

Idealism and Magic in 20th Century Italy (1910-1940) How Italian Scholars Discovered Western Esotericism

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This paper can be viewed as an attempt to explore some of the remote foundations of the “history of Western esotericism” as an academic discipline. Its underlying question is “why did 20th century scholars turn to the study of magic and esotericism?”. I will address it by examining briefly the (re)discovery of Western esotericism by a few Italian scholars after WW2.

The origins of a mature approach to the history of Western esotericism can be traced back to French academic culture of the '60s and the '70s, and particularly to Antoine Faivre, who was preceded by a group of prominent scholars such as Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964), François Secret (1911-2003) and Henry Corbin (1903-1978). And if one should mention an influential work produced *outside* France in that very period the first author that we might think of is probably Frances A. Yates, with her seminal *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964).

Very often we forget, however, that the study of magic and Renaissance esotericism had already blossomed in Italy in the '40s and the '50s thanks to two major scholars: Ernesto de Martino and Eugenio Garin. Before I proceed to the core of my paper, I will make two examples to show the relevance of their works – especially those of Garin – for our current understanding of esotericism.

EUGENIO GARIN AND OUR CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF ESOTERICISM

In his essay “Magia e astrologia nella cultura del Rinascimento” (1950), Garin discusses the Hermetic writings and their relationship to «the occult, astrological and alchemical literature» of the late Antiquity. According to Garin, these traditions agreed about «the idea of a universe wholly alive, all made of hidden correspondences, of occult sympathies, all pervaded by spirits [...] and in the middle of it stands man, a wonderful changing being, who can say anything, reshape anything, draw any character, respond to any invocation, invoke any god»¹.

Interestingly enough, in these few lines we have the very core pattern of Faivre's classical definition of esotericism²:

Garin 1950
the idea of a universe wholly alive
all made of hidden correspondences, of occult sympathies
all pervaded by spirits
in the middle of it stands man, a wonderful changing being,
who can say anything, reshape anything

Faivre 1992
living nature (2)
correspondences (1)
imagination and mediations (3)
the experience of transmutation (4)

Which shows that Garin's understanding of Renaissance Hermeticism provided a very influential and persistent model for the subsequent research about esotericism³.

The second example is the following. It is generally assumed that the term “esotericism” entered the scholarly discourse as a coherent historiographical concept in French academic culture, thanks in particular to Antoine Faivre's writings, during the '80s and the '90s⁴. Which is quite true, on the whole. We must point out, however, that in 1960 the Centro Internazionale di Studi Umanistici organized a conference entitled, quite meaningfully, *Umanesimo e esoterismo*, aiming at «a deeper examination of the problem of symbolism in the Hermetic currents of 15th and 16th centuries»⁵. In the bilingual (Italian/French) introduction to the conference proceedings, signed by Enrico Castelli, the expression “esoteric currents” (*correnti esoteriche, courants ésotériques*) – which was to have great success a few decades later thanks to Faivre – made its official entrance in the academic discourse. In these pages, however, the meaning of “esotericism” was still quite

undetermined. Basically, this expression was a synonymous for “mystical/Hermetic currents” – and more specifically, those of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance. It is noteworthy that the first article of this volume (“Le 'elezioni' e il problema dell'astrologia”) is by Eugenio Garin, who was at that time at the leading edge of the research on Renaissance Hermeticism, magic and astrology.

These two examples show beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Italian scholarly discourse about Renaissance esotericism has been deeply influential in orienting the subsequent research in this field. It is undeniable that Faivre, at the beginning of the '90s, gave for the first time a clear and comprehensive description of what we now call Western esotericism, broadening this field so as to include Illuminism and Christian theosophy of 17th and 18th centuries, as well as contemporary esoteric currents. However, his conceptualization of esotericism as a range of “historical currents” sharing four intrinsic characteristics – living nature, correspondences, imagination and mediations and the experience of transmutation – seems to be directly or indirectly dependent, as we have just seen, on the research about Renaissance esotericism carried out in Italy throughout the '50s and the '60s, and in particular on Garin's publications about Renaissance Hermeticism.

In my opinion, one of the most fruitful ways of understanding the origins of Garin and de Martino's research is to situate them within the framework of the Italian idealistic culture of the early 20th century, to which both scholars belonged⁶.

In the following pages, I will therefore examine three major representatives of this culture: Benedetto Croce, Adolfo Omodeo and Piero Martinetti. We will see that the commonplace assumption that idealist thinkers disregarded esotericism and magic is not completely true⁷. As a matter of fact, idealists were often interested in such topics, even though they considered magic as something belonging to an archaic past, and not to be resumed so lightly.

CROCE, OMODEO AND MARTINETTI

The first thing to observe is the role played by Croce, as the main editorial consultant of the prestigious publishing house “Laterza”, in promoting the publication of historical studies about ancient and modern esotericism, notably in the '20s and '30s⁸.

Croce, for instance, supported Julius Evola in his endeavors to get his books published by Laterza⁹. With Laterza, Evola eventually published *La tradizione ermetica* (1931), as well as three other volumes¹⁰. Croce also played a role in the publication of *Zagreus* (1920) by Vittorio Macchioro (future de Martino's father-in-law)¹¹. In this work Macchioro interpreted the frescoes of the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompei as representing the stages of initiation of an Orphic cult, which he studied in the light of hypnotic phenomena and mediumship. This book, now almost forgotten, had great influence on young Eliade¹² and de Martino. Croce also helped Emilia Nobile, whose studies on Boehme were published by Laterza and reviewed in “La Critica”¹³, as were reviewed, over time, the most recent international publications about Paracelsus, Bruno and Campanella.

In the last years of his life, Croce supported the research on magic carried out by his disciple de Martino and reviewed his volume *Il mondo magico* (1948), recognizing that it helped lay the groundwork for a more accurate historical understanding of “magism”¹⁴.

Croce was also genuinely interested in various aspects of Renaissance esotericism. He wrote essays about Renaissance treatises on numbers¹⁵ and on cosmological and astrological texts such as the *Zodiacus Vitae* (1543) by Marcellus Palingenius Stellatus¹⁶, and reviewed books about Paracelsus¹⁷. On the other hand, Croce was very critical of the most typical expressions of *fin-de-siècle* esotericism (spiritualism, theosophy, occultism, etc...), in which he saw a degenerate form of “irrationalism”. This seems relevant since it shows how the elite often perceived these currents, filtering Western esotericism through a category quite unfit to describe its historical and

cultural specificity.

Let us now turn to Adolfo Omodeo (1889-1946), the most renowned historian of Christianity of his time in Italy¹⁸. For many years, Omodeo held the chair of History of Christianity at the University of Naples and in 1944 he was appointed Minister of Education in the second Badoglio Government. In *Gesù Cristo e le origini del Cristianesimo* (1913), Omodeo explored the relationship between early Christianity, the mystical and magical trends of Judaism, and Gnostic and Hermetic traditions. He developed these topics some years later, in *La mistica giovannea* (1930), dealing with the Gospel of John and its Gnostic background. In the volume *Un reazionario. Il conte Joseph de Maistre* (1939), Omodeo showed that not only the thought of Maistre, but the whole late eighteenth-century French culture was pervaded by strong mystical yearnings, and influenced by ancient Gnostic ideas, filtered through Boehme's Christian theosophy.

There seem to be two main themes in Omodeo's survey of esotericism: the influence of Gnosticism on early Christianity, and the Gnostic emphasis on man's power and on his essential and inalienable dignity (albeit temporarily lost because of the fall into matter).

As to Piero Martinetti (1872-1943), Professor of Theoretical and Moral Philosophy at the University of Milan from 1906 to 1931, his idealism is in fact a monistic spiritualism akin to that of some Eastern philosophies and Neo-Platonism, and deeply influenced by Schopenhauer¹⁹. In *Dio, il mondo e l'uomo* (1914-1915), for example, Martinetti exposes his non-dualistic philosophy following the Platonic, Neoplatonic, Kabbalistic and theosophical doctrines, in a time when these materials were mainly studied by theosophists and occultists. The Kabbalistic doctrines of En-Soph and Sephiroth are described in detail, with long quotations from the *Zohar*. Martinetti also elaborates on Boehme's theosophy, showing its influence upon the fathers of post-Kantian idealism such as Schelling and Krause²⁰.

So we can say that, despite their overt rejection of what they called “irrationalism” – which had obvious implications for their opinion about esotericism – idealists proved to be sensitive to many subjects and authors that were in fact very closely related to Western esoteric currents. The ultimate reason for such a sensitivity should probably be looked for within these authors' intellectual background, imbued with spiritualistic assumptions and deeply influenced by the Hegelian philosophy²¹. But this kind of analysis would lead us too far away from our subject. Let us go back, then, to Garin and de Martino, and try to describe their understanding of magic and esotericism between the end of the '40s and the beginning of the '50s.

GARIN AND DE MARTINO: MAGIC AS THE RESPONSE TO A CRISIS

At the beginning of the '50s, Garin's ideas are clear: Renaissance Hermetic magic is basically the response to a crisis, the “crisis of Medieval thought”²². Attached to the fixity and the rationality of its philosophical patterns, medieval theology did not fully recognize the inner freedom of man, his power to act on things and to transform, to transmute his world:

The intellectual frameworks of medieval theological vision - as has been the case again, in recent times, with an excessive rationalism - break the Real, opposing their strict logical and conceptual patterns to the soft plasticity of life²³.

Which implied, for Garin, an “integral dehumanization”, since man is a free spiritual self-realizing being (“*libero farsi spirituale*”). It implied also the condemnation of magic: in this medieval context «the magician is not but a demonic temptation [...]. To the condemnation of the magician corresponds the age of subhuman magic, of necromancy. The magician, banished from rational reality, takes refuge among shifting ghosts, evokes shadows, sees monstrous gods in the heavens, feels murky, obscure forces in the depths of man»²⁴.

So, if Aristotelian theology ignored the “plasticity of life”, and dissected reality into discrete and mutually opposing dimensions – nature vs. spirit, body vs. soul, passion vs. reason – Hermetic

magic, instead, 1) was based on the idea of the solidarity and unity of the All, and 2) suggested that man could *know* those spiritual and natural vital energies and *use* them in order to act on his world, and to transform it:

Against a skeleton man moving in a world of geometrisable skeletons, stands the exaltation of the Hermetic ideal where the will, the work, the act, produce and dissolve forms, create and recreate, move freely heading for the future in an infinity of possibilities, in an opening without borders ... To the man who operates corresponds the universe as inexhaustible possibility... This, and no other, was the significance of the defense of magic, which the Renaissance inserted in its celebration of man²⁵.

Garin focuses on this transforming, active knowledge, typical of the Hermetic context, and recalls Bruno's definition of the magus: *magus significat hominem sapientem cum virtute agendi*²⁶.

For Garin, to sum up, Hermetic magic, with its praise of the unity of creation, and its idea of a transforming and dignifying knowledge, is part of the Renaissance response to the crisis of Medieval culture. Now – and this is a very interesting point – in Garin's pages that medieval crisis seems to echo the crisis of contemporary Europe, caught in the turmoil of dictatorships and about to fall into the abyss of the Second World War.

The influence of the crisis in contemporary Europe on Garin's research about the Middle Ages is clearly discernible. In his second preface (1985) to *L'umanesimo italiano* (1947), he writes:

In '46, when I concluded this book [*L'umanesimo italiano*] I had breathed the atmosphere between the two world wars, when the word of the past was imbued with all the tensions of a moment of crisis. The [...] very term “humanism” [...] was chosen on purpose, to underline the regenerating and paradigmatic value of that [Renaissance's] way of reading any “book”: of man and of nature²⁷.

In Garin's texts of this period, then, we have a clear – although often implicit – parallel between the Middle Ages and the European crisis of the early 20th century. In both cases, the powerful energies of life did not find expression otherwise than in a chaotic and unconscious way, for they had not been overtly accepted, resulting on the one hand on the crisis of a dehumanizing Aristotelian theology – which caused the emergence of “subhuman magic” and “necromancy” – and on the other in the disastrous consequences of fascism, nazism and WW2. Hermetic magic, emphasizing man's dignity and his power to transmute himself, helped the Renaissance man forge a new humanism and find his way out of the medieval gloom. 20th century Europe had to find its own “Renaissance”.

At the beginning of the '40s de Martino, former student of Omodeo at the University of Naples, and very close disciple of Croce himself, was also quite aware of the crisis of his time and of its implications for his research. We must recall the epic sentence of the *Introduction* to his first volume, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia* (1941): «Our civilization is in crisis: a world is about to fall apart, another is preparing». And in 1953, looking back at the early stages of his research, he wrote: «What pushed me to ethnological studies was not the “urge for distant and ancestral experiences”, but, on the contrary, the defense of modern civilization and the need for a wider historicist humanism as a non-negligible contribution to cultural catharsis. Those were the gloomy years in which Hitler “shamanised” in Germany and Europe, and at the same time our generation was slowly regaining consciousness of what is human and civil»²⁸.

The link between his research on magic and the crisis of contemporary Europe is clearly stated by de Martino in the preface to *Il mondo magico* (1948): «The task of historicist ethnology is to pose problems whose solution may lead to the enlargement of our civilization's self-awareness»²⁹. Again, in the words of Benedetto Croce, «all history is contemporary history». Studying the past, for de Martino as well as for Garin, was a way of expanding Western civilization's self-awareness, and ultimately of providing the present with a new humanism.

In *Il mondo magico* magic is still, as it was for Garin, an answer to a crisis. Nevertheless, this crisis is a much more general and existential one. In the “primitive cultures” studied by de Martino, magical techniques serve the purpose of reinforcing the presence of man, re-assuring thus his existence itself. Magic, in other words, is the means employed by primitive societies to solve a drama, the “drama of presence”: «The shaman is the hero who was able to move up to the threshold of chaos and to make a deal with it [...]. As a psychotherapist, the shaman cures the lability of people effectively»³⁰. And what makes his cure even more effective, is that for de Martino magical phenomena are real, because the culture in which they occur *consider them as such*. This implies that “nature” does not exist as a neutral set of data, but is rather culturally determined and constructed by man³¹.

Although *Il mondo magico* focuses on primitive societies, it is to be noted that at this stage, “magic” (or magism) is for de Martino a large umbrella-notion that includes not only shamanistic practices, but also Renaissance natural and astrological magic, and de Martino's goal is to write an extensive “history of magism”³². In his subsequent works, however, de Martino got involved in an anthropological survey about the remnants of “magic world” within contemporary southern Italian folklore. In this phase, de Martino's attitude towards magic was different: having adhered to marxism, he was now the representative of a progressive anthropology, whose objective was to shed some light on the poor conditions of the popular masses and to denounce the primitive, irrational character of magical practices. Magic became then for de Martino a “fictitious light” serving one purpose: «helping uncertain men, living in an uncertain society, replace, for practical reasons of existence, the authentic light of reason»³³.

GARIN AND DE MARTINO'S EARLY UNDERSTANDING OF MAGIC AND ITS IDEALISTIC BACKGROUND

Let us try to draw some conclusions.

Both Garin and de Martino, at the very beginning of their career, saw magic as a creative response to a crisis: the decline of the sclerotic intellectual structures of Middle Age culture on one side, and the precarious existential condition of “primitive man” on the other. Moreover, both considered magic as something that contemporary Western civilization had to bring back to memory and eventually integrate – through a deeper historiographical understanding – in order to expand its own self-awareness and to achieve what both called “a new humanism”.

Garin and de Martino's early discourse about magic seems to owe a lot to their idealistic background³⁴. First of all, the very pattern of “magic as the response to a crisis” can be seen as stemming from the idealistic view of history as a dramatic process taking place through oppositions in which spirit affirms itself dialectically. Secondly, the idea of man as a “free spiritual self-realizing being”³⁵ – that we have encountered in Garin's discourse – is at the very core of Croce's philosophy. Last but not least, Garin and de Martino could look at such traditions this way, because their cultural background offered them the materials for doing so. In this perspective, the sensitivity of idealist authors for magic and esotericism that I have highlighted above – despite their harsh disapproval of “irrationalism” – could have played a discrete but meaningful role in fostering their early interest in such matters.

Now I might try to come up with a possible, synthetic answer to my initial question: why did 20th century scholars turn to the study of esotericism? As we have seen above, the Italian scholars who studied these subjects during the '40s and at the beginning of the '50s were dealing, more or less explicitly, with a painful dilemma: in this critical phase of its history, will Western civilization, still shaken by the tragedy of dictatorships and of WW2, be able to restore the idea of man's dignity and of his ability to operate in a more meaningful, cohesive world? Looking for an answer, they explored the areas of Renaissance Hermetic magic and primitive magic.

This is how the whole story began.

- 1 «L'accordo [fra loro] è proprio nell'idea di un universo tutto vivo, tutto fatto di nascoste corrispondenze, di occulte simpatie, tutto pervaso di spiriti [...] e in mezzo v'è l'uomo, mirabile essere cangiante, che può dire ogni cosa, riplasmare ogni cosa, disegnare ogni carattere, rispondere ad ogni invocazione, invocare ogni Dio» (*Medioevo e Rinascimento* [1954], Bari 2007, p. 144).
- 2 See *L'ésotérisme*, Paris 1992, pp. 13-19.
- 3 About the influence of Garin on F. Yates, cfr. M. Ciliberto, «Prefazione», in E. Garin, *Ermetismo del Rinascimento*, Pisa 2006.
- 4 In his recent, fundamental volume *Esotericism and the Academy*, focusing on the birth of the historiographical concept of “esotericism”, W. Hanegraaff writes: «In the wake of Matter's book, the term “esotericism” began to spread as well, first in French and eventually crossing over to various other languages. For our concerns, the French context remains most relevant by far, because it is here that “l'ésotérisme” eventually mutated from a term for secrecy and concealment or interiority into a historiographical concept, and came to be taken seriously by academics» (*Esotericism and the Academy*, Cambridge 2012, p. 337).
- 5 *Umanesimo e esoterismo*, Atti del V Convegno Internazionale di Studi Umanistici, Oberhofen, 16-17 settembre 1960, ed. by E. Castelli, Padua 1960, pp. 6-7.
- 6 On de Martinos' idealistic background, the reader can refer to G. SASSO, *Ernesto de Martino tra religione e filosofia*, Naples 2001 (but see also, for another approach, G. CHARUTY, *Ernesto de Martino. Le precedenti vite di un antropologo*, Milan 2011). As far as Garin is concerned, see G. GALASSO “Storicismo, filosofia e sapere storico” in *Eugenio Garin. Il percorso intellettuale di un maestro del Novecento*, edited by F. AUDISIO and A. SAVORELLI, Florence 2003, pp. 35-52. Another fundamental reference about the early Garin is to be found in the recent volume by M. CILIBERTO, *Eugenio Garin. Un intellettuale nel Novecento*, Bari 2011 (see in particular the first chapter: “Una meditazione sulla condizione umana: Garin interprete del Rinascimento”, pp. 3-51).
- 7 See for example A. GROSSATO, “Il posto dell'esoterismo nella storia della cultura occidentale”, in *Forme e correnti dell'esoterismo occidentale*, Milano 2008, p. 11).
- 8 On this point, see also D. COLI, *Croce, Laterza e la cultura europea*, Bologna 1983 (2nd ed. Naples 2002).
- 9 The correspondence between Croce and Evola has been published by S. ARCELLA: *Lettere di Julius Evola a Benedetto Croce*, edited by S. ARCELLA, Roma 1995. For a different point of view, see S. MICCOLIS, “Benedetto Croce e Julius Evola. Un legame immaginario”, *Belfagor*, LIV, 1999, pp. 349-354.
- 10 *Il mistero del Graal*, Bari 1937; *La dottrina del risveglio*, Bari 1943; *Maschera e volto dello spiritualismo contemporaneo*, 2nd ed., Bari 1949. We must also mention the 17th century Hermetic treatise by Cesare Della Riviera *Il mondo magico de gli heroi* (Bari, 1932) which Evola edited.
- 11 V. MACCHIORO, *Zagreus: studi sull'orfismo*, Bari 1920, p. 150. For a biographical sketch of Macchioro, see the page http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittorio-macchioro_%28Dizionario_Biografico%29/.
- 12 On this point, see *Mircea Eliade e l'Italia*, edited by M. MINCU and R. SCAGNO, Milano 1987, p. 117-119. For the influence of Vittorio Macchioro on young de Martino, see G. SASSO, *op. cit.*, Naples 2001 and G. CHARUTY, *op. cit.*
- 13 E. NOBILE, *Jakob Böhme ed il suo dualismo essenziale*, Laterza 1928. See also her Boehme's translations: *La via verso Cristo*, translated by E. NOBILE, Bari 1933; *La storia di Giuseppe: dal Mysterium Magnum*, translated by E. NOBILE, Bari 1938.
- 14 Cfr. Croce's first review of de Martino's volume in *Quaderni della “Critica”*, X (1948), pp. 79-80 and the longer analysis developed in “Intorno al 'magismo' come età storica”, *Quaderni della “Critica”*, XII (1948), pp. 53-64.
- 15 “Libri secenteschi sui misteri dei numeri”, *La Critica*, XIX (1921), p. 251.
- 16 In “Studii sulla letteratura cinquecentesca”, *Quaderni della “Critica”*, XVII-XVIII (1950), pp. 29-90 (cfr. pp. 54-60). Cfr. Also *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte*, Bari 1930, pp. 416-417.
- 17 *La Critica*, II (1904), p. 410. The volume reviewed by Croce is F. STRUNZ, *Theophrastus Paracelsus, sein Leben und seine Persönlichkeit, Ein Betrag zur Geistesgeschichte der deutschen Renaissance*, Leipzig 1903.
- 18 On Omodeo, see G. DE MARZI, *Adolfo Omodeo: itinerario di uno storico*, Urbino 1988; M. MUSTÈ, *Adolfo Omodeo. Storiografia e pensiero politico*, Bologna 1990; R. PERTICI, “Preistoria di Adolfo Omodeo”, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di lettere e filosofia*, s. iii, vol. xxii.2, 1992, pp. 513-61; ID., “Come Adolfo Omodeo divenne storico delle origini cristiane”, *Belfagor*, LII (1997), pp. 179-190.
- 19 About Martinetti's philosophy, see F. ALESSIO, *L'idealismo religioso di Piero Martinetti*, Brescia 1950; G. BERSELLINI, *Il fondamento eleatico della filosofia di Piero Martinetti*, Milan 1972; G. COLOMBO, *La filosofia come soteriologia. L'avventura spirituale e intellettuale di Piero Martinetti*, Milan 2005; A. VIGORELLI, *Piero Martinetti. La metafisica civile di un filosofo dimenticato*, Milan 1998.
- 20 *Scritti di metafisica e di filosofia della religione*, Milan 1976, pp. 98-104.
- 21 On Hegel's esoteric background, see G. MAGEE, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, Ithaca - NY 2001.
- 22 See the title of a Garin's fundamental essay: «La crisi del pensiero medievale», *Medioevo e rinascimento*, cit., pp. 13-39.
- 23 «Le impalcature intellettive della visione teologizzante medievale, come di nuovo, in tempi recenti un razionalismo ad oltranza, spezzano il reale, opponendo i quadri logici, concettuali, fissi, alla morbida plasticità della vita» (*ibidem*, p. 154).
- 24 *Ibidem*, pp. 148-149.
- 25 «Di contro a uno scheletro d'uomo che si muove in un mondo di scheletri geometrizzabili, si leva l'esaltazione dell'ideale ermetico ove la volontà, l'opera, l'atto, produce e dissolve le forme, crea e ricrea, si muove liberamente

proteso nel futuro in un infinito di possibilità, in un'apertura senza confini ... All'uomo che opera corrisponde ... l'universo come possibilità inesaurita ... Questo, e non altro, intendeva la difesa della magia, che il Rinascimento inserì nella sua celebrazione dell'uomo» (*Medioevo e rinascimento*, cit., p. 157).

26 *Ibidem*, p. 142.

27 «Nel '46, quando concludevo questo libro [...] avevo respirato l'atmosfera tra le due guerre, quando la parola del passato si caricava di tutte le tensioni di un momento di crisi [...]. Quell'uso stesso del termine umanesimo [...] fu scelto di proposito, e proprio per sottolineare la carica rinnovatrice il valore paradigmatico di un modo di “leggere” ogni “libro”: dell'uomo e della natura» (*L'umanesimo italiano* [1947], Bari 2008, p. 2-3).

28 «A spingermi agli studi etnologici non fu la “bramosia di lontane esperienze ataviche”, ma, al contrario, la difesa della civiltà moderna e l'esigenza di un più largo umanesimo storicistico come non trascurabile contributo alla catarsi culturale. Erano quelli gli anni sinistri in cui Hitler *sciamanizzava* in Germania e in Europa: ed erano al tempo stesso gli anni in cui la nostra generazione andava lentamente riprendendo coscienza di ciò che è umano e civile» («Etnologia e cultura nazionale negli ultimi dieci anni», *Società*, IX, 1953, p. 314).

29 «Il compito dell'etnologia storicistica consiste nella possibilità di porre problemi la cui soluzione conduca all'allargamento dell'autocoscienza della nostra civiltà» (*Il mondo magico* [1948], Turin 2007, pp. 3-5).

30 «Lo sciamano è l'eroe che ha saputo portarsi sino alle soglie del caos e che ha saputo stringere un patto con esso [...] Come psicoterapeuta lo sciamano cura con reale efficacia la labilità delle persone» (*Il mondo magico*, cit., pp. 94-95).

31 Cfr. de Martino's formula “natura culturalmente condizionata”.

32 The subtitle of *Il mondo magico* is “Prolegomeni a una storia del magismo”.

33 *Sud e Magia* [1959], Milan 2010, p. 184.

34 This is something seldom detected by critics, who tend to associate these authors to Marxist culture. As a matter of fact, de Martino and Garin were deeply influenced by Antonio Gramsci (himself influenced by Croce), but for both of them the encounter with Gramsci took place a few years later, at the beginning of the '50s: Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (*Quaderni del carcere*) were published for the first time by Einaudi between 1948 and 1951.

35 *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, cit., p. 36.