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### Aladdin's Problem [Aladins Problem]

Mark Axelrod

Chapman University, [axelrod@chapman.edu](mailto:axelrod@chapman.edu)

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## Aladdin's Problem [Aladins Problem]

Written at the age of eighty-five, *Aladdin's Problem* shows the influence of the eighteenth-century mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg's philosophy on Jünger. It is clear that he became obsessed with the materialising of matter in the modern world and the problems that stem from it. In a first-person narrative he traces the life of Friedrich Baroh as he talks about his youth, marriage, subsequent divorce and his desertion from the Polish People's Army for the material wealth of the West. Very badly off, he manages to finish a degree in media and statistics (a curious coalescence of images and finance) and finally secures an entry-level position in his uncle's funeral parlor, *Pietas*. He continually improves on his position and, as the funeral home becomes more and more successful, so too does Baroh who uses his background in media for the commercial advancement of the business. Eventually, *Pietas* is bought out by a bigger company which plans something akin to a 'Disneyland for the Dead' known as *Terrestra*. Located in Turkey, the place is to be the final resting place for thousands, to the great financial enjoyment of the investors.

Though symbols and mythology generally abound in Jünger's work, in a way, the growth of the funeral business is reminiscent of the great Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* as Baroh moves from his humble beginnings as an impoverished graduate student to wealth and respectability in the material world. However commerce and spirituality make uncomfortable partners and by the fourth section of the novel,

Baroh too finds that he has become a part of one of the more insidious forms of commercialisation which reduces the dignity and integrity of the deceased to plots of statistical size and measure that will be cost effective for the corporation. As Baroh improves economically, he regresses intellectually. The things that interested him as a young man — philosophy, literature, art — pale as he becomes financially solvent and as the metaphysical becomes undermined by the material.

In fact, the notion of some colossal social and spiritual disaster haunted Jünger all his life and writing specifically about 'the problem' he says, 'Aladdin preferred the life of a minor despot. Our lamp is made of uranium. It establishes the same problem: power streaming toward us titanicly.' M R A

'The problem is invisible; man is alone. Ultimately, one cannot rely on society. Although society usually wreaks harm, indeed often havoc, it can also help, although not more than a good physician — up to the inevitable limit where his skill fails.

Above all, no melancholy. The individual can comfort himself by recognizing his situation. Earlier, the religions contributed to this. Their close link to art is no coincidence, for they are its most sublime inventions.

Now that the gods have abandoned us, we must fall back on their origin: art. We have to gain an idea of what or whom we represent. There has to be a workshop somewhere. A potter throws vases, pitchers, ordinary tableware. His material is clay. Everything emerges in the ebb and flow of tides, then crumbles into dust, and becomes new material for us.

Our social or moral position makes no difference in this regard. You may be a prince or a wage earner, a shepherd, a prostitute, a pickpocket — but usually you are like me, an ordinary person.

Everyone had his duty, his task. What was the idea when we were created, what was our mission? — anyone who gives us even an inkling of that has ennobled us.' p 11-12