

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

HAKIM BEY



Christian Greer

Peter Lamborn Wilson (1945–) dropped out of Columbia University to pursue an autodidactic, and largely peripatetic course of education that would be as wide-ranging as it was unorthodox. This began with an initiation into the Moorish Orthodox Church, which was fashioned after Noble Drew Ali’s Moorish Science, Tantra, Hazrat Inayat Khan’s ‘Universal Sufism’ and the sacramental use of hallucinogenic substances (‘entheogens’). As a member of the church, his interest in psychedelics was accented when the Moorish Orthodox Church installed itself alongside the Neo-American Church and the League for Spiritual Discovery at the Millbrook ‘ashram,’ then under the direction of Dr. Timothy Leary. As a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War and with the foreboding sense that the spirit of the counterculture was lost, Wilson expatriated in 1968 and embarked upon what would become a decade of spiritual sojourning throughout North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East. After his tutelage under Ganeesh Baba (Shri Mahant Ganesh Giriji Maharaj – a teacher in the tradition of Kriya Yoga) and an initiation in Tara Tantra in India, Wilson spent the following years trekking what became known as the ‘hash trail’ through Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan where he followed itinerant Qalandariyyah Sufis, sought initiations from Hindu gurus and Sufi masters, and availed himself of the abundant supplies of opium and *bhang*. Following the recommendation of Vilayat Inayat Khan, upon reaching Iran, Wilson sought out the Nimatullahi Sufi order. However, after an introduction to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, it has been plausibly suggested that he joined Frithjof Schuon’s Maryamiyya order instead. His affiliation with Nasr and connection with the Maryamiyya led him to an editorship of *Sophia Perennis*, which was published under his guidance from 1975 to 1978 and functioned both as the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy’s journal and a mouth piece for Schuon’s Traditionalist Sufi order. Also working as the director of English language publications for the academy, Wilson worked alongside Traditionalist luminaries Henry Corbin, Toshihiko Izutsu, and William C. Chittick. At this time, Wilson’s own scholarship reflected a traditionalist bias. However, in the following years, his literary output would be transformed through a closer engagement with anarchism, hermetic philosophy, and post-structuralism.

After the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, Wilson returned to the US. Once there, he escalated his involvement in the underground press by publishing prodigiously under the name 'Hakim Bey,' named after the eccentric sixth Fatimid caliph, Hakim bi Amr al-Lāh. It was not long until the work of this mysterious figure became a staple in numerous anarchist, queer, and esoteric zines (abbrev. 'fanzine': small circulation, often self-produced publications) and underground newspapers. As distinct from his previous traditionalist scholarship, Bey's writings amalgamated Nietzschean philosophy and Individualist Anarchism with Hermeticism and esoteric themes to form a powerful brand of mystical anti-authoritarianism. Unique within the anarchist circles in which his work appeared, Bey's spiritual anarchism was summarized in the name of his own esoteric order, the Association for Ontological Anarchism (AOA) founded in the early 1980s. His voluminous output termed, 'communiqués of ontological anarchism,' as well as the mystery surrounding Bey's identity, garnered the author (and more specifically his alter ego) a great deal of attention within underground Pagan, anarchist, and queer milieus. Bey's underground notoriety continued to grow as a result of his radio show, *The Moorish Orthodox Crusade*, his editorial work for *Semiotext(e)* publishing, and his controversial contributions to the newsletter of NAMBLA (North American Man-Boy Love Association), not to mention the vitriolic attacks made against his brand of anarchism by notable anarchists such as Murray Bookchin. His most famous work to date, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone: Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (commonly abbreviated to *TAZ*) is an expansion on an earlier collection of Bey's writings culled from notable zines like *Factsheet Five*, *Popular Reality*, and *Kaos*. Apart from his science fiction, man-boy love novel *Crowstone* published in 1983 under the name 'Hakim,' *TAZ*, published in 1991, was Bey's first full length book and the one with which both identities are routinely associated. This is due in large part to the profound influence the text has had on, for example, Chaos Magick, rave culture, Post-Anarchism, and the Cacophony Society, who later founded the massive temporary autonomous zone event known as Burning Man. Alongside the vast array of Bey's anarcho-mystical publications, Wilson continued to write numerous learned books on esoteric and heretical sects of Islam, psychedelic spirituality, and angels.

In the late 1990s, Bey's identity became a public secret largely due to the internet, but little changed in terms of the use his *nom de plume* served. Essentially, he articulates the same premises concerning esoteric non-authoritarianism in two different voices, for Wilson they functioned as historiographic tools, and for Bey they were fodder for ontological anarchist agitation and utopian engineering. The basis of these premises lay in his anarchist refashioning of traditionalism, whereby the non-authoritarianism and 'shamanic spirituality' of paleolithic society is identified as a more traditional form of traditionalism. Much of Wilson's historical work traces the contours of this proclivity for nonauthoritarianism as it expressed itself in dissenting and esoteric doctrines, beliefs, and groups. In his reading, this loose lineage originates with the 'shamanic spirituality' of the hunter-gatherers and continues in medieval 'free spirit' movements, 'heretical' traditions, and renaissance hermeticism. In his works, Wilson attempts to show how the Anarchist tradition has a lost prehistory in the utopian aspirations of a number of heretical, antinomian, and esoteric discourses, and enumerates the ways in which these discourses can revitalize what he considers to be the obsolete logic of leftist anarchism. Writing under the name Bey, he claims

that a paradigm shift must occur within Anarchism if it is to remain relevant and, more importantly, effective against the ‘technopathocracy’ of global capitalism. To do this, he argues, it must base itself in an ontological framework defined by chaos. Anarchism scholars such as Lewis Call have traced the origin of the postmodern turn within anarchism, termed ‘Post-Anarchism,’ to Bey’s theorization of ontological anarchism, although post-anarchists general ignore its thoroughly esoteric nature.

Arguably today’s foremost anarchist writer, Wilson has spent the latter portion of his career participating in art exhibitions, once notably with fellow ‘Beats’ Brion Gysin and William Burroughs, publishing a number of poetry chapbooks, promoting his brand of environmental esotericism termed ‘green hermeticism,’ and teaching alongside Allen Ginsberg at Naropa University.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Bey, Hakim (2003 [1985]) *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, second edition, Brooklyn: Autonomedia.
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