordance with historical change.

Accordingly, the vantage point of heroism and death is particularly suited to an ideal-typical assessment of Osho's and Yogananda's autobiographies for two reasons: 1) the reflection on life and the reflection on death are two faces of the same autobiographical coin, therefore (for the reasons we have seen in §3.4) they do not pertain only to the factual domain. For instance, both Mukunda and Raja attend funerals and frequent burning grounds; and both Osho and Yogananda describe death as "an illusion," in accordance to a received Eastern wisdom. If we read between the lines, however, *Autobiography of a Yogi* implies a quite different heroic model than the one that is portrayed in Osho's life writing. Indeed, the blunt denial of human limitations and the emphasis on the search for physical immortality encourage Yogananda's reader to believe in what Ernest Becker calls "the necessary cultural lie" of immortality – at the cost of remaining inauthentic by repressing his own

deepest fears. Conversely, the protagonist of *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* gives the reader a quite different example: Raja braves physical death at every step of his way, and thereby he intimates that self-realization and conscious fearlessness are essentially one and the same. The advice that Osho gives is as direct and existential as it can be: "Don't die like a coward, take a jump into the unknown" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 54). One expires the way one has always lived, and eventually only courage makes a difference.[30] In fact, Raja knows full well that he is running a mortal danger when he crosses a vast river in flood only in order to test his own mettle: he can hardly discern the bank on the other side, and the current is so strong that Hari drowns by his side and disappears forever – leaving just a beautiful memory behind.

In any event, 2) so nuanced a cultural phenomenon as the modernization of the Indian tradition is best framed in a diachronic perspective when we consider history as a succession of immortality ideologies: the old ones that disguised the fear of death have fallen away, and the new secular ones which have replaced them are too thin to contain that existential anxiety. "What characterizes modern life," explains Becker, "is the failure of all traditional immortality ideologies to absorb and quicken man's hunger for self-perpetuation and heroism" (Ernest Becker 1973, 190). As we have seen in the previous chapters, Rajneesh's secular/spiritual outlook takes stock of the eclipse of the sacred dimension in the West; and it is ideationally "modern" inasmuch as it declaredly points to an affinity with Nietzsche, and it builds on the premises of J.P. Sartre's existentialism and of Camus's "absurdism." Accordingly, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* exemplifies the fact that the acceptance of death makes a person's life unique and "authentic," and therefore it constitutes the hallmark of a free and truly "spiritual" individuality. Contrariwise, the traditional or "tribal" man is confined by his culture, maintains Ernest Becker. Such a man identifies himself with the norms and the values of the collectivity he belongs to: he *represses* the fear of death (*and* of life) to the point that he has no awareness of it, and he unknowingly renounces his individuality in order to preserve what Charles Taylor calls his "embedment."[31]

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[30] Osho holds also that one should die remembering that one is *a witness* (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 93). It bears underscoring, in this respect, that for him witnessing means awareness, and is incompatible with the repression of one's feelings: courage, fear, and awareness are linked to one another.

[31] About the concept of "embedment," see §1.5 of this dissertation.

In this context, it bears emphasizing that repression is a concept of psychoanalytic origin[32] that is now of common usage, but that is foreign to Yogananda's pre-modern rhetoric and worldview. According to Becker (who quotes Otto Rank on this matter) Freud's great lesson is that repression is "normal self-protection" and "creative self-restriction," and that it is indispensable to buttress man's fragile ego. In a comparative context, take for instance the protagonist of Paul Bowles' *A Distant Episode*, an American academic who is kidnapped in North Africa by the Reguibats, who train him like an animal, and cut out his tongue: by losing not only the protective embedment of his cultural *milieu*, but also the very ability to articulate speech, he is completely overwhelmed by the sensory input of reality, and he loses his humanity. In this short story, Bowles argues the same point that inspires *The Denial of Death*: raw experience is too overwhelming to be taken in as it is, and it needs to be somehow "partialized" and filtered thorough the screen of the mind. Men aren't built to be gods and to "take in" the whole world, concludes Ernest Becker. Unlike Osho, however, he speaks only from the point of view of the ego – and he cannot conceive of a synthesis between Western secularism and spiritual enlightenment in the Eastern sense.

A self-realized person is not a helpless victim, but a rebel. As we have already noted in §2.2, the primacy of the *pars destruens* is foregrounded in Rajneesh's life writing, but it is also followed by a spiritual rebirth. As a matter of fact, the account of Osho's spiritual enlightenment shows that in psychological terms an enlightened man is one who has been able to destroy the emotional armor made up by social and parental conditioning as well as by national and religious symbols – and who has been centered enough not to be overwhelmed by so potentially shattering an experience. Actually, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is declaredly addressed to a modern audience whose worldview is influenced by the Freudian psychoanalytical revolution – which Peter Watson pointedly considers a defining character of Western modernity – but it complements it with the Eastern insight that through meditation man's awareness can *rise above* the mind, and use it as a tool without having to be limited by it.

[32] According to the *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, "Repression is the operation by which the subject repels and keeps at a distance from consciousness representations that are disagreeable because they are incompatible with the ego" (https://aylamichelledemir.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/international-dictionary-of-psychoanalysis).

According to the definitions of "normality" and "neurosis" that we find in *The Denial of Death*, Yogananda writes for "normal" people that are happy to be adjusted to a society that believes only in power, while Osho talks to the dropouts and the so-called neurotics: those who are endowed with too much intelligence and courage to do the same. Indeed, Rajneesh's recipe for spiritual enlightenment presupposes the acknowledgement of the fact that man's consciousness is a complex multi-layered phenomenon, and that repression (at *all* levels) works against existential awareness because it blocks experience, and hence freedom. In this sense, the neurotic is both an existential rebel who hasn't yet come to know his vocation, and also a child who has refused to grow up as fake as society would have liked him to become. Likewise, for Ernest Becker, "The essence of normality is the refuse of reality," and "Neurosis is the miscarriage of clumsy lies about reality" (Ernest Becker 1973, 178).

From the vantage point of spiritual anarchy a neurotic is closer to self-realization than the traditional man who is after physical immortality and is satisfied with the "safe heroic" of his culture – since he dares to make himself vulnerable to experience. So far as shedding one's emotional defenses is concerned, *The Denial of Death* casts a revealing light on the relationship between love and death and on the trope that inspires the very title of Osho's life writing: *the golden youth*. Every child needs support in order to cope with so numinous and potentially overwhelming a phenomenon as life: his parents and the society he lives in grant that support only if the child renounces what Becker calls the *causa sui* project: *i.e*., the categorical trust in one's own power and worth.[33] Leaving good *karma* from former reincarnations aside, Raja's childhood is "golden" because through their unconditional love Nana and Nani[34] do not in any way repress the protagonist's freedom, and give him plenty of what Ernest Becker calls "inner sustainment:" that is, the feeling of being good, supported, and accepted by existence. By comparison, the kind of emotional support that the protagonist of the *Autobiography of a Yogi* gets from the very beginning of

[33] So far as the definition and the implications of the *causa sui* project are concerned, see Chapter Six of *The Denial of Death*. Ernest Becker makes reference to Freud's theorization of the Oedipus Complex: the child wants to become his own father and gain total control over his own life by uniting with his mother, on whom he is utterly dependent. Against Freud, however, Becker emphasizes that what motivates the child is not sexual desire, but an existential need to transcend human limitations and to attain to immortality and freedom.

[34] Nani and Nana are the nicknames of Osho's maternal grandfather and grandmother.

his spiritual quest is anything but unconditional: indeed Mukunda is the epitome of traditional virtues, and imitation is what inspires his behavior – as we see from the fact that even his foundational spiritual experience is a stereotyped vision of Himalayan sadhus. From the moment of that epiphany onwards, he will follow a beaten spiritual track. Accordingly, his parents and his gurus will not be nourishing his individuality: *through* him they will be actually upholding a traditional way of life.

From Ernest Becker's standpoint, Mukunda gives meaning to his life by foregoing the possibility of being original and "authentic" in the contemporary sense of the word: he is a "collective" hero. As a matter of fact, the power that his gurus' help and that ascetic discipline confer on him is *delegated* power – the result of what in psychoanalytic terms is known as 'transference.'[35] Becker calls transference "the root of unfreedom," and he defines it against the background of Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* in a way that encapsulates the import of Yogananda's "sacred" autobiography in contemporary psychological terms: man identifies himself with the powers of a hero-leader (such as Babaji) for the same reasons a child identifies himself with his mother. Since ordinary people are afraid of both life and death, they abdicate their freedom, and they nourish "an extreme passion for authority." In a similar vein, *The Denial of Death* significantly quotes Alfred Adler's claim that "transference is a problem of courage," and that it amounts to immaturity and to "a rebellion against reality" (Ernest Becker 1973, 99-101).

All this helps explain the real reason why to a modern reader Mukunda's loyalty to the authority figures in his life comes across as clichéd and immature, while Raja's rebellion against the religious and political establishment appears anything *but* childish. Indeed Raja is bold, highly intelligent, and full of enthusiasm and energy, rather than irresponsible or naïve: he gives the reader an example of *personal* – not of *cultural* heroism. Even so, he has to pay a price. Since he lives every moment to the fullest and is not ready to conform to the limitations imposed by society, he "sticks out" in his social environment, he attracts jealous (and even murderous) enmities,

[35] Merriam-Webster broad definition of 'transference' is: "the redirection of feelings and desires and especially of those unconsciously retained from childhood toward a new object (as a psychoanalyst conducting therapy)." This is how Ernest Becker encapsulates the Freudian concept of transference: the child imagines the mother to be omnipotent, and feels reassured by identifying with her. This experience is "transferred" later on in life to other persons, objects, or situations.

and he has very few friends. “Personal heroism through individuation is a very daring venture,” writes Becker in this regard. “The most terrifying burden of the creature is to be isolated, which is what happens in individuation: one separates himself from the herd” (Ernest Becker 1973, 160). Though Raja goes against the grain of his social environment and is at odds with nearly anyone around him, his grandparents love him unconditionally, and he loves them back with the same authentic intensity: therefore he experiences the anguish of death *through* the death of the other, as it is explicitly stated in Rajneesh’s autobiography:

> Death can only be encountered in the death of the loved one. When love plus death surrounds you, there is a transformation, an immense mutation... as if a new being is born. You are never the same again. But people do not love, and because they do not love, they can’t experience death the way I experienced it. Without love, death does not give you the keys to existence. With love, it hands over to you the keys to all that is. (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 80)

Once again, *The Denial of Death* provides a useful background to appreciate the secular/spiritual quality of Rajneesh’s life writing. Becker explains that not only is transference accountable for man’s “unfreedom” inasmuch as it amounts to a mere illusion, but that it also fulfills a useful function as far as everyday life is concerned. Nana’s death spells the end of any *positive* transference that is left in the protagonist’s life, and it seals Raja’s destiny of authenticity and aloneness. Nothing short of unconditional love can represent a positive and fulfilling “embedment,” but love cannot last forever, therefore it is not “real” in the sense that Rajneesh gives to this word: “Only that which cannot be taken away from death is real” (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 154). Ultimately, the deepest roots of a self-realized person can only be in his own inner being, which (as we have seen in the previous chapters) is one with existence.

The paradox here is that the protagonist is able to love because he is an integrated individual and he is not dependent on others, but for that very reason he is also completely alone. That is why Nani cries at the thought that her beloved grandson will never be able to rely on the support of a net of relationships in the same way as most ordinary people do. From the exquisitely modern vantage point of psychoanalytic transference, the kind of self-realization that Osho portrays in his autobiography happens only when a person identifies himself with the Whole, and

stops identifying not only with his mind, but also with his body and with his ego. Accordingly, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* teaches how a contemporary *sannyasin* can have a taste of enlightenment and get ready for that final moment of total surrender: indeed, *every moment* of a true seeker's life is a prefiguration of that occurrence.[36] Death is a fiction not because the body of a yogi-saint such as Lahiri Mahasaya can be transfigured through meditation and made immortal, but because we are not separate from existence – which has always been there and it always will be.

Moreover, from an ideal-typical vantage point little Raja is reminiscent of the Child – the last stage of man's evolution that is foregrounded by *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: for Osho the acceptance of death brings about the *quality* of eternal youth. In fact, through the title he gives to his memoirs Rajneesh hints at Nietzsche's theorization of the three great spiritual metamorphoses: "Three metamorphoses of the spirit have I designated to you," says Zarathustra, "how the spirit became a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child" (Friedrich Nietzsche 2012, link2H_4_0006). According to this perspective, the traditional man of the kind that Yogananda wants to co-opt into Kriya Yoga has much in common with the camel: he follows and endures; he belongs to the collectivity, and has no substance outside it. With only few exceptions, most human beings that we meet in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* fit Nietzsche's ideal-typical description of the sacred and collective beginning of man's spiritual quest. Likewise, the religious idealist is the lion: he has the courage to stand tall and be himself – therefore he is also ready to live dangerously and to follow untrodden spiritual paths. Raja's few trusted friends, his mentors, and his grandparents are lions. They recognize the protagonist's spiritual primacy, and they see clearly that that strange boy represents a clear break with India's sacred past: in Nietzsche's words, they help "create freedom for new creating."

In fact, the autobiographical protagonist that emerges from Osho's life writing has both the innocence of the Child and the courage of the Lion:[37] accordingly, he

[36] Rajneesh claims that spiritual enlightenment and the life that leads to it are one and the same. In this perspective, Heidegger's concept of "being-towards-death" is suggestive of a consonance between existential authenticity and Osho's portrayal of self-realization as "death of the ego." On Heidegger's interpretation of death, see Simon Critchley's *Being and Time Part Six: Death*.

[37] In *Character and Characterization in Religious Autobiography*. J.D. Barbour writes: "[…] character and characterization should not be thought of as two

represents "a self-rolling wheel," "a new beginning," "a holy Yea" (Friedrich Nietzsche 2012, link2H_4_0006). We see again here, from a different angle, how *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* epitomizes a meeting of East and West in the cross-cultural context brought about by modernity. Indeed this work suggests that the last stage of man's existential "coming of age" culminates with spiritual enlightenment, which is both a death and a resurrection: when the Child disappears, the guru (a pure emptiness[38]) appears in his place – and stands for a totally new beginning. As a matter of fact, the author agrees with Max Weber on the assumption that (as we read in *Nine Theories of Religion*) "[…] most of the great world religions trace their origin to a transforming prophetic figure whose charismatic life and compelling message revolutionized the world to this day" (Pals 2015, 160). Paradoxically, however, though Rajneesh sees himself as the fountainhead of a new spiritual tradition, he also nourishes an anarchic dislike for all kinds of institutions, and he emphatically declares that he is not special at all.

His life *is intended* to come across as groundbreaking and charismatic, and yet the message it conveys differs from Yogananda's in that it does not aim at establishing a code of conduct and at creating another religious orthodoxy, but at helping fellow human beings to have unconditional trust in themselves: that is why Osho states that he would rather have friends than followers and disciples. As it happens, a close reading of the works I compare shows a) that Paramhansa derives his authority from that of an ancient line of gurus. The attainment of physical immortality presupposes climbing the ladder of a spiritual hierarchy; and b) that Osho is all in favor of secularizing spirituality and disseminating power: not only does he consider a creator God to be "an unnecessary hypothesis," but also he maintains that the acceptance of death makes for self-realization and for *the equality* of all human beings. In conclusion, Rajneesh's life represents a fresh beginning – but only in the sense that so does the life of any individual who has the courage to face death, and who declares his uniqueness and his unconditional freedom.

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alternative interpretations of the activity of the religious autobiographer, but as inseparable concerns" (Barbour 1987, 307).

[38] For Osho's subjective and poetic account of the experience of self-realization described in terms of pure emptiness and freedom, see *My Way*. *The Way of the White Clouds*.

3.6 Images of Death

In his *The Images of Death in Modern Society*,[39] a sociological work that belongs to the intellectual climate of the late 1960s, Werner Fuchs outlines an interpretation of the cultural and political importance of death that helps develop the argument I advance. The appraisal of what death is, he writes, has become a central feature of the "critical theories"[40] that aim at changing society. In fact, society as such is needed for the preservation of human life. Consequently, it has always offered institutionalized protection against premature death. To be sure, there are still occasions in which society demands that its members sacrifice their lives, and to this day the threat of mortal violence serves the purpose of social control whenever organized conformity falls short of its intended aims. Yet the modern industrial society has in many ways managed to assuage man's mortal fear, since it is characterized by a deliberate attempt to take total control of the natural world, and therefore it constitutes a bulwark against death seen as the principal incarnation of natural necessity. Significantly, Fuchs concludes on a note that constitutes the sociological counterpart of Ernest Becker's line of thinking, which foregrounds Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and the most important exponents of the psychoanalytical movement: in spite of our proclaimed rationality and technological prowess, "Behind the glamorous façade of the developed industrial society there is the repression of the death anguish" (Fuchs 1973, 14).

The author takes pains to emphasize the multiplicity of contrasting scholarly opinions about this matter – which comes hardly as a surprise, given that no amount of scientific research can alter the fact that the relationship between a man and his death is not only "a socially mediated behavior," but also a mystery that (as Osho points out) one can experience, but not explain. *The Images of Death*, however, is a source of important insights in that it highlights continuity between past and present – and

[39] I translate the title and the quotations related to it from the Italian edition of Fuchs' book, which was first published in German in 1969: *Le Immagini della Morte nella Società Moderna.*

[40] According to James Boham's entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* on line, 'Critical Theory' in the narrow sense designates the theorists of the Frankfurt School. "[…] a 'critical theory' may be distinguished from a 'traditional' theory according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human 'emancipation from slavery,' acts as a 'liberating influence,' and works 'to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers' of human beings (Horkheimer 1972, 246)."

therefore it helps put into a comprehensive diachronic perspective the belief in the actuality of physical immortality that characterizes *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Significantly, Werner Fuchs does not merely dismiss that belief as "irrational" and outdated. On the contrary, he maintains that it is still widespread in unrecognized ways, and that "The images that devaluate death are relics of archaic worldviews" (Fuchs 1973, 21).

From this vantage point, Yogananda's persuasive appeal to Western readers is due to a fundamental contradiction: namely, the idea of a permanent and irreversible end of life is a characteristic trait of modernity, but even in the West (let alone India) it is far from being universally accepted, so far as its practical consequences are concerned. To make but one incisive example, modern medicine is still unconsciously conceived by many as a form of magic that works miracles, and that it is hoped will one day lead to physical immortality. In our technologically advanced secular world – we read in *The Images of Death in Modern Society* – "[…] the natural limit to human life is not known, and it is unclear whether nature has forever set a boundary to that duration" (Fuchs 1973, 67).

In primitive societies death does not annihilate the individual because (as I have already pointed out in this dissertation) the modern concept of an autonomous individuality has not historically evolved yet. Since nature is "socialized" exclusively through magic, death is not conceived as a natural and inevitable occurrence, but it is ascribed to supernatural causes. Common people come and go without leaving a trace, but the most powerful authority figures cannot simply disappear, because they embody the collectivity's very essence: they move on to the kingdom of the dead, from where they continue to infuse meaning into social norms and extend magical help or retribution to the living. The consonance between these archaic conceptions and the esoteric spiritual hierarchy of Kriya Yoga (which harks back to time immemorial) is clear; and it helps explain also the fascination with the body that we find in "sacred" outlooks such as Hinduism and traditional Christianity. To make but one pertinent example, in *Autobiography of a Yogi* Lahiri Mahasaya has donned a perfect etheric body and has moved on to the utopic planet of Hiranyaloka, a yogi's paradise from where he comes back to earth in order to give spiritual guidance to Yogananda.

Indeed, Werner Fuchs points out that the archaic refusal to admit death as a reality has roots in the credence that the corpse is magically alive. Accordingly, the notion

that a wicked man's dead body still poses a threat mirrors in reverse the same kind of magical thinking according to which the *material* bodies of saints such as Babaji and Lahiri Mahasaya are made miraculously almighty by physical immortality: since power relations are the only conceivable reality, it is thought that they continue to obtain also between the living and the dead. In this context, it is worth underscoring Werner Fuchs' statement to the effect that "In Christianity death is foreign to man's essence. Physical death is due to original sin: this coincides with the primitive idea that death is an accident" (Fuchs 1973, 67). As a matter of fact, this observation accounts for Yogananda's choice to emphasize physical immortality rather than reincarnation (a key concept in Hinduism) in his autobiography – which is primarily addressed to a Christian public, and it was written at a time when secularism had not yet become a mainstream intellectual option in the West.

With regard to more elitist conceptions, according to *The Images of Death*, Heidegger's idea that death operates within life and makes the individual unique belongs to a philosophical trend that has never taken hold as a social value. Yet secular modernity is best framed in the perspective of a new appraisal of human existence from the vantage point of death. Indeed, the "buttressed self" theorized by Charles Taylor cannot be conceived as an entity that lasts forever for a reason that Osho plainly states in his life writing: everything that has a beginning has also an end. As it happens, according to Werner Fuchs "progressive" sociology has come to acknowledge that death does not simply annihilate the individual, but it also frees him from the constrictions of society, and it is antithetic to conformism and hierarchy – since it creates a distance between social roles and the persons that actually fill them (Fuchs 1973, 18). Appropriately, this idea constitutes the background of Rajneesh's autobiography, which is not intended for the general public, but it is addressed to unprejudiced and sophisticated readers – although Osho crucially complements it with the assertion that a man's consciousness is far from being only a phenomenon that is confined to one's body, mind, and emotions.

All in all, Fuchs' essay shows that two radically different conclusions can and have been drawn from the new appraisal of death that I have mentioned above. On the one hand, 1) Christian von Ferber (a German social theorist that has pride of place in Fuchs' essay) defends a viewpoint that has much in common with Ernest Becker's, and epitomizes a central aspect of Osho's "heroic" autobiographical outlook: "The

memento mori,[41] " he writes, "is a warranty of freedom, since it highlights the inauthentic character of society's claims" (Fuchs 1973, 208). When death is exposed as "an instrument of dominion" at the service of society, a rebellious individual is bound to prefer embracing it, if necessary, rather than bargaining away his freedom. This explains why Rajneesh maintains in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*: "In fact to me it seems that death happens not at the moment you stop breathing, but when you stop being yourself. I have never for any reason allowed any compromise" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 229). In Osho's secular/spiritual life writing, death is not presented as a *fact* that concerns the body, but as an event that (just like an authentic life) belongs in its essence to the realm of meanings: indeed it consists in the betrayal of one's own "heroic" authenticity.

On the other hand, 2) according to Herbert Marcuse "[…] there is a fundamental connection between resignation *vis-à-vis* death and resignation *vis-à-vis* the power relations that obtain in society." The realization that life's pleasures will not last forever is "a primary disappointment" that makes pleasure itself painful and that "becomes the inextinguishable source of all subsequent disappointments, and of their social effectiveness" (Fuchs 1973, 205). Marcuse believes that when man acknowledges that death is inevitable he also resigns himself to subordination and to hierarchy. Allegedly, Socrates' example shows courage, but it also points to an exemplary defeat: indeed the noble philosopher's suicide proves that "Compliance with death is compliance with the masters over death: the polis, the state, nature, or the god" (Fuchs 1973, 206). From the viewpoint of my dissertation, what is condemned here is not the Greek man himself, but the fatalistic perspective that is inherent in all collective outlooks that buttress the primacy of society on its members. As we have seen in §2.2, Naipaul criticizes this acquiescence in traditional Indian autobiography: for him the Indian mind is obsessed with transcending death, therefore it devaluates life, and it does not take responsibility for social injustice and for the "banal evils" [42] inherent in *all* interpersonal relations based on unconsciousness and power.

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[41] Latin, literally "remember (that you have) to die."

[42] The conception of "the banality of evil" helps explain in modern Western terms Osho's indictment of conformity and unawareness. For Rajneesh the rebel is a free individual that takes responsibility for the world around him: he is capable of compassion and critical thinking. Likewise, in *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* Majid Yar explains that according to Hannah Arendt we should do

On closer comparative inspection, Marcuse and Yogananda have in common the implicit materialistic assumption that pleasure – not freedom – makes life worth living. The former a) represents progressive Western rationality, and he carries a grudge against *both* nature *and* all social systems that repress individuality. In fact in his perspective they deprive man of what in Eastern spiritual terms would be called the pleasure of being identified with the body. Accordingly, those who know what is really at stake should wage a political revolution and hope in technological progress in order to avert physical death as long as possible. A categorical *no* to death is the only possible answer: resignation is out of the question on political and on existential grounds. Yogananda b), on the contrary, stands for traditional Eastern wisdom: he affirms that death is an illusion *because* so is life. From this he implicitly draws the conclusion that a spiritual man should say an *uncritical* yes to all that is – including what from a secular vantage point is called injustice. Yet, by suggesting that man should strive after physical immortality he shows he does not believe that spiritual heroism can consist in a *total* affirmation, and be deep enough to contain the acceptance of nothingness conceived as the ultimate freedom – which is the deeper meaning that Osho gives to the death of the ego.

A "rational" writer such as Werner Fuchs does not conceive (as Rajnesh does) that meditation comes to fruition in aloneness, which is *beyond* love and all kinds of relationships. Therefore the author of *The Images of Death* holds against von Ferber that it is contradictory to think that "liberation" (which is yet another name for what in this paper I call "self-realization") can be expected from death: "*a force that men fear so much, because it implies separation from the social context*" (Fuchs 1973, 209, italics added). Given these premises, it is hardly surprising that Fuchs agrees with Marcuse and points out that man's desire for unlimited freedom is "unrealistic," since it shows that "unfortunately" the longing for transcendence is still alive in our supposedly secular Western world.

Ernest Becker, however, agrees neither with Marcuse nor with Yogananda. As it happens, he appeals to Kierkegaard's authority in defense of the need for

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without the customary rules we call "morality." Indeed, there exists "an independent human faculty, unsupported by law and public opinion, that judges anew in full spontaneity every deed and intent whenever the occasion arises" (http://www.iep.utm.edu/arendt/#H6). Likewise, Osho explains that awareness is an "independent faculty", which grows with meditation.

transcendence, and explains it from the eminently modern point of view of psychoanalysis: for him the desire for individuation (*Eros*) and the urge to yield to the superior powers of existence (*Agape*) are equally essential to man's existential fulfillment, and they should be both cherished. Interestingly, his work shows evidence of a substantial affinity with a central theme that inspires Rajneesh's memoirs: namely, spiritual enlightenment implies the acceptance of both life and death, and saying *no* paves the way for being able to say *yes* without renouncing one's freedom. "One should live while one is alive; there is no need to think of death," is the final lesson that Raja learns from the death of his grandfather. "When death comes one should die, and die totally; then there is no need to look backwards. And every moment being total in living, in loving, in dying – that's how one comes to know" (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 103). In conclusion, it bears reiterating that nowhere as pointedly as in the trope of death does Rajneesh's autobiography show evidence of an innovative synthesis between East and West. Indeed, it exemplifies both a heroic rebellion and a new kind of religious affirmation: therefore it is best seen in the context of the process of cultural change that I have already described in terms of "modernization of the Indian tradition."

CHAPTER FOUR
INNOVATION AND CONTINUITY

> "The day I became enlightened" simply means the day I realized that there is nothing to achieve, there is nowhere to go, there is nothing to be done. We are already divine and we are already perfect as we are. No improvement is needed, no improvement at all. (Osho Rajneesh 2000, 64)

> The entire cosmos, gently luminous, like a city seen afar at night, glimmered within the infinitude of my being. […] Blissful *amrita*, the nectar of immortality, pulsed through me with a quicksilverlike fluidity. (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 117)

4.1 Old Wine, New Flasks

In the Indian context, Osho's "autobiography of enlightenment" represents innovation with respect to Yogananda's established interpretation of the experience of self-realization, and radicalizes a politically progressive literary tradition that flourished during the Indian Renaissance. In fact, in *Writing the Life of the Guru*[1] Udaya Kumar outlines two different trends in the first part of the twentieth century, so far as Indian spiritual biographies are concerned: on the one hand we have mythological constructions of tradition in which the superhuman powers of the guru are highlighted as focal points (Vijaya and Sharma 2013, *Locations* 1027-29); on the other hand we have polemics on caste and religion, and a new sort of guru engaged with the secular world (Vijaya and Sharma 2013, *Location* 1024).

As it happens, while *Autobiography of a Yogi* follows closely the hagiographical trend, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* is a humorous and libertarian reinterpretation of the images and the spirit of the "secular" trend, which ranges from the trope of the astrologer who prophesies an auspicious future (Osho refuses to listen and shocks him by predicting *his* future instead) to the provocative reversal of the theme of the guru's achievements. Traditionally, these exploits are due to austerities (*tapas*) and

[1] Udaya Kumar's "Writing the Life of the Guru" appears in *Biography as History*, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma (Himayatnagar, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Ltd., 2013).

cause nothing but edification and awe, while the moments of non-identity and of conflict between the guru and the community are carefully ignored. Raja's "achievements," on the contrary, translate into a "heroic" misconduct that results from an uncontrolled subjectivity and provokes animosity and dismay. As for the motif of the appearance of the future guru's body, and the anecdotes pertaining to his way of looking at the world, the author admits candidly that for many years he lived "like an animal," and that he stopped at nothing, in order to have some fun. From Udaya Kumar's vantage point, Osho Rajneesh aims a) at creating a new framework of norms and values to serve as the locus of his authorial self-presentation, in order to accommodate individualism and secular rationality; and b) at changing the feeling and emotional rules that set *the emotional standards* of the people he addresses, because he feels that "the freedom of individual action that is tolerated by the system sets limits to the art of existence" (Vijaya and Sharma 2013, *Location* 1802).

In short, he pours the old wine of his enlightenment, which transcends time, into the flasks of a new kind of spiritual life writing, which is intended to help a modern individual to give meaning to his life – and to his death. This is particularly evident in relation to the trope of self-realization, which I will examine in some detail so far as Rajneesh's memoirs are concerned. Indeed, an appraisal of the ways in which Yogananda and Osho outline spiritual enlightenment is crucial to understand the change in perspective from *Autobiography of a Yogi* to *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, and its connection with the modernization of the Indian tradition. Significantly, Acharya Rajneesh describes his spiritual experience as "Buddhahood" in honor of Siddhartha Gautama (who did not believe in a personal God), while Paramhansa Yogananda speaks of "Christ-consciousness" to underline that Christianity and Hinduism have roots in the same religious experience, and to appeal to prospective Western followers.

As it happens, the concept of spiritual enlightenment is the cornerstone of all the great religions born in the Indian subcontinent – Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism – and it is associated with the ideas that death is not the end, and that the soul keeps reincarnating until it attains ultimate freedom. That is why at the moment of his death Nana (a Jain) keeps begging his grandson to help him "stop the wheel." In spite of her grief, Raja's grandmother laughs at the absurdity of that plea: she knows that the *very effort* to stop the wheel of reincarnation keeps the wheel turning. For Osho the obsession with transcendence is yet another desire that keeps one identified with the

ego: life should be seen as a boon, not as misery, and self-realization is a let go, not a doing. Broadly speaking, the word "enlightenment" points to the union of the individual self with God, for theists like Yoganada,[2] and to the dissolution of the ego and the merging into existence, for a "spiritually incorrect mystic" and an atheist like Rajneesh. That helps explain why Osho announced that it would be impossible for him to reincarnate after his death, and that he would "dissolve in the people who loved him," while Yogananda promised he would come back as a divine incarnation in order to help humanity.

On close inspection, Yogananda's presentation of enlightenment is naïve, stereotypical, and unlikely: it implies that the transcendence of duality can be put in words, and is vague about its practical consequences in the lives of the adepts of Kriya Yoga and of the saints the yogi meets in his travels to the West. In fact, *Autobiography of a Yogi* provides ample evidence of the uncritical and pre-modern attitude toward enlightenment that is typical of popular devotion. For instance, Ananda Moi (a saintly woman who is said to have solved "the only problem in human life: the establishment of unity with god") is so ecstatic that she has to be spoon-fed by a disciple, or she would starve to death (Paramhansa Yogananda 2005, 441). Given Osho's aversion for masochism and affectation, Ananda Moi's non-dualistic cure-all remedy for all life's problems would be completely out of place in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*. Indeed, from a modern vantage point, Yogananda's account paradoxically (and no doubt unintentionally) suggests that spiritual enlightenment is a handicap that makes one "special" for the worst possible reason: it makes one utterly dependent on others – a liability, not a blessing for a saint's disciples and friends.

Once again, while according to Rajneesh the body partakes in the experience of self-realization *as it is*, the *Autobiography of a Yogi* lightheartedly intimates that it should be mastered and effaced. In a comparative context, it bears underlining 1) that Paramhansa repeats but takes at face value the conventional saying that a self-realized person is bound to be ostracized and misunderstood, and 2) that he is not aware of the consequences entailed by the controversial charisma of a man such as Rajneesh, who proclaims his affinity both with Zorba the Greek and with Gautama

[2] Yoganada defines self-realization as "[…] the knowing – in body, mind, and soul – that we are one with the omnipresence of God" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-realization).

the Buddha.[3] Conversely, Osho's spiritual insight is a far more ironic, experiential, and penetrating:

> I have created so many enemies that you can depend on it, he writes, that I must have made a few friends at least. Without creating friends, you cannot create enemies. That is a basic law. If you want friends, get ready for the enemies too. That's why many, the majority of people, decide to have neither friends nor enemies, just acquaintances. (Osho Rajneesh 1984, 262)

These are plain words that anybody can relate to, not esoteric speculations, and they point to the hard truths of an unenlightened society where power relations are pervasive. Raja's childhood may well be described as golden, but it does not come across as plain sailing the way Yoganada's initiation into spirituality does. As it happens, the modernity of Osho's life writing owes much to the fact that it presents self-realization as a reality that has a direct bearing on everyday life, rather than as a state far removed from our experience, which we can only dream about or believe in. In short, on the one hand the journey to self-realization is pictured as a heroic task that makes for *passionate* involvement on the part of the reader, and on the other hand enlightenment itself is not presented as something special, but as everybody's birthright.

Indeed, Yogananda's life writing comes across as stereotypical and artificial (as I have pointed out in §1.3) because it is emotionally flat: its *forte* is erudition, not the author's ability to express feelings and through them "enlighten" the reader. *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, on the contrary, reconnects itself to an ancient Indian literary tradition of comparable age to the Greek one.[4] In that tradition, explains Keith Oatley in *Emotions: a Brief History*, art has a spiritual purpose: by an empathetic process, the members of an audience experience emotions called in Sanskrit *rasas*, which are based on the spectators' (or the readers') own experience of what is being portrayed. The difference between ordinary emotions and *rasas* is that in everyday life one is identified with (and hence driven by) one's emotions, while the experiencing of *rasas* entails heightened awareness (Oatley 2004, 152-53).
From this vantage point, it bears pointing out that in *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*

[3] About the concept of "Zorba the Buddha" see § 3.3 of this dissertation.
[4] According to Oatley, this tradition still survives in Kashmir, and is thought to have started between 400 and 100 BCE.

the *rasa* of masculine valour, *veeram*, replaces *santham*, the restraint characteristic of the ascetic – which is more in tune with Yoganada's subordination to a sacred hierarchical order. The source of the protagonist's actions is not located outside, but inside him, and the help Raja gets in his spiritual search is not supernatural, but human. Significantly, it comes from a woman (his grandmother) who loves him passionately, and from like-minded individuals who are impervious to the conditionings of society: it suits the figure of an individualist hero with romantic overtones that a contemporary reader may wish to identify with. Osho's point is that emotions are much closer to our essential reality than thoughts, and therefore it is vital to *live* them and to *understand* them, in order to progress on the path to spiritual enlightenment. As it happens, Matte Blanco argues a similar point with regard to rationality, feelings, and self-knowledge in the works he has written about the functioning of the unconscious.[5]

To be sure, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and all the Buddhist texts do give precious insights into the meaning of self-realization. Words, though (and here we touch one of the most important differences between Osho and Yogananda), can go only so far: they are at best pointers to something that transcends them, and a prod to action. The world of today is very different from the world of the *Vedas*, and India's *unique* contribution to humanity is not its philosophy, but its fervent commitment to the individual search for a higher meaning. The discourse on self-realization as Osho formulates it remains relevant to this day, and has widened its appeal outside India, precisely because it has an emotional impact that allows it to reach across cultural, national, and doctrinal divides.

In Osho's memoirs, Raja shows again and again that self-realization is a challenge, a problem that demands an existential answer. Something needs to happen to us because we are not fulfilled, we have not realized our potential, our true nature. In Rajneesh words, we don't know how to live with "totality" – a term he coined to indicate the quality of being passionately committed to our truth and to the present moment. Something stops us from living in a way that can fulfill us. This "something" is the mind, the mechanism that functions as a filter and a buffer between reality and us, the computer we can no longer recognize as a tool and we

[5] Matte Blanco: *L'Inconscio Come Insiemi Infiniti* (*The Unconscious as Infinite Sets*).

now mistake for our true self. Spiritual enlightenment is what happens when we transcend the mind, and Osho prefers to describe it as a deep relaxation, an act of surrender, and an experience that in many ways resembles death, rather than as rapture and esoteric empowerment the way Yogananda does.

4.2 Conclusion

Two overall remarks will serve as a conclusion to this dissertation. First, the texts I compare (professedly, life narratives *of* self-realized persons *about* self-realization) are not only existentially and "politically" relevant to the present situation; they are also paradoxical and intellectually challenging – albeit to the different extents I have outlined in this work. In fact, on the one hand they announce an impossible situation, and on the other hand they offer both criticism *and* solution. Rajneesh himself acknowledges that an enlightened author has no ego, so there's no one who writes and is written about; and in Yogananda's book (in accordance with ancient Eastern hagiographic conventions) there is little in the way of what we would normally expect to find in an autobiography. Yet both Rajneesh and Yogananda experienced "conversions," turning points that changed them, and by telling us, they "established narrative structures to their lives," a "before" and an "after" – a feature which (according to James Olmes) is the only firm foundation left in contemporary life writing. From this angle, the concept of self-realization points to an experience worth exploring both in life *and* in literature, and this holds especially true for Rajneesh's autobiography, which looks more to the future than to the past.

Osho and to a different degree Yogananda would certainly see the merit of the modernist feeling of autobiographical alienation (Samuel Beckett's "Not-I!"), though they would explain it differently, since the way they conceive self-realization is not the same: one considers that it leads to physical immortality and makes you larger than life, the other holds that the disappearance of the ego is in itself a fulfillment, and that what the ego sees as nothingness is nothing but ultimate freedom. In any event, both authors maintain that spiritual enlightenment is the only way to fulfill an existential need that the collapse of traditional structures, in the West and elsewhere, has only made more pressing.

Unlike Yoganada, who provides certainties, Rajneesh claims that to suffer from the absence of meaning is to take the first step in the right direction, and that once you begin the journey to enlightenment, in a way you have already arrived. In any event,

Beckett's creativity is as rebellious (if not as aware) as Rajneesh's unorthodox spirituality, and in Olmes' book we do read that the author of *Waiting for Godot* used to claim he remembered being born and his previous existence in the womb (Olmes 1998, 325). In short, the autobiographies I have studied pose an intellectual challenge to a Western reader in that they exemplify the two horns of an urgent contemporary dilemma: whether the way forward is a return to the relative safety of our traditional past, in which existential anguish is appeased and forgotten in ways that are sanctioned by society, or whether we should move forward and infuse new spiritual meaning in the individualist outlook that characterizes secular modernity.

Second, my comparison is also about a discrepancy, and it spans the gap between an overstatement and an absence: one book is replete with *miraculous* events; the other shows that self-realization is the outcome of a *natural* life when lived with totality. For Yogananda, self-effacement is a means, not an end; for Osho the opposite is true. In essence, pre-modern autobiographies such as that of Yogananda are addressed to "poor" readers, who need reassurance and illusions, and who are afraid of life and death alike. Osho addresses instead the rich in courage and in intelligence, who can afford to see things the way they are. Accordingly, I have read the two works from the vantage point of power relations – an eminently modern perspective – and I have argued that in the *Autobiography of a Yogi* miracles are always social and public events – which are effective only in the framework of previous doctrines and convictions. Indeed, they presuppose both a relationship to established authority, and the presence of expectations and desires.

All things considered, Paramhansa's life writing rests on the assumption that miracles are not only possible, but also needed: a mixed bag of pessimism and trust. *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, on the contrary, demands drastic measures, and delivers the message that in the recipe for spiritual enlightenment the basic ingredient is courage (a human, albeit not prevalent, quality): not fatalistic compliance or esoteric knowledge, let alone morality. Yogananda's book reads like the bidding to make a supreme effort, and dangles the carrots of physical immortality, superhuman powers, and social approbation in front of us: it has the quaint charm of the kind of naïve trust that comes across both as childish and as childlike.

Acharya Rajneesh's autobiography encourages one to try new experiences, make *different* mistakes, and take risks: its basic appeal is to the misfits and to those who have nothing to lose, as I have explained in the section about the denial of death. One

is well-intentioned holy bribery, a necessary compromise: the staple of many traditional religions. The other amounts to a roguish daring to rise to the challenge of an unfathomable existence: a minority option.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

I was born in Rome, Italy, in 1952. From 1976 to 1977 I worked as an apprentice in the newspaper *La Voce Repubblicana*, in Rome, where I published several articles of cultural and political content. In 1978 I graduated in Philosophy at the University "La Sapienza" of Rome with a score of 110/110. My final dissertation was about Gaetano Mosca's theory of political élites.

In 1978 I passed a state examination to become a public servant and be employed as a full-time teacher. Since then I have been teaching Italian, History and Geography in the Italian Secondary School, where I am currently employed. In 1997 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent me to England, and I taught Italian Language and Civilization at the St. Joseph's Secundary School of Swindon for six years.

I came back to Italy in 2004, and in the same year I was awarded a Master Degree in "Didactics and Promotion of Italian Language and Culture for Foreigners" at the University "Ca' Foscari" of Venice, with a final score of 108/110. My final dissertation was about the teaching of reading skills to non-Italian students. In 2007 I was awarded a Bachelor Degree in Arts at the "University of Roma Tre," scoring 110/110 *cum laude*. My dissertation was about the history and the geography of Wiltshire, England. In January 2008 I was sent to Eritrea to teach Italian, History and Geography in the "Istituto Onnicomprensivo" of Asmara.

In 2012 I enrolled at the Fatih University of Istanbul, where I followed the graduate courses of Compared Literature in the Faculty of Social Sciences and I passed the examinations required by the curriculum.