

RODNEY COLLIN

a man who wished to do something
with his life



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THE KARNAK
PRESS

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Plate 1. Rodney Collin-Smith

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CHAPTER 1

Towards The Inner Life

If one wants to understand Rodney Collin one eventually has to look behind the outer condition of his life and into life itself and its potentiality. Although external living conditions can both contribute to and make it impossible to reach an inner aim, or even form one, the decisive steps must be taken by each individual.

Such steps reveal the human potential and anyone who takes them moves in the direction of another realm, different from the one formed by the conditions of outer life. Rodney Collin's directions in life became an endless inner journey but without disregarding the outer world. He was in it, but eventually not of it. Drawn by his extraordinary love for higher realms and seeking, above all, knowledge of universal laws, his unending quest led him to a life of contemplation, presence, and sharing what he had found on his often arduous journey. His spiritual, dramatic life has captivated a generation with a spiritual quest, arousing intense interest and bewilderment, but also rejection.

He was born on April 26th, 1909, in the coastal town of Brighton, England, as the first child of Fredrick Collin-Smith and Kathleen Logan. At the age of 50 his father had retired, as intended, from a business as a general merchant and wine importer in London, where he became fairly wealthy and, after travelling in Europe and Egypt, had settled down in Brighton. There he married Kathleen Logan, much younger than he, and a daughter of the owner of the local Royal Crescent Hotel. Before World War I he had bought a Georgian house at Marine Parade in Brighton, where the family lived, and where Rodney and his brother Derry, who was four years younger, were born.

From an early age Rodney Collin tended to explore and immerse himself in areas of knowledge that might enrich and widen his outlook on the world. He was fascinated by stone circles, megaliths, prehistoric man, former civilizations and antiques. It was presumably these and similar interests which led him to be swallowed up by books and provided him with an insight that was unusual for boys of his age. His brother remembered how they often strolled around on journeys of discovery,

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Abandoning the System

There can be no doubt that the last years of Ouspensky's life were the most challenging, spectacular and educational period of Rodney Collin's life. Regardless of which perspective one assumes for a description or interpretation of Collin's Work-life, Ouspensky's direct and indirect influence is clear. From one perspective they even seem inseparable. Ouspensky's role, action, understanding and level of being have often been subjects for debate. Sometimes a bystander's experience collides with rumour, speculation, half-truths, slander and historical investigations. James Moore's lax handling of historical data in this context is both problematic and unsettling, not least given that his extensive writing includes so many influential people in the Gurdjieff-Ouspensky tradition. There is no doubt that his writing must at times be considered outstanding, but his descriptions of the events at Lyne Place in 1947 are incorrect and directly misleading, even though he admits that Ouspensky worked hard in his final phase. Collin's role and contribution is, however, almost dismissed as melodramatic. It becomes particularly problematic when Collin's and Ouspensky's roles are not only hinted at erroneously, but are emphasised.

Rodney Collin was regularly in the midst of Ouspensky's activities from 1936, except for a period during the war when he was working for the British Government. After 1945 he dedicated himself entirely to work with Mr. and Madame Ouspensky. During the whole summer and autumn in 1947 he was permanently around Ouspensky until he died on October 2nd. This period was critical to Rodney Collin who was an eyewitness to the changes that took place in Ouspensky's life close to his death. No histories or historical investigations can replace an eyewitness experience.

Ouspensky had left England for the United States on January 31st, 1941. When he set out on his return journey on January 18th, 1947, it was not only against Madame Ouspensky's will, but also against the advice of his doctor. Already during the summer in 1946, at Steinway Hall, New York, he had announced that he would leave and return to England, and that Work would proceed at Mendham under Madame Ouspensky's direction. This became difficult for many of his followers in New York who did not

CHAPTER 7

The Return to America as a Stop Exercise

Not long after Rodney Collin arrived at Lyne in April, Ouspensky asked him to come with him on his return to America in September. Collin immediately agreed. Due to Ouspensky's deteriorating health there were other conditions to address and consider for the departure besides the necessity for special facilities on the ship. Both at Lyne and Mendham the whole household was focused on either his departure or his arrival. In the early morning of September 4th, the truck with all the luggage left Lyne and travelled down to the ship at Southampton. Rodney Collin, R. and H. left Lyne at about one o'clock and arrived at 3.30 p.m. R. then arranged with the transport and medical officers for Ouspensky's car to drive straight through and right to the ship's gangway.

Ouspensky's car, arriving just a few minutes later, drove through the gate and parked right at the end of the gangplank. Miss R., Miss Q. and Ouspensky, all traveling together, remained in the car. The rest of the travel companions waited patiently on the dock in quiet. It was then when Ouspensky made some remarks that seemed to indicate that he did not want to go. Miss Q. tried hard but could not persuade him. Neither could Miss R., who insisted that he must go to see Madame. At about four o'clock he called the people that were to travel with him, each in turn, and said:

"I cannot go in these conditions."

To Rodney Collin he added: "I thought to take a holiday, but I decided not."

Except for Miss Q., who made a last attempt to persuade him and Miss R. who cried and said: "Do as he says," the rest of the travellers remained silent.

A little later Ouspensky, for some reason, emerged from the car and advanced in the direction of the gangway and then returned to the car. He struggled and was obviously in great pain. All activities at Lyne and Mendham came to a halt. This incident has historically been viewed simply as if Ouspensky changed his mind because of his medical conditions. Rodney Collin saw it differently. Not only did he recognise Ouspensky's

CHAPTER 11

The Drama Unravels

In the afternoon of September 23rd Ouspensky called Rodney Collin to his bedroom and said “Look after all the cats. They are in your care.” The previous evening Collin had tried, through some special efforts, to expand his understanding in a particular area and was determined to continue with this as he withdrew to the Best Dining Room at eleven o'clock. But this evening he lacked emotional force and it came to nothing.

About two o'clock he and Miss P. fetched R. and all three went to Ouspensky's bedroom. A little earlier Miss P. had become aware of Ouspensky's discomfort and her benevolence had overcome her fear of his resistance. The three of them, working together, lifted him, changed his pyjamas and bed clothes, and made him as comfortable as possible. To begin with he resisted and opposed, but accepted help when he saw that they would not relent.

When it was over, and the fire made up, they began to realise many things which they hitherto had failed to understand, and at last tried to see through his eyes rather than their own. They realised that it had been a principle for him to refuse to ask the slightest service which might alleviate his discomfort. He had made it his rule to accept everything. He accepted the physical weakness which prevented him changing his clothes, he accepted the incontinence of his illness, he accepted the discomfort, dirt and repugnance of old age and decay – he accepted all this to the utmost, with all its consequences, not attempting to mitigate it in the slightest. Indeed, he seemed deliberately to accentuate it. In a way almost incomprehensible to ordinary people, he accepted suffering. This was evidently part of his plan. At the same time he would shout and violently resist any who attempted to make things easier for him.

Up till now those who wished to do so had been immediately deterred by this apparently violent reaction. But now Miss P. had shown that when real and heartfelt sympathy simply ignored this resistance, he accepted all, and could at last be given some comfort. And they suddenly understood, to their remorse, that it was their own fear which had kept

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The Theory of Eternal Life

Ouspensky's death was pivotal to Rodney Collin's depth of understanding of inner work. It was also to become a backbone and source of inspiration, not only for his book, *The Theory of Eternal Life*, but for the rest of his life.

During the time when he was locked in the chamber beside Ouspensky's bedroom, he felt he gained a greater insight into the universe. Joyce Collin-Smith told me that he referred to this in their conversations as a vision. It was a part of this vision that was now revealed through his writing and would become the manuscript for *The Theory of Eternal Life*. He did not see what he had gained from this vision as a personal achievement, or that he in anyway could claim authorship for it; he simply saw it as a gift or a communication. Therefore, the first edition, published in 1950, did not carry his name, but was published anonymously. It sold extensively, as many people believed it to be written by Ouspensky.

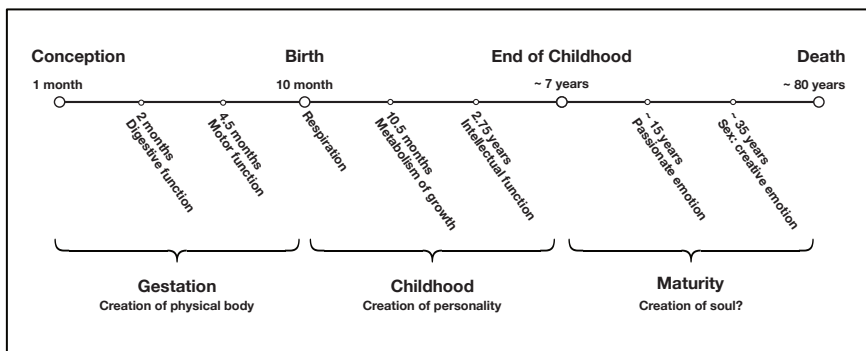


Figure 1. Man's Life in Logarithmic Time

Life, as we know it, begins at birth and ends at death. In the first chapter of *The Theory of Eternal Life*, Collin expands this idea by pointing out that, at the moment of death, man is exposed to an intense energy which is unbearable to the physical body but necessary for a new conception, including the formation of new potentials. Already, here, he challenges our ordinary conception of time, as he claims that this connection of death and

THE THEORY OF ETERNAL LIFE

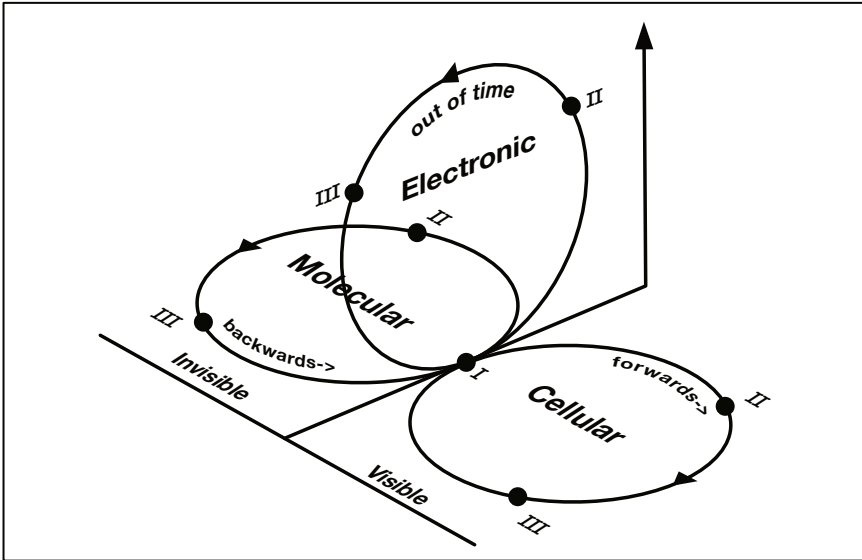


Figure 2. Man's Lifetime in Three Worlds

conception takes place outside time. Less challenging is his division of man's life into eight parts, presented as a logarithmic scale, where each step is characterized by development of various functions, such as growth of the body, gain of personality, and the development of an inner unity.

Considering the religious idea of rebirth from the perspective of the logarithmic scale created a springboard for his visualisation of the course of events between death and birth. By an image consisting of four interlinked circles, Collin demonstrates four different worlds. Our visible world, the cellular world, is placed horizontally along the line of linear time. Next to it, parallel along the same line (of time), is the molecular world, consisting of far more refined matter. The third circle, raised to an upper vertical position, represents an even more refined matter, the electronic world. Finally (not shown in *Figure 2* above) there is the mineral world, which is represented by a circle on the lower part of the vertical plane. This world consists of an almost motionless dense energy.

It is important to note that, in the text, the time periods follow a logarithmic scale for the points *II birth*, *III mature age*, and *I death* in all the three worlds, and that the times in this version are different for the molecular world than those indicated in the diagram in the version of *The Theory of Eternal Life* published by Shambhala Publications Inc., 1984. Hopefully that publication is a one-off.

CHAPTER 17

Mexico

When the Collins went to Mexico it was after some hesitation. To break away from England was not so easy for them. It was the same for several of their companions, however, in addition to an unshakable trust in Rodney, they were motivated by the social climate which included rationing and other aftermaths of the war. In addition, the Labour Party's policies and post-war measures put some pressure on wealthy people like Janet Collin. One way or another, there was a lot of uncertainty in England at that time.

It's also conceivable that there was a certain amount of tension between the various factions of Ouspensky's followers which Collin wanted to distance himself from and help to neutralise by leaving. However, what was crucial to Collin was his rock-solid faith that rested on Ouspensky's call for reconstruction and the need to start over and he seemed now, more than ever, to be a man of action and not reaction.

They first settled in Guadalajara, a large city in the eastern highlands of Mexico, where Collin made the final touches to the manuscript of *The Theory of Eternal Life* on November 19th, 1948. They had been traveling with a group of followers, who must have been overwhelmed by the unfamiliar surroundings. Guadalajara, with its wide brimmed sombrero-dressed figures and distinctive mariachi-music, was the most Mexican of all cities. There must have been little in the external circumstances that did not indicate that something new was about to happen. Collin, on the other hand, had been familiarized with Mexico during his wartime service and had already developed a passionate relationship with both the country and the people.

After November they all moved to Tlalpan and installed themselves in an old hacienda outside Mexico City. More of Ouspensky's followers arrived from England and the community at Tlalpan grew. In Mexico City they rented a flat where meetings were held regularly. They attracted new people, mostly Mexicans, but also foreigners who had been stranded in the city for various reasons, and the community grew. Due to Janet's financial independence, there were no economic constraints to implementation of the projects that they thought may benefit their work.

CHAPTER 21

The Theory of Celestial Influence

On one of the first occasions Collin met Ouspensky at his home at Gwendwr Road in London in 1936, he introduced himself as a writer and asked how he could contribute.

Ouspensky simply said:

“Better not to get too involved. Later we may find something for you to write.”¹

Collin was relieved at Ouspensky’s response. He felt insecure and was concerned about how his writing could be useful. For the next ten years he wrote virtually nothing about the Work.

However, in 1947, two months before Ouspensky’s death, he began to outline the basic main features and structure of the manuscript for *The Theory of Celestial Influence* and experienced this as a fulfilment of Ouspensky’s original promise.

In order to trace the impetus and source of the manuscript we must return to a group-meeting held in New York in 1944. The members were assigned the task of classifying the sciences according to the principles of the Work and the different worlds that the Work embodies. Ouspensky’s rationale for the thesis was that the existing classifications could not be considered satisfactory, either in light of Work-ideas, or from the viewpoint of the current era.

At this meeting he pointed out how the work of English philosopher Herbert Spencer, who transferred Darwin’s theory of development to areas such as art, science and social life, was interesting but far from satisfactory. Although Spencer gained recognition in several disciplines, primarily in pedagogy, sociology, anthroposophy and religious history, he is probably best known as the man behind the term ‘survival of the fittest’.

Collin’s objective in *The Theory of Celestial Influence* was to shed light on the human position in the universe. Rather than unilaterally emphasising a scientific approach based on the accumulation of measurable facts, or an approach where universal laws and principles are rediscovered by an

¹ Rodney Collin, *The Theory of Celestial Influence* (London: Vincent Stuart Publishers Ltd, 1958), XIX.

RODNEY COLLIN

DUALITY

True	False
Real	Imaginary
White	Black
Light	Dark
Myself	Not myself
Inside	Outside
Up	Down
Motion	Matter
Waking	Sleep
Life	Death

Think about these contraries; how to resolve them?

Ordinary man lives inside out.

He lives in constant forgetfulness of what is real – **constant forgetfulness of his own existence.**

He lives in constant remembrance of what has no reality – **constant remembrance of his own self-importance.**

He **does** exist – both physically and in other ways. Yet ninety-nine per cent of the time he actually feels himself as the centre of the universe, actually believes the true significance of things lies in the way they affect him. This is illusion.

Unconsciousness plus illusion is sleep.

Sleep infinitely prolonged is death.

To wake up and live everything has to be reversed:

Remember your true existence.

Forget your self-importance.

Remember yourself and forget yourself – always and everywhere.

Begin with the body.

Begin by feeling the existence and behaviour of the body.

Soon you will have to admit that usually you **are not aware of its existence** unless it is stabbed by some penetrating pain or pleasure.