

The Creative Launcher

Journal URL: <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com/index.php/tcl>

ISSN: 2455-6580

Issue: Vol. 7 & Issue 6, (December, 2022)


Publisher: Perception Publishing

Published on: 30th December, 2022

Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access: Yes

Journal DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.53032/issn.2455-6580>

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Article History: Abstract and complete research article received on: 22 November 2022 | Revised article received: 24 November 2022 | Accepted: 20 Dec. 2022 | First Published: 30 December 2022

Research Article



Use of Conspiracy Theories in *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* by Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea

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 <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2022.7.6.24>

Pages: 210-217

Abstract

Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea both have been influenced by anarchism, Discordianism and conspiracy theories. They both use conspiracy theories about Illuminati, knights Templars, Freemasons and New World Order, anti-semitism, end time prophecies of the Bible and world domination plans etc. Their main genre of writing is conspiracy fiction. Conspiracy fiction is a sub-genre of thriller fiction. Both the authors have filled their works with various types of conspiracy theories and thrilling feel. The focus of the present research paper is on the use of conspiracy theories in *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*. Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea made this trilogy one of the best works in the field of conspiracy fiction. Although the writers have used several of them, in the present paper only use of the New World Order conspiracy theories and secret societies, especially the Illuminati conspiracy theories will be analyzed. The study of conspiracy theories is an emerging field and little work has been done on this topic. So, the present paper will enrich the information about conspiracy theories and conspiracy fiction.

Keywords: Anti-semitism, Conspiracy Theories, Freemasons, Illuminati, New World Order, Secret Societies, World Domination plan

Robert Anton Wilson is one of the giant figures of conspiracy fiction writers. He belongs to America. He is supposed to be a great figure in American counterculture in the 1970s. He has popularized Discordianism through his writings. He has established his name as an occult writer through using references from occult books, rituals and philosophy in his According to him his aim was to bring people into a condition of common agnosticism. He says that he wants to get them into “not agnosticism about God alone but agnosticism about everything”.¹ Although he has written a lot of literary texts, his main works like *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* (1975) and *Schrodinger's Cat Trilogy* (1979- 81) are especially praiseworthy. In his writings he mainly used conspiracy theories, cults and mystic philosophy. Robert Joseph Shea is also an American author who wrote novels, did journalism and edited Playboy magazine. He came into limelight through his deed of co-writing the famous conspiracy fiction work *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* with Robert Anton Wilson. He also wrote novels that are laden with occultism, anarchy and conspiracy theories. His other famous novels are *Shike* (1981) and *All Things Are Lights* (1989).

Eric Davis says about *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* that “Wilson wove anarchist, psychedelic, and occult themes into a prophetic conspiracy fiction written with a satiric and wilfully pulp sensibility”.² There are three parts in the trilogy and these are divided into 5 books and appendices. First two books are included in *The Eye in the Pyramid*, the third and part of fourth book is included in the second part *The Golden Apple* and share of fourth and the whole of fifth book and the appendices are included in the third and last part *Leviathan*. Conspiracy fiction or conspiracy thriller is a subtype of thriller fiction. The protagonist of a conspiracy thriller tries to find out a conspiracy behind any incident in the way of a detective fiction hero. Various conspiracy fiction works also consist of secret history, occultism and pseudo history.

Christopher Hodapp and Alice Von Konnon provide the definition of a conspiracy theory saying; “A conspiracy theory is a way of looking at a single event and postulating that there may be a lot more to it than can be seen on the surface, with the darker forces behind the whole thing”.³ In other words, conspiracy theory is an idea or an explanation about an incident and approach to analyze an event thinking the event was not a normal event. It tries to find out the causes and conspirators behind it. It says that a person or his/ her allies work confidentially to achieve the goal of achieving money, fame, domination and other favours. Conspiracy theories try to reveal the causes behind any incident that was caused by a conspirator or a group of conspirators secretly whose motive is covert. Every conspiracy theory tries to present certitude and logic to prove its point.

The parts of *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* were published as different volumes. The parts were started to be released in separate volumes in the beginning of September 1975. In 1984 they were published collectively. The Trilogy won the Prometheus Hall of Fame Award in 1986. The work is full of allusions from musical pieces, articles, fictional works and other means of communication. The writers of the trilogy have used references from *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, novels by Thomas Pynchon. Characters from H.P. Lovecraft's works have also been mentioned. The novels are laden with the conspiracy theories about secret societies like Illuminati, Freemasons, their secret symbolism, founding fathers of America and countercultural ideas of the 1960s. The trilogy is often compared to *Foucault's Pendulum*, a conspiracy theory laden novel by the Italian semiotician and novelist Umberto Eco. The plot of the trilogy has been woven around an investigation being done by two New York Police officers who are trying to find out the causes behind the bomb attack on the building of confrontation, a left-wing supporter magazine. One of the associate editors of the magazine, Joe Malik, also disappears. They search for him too. While doing their investigation, they reveal the history and conspiracy theories related to the murders of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. etc. Both detectives come across various memos that indicate the indulgence of influential secret groups. Gradually, they come to know about a lot of conspiracy theories, cults etc. A war between the most fatal secret societies like Illuminati and the Discordians also takes place in the trilogy. The story of the whole trilogy runs around conspiracy theories about secret societies, New World Order, the lost civilization of Atlantis and world domination plans etc.

A secret society is a group of people that is in the knowledge of people and its subscribership is also known, but its gatherings and customs and practices are supposed to be confidential. The Freemasons are really the best example of this type of secret society. According to some thinkers any organization whose entity is not confirmed or supposed to be rumoured but some facts are or phenomena are available about its existence. Various scholars say that several times, this type of society or group provides a very good material of guess work or hypothesizing to the new comers or well-established conspiracy theorists due to their disputed and very difficult to prove existence. This type of secret society can be the Illuminati of this age. A secret society, according to Christopher Hodapp and Alice Van Cannon is "an organization whose existence is known, and whose membership is public knowledge, but whose rituals and meetings are considered to be secret."⁴ The Illuminati is supposed to be the

most dangerous and powerful secret society of the world. According to sources Illuminati came into existence in 1776 in Ingolstadt, Bavaria, Germany. It was formed by Adam Weishaupt who was an ex-Jesuit and University professor. In the beginning it was called Perfectabilists. Then it was renamed the Bees and finally the Illuminati. It was banned by the German government in May 1786 in Bavaria. They also say that it was not suppressed in 1786 rather the members related to it fled to different countries and infiltrated the leading organizations based there and achieved their goals.

They (members of Illuminati) have a lot of sub organizations. They can influence the social, economical, and political events of nations. They can assassinate anyone, wage revolutionary activities or murder millions of humans through biological warfare or spreading viruses. In *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*, a lot of conspiracy theories about the Illuminati, its genesis, the recruits of it, symbolism related to it and successful conspiracies done by it have been discussed on a very large scale. The first novel in the trilogy is named *The Eye in the Pyramid*. It gives the reference to the Eye of Providence of Horus, an Egyptian god and it is claimed to be one of the symbols of the Illuminati.

Joe Malik is the associate editor of a leftist magazine named *Confrontation*. A bombing incident at the office of *Confrontation* occurs and he disappears. The task to inquire about the attacking incident is given to two New York Police detectives, Saul Goodman and Barney Maldoon. They try to find Joe Malik and come to know some memos about Illuminati. Both become bewildered on reading the memos and the claims of these about running the world secretly by Illuminati and the contradiction in the matter of memos. In the very first memo, Joe Malik talks about the starting of the Illuminati in the 11th century by an historical personality named Joachim of Floris. In the memo number two, allusions from Arkon Daraul's *A History of Secret Societies* are found. According to this memo Daraul doesn't refer to the genesis or beginning of Illuminati from the hands of Joachim of Floris but it is linked with the beginning of the eleventh century. According to Joe Malik's hypothesis, the Illuminati originated from the Ishmaelean sect of Shia Islam. They were also popular as the Order of Assassins. They were also called assassins due to their use of hashish or heroin. They were crushed in the 12th century but they came back after some gap and took the form of the Ishmaelean Shia Muslims of today. He also adds that the Roshinaya or the Illuminated ones in Afghanistan were also the followers of the assassins. He concludes his point that the Spanish Allumbrados, the Roshinaya or the Illuminated ones or Enlightened ones in Afghanistan, the Illuminati in Germany and in France the Illuminati of Paris in 1880 are also the instances of the establishment of the Illuminati.

According to Arkon Daraul, the official starting of Illuminati was just a tradition to follow and it was already in existence in the past. Robert Anton Wilson and . . . also say in their book *Everything is Under Control, Conspiracies Cults and Coverups*. "Thus, in Daraul's version, the Illuminati of Bavaria founded by Adam Weishaupt in 1776, represents only a late manifestation of a much earlier tradition".⁵

Conspiracy theorists try to accomplish this point that the Illuminati has been made for dominating the world. They are trying to execute their plans through infiltration in the governments of the world. They can start wars among the countries, cause civil wars in the

nations and can assassinate leaders and celebrities like J. F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Michael Jackson etc. They want to turn the world into an Orwellian state through their imposing surveillance on freedom of speech, and trespassing privacy of everyone. A character named Hagbard says about Illuminati, "... their evil goal is to transcend materiality, and to bring about one world, denying the sovereignty of nations and the sanctity of private property".⁶ In the second novel *The Golden Apple* a character called Mama Sutra talks about Illuminati's good works for liberating humanity. She says that due to a danger of the existence of the Illuminati it has covered itself with various front organizations. She says "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". (300)

The names of the organizations that have been given above exist in reality. They are supposed to recruit members for the Illuminati. They practice many secret rituals and customs, human sacrifice and devil worship also. They believe in the mystic philosophy of Kabbalah, and consume various types of heroin also. According to Mike Colagrossi the Freemasons, the Bohemian Grove, Bilderberg group, Skull and Bones and Trilateral commission are some names that have been popularized by conspiracy theorists as front organizations of the Illuminati.

According to the report of the *Daily Beacon*, the Illuminati is the prime conspirator in several incidents happening in the world and it is also manipulating world incidents and through the tactics of the members related to it, pressurize the governments and big political groups for gradually forming The New World Order. Annie Tieu says in this report, "A variety of historical events have been said to be orchestrated by the Illuminati, like the French revolution and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy".⁷

In the first novel *The Eye in the Pyramid*, Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea have given the description of the creation of the Illuminati, depicted the historical records about it and conspiracy theories about it while in the second one, *The Golden Apple*, they talk about the symbolism related to it. There is a character named Mama Sutra who asserts about the Cult of the Yellow Sign that is a cult against the Illuminati. She also says that the government of America has accepted the Illuminati symbol. She says, "One Illuminati symbol was adopted by the new government: the Eye on the Pyramid, presenting knowledge of geometry and, hence, of the order of nature" (305).

She further says that it was done to pave the way to the coming generations to show the genuineness of the phenomenon of the making of the United States government by the Illuminati members. According to her, it was done due to the fear of the Cult of the Yellow Sign that was an anti-Illuminati cult and the members of it could violate the truth about the founding of the United States government. It is a well-known conspiracy theory that the founding fathers of America were Illuminati members and Freemasons. They wanted to impose Illuminati and Masonic order upon the nation. She (Mama Sutra) says, "... and, of course, the first half-dozen Presidents were all high-ranking Masons and Rosicrucians who understood at least the fundamentals of Illuminati philosophy". (305)

According to conspiracy theorists the founding fathers of America are controlling the nation from the beginning. The one-dollar bill of the US has a great seal of America, has an

incomplete pyramid and an eye on it. It is called the All Seeing Eye or the Eye of Horus (the Egyptian god). Conspiracy theorists claim that it is an Illuminati symbol and the date 1776 on the seal symbolizes the founding date of the Illuminati in Bavaria. It is absolutely a genuine fact that one symbol of Illuminati is an all seeing eye but it is represented with the dot in the center and not with the pyramid like triangle. It is also true that 1776 is also that great day when thirteen colonies achieved independence.

As every conspiracy theory lover or believer knows, Jews have always been the soft targets of conspiracy theories. These types of conspiracy theories are called the antisemitic conspiracy theories. In the black death of 1345-50, they were alleged to cause the pandemic through pouring poison in the wells. They were accused of causing the death of a lot of people. In the same way the number 13 of the original colonies of America is related to the 13 families of rich Jews. According to some conspiracy theories of the New World Order and Jewish world domination plan, the number 13 is related to the wealthiest Jewish families like the Rothschilds and the Rockefellers. They say that the eagle on the great seal is holding 13 arrows in its left claw and a branch of an olive tree which has 13 leaves. According to conspiracy theorists the 13 number in Numerology is an unlucky number and it also symbolizes the 13 families of the richest Jews who are preparing for their world domination plans through their banking system based on interest. Above the Eye of Providence is written *Annuit Coeptis*. And this phrase has letters that are also 13 in number. Before the unfinished pyramid three words have been written "*Novus Ordo Seclorum*". The three words also make the six-pointed star of David that is related to Jews. In Jewish culture and on the flag of Israel the six-pointed star can be seen. Again, it is considered a Jewish conspiracy. According to the Christian conspiracy theorists, the eye is also related to the false messiah or the Antichrist who will come in the end time of the world and will try to tempt humanity to commit sins and the true messiah Jesus Christ will fight against him and after that the reign of peace will be established on the Earth. The Muslims believe that in the end time of the world the false messiah or Dajjal will rise and walk upon the earth to lure humanity for committing bad deeds and will claim to be God. Both Christians and Muslims have a common belief that Jesus Christ will come again on Earth and will save humanity from the Antichrist or Dajjal. According to conspiracy theorists the one eye symbolism is related to him because he will be blind in one eye and the other eye will also be defected. Both Muslims and Christian conspiracy theorists say that the mark of the beast or the number 666 related to the Antichrist is being promoted through mass media, metal music, movies and cartoons. Mind programming is being done for capturing the consciousness of the people. They are making movies and web series like Lucifer, cartoons like Simpsons, Johnny Bravo for normalizing this symbolism. The three words below the unfinished pyramid on the great seal of America are *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. This phrase is written in Latin which means a new sequence of the era while according to conspiracy theorists it indicates the 'New World Order'. According to an online document of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue – “The New World Order conspiracy posits that a global elite is trying to implement a single world government”.⁸

It is a conspiracy theory that talks about the world domination plans that are being executed by secret societies like Illuminati, Freemasons and they also include Jews in the list of the conspirators indulged in it. They want to turn the world into a totalitarian state. They

also relate it to the end time prophecies of the Bible about the false messiah or Antichrist. John Nelson Derby, a Christian clergyman and other Christian scholars of the end time prophecies of the Bible have claimed the world-wide conspiratorial plan to turn the world into an Orwellian state that will be run through the New World Order government. It will be done by those people who have made a pact with Satan and Antichrist. *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, the infamous antisemitic text, also claims Jews preparing for the world domination plans and taking help from the Freemasons to execute their plans. In the third novel *Leviathan*, a character named Hagbard says that the Illuminati was founded by a Jesuit and its members were Freemasons. He also says that some big political and artistic figures like King Leopold, Goethe and Beethoven were also members of Illuminati.

Robert Anton Wilson and his co-author of the trilogy, Robert Shea has presented a great example of antisemitic conspiracy theories in a simple conversational manner through the conversation of the characters named Hauptman and Hagbard. In the whole trilogy, they have exploited every main type of conspiracy theory. They have weaved the plot of the trilogy with the dangerous plans of dominating the world by the Illuminati and its confrontation by the Discordians.

A character whose name is not Hagbard, says that the Illuminati infiltrated government is using the surveillance system to keep an eye on everyone. The government is also monitoring mails and collecting fingerprints and other biological entities of a person. The laws of controlling gun keeping, strict rules on journeys and assassinations are being done by them. The assassinations are done due to their plans to make the ambience of terror so that when the government implements restrictions on journeys, start controlling gun laws and keep the third eye or electronic surveillance to achieve all information of a common man to capture his all freedom. He further says that the government will supersede Hitler's surveillance on Germans. He also says, "And the beauty of it is, the majority of the American will have been so frightened by illuminati-backed terrorist incidents that they will beg to be controlled as a masochist begs for the whip". (121)

Hagbard again says about Illuminati that it was a world-wide conspiracy that the Illuminati will burden a totalitarian government upon the world that will remain till the end of the world. According to him the French revolution was also an illuminati experiment. Socialism in Europe and the Russian revolution and the Second World War was also caused by them. What's that now America is the prime target of the illuminati. He asserts that now America is the prime target of the Illuminati. The members of it are pushing America towards totalitarianism. He says, "They have got most of Europe and Asia. Once they get America, they can come out into the open. The world will then be the much as Orwell predicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*". (122)

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