



UNCOMMON GROUND

ANTHONY MANN, GEOFFREY SHURLOCK, AND THE CULT OF THEOSOPHY **John Wranovics**

Throughout his career, Anthony Mann pushed the envelope regarding what could be shown on screen. With unprecedented acts of violence, such as Raymond Burr throwing molten Cherries Jubilee in Chili Williams' face in *Raw Deal* (1948), George Murphy slashed to pieces by a motorized harrow in *Border Incident* (1949), or Alex Nicol firing a bullet through Jimmy Stewart's hand in *The Man from Laramie* (1955), Mann constantly tested the limits. He didn't shy away from controversial sexual subjects either, filming adaptations of James M. Cain's *Serenade* (1956) and Erskine

Caldwell's *God's Little Acre* (1958), stories that for years had been stalled by censors and branded as unfilmable.

As he moved from Poverty Row to major studios, Mann routinely battled the Production Code Administration (PCA), the industry's self-policing censorship office, headed by Irish-Catholic Joseph I. Breen. From its inception in 1932 until 1954, Geoffrey Manwaring Shurlock served as Breen's right-hand man. Shurlock even ran the PCA during Breen's brief stint as general manager of RKO from 1941-1942. He formally took the reins when Breen retired in '54, serving as America's chief film censor until his own retirement in January 1968, when introduction of the ratings system made the PCA superfluous.



In 1900, Katherine Tingley founded the International Theosophical Headquarters, aka “Lomaland,” in Point Loma, a seaside community in San Diego, California

“The code is a set of self-regulations based on sound morals common to all peoples and all religions.”

—Geoffrey Shurlock

“Shakespeare was the most violent writer that’s ever been. Heads roll. The most gruesome. Even in King Lear when he gouges Gloucester’s eyes out with his spurs...but this is true of great drama, that it needs violence...it’s been used in all the Miracle Plays, it was used in every form of theatre.”

—Anthony Mann

It’s now known that during the first two decades of the 20th century, Anthony Mann was raised in a bizarre utopian commune known as “Lomaland,” run by the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. It was located on 350 acres of Point Loma, a peninsula bordering San Diego Bay. What has remained unexplored, however, is the intriguing coincidence that Mann’s nemesis at the PCA, Geoffrey Shurlock, also spent his youth at Lomaland.

Founded on the precepts of notorious Russian occultist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and run by Katherine Tingley, the community at its peak boasted 500 residents, of which 300 were children. Mann, an only child, was born Emil Anton Bundsmann on June 6, 1906 on the grounds of the commune. There, he attended the theosophist Raja Yoga school, participated in the community’s famed productions of ancient Greek and Shakespearean tragedies and ornate pageants, and toiled in its avocado groves. At the insistence of his aunt, he was removed from Lomaland at the age of 14, and moved with his mother to the relative normality of life in Orange, New Jersey. According to Mann’s daughter Nina, up until that time he had never seen money.

Geoffrey Shurlock, 12-years older than Mann, was born in Liver-

pool, England. He arrived in Lomaland in 1901, at the age of seven, in the company of his parents and two younger siblings. Deemed one of the commune’s most promising youngsters, Shurlock lived in the commune until 1918, graduating from the Raja Yoga College and the School of Antiquity, Lomaland’s equivalent of a graduate-level theology school.

“Any one who lives in a Raja Yoga school has plenty of chances to study character...This is the magic of Raja Yoga. The effect of Raja Yoga is not only seen in a child’s physical improvement, but also in his mantle and moral improvement, which is more important...We are all taught not to have mean or unclean thoughts...Every thought we think influences our body, so that bad thoughts produce diseases in our body...We believe that there are two ‘people’ inside of us, that one is a god and the other a demon, that each is trying to get ahead of the other, and it depends on us which is to gain mastery.”

—Geoffrey Shurlock

“The Effect of Raja Yoga on Character”

“Actually, I think the real reason why people like violence, particularly in pictures or in drama, is they can look at it and they see this terrible thing, and they say it’s not happening to me. I can understand it, and I feel it, and I’m excited by it, but I’m not doing it, it hasn’t happened to me. And really, the same thing in my own life. I’m very mild mannered, but I like to impress. I like to do something violent to make people to talk and to make people say, well that’s a fascinating thing. That’s why I use it.”

—Anthony Mann

Mann’s father, Emile Bundsmann, was born in Rositz, Bohemia, in 1869. He emigrated to the U.S. in the spring of 1891, settling



Anthony Mann (left), born in Lomaland, lived there until he was 15. Geoffrey Shurlock (right) arrived at Lomaland at age seven and left there at the age of 24

in Macon, Georgia. With a Chemical Engineering Ph.D. earned in Vienna, Emile found work at a cotton mill owned by the locally prominent Hanson family. In 1898, a year after becoming an American citizen, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported: “Emile Bundsmann, superintendent of the dye works in the East Macon factory of the Bibb Manufacturing Company, left this morning for Europe to be gone several months...while away [he] will deliver a series of lectures on ‘Theosophy.’ He is one of the best read members of the Macon Theosophical Society.”

In 1900, Emile married Bertha Waxelbaum, daughter of a wealthy textile and dry goods merchant, described in the local press as “one of the most beautiful brides of the season.” Four years earlier, the death of Sol Waxelbaum, Bertha’s father, had been major news. Known as the “merchant dry goods prince of Georgia” and the “best businessman in Macon,” Sol’s fortunes collapsed when his business, Waxelbaum & Son, was destroyed in a fire big enough to be reported 900 miles away by the *New York Times*. His death the following year was attributed to a “sinking attack” following “a collapse of the nervous system.”

Bundsmann’s employer, Walter T. Hanson, was a leading figure in Macon’s Theosophical community and likely the major influence on Emile’s involvement with the group. Heeding Katherine Tingley’s call, Hanson moved his entire family west to Lomaland in 1900. The Bundsmanns followed suit one year later. The kibbutz-like Lomaland community had been founded by Katherine Tingley, head of the dominant branch of the Theosophical Society that emerged in the U.S. following the death of Madame Blavatsky in 1895. Major funding for the development of

the Point Loma property came from a core group of wealthy followers, including Albert Spalding, famed pitcher for the Chicago White Stockings baseball club, renowned for popularizing the use of a mitt and founding the eponymous sporting goods company.

The Theosophist religion had been founded a couple of decades earlier by Madame Blavatsky and one-time newspaper reporter Henry Steel Olcott, following a meeting in Vermont at the home of two boys who, it was claimed, had the ability to levitate. In 1896, Katherine Tingley seized the reins of the Theosophical Society in

America following the death of her mentor, W. Q. Judge. Tingley’s main rival, Annie Besant, retained control of Theosophical lodges in the UK, Europe, and India. The highly disciplined Lomaland community, which embraced a blend of Hindu, Buddhist, and Neo-Platonist thought—intermixing concepts of spiritualism, reincarnation, and karma—was purportedly directed by an unseen Great White Brotherhood of “Mahatmas,” ancient advanced souls living in Nepal, who only communicated with adepts like Blavatsky and Tingley.

Geoffrey Shurlock’s father, Captain Charles Shurlock, born in 1847, was a master mariner in the merchant navy and the great-grandson of John Russell, a notable portrait painter and member of the Royal Academy famed for his

deeply religious lifestyle. For most of his career, Capt. Shurlock sailed cargo ships from Liverpool along the coast of South America and the U. S. In 1890, he married Frances Hallawell, an active Theosophist in England. Geoffrey Shurlock was born in Liverpool in 1894. Seven years later, the couple and their three children, Geoffrey (7), Alan (6), and Olive (3), moved to Lomaland.

The Century Path, one of the group’s numerous publications, reported

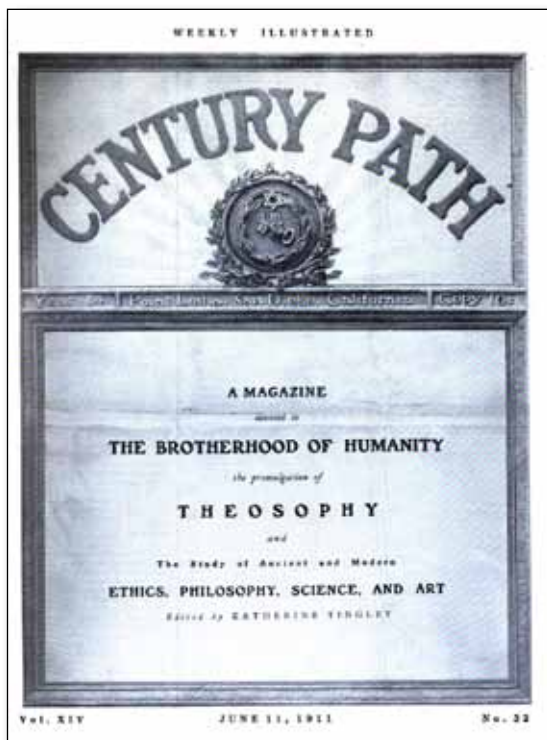
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Following the death of Madame Blavatsky (left), the Theosophical Society splintered with Katherine Tingley (right) taking the reins of the U.S.-based lodges in 1896

on November 2, 1902, that “Mr. and Mrs. Shurlock, who are so well known in England, are moving into their new home, which occupies an exceptionally charming position midway between the Homestead and the Bay, and commanding an exquisite view of both.”

Childhood in Lomaland was unusual. Children were raised by the entire community. After a few months with its mother, a baby was placed into a common nursery. Parents were allowed to visit the child for a few hours, only on Sunday. Once old enough, children moved from the nursery into a gender-segregated group home, overseen by surrogate mothers. The uniformed children were marched to classes and forbidden to speak in class or at meal-times, unless absolutely necessary. Their day was divided between school work and field work, in which they tended the community gardens. In their early teens, classes were separated by gender. According to one alumnus of the Raja Yoga school,



“When we got to be dangerous teenagers, we were kept pretty much apart.”

Dramatic performances were integral to Lomaland, and Tingley oversaw construction of the first open-air Greek amphitheater in the U. S. In the evenings, children attended orchestra or theater rehearsals. Preparations for a play preempted the regular schedule as the entire community focused on making costumes, building sets, and rehearsing. Significant for Tingley was the ancient Greek drama *The Eumenides*. She considered Aeschylus, the “intellectual Sphinx” and Shakespeare a teacher of ancient wisdom.

“Theosophy teaches the very antithesis of [Calvinism]. It declares that we are dual in nature; that we are born for a high purpose; that our souls and our spiritual natures are splendid with all the infinite possibilities of human life; that the soul is the Knower, the Inspirer; that the soul is immortal, and the physical is mortal.



The onion-shaped glass domes atop Lomaland's major buildings were lit at night and could be seen for miles

So the physical has its weaknesses, its passions, its greed, its deceit, its imperfections; it is on this plane for the purpose of self-evolution; it is not evil, it is only undeveloped good. And so we have the soul the Inspirer, the protector; and the mind the vehicle, receiving the inspiration from this higher source as far as it is able to."

—Katherine Tingley

While at Lomaland, Anthony Mann's father created several new dyes and granted the patents to Tingley. He was listed in the faculty as a teacher of German, Mathematics and Science, and Engineering, and Mann's mother was listed as a Dramatic Instructress in the Isis Conservatory of Music and Drama. Around 1912, Emile Bundsmann fell seriously ill and his wife squired him back to Austria, leaving their son, six-years old, behind—essentially an orphan for the two years they were away.

In 1918, at the age of 24, Shurlock left school to help his mother run the family business in San Diego, a steam laundry. Three years later, the entire Shurlock family returned to England for 18 months. In 1922, Geoffrey and his sister Olive reconnected with Katherine Tingley and accompanied her on a lecture tour of Europe. Shurlock later recalled, "We traveled around with them in Germany and in Holland." The Lomaland newspaper described "two big public meetings in Nürnberg in the old Katharinebau ...

the hall was packed with a larger crowd than it had ever known before, according to the statement of many of the citizens. The Theosophical Leader's work in Nürnberg was a tremendous triumph in every respect."

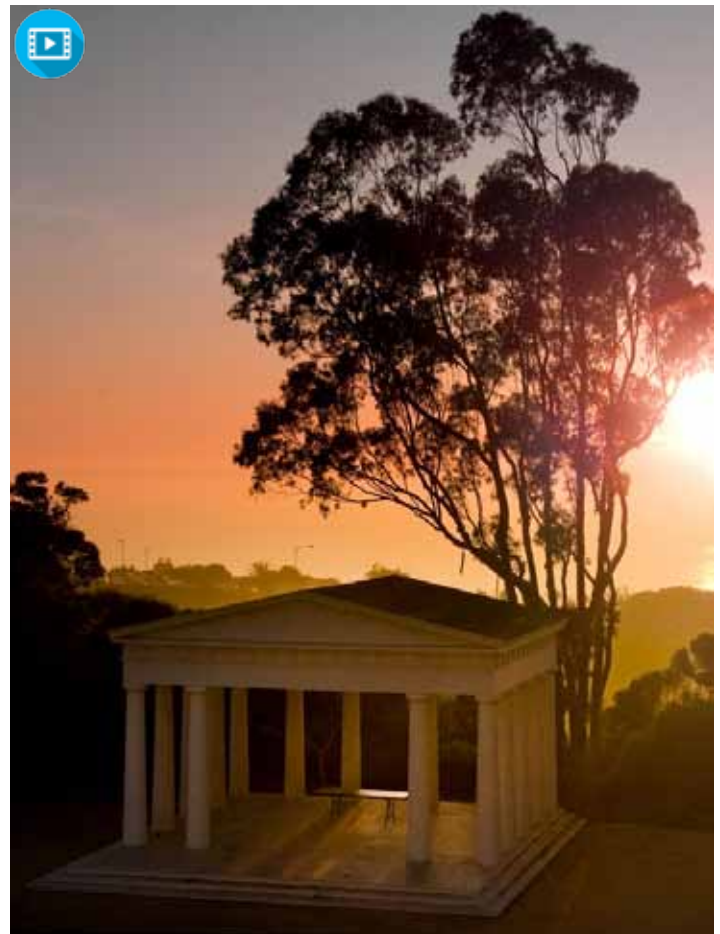
Later that year, the Shurlocks returned to San Diego. Geoffrey worked briefly as a journalist before becoming a research secretary

for Rupert Hughes. Hughes, a popular novelist and screenwriter and the uncle of Howard Hughes, needed someone fluent in French to help him research his novel *The Golden Ladder*. Hughes' novel about the film industry, *Souls for Sale*, was published in 1922 and filmed in 1923. *The Theosophical Path* magazine noted in its July 12, 1923, edition that Hughes was among recent "notable visitors" to Lomaland. Shurlock worked with Hughes for four years—quitting once he discovered that Hughes' chauffeur was more highly paid.

Upon leaving Hughes in 1926, Shurlock co-wrote an unproduced play, *The Painted Man*, with Joseph Jackson, who also helped him get hired by Paramount's story-reading department. Shurlock worked as a script editor before getting a chance to produce. In 1929, he produced Paramount's last silent film, the Western *Stairs of Sand*, starring Wallace Beery. He oversaw the production of ten sound films made for the foreign market, but later that year, Shurlock was fired from Paramount. The following year, he became a naturalized U. S. citizen, and, in 1932, he went



Emil Anton Bundsmann, raised in the dramas of Lomaland, pursued an acting career in New York and in summer stock. He changed his name to Anthony Mann in 1941 when he began to direct



Above a San Diego canyon overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Tingley had the first Greek theater in America built in 1901

to work for the Motion Picture Association of America, a lobbying group advocating for the six major studios. In later years, Shurlock was frequently described in the press as an Episcopalian, setting him apart from the Catholic-dominated PCA. It's unclear if Shurlock purposely obfuscated his Theosophical background. Several film history books falsely state that Shurlock graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Dartmouth College. In his memoir, *See No Evil*, Jack Vizzard, a member of the PCA staff, described Shurlock, perhaps with a knowing wink: “Geoff Shurlock ... passed for Episcopalian, even though he was an eclectic, and in the deepest currents of his soul, a theosophist.”

No hard evidence exists that Anthony Mann and Geoffrey Shurlock ever acknowledged each other as fellow Lomalanders during their careers in the movie business. Shurlock, though, had a prince-like status at the commune during Mann's time there, and his sister, Olive, was a celebrated musician. It is highly unlikely that Mann wouldn't remember or recognize Shurlock from his childhood. It would also not be surprising if both men chose to hide their unusual and potentially controversial upbringings. After all, the magazine that Madame Blavatsky published in London was entitled *Lucifer*.

It remains for researchers to tease out any evidence of theosophi-

Mann and Shurlock frequently refer to ancient Greek playwrights and Shakespeare, and the dramas they were raised on, to make points about aesthetics or the value of cathartic violence.

cal tenets in Mann's movies and Shurlock's censorship. One may notice, for example, how often the first shot of a Mann film is of a mountain peak—a theosophical metaphor for the struggle and progress a soul makes towards its next incarnation. In interviews, both Mann and Shurlock frequently refer to ancient Greek playwrights and Shakespeare, and the dramas they were raised on, to make points about aesthetics or the value of cathartic violence. Mann argued that one of the things he liked about Westerns was that the characters “can be more primitive: they can be more Greek, like *Oedipus Rex* or *Antigone*.” Unfortunately, Mann died before realizing one of his great ambitions—a Western based on *King Lear*.

“I don't think we're here to preach. I don't think we're here to sermonize or moralize or even socialize...I don't try to bring out moral issues.”

—Anthony Mann

Another area of potential exploration for researchers is Shurlock's antipathy toward any depiction of homosexuality. As social attitudes shifted in the second half of the 20th century, one taboo after another fell by the wayside. Shurlock was often given credit for



"In *Winchester 73* he went out to destroy the man who killed his father... So he killed his brother. This is as powerful and strong a yarn as you can tell." Anthony Mann

his reasonable stewardship of the PCA, displaying a markedly more liberal reaction to the rapid cultural changes of the early 1960s. Adultery, narcotics, prostitution, and violence all found a way onto movie screens, but the last taboo against which Shurlock held fast was the depiction of gay relationships.

Mann, on the other hand, helmed several projects during his career that featured homosexual characters (though typically dialed down by the PCA), ranging from the character Rick Coyle in *Raw Deal*, the admittedly bowdlerized version of *Serenade*, all the way to *Spartacus*, from which Mann was fired after the start of production. Shurlock had rejected the dialogue in the bath scene between Laurence Olivier and Tony Curtis about those who "eat oysters and those who prefer snails." Although the scene was filmed, it was removed from the film and not restored until 1991 (with Anthony Hopkins looping the late Olivier's lines).

Shurlock's bulwark against homosexuality is especially interesting when one considers that Katherine Tingley's most aggressive weapon against her great rival in the Theosophical world, Annie Besant, head of the Adyar Society, was propaganda, widely distributed in a series of tracts, that denigrated Besant for the continued support within her organization of reputed pederast Charles Webster Leadbeater. To articulate the distinction between the American lodges and those led by Besant in the UK, Europe and India, Tingley vociferously campaigned against Besant's harboring of an admitted homosexual. One early historian of Point Loma wrote that Tingley "doubtless hoped to establish in the public mind a distinction of Point Loma as the center of 'pure' Theosophy and Adyar as the disseminator of an

'unpure' brand."

Like the two brothers in Mann's *Winchester 73* (1950), the righteous Lin McAdam (James Stewart) and the outlaw Dutch Henry Brown (Stephen McNally), Mann and Shurlock followed divergent paths, but their unusual and intense upbringing inevitably brought them into fundamental conflict. In its day, the Theosophical movement had a strong presence in Hollywood. The Krotona colony, founded by followers of Annie Besant, was established on 10 acres in lower Beachwood Canyon in 1912, and, in 1924, moved to a 115-acre property in Ojai. That same year, Thomas Ince, "father of the Western", after dying mysteriously (in some reports, he was shot by William Randolph Hearst), was given a Theosophist funeral. Talbot Mundy, writer of "King of the Kyber Rifles" and "Her Reputation," lived on the grounds of Lomaland from 1922-1927, and there wrote the Blavatsky-influenced "Om: The Secret of Ahbor Valley." With the passing of time, the Theosophist movement has seen a great decline and mostly faded from public awareness. The religion's influence remains to be discovered in the works of those filmmakers who embraced it. Undoubtedly, future researchers will similarly look back to investigate how the teachings of Scientology, arguably the Theosophy of today in Hollywood, may be infused in the films made by its adherents. ■