



A Review of ***THE ISLE OF MONTE CRISTO: FINDING THE INNER TREASURE*** by S.T. Georgiou

Mr. Georgiou will be presenting a Book Talk and Slide Show at the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute on Tuesday, February 22, 2011 at 7:30 PM. The PAOI is located at 2311 Hearst Avenue, in Berkeley, California. For further information, please call 510 649 3450.

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<http://telegraphjournal.canadaeast.com/salon/article/1368510>

No man is an island

The American Eastern Orthodox theologian and spiritual writer Steve Theodore Georgiou is nothing if not both prolix and orotund as a writer, but he is also staggeringly insightful and worth reading for his acute probes of the transcendent. With **The Isle of Monte Cristo** he has just published the final volume of his trilogy, following *The Way of the Dreamcatcher: Spirit-Lessons with Robert Lax* and *Mystic Street: Meditations on a Spiritual Path*.

The organizing principle behind the trilogy is the writer's spiritual search for meaning and emotional integration. Nothing unusual in that, save perhaps that a chap as young as Georgiou writing a spiritual autobiography of such length has about it something of the grand ambition of Thomas Merton's phenomenally influential *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948). Although Georgiou's first volume placed a disproportionately marked emphasis on the self-referential (admittedly a natural pitfall when writing a spiritual autobiography), the author is not technically writing a formal autobiography at all. This is a series of thematically and chronologically connected pensées that have a distinctly and predominantly autobiographical flavour.

The title of the last installment of the trilogy is clearly intended to draw parallels with Alexandre Dumas's novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* - with its tragic and heroic tale of false imprisonment, escape, revenge and personal redemption. Dumas's protagonist, Edmund Dantes, unjustly accused and condemned to solitary confinement on the infamous prison island, the Chateau d'If, comes to realize that his true escape from the

nightmarish imprisonment that is hate can only come about through a radical re-evaluation of his life.

Georgiou observes: "How can this epic spiritual story be allegorically applied to ourselves? Like Dantes many of us have, at some point in our lives, felt betrayed, falsely accused, perhaps even victimized. Somehow the Chateau d'If - that is, the cold, hard world - has transformed our innocence and idealism into a grim discontent that has left us numb, alienated from our own hearts. And then, perhaps in our most intolerable hour, someone or something enters our existence, gives us hope, and shows us a way out of the darkness and into the light. This liberation may be initiated through the insight and compassion of a friend, teacher, perhaps a stranger; this freedom may be generated through a book, a song, even a spirited word or smile."

Georgiou's liberation was effected by an extraordinary mentor, spiritual master and dear friend: Robert Lax. A respected poet (his obituary in *The New York Times* nicely underscored the failure of the U.S. literary establishment to take seriously one of the genuinely revolutionary poets of his era), Lax was also a visionary-hermit whose charismatic personality stamped a generation with spiritual integrity. Georgiou travelled to the island of Patmos in Greece following a personal crisis in the early 1990s. Patmos is the holy isle of St. John the Evangelist, the isle of the Apocalypse, the ancient and venerable island that for decades served as the quasi-monastic habitation for Lax. It was on this island that Georgiou found consolation in his pain, direction in his confusion, focus in his chaos. He discovered Lax.

But he also discovered himself.

And so *The Isle of Monte Cristo* introduces the reader to Georgiou's potpourri of friends and acquaintances - some of whom include Demetrios, Galatea, Jackie and Nick of the Dunes - drawn from his visits to Patmos, from his colleagues and co-religionists in California (he is a lecturer at San Francisco City College, San Francisco State University and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley) and from the people he meets through chance encounters roaming the beaches, hugging the harbours and climbing the mountains.

The Isle of Monte Cristo is suffused with the energy, enthusiasm and innocence of a quester who sees the mystical in the ordinary, God in the unfolding cosmic drama of creation, love in the simple epiphanies of beauty, goodness and truth.

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