

From *The Tablet* to *The Prague Cemetery*: The Jew, The Freemason, and the Diana Vaughan Hoax

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In a recent review, psychologist David Sokol stated: “Understanding the successful antisemitic leader’s mind is an important tool in countering the damage they do. Umberto Eco in *The Prague Cemetery* may have given us some insight into those psyches.”¹

While Umberto Eco may have provided us with some insights into the disturbed but creative mind of the successful antisemitic leader, I think he was trying to achieve something else. In a lecture delivered on May 15, 2008, at Bologna University, and recently published in a new volume of essays, Eco explains that the process of “inventing the enemy” has featured in almost all cultures. In this lecture, “inventing the enemy” takes on an ontological significance, “important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth.” We are, he suggests, “beings who need an enemy.” Consequently, “when there is no enemy, we have to invent one.”²

Eco drew upon a wide range of examples from across history, such as Saint Augustine’s condemnation of the pagans, the diabolization of prosti-

1. David Sokol, “The Successful Antisemite,” review of *The Prague Cemetery* by Umberto Eco, *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 4, no. 1 (2012), 310.

2. Umberto Eco, “Inventing the Enemy,” in *Inventing the Enemy and Other Occasional Writings*, trans. Richard Dixon (London: Harvill Seeker, 2012), 2, 20.

tutes, lepers, gypsies, witches and “the Negro,” the ancient theological myth of the Jewish Antichrist, and Hitler’s construction of “the Jewish mongrel.”³ He was justifiably disturbed by this process, and the prospect that “our moral sense” may be “impotent when faced with the age-old need for enemies.”⁴ I believe it was this widespread cultural cultivation of the so-called enemy that he had in mind when he wrote *The Prague Cemetery*.

Sokol observed that *The Prague Cemetery* is a “confusing and challenging novel.”⁵ This can also be said of many of Eco’s other fictional works, and their complexity is partly explained by Eco’s belief that “people are tired of simple things. They want to be challenged.”⁶ In the case of *The Prague Cemetery*, however, the confusion also arises because the episodes upon which it was based were rather fantastic to begin with.

One of the more unusual characters in the novel is accurately described by Sokol as a “strange character” who “switches into bizarre personalities.”⁷ Though he added some creative flourishes to her already very bizarre personality, Diana Vaughan was not invented by Eco. She had a reality dating back to the late nineteenth century, as a textual construction within a number of discourses. In the original version, Diana Vaughan was a noble-minded lady who abandoned the misguided worship of Lucifer, converted to Roman Catholicism, and revealed the secret satanic inner workings of Freemasonry. In *The Prague Cemetery*, Eco removed the linear development from “Palladian” Freemason to Roman Catholic, thereby introducing a multiple personality disorder to an already fantastic construction—with the “good” Diana being a virtuous Christian, and the “bad” Diana a sexually depraved Masonic Luciferian.⁸

Eco may have embellished the Diana Vaughan narratives, yet as a skeptical Catholic critic pointed out in a letter to *The Tablet* in 1897, they were already a “preposterous extravagance,” with tales of “the embracing of the chaste Diana by the beautiful demon Asmodeus, the flying through the air on the back of monster eagles down the mouths of volcanoes in full eruption, the profanation of hosts, the blasphemous parodies of Masses and

3. Ibid, 2-17.

4. Ibid, 18.

5. Sokol, “The Successful Antisemite,” 305.

6. Stephen Moss, interview with Umberto Eco, *The Guardian* (online), November 27, 2011 (accessed December 28, 2012), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/nov/27/umberto-eco-people-tired-simple-things>

7. Sokol, “The Successful Antisemite,” 309.

8. See Umberto Eco, *The Prague Cemetery*, trans. Richard Dixon (London: Vintage, 2012), chap. 22.

devotions . . . and the lion's tail animated by the devil to make a necklace for Diana."⁹

Diana Vaughan began her "existence" in 1895. Léo Taxil (formerly Marie Joseph Gabriel Antoine Jogand-Pagès), a French writer and lapsed Catholic/disgraced ex-Freemason, crafted the memoirs of Diana Vaughan as a fictitious female apostate from "Palladian" Freemasonry.¹⁰ Taxil also wrote other elaborate stories about devil worship and sinister rituals in Masonic lodges, some of which were published under pseudonyms. These tales included bizarre accounts of Host desecration, satanic magic, murder, the Antichrist, and the manifestations of Lucifer and Asmodeus. While Taxil was the original inventor of Diana Vaughan, his construction took on a life of its own in a number of discourses outside of his control.

If Diana Vaughan is discussed, it is usually in the context of French discourse. What is generally unknown is that the Diana Vaughan narratives played an important role in constructing "the enemy" in the English Catholic discourse during the late nineteenth century.

The English Catholic newspaper in which Diana Vaughan made her first appearance was *The Tablet*, which was owned by Herbert Vaughan, the cardinal archbishop of Westminster and head of the English Catholic hierarchy (the shared surname with Diana being coincidental). Herbert Vaughan purchased the newspaper in 1868, and used it as a forum for the articulation of Ultramontane views. The paper became the semi-official newspaper for the English Catholic community.

In August 1895, an editorial in *The Tablet* celebrated the inauguration of the Anti-Masonic Congress. The paper referred to this international gathering of Catholics as "the most hopeful augury for the future of society on the continent." According to the editorial, the main aim of the movement was "to prove to the world, by the most convincing evidence, the evils and disasters of which freemasonry has been the cause to mankind at large and to the Catholic Church in particular."

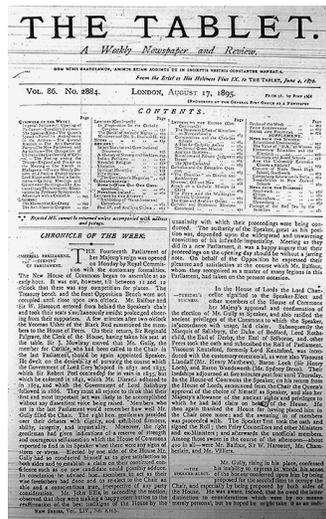
The Tablet suggested that the Anti-Masonic Congress was important because it permitted Catholics to "rally their forces from the state of help-less disorganization which condemned them to political extinction despite their great numerical preponderance." This statement seems to correlate

9. Anonymous reviewer, Letters to the Editor, *The Tablet*, April 17, 1897, 617-618. In this letter, and in the *Month* (the periodical of the English Jesuits), the critic lamented that "respected ecclesiastics" were found defending the cause of Diana Vaughan. "The Diana Vaughan Hoax," *Month* LXXXIX (April 1897), 442.

10. Léo Taxil [Miss Diana Vaughan, pseud.], *Mémoires d'une Ex-Palladiste* (Paris, 1895-1897). The *mémoires* were published as a series of installments from July 1895 through April 1897.

with Eco's argument that the process of "inventing the enemy," in this case "the Freemason," has played a significant role in shoring up cultural identity.

It was in this editorial that Diana Vaughan made her appearance. According to the editorial, "much attention has recently been called to the doings of the various sects of Freemasons abroad by the sudden conversion of one of their high priestesses, Miss Diana Vaughan, ex-Grand Mistress of the Luciferians or Palladians." Taking Taxil's lurid narratives at face value, *The Tablet* reported that prior to conversion, Diana had tried to set up a more moderate reformed sect of Palladium Freemasonry—because despite "the strange perversion of mind by which an intelligent and high-souled woman dedicated herself to the worship of Lucifer," she was not blind to the "degrading character of the rites practised by her fellow-worshippers."¹¹



The Tablet, August 17, 1895

In spite of attempts by the influential and scholarly mystic Arthur Waite to demonstrate the non-existence of "Palladian" Freemasonry,¹² *The Tablet* reported in 1896 that it remained "strongly persuaded that there is an inner Masonry whose workings are unknown to the general run of Masons," and that "Satanism is practised under circumstances at least pointing to

11. "The Anti-Masonic Congress," *The Tablet*, August 17, 1895, 250-251.

12. See Arthur Edward Waite, *Devil Worship in France or the Question of Lucifer* (London: George Redway, 1896).

Masonic association.”¹³ A week later, *The Tablet* reported that the Anti-Masonic Congress had set up a “special committee” to deal with the “burning questions” relating to Diana Vaughan. The paper stated: “That there is in France a sect devoted to the worship of Lucifer, as the champion of rebellious humanity, is, we believe, a well-attested fact, and the propagation of this diabolical creed has been ascribed by M. Taxil and M. Ricoux to an inner ring of the Masonic body called Palladic Masonry.” *The Tablet* concluded that Arthur Waite’s book “traverses and impugns these statements, but without any conclusive refutation of their general drift.”¹⁴

While the original Diana Vaughan narratives were anti-Masonic in character, the construction of “the Jew” as enemy was woven into the discourse that developed around them. For example, one of the many letters published in *The Tablet* expressing support and admiration for Diana Vaughan suggested that Jews and Freemasons were working together to “cast discredit on the damaging revelations of Masonic devilry revealed by Diana Vaughan.” The letter, which was by Norbert Jones, a member of the Canons Regular of the Lateran, cited a correspondence from Amand Joseph Fava, the bishop of Grenoble. According to Jones, the bishop stated that “Miss Diana Vaughan *does* exist, she has written and she had made her first Communion.” Jones concluded that the bishop’s correspondence shows that those who doubt the existence of Diana Vaughan and “talk of deception in the matter are themselves the real dupes of Jew Masons.” The bishop of Grenoble referred to “Nathan” and other “prominent Masons sent about to cast discredit on Miss Vaughan’s damaging attack on Masonry.” According to Jones, this Nathan was “an English Jew” and the “Grand Master of French and Italian Freemasonry.”

Jones also claimed that “it is well known in Holland that since January up to June, 1896, a certain M. Rosen, in reality a spy of the Italian archmason Lemmi, has been visiting many Dutch ecclesiastics and repeating to them that Diana Vaughan is a myth.” Jones claimed that Rosen is a “Jewish Rabbi and a leading mason” and only “pretends to be a convert from Masonry.”¹⁵ Another example is provided by a close friend and confidant of the owner of *The Tablet*,¹⁶ Baroness Mary Elizabeth Herbert, who

13. “Devil Worship in France,” review of *Devil Worship in France or the Question of Lucifer*, by Arthur Edward Waite, *The Tablet*, October 3, 1896, 529-530.

14. “Report of the Anti-Masonic Congress,” *The Tablet*, October 10, 1896, 565-566.

15. Norbert Jones, Letters to the Editor, *The Tablet*, January 23, 1897, 138-139. This letter includes the text of the correspondence from the bishop of Grenoble (dated January 7, 1897).

16. Mary Elizabeth Herbert, the Baroness Herbert of Lea, was a convert to Catholicism and the author of several religious books and pamphlets. For Herbert

accepted with enthusiasm Domenico Margiotta's account of the "noble and generous character" of Diana Vaughan and his claims that Adriano Lemmi was a Jew convert and a satanist.¹⁷

Articles in *The Tablet* as the Diana Vaughan hoax was coming to a conclusion, and as the Dreyfus Affair was heating up, reveal the ongoing process of casting "the Jew" and "the Freemason" in the role of the enemy. For example, in March 1897, a few weeks before the conclusion of the Diana Vaughan hoax,¹⁸ the paper argued that an antisemitic policy was the understandable if regrettable means of dealing with the so-called "alliance" between Jews and Freemasons. The paper stated that:

In criticizing the Anti-Semitic policy of the clerical party on the Continent, it must be remembered that the Ghetto is there the focus and centre of the Liberal warfare against Catholicism, and that Jews and Freemasons form every-where the vanguard of the forces of infidelity. . . . The alliance of the Synagogue with the Lodges is in all continental countries the symbol of the triumph of infidelity over Christianity, and the creed of modern, no less than of ancient Judaism, is hostility to the Christian name.¹⁹

Another *Tablet* article stated that:

We shall not, we trust, be accused of palliating or condoning the excesses of anti-Semitism, by pointing out that the Jews, in France, Italy, and Austria, the three principal Catholic nations of the continent, exercise a politi-

Vaughan's letters to Mary Elizabeth Herbert, see Shane Leslie, ed., *Letters of Herbert Cardinal Vaughan to Lady Herbert of Lea, 1867 to 1903* (London: Burns Oates, 1942).

17. Mary Elizabeth Herbert, review of two books by Domenico Margiotta—*Adriano Lemmi: Supreme Head of the Freemasons* and *Le Palladisme; Or the Worship of Lucifer*, *Dublin Review* CXVIII (January 1896), 192-201. Taxil described Margiotta as "an unexpected auxiliary." According to Taxil, "he began as one of the hoaxed," and, fearing ridicule, he "chose to declare himself an accomplice rather than a blind volunteer in our navy." Alain Bernheim, A. William Samii, and Eric Serejski, "The Confession of Léo Taxil," *Heredom: Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 5 (1996), 159.

18. On April 19, 1897, a large audience gathered in the auditorium of the Société Géographique in Paris in order to meet the elusive Diana Vaughan. The audience was surprised when Taxil appeared on the stage and announced that the whole tale of Palladian Freemasonry had been a hoax. An English translation of Taxil's speech is provided in Bernheim, Samii, and Serejski, "The Confession of Léo Taxil," 137-168.

19. "Antisemitism in the Austrian Election," *The Tablet*, March 27, 1897, 481-482.

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cal influence entirely disproportioned to their numbers, and that this influence is always exercised against the religion of the country. In close alliance with the Freemasons, . . . they form the backbone of the party of aggressive liberalism, with war to the knife against the Church as the sum and aim of its policy.”²⁰

The Diana Vaughan narratives in *The Tablet* demonstrate the power of discourse to construct a protean reality that is readily accepted, repeated, and adapted by newspaper editor and reader alike.

In his review of *The Prague Cemetery*, Sokol suggests that what distinguishes the “successful antisemite” from “the-run-of-the mill” variety is “his special motivations and skills.” He explains that “the successful hater has these communication skills in abundance; the followers need no special skill.”²¹ He also suggests that there is “some indication that the successful antisemite . . . may be mentally ill.”²² It is, however, difficult to explain the pervasive hostile constructions of “the Jew” and “the Freemason” in the English Catholic discourse during the late nineteenth century by looking for a talented but mentally disturbed individual. The Diana Vaughan narratives in *The Tablet* were by no means exceptional. Constructions of “the Jew” and “the Freemason,” blending contemporary stereotypes of greed, cowardice, disloyalty, and secrecy with religious myths about deicide, ritual murder, sorcery, devil worship, and the Antichrist, were a pervasive theme in the English Catholic discourse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Such constructions can be found in the lectures, sermons, and pastoral letters of a wide range of distinguished priests, bishops, and archbishops. They can also be found in editorials, articles, and letters in a wide range of newspapers and periodicals, such as the *Catholic Times*, *Catholic Herald*, *Catholic Gazette*, *Catholic Federationist*, *The Universe*, and *The Month*.²³ The wide range of texts in which such constructions can be found suggest that creative antisemitism was not the preserve of a handful of skilled, crea-

20. “Captain Dreyfus and his Champions,” *The Tablet*, February 12, 1898, 238.

21. Sokol, “The Successful Antisemite,” 306.

22. *Ibid.*, 309.

23. The stereotyping and mythologizing of Jews and Freemasons in a wide range of English Catholic texts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is examined in Simon Mayers, “From ‘the Pharisee’ to ‘the Zionist Menace’: Myths, Stereotypes and Constructions of the Jew in English Catholic Discourse (1896-1929),” PhD thesis, University of Manchester (2012); and Simon Mayers, “From the Christ-Killer to the Luciferian: The Mythologized Jew and Freemason in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century English Catholic Discourse,” *Melilah* 8 (2011). The Diana Vaughan hoax and a number of other episodes that cast Jews and Freemasons in the role of villain are examined in these studies.

tive, but mentally ill personalities; something much more disturbing and difficult to deal with seems to be indicated. It was often the wider cultural consciousness, rather than just the mentally disturbed individual, that was willing to accept bizarre fantasies, myths, and fairy tales about Jews and Freemasons as fact. As psychologist Steven Baum has argued:

In the social mind, Jews conspire, and plot, and ready themselves to undermine and betray all that is good, godly, and orderly. The Jews the fantasizing public is waiting for are not real people, but are imaginary social ideas and superstitions based on legend, fable, and fantasy.²⁴

Umberto Eco suggested that the process of “inventing the enemy,” whether that role was assigned to pagans, Jews, Freemasons, gypsies, or another outside group, has been a deplorable but pervasive feature of civilization. He posited that cultures require an enemy, and when there is no genuine external threat, an internal one is usually invented in compensation. It would seem to be this widespread cultural process that was at the root of the hostile constructions of “the Jew” and “the Freemason” in the English Catholic discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and presumably in other discourses too. Eco suggests that stereotypes can be destroyed when a genuine effort is made to understand other people without denying or disrespecting their distinctiveness. He was, however, far from sanguine about the possibility, suggesting that efforts to understand those labeled as the enemy tend to be “the prerogative of poets, saints, or traitors. Our innermost impulses are of quite another kind.”²⁵ One can only hope that Eco was being overly pessimistic about the prospects of de-inventing “the enemy.”

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24. Steven K. Baum, “When Fairy Tales Kill,” *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 1, no. 2 (2009), 201-202.

25. Eco, “Inventing the Enemy,” 18.