


The Elusive American Tibetologist in Gendun Chöphel's Life: "The First White Lama" (Theos Bernard) and Their Dream of Tibetland, California*

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or biographers of Gendun Chöphel, one still unanswered question has been to what extent he was influenced by the non-Tibetan scholars he met or collaborated with in northern India in the 1930s and 1940s. Along with his closest Indian associates—the scholar Rahula Sanskritayana ("Rahulji") and the missionary Khunu Tharchin Babu—his European foreign colleagues may well have shaped Gendun Chöphel's understandings not just of scholarly practices but also of many other modern ideas.¹ His relationships with foreign scholars were not always rosy; his famous Song of Despair laments the behavior of one such ungrateful collaborator, calling him an "evil friend," "dog," "fool," and "tyrant".² A related puzzle that until now has escaped solution by biographers is the identity of a certain elusive "American Tibetologist" to whom Gendun Chöphel's editor referred at the end of the poems he published in English from Calcutta in 1941 in the *Mahabodhi Journal*. This American scholar tried in vain to bring Gendun Chöphel to America. Who was that scholar, what were his plans, and whatever became of him?³

The following paper was originally submitted in 2005 for

* The editors note that, as acknowledged by its author, this essay was written many years ago, and in the interim presented by him on academia.edu. Moreover, it much predates the appearance of the monographic studies of Hackett 2012 and Veenhof 2011, both however dealt with by the author briefly near the end of this essay. In consultation with the editor of this journal, it was decided to include this paper for the additional information it brings forth.

¹ On Gendun Chöphel as the author of the first "modern" native Tibetan treatise, see Huber 2000, 19. But as Hubert Decler has noted in another context, the critical scholarly methods of Gendun Chöphel in his investigations of pilgrimage places are very close to those of Si tu Paṅ chen, who lived two centuries earlier. See Decler 2000, 42 and note 14.

² The ungrateful scholar in question now seems most likely to have been the Russian Tibetologist George Roerich (1902–1960), with whom Gendun Chöphel collaborated in Kulu when translating the huge history of Tibetan Buddhism, *The Blue Annals*. See Bogin and Decler 1997.

³ The answers presented here derive in part from sources in archival collections, kindly consulted for me by Moke Mokotoff, Mike Mahar, Burkhard Quessel, Valera Reynolds, Ralf Kramer, and several others.

publication in a now long-defunct Gendun Chöphel volume in the *Lungta* series, Dharamsala. In the present version, I consider at its very end, in Appendix C, three highly relevant books that appeared in subsequent years on the lives of Theo and his rascal uncle. (See below Appendix C, Further Notes on Hamati and Glen Bernard, which were added in September 2021.) I think that Dan (in whose honor the present volume is compiled) as a fellow ancient American Tibetologist will not have lost interest in the theme!

1. *American Tibetologists of the Late 1930s*

In 1935–1939, two decades after the death of the first American Tibetologist, William W. Rockhill (1854–1914), not many Americans would have qualified to be called “Tibetologists.” Only three would have: (1) W. Y. Evans-Wentz, (2) Robert Ekvall, and (3) Marion Duncan.

(1) *Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz*

The American scholar of Tibetan Buddhism who sprang to my mind as his most likely collaborator was W. Y. Evans-Wentz (1878–1965), a Stanford- and Oxford-trained scholar of religions who in the late 1930s was at the peak of his fame.⁴ The fact that he did not read or speak Tibetan would exclude him from being counted as a true “Tibetologist” nowadays, but not then. Born in New Jersey, he had come out to California in the late 1890s. There he soon came under the influence of the Theosophical Society, which had its American Section at Point Loma, California, led in 1901 by the inspiring Katherine Tingley, a woman of unusual flair who was known as the “Purple Mother.” Evans-Wentz joined the society and at Tingley’s urging enrolled at Stanford University.

Though lacking formal qualifications for college (he had dropped out of high school and worked for newspapers), Evans-Wentz joined as a special student, graduating with the high honor of Phi Beta Kappa four years later. After graduate studies in England, he wandered in India for five years as a student (ca. 1916–22?), living as a novice monk in Sikkim between 1920 and 1922, though he never learned enough Tibetan to be able to read an original text. He could only edit the raw translations of others, especially those of his teacher Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup (d. 1922), who was introduced to him by Laden-la. This did not stop him from publishing from Oxford University Press a series of four translations of Tibetan Buddhist esoteric works, including: *Tibetan Book of the Dead* 1927, *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa* 1928, and *Tibetan Yoga*

⁴ For a life of Evans-Wentz, see Winkler 1982.

and Secret Doctrines, or The Seven Books of Wisdom of the Great Path 1935.⁵ In 1931, Oxford University conveyed upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science in Comparative Religion. He turned sixty years of age in 1938 and seems to have spent the mid-1930s still shuttling between San Diego, California, and his house in Almora, India.



Fig. 1. Evans-Wentz and Kazi Dawa Samdup, the Sikkimese savant who was his main source. Photo from online source.

Evans-Wentz was a gentleman scholar with property in San Diego, and he could certainly have afforded to sponsor Gendun Chöphel. He typically collaborated with Tibetans or Sikkimese who could provide him with raw translations. Had he been so inclined, he could also have invited Gendun Chöphel to his home in Almora. If Evans-Wentz had been the American Tibetologist, there would probably have survived some correspondence between the two from 1938 to 1942.⁶

⁵ Evans-Wentz received editorial or other help from W. L. Campbell and F. W. Thomas. His collaborators for his fourth book, *Evans-Wentz 1954* included S. W. Laden-la (1876–1936, b. Darjeeling) and the lamas Karma Sumdhon Paul and Lobzang Mingyur Dorje. Karma Sumdhon Paul (b. Ghoom, 1891) succeeded Kazi Dawa Samdup at the University of Calcutta in 1924–1934. Lobzang Mingyur Dorje was born in Ghoom in 1875). *Evans-Wentz 1954*, 86–92, gives brief biographical sketches of his three main later Tibetan collaborators, mentioning (p. 91) the great help given by one to S. C. Das in the compilation of the latter's dictionary.

⁶ My inquiries at Stanford and Oxford, where Evans-Wentz's papers are archived, have not turned up anything.

(2) *Robert B. Ekvall*

A second possibility as American Tibetologist who occurred to me was the American Protestant missionary and scholar Robert Brainerd Ekvall (1898–1983). Ekvall was born in Minhsien, Kansu, China, the son of two Protestant missionaries.⁷ As a child he learned to speak several Chinese dialects. After his father's death in 1912, he returned with his mother to the United States. He earned in 1920 a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wheaton College and attended the Nyack Missionary Institute in Nyack, New York, in 1921–1922. In 1922 he departed for China and from January 1923 on, he spent much of the 1920s and 1930s working as a teacher and “explorer” for the Christian and Missionary Alliance interdenominational group, investigating the possibilities for mission work in the Chinese-administrated borderlands of Northeastern Tibet (Amdo).⁸ He learned the local Tibetan nomad dialect fluently and from 1929 to 1935 he lived with his wife and son in the isolated village of Lhamo (Stag tshang lha mo).⁹



Fig. 2. Robert Ekvall and wife wearing Chinese dress. After Jackson 2003, fig. no 81.

⁷ For references to Robert Ekvall's father, David Ekvall, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance, see William S. Martin 1998, p. 14. See also R. Ekvall 1938, the history he wrote of this mission.

⁸ Ekvall's life during this period is to some extent recorded in his travel memoirs in Ekvall 1952 and 1955..

⁹ Ekvall 1952 is a fascinating, even if partly fictionalized account of his experiences during the years 1930–1935.

In 1936, Robert Ekvall returned to the U.S. for a three-year furlough, during which he wrote two histories for the mission society sponsoring him. He took a year off from missionary work to attend the University of Chicago for graduate study of anthropology and to write his book *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border* (University of Chicago Press, 1940). He returned with his wife and son to Taktshang Lhamo in 1939. His wife died there in 1940, and he left in summer 1941 for French Indochina to visit his son, thus ending his missionary work. When Japan entered World War II in December 1941, Ekvall and his son were interned by the Japanese in Southeast Asia for about two years. He is not known to have come to India during the crucial period 1936–1940. In 1939–1941, he was living on the border of Gendun Chöphel's home province of Amdo, and not anywhere near America.¹⁰

(3) *Marion Duncan*

A third possibility who occurred to me was Marion Herbert Duncan (1896–1977), who served as a Protestant missionary for long enough at Bathang in Khams (1921–1935) to learn Tibetan fairly well. Marion Duncan gave up his missionary work and returned from Khams in 1935. He did pass through northern India to join and assist the Cutting-Vernay expedition to Lhasa in 1935, which collected many objects for the American Museum of National History in Philadelphia. Duncan later published several books and a few privately published articles and poems, including some of an autobiographical nature. Some publications on folk traditions were of lasting scholarly value, based as they were on his twelve years spent in Batang, though they are generally underrated by scholars.¹¹ But by 1939/1940 he was in North America and struggling to make a living before the USA declared war in December 1941. Financially he would not have been able to invite Gendun Chöphel, had he been interested.

¹⁰ For more details on the life of Ekvall, see Jackson 2004.

¹¹ For a bibliographical listing of Marion Duncan's publications, see Kuløy and Imaeda 1986, nos. 2539-2552 and 2631-2702.



Fig. 3. S. K. Jinorasa of Darjeeling and Gendun Chöphel (courtesy of Amnye Machen Institute Visual Archives, Collection Tashi Tsering) After Hackett 2012, fig 11.1.

Thus, each of the three most obvious candidates can be ruled out. Nor do the available biographies of Gendun Chöphel shed much light on the problem. Heather Stoddard's classic piece of Tibetological research, *Le mendiant de l'Amdo*, which remains one of the only serious, critical biographies of a modern Tibetan in any European language, duly noted the mention by the Mahabodhi editor of Gendun Chöphel's invitation "to New York" by an American Tibetologist. She added a reference from Rahula's memoirs of 1957 in Hindi ("To Whom I am Grateful") to a letter that Gendun Chöphel had written Rahula on December 29, 1943, informing him that the journey had to be called off. She also records and rejects a doubtful rumour that the Indian government had refused Gendun Chöphel an exit visa because a Sikkimese living in Calcutta had accused him of spying. Gendun Chöphel was greatly disappointed by the failed invitation, but Stoddard gives no clue about who his equally frustrated American host might have been. Finally, she raised the interesting question of how he would have traveled, had the invitation to the USA worked out. He was perhaps the

only Amdowa of his period to attempt a journey to the West. Would he have obtained a Chinese passport from the Chinese consulate in Calcutta? (Pandatsang and Geshe Sherab travelled on Chinese passports.)¹² It seems unlikely that he could have travelled on Tibetan documents, as some Central Tibetan nobles managed in 1947, as foreign emissaries of the Tibetan government.

So, the "American scholar" eludes an easy identification. Could there have been some mix-up about his nationality?¹³ One thing not in doubt is Gendun Chöphel's willingness to go abroad to the USA during this period. That was perfectly in character, and in North America he would have found far better chances to improve his life materially. His situation in India was increasingly precarious with the end of his work at the Bihar Research Society in the late 1930s, and things would soon become even more difficult for him during the war and Bengal-famine years. Gendun Chöphel was an inveterate traveller and one of his unfulfilled dreams was to roam still more of the world beyond, as his friend Rahulji had managed to do already.

2. *Theos Who?*

Who would have imagined that the "American Tibetologist" in Gendun Chöphel's life was the populariser of Indian yoga and Theosophical-style Tibetan Buddhism, Theos Bernard? Though in the late 1930s Bernard was one of the Americans with closest links to Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism, his name today is remembered only by the most devoted Tibet aficionado or bibliographical obscurantist.

Though largely forgotten by serious scholars now, Theos Bernard managed in the late 1930s to make himself into the most visible and active of American students of Tibetan Buddhism. He even can be counted among "Tibet explorers" of the period, as the second American to reach Lhasa, arriving there in summer, 1937, at the age of only twenty-seven. By 1939 his attempts to popularize yoga and Tibetan Buddhism in America through nationwide film and lecture tours had met with considerable success, and he was teaching yoga at "health studios" in New York City. He had become a minor celebrity guru, with his youthful, handsome face appearing on the cover of at least one national-circulation magazine.

But if Theos was then so famous and successful, why, seventy years

¹² Stoddard 1985, pp. 203-205.

¹³ Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) was the most versatile and highly accomplished German Tibetologist at the turn of the century and the best scholar of Tibetan living in North America during the first three decades of the 20th century. As he could not find a suitable academic position in Europe, he went in the late 1890s to the Field Museum in Chicago, where he worked for many years, dying in 1934.

later, has he fallen into scholarly obscurity and even disgrace? Most scholars of Tibet today would classify Theos not as a "Tibetologist," but as one of several poorly informed and extravagant American travellers who wrote sensationalised and even fictionalized travelogues in the 1930s. Beatrice D. Miller writing in the 1950s in her "Bibliographical Article, A Selective Survey of Literature on Tibet," listed two travelogues of disappointing quality that appeared in 1935, both by authors who possessed "an overdeveloped sense of the dramatic but an underdeveloped devotion to facts."¹⁴ These included one by a certain Gordon Bandy Enders, who published two such books and claimed to be a close confidant of the Panchen Lama. The other was by Harrison Forman, who published in 1935 the book *Through Forbidden Tibet: An Adventure into the Unknown* (New York, Longmans, Green and Co.). Forman spent his time not in "forbidden Tibet" but in the then highly accessible Amdo/Chinese borderland areas of Labrang and Hsining. Li An-che in his review of 1940 stated that Forman's work could only be classed as a novel.

Beatrice Miller would probably have classified Theos Bernard's travelogue of 1939 in the same group, had she taken notice of it. It does not belong among the few more factual and reliable travelogues of the period, such as the one written by the other American "Tibet explorer" of the period, Suydam Cutting. He led the Cutting-Vernay expedition to Lhasa in 1935, gathering many specimens for the American Museum of National History in Philadelphia, and he published in 1940 his travelogue, *Fire Ox and Other Years*.

3. Theos in the Popular Press

The treatment Theos received from the American press, including even the sometimes sceptical New York newspapers, was from the beginning positive. On November 6, 1937, a brief article appeared in the *New York World-Telegram*, p. 27, showing a letter Theos had mailed from Tibet. The article reported: "Bernard was granted special permission to enter the walled country by the Lamaist priests in conjunction with work he is doing for Columbia University's philosophy department. Because he adopted the Buddhist religion, he was permitted to partake in sacred rituals, the first white man to do so."

In late November Theos returned to New York on the ocean-liner *Queen Mary*. The day before he reached America, the *New York Times* carried an article announcing his impending arrival. The article began: "Buddhist Worship in Tibet Pictured: Young Explorer Is Returning Tomorrow with Results of Five-Month Study. He gathered Rare Data.

¹⁴ Miller 1953, p. 1143.

Treasures Include Complete Copies of the Kan-Gyur, Buddhist Scriptures."¹⁵

The first paragraph claimed that Theos, here described as an "American Buddhism scholar and Tibet explorer," was the first white man "to witness, photograph and participate in the religious rites of the lamaseries and monasteries of Tibet." He visited the three great monasteries, the Jokhang and Ramoche, and participated in the religious ceremonies there, taking photographs and motion pictures everywhere.

Back in America, Theos intended to continue his studies for a doctorate. "His research at Columbia had included an intensive study of Buddhist philosophy. Pursuing interests developed through work in philosophy and anthropology, he undertook a field trip to India, Eastern Russia [sic], and Tibet to find and study original material on Buddhist philosophy and customs."¹⁶

A few days after his arrival, one of the first of many articles appeared in the *New York World-Telegram* about Theos's trip, based on an interview he gave to staff writer Allan Keller. The article, published on December 4, described Theos as an immaculately dressed man about town, with a deep tan from sunlight reflected from glaciers. Theos was awaiting the arrival of his nearly five hundred rare books, before retiring to some rural retreat to write the doctoral dissertation for which he had made his seventeen-month journey to Asia.¹⁷

"To be perfectly honest," said the explorer-scholar, "I think I am a Buddhist. At least I believe implicitly in the teachings of that form of Buddhism which is held sacred in the monasteries of Lhasa and Sakya. The sincerity on my part finally opened the way for me when I asked permission to enter the country."

On December 26, yet another article appeared in the *New York Times* (II 1:5): "Describes customs of Tibetan Lamas."

The "retreat" that Theos resorted to for writing his dissertation was evidently Stepping Stones in Princeton, New Jersey. On December 13, 1937, Theos wrote Evans-Wentz from there, thanking him for his congratulations, stating that Evans-Wentz's books were the inspirations behind all his efforts.¹⁸

In November 1938, Theos scored a considerable publicity coup

¹⁵ *New York Times*, November 28, 1937, II 1:6.

¹⁶ *New York Times*, November 28, 1937, II 2.

¹⁷ *New York World-Telegram*, Saturday, December 4, 1937. Courtesy of V. Reynolds, Newark Museum.

¹⁸ Bodleian Library, Ms. Eng. lett. c. 577, fol. 8: Theos C. Bernard to Evans-Wentz (handwritten).

when his photo was published on the cover of *Family Circle Magazine* (November 18, 1938). The cover photo bore the caption, "Theos Bernard ... who became the first White lama of Tibet, continues the story of his adventures by telling Stewart Robertson about his year in India. Another F.C. scoop. Pg. 10."

In the coming months of early 1939, Theos also published a series of articles in the *Asia (and the Americas) Magazine* [New York], including one titled "I became a lama." This magazine was then a respectable venue for reports on Tibet exploration. It had published between 1926 and 1929 four articles of David Macdonald on life in Tibet and, in the 1930s, several articles by Robert Ekvall.

In the books he then published about his experiences in Tibet, Theos turned to still more energetic self-promotion, almost in the American frontier tradition of the covered-wagon medicine show. His Tibet travelogue of 1939 contained lofty claims about his mystic experiences in Tibet and his spiritual attainments.¹⁹ As before he claimed to have become through a ceremony "a full-fledged Buddhist monk, a Lama." But in his travelogue, he made public a story of his supposed telepathic initiation from the highest lama of the Gelukpa school, the Ganden Tripa of Ganden monastery.²⁰

This claim was considered an outright lie by the British diplomat-cadres in India, who denied later that he was ever seen attending special religious ceremonies. For a practicing Buddhist, this sort of lie would have been particularly grievous, entailing the loss of his fundamental vows, if he had claimed higher spiritual experiences than he as an ordinary person actually possessed.²¹ Genuine mystics always hide their inner experiences and never announce them to the world in the *Psychic News*, or did such basic rules not apply to Theos?

¹⁹ Bernard 1939a (repr. 1952), 13.

²⁰ If he met the Ganden abbot, it would have been Shar rtse Ye shes dbang ldan, 93rd abbot of Ganden, tenure 1933–1939.

²¹ Regarding these claims, the travel diaries of Theos should be carefully compared.

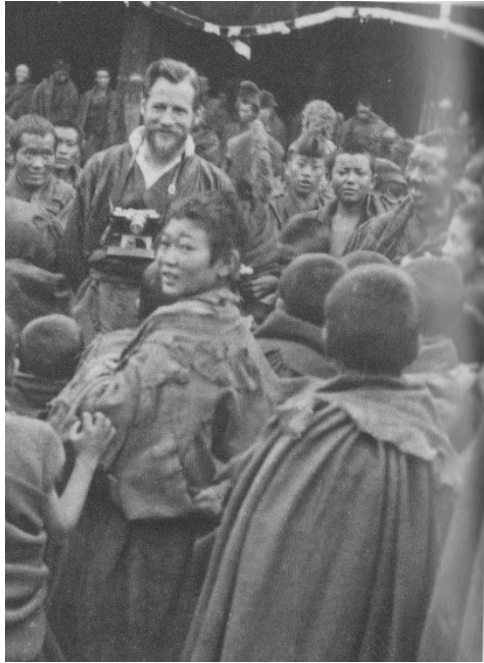


Fig. 4. Theos during his visit to Drepung in 1937. After Veenhof 2011, Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley.

Theos's claims to have been recognized as the reincarnation of a Buddhist saint were of a different order and may have been based on his misunderstanding of flattering remarks made by his Tibetan hosts in Lhasa. Lama Anagarika Govinda, a spiritually oriented scholar of German birth then studying Tibetan Buddhism in India, tended to discount Theos's achievements and claims, believing that he had only made it to Tibet by virtue of large and well-placed gifts (i.e. bribes), and that his claims of special spiritual recognition from the Tibetans were nothing more than a naive misunderstanding on his part. Lama Govinda, who was a friend and tenant of Evans-Wentz on his Almora estate, later reminisced:²²

...The young man [Theos] had bribed his way into Tibet with a mind to research scriptural work. While there he supposedly made a grand gesture of promising to bring the Tibetan canons back to the West and translating them. The Tibetans paid him the compliment that he was acting as Padmasambhava had when he brought Buddhism to Tibet. Bernard, so the story goes, thought this meant he was a reincarnation of the historical figure and so declared he

²² Winkler 1982, 69.

had been accepted as such.

In his travelogue, Theos made the assertion as a matter-of-fact aside: "Padmasambhava (whose reincarnation I am believed to be)."²³ He also reported such things as that the Ganden Tri Rinpoche explained to him later (telepathically?) that he "was one of their famous saints who had been reborn in the Western world, and that this was the reason that [he] had to come to Tibet and had been able to pass through all Tibetan ritualistic rites..."²⁴



Fig. 5. Theos Bernard with Reting Rinpoche Regent of Tibet in 1937. After Veenhof 2011, Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley

Theos had been fascinated by the life of Padmasambhava even before reaching Tibet. He considered that Indian adept his favorite teacher.²⁵ While in Kalimpong in 1937, he had begun a translation of Padmasambhava's life, and in Lhasa during the summer of that year he continued it, wanting to finish it.²⁶

²³ Bernard 1939a (repr. 1952), 102.

²⁴ Bernard 1939a (1952), 32.

²⁵ Bernard 1939a (1952), 96.

²⁶ Bernard 1939a (1952), 212.

4. *The British Reaction: Snub the Bounder*

While Theos's fame in the U.S.A. seemed to be in unstoppable ascent in 1939, his books and articles did not receive serious comment or reviews from contemporary scholars in learned journals. His books had the bad luck to appear just before or, in Europe, at the start of World War II, when many journals cut back or had other difficulties. Still, one would have expected at least some scholarly notice, unless they were deemed too popular for a review as serious scholarship. After all, the similarly sensationalist books of Alexandra David-Neel were listed in the *Bibliographie Bouddhique*.²⁷

In any case, whatever support Theos had enjoyed in British official circles of India and Tibet in summer, 1937, had completely evaporated by the time his flamboyant books appeared two years later.²⁸ Theos Bernard's poor later reputation as a Tibetologist derives in the first place from the behind-the-scenes rejection of his claims by the British Tibet diplomat-cadre of his day, who included some of the best Tibetologists of the English-speaking world. Those British civil servants manned the small British stations in the Himalayas and in Tibet itself. In their view, his books were filled with exaggerations and distortions. As the author of one later biographical sketch who consulted the British Tibet cadre official files on Bernard said:²⁹ "Bernard goes on and on about his many secret initiations by all of the great Tibetan masters. How much is true and how much in sensationalism to promote his book, is hard to tell."

²⁷ On the reliability of the Frenchwoman Alexandra David-Neel, see Braham Norwick 1976. According to Aaron Sussman, "It Is the Mind that Moves," introduction David-Neel 1965 and 1971. David-Neel's *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* first appeared in Britain under the title *With Magicians and Mystics in Tibet* in summer 1939, where it was treated politely but did not sell well. By contrast, the American edition, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, was a big success, going through six printings between 1932 and 1937.

²⁸ MacKay 1997, 173.

²⁹ Cooper 1986, 13.

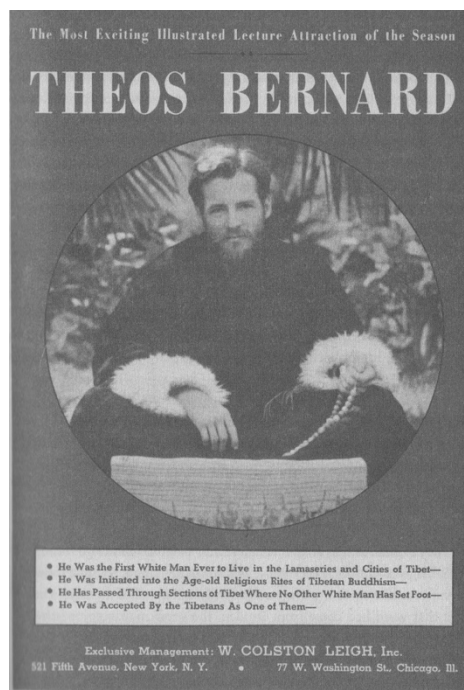


Fig. 6. Bernard's tour flyer of 1939/40: the art of misrepresentation (Helen Graham Park Foundation). After Hackett 2012, fig 9.2.

During his preparations and actual visit to Tibet, Theos had been helped by the British cadre every step of the way. But once he reached Lhasa in 1937, Theos decided not to stay at the residence of the British, preferring to live with the powerful nobleman and minister Tsarong. The Tibet cadre must have sensed something had gone wrong already when they read the first claims Theos made upon his return to the West, as reported by the *Daily Mail* in London:

SECRET RITES I SAW IN DARKEST TIBET

I Was a Lama

"The Daily Mail" publishes today the most remarkable adventure story of the year—the narrative of a young man who unveils mysteries of forbidden Tibet.

Mr. Theos Bernard, an American, has just returned from a six months' exploration of Tibet, for which he was granted special facilities by the British political authorities and had the cooperation inside Tibet of a high India Government official, with whom "The Daily Mail" has been in communication.

...

Bejewelled Oracle

By THEO BERNARD

I am the first white lama—the first Westerner ever to live as a priest in a Tibetan monastery, the first man from the outside world to be initiated into Buddhist's mysteries hidden even to many native lamas themselves.

The Tibetans told me they believe that I am the reincarnation of a great and saintly lama and that I was sent by fate to their country to gather knowledge to take back to the West. That was why they granted me special privileges....

The groan of the British cadre must have been audible all the way from Sikkim and Lhasa as they read the truth, that Theos “was granted special facilities by the British political authorities and had the cooperation inside Tibet of a high India Government official.” Even the identity of the “Daily Mail correspondent” Mr. F. W. R. Perry, hinted at official complicity in Theos's exploits: Perry was until recently a member of the British Tibet cadre and had served in Gyantse.

Theos's extravagant claims to be the “First White Lama” and so forth might have been bearable in small doses, since many of the cadre were not unsympathetic to Buddhism. But these and other inaccurate claims (regarding the plentitude of Tibetan gold, etc.) were published by the *Daily Mail* throughout Britain. This provoked queries about the bona fides of Theos, and this time the cadre would observe a noble silence in public, but be increasingly critical in private. Already in October 1937 Miss M. N. Kennedy, Secretary of the Royal Central Asian Society, wrote a letter asking Mr. Rumbold: “An American, Bernard, is splashed in the *Daily Mail* (date unknown) as having brought a number of manuscripts back from Tibet—is he another Illion? We had to send Illion's book back to the publisher.”

Theos was of course no “Illion”—i.e., no Lobsang Rampa who wrote pure fictions, never having set foot in Tibet. A more apt question would be: Was Theos another McGovern or Alexandra David-Neel? Both were non-British Western converts to Buddhism who had annoyed the British cadre a decade previously through their successful circumvention of British restrictions and travelling illegally to Lhasa in 1923 and 1924. Unlike them, Theos had travelled with British blessings. But like them, he shared a certain “eccentricity” from a British point of view. His similarities with the highly dramatic, sometimes sensationalising Alexandra in particular (whose writings had established her as a prime contender for the title of first White, though female, lama) should be examined by future biographers, comparing her

British file with that on Theos.³⁰

Three years after Theos's travels to Tibet, one of the Tibetan staff of the British in Lhasa would report that Theos was not observed attending any special religious ceremonies, and that he did not participate in any Buddhist ceremonies that were not also open to British staff.³¹ In October 1940 the British official Norbhu went so far as to claim:³² "At no time was [Bernard] seen associating with monks or carrying out religious Buddhist ceremonies."³³

Had Theos simply invented his many Buddhist activities in Lhasa monasteries? It was British policy to try to keep an eye on all Westerners visiting Tibet, even trusted ones. The Rev. Tharchin was reporting on Theos regularly to the chief of the Tibet cadre, Charles Bell, even during the Lhasa trip. Two brief letters from him survive in the India Office Library:³⁴

1/7/1937, Tsarong House, Lhasa:

I came up to Tibet for nine weeks leave from the mission and accompanied with an American gentleman named Mr Bernard. He got pass upto Gyantse for 6 weeks, but he applied to the Tibetan Govt. that he may be allowed to come to Lhasa + it was granted + he is now here. I came up two weeks head + he arrived here at the 24 June.

25/7/1937, no place:

The American gentleman Mr Bernard is still here, and he is a Buddhist and doing a lot of ceremonies in all the Monasteries. All the Tibetan Officers liked him very much and also, he is very good friend to our officers who are in Tibet. I am with him and found that he is only after Tibetan letterery and resurching the Buddhism in Tibet and he is thinking to write a book on Buddhism. Also, he is taking lot of photos with the permission of the Tibetan officers.

Thus, the eyewitness report submitted by Tharchin Babu records that Theos was most definitely active in Lhasa "doing a lot of ceremonies

³⁰ Aaron Sussman in David-Neel 1971, 11, calls her "the only European woman with the rank of a Lama." The first European to have trained as a Tibetan Buddhist monk (thus the "first white lama"—a title much aspired to by Theos), according to Batchelor 1994, 291, was the Latvian Kunigaikstis Gedyminas (Mahacharya Ratnavajra), who was ordained in the mid-nineteenth century and stayed for many years in a "lamaist" Buddhist monastery, about three generations prior to Theos. Snelling 1987, 199, considered him a Lithuanian.

³¹ Cooper 1986, 13.

³² Cooper 1986, nos 13-14 cites IQR L/P&S/12/4203. This is the file on "TIBET, Exploration of: by Mr. Theo Bernard."

³³ As quoted by Cooper 1986, 13.

³⁴ Mss Eur F80, #5a is missing from the box, #130 (folio f) contains 2 letters. Contents courtesy of Mr. Burkhard Quessel.

in all the monasteries."³⁵ Tharchin himself briefly reported on Theos's visit to Lhasa in his Tibetan newspaper *Me long* (in an early 1938 issue?), mentioning the kind hospitality he received from the Tsarongs.³⁶

In the early wartime years 1940–1941 with the near impossibility of ordinary international travel, members of the British Tibet cadre probably thought they were safe from further irritations from Theos Bernard. They were wrong. On May 11, 1940, Theos or his agent succeeded in flogging another sensational article "American becomes only White Lama in Tibet" to the London newspaper *Evening Standard*. One presumes it was meant to promote the British version of his travelogue, *Land of a Thousand Buddhas*. The newspaper editor may have considered the story an innocent diversion from the otherwise dreary news of war. On June 8, 1940, another similar article, "Secrets of Tibet were revealed to Author," appeared in the *Psychic News*.

In June 1940, Theos's travelogue came to the attention of E.W. Fletcher in the External Affairs Department. Fletcher wrote B. J. Gould that Theos seemed to be "another imposter like Gordon Enders," referring to the telegraphed permission their department had granted to Theos in summer, 1937. Fletcher was discrete enough not to mention explicitly Gould's role in the granting of travel approval.

On November 1, 1940, Miss Kennedy of the Royal Central Asian Society wrote Mr. G. E. Crombie to inquire about Theos, asking whether he was in Britain and whether he would be someone he would recommend to lecture to the society. Crombie replied in a confidential letter, stating that although he had not yet had the chance to read the travelogue, based on the other shorter pieces by Theos that he had read he expected Theos's book to be "somewhat sensational and not at all reliable. He is hardly a person I think whom we could recommend to you as a lecturer."

Just to make sure he had gotten his point across, Crombie in February 1941, wrote a follow-up letter, this time "strictly personal, confidential," to Miss Kennedy. In it he excerpted at length from an official letter written by Norbhu Dhondup on October 18, 1940, from the British Mission, Lhasa, to the Gould in Sikkim, who forwarded it to the External Affairs Department, New Delhi. Norbhu Dhondup had been acting British representative at the time of Theos's visit. This letter was the harshest and most cynical assessment of Theos's activities by any of the cadre.

³⁵ Mr. Burkhard Quessel kindly checked for me some of the other references in Alex McKay 1997, *Tibet and the British Raj*, p. 261, note 27. The Lhasa Mission Entries in L/P&S/12/4193 are disappointingly meagre, just mentioning Theos's name. Mr. Quessel could not find the reference in L/P&S/12/4202 and 6154, which are classified as "not for photocopy, by film order only."

³⁶ Don Lopez kindly informed me of this fact by email.

(Dear Sir),

Please refer to your demi-offical letter no. 10(22)-?/40 dated the 29th August 1940.

In fact, Bernard's claims have no foundation and are exaggerated to make the stories interesting. If his publications both in America and elsewhere are being accepted without criticism, such can only be attributed to widespread ignorance of the life conditions and religious customs prevailing in Tibet.

During his stay in Lhasa Bernard's behaviour was conventional and not unlike that of other visitors, except that he adopted the lay dress for visits to Tibetans, Tibetan theatrical dances, and the monasteries. At no time was he seen associating with monks or carrying out religious Buddhist ceremonies.

He made several visits to the 'Potala' to take photographs of different shrines, but not as he states to take part in the daily ceremonies, but to thoroughly survey the items of interest with his camera when lighting conditions were suitable. Considering the enormous size of the 'Potala' and its numerous contents, this obviously would take many days in uncertain and dull rainy weather.

Bernard arranged to have himself quartered with Tsarong Dzasa in preference to accepting the offer of Mr. Richardson to stay with the Mission. This is significant, because, in the light of what has transpired since his departure, he would naturally not be keen to have his actions and movements too closely watched or discussed by those in intelligent contact with the outside world.

His visits to the monasteries were arranged through the permission of the Tibetan Government and in the same manner adopted by any visitor, no matter whether he be a Tibetan or a foreign official of a neighbouring state. Bernard arrived in Tibet with plenty of money which he applied to good advantage in securing the services of monks.

The monasteries of course are institution dependent to a large extent upon charity, and if a visitor makes a lavish gift of money to any one of them, it is quite obvious, he will be given all the polite and carefully attention he desires for his purpose and exceptions would no doubt be made to show him every cheek and corner of the monastery if he so desired. In fact, this has been the experience of many visiting British officers long before Bernard's arrival in Lhasa.

Bernard has not seen or witnessed a ceremony of Buddhist worship which has not also been open to the British personnel.

When proceeding anywhere, Bernard always had a battery of cameras with him and was invariably accompanied by Tharchin, his interpreter and guide. His knowledge of the Tibetan [p. 2] language was very scanty indeed and he cannot even converse in simple sentences freely.

His 'modus operandi' was to prepare the way with a handsome cash gift and advise the monastery officials when they may expect him. At the appointed time, he would arrive complete with Tharchin and cameras and be received with pleasure by the monks who would offer him the usual

tea and sweetmeats, whereupon Tharchin would reel off as many films as possible from many angles. Normally the monks object to indiscriminate photography, but Bernard's clever generosity would, as he knew, override such scruples temporarily and in many instances, permission was readily given to photograph what he liked.

Another important part of his equipment was a complete monk official robe and the yellow hat, all of which he had made for himself in Lhasa. Attired in this, he would, by arrangement with monk officials, mingle with the monks while at prayer, and Tharchin from various points was busy creating the photographic proof of the 'only White Lama.'

It may be of interest to point out that Bernard avoided as far as possible any contact with the Cuttings, who left Lhasa just after his arrival.

Bernard was absent approximately a week from Lhasa visiting Yerpa and Ganden monasteries. Either on the way out or returning would hardly allow him the time for the programme so ably arranged in his book 'Penthouse of the Gods.'

It is quite apparent from the various articles appearing in the Press, periodicals, and book publications that he is drawing upon a decidedly distorted imagination and sparing no effort in his superlative descriptions of the poorness of the people, the filth of Lhasa and the wickedness of the cult generally, to bring ridicule upon the religion he professes.

For further criticism of Bernard's claim, I would refer you to Mr. Richardson's memorandum No.7(14)-L/37 dated the 12th July 1939 and demi-official letter No.7(22)-L/39 dated the 28th September 1939.

The enclosures to your demi-official letter under reference are returned herewith as desired.

(Yours sincerely),
Sd/- Norbhu Dhondup.

So, what had Theos really been up to in Tibet, in the considered British view? By 1940 Gould, at least, still thought that Theos was genuinely interested in Buddhism, yet he noted that Theos was apt to let his imagination run wild. "Mr. Bernard," he wrote in one letter, "was good at giving people what they want. He has apparently given the American public what he thought they would like—sensationalism, padded out with a good deal of obvious fact and Buddhist jargon."

But even though Gould and perhaps one or two others of the British Tibet cadre still conceded Theos's serious interest in Buddhism, the more they read his overweening exaggerations and inaccuracies, the more they were put off by the new Theos Bernard in his mode as a self-promoting American guru-showman. The strictest of the cadre, Norbhu Dhondrup, carried the critique one step further, implying that Theos had been a kind of confidence trickster, willfully engaging in deceptive behavior. In his letter, Norbhu Dhondup further alleged that some of Theos's offhand condemnations of "the filth of Lhasa and the wickedness of the cult," brought disrepute upon Tibetan Buddhism,

the very religion he professed to want to spread in the West. (Norbhu's letter would close the door on any chance of future approval of travel to Tibet by Theos, as long as the British remained in India.)

5. How Did Theos Finance His Journey?

Theos was born in the American West to parents who were both deeply fascinated by Asian traditions of spirituality. He was born at home on December 10, 1908, in Los Angeles,³⁷ and grew to adulthood in Arizona.

His mother, Aura Georgiana Crable Bernard, was step daughter of William Arthur Harwood, first mayor of Tombstone, Arizona, who arrived in the vicinity of Tombstone in 1878, three years before the great silver-mining boom began.³⁸ Aura was the first postmistress of Tombstone and at the time of her appointment, the youngest in America.³⁹ She was a member of the universalist Bahai faith since a teenager but also occasionally gave sermons at their local church when the usual teacher was absent. Aura divorced her first husband, Theos's father, Glen (who all his life continued to cultivate interests in yoga and hypnosis).⁴⁰



Fig. 7. The Gordon brothers in the Dragoon Mountains: Theos, Ian, Dugald and Marvene (Arizona Historical Society). After Hackett 2012, fig 1.1.

³⁷ His birthplace was confirmed by Paul Hackett.

³⁸ Aura had a sister Alice Anita Crable, who was born on 10 Jan. 1881 at Sacramento, California. She married district attorney Edward W. Land in 1898 at the age of 17 and died four years later at the birth of her son Lawrence Edward Crable Land.

³⁹ For some details on the ancestry and early years of Theos, I have referred to the unpublished article by Carol Lingham and J. Michael Mahar, "From Tombstone to Tibet: The Early Life of Theos Bernard," and other notes of Mike Mahar.

⁴⁰ According to received tradition (M. Mahar), Glen had abandoned Aura and their small child.

Afterwards she married a more staid assayer and mining engineer, Jonathan Gordon. Theos grew up with his mother, stepfather, and stepbrothers in adequate but not wealthy circumstances. He grew up in the mining town of Tombstone and was educated in Tucson, Arizona, studying and even practicing law for a short while in his home state, before coming to the East Coast in 1934.

Only in New York did Theos come into money through marriage to a Jewish heiress. With her wealth to support him, Theos could afford to be outlandish and behave in ways that might seem odd to ordinary mortals. Certain high Lhasa nobility are also said to have remembered Theos with a certain puzzlement twelve years after his visit to Tibet:⁴¹

The Tibetans told [Lowell Thomas and his son] that they were amazed and puzzled at the way Bernard kept changing his outfit when he was in Lhasa. One day he would wear a Tibetan nobleman's outfit, and the next day he would appear in the robes worn by the abbot of a monastery. But what puzzled them most was that when he returned to America, he called himself "a white lama."

During his stay in Lhasa, Theos did dress flamboyantly at times, but he was courteous and friendly enough not to offend either the Tibetan or the British. Still, his dress was for one modern critic another mark of his eccentricity. Theos in Tibet had displayed his wealth conspicuously, even making his own Tibetan robes of costly materials and wearing them "in a continual fashion show," while at the same time remarking on the glaring poverty of many Tibetans.⁴²

On the other hand, Theos was ahead of his time in taking a (relatively) sympathetic, participatory approach to the tradition and people he was visiting and studying, even making some attempt to learn their language and immerse himself in their culture. Not the approach of the adventurer and travel-film maker Lowell Thomas and his son.

While in Lhasa, Theos assiduously gathered the scriptures and religious articles he believed would be necessary for spreading Buddhism in the West. His success in bringing out of Tibet a large number of such books and images exposed him to the later charge of being an "exploiter" who in fact acquired these precious objects for himself under the guise of spreading the Buddhist Word.⁴³ This charge rings false, since Theos in the coming years did everything possible to carry out

⁴¹ Thomas Jr. 1950, 125.

⁴² Cooper 1986, 13. Cooper condemned Theos as "eccentric," using this as a euphemism for mad, saying: "It is oft stated that if you are rich, you are not mad but eccentric; to me Bernard along with Mr. W. M. McGovern and Alexandra David-Neel were eccentric in every way." I think the comparison with McGovern and David-Neel is apt, though for other reasons.

⁴³ Cooper 1986, 11.

the ambitious religious projects he had outlined to the Tibetan regent and others in Tibet. There is no evidence that he used the sacred objects other than respectfully, and he is not known to have enriched himself through their sale.

6. *Uncle Pierre, another American Padmasambhava?*

That Theos's main scholarly interest was tantric yoga would have been held against him by the next generation of Tibetologists. In fact, his main impact upon American religious culture was not academic, but as a populariser and teacher of yoga. Still, in the late 1930s not even every member of the American Eastern-religions and yoga scene would have rated Theos that highly, even as yoga instructor. At best he was then a still-unproven successor to his uncle Pierre Bernard, who was indisputably *the* established yoga master of his generation.

In New York City in 1939–1940, Theos was teaching yoga at the Pierre Health Studio at the Hotel Pierre, 5th Ave and 61st St. Claire Lea Stuart, noted dancer and disciple of uncle Pierre Bernard, was assistant director of this health studio, presumably named after uncle Pierre.⁴⁴

In spring, 1934, Theos had gone east at age twenty-six to New York City to find a wife and enroll at Columbia University.⁴⁵ In New York, he visited his uncle in Nyack, whom he had never met.⁴⁶ This uncle, "Dr." Pierre Arnold Bernard (1876–1955), was a colorful and successful guru to prominent New Yorker socialites of his time.⁴⁷ He was also controversial and was reviled for many years by New York newspaper journalists ever since his involvement in a "love-cult" scandal in 1910 involving two female students. Though he styled himself "Dr.," Uncle Pierre lacked both medical and academic degrees, and he was very elusive about the facts of his early life, often making up details as suited the occasion. Still, he was the greatest American expert of yoga practice and tantra of his generation.

As a teacher, Pierre Bernard attracted an impressive list of disciples from the highest strata of New York society to the country club he founded, and he also attracted scholars to his superb library. Later in life he integrated himself more and more into the local community of Nyack, becoming a landlord and president of a local bank. How could

⁴⁴ Boswell 1965. Another club in New York City that Theos was connected with was the Lotus Club, 110 W. 57th St., which he sometimes used as a mailing address when away from New York in the mid-1940s.

⁴⁵ Carlsen 1985, 28, wrongly asserts that Theos enrolled "in the anthropology department." Charles Boswell 1965 stated that uncle Dr. Pierre Arnold Bernard invited Theos "from California to Nyack, NY," but this is not confirmed by other sources.

⁴⁶ Carlsen 1985, 28.

⁴⁷ An excellent sketch of Pierre's life is given by Gordon 2000.

his nephew Theos have failed to be influenced by such a rascal-guru of an uncle? Presumably uncle Pierre's success helped Theos subsequently to choose the career he did: to earn a decent living as yoga guru to a well-heeled clientele.

Who was "Dr. Pierre Bernard," and how did he become America's first tantric guru? With outsiders and the press as well as with his students, uncle Pierre was exasperatingly secretive about his family background. The few details he begrudgingly gave out were confusing or false, but they allowed the press just enough to construct its own distorted pastiches of his life story. The following could be pieced together about his family and early life with the help of his newly accessible personal papers and from Nyack Library local history files.⁴⁸

Dr. Pierre Bernard was born "Peter" or "Perry" Baker, son of Catherine C. (Kittie) Givens (1854–1932), and her first husband, Erastus Warren Baker (1845–1917?). Pierre was the half-brother of Theos's father, Glen (or Glenn) Bernard (1884–1976), whose mother was also Catherine (Kittie) Givens. But Glen's father was her second husband, John C. Bernard (?–1932). (For what is known of Pierre Bernard's ancestry, see below, Appendix A.)

Perry's mother, Kittie, married second John C. Bernard, a barber in Leon, Iowa. They moved to "Harriston" (i.e. Humeston?), Iowa, when he was three and a half years old (ca. spring 1880 or 1881).⁴⁹ When he was sixteen years of age (ca. 1892 or 1893), Perry moved with his parents to Riverside, south of San Bernardino in southern California. In 1895 his parents returned to Iowa, leaving him in California.⁵⁰ At some point as a child or young man, Perry Baker took the family name "Bernard" of his stepfather, John C. Bernard.⁵¹ Later he changed his given name from Perry to Pierre.

As a young man first experiencing his freedom in California, Pierre supported himself as a fruit picker, salmon packer and barber. He took up with a certain Mortimer K. Hargis, with whom he shared an interest in hypnotism, yoga, and the occult. The two founded in San Francisco the "Bacchante Academy."⁵²

By his mid-twenties, Pierre had become proficient at various yoga exercises, becoming able to control his breath to the point of simulating death. He gave demonstrations of these skills to earn a living and

⁴⁸ I have benefited from the biographical sketch published by Gordon 2000.

⁴⁹ There is no town named Harriston in Iowa. The similar-sounding Humeston is located nearby in adjoining Wayne County. A town named Harris is in Osceola County.

⁵⁰ Court transcript of New York City, 1910, seen at the Rockland County historical museum.

⁵¹ Gordon 2000, 3f.

⁵² Boswell 1965.

recruit students, though at the same time hoping to advance medical knowledge. Pierre later recalled:

I gave exhibitions in phenomena, illustrating many points in self-control, in control of the respiration, circulation, sensation, the latter being an exemplification of what we might term self-induced anaesthesia. These exhibitions were given before medical men in every case; not theatrical exhibitions.

Pierre later claimed that he, as an adolescent in Lincoln, Nebraska, had learned yoga and other tantric lore from his master, a Syrian named Salvais Hamati. This would have been in the early 1890s. He asserted he studied with Hamati for six years and was associated with him on the West Coast for longer than that.⁵³ Certainly it would have been highly unusual to meet a tantrika in Nebraska in around 1890. Practicing tantrikas were exceedingly rare in North America but contact with Asian religious and spiritualist (for instance, Theosophical) ideas, at least, would have been easier in California, where Pierre first manifested his skills. The first Buddhist publication in America, *The Buddhist Ray*, was published by a man named Vetterling for seven years beginning in 1887 from his small farm in the hills above Santa Cruz.⁵⁴

Yet it would not have been wholly impossible for an Oriental sage to pass through the American Midwest in the mid 1890s. In September 1893 there had taken place in Chicago a great World Parliament of Religions in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition of the same year. It was attended by numerous delegates from Asia, including many Buddhists and Hindus. Prominent among the Hindus were Vivekananda—the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna—and B. B. Nagarkart of the Brahma-samaj. Banryu Yatsubuchi, a master of Tendai esoteric Buddhism, expounded to the assembled audience tantric doctrines! After the parliament closed, one American took the vows of Buddhist refuge, in a ceremony led by Dharmapala at the Chicago Theosophical Society.⁵⁵ Some Indian delegates afterward left to found centers of their religion in “ironclad” mainly Protestant North America.⁵⁶ (In Southern California at Point Loma, Pierre might easily have come in contact with the colorful American Theosophical guru of the day, Katherine Tingley, who influenced Evans-Wentz as a young man.)

Hamati reportedly returned to India when Pierre Bernard was about 26 years old (ca. 1902?), and they never saw each other again.

⁵³ Gordon 2000, 4. G. Gordon assumes, for lack of any disproof, the actual existence of this master.

⁵⁴ Fields 1992, 130ff.

⁵⁵ Fields 1992, 120ff.

⁵⁶ Keesing 1981, 67.

Pierre later claimed that they stayed in contact through many letters (sometimes as many as three a month) for several years.⁵⁷ Still, not a single letter from Hamati or any other trace of him has so far been found among Pierre's papers—which is surprising since a tantric disciple would normally have treasured and preserved photos and letters of his guru. Pierre later claimed many times to have lived and studied in India, though he never set foot there.

Pierre's later caginess makes me wonder whether Hamati was not at least in part an invention, like Blavatsky's master, the Mahatma K.H. (Khoote Hoomi). If Hamati were a fabrication, Pierre probably could have learned about yoga and tantra from books and in California through the Theosophical Society, which was established in California (especially at Point Loma) and had published N. C. Paul's treatise on yoga philosophy from Bombay in 1899. Yoga was well known to William James in 1902, who cited in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* the book *Raja Yoga* by Vivekananda published from London in 1896.⁵⁸ Furthermore, if Hamati was a real tantrika, he would have been more likely not a Syrian named Salvais but an Indian, coming from someplace where Tantrism was still alive.⁵⁹

The guru's name seems to have been known in a different form in family circles. In 1909 when a son was born to Pierre's half-brother Glen A. Bernard, the child was named at baptism "Theos Cassimir Harrati [i.e. Hamati] Bernard."⁶⁰ When one considers the two middle names of Theos, what could Theos's first middle name—"Cassimir"—be, if not a clue that Hamati had actually been a Kashmiri? (Or at least that Pierre Bernard's own brother believed that.)

Pierre taught in San Francisco for about three years in all, giving his first big yoga exhibition before forty physicians and surgeons in November 1900. He taught mental suggestion and its application in medicine to doctors who paid \$100 each. His pupils included Major Bulwer of London, Dr. Harry Tevis and nephew, Hugh Tevis, and Lansing Kellogg.

⁵⁷ One-page fragment of the memoirs of Pierre Bernard, marked "-3-" [no other pages survive] surviving in the local history files, Nyack Library. If Pierre studied under him for at least six years in Nebraska and more than six years in California, as he seems to have later claimed, they would have met in ca. 1890. Cf. Gordon 2000, 4.

⁵⁸ William James taught for a short while at Stanford University, influencing the young Evans-Wentz.

⁵⁹ But one of Blavatsky's mahatmas was supposedly a "Syrian" who had responsibility for all religions in the "Great White Brotherhood." See Washington 1995, 32.

⁶⁰ Theos's mother married Glen A. Bernard, and their son Theos Cassimir Harrati [or Hamati] Bernard was baptised June 20, 1909, at St. Paul's, according to the St. Paul parish book, Tombstone, Arizona (quoted in a letter of Carl Chafin, historian of early Tombstone).



Fig. 8. Pierre Arnold Bernard, Tantric yogi, ca. 1900. After Love 2010, 1.

Pierre also coached people in “Vedic philosophy and the physical training peculiar to that branch of work in India,” in other words, yoga. In San Francisco he also opened a free clinic for nervous disorders in which he collaborated with local physicians. He travelled to New York via Portland, Oregon (where he stayed one winter, teaching philosophy). His student Florin P. Jones was already teaching in Portland, having among his students a certain judge Webster and family. Pierre then returned to Seattle, Washington, and the Pacific Northwest (which had boomed thanks to the Yukon Gold Rush), where he taught for about two years.⁶¹ Wherever he taught, Pierre established schools or “temples of learning” in which he taught yoga. He called himself a medical doctor, “Dr. Pierre Bernard,” though he possessed no medical degrees.⁶²

⁶¹ One-page fragment of the memoirs of Pierre Bernard, marked “-3-” [no other pages are known to exist] surviving in the local history files, Nyack Library.

⁶² Gordon 2000, 4.



Fig. 9. Pierre Bernard in the vestments of a kaula rite preceptor. After Love 2010, 28.

During these years, moving frequently from place to place, Pierre tried to found a Tantrik Order in America. He is said to have officially registered it as a society (in Washington state?) in summer, 1906, and perhaps also in Canada. His Tantrik order had lodges on the West Coast, with himself as founder and main teacher. The order superseded Pierre's Bacchante Academy, which was disbanded after the San Francisco earthquake of spring, 1906.

Pierre's Tantrik Order in America published, supposedly by the Tantrik Press, New York, just one number of its journal: *International Journal, Tantric Order*, vol. V. no. 1, originating from St. Louis. This number was entitled "Vira Sadhana, American Edition," and it showed in one illustration "Dr. Pierre Bernard" simulating death before a gathering of physicians.⁶³ Among the principal "officer-initiates" of the order is listed Salvais Hamati.

⁶³ J. Gordon Melton ed. ca. 1989, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, lists the "Tantrik Order in America" as one of the first Hindu groups founded in the United States, "possibly the first created by a Western student of the Eastern teachings." The order died with its founder in 1955, and reports could not be confirmed that an offshoot, the "New York Sacred Tantrics" still functioned in the 1960s.

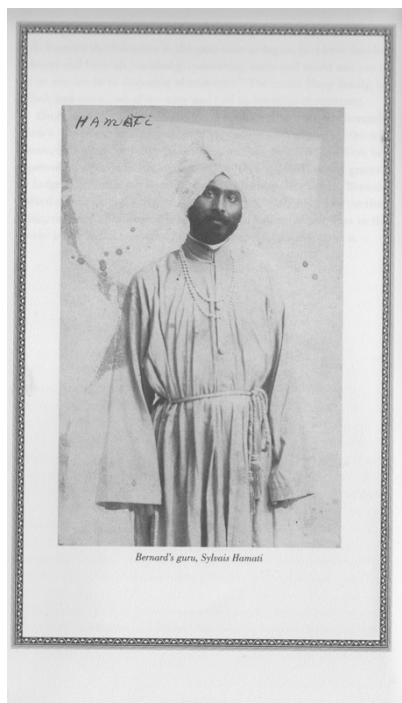


Fig. 10. Pierre Bernard's guru, Sylvais Hamati. After Love 2010, 69.

Though a yoga-exhibitionist, Pierre possessed considerable good sense. He veiled his tantric order in a blanket of impenetrable rigmarole, yet his teaching of ordinary students was usually simple and to the point. He early on saw the great potential of New York City as an inexhaustible pool of disciples and patrons. With several of his followers, he shifted his operations in about 1909 or 1910 from the West Coast to New York.

In 1910 Pierre was arrested in New York and spent four months in prison there awaiting trial, after two female disciples alleged that they had been held against their wills in his love cult. Later both young women failed to appear in court to testify against him, but the scandal tarnished his reputation for decades with the New York and San Francisco press.⁶⁴

Unfazed, Pierre continued his operations and allied himself with another colorful character, the singer Blanche Devries (1891–1984),

⁶⁴ See below, Appendix B.

whom he secretly married a few years later.⁶⁵ Blanche was born Dace Melbourne Shannon in Adrian, Michigan. She had come to New York to pursue a singing career, but after teaming up with Pierre she became his stage designer and manager. Ultimately, she, too, became a respected yoga instructor. Together, Pierre and Blanche formed an irresistible team, and they enjoyed a steady upward march through New York society. They attracted many students, some of whom later moved on to more serious practice under more doctrinaire teachers.⁶⁶

Pierre Bernard was a cigar-smoking autodidact with a love for baseball and other American sports. He was a big reader and collector of books, and also collected exotic animals, including elephants. He joined the American Oriental Society in 1914 and the name Pierre A. Bernard remained on the society's member's roster for over twenty years. From 1914 to 1920 his address was 662 West End Ave., New York City. From 1921 to 1926 he lived at Rossiter House, Braeburn Club, Nyack, New York. In later years his address became "Clarks-town Country Club, Nyack."

At his country club, Pierre presented the wisdom of the East to Americans through music, drama, and sports. In the early 1920s, Pierre and Blanche successfully tapped into the post-WW1 craze for self-improvement and plain living.⁶⁷ In many respects Pierre's theatrical approach was vintage Katherine Tingley-style Theosophy. Tingley had been the decisive figure for much of Theosophical spiritualism in America and California at the turn of the century and in the following two decades. At her seat in Point Loma, California, she had established a center to rival Adyar. Founded in April 1899, within a magnificent natural setting on a headland overlooking the Pacific, Point Loma opened with great pomp and ceremony through a vast congress that included religious rites, exhibitions, plays, lectures, and the laying of an Irish-style foundation stone. Tingley took to heart not only the spiritual welfare of her students, but also their cultural and aesthetic development. "Theater as sacrament was the focus of activities at Point Loma, with Katherine Tingley as director, celebrant and star

⁶⁵ When Pierre A. Bernard secretly married Blanche Devries on August 27, 1918, at Richmond, Virginia, he stated his parents to be "J. C. and Catherine C. Bernard," claiming he was born in Chicago, Illinois.

⁶⁶ The later populariser of Buddhism in America in the 1960s and 1970s, Alan Watts, benefitted indirectly from the interest in Orientalia encouraged by Pierre Bernard. His first wife was the daughter of wealthy Chicagoans whose mother had studied under Pierre, and who later became an important backer of Zen Buddhist masters. Alan Watts referred to Pierre as a "phenomenal rascal-master" who taught hatha yoga and "tantra," though wrongly calling him "Pierre Bonnard." See Fields 1992, 188.

⁶⁷ On the cultural developments in this period, see Washington 1995, 213.

performer.”⁶⁸

7. *Theos's First Wife, Viola Wertheim*

In the 1920s and 1930s, Dr. Pierre Bernard rode a rising wave of American fascination with Indian spirituality, doing what he could to stir that wave even higher.⁶⁹ When his nephew Theos Bernard arrived in New York in 1934, the wave was near its crest, and uncle Pierre was reigning potentate of the Clarkstown Country Club. No source records or implies that Theos studied under Pierre or was strongly influenced by him. Still, at a dinner party at his uncle Pierre's club, Theos met a woman who would change his life and open many horizons: the twenty-six-year-old Viola Wertheim (1907–1998).

⁶⁸ Washington 1995, 111. On the rise and fall of Katherine Tingley, see *ibid.*, p. 110ff. Though not a direct disciple of Blavatsky, Tingley claimed to have had her own direct contact with Khoot Hoomi in Darjeeling, as described in her autobiographic *The Gods Await*. At Point Loma she founded a successful school called “Raja Yoga,” and in 1919 chartered a less successful Theosophical University. On Tingley's life and the history of Point Loma, see also Greenwalt 1978.

⁶⁹ Tibet and Indian spirituality were romanticized by novelists of the period, for example in:
 Mundy, Talbot 1927. *OM. The Secret of the Abhor Valley*. Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merill and Co. / London, Hutchinson and Co. German translation: *OM, das Geheimnis des Abhortales*. Berlin, 1927 (Aschoff 1992, no. 2105). [An orphaned English girl is raised in a remote monastery in Western Tibet and then twenty years later fetched back to the West by her uncle Ommony. Mundy was a friend and admirer of the Theosophy guru Katherine Tingley.]
 Adams Beck, Lily Moresby [d. 1931] (1927 or 1928). *The House of Fulfillment: The Romance of a Soul*. (New York?) Cosmopolitan Book Corporation; London, Fischer and Unwin, 1927. Reprint: Los Angeles, Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989. German translation: *Das diamantene Zepter*, 1954 (Aschoff 1992, no. 82). [The artist Hew Cardonald travels to India, where he falls in with spiritual seekers and then journeys to a monastery in the western Himalayas. A story of love, adventure, and spiritual growth.]
 James Hilton 1933. *Lost Horizon*. London and New York, McMillan, and Co. German translation: *Irgendwo in Tibet. Geschichte eines Abenteurers*. 1937 (Aschoff 1992, no. 885). [Four Westerners are abducted and taken by plane to a lamasery in Shangri-la, high in the uncharted mountains of Tibet.]



Fig. 11. Viola Wertheim, the future Viola Bernard, ca. 1930 (Viola Bernard papers, Columbia U Health Sciences). After Hackett 2012, fig. 2.2.

Viola, whose family had a weekend house in Nyack, studied yoga and Oriental philosophy under Pierre, and she was in 1933 enrolled at Cornell Medical College in New York City. They hit it off. Theos returned to Arizona to settle his affairs and quickly returned to NYC, where he wanted to attend graduate school.

Friendship very quickly led to an engagement. Theos and Viola were married on Wednesday, August 1, 1934, at the bride's home at 315 E. 68th Street. Dr. John L. Elliot, head of the New York Ethical Culture Society, officiated.⁷⁰

Viola Wertheim was the youngest child of Jacob Wertheim and Emma Stern.⁷¹ Her late father, Jacob Wertheim, had been a multi-millionaire merchant, and her mother's ex-husband was Henry Morgenthau, Sr.⁷² Viola's father had amassed a fortune as a dry-goods merchant and was one of the founders of the General Tobacco Company. He was an important philanthropist, co-founding the Federation for

⁷⁰ *Daily News* (New York City), August 3, 1934, clipping courtesy of Grace Gordon. Theos was then living at 400 E. 57th St. This would be their shared residence. According to Paul Hackett, they were actually married on 26 July.

⁷¹ Kelly 1998.

⁷² This information thanks to Paul Hackett. Boswell 1965 wrongly calls her Henry Morgenthau, Sr's niece.

the Support of Jewish Philanthropic Societies.⁷³

Viola's family had built and owned a home in South Nyack (which she later inherited). She became involved in Pierre Bernard's Country Club as a teenager.⁷⁴ Viola's sister, Dianna Hunt Wertheim, was a disciple of Pierre from at least 1927 and married Pierre Bernard's private secretary, Percival Wilcox Whittlesey, in May 1929.



Fig. 12. Theos Bernard, ca. 1930. After Love 2010, 260.

8. *The First Yoga Manual*

Theos's first yoga manual, *Heaven Lies Within Us*, was published by Charles Scribner's Sons from New York in 1939.⁷⁵ Theos dedicated the book to his father. He also personally inscribed a presentation copy for his father with the words: "May his spirit live forever."⁷⁶ (Whose

⁷³ Or: Federation for Jewish Philanthropies. Clipping, *Daily News* (New York City), August 3, 1934. Courtesy of Grace Gordon.

⁷⁴ Viola W. Bernard, M.D., letter to Richard Stringer-Hye, January 15, 1992, local history files, Nyack Library.

⁷⁵ Could it have been somehow related to his Ph.D. dissertation "Tantrik Yoga," which he had unsuccessfully submitted the year before?

⁷⁶ TB archives appraisal, box 495-1.

spirit? That of Hamati or another late Indian guru of the family?)

Theos completed the book in California, signing the foreword: "Theos Bernard. Beverly Hills, California. August 1, 1939." Some of Theos's statements in this book could be interpreted as a declaration of independence from Uncle Pierre. In his foreword (p. 10), for instance, one reads, "Guidance of a teacher ... meant a journey to India, the home of yoga. There was no place in America where one could go for such training nor was there any one whose knowledge was sufficient to guide one." And on p. 46: "I knew I was still travelling in the Shadow of Truth rather than in its light. This could only be attained by going to India and being initiated."

Theos made a somewhat dubious assertion in the same book: he claimed to have met an Indian guru in Arizona in ca. 1930.⁷⁷ The aged wise man showed up suddenly to instruct him just at the moment he was needed.⁷⁸ Was this story an instance of "skill in means" (stretching the truth a little) to help establish his spiritual pedigree, as Uncle Pierre had done? Who among the Indian gurus could have been just passing through southern Arizona in the early 1930s? (Tucson did lay on the major east-west rail route of the Southern Pacific railroad, which linked Texas with southern California.)

Vivekananda on his second journey to the United States in 1899 had founded a temple in Los Angeles. This had been taken over by the swami Prabhavananda. But though they followed the universalist teacher Ramakrishna (d. 1886), these swamis were more orthodox Vedantins and did not propagate a Theosophical-style synthesis of wisdom religion that combined the common elements and best of all faiths.⁷⁹ When the Sufi musician Inayat Khan visited San Francisco in 1911, he found there a functioning Hindu temple where he was greeted by Swami Trigunatita and Swami Paramananda, the resident teachers.⁸⁰ Since the 1920s a draconian immigration law with regional quotas strictly limited the number of yearly entrants from India to a mere handful.⁸¹ One Indian guru in America whose star was still on

⁷⁷ Theos had begun experimenting with yoga as a teenager or university student in Arizona. In 1930 Alan Watts had similarly cut his adolescent yoga teeth by reading Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*. See the biography of Watts by Stuart 1983, 16.

⁷⁸ Among the Theosophists it was said that the Mahatmas would suddenly show up at a key moment in a seeker's life and bestow crucial advice or teachings. See Washington 1995, 58, for Olcott's critical brief contact with a (Himalayan) master—a contact now assumed to have been imaginary.

⁷⁹ See Washington 1995, 320.

⁸⁰ Keesing 1981, 67.

⁸¹ The Indian Sufi sage Inayat Khan was detained when trying to enter the USA and would probably have been sent back if a New York professor had not spoken up for him at his hearing, attesting to his previous visit. That master had not helped

the rise in 1930 was Krishnamurti, protegee of the Theosophical Society, who had by then cut his official links with the parent organization.

Though Theos's books were greeted by a universal silence from scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, the popular press did review Theos's books—and usually positively.⁸² The popular arena was where Theos's career could progress, and he remained a darling of the press despite his familial links with “Oom the Omnipotent”—as the papers disparagingly called Uncle Pierre. Nobody seems to have noticed then that the brand of yoga that Theos taught—always called “tantrik yoga”—and his method of teaching through public demonstrations both smacked strongly of Uncle Pierre. A lawsuit against Theos (“Donovan vs. Bernard [1942]”) for yogic malpractice seems also not to have dented his reputation in the least.

Still, with his growing academic qualifications including a B.A. from Arizona and M.A. from Columbia, Theos considered himself, among other things, a scholar. In 1936 before leaving for India, Theos joined the main learned association for Asian studies in the U.S.A. in those days, the American Oriental Society. (His wife, Viola, had by then been a member for eight years under the pseudonym “Viola White”, and Uncle Pierre, for twenty-two.) Mr. Theos Bernard appeared in the 1936 membership list as living at 400 E. 57th St., New York, the same address as his wife.

9. *Ganna Walska and the Birth of the Tibetland, California Dream (1941–1944)*

The young psychiatrist in training, Viola, and the ambitious young populariser of Buddhism and yoga found themselves unsuited for a long-term marriage. By 1938 they divorced, and Mr. Theos C. Bernard was living separately from Viola at 140 West 57th Street.⁸³ The next time he would marry, it would be to someone slightly more in tune with his spiritual aspirations.

his own case by answering the immigration inspector's questions ironically with inscrutable Sufi koans.

⁸² *New York Times*, April 2, 1939 (VII 9:1), review of *Penthouse of the Gods*. Many other clippings exist in the TB archives.

⁸³ By 1940, Mr. Theos C. Bernard at 795 5th Ave., New York, was the only Bernard still belonging to the A.O.S., a membership he continued the rest of his life. In 1945 he was “Dr. Theos C. Bernard” at the Lotus Club, 110 W. 57th St., New York. By 1947 he had changed his address to the West Coast: Dr. Theos C. Bernard, Box 187, Northridge, California.



Fig. 13. Ganna Walska (in 1940): free and wearing diamonds as big as pigeon eggs. Photo by Patrick A. Burns, New York Times. After Hackett 2012, fig 11.4.

One day in 1940 while giving a lecture and yoga demonstration in New York, Theos noticed a striking older woman in the audience who left a deep impression on him. The woman was Madame Ganna Walska.⁸⁴ Ganna had been invited by a friend to attend a yoga demonstration in Theos Bernard's studio suite at the Hotel Pierre. She read his book *Penthouse of the Gods* but was not impressed by him personally. Still, she signed up for daily lessons as a kind of exercise and weight control. Several weeks later he invited her to join his Wednesday evening seminar.⁸⁵

Walska, a wealthy woman with ambitions to become an opera diva that were never fully realized, was then married to but living apart from her fifth husband, Harry Grindell-Matthews, the inventor. A mature, intense Slavic beauty twenty years older than Theos, she was the Zsa Zsa Gabor of her day ("Don't take revenge, darling, take everything").⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The main source on the early life of Theos's second wife, Ganna Walska, is the memoirs she published while she was married to Theos in Walska 1943. Two recent monographs dedicated to her and her horticultural legacy, the Lotusland garden, are: (1) Gardner 1995. On her relationship with Theos, see Walska 1943, 118, "Husband #6." See also (2) Sharon Crawford 1996, "Ganna Walska Lotusland: The Garden and Its Creators." (California Companion Press.) 48 pages. The extensive archives of Ganna's papers at Lotusland include much correspondence with Theos.

⁸⁵ Crawford 1996, 17.

⁸⁶ It may be worth recalling that Uncle Pierre's wife with whom he collaborated so successfully, Blanche Devries, was (like Ganna) a singer with dramatic flair.

Ganna had returned to New York from Europe in October 1939, on the American Clipper, the last ordinary passenger ship to return to the USA after the start of war in Europe. She had known Theos's uncle and had learned some yoga at his Nyack club, but she had never been one of Pierre's intimate disciples. She later recalled:⁸⁷

During and immediately after the last war [World War One], such prominent and strikingly beautiful women as . . . were faithful followers of Dr. Pierre Bernard in his Westhampton colony. Dr. Bernard, or the "Nyack Omnipotent Om," as he was mockingly called by the press, advocated washing one's stomach three times a day as well as standing on one's head for protracted periods of time. I succeeded beautifully in standing on my head, although I did not continue it as a regular practice

Ganna Walska published her memoirs in 1943, the second year of her marriage to Theos. Entitled *Always Room at the Top*, the book is filled with rambling spiritual and philosophical reflections on the intense experiences of her life. The long account ends with the place and date: "New York, 1941."

Late in her narrative Ganna mentions meeting a young man "who taught me much about forgotten teachings—an old soul dwelling in a young Arizona boy, who already had time in the flower of his youth to gather much knowledge in India and Tibet. . . ." ⁸⁸ According to Ganna, Theos's romantic interests caught her completely by surprise.

In her memoirs she praised "the American boy" (Theos), as her master. ⁸⁹ The book has several other effusive mentions of Theos: "that same California-born prodigy..." ⁹⁰ and "Thanks to my youthful teacher..." ⁹¹ Theos had visited southern California in August, 1939, concluding his first yoga manual in fashionable Beverly Hills. ⁹² At his insistence, Ganna moved to California and bought two properties outside Santa Barbara: 1. Cuesta Linda ("Tibetland", later "Lotusland") in June, 1941; and 2. El Capitan ("Penthouse of the Gods") in September, 1941. ⁹³ Using Ganna's assets, Theos hoped finally to realize his goal of establishing an institution for the study of Tibetan Buddhist literature and culture: Tibetland. There Theos planned to provide accommodations for Tibetan lamas, who would translate their sacred writings into

⁸⁷ Walska 1943, 36.

⁸⁸ Walska 1943, 487.

⁸⁹ Walska 1943, 492.

⁹⁰ Walska 1943, 488.

⁹¹ Walska 1943, 494.

⁹² Bernard 1939b, foreword.

⁹³ Crawford 1996, 18.

English. The place would have room for a Tibetan temple, a library, and a museum in which to keep and display Ganna's considerable collection of art from Tibet.⁹⁴

The last pages of Ganna's memoirs are filled with notions of California as an important center of spirituality. She wondered whether California was destined to become "a spiritual capital of the future American empire—the Vatican of all Spiritual Truth seekers?"⁹⁵ She believed that America had become the birthplace of a future spiritual empire, etc.⁹⁶ Her memoirs end in effect with an advertisement for the Tibetland she was founding with Theos, "where the mystery of our being is to be unfolded to all truth seekers." The estate is even pictured in one illustration: "Tibetland in Santa Barbara."⁹⁷

10. *Gendun Chöphel, First Lama of Tibetland*

One of the lamas Theos hoped to invite to Tibetland was Gendun Chöphel (1903/5–1951). As a many-sided scholar, artist and writer who had collaborated extensively with Tharchin Babu and George Roerich in India, Gendun Chöphel had dreamed of such a journey to Europe and America. Theos Bernard, using Ganna's money, could promise to arrange that journey.

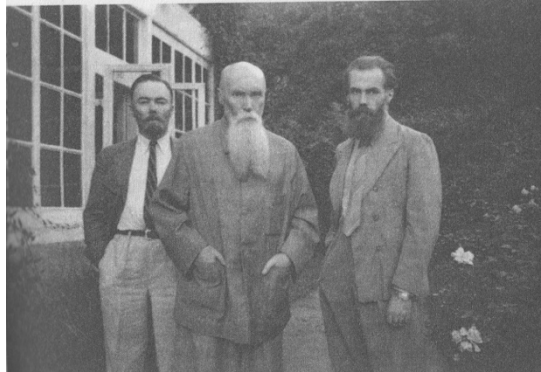


Fig. 14. The Roerichs in Kulu (father, Nicholas, in center; son George, to right; and son Svyatoslav Roerich (1904-1993), the artist, to left (courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York). After Hackett 2012, fig 12.3.

⁹⁴ Crawford 1996, 18. Ganna was also trying to sponsor the immigration of her brother at this time.

⁹⁵ Walska 1943, 503.

⁹⁶ Ganna Walska 1943, p. 476.

⁹⁷ Ganna Walska 1943, black and white photo, between pp. 488 and 489.

But with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the entry of the U.S.A. into the war, the American State Department blocked visas for people coming from Asia. This prevented the lamas from coming.⁹⁸ British India was already at war from September 1939, so the difficulties of wartime travel had begun in India two years earlier. Thus, the brief editorial note published with Gendun Chöphel's English-language poems in the *Mahabodhi Journal* [Calcutta], August, 1941, pp. 293-295, can now be understood. It stated that Gendun Chöphel had been invited to the USA by an "American Tibetologist," but that owing to the wartime conditions, this had to be called off.⁹⁹ Without a doubt, the "American Tibetologist" was the young man whom Tharchin Babu had accompanied to Tibet in 1937: Theos Bernard.

11. *Waiting for the Lamas: Tibetland on Hold (1941–1943)*

In fall and winter 1941, Theos pressured Ganna into marrying her, worried that he would be evicted from Tibetland after her death.¹⁰⁰ She had willed both properties to him, so she saw no need for the marriage. They received word from England that her fifth husband died in September 1941. Her attorneys arranged for a secret marriage at Las Vegas, Nevada, in July, 1942.¹⁰¹ She insisted that both sign a pre-nuptial agreement protecting her property in case of divorce.

One journalistic account asserted that Theos, in the manner of his uncle Pierre, fell "victim to a compulsion for the practice and teaching of yoga. A woman Theos taught reputedly went crazy, and her husband sued him for \$25,000."¹⁰² The legal case "Donovan vs. Bernard (1942)" relates to this.¹⁰³

At Santa Barbara, Theos wrote seven chapters of a work he never completed, "The True Nature of Things, by a Student." The surviving typescripts are dated "1942. Santa Barbara, Tibetan Text Society."¹⁰⁴ Another unpublished typescript from the period: "The Path of Purity by a Student, 1942."¹⁰⁵ Also perhaps from the early Tibetland period is a six-page typescript: "Establishing an Academy on Tibetan

⁹⁸ Crawford 1996, 19.

⁹⁹ Gendun Chöphel had published five other articles in the same journal, between August 1939 and January 1941. See Mengele 1999, 99, nos. 43-47.

¹⁰⁰ The following account of Theos and Ganna's marriage is told from the point of view of the available sources, i.e. primarily from Ganna's perspective.

¹⁰¹ Nevada marriage certificate no. 70809, dated July 27, 1942. According to the certificate, Theos Bernard married "Anna Trimbel [?]."

¹⁰² Charles Boswell 1965.

¹⁰³ TB archives appraisal, box 495-61,

¹⁰⁴ TB Archives appraisal, box 495-57.

¹⁰⁵ TB Archives appraisal, box 495-58.

Literature."¹⁰⁶

On sixteen Thursdays from October 8, 1942, to February 18, 1943, Theos held a series of down-to-earth lectures devoid of Asian arcane references.¹⁰⁷ Theos presented the wisdom of the East simply to war-preoccupied America, ending with a lecture about the desirability of vitality in old age.¹⁰⁸

13. *Scholarly Influences at Columbia University*

Though now based mainly in California, Theos and Ganna presumably lived part of every year on the East Coast. Theos decided to spend his time while waiting for "the lamas" by completing his Ph.D. in Philosophy at Columbia University in New York City. Ganna financed his education, including tutorials in Sanskrit and other languages.¹⁰⁹ This Ph.D. program continued the studies he had begun at Columbia in 1933, for which he had received his M.A. in 1938.

In 1943 Theos submitted his dissertation "T-A-N-T-R-I-C Yoga" to the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University.¹¹⁰ A carbon copy of the dissertation survives in TB archives appraisal, box 175-12, along with five pages of single-spaced typed comments of all dissertation committee members, including Schneider and Evans-Wentz. Five years before Evans-Wentz had helped evaluate an earlier version of this dissertation, and now in 1943 the reclusive scholar agreed to help again. Then sixty-five years old, living in California and blocked from visiting India by the war, he was the most venerable of Tibetan-Buddhism experts in the U.S.A., though (like Theos) he could not make direct use of Tibetan texts.

Theos mentions in the preface to his published dissertation, *Hatha Yoga*, p. 14, his indebtedness to "my teachers of India and Tibet, who, shunning public acclaim, must perforce remain anonymous." He also

¹⁰⁶ TB archives appraisal, box 495-59.

¹⁰⁷ Typescripts of these lectures survive in TB archives appraisal, box 495-59.

¹⁰⁸ In the early 1940s people in America were hunkering down for the war, even the more spiritually inclined. See Washington 1995, chapter 17, "Gurus in the War." At the same time Theos was trying to found Tibetland in 1942, another small experimental community was established by Heard at Trabuco, sixty miles south of Los Angeles. It was a small "club for mystics," intended to be non-dogmatic and non-sectarian. See Washington 1995, 323. Elsewhere the formerly successful country club-ashram of Uncle Pierre in Nyack was reduced by the war to a haven for refugees, a financial disaster from which it never recovered.

¹⁰⁹ Crawford 1996, 19.

¹¹⁰ The English translation of a similarly entitled book in French had in the meanwhile appeared in 1940 and was cited by Theos in his bibliography to *Hindu Philosophy* (the American reprint of *Philosophical Foundations of India?*) by J. Marques Riviere *Tantrik Yoga, Hindu and Tibetan* (London, Rider and Co., [1940]), translated from the French by H. E. Kennedy.

thanks Professor Herbert W. Schneider, "for his constant encouragement and helpful suggestions in the preparation of the manuscript," and Professor Henry Zimmer, "for his valuable guidance and technical assistance."

Columbia University was the fifth-oldest university in the United States and the oldest in New York State. Its department of philosophy in particular was an important center of the American Naturalism movement and—as academic home since 1905 to John Dewey—of Pragmatism. Since William James (1842–1910), pragmatic philosophers had taken a serious interest in religions, James being himself the son of a mystic. In his classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James mentioned Hindu yoga first among the various methods of methodically cultivating mystic consciousness:¹¹¹

In India, training in mystical insight has been known from time immemorial under the name of yoga. Yoga means the experimental union of the individual with the divine. It is based on persevering exercise.

John Dewey (1859-) and his pupils tended to exclude the supernatural and maintained that reality came within the laws of nature. Still, they were interested in religion.

14. Herbert Wallace Schneider

Theos acknowledged in two prefaces his indebtedness to his Columbia University professors, in both cases to Professor Herbert Wallace Schneider (1892–1984), eminent professor of religion and philosophy at Columbia from 1929 to 1957. Schneider, the son of theology professor F. W. Schneider, was a student of Dewey who took his Ph.D. at Columbia in 1917 (as a "classmate" of Will Durant) and afterwards joined the philosophy department at Columbia, first as Dewey's assistant. While still an assistant he helped Dewey organize a new curriculum in which he "developed unconventional perspectives and stimulated much active research."¹¹²

Schneider was a pragmatic naturalist and shared his teacher Dewey's concerns with social philosophy and ethical theory. His interest in social theory led him to his study of fascist Italy, including two stints of field work in 1928 and 1937. After serving as instructor and assistant professor, in 1929 he was appointed full professor of religion and philosophy, in the new program of religion in Columbia's philosophy department. He instituted a graduate seminar in the study of

¹¹¹ William James 1902 (repr. 1963), 307.

¹¹² Web site of the Selected Papers of Herbert W. Schneider, Collection 107, Special Collections, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

religious movements in American culture, which Theos presumably attended.

Schneider published numerous books on philosophy and religion, including histories such as his *History of American Philosophy* and a study of an early American utopian religious community founded by Thomas Lake Harris and Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888). Indeed, the book *A Prophet and a Pilgrim, being the incredible story of Thomas Lake Harris and Laurence Oliphant; their sexual mysticisms and Utopian communities. Amply documented to confound the skeptic, by Herbert W. Schneider and George Lawton* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1942) was completed by Schneider and Lawton while Schneider was still supervising Theos.¹¹³ The American prophet Thomas Lake Harris (1854–1942) led the utopian Brotherhood of the New Life in California—could Herbert Schneider have had an inkling Theos might be a latter-day Harris in the making?¹¹⁴ Herbert Schneider joined the American Oriental Society in 1936 and he remained active in the East-West Philosopher's Conference, but one of his few published ventures into a comparative study of Asian philosophy appeared in 1954: "Idealism—East and West," in *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 4, pp. 265-269.¹¹⁵

15. Heinrich Zimmer

The Professor "Henry" Zimmer whom Theos also thanked was Heinrich Robert Zimmer (1890–1943), the famed German Indologist and scholar of the symbolism of Indian art, whose *Philosophies of India* was posthumously published in 1951 and which was later translated into both German and French. He evidently anglicized his personal name from Heinrich to Henry after leaving Germany in 1938.

Born in Greifswald, Germany, Zimmer studied Sanskrit and linguistics at the University of Berlin, graduating in 1913. He taught at Greifswald from 1920 to 1924 when he was called to the Heidelberg chair of Indian philology, his largely nominal position for fourteen

¹¹³ On the colorful life of Harris's disciple and financial supporter L. Oliphant, see Margaret Oliphant 1892, *Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant and of Alice Oliphant, His Wife* (Edinburgh and London).

¹¹⁴ Schneider and Evans-Wentz were on the Ph.D. examining committee, and their detailed comments survive in the TB archives. But correspondence relating to Theos Bernard could not be located among the Selected Papers of Herbert W. Schneider, Collection 107, Special Collections, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

¹¹⁵ For a bibliography of Herbert W. Schneider, see the Pragmatist web sight, Columbia school.

years until forbidden to teach by the Nazis in February, 1938.¹¹⁶ He was one of at least nine German Indologists to be victimized by the Nazis because of their Jewish parentage or spouses¹¹⁷—his second wife was Christiane, daughter of the famous Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal.¹¹⁸ Zimmer with wife and three children managed to emigrate to England, where he taught unpaid at Balliol College, Oxford in 1939–1940. They came to New York by dangerous sea passage in May 1940, and in 1942 he took up a paid visiting lectureship in philosophy at Columbia. A colleague of Carl Jung, his publications on mythology and symbolism helped popularize Indian art in the West.

Heinrich Zimmer was thus lecturing on Indian philosophy at Columbia University (where Theos was doing his second degree) in spring, 1943, when he was struck by a sudden lung infection, which caused his untimely death.¹¹⁹ Zimmer's work on art-symbolism and Yoga (e.g. his *Kunstform und Yoga im indischen Kultbild* [Berlin, 1926], translated as *Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India*, Princeton, 1984) and his knowledge of philosophical, puranic and tantric works made him a natural source of expertise and lore for Theos.

16. Final Years with Ganna and the End of Tibetland (1945–1946)

In the mid-1940s, Ganna supported both Theos and his father, Glen Bernard. She also reluctantly paid in 1944 for the publication of his dissertation, renamed *Hatha Yoga; the report of a personal experience* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1944), his revised Ph.D. dissertation.¹²⁰ He dedicated the book "to Ganna Walska." As he explained in the preface (p. 11), he had written the book as:

the report of a Westerner who has practiced yoga under a teacher in India. For this purpose, I went to India and Tibet. After the 'grand tour'.... I became the sincere disciple of a highly esteemed teacher and settled down at his retreat in the hills near Ranchi.
... In order to further my studies, it was suggested by my

¹¹⁶ My sketch of H. Zimmer's life derives in part from the Duke University art library online directory. See also Margaret H. Chase ed. 1994, *Heinrich Zimmer: Coming into His Own* (Princeton, Princeton University Press), and the *Dictionary of Art*.

¹¹⁷ Pollock 1993, 95.

¹¹⁸ For some details on Zimmer's wife and life, I have consulted the postscript to Maya Rauch and Gerhard Schuster eds. 1991, *Christiane von Hofmannsthal: Tagebücher 1918–1923 und Briefe des Vaters an die Tochter 1903–1929*, pp. 181–183. Franz-Karl Ehrhard kindly referred me to this source.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Campbell (1904–1987), editor's foreword to Zimmer's *Philosophies of India*, p. v.

¹²⁰ This study is listed as a Columbia dissertation in the UMI listings and the Columbia University on-line catalogue, kindly checked by Tom Yarnall.

teacher that I go to Tibet.

(p. 12) My travels culminated in a pilgrimage to the holy city, Lhasa, where I was accepted as an incarnation of a Tibetan saint.

In 1944 Theos also produced a typescript on Tibetan grammar, marked "NY 1944." A corrected 221-page typescript of *Hindu Philosophy* dated "NY 1944" also survives.¹²¹

Theos and Ganna's relationship deteriorated in 1945. Bernard went to California in the autumn without her. In 1945 he registered the Tibetan Text Society (in Santa Barbara?), with bylaws and surviving letters and minutes.¹²² Ganna stayed behind in New York and plagued by a series of minor illnesses, had plenty of time to reconsider their relationship.¹²³

In Santa Barbara he prepared this year a 400-page typescript of "Philosophical Foundations of India" (Santa Barbara, 1945), evidently a reworking of his "Hindu Philosophy."¹²⁴ In spring, 1946, Theos filed for divorce, having Ganna served with divorce papers when she flew to the Burbank airport on May 29, 1946.¹²⁵ At this time he compiled a 6-page typed document on his marriage to Ganna and its problems, which gives many details about his activities in the 1940s.¹²⁶

Ganna arrived back at Tibetland to find that Theos had moved out, taking with him numerous valuable books and art pieces.¹²⁷ Theos sued Ganna for separate maintenance, saying he had become dependent on the lifestyle she had provided him. It was revealed in court that he had divorced another wealthy wife who had supported his early education and two years in India and Tibet. According to Ganna, he was caught perjuring himself about his financial situation.¹²⁸

Ganna reimbursed his legal expenses and paid him to vacate their other residence, the "Penthouse of the Gods." Reports of their divorce reached the major newspapers in mid-July.¹²⁹ On July 9, the *New York World-Telegram* carried the U.P. dispatch: "Fed Up on Yogi: Mme Ganna Walska Wants to Quit 'White Lama.'" In the midst of their divorce wrangling, Ganna lashed out at Theos, charging that he had threatened her with the yogi "power of kundalini" and well-nigh choked and strangled her when she refused his demands for money.

¹²¹ TB archives appraisal, box 495-60.

¹²² TB archives appraisal, box 495-57.

¹²³ Crawford 1996, 20.

¹²⁴ TB archives appraisal, box 896-14.

¹²⁵ Crawford 1996, 20.

¹²⁶ TB archives appraisal, box 495-60.

¹²⁷ Crawford 1996, 20.

¹²⁸ Crawford 1996, 20.

¹²⁹ *New York Times*, July 14, 1946, 31: 5, Ganna Walska divorced [Theos Bernard].

In summer 1946, Theos finished and published (Santa Barbara) a 65-page handbook of literary Tibetan. Newly separated from Ganna and Tibetland, Theos completed the little book on August 15, 1946, at Santa Ynez Mountain Lodge, Santa Barbara, California. (Santa Ynez is a town northwest of Santa Barbara, and the "lodge" was presumably located near there, in the San Rafael Mountains.) The handbook's inception dates to the Tibetland phase, for it was published by the Tibetan Text Society of Santa Barbara, California. This book was a small fruit of Theos's decision in the early 1940s to devote himself more to Tibet and its literary heritage. In the preface he wrote (p. vi):

Today Tibet remains the last unlocked treasure chest of ancient wisdom, for all that has been lost in India (and much has been lost) can be found living in Tibet. Not everything is borrowed, for the Tibetan has a fertile and independent mind which has enabled him to shed much light on the subtle and profound philosophical teachings of the past. This knowledge is available to those who will master the language.

Theos was fond of simplified summaries (see also his *Hindu Philosophy*), and in this little manual he reduced Tibetan grammar to eighty-nine points summarized from the handbooks of Csoma de Körös, Jaeschke and Hannah. The book concludes with a brief reading exercise from the biography of Mila Repa, with text, translation, and glossary. The passage Theos selected is the episode in which Mila edifies his wicked, greedy aunt, succeeding in the end in teaching and gratifying her. Theos's choice of this passage can hardly have been a coincidence, coming as it did just a month after his divorce from Ganna.¹³⁰

Many sources document the six-year relationship of Ganna and Theos. In addition to numerous letters from both sides and Ganna's published memoirs (which ends in ca. 1942), Ganna Walska also wrote a detailed account of her years with Theos which survives as an unpublished typescript: *Life with Yogi*.¹³¹

17. *The Second Journey to the Himalayas (1947)*

In 1946, Theos became close to another lady, Helen Graham Park, whom one later account called his "secretary and travelling companion."¹³² He went with her in ca. late 1946 to India, where he schemed

¹³⁰ Cf. Evans-Wentz edition, 190f.

¹³¹ The typescript of this book is cited by Crawford 1996, 20, and by Gardner 1995 in their books on Lotusland.

¹³² Murray Sinclair, "The 'White Lama' Must Be Dead, Most Agree Now," *Arizona Daily Star*, Sunday, March 5, 1972, p. 3E. Clipping courtesy of Valrae Reynolds, Newark Museum.

to realize his cherished goal of reaching Tibet a second time. Ever the American optimist, he seems confident he could overcome any obstacle. In the first yoga manual published eight years earlier, he repeated twice an adage from his guru: "No harm could come to one ... as long as he is purified by a knowledge of the Truth."¹³³ Had he really gained that knowledge?



Fig. 15. Theos Bernard, Visa photo, August, 1946 (Helen Graham Park Foundation). After Hackett 2012, fig 12.1.



Fig. 16. Helen Park, visa photo, August, 1946 (Helen Graham Park Foundation). After Hackett 2012, fig 12.1.

¹³³ Bernard 1939, 25.

Both in Tibet and in India, Theos's timing could not have been worse. Among the Tibetan governing circles in Lhasa, a group hostile to Reting had ruled Tibet for five years. The previous regent, the relatively fun-loving and approachable Reting, who had befriended Bernard in 1937, resigned his post in 1941 and was about to die under mysterious circumstances. Within a few weeks, the Reting conspiracy and the rebellion of the Sera Che monks in spring, 1947, would take place, ending with Reting's death—most likely by assassination.¹³⁴ The Tibetan scholar Gendun Choephel, whom Theos had worked hard to bring to California, had been arrested in July 1946, for political reasons—his involvement in the Tibet Improvement Party—and he was languishing in a Lhasa prison.¹³⁵

Theos applied to the Tibetan Kashag ruling council in January 1947, for permission to visit Lhasa for the Tibetan New Year. In February 1947, the Kashag refused permission on the grounds that many people were applying, and if one were permitted, all would have to be.

The real reason, many later speculated, was the outrageous claims Theos had made in his travelogue of his previous trip.¹³⁶ But Theos's previous book is unlikely to have been read by Tibetan governing bureaucrats, unless it had been specifically criticized and brought to their attention by the British Tibet cadre. The British administrators in India and their Tibetan specialists had been neither impressed nor convinced by the claims of Theos (after going to great lengths to accommodate him in 1937), and they were determined to snub him this time. To be sure, they had more important things to worry about than a visit by Theos: Britain was about to hand over political rule to the Indians in half a year on August 15, 1947.

Most likely the Tibetan government—an increasingly hidebound regency with a child Dalai Lama—was distracted by too many other worries to want to entertain eccentric foreign guests. A little before the Reting conspiracy, rumours reached Lhasa that the Chinese were escorting a pretender Panchen Lama to Tibet, and the Tibetan government was unsure what changes the impending changes of government in India might bring, come August. By summer 1947, the government was also scheming to send a trade delegation abroad.¹³⁷

As Theos waited month after month, still no official permission was forthcoming. Meanwhile, things went from bad to worse in many parts of India. Partition troubles in summer 1947 racked the Punjab and Bengal with "religious" communal riots. Moreover, an experienced old British representative—Gould's protegee, Hugh Richardson, who had

¹³⁴ On the Reting conspiracy and the rebellion of Sera Che, see Goldstein 1989, 464ff.

¹³⁵ See Goldstein 1989, 462, and Stoddard 1985.

¹³⁶ Cooper 1986, 14.

¹³⁷ Richardson 1984, *Tibet and Its History* (Boston: Shambhala), p. 172f.

been in Lhasa during the first two weeks of Theos's previous trip—began in 1947 a three-year stint in Lhasa for the new Indian government. Theos could expect no help from him.

The Tibet cadre of the Government of India tried in the 1930s and 1940s to limit access to Tibet. Non-British were generally kept out. The first American to come (Suydam Cutting) was a wealthy man, and the British arranged to have a particular caravan leader accompany him so they could keep an eye on him.¹³⁸ Two examples of even religious seekers who the British found “acceptable” were Edwin Schary and Lama Govinda. Neither Schary nor Govinda commented on political matters.¹³⁹ The German-born Govinda, however, though a naturalized British citizen, was not “acceptable” enough to be spared internment for several years during the Second World War—possibly because of his personal links to the Nehru family.

Theos was by no means the only one refused permission. No less a person than Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark was consistently refused entry to Lhasa during his entire sojourn as anthropologist in northern India during this period. Prince Peter later learned that the Tibetans' policy was to refuse permission to Lhasa unless some benefit accrued to them.¹⁴⁰

18. Mysterious Disappearance in the Himalayas

The dynamic Theos Bernard had reached a dead end. After being denied permission and giving up hope that he would ever succeed through official channels, he visited the “lama” of German-Bolivian ancestry, Anagarika Govinda, presumably travelling to Evans-Wentz's house in Almora in the Kumaon hills of northern Uttar Pradesh.¹⁴¹ Though “guru stardom” was slowly but surely approaching even the reclusive Govinda, he was then still hard at work on the mystical books that would attract a stream of Tibetan-Buddhist seekers to him in the 1960s and 1970s.

Govinda was a friend and tenant of Evans-Wentz, so Theos might have hoped for a cordial reception here. But Govinda and his Almora expatriate Buddhist friends were skeptical of Theos and believed that Theos's “book on his experiences in Tibet did not gain him popularity

¹³⁸ McKay 1997, 174 and 261, note 31.

¹³⁹ McKay 1997, 261, note 28.

¹⁴⁰ On Prince Peter's career, see Jones 1996, 24-34.

¹⁴¹ Coincidentally, though Lama Govinda was a recluse and very self-effacing, he married the artist and photographer daughter of the wealthy Petit family, Farsi industrialists of Bombay.

among the Tibetans."¹⁴² Govinda and some other Buddhists in India in the 1940s viewed Theos Bernard as a wealthy socialite whose relationship with Tibet was self-centered (like that of Alexandra David-Neel).¹⁴³

Theos asked Govinda how best to sneak into Tibet. Govinda tried to discourage him from attempting to enter without authorization, stressing the importance of governmental protection. Theos decided to ignore Govinda's advice.¹⁴⁴

Theos wrote detailed letters from India to his father in summer and fall, 1947, describing partition struggles and one mentioning the "usual murders."¹⁴⁵ By early September he had reached his decision. Since neither the authorities in India nor the Tibetans would help him reach Tibet, he decided to ignore the unrest and communal riots, and he headed across northern India toward Kulu in the western Himalayas (present Himachal Pradesh), planning to begin a small expedition from there.

Theos travelled to the Kulu Valley in northern Punjab. He was accompanied that far by Helen Park, but from there he set out on foot, walking to a remote region of the western Himalayas. He left on August 20, leaving Helen behind. Accompanied by a group of Moslem (Gaddi?) porters, his official destination was Ki monastery. Six days later Hindu-Moslem rioting broke out in the valley.¹⁴⁶

Though in retrospect his decision proved foolhardy, Theos may have thought he could turn the fluidity of the new political situation to his own advantage. One can only assume that he planned to dash across one of the unguarded passes of the Tibetan border when he was close enough. Once on the Tibetan side of the border, he may have planned to bribe his way the rest of the way to central Tibet through an emissary bearing generous gifts. After all, a similar strategy, with Tharchin acting as his emissary, had worked well in 1937.

Whatever his plans, they came to naught. Theos and his porters were caught in sectarian violence, and he disappeared, presumed murdered.

Helen Park waited four weeks in the Kulu Valley, in vain. On September 16, a Gurkha company commanded by a captain Wilson arrived with trucks, offering to evacuate Europeans and Americans who wanted to leave. Shortly thereafter, heavy late-monsoon cloudbursts

¹⁴² Winkler 1990, 128f. Theos was occasionally discussed in Almora in the late 1940s by Govinda, who in personality was the opposite of the flamboyant American celebrity.

¹⁴³ According to Winkler, Govinda's approach was not self-centered.

¹⁴⁴ Winkler 1990, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ TB archives appraisal, box 495-42.

¹⁴⁶ *New York Times* (AP), Oct. 31, 1947, version A.

washed out roads and bridges, stranding the trucks. Captain Wilson offered to investigate the disappearance of Theos, but then satisfied himself that the people in the area where the attack was reported knew nothing about it. Helen Park was eventually forced to trek 126 miles on foot to Simla.¹⁴⁷ From Simla, Helen Park went via Delhi to Calcutta, where she planned to wait for any further word about Theos. She arrived in New Delhi on October 29 en route to Calcutta, and the next day reported her husband missing and feared dead. She estimated that sometime between September 12 and September 15, shepherds had seen Lahouli tribesmen attack her husband's party and kill his Moslem servants. She believed he was already short of food and feared he might have lost his cold-weather clothing during the raid.¹⁴⁸ He was, she believed, attempting to return to get back to the Kulu Valley at the time of the attack.¹⁴⁹ She thought there was still hope he might be alive.¹⁵⁰

Shepherds (Gaddi Moslems?) had witnessed and reported the attack. When a search party was sent, no trace of him was found, and Helen Park clung to the hope that Theos, who spoke some Tibetan and knew the terrain, might have made his way out through either Kashmir or Tibet. He was last seen by a group of shepherds, who said tribal raiders had killed his Moslem servants. They did not know whether he had escaped.¹⁵¹

On November 3, 1947, the *New York Times* published a dispatch from New Delhi (Nov. 2) that the American author and travel lecturer Nicol Smith, recently returned from a trip to Western Tibet, said he had heard repeated reports that Bernard, another American author, was killed in the Kulu Valley. Smith reported that "several groups of Lahoulis, Tibetan Buddhists, whom he had met on a road told him that a white man had been killed when a Hindu mob attacked a trekking party sometime during the first two weeks in September."¹⁵²

Then, on 17 November 1947, a conflicting report reached the West, and Theos was reported safe. As the *New York Times* reported, Helen Park wrote on November 5 in New Delhi a letter to one of Theos's publishers, Dagobert Runes of the Philosophical Library. "Marauding tribesmen had attacked her husband's expedition and slain most of the carriers, but ... he had escaped." Yet she did not know his

¹⁴⁷ *New York Times* (AP), Oct. 31, 1947, version B.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, version A.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, version B.

¹⁵⁰ Also published in the *New York Times*, October 31, 1947, was a sketch of his career and a portrait.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *New York Times*, November 3, 1947, p. 10:7. Nicol Smith later published a book on his journey, *Golden Doorway to Tibet* (Indianapolis, 1949).

whereabouts.¹⁵³

Theos's companion, Helen Graham Park, used the name "Helen Graham Bernard" in letters dated 1947–1948 to U.S. and Indian officials.¹⁵⁴ One of her letters created uncertainty about his fate:¹⁵⁵ His present whereabouts were unknown, she said. That was the last word received in this country [USA] about the fate of Theos Bernard. Was he alive? Did he disappear into one of those Tibetan monasteries, which he described, where holy men shut themselves in cave-like grottos for the rest of their lives? It all seemed quite a mystery—a theme for a movie thriller. Yet Helen Park's doubts were mostly discounted as time went by and Theos never emerged from the mountains alive. When the American maker of travel films Lowell Thomas went to Tibet with his son Lowell Thomas Jr. two years later in 1949, they were told in Lhasa:¹⁵⁶ All of [our Tibetan friends] agreed that Bernard had been killed. The bodies of his servants were found. Although his body was never found, they said he had unquestionably been murdered, too.

Prince Peter of Greece later gave still more details in the *Explorer's Journal* about the attack. Theos was attacked in Kosar, a village about twenty kilometers north of Manali, on the way to Lahul and the Roh-tang Pass. Bernard spent his last night in Kosar, and the next morning he woke up to a lot of noise. He went outside to see what was causing the hubbub, and saw a band of excited, drunken Lahulis. They were marching down to Kulu to avenge a recent massacre by Moslems. Seeing Bernard's beard, they mistook him for a Moslem, and the leader of the Lahulis—an acquaintance of Prince Peter—shot him. They looted his caravan. When they learned he was an American, they got rid of his body and tried to hush things up.

After her return to the U.S.A., Helen Park kept contact with some of the main figures of the American Tibet scene.¹⁵⁷ On the East Coast, Helen was a friend of Eleanor Olson at the Newark Museum and lived for some years in New York. Some years later, Helen Park submitted an affidavit describing the circumstances of Theos' disappearance and almost certain death. Though it was no consolation to deceased Theos,

¹⁵³ *New York Times*, November 17, 1947, p. 5:2.

¹⁵⁴ Numerous letters from Helen Park to Glen Bernard in 1947 and various letters to her from Indian and U.S. agencies or embassies are found in the TB archives appraisal, box 495-42.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Jr. 1950, 125.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Winkler 1982, 81. "Mrs. Theos Bernard, whose husband had recently been murdered in India," visited Evans-Wentz in southern California. Winkler 1982, *ibid.*, mentions that Evans-Wentz was also visited at about the same time by "Gamma Walsha [sic], the art collector." "Gamma" was of course Theos's previous consort, Ganna.

he would probably have smiled to read a newspaper article in 1953, six years after his death, that he had “disappeared in Tibet”.¹⁵⁸

‘White Lama’ Declared Dead

Los Angeles, Nov. 27 (AP)— Theos Casimir Bernard, once called the only American ‘white lama,’ who disappeared in Tibet in 1947, was declared legally dead today. Mr. Bernard, who lived in Santa Barbara, Calif., and New York, was a son of Glen A. Bernard of suburban Northridge, Calif., who petitioned Superior Court to have his son declared legally dead to facilitate disposition of an estimated \$25,000 estate.

The judge accepted Miss Park’s statements and issued the requested order.¹⁵⁹

19. *Concluding Thoughts*

Though it is now clear that the unnamed “American Tibetologist” in Gendun Chöphel’s publication of 1941 was Theos Bernard, in the present paper I could only summarize the historical background of Theos and those others most involved with him on the American side. Several important questions could not be answered, such as whether Theos and Gendun Chöphel actually met face-to-face in 1937, and who connected them. One likely middleman in their relationship was, of course, their mutual friend Tharchin Babu in Kalimpong.¹⁶⁰ Tharchin seems to have been fond and supportive of both Theos and Gendun Chöphel.

The above sketch was pieced together in 2000 mainly from publications and not through direct access to the relevant archives. Now, five years later, it is possible to learn much more. Archives have been established for the papers of both of Theos Bernard’s long-lived and noteworthy wives—Viola and Ganna—and the papers of Uncle Pierre have also been preserved. The papers, books, and films of Theos, too, have finally found a safe home at the University of California, Berkeley, though they have not yet been made available to researchers.

¹⁵⁸ *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 1953, p. 9:6.

¹⁵⁹ Murray Sinclair, “The ‘White Lama’ Must Be Dead, Most Agree Now,” *Arizona Daily Star*, Sunday, March 5, 1972, p. 3E. Clipping courtesy of Valrae Reynolds, Newark Museum.

¹⁶⁰ A detailed biography of Tharchin Babu by Herbert Louis Fader has been recently announced: *The Life and Times of a True Son of Tibet: Gergan Dorje Tharchin*. Vol. 1 (of 3?), (Kalimpong?) Tibet Mirror Press, 2002. I have not yet been able to consult it for possible references to Theos and Gendun Chöphel. It also remains to be seen whether Tharchin Babu is mentioned in letters now surviving in the papers of Ganna Walska and Theos Bernard.

Several biographical projects have in the meantime begun, including book-length biographies of both Theos and his uncle Pierre.

It is not the task of a historian to wonder what might have happened had events taken a different turn. Still, one can hardly resist speculating how things might have gone had Gendun Chöphel managed to reach Santa Barbara by 1940. And how might the life of Theos Bernard have ended if he—with his Amdo lama-tutor safely in Tibetland—had not felt impelled in 1947 to make the fatal decision to enter Tibet at all costs? If the dream of Tibetland had only been realized, both men might well have lived longer and died less tragically in the healthier climes of California.

Addendum: Their Meeting in Calcutta

Previous to my earlier submission of this article for publication in 2005, Paul Hackett was kind enough to share one of his recent discoveries, answering for the first time definitively the question of how Theos first met Gendun Chöphel. His findings are based mainly on Theos's correspondence with Viola, and they form part of his book-length biography of Theos Bernard.

According to Hackett, Theos formally met Gendun Choephel for the first time in Calcutta at the World Parliament of Religions (February 28–March 6, 1937). In early February 1937, Theos had been staying in Kalimpong at the time of the Tibetan New Year, and he went to the Losar “Tea Party” hosted by his language instructor, Tharchin. Through Tharchin, Theos met the Kalmuk lama Geshe Wangyal (1901–1983, later active in New Jersey), who began teaching him about Tibetan religious literature and continued to do so until the lama left for London in May to work with Marco Pallis. Geshe Wangyal invited Theos to his own Losar dinner party, where Theos met several people, including Geshe Sherab Gyatso (Gendun Chöphel's ex-teacher), who was travelling with Ngagchen Rinpoche, both of whom were going to the international conference in Calcutta, en route to China.

When Theos heard that Younghusband would be attending the conference, he decided to attend without an invitation. Theos had previously met a retired general who had accompanied Younghusband on the 1904 expedition, and he now offered to cover the general's expenses if he would come with him to Calcutta and introduce him to Younghusband. The general accepted, and Theos got into the conference as a member of Ngagchen Rinpoche's party, with the general acting officially as Theos's interpreter. Younghusband had met Ngagchen Rinpoche in 1904, so Theos invited them both out to dinner as his guests. Through Ngagchen Rinpoche, both Younghusband and Theos were introduced to Gedun Choephel, who was also attending the

conference.

Theos quickly struck up a friendship with Gendun Choephel and began discussing in his letters to his wife the idea of inviting him to America to assist him as translator and informant for his research on tantra.¹⁶¹ But upon his return to America in late 1937, Viola rejected the idea of inviting Tibetan lamas and shortly thereafter, gave up on her marriage to Theos altogether.¹⁶²

Appendix A

The Family of Pierre Bernard

Pierre Bernard's parents Catherine C. (Kittie) Givens (b. ca. 1854, Iowa)¹⁶³ and Erastus Warren Baker (b. 1 June 1845, Buffalo, Scott County, Iowa) were married in Iowa in about 1877.¹⁶⁴ Pierre may have been born on 31 October 1876 at Leon, a township in Decatur County, in south-central Iowa near the border of Kansas.¹⁶⁵

His mother and Erastus Baker were divorced in ca. 1880, and he was the only child from that union.¹⁶⁶ Uncle Pierre later gained five half-siblings on his father's side, after Erastus W. Baker married his second wife, Alletta Margaret Hiatt (1859–1922).¹⁶⁷

1. Allie May Baker (b. July 1884, Kansas; d. 1961),¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ According to Hackett, a mere three weeks earlier, Theos had already invited Geshe Wangyal to come to America for the same purpose.

¹⁶² For more details, see Paul Hackett's 2012 biography of Theos Bernard.

¹⁶³ According to the "genealogy of Pierre A. Bernard," Local History files, Nyack library, Nyack), Catherine C. (Kittie) Givens (b. ca. 1854, Iowa) was daughter of Elizabeth Warner (1832–1911) and J. C. F. Givens (b. 1828). Her sister Ina Givens (b. 1860) married a Mr. Coons.

¹⁶⁴ International Genealogical Index, v4.02. A marriage in 1877 might necessitate moving Pierre's birth date to Dec. 1877, but this is not an exact date, and the marriage might have taken place one year earlier. Erastus Warren Baker was the son of George Washington Baker (1821–1909) and Eliza Maria(h) Clark(e) (b. 1829), whose other children included Dr. Clarence Baker (d. 1923) and Ida Baker (b. 1858). George Washington Baker's second wife was Susan Warner (1830–1913), whose sister Elizabeth Warner (1832–1911) was mother to Catherine C. Givens, mother of Pierre and paternal grandmother of Theos.

¹⁶⁵ In the transcript of his court hearing in New York City in 1910, Pierre refused to confirm his date of birth as 31 October 1877 at Leon, Iowa. Later he said it was 31 Oct. 1876, ("15 to 11 o'clock" =10:45 a.m.). Court transcript seen at the Rockland County historical museum.

¹⁶⁶ Gordon 2000, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Where not otherwise noted, this account follows the "genealogy of Pierre A. Bernard," Local History Collection, Nyack Library.

¹⁶⁸ She is also listed in the International Genealogical Index, v4.02.

2. Lula Fay Baker (b. 22 July 1886, Eureka, Kansas; d. 1935),¹⁶⁹
3. Ora Ray Baker (b. 8 May 1888, Albuquerque, New Mexico;¹⁷⁰ d. 1949). She married the Sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan (1888–1949).¹⁷¹
4. Lela Murie Baker (1891–1967), and
5. Earl W. [Warren?] Baker (1893-).

Erastus Baker and Alletta thus left Iowa for Kansas by summer 1884, and by 1888 were in New Mexico.

Appendix B

Press Reports on Pierre Bernard, 1910–1931

The following references have been drawn from a Vanderbilt University website devoted to Pierre Bernard (<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeIII/HTML/Oom.html>). The *San Francisco Chronicle* in particular was highly scandalized by his activities and kept an eye on “Oom” all the way from the West Coast.

May, 1910. “‘Omnipotent Oom’ Held As Kidnapper: Girls Give Startling Evidence Against Bernard’s ‘Sanitarium’ to District Attorney: Kept Like Prisoners: They Said Further He Excercised Something Like a Hypnotic Influence Over Them.” *New York Times* (New York), 4 May 1910, p. 7.

“Wild Orgies In the Temple of “Om”: Police Get New Light on the

¹⁶⁹ International Genealogical Index, v4.02. The U.S. Social Security Death Index lists (a different?) Lula Baker, b. May 1886, as dying in Yuma, Arizona, on 15 Sept. 1971. There are towns named Eureka in six different counties of Kansas!

¹⁷⁰ International Genealogical Index, v4.02.

¹⁷¹ *The Encyclopedia of American Religions* listed Theos Bernard, nephew, as the third of Pierre Bernard’s famous relatives. The other two were: (1) Mary Baker Eddy, a distant relative through marriage to a cousin of his, and (2) Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882–1927), Indian musician and Sufi master, who founded the first Sufi group in the West. Hazrat Inayat Khan married Pierre’s half-sister Ora Ray Baker (1888–1949) [in Paris, March, 1913?, when she took the name Amina Sharda Begum], of whom Pierre was the guardian. Hazrat Inayat Khan’s life is told in the biography by Sikar Van Stok and Daphne Dunlop 1967, *Memories of a Sufi Sage, Hazrat Inayat Khan* (The Hague). Another biography is by Elisabeth De Keesing 1981, *Hazrat Inayat Khan*. Yet more information is given by their son Pir Vilayat Khan in his book *The Message in Our Time* (New York, Harper and Row), p. 306f. According to the “genealogy of Pierre A. Bernard,” Local History files, Nyack library, Nyack, Hazrat and Amina’s children were: Noor Khan (1914–1944), Vilayat Khan (1916-), Hidayat Khan (1917-), and Khair (Claire) Khan (1919-). The first daughter, Noor Khan, was the Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan alias “Madeleine” who was sent as a wireless operator in 1943 to France, where she was betrayed to the Nazis and shot at Dachau. Jean Overton Fuller told her life story in the book *Madeleine (Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan)*.

Doings of Fakers of New York." *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco), 5 May 1910.

"Women Kept In His 'Mystic Temple': Serious Charges Against a Young Native of India Arrested in New York." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 May 1910.

"Girl Throws Light On Tantrik Circle: Doings of Om Revealed in Court During Hearing." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 May 1910.

"Bernard Known to Local Police: Was Identified With the Mystic 'Order of Tantrik' and 'Bacchante Club,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 May 1910.

"Nautch Girl Tells of Oom's Philosophy: Gertrude Leo Says She Believed That He Had Supernatural Power: She Loved and Feared Him: Sister Interrupts Hearing and Berates His Lawyer. The Oom is Held for Trial." *New York Times*, 8 May 1910, p. 20.

June, 1910. "To Take Testimony in Portland On 'Om' Case." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 16 June 1910.

September, 1910. "Oom, the Omnipotent To Escape Prosecution." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 September 1910.

October, 1919. "N.Y. Society Joins New Cult: 'High Priest of the Yogis' Opens Colony at Nyack; Prominent Women Involved." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 October 1919.

October, 1922. "Country Club Specializes in Sex Worship: Initiates, Known As Tantrik Yoga, Hold Wild Orgies in Nyack New York: Dr. Bernard is Head: Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt Spent \$200,000 Financing Oom the Omnipotent." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 October 1922.

February, 1923. "'Oom' Loses by One Vote: Head of 'Tantrik Cult' Nearly Defeats Candidate for Village Trustee." *New York Times*, 28 February 1923.

December, 1925. "Two Coffins Used at Wedding Fete: Weird Ceremony Said to Have Been Held at Club Operated by 'Oom the Omnipotent,'" *New York Times*, 21 December 1925, p. 14.

November, 1931. "Oom Named Bank Head." *New York Times*, 15 November 1931, p. 33.

*Appendix C**Further Notes on Hamati and Glen Bernard*

Though the main text was written in 2005, I am adding the following notes in September 2021.

*Main Published Sources**1. Two Published Biographies of Theos*

To begin with, I would like to mention the existence of two highly relevant detailed biographies that were published in 2011 and 2012. They include two detailed books on the early American Tibetologist, Theos Bernard:

Paul G. Hackett 2012. *Theos Bernard, the White Lama. Tibet, Yoga and American Religious Life*. (New York: Columbia University Press).

Douglas Veenhof 2011. *White Lama: The Life of Tantric Yogi Theos Bernard, Tibet's Lost Emissary to the New World*. (New York: Harmony Books).

The books of Hackett and Veenhof, though very helpful in many ways, complement the present article rather than completely replace it. For instance, regarding the important teacher of Theos at Columbia, Veenhof 2011, p. 41, skipped over the presence of the for Theo crucial figure, Prof. Schneider, who served as his professor for philosophy of religion (a Pragmatist standing in the tradition of William James). Even Hackett, who provides many useful details about him (p. 40), and who comes from Columbia, does not seem to realize that Schneider had written (during this very period) a highly noteworthy book on American mystics and California utopias.

It is also interesting that (though both Hackett and Veenhof give very accurate and detailed accounts) neither document in the same detail as here Theos's interactions with the crucial British Tibet cadre in the 1930s as I have documented from the intelligence files. I quote more original letters and news clippings.

The books of Hackett and Veenhof both document clearly the importance of Gendun Chöphel for Theos and his plans. Hackett does so in the most detail, mentioning his collaboration work with George Roerich in Kulu and also, in detail, his attempts to come to America to work with Theos. Hackett also deals with such varied things as Gendun Chöphel's arrest and imprisonment in Lhasa, early life in Amdo, current situation in India, high praise by Jinorasa, and past translation

work in India.

It is fascinating to also read that Gendun Chöphel first began his working on Ancient Tibetan (Dunhuang) historical texts (cf. his famous *Deb ther dkar po*) here, (p. 122.) helping Tharchin continue with the texts left in Kalimpong in 1931 by Jacques Bacot. (p. 119). To explain the background, he tells quite a lot about the connection with the Indian Buddhist Sanskrit manuscript seeker Rāhula Sankrityayana. The only gap I noticed in Hackett's magisterial sketch is that Gendun Chöphel did have a job at first for Rāhula, cataloging his Tibetan collection now in the Bihar Research Society, Patna.

Also worth mentioning as an important source on Theos Bernard is Julia M. White, "Tibet in the 1930s: Theos Bernard's Legacy at UC Berkeley," [Cross-Currents e-Journal \(No. 13\)](https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-13/Bernard).

Jul <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-13/Bernard> ia M. White, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

As a source of rich materials about early American Tibetologists I should mention "Tibetology in the United States of America: A Brief History" by Donald S. Lopez, Jr.

2. *A Biography of Pierre Bernard*

The third biography is a very helpful book. Published after 2005, it is by Robert Love, and it tells much more about Theos Bernard's rascal uncle:

Robert Love 2010. *The Great Oom: The Improbable Birth of Yoga in America*, New York, Viking.

We should note that Love confirms in great detail the existence of Pierre's real-life Tantric guru, Hamati, who went back to India in 1908, after Pierre paid him \$5,370 in gold coin in Seattle. (Love 2010 records this on p. 45.) And he helpfully reproduces the sole surviving photo of Hamati! What is known about Hamati's origins? As Hackett (p. 431, note 11) explains:

How and why Hamati came to be in Lincoln, Nebraska in the 1890s is unclear. Some have speculated that he might have come to America to work in a circus act as part of a traveling carnival. Little information about his identity is known. He was self-described as the son of a French woman and Persian man, born in Palestine and raised in India in the tantric yoga traditions of Bengal. (Source: Love, *The Great Oom*.)

According to a long footnote in Love's book (p. 351, note 14), this is

known about Hamati's own guru, the yogi-adept Mahidhar, according to Pierre's own statement and legal deposition:

As for guru lineage, Perry Baker's own guru had a guru. A yogi-monk-ascetic named Mahidhar, who trained the young Hamati from the age of seven until he turned twenty-six, as Bernard recounts in PAB statement and PAB deposition. Hamati's guru is acknowledged by Swami Ram Tirath, a legitimate Hindu monk who said he knew of two great tantric masters in India, in "Mahidhar and Yogi Gyanananda," in an interview in the *IJTO (International Journal of the Tantric Order?)* conducted by D. J. Elliot.

Hackett, p. 102, also mentions a very old yogi then still alive in the 1920s, named Madhavadasī. (I think this was a more correct spelling for Hamati's guru) called "Mahidhar" in the single reference (based on memory). Glen had met that yogi in 1925. He was: Paramahansa Sri Madhavadasji Maharaj (1798–1921) was a great Master of Yoga from Bengal, who after 50 years of traveling India by foot and practicing yoga in the solitude of the Himalayas, had settled, at the age of 80, to begin teaching.

Further Remarks

Re: Hamati, Dan Martin by email confirmed that the name Hamati was Syrian.

On Theos's middle name, Casimir, it is a real name and not a misspelling of Kashmir, as I guessed above. In fact: Casimir is used predominantly in the English and German languages, and it is derived from Slavonic origins. The name's meaning is declaration of peace, destroyer of peace. The name is derived from the Polish Kazimierz. The first element is the Slavic 'kazic', but the second element is not known for sure. The Old Slavonic word 'meri' (meaning great, famous) was often re-interpreted as the medieval word 'mir,' Consequently, the name was interpreted as 'declaration of peace,' However, the name could also have the opposite meaning 'destroyer of peace,'

Notes on Glen Bernard and his Yogic Legacy

Hamati had at least one other American disciple (Pierre's half-brother Glen) who remained a quieter, sincere chela, and he was important for Theos in many ways and at many stages. (He hated the approach of and rejected the showmanship of his quasi-yogi con-man older half-brother.) According to Love 2010, 261 Glen left the tantric order by 1906. Over the years he sometimes worked as chemist and financed his travels and long periods of solitary yoga practice. Over the years he

never changed his bad opinion of Pierre. In Hackett 2012, 63, there is a beautiful quote where Uncle Pierre described Viola's future father-in-law, someone he had known well since childhood. (Viola's mother has asked what kind of family and people they are.) Pierre says, as Theos quotes him: "My father [Glen Bernard] was a man of excellent character—very studious, well read—and had an excellent mind. My mother was well educated and also of strong character." Theos was fully expecting Pierre to later change his tune and give a much more critical account of his old nemesis, and wanted to prepare Viola for that eventuality, too.

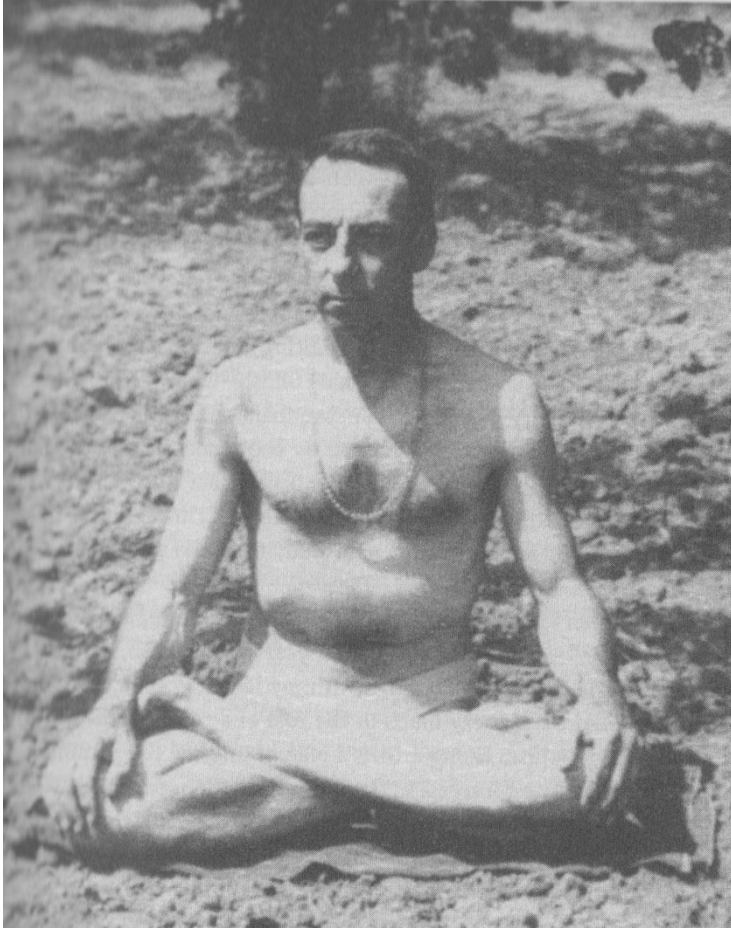


Fig. 17. Glen Bernard (Theos Bernard papers, Bancroft Library). After Hackett 2012, fig 4.2.

One of the people who is a bit strange in ways but consistently comes across as sincerely practicing yoga as a spiritual path is Glen Agassiz Bernard—Theo's father. (Glen Bernard was born on 23 January 1884, in Humeston, Wayne, Iowa, the first son of John C. Bernard (age 32) and Kittie Given Bernard (age 30).) She had previously had one child (Perry or Pierre) with her short-lasting Baker husband. According to Love 2011, 11, Glen was the first of five boys born to that couple in that town. According to searches on the FamilySearch.org website the five boys were:

1. Glen A. Bernard (1884–1976)
2. Clyde J. Bernard (1887–1970), married in 1917 to Edna Beck in LA
3. Ervin (Irvin) E. Bernard (1891–1962)
4. John Bernard (died young)
5. Ray D. Bernard (1899–), lived Maricopa, Arizona, with wife Kathryn.

Glen probably first became involved as a teenager with his yoga guru Hamati, whom older brother Pierre had first met in Lincoln, the capital of Nebraska, in 1889. The young Bernard family went to California in early 1890s, but in 1896, the parents move back permanently to Iowa, bringing Glen and the younger brothers. (According to Love, p. 15.) As adults, Glen and the two brothers closest to him in age lived most of their lives in Los Angeles. Glen is such an odd character—he is a would-be hermit who abandons his young son and wife because he wants to drop out of normal lay life. In 1908 he was a deadbeat dad, abandoning his son, but for a higher spiritual purpose. His main love in life was doing yoga retreats. (He died on 1 Oct. 1976, at the age of ninety-two, leaving a gigantic pile of Theos memorabilia with his former housekeeper, Ms. Gertrude Murray, who passed away herself in 1998, leaving the huge pile intact.). According to searches on the FamilySearch.org website, Glen A. Bernard shows up as a married lodger in the 1910 census in Fillmore, Ventura, Cal. In the 1920, 1930 and 1940 ones he is staying in Los Angeles city, and in 1940 he is divorced, living with his brothers Clyde (a widower) and Irven (Ervin) Bernard (who is single). He did have draft registration for WW1 and shows up in passenger lists for entering the USA in 1926 (in San Francisco, on the ship *Siberia Maru*) and in 1937, returning from India to New York City on the ship *Hamburg*. When Theo's claims in one of his 1930s yoga books he has been contacted by an "Indian guru," it was evidently his own yoga expert father he was referring to! Glen had made a long trip there in 1926, visiting India as part of his continuing spiritual quest, and warned his son about his coming American university studies:

"Don't study law anymore!" he said, "Take up a main subject more like philosophy!" According to Love's book (p. 34), Glen came from Iowa to the West Coast to live in 1904, was then aged twenty, staying very briefly with his older brother and guru Hamati. The occasion for coming was the death of his father in 1904. He was clothed and fed by the group (his brother) but was asked to work for the Tantric Press part their fledgling Tantric Order, helping organize its tiny publications department. According to Love (p. 44), Glen left the group very quickly, in 1904, when his half-sister Ora Rae came. The studious, well-meaning proto-hermit Glen must have been very sad when his authentic yoga guru (Hamati) left the USA in 1908, and the job of local guru was taken over by a big fraud (an early American fakir who was also a faker). (This is also the year of Theos' birth.)



Fig. 18. Glen Bernard (Theos Bernard papers, Bancroft Library). After Hackett 2012, fig 5.2.

Glen's First Trip to India in 1925/26

According to Hackett (pp. 54-64), Glen went for his first trip to India in late 1925, going by steamer to Calcutta (which was home of the Bengali yoga tradition and of one of his minor yoga teachers in San Francisco, Sukumar Chatterji, in the early 1920s). Hamati's guru was also from there. Calcutta was the capital city of British India and also home to seats of higher learning and publishing. According to Hackett 2012, 54 Glen in 1926 was close friends with (the true Arthur Avalon behind the books) Atal Behari Ghosh (disciple of Swami Vivekananda), who was also a close friend and helper of Evans-Wentz. As Hackett 2012, 57 also tells, Glen and was during that trip also close to Kalikacharan Roy Chaudhuri (the eldest son of the late Swami Vimalananda). Hackett 2012, 102 later has an interesting passage about the importance of religion for yoga according to Yogendra.

Glen's Second India Trip in 1935

After the 1926 visit, Glen kept in touch with his main Indian friends and contacts by letter. He had wanted to go back for many years but could not afford it (during the Great Depression). But then he was sent ahead to India in 1935 as a paid research assistant, mainly gathering sources and contacts for his son, who by then had become a Columbia grad-student (funded by his son's well-healed new wife, Viola). One interesting development then is that by the early 1930s Glen had started teaching a few students in California, but very privately. (See Hackett, p. 437, note 14.) Meanwhile, in a letter to Viola before leaving for India (February 1935), secretive Glen not just admitted that he was by then a well-trained yogi, but also described what it might mean to him to have his son as fellow yogi to share yoga with:

I don't believe there is a more lonely individual living than the well-trained yogi. Yet just as he is capable of the greatest loneliness, he is also capable of the greatest happiness. So, to put it in a few words, a companion in yoga is a blessing rare to be found.

On his second trip, Glen first arrived in Bombay in June 1935. In September he was looking in Calcutta for tantric yogis for Theos. (Hackett, p. 68.) Eventually in India Glen was very saddened by the low state in which Indian tantric yoga practice survived. He told Theos, "You can practice yoga better these days in the American Southwest and in California!"

For me Hackett's detailed account of Glen's second trip includes

memorable details such as that he was avidly using the opportunity to do retreats himself, though he kept corresponding with important contacts. It was very impressive to see Evans-Wentz at that point also very actively helping Glen locate in other parts of India rare and hard to trace tantric swamis. (See Hackett, p. 73.) This was obviously another field very close to Evans-Wentz's heart. For Theos in the early 1930s, Evans-Wentz was no less than the "most reliable researcher in Buddhist tantric studies." (See Hackett 2012, 44). But also for Glen's tantric yoga he was amazingly helpful! (It is astounding what Evans-Wentz accomplished, bit by bit, book by book, from 1927 on, even leading to an honorary doctorate at Oxford in 1931 for the first two books.) So, we should count his 2 or 3 years spent personally learning under his main lamas in Sikkim as making him a "genuine" Tibetologist. No wonder Theos was also sure to include him as a member of his thesis committee back in Columbia. (He would turn sixty years of age in 1938.)

Meanwhile in India, Glen, who was close to Evans-Wentz and a few others, was in 1936 crucial for Theos's deciding to go quickly to the Himalayas and seek out Tibetan teachers there. Though Theos's wife Viola was not at all pleased to depart from the tourist circuit, Glen insisted that they all travel to Darjeeling. (In the hope of meeting genuine highly realized masters). The tantric swamis that Glen was hanging out with in those days were not at all anti-Buddhist; they thought of it as a living Vedanta-like spiritual cousin of their tradition.

The trip to Darjeeling in September 1936 was crucial for Theos to establish his Tibetan connections. Theos and Glen met the important person Jinorasa (Young Men's Buddhist Association); Glen had in May 1936 contacted Jinorasa by letter. They also explored contacts through Laden-la, i.e., S. W. Laden-la (1876–1936, b. Darjeeling), one of Evans-Wentz's main collaborators, who would pass away at the end of that year. This crucial meeting also introduced Theos to none other than the noteworthy Tibetan scholar *Gendun Chöphel*! (This crucial trip to Darjeeling in 1936 is described by both Veenhof 2011, 58, and Hackett, 2012, 94.)

Glen was, in general, not in favor of Theos devoting a lot of time to learning Tibetan language. He was during that period facing illnesses and plagued with frequent angry outbursts. He was also completely burned out on India and having to stay there. Glen also faced a problem using his return ticket back to the States on a Dollar Line steamship, which only departed Calcutta once every four months! (Hackett 2012, 123.)

A Sufi Matrimonial Connection in the Family

A noteworthy romantic connection bloomed for one of the Baker sisters, the third one, who was living with Pierre in New York and New Jersey in 1910 to 1912. Named Ora Ray, she had joined Pierre's family in 1904 when Glenn left, and she eventually married a very prominent Sufi master (as mentioned above in Appendix A). Love (p. 86f.) says she was in 1912 assisting Pierre at the organization's home with teaching, bookkeeping, and housekeeping. She fell in love with the handsome visiting musician and finally, a year after he had left, had to elope to Belgium in 1913, though her older brother Pierre did everything he could to stop the match. (He started throwing away their letters and bad-mouthing his future brother-in-law.)

According to Wikipedia, her husband, Inayat Khan Rehmat Khan (5 July 1882–5 February 1927), was a professor of musicology, singer, exponent of the saraswati vina, poet, philosopher, and pioneer of the transmission of Sufism in the West. He toured the United States with his brother Maheboob Khan and cousin Mohammed Ali Khan between the years 1910 and 1912. In New York, he met the woman who would become his wife, Ora Ray Baker (henceforth known as Ameena Begum). On Inayat Khan's troubles entering the USA, see also above, note 81.

As mentioned above, note 171, the tragic compiler of a *Jātaka* collection, Noor Inayat Khan was their daughter, who was also the niece of both Glenn and Pierre! According to Wikipedia, Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan (1 January 1914–13 September 1944), also known as Nora Inayat-Khan and Nora Baker, was the eldest of four children, born on 1 January 1914, in Moscow. Her siblings were Vilayat (1916–2004), Hidayat (1917–2016), and Khair-un-Nisa (1919–2011).

As a young woman, Noor also began a career as a writer, publishing her poetry and children's stories in English and French and becoming a regular contributor to children's magazines and French radio. In 1939, her book *Twenty Jataka Tales*, inspired by the Jātaka tales of Buddhist tradition, was published in London by George G. Harrap and Co. (The American edition: Noor Inayat Khan and H. Willebeek le Mair; Philadelphia: D. McKay.) This was the retelling of Buddhist Jātaka tales by the daughter of an important modern Sufi master. She died as an Allied secret agent in France during World War 2.

Final Reflections about Glen

I have given Glen Bernard and his status as first secretive Los Angeles anchorite some thought. What was going on in his mind (as he abandoned his wife and son and tried to live as a *sannyasin*)? Finally, I

would like to share my ideas with you, Dan, as perhaps the last remaining long-suffering reader of this article.

Our question is also: What must have happened at some crucial stage between Glen and Hamati? The impressionable teenager Glen was so smitten by his saintly teacher, one of whose remarkable aspects was that he had renounced ordinary lay life and lived as a renunciate. In brief: Glen while still a beginner was trying to imitate him outwardly.

And I imagine that as a mystical teacher, Hamati must have waited for a perfect moment to spring his world-changing teachings upon the sincere and bright young American from the Midwest. I can imagine that Hamati took him aside and quietly whispered powerful *nyengyud* words of instruction like: "Turn your mind within, Glen! Keep watching it, quietly and clearly! Don't be distracted by the objects of desire! Keep watching, Glen, now try this posture!"

So, I imagine that under Hamati's brief tutelage, Glen basically became addicted to watching his own mind. This would have turned him into the first secret tantric hermit of Los Angeles. At least, that is my own *gongter*-style reconstruction in 2021.

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manuscripts. While on his way, rioting broke out among the Hindus and Moslems in that section of the hills; all Moslems including women and children in the little village from which Theos departed were killed. The Hindus then proceeded into the mountains in pursuit.... .

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