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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Conspiracy Theories of the Illuminati in Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*

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Abstract

Famous American authors Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Joseph Shea are considered to be one of the best conspiracy thriller fiction writers. Both were impressed by conspiracy theories. Both have explored conspiracy theories about secret societies like the Assassins, Knights Templars, Freemasons, the Illuminati, and conspiracy theories about depopulation agendas, cults, anti-Semitism, discordianism, New World Order, famous assassinations and world domination plans in *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* (1975). Terms like conspiracy theories, secret societies, Freemasons, and the Illuminati, Baphomet, Assassins, and their symbols like pyramids, the number 666, the All-Seeing Eye or one eye symbolism, Satanic or Devil worship are used in movies, cartoons, reality shows, literature, music and popular culture. Secret societies have become one of the most attention seeking topics for fiction writers, and mostly the conspiracy thriller fiction writers like Dan Brown, Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea have explored them in their works. Conspiracy theories have become a new burning topic of debate and research for psychologists, social science and literary researchers. The 2009 movie *Angels and Demons* based on the same titled novel by Dan Brown and famous conspiracy theorist David Icke's books and videos have also done a spurious publicity of this secret society. So it is necessary to know what this Illuminati is. This paper is focused on the conspiracy theories and questions about the existence of the Illuminati.

The Voice of Creative Research

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Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea are considered to be the giant figures of conspiracy fiction genre. Their work in the field of conspiracy fiction is really praiseworthy. They are influenced by discordianism, conspiracy theories, and anarchism. In *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*, they have explored each and every kind of conspiracy theories about secret societies, famous Illuminati members, cults, assassinations of famous personalities like J. F. K, lost cities like Atlantis, government surveillance on citizens, germ warfare, devil worship, and Bible end time prophecies about antichrist etc. “A conspiracy theory is the idea that someone, or a group of someone, acts secretly, with the goal of achieving power, wealth, influence, or other benefit” (Hodapp, 10). In other words, a conspiracy theory tries to answer the unanswered questions that are raised upon any event that has happened. A secret society is a group, its entity is recognized by people but its members, working methods and gatherings are secret. A secret society, in the light of conspiracy theories, work secretly for mostly achieving power and domination and uses its puppet fronts for recruiting members e.g.- Freemasonry is considered to be the front for the Illuminati.

Illuminati- The word Illuminati is plural of Latin word Illuminatus that means enlightened and it is considered by various conspiracy theorists a secret society which have many celebrities, bankers, politicians, artists, military generals, writers and other high profile people as its members and they are working secretly for it. It is a historical fact that the real Illuminati was founded by an ex-Jesuit, Adam Weishaupt, who was a professor and Freemason in Bavaria, Germany. It was founded by him on 1st May 1776 and was suppressed in 1786 by the Bavarian government but conspiracy theorists say that it was in existence before its official starting in Bavaria and the Bavarian Illuminati after 1785-86 was not ended; rather its members migrated to many nations and intruded into their main institutions and executed their plans.

In the trilogy *The Illuminatus!*, Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea have explored conspiracy theories that they (comrades of the Illuminati) have various subgroups. They can start war in nations, can assassinate anyone, wage revolutions or kill millions of people by viruses or biological weapons. In the trilogy they have used several conspiracy theories about the Illuminati, its history, works, symbolism, members and also extensively discussed its goals. *The Eye in the Pyramid* is placed as the first novel in the trilogy. It refers to the ‘Eye of Providence’ or the ‘Eye of Horus’ and it is asserted to be the symbol of the Illuminati. The theme of Illuminati world domination plan is dominant in all the three novels. The first book of the first novel starts with its German name *VERWIRRUNG* (chaos or confusion) and a quotation from novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (1978) by Afro-American author Ishmael Reed, “The history of the worlds is the history of the warfare between secret societies” (3).

In the trilogy, a character named Joe Malik is the deskman of ‘Confrontation’, a left-wing magazine. The office is bombed by someone and the task of inquiring about the attack is decided to give two New York detectives named Soul Goodman and Barney Muldoon. They start discovering about it and very soon come to know that Mr. Joe Malik, one of the associate

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 7 & Issue 1 (January 2025)

editors of the magazine, has been disappeared. Both detectives try to discover about him and find some memos written by Joe Malik about the Illuminati. Both become confused after reading the memos which reveal things about operating the world privately by the Illuminati and other conspiracy theories about secret societies and cults.

In the first memo (all the memos are named and numbered like 'Illuminati Project: Memo # 1'), Joe talks about the starting of the Illuminati by taking name of a historical person Joachim of Flora. He says that he found the very first reference about Illuminati in a work named *Violence* by Jacques Ellul (1969) He says that "The Illuminated ones were founded by Joachim of Floris in the 11th century and originally taught a primitive Christian doctrine of poverty and equality" (08). He further tells that in 15th century they went rampant, looted the affluent and declared the rule of the spirit in the leadership of Fra Dolcino. He concludes that, "They were vanquished by the 'forces of order'- that is an army commanded by the Bishop of Vercueli" (08). Robert Anton Wilson and Miriam Joan Hill mention the name of Joachim of Floris that "He founded an order called the Illuminated Ones or Illuminati,...under the influence of one Fra Dolcino, plundered the homes of rich, preached general revolution, and were wiped out by an army led by the bishop of Vercueli in 1507" (263).

Philip Gardiner also reveals the history of the Illuminati which was started by Adam Weishaupt, an ex-Jesuit professor of Canon Law College in Ingolstadt, Germany. Robert Anton Wilson and Miriam Joan Hill also take reference from *Proof of a Conspiracy*, a book from John Robison, a former Mason and Dutch academician who claimed "The Illuminati had infiltrated most Continental Masonic lodges and warned his Scotch, Irish, and English brethren not to let these conspirators infiltrate British lodges, too" (Wilson and Hill 61).

Abbe Barruel, a French Jesuit priest, intellectual and journalist, wrote various works regarding conspiracy theories about the secret society, the Illuminati, French revolution, and the Jacobins. He supersedes John Robison's views about the Illuminati and says that the Illuminati controlled the Continental Freemasonry and they also existed long before they came into light with the name of the Illuminati in Bavaria. He also says that "In fact, they had existed for over a thousand years and had used the title Knights Templar when founded in the ninth century" (62). He further reveals that the Templars were found indulged in devil worship and sodomy by the Inquisition.

In "ILLUMINATI PROJECT: MEMO # 2" (08) Joe Malik gives another reference about starting of Illuminati from taking reference from Akron Daraul, *A History of Secret Societies*. He says "Daraul traces the Illuminati back to the 11th century also, but not to Joachim of Floris. He sees the origin in the Ishmaelian sect of Islam, also known as the Order of Assassins. They were vanquished in the 12th century, but later made a comeback with a new, less violent philosophy and eventually became the Ishmaelian sect of today, led by the Aga Khan" (08-09). He further says "However, in the 16th century, in Afghanistan, the Illuminated ones (Roshinaya) picked up the original tactics of the order of assassins" (09). He finalizes his statement saying that in Spain the Allumbrados, the Illuminated Ones, in Bavaria the Bavarian

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 7 & Issue 1 (January 2025)

Illuminati and in Paris the Illuminati of Paris in 1880 are also the examples of establishment of Illuminati secret society.

Assassin name is given to the Ishmaeli sect of Shia Islam. There are two views about naming them assassins. First is due to the founder of the Order of the Assassins, Hassan Ibn Sabbah. And the second is due to their use of hashish (a drug) that the members of the order used with Sufi dancing. Hassan gave hashish to his recruits for intoxication and then these people would be taken to his self-made garden of Adan or Eden for having pleasure of Eden or paradise. He assured them through it that he had keys to the paradise and he was their Lord. By this pleasant experience they would become assassins and could accept death by being 'Fedayeen'. Robert Anton Wilson and Miriam Joan Hill in their book *Everything is Under Control: Conspiracies Cults and Cover Ups*, talk about the assassins that they used to infiltrate the court of any shah or king who had enemy like intention against them. "They would work hard and honestly for years, sometimes many years; but at the first sign of preparation for war against Hassan, they would slit the throat of their master" (53-54).

According to some conspiracy theorists, the Hashashiyin or Assassins were the first to start sleeper agents or soldiers. Through their sleeping technique (being loyal for a long time and killing the target on the right time) they became undefeated for some time. Rashid ad- Din Sinan, the Syrian head of the order, freed his area from the control of Alamut. He also tried to assassinate twice the famous Muslim warrior Salah Din Al Ayyubi to maintain his own freedom from the Sunni rule but failed because the Arabs also had started to learn the assassins' tactics. The biggest success of him was the assassination of Conrad of Montferrat, the king of Jerusalem. "After Sinan's time, the Assassins moved away from their sectarian roots and became an organization of hired knives who killed for money" (76). Although they were very fatal secret society, yet they couldn't resist to the barbaric genocidal war methods of the Mongols. In 1256, the Assassins were defeated and surrendered before the Mongol commander Hulegu Khan. The Syria based branch of the order of the Assassins could not save its entity for long time after this incident. Most of members of the Assassins joined service of the Sultan of Egypt as hired killers.

Arkon Darual, a conspiracy theorist has this view that Illuminati is not a new organization nor was it founded in 1776 in Bavaria. According to him, there are instances of its existence in 11th century also in the form of the Order of the Assassins or Ishmaelian Shias. He also finds Illuminati symbolism and doctrines in the Roshinaya (Illuminated Ones), a Sufi movement, started and spread in Afghanistan which believed in secret rituals. The other instance is of the Allumbrados (Illuminated Ones), the people who believed in practicing a mystical form of Christianity in Spain in 15th-16th century. According to Arkon Darual, founding of Illuminati in Bavaria is only showing the glimpses of the tradition that was already started very early in former times.

Various conspiracy theorists say that the Illuminati is formed for dominating the world by making it a totalitarian state. They infiltrate every powerful organization of the world, wage wars, assassinate leaders and celebrities and arrest freedom of speech and privacy, for making

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 7 & Issue 1 (January 2025)

the world an Orwellian state. In the first novel *The Eye in the Pyramid* the authors say “The Illuminati are actually trying to accomplish: Their evil goal is to transcend materiality, and to bring about one world, denying the sovereignty of nations, and the sanctity of private property” (110).

Brad Steiger and Sherry Steiger also agree to this point in their book *Conspiracies and Secret Societies* that the Illuminati is the greatest secret society, a group which expands its network to circumscribe the whole world. The agents of the Illuminati are the real monarchs of the world. People think that their kings Shahs or presidents are ruling them, but they are in reality not more than the puppets in the hands of these cabals. They have intruded into every administration and captured every element of society in the whole world. They further say that “Their ultimate goal is to install a satanic New World Order, a one- world government that will prepare Earth’s citizens for the coming of the antichrist” (204). The antichrist is considered to be a false messiah in the Christian eschatology who will rise before the second coming of Jesus and he will claim to be the savior of the humanity. His name is mentioned in the holy Bible. In Islam, the antichrist is named Dajjal or Al Masih ad- Dajjal who is a deceitful messiah. Dajjal is not mentioned in the Quran but his name is mentioned in Hadees. Both Muslim and Christian eschatology agree on the rising of antichrist or Dajjal, his attempt to corrupt humanity by declaring himself Jesus or Isa and finally claiming to be God and performing miracles to prove his point and his defeat by Jesus who will reincarnate in the world. While, in *The Golden Apple*, the second novel of *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*, a character named ‘Mama Sutra’ talks about the positive side of the Illuminati’s aiming about the liberation of humanity, and due to its being in danger and hatred against its members it concealed itself into many facade organizations. She states “They have many names, the Great White Brotherhood, the Brethren of the Rosy Cross, the Golden Dawn... usually, though they are known as the Illuminati” (363).

The above mentioned organization are real organizations and discussed to be sub-organizations or recruiting fronts for the Illuminati. They habituate various secret customs and practices and appear to be mystic in nature. They perform magic (Kabalah or Qabalah) and consume various types of drugs like weed. Conspiracy theorists say about the Illuminati that in the beginning the Illuminati was a group of really enlightened people but, by the time, they started to pollute it by devil worshipping, assassinating people and doing covert activities. Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea, in the first novel *The Eye in the Pyramid*, talk about nature, history and starting of the Illuminati and conspiracy theories related to it, in the second novel, *The Golden Apple*, they talk about Illuminati symbolism. Mama Sutra (a character in the trilogy) talks about the Cult of the Yellow Sign, an anti-Illuminati cult and American Government’s accepting the Illuminati symbol. “One Illuminati symbol was adopted by the new government: the Eye on the Pyramid, representing knowledge of geometry and, hence, of the order of nature” (368).

There are various conspiracy theories about founding of America and administering it by the Illuminati and Freemasonry. These theories say that the Illuminati and Freemasons are the constructing fathers of America and they are manipulating and dominating the nation from the

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 7 & Issue 1 (January 2025)

beginning, and the Rothschild family (one of the richest Jewish families of America) are also indulged in it. The Great Seal of US was first used in 1782 and on its reverse side, an unfinished pyramid and an eye is situated on its top. According to conspiracy theorists, it is an Illuminati symbol. Christopher Hodapp and Alice Von Konnon in their book *Conspiracy Theories & Secret Societies for Dummies* say “Some conspiracy theorists have claimed the symbol is that of the Illuminati and that the appearance of the date 1776 on the seal is commemorating the formation of that group in Bavaria” (202).

Texe Marrs, an ex U.S. Air Force commander and famous conspiracy theorist says that America has nothing to do with the Egyptian pyramids, the Eye of Horus and Latin inscriptions on the great seal of America and one dollar bill. According to him these are the Illuminati symbols and these symbols were demanded by a Jewish person Haym Solomon who is considered to be a Rothschild agent. “Freemasons, under the direction of Haym Solomon, Ben Franklin, and others, designed the Great Seal with its all-seeing eye in the capstone amidst the radiant sun background” (268). He further says that although it was considered the eye of the Egyptian Sun god or Horus, his son but there was much more than these things. Some conspiracy theorists also say that it is also a Masonic symbol and Freemasons and Illuminati are the two sides of one coin. They both are controlling the government and manipulating the events happening in the politics, banking sector, art industry and every influential organization. They have various symbols of their organization. According to some conspiracy theorists, the Illuminati members worship Satan or serpent god Leviathan. Jews have been one of the best examples of scapegoating through spreading conspiracy theories against them. They were burned alive or expelled from the state due to conspiracies circulated against them. Even in Black Death of 1345-50, Jews were indicted for starting the pandemic by pouring poison into wells. Any prejudice or enmity against Jews is called ‘Anti-Semitism or anti-Semitism’. In *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are also used on a broad scale.

Many conspiracy theories are there that try to prove that Jews are in a plan to control the world. John Michael Greer, a conspiracy theorist says “During the heyday of anti-Semitic conspiracy theory in the early twentieth century, most of the important revolutionaries and secret society leaders of the past were redefined as Jews to justify their membership in the alleged Jewish world conspiracy” (61). He further says that the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin and Adam Weishaupt, the initiator of the Illuminati of Bavaria were also labeled to be the believer of Judaism by the anti-Semites. The most famous anti-Semitic text ‘*The Protocols of The Learned Elders of Zion*’ also accuses Jews for making a scheme for conquering the universe and making the Freemasons as their helpers in it.

In the book ‘*Grummet*’ of the *Illuminatus! Trilogy* or the last novel *Leviathan*, two characters are in Bavaria, Germany. They see some dead Jewish people and talk. Hauptmann says “There was an organization connected with the Zionist movement founded here in Ingolstadt on May 1, 1776. These elders of Zion might have assembled here to celebrate the anniversary” (467). Hagbard claims this organization to be the Illuminati and also claims some real names to be Illuminatus. “The organization was founded by an unfrocked Jesuit, and its

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 7 & Issue 1 (January 2025)

membership consisted of Freemasons, Freethinkers, and Jews. There were also some famous names in politics and the arts: King Leopold, Goethe, and Beethoven” (467).

The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion (1903) is one of the most disreputable anti-Semitic conspiracy theory text that achieved its popularity by the right wingers, Nazis, anti-Semites and conspiracy theorists. Although it has been manifested to be a fraudulent copying by the real intellectual chroniclers yet it is still one of the dearest book for the conspiracy theorists. Robert Anton Wilson and Miriam Joan Hill say that several people told them about it being a forged text and they accept it to be a forgery but also ask them why its several claims became true. Jews have always been alleged by the conspiracy theorists to be the main conspirators behind the Illuminati. Jan Van Helsing in his influential book *Secret Societies and Their Power in the 20th Century*, claims to prove the Illuminati itself to be the front organization for the Jewish Rothschild family. (Rothschild family is considered to be the most influential Jewish family and one of the creators of America by the anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists.) Helsing provides a long list of conspirators who were indulged in the Illuminati plot but he doesn't denounce Jews in general in spite of his emphasis on the Rothschilds, and also calls the Nazis as mad hate-mongers.

The authors of the trilogy have explored almost every type of conspiracy theories through knitting a very beautiful plot that gives information about not only secret societies but also several cults, discordianism, information about famous Illuminati members and have given very good examples of people believing in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in a simple dialogic manner through the characters of Hauptmann and Hagbard.

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The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 7 & Issue 1 (January 2025)

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