MAGYAR

Lettre

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Writers from Finland, Guest of Honour country of this years' Frankfurt Bookfair at the Budapest International Book Festival: Sofi Oksanen, Rosa Liksom, Ulla-Lena Lundberg, Pauliina Rauhala

Thursday, April 24, 2014 ▪ 4.00–6.00 pm ▪ Sofi Oksanen in Millenaris Teatrum

Friday, April 25, 2014 ▪ between 10.00 am and 6.00 pm ▪ Sofi Oksanen, Rosa Liksom, Ulla-Lena Lundberg, Pauliina Rauhala at the European Writers' Meeting in Millenaris Europa Pont

Saturday, April 26, 2014 ▪ 10.30 ▪ Rosa Liksom in the Marai Hall, 1.30 pm Rosa Liksom, Ulla-Lena Lundberg, Pauliina Rauhala in the Osztovits Hall

Sunday, April 27, 2014 ▪ 3.00 pm ▪ Ulla-Lena Lundberg in the Marai Hall

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SOFI OKSANEN

The period between the cold wars is over

Russia's annexation of Crimea, in blatant violation of international law, is a highly symbolic expression of power. In an exclusive article for the Swedish newspaper Expressen*, Sofi Oksanen exhorts the West to put a stop to Putin's colonialism.*

FOTÓ: © TONI HÄRKÖNEN

OKSANEN, Sofi
Purge
Grove/Atlantic, 2010

I wake up every morning wondering if today is the day when eastern Europe is going to be sold out again. I check my mobile, and when I see it hasn't yet announced anything too alarming, even if the news isn't exactly cheering, I switch on my computer and go through the news headlines, still wondering if it's going to happen today, or tomorrow.

The day when I will only be able to cope with the news by concentrating on observing my own reactions and those of the world around me, because it is the duty of a writer to remember the moments when the pages of history turn.

A new age has already begun. The inter-Cold War period – 1989–2014 – is over.

The last time eastern Europe and the Baltic states were sold out to the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a manoeuvre which contributed to the Soviet empire reaching its greatest strength. An unpaid workforce was locked away in the slave camps of the gulag. Now Russia has made clear in both word and deed that it intends to restore the empire to its former glory. Brezhnev's doctrine has been updated and adopted by Putin:

Russia believes it has the right to intervene in the actions of independent states if they appear to be moving too far towards the West, and if Russia considers itself to have authority over the area in question.

The Russian Duma is currently pushing through a law which would facilitate the annexation of regions that were previously Soviet, and the peoples of eastern European and Baltic countries are wondering if they have once again put their faith in the West in vain. For the past decade the West has paid little attention to eastern Europe, except as a source of cheap labour and profitable production facilities.

The illegal annexation of Crimea is of great symbolic value: this is the first region since the Soviet period to have been taken from an independent state and incorporated into Russia. It is also a test, an exploration of western tolerance and morals: will the West dare to stand by its promises – or will it betray eastern Europe again?

The fallen empire's counterattack began back in 2005, when Putin declared that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century. The way history is taught is one of the methods by which this thesis is promoted, its retrograde content motivated by geopolitical interests. This version of history is intended to reawaken Russian national pride and act as a reminder that belonging to the Russian empire was beneficial to the peoples of other nations.

The former vassal states themselves take a rather different view.

For years people in the West have politely applauded Putin's speeches about his country's "democratic development". Putin himself has defined his societal model as "managed" democracy. This sort of government is no democracy, but the West fell for the explanation, as it did for other euphemisms from the FSB (today's KGB) that were intended to calm the rest of the world while the elite in power in the Kremlin made preparations for Putin's brave new world.

The Soviet Union was rehabilitated, and journalism became a suicidal career choice. Since 2012 Putin's elite have been repatriating their assets from the West in order to guarantee the independence of those in power.

One of the founding principles of the European Union

One of the founding principles of the European Union is that we should at least try to learn something from the past. The Eurasian Union promoted by a clique within Putin's elite is diametrically opposed to this. It is based upon the choicest bits of Stalinism and National Socialism, the lessons of whose propaganda are consistently followed. And this way of exercising power has an inexhaustible budget.

In 2005 the English-language television channel Russia Today was set up to serve the Kremlin's propaganda purposes, with an annual budget of more than 300 million dollars. Because the channel's programming looks like news, everyone believes that it *is* news, whereas in fact it is focused on disseminating Russian "truths" to the West, as former employees have admitted.

Only with the Ukrainian crisis has this propaganda become so shameless that it no longer makes any attempt to disguise its intentions to the West, as it had previously. This is a considerable change.

In the West, editors are used to presenting the opinions of various parties in order to come up with an article that comes somewhere close to the truth. But this is the wrong way to go about things when one of those parties is blatantly lying. Acting in this way also means that the western media are indirectly repeating the message promoted by the Kremlin's *siloviks* [literally "people of power", used to denote senior politicians with a background in the security services].

At the very heart of Kremlin's policy is a war of information, full of claims and counterclaims, because this is the cheapest way of waging war and conquering territory without tanks. Fear, provocation, projection and propaganda: the Kremlin's elite are masters of these. And these are the weapons that are always used to justify occupations, both to native populations and the outside world.

To Russia, the annexation of the Crimean peninsular, legally part of Ukraine, was a simple nut to crack. The invasion didn't lead to any Russian casualties that could have brought mothers out onto the streets, and they managed to present the West with a narrative in which the annexation was rendered understandable, seeing as a large proportion of the region's population is Russian-speaking.

The majority of these arrived in Crimea as a result of Stalin's mass transplantations, whose purpose was to mix up the populations of the Soviet Union's vassal states and russify the region. Similar areas can be found in various parts of eastern Europe. And now these people are being exploited by Putin's gang. But the fact is that the original inhabitants of Crimea, the Tatars, have already been forgotten. Their experience of Stalin's population policies culminated in genocide.

At the time of writing, the doors of houses occupied by Tatars are being marked with crosses. Does that sound familiar?

Russia has been trying to destabilise the independence of eastern Europe and the Baltic states for a long time now. Back in 2008 Putin described Ukraine as an artificial state. Russia has called into question Ukraine's right to inviolable borders, and through a skilful construction of lies has managed to make it look almost like a Russian state. There's nothing new about this strategy: this is what happened to the young Austrian state in the 1930s, and led to the *Anschluss* in 1938.

The Baltic states have had to listen to this sort of rhetoric from Russia for years now. The rest of the world knows relatively little about these countries – just like Ukraine. Consequently the Russian agenda – to question their right of self-determination – is by no means an impossible task.

In what passes as the Russian media, there have long been stories about Russians being kept in concentration camps in Estonia (vintage of lie: 2007). It is also claimed that the children of Russian tourists could be kidnapped from hotels in Finland, which is historically regarded as belonging to Russia (vintage of lie: 2013).

When this sort of thing is being pumped out into the ether year after year, it is hardly surprising when a majority of the Russian populace gradually begins to adopt a suspicious attitude towards the West. And this is precisely the point of it. This way people can be mentally mobilised for war and previously amicable ethnic groups goaded against one another.

Compatriot policy

Imaginary enemies are exactly what Putin's clique needs in order to maintain their popularity and preserve the assets they have acquired for themselves by highly questionable means. Any loss of power would expose the corruption that allowed them to accumulate such wealth. Which is exactly what happened to Ukraine's deposed President Yanukovych.

For the time being, the Russian leadership is concentrated on a small group of *siloviks*, and Putin – the richest man in Europe and Russia – is its outward face. The educational background of the group's members differs from that of western politicians, and has its basis in the FSB and KGB. There is no higher status within the Russian power hierarchy. In the days of the Soviet Union, at least the Party used to be above the KGB.

Anyone who still believes that Russia is using its "compatriot policy" to protect the interests of ethnic Russians outside the country's borders is advised to do a quick reality check and remember how Hitler made use of ethnic Germans. Everyone who has ever visited Russia knows how little those in power really care about Russians. And it was Russian actions under the guise of "humanitarian aid" that left South Ossetia in such a wretched state.

The Kremlin is not particularly fond of the variously coloured revolutions in neighbouring countries. So people inclined towards Moscow are installed in the governments of countries riddled with corruption. While he was in power, Yanukovych managed to arrest historians investigating Soviet crimes, and personally expressed his doubts about the *Holodomar*, the catastrophic famine that was actually an act of genocide instigated by the Soviets in the early 1930s. His policies also included limitations on freedom of speech, and homophobic propaganda. Yanukovych acted as a Moscow-inclined leader is expected to act. But the people protested, and spoiled Putin's well-progressed plans to quietly unite Ukraine with Russia.

It's time for the West to say no to Russia's intention of expanding its territory beyond the country's borders, and this cannot be done by diplomatic dialogue.

It is impossible to negotiate with an adversary who consistently lies about their goals. Russia has already shown that it adopts a diplomatic façade merely to buy time to transport heavy weaponry to the border. To buy time to push through laws supporting puppet regimes.

The West has tried to understand the policies being put into practice by the Kremlin, but there's really no need to understand colonialism. It is simply greed, and it has to be stopped.

Or would we try to show understanding if Queen Elisabeth II decided to revive British colonialism? Would you try to comprehend Angela Merkel's thinking if she threatened to restore the German Reich? What if German television started to broadcast children's programmes in which stuffed toys were shown preparing for war? What if Germany were run by people trained by the Gestapo? How would you feel if the Germans regarded Hitler as one of the greatest men in their country's history, the way Stalin is regarded in Russia?

What if Germany declared that Europe (or "Gayrope", as the Russians call it) was governed by a homosexual conspiracy, as has recently been claimed in a Russia bolstered by anti-gay propaganda legislation? Does anyone remember who it was who claimed that western degeneracy was the result of a Jewish conspiracy?

No-one would tolerate this, not even for an instant. You know that there is no way you could ever explain to your grandchildren why you let it happen.

(an exclusive article for the Swedish newspaper Expressen)

FOTÓ: © TONI HÄRKÖNEN

GYÖRGY SPIRÓ

The Peace Hunt (flash play)

Characters:
Kaiser WILHELM II of Germany
Tsar NICHOLAS II of Russia
ADJUTANT

Set on the eve of the 28th June 1914.

ADJUTANT ■ I have Moscow on the line, your Imperial Majesty. May I connect Tsar Nicholas?
WILHELM ■ Yes. Your Majesty?
NICHOLAS ■ Your Majesty!
WILHELM ■ My dear cousin!
NICHOLAS ■ My dear cousin!
WILHELM ■ How is my favourite relation, her Imperial Highness, the Tsaritsa?
NICHOLAS ■ The Tsaritsa is fine, thank you for asking, and sends your Imperial Majesty warm and heartfelt greetings. Every week she reminds me that had your Majesty not urged me on, I would never have dared ask her for her hand!
WILHELM ■ Ah, yes, the eighth of April twenty years ago… But it was hardly a case of urging – I merely gave your Majesty a bunch of flowers with which to woo her…
NICHOLAS ■ Happiest year of my life, 1894!
WILHELM ■ How fine it would be to have your Royal Highness in Germany once more.
NICHOLAS ■ It'll be four years this November since we hunted together on your estates.
WILHELM ■ Yes, it was a bit chilly by then.
NICHOLAS ■ We were up to our knees in mud! But I like the mud. What a bag we had! Forty stags, I think, and more than sixty deer… It was wonderful, Majesty!
WILHELM ■ I hope to see your Highness in Berlin again this year.
NICHOLAS ■ It would be my pleasure. The war will be over by mid-September, anyway.
WILHELM ■ Am I to take it your Majesty has reason to believe there will be war?
NICHOLAS ■ I can hardly see how there couldn't be, given that the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, was shot and killed in Sarajevo earlier today.
WILHELM ■ I hadn't heard.
NICHOLAS ■ I only heard five minutes ago.
WILHELM ■ Does his Imperial and Royal Highness Franz Josef know?
NICHOLAS ■ He will soon. He's not a sentimental man, but he's bound to issue Serbia with an ultimatum, which – with my backing – they will refuse, and the armies of Austro-Hungary will mobilize…
WILHELM ■ I will stand by Franz Josef.
NICHOLAS ■ Your Majesty's troops will clash with mine in Eastern Prussia. I would recommend the region of the river Vistula near Warsaw as a suitable battleground. It's all Poles 'round there anyway, so no one will miss them. General Samsonov of my General Staff is ready and waiting.
WILHELM ■ For my part, it will be Von Mackensen. The old boy can hardly wait to show us all what he's made of.
NICHOLAS ■ In a few weeks, after some minor victories on the Eastern Front, your Majesty and I will conclude a peace. I know your Majesty is only really interested in the French Front, anyway. I have no objection to your Majesty's marching into Paris.
WILHELM ■ Most kind.
NICHOLAS ■ But Serbia, Romania and the Balkans will stay with me. Poland remains divided.
WILHELM ■ Agreed.
NICHOLAS ■ There's so much tension here, chaos. All sorts of lunatics, atheists and revolutionaries running around; and then there's the General staff and their thirst for glory. I simply must find an outlet for it all.
WILHELM ■ Same here. My Generals are hounding me to death, and I've already given them every promotion there is. Von Seecht, Hindenburg, Ludendorf, von Falkenhayn, von Moltke… There's not enough military manoeuvres in the world to satisfy their urge to show off… We need a good little war, but I'm worried they'll get too powerful… So I would ask your Highness to make sure that Brusilov and your other fine Generals put on a good show against them.
NICHOLAS ■ I promise. These Generals are like small, yappy dogs. You have to let them run around a bit from time to time so they don't feel the leash. Besides, the Opposition need something to rattle on about in the Duma… Which reminds me, how are those Russian Bolsheviks your Majesty keeps on the payroll in Switzerland?
WILHELM ■ They're fine, thank you very much, playing lots of chess. Not much else for them to do, really. There's twenty-seven of them and they've split into six factions that all hate each other.
NICHOLAS ■ I really don't know what they see in chess.
WILHELM ■ But tell me more, your Majesty, about this assassination! Where was it again?
NICHOLAS ■ In central Sarajevo.
WILHELM ■ Sarajevo, where's that?
NICHOLAS ■ In Serbia. No, wait, my adjutant is shaking his head… Croatia, then… No? My apologies… Bosnia, my adjutant says. Whatever. The first assassin, a Muhamed Mehmedbašić, didn't have the nerve to shoot, though he'd sworn blind he would.
WILHELM ■ Sounds Turkish. Are you saying the assassins were Turks?
NICHOLAS ■ Some Turkified Slav, or Slavified Turk. They're all South-Slav nationalists, this lot, members of something called *Narodna Odbrana*. It means 'National Guard'.
WILHELM ■ How many of these South Slavs are there, anyway?
NICHOLAS ■ How many South Slavs? My adjutant says there's six or seven South Slavic peoples… and they all want to make one little independent South Slav Kingdom. It's not entirely in Russia's interest to have such a state, but for the moment I've got to keep supporting them to counter the other Slavs the Austrians are bankrolling. Anyway, so this Muhamed lost his nerve and couldn't shoot. The second assassin… what was he called? Pardon? Nedeljko? Nedeljko, then… threw a bomb at the car, but he set the fuse wrong and it went off ten seconds too late, injuring the people in the next car… This Nedeljko took cyanide at the scene and jumped into the river, not knowing that it was only four inches deep! It's a miracle he didn't break his neck. The cyanide was past its best, too, so he was none the worse for it… (laughs).
WILHELM ■ Are these really your Highness's best assassins?
NICHOLAS ■ They're not *my* assassins, I just pay them. Tuppenny-ha'penny bunch, more zealots than opportunists. But I would like to point out that I was the first to know about this assassination.
WILHELM ■ And I'll have a thing or two to say about that to my secret service! They should be ashamed of themselves. But please, continue.
NICHOLAS ■ Well, they took the injured to hospital and Franz Ferdinand and the Duchess decided to go visit them. A most commendable decision, of course, but we were tipped off at once. The driver, who was one of ours, happened to take a wrong turn and decided to back up.
WILHELM There's some word for it…
NICHOLAS ■ Reverse.
WILHELM ■ That's it.
NICHOLAS ■ So the driver was manoeuvring by the riverbank, and they say he stalled the car several times, which made for an excellent target. Another assassin was supposed to shoot, what was his name again? Gavrilo Princip. Thank you. He was all ready to take the shot when it turned out that he'd forgotten to load his gun. So in the end one of their own bodyguards had to shoot the Archduke and Duchess right inside the car, from something like a foot and a half away. They arrested this man Princip as the assassin. He took cyanide too, but what with all the excitement, threw it

back up. Must have been off as well! There was also some Governor in the car with them… Pardon? My adjutant says his name is Potiorek. He was unharmed.

WILHELM ■ The cyanide had gone off! (Laughter). Whoever heard such a thing! How is the Tsarevitch?

NICHOLAS ■ His haemophilia seems to be getting a bit better… he's being treated by the most brilliant man. He's been praying for him, reciting incantations, and using the laying on of hands.

WILHELM ■ A man called Rasputin, yes?

NICHOLAS ■ Indeed. My wife adores him. He truly is a great man. The only problem is that he's against the war. He's afraid that it'll mean the downfall of the House of Romanov and he's been going around saying so.

WILHELM ■ Nonsense.

NICHOLAS ■ He's brilliant, but he's quite uneducated and has his limits. He can't see the position I'm in. He simply doesn't understand how many people I've got hounding me on all fronts. The only way to get myself a little peace is to have a quick war.

WILHELM ■ I know what you mean. It's now the end of June. It'll take two or three weeks for everyone to get the declarations of war, but we should be on the battlefield by mid-July. August will be taken up with battles, and then we can make peace in September.

NICHOLAS ■ Sounds about right to me.

WILHELM ■ How is your Majesty's cousin, King George? Any news of his intentions?

NICHOLAS ■ King George agrees with your Majesty's statement that anti-British sentiment is growing in Germany. For his part, he is supportive of – and fanning the flames of – anti-German feeling in Britain. He will join our side in the war, against your Majesty.

WILHELM ■ I'll be counting on it. Won't make much difference either way, Britain is a long way off. I'm planning to use poison gas against the French. Apparently you can kill hundreds of thousands of people in minutes. I have my doubts; we'll see. I shan't be using anything of the sort against your Imperial Majesty's troops, of course. Please do convey my warmest greetings to King George. I can't wait to see what my submarines can do to his precious navy.

NICHOLAS ■ King George doesn't think much of submarines. He's counting on the war ending sometime in early October.

WILHELM ■ My Generals think we'll smash his fleet well before then.

NICHOLAS ■ I hear your Majesty also has some new-fangled war engines.

WILHELM ■ Yes, 'tanks' they're called. Go through anything. But I'm even more excited about my war aeroplanes. They'll be dropping grenades from the sky right onto the front!

NICHOLAS ■ I put my faith in manpower. The heroism and numbers of the Russian people are inexhaustible.

WILHELM ■ The determination of the German soldier is proverbial. We'll give the French a good thrashing. In any case, your Imperial Majesty, I hope to see you in Berlin this September along with King George.

NICHOLAS ■ Likewise. I hereby accept your kind invitation, and will extend it to his Majesty King George. I'm sure he'll be just as pleased.

WILHELM ■ Please pass on my warmest wishes to her Highness the Empress. Queen Victoria did always say that Alix was her favourite grandchild. We, the others, could only look on with envy. Later, of course, we envied you, who finally carried her off.

NICHOLAS ■ I will. My wife is troubled by the growing anti-German feeling within *Rus*. I have tried in vain to tell her that it is necessary just now, and that it is merely a passing phase the war will sweep clean away. (Laughs). That a man could dive headfirst into four inches of water and live! *C'est ridicule*!

WILHELM ■ (Laughs) Cyanide that's off! *C'est magnifique*! All the best, dear cousin, see you on the battlefield!

NICHOLAS ■ All the very best of luck to your Royal Highness!

(Click)

ADJUTANT ■ I have von Mackensen on the other line for you, Majesty. He says it's urgent.

WILHELM ■ Yes, fine, in a minute. I want you to start organising the September hunt right away. In attendance will be the Tsar, King George, and His Imperial and Royal Majesty Franz Josef. What the hell, let's invite one of the French as well. Whoever's still alive and happens to be President. It must be a special, enormous Peace Hunt! But before you do that, don't forget to declare war on everyone who needs declaring war on.

ADJUTANT ■ Yes, your Majesty!

WILHELM ■ And don't you go mixing up our friends with our enemies, now!

ADJUTANT ■ Absolutely not, your Highness!

WILHELM ■ I want a huge number of animals for the hunt. At least eighty stags, a hundred and twenty wild boar, and the rest.

ADJUTANT ■ Yes, your Majesty!

WILHELM ■ And bears! Let's give the Tsar a treat. Let's have at least twenty polar bears!

ADJUTANT ■ The Russians don't have polar bears, Majesty…

WILHELM ■ All the better! Get some over from Alaska.

ADJUTANT ■ The Russians sold Alaska to America…We might not be able to get them if America joins the war.

WILHELM ■ Oh, please, America is very far away and will remain neutral. But if you really want, you can invite their President…what's his name again? He does have a name, doesn't he?

ADJUTANT ■ I think he's called Nelson or Wilson or something, your Majesty…We'll look into it.

WILHELM ■ They're a young nation, no traditions…I'd be surprised if they knew how to hunt at all…anything other than Indians, that is.

ADJUTANT ■ Shall we get some Indians to go with the bears, then?

WILHELM ■ Yes, better make it sixty.

ADJUTANT ■ Five dozen Indians, very good. If we can't get them from the Americans, we'll ask the Tzar for some Chukchis.

WILHELM ■ Spare me the details. I want this to be a special hunt, one that people will remember! A great big Peace Hunt, the likes of which the world has never seen! And another thing. Before you send out the invitations, don't forget to declare war on everybody, all right?

GYÖRGY SPIRÓ TALKS WITH EVE MARIA KALLEN

No politics, no ideology, just human relations

EVE-MARIE KALLEN ■ György Spiró, I would like to find out a few things about your relationship between élet és irodalom, between life and literature. You have been writing in many genres, for many years and with a huge output. There is the historical and the science-fictional novel, the drama, the essay, the recension, even the translation. At the same time you are a university teacher at ELTE (Eötvös Loránd Tudomány Egyetem, the University of Budapest) and at the Theatre and Film Academy in Budapest. So, to start out with something rather simple: Where do you find the time and the energy to do all this?

GYÖRGY SPIRÓ ■ I find it interesting to involve myself in all this. Parts of this process are not work at all. Preparing to write a historical novel for instance, means sitting in archives, reading all sorts of material like old chronicles and letters and thereby reaching people that otherwise I would not manage to meet in real life. I am interested in writing historical novels or historical plays just because of this amusement, and I found out that we have much more information about the past than about the time we are actually living in.

■ *But there is this distance which seperates us from the past. Everything we know about past times is indirect. When I read your historical novel "Fogság" (Captivity), it was a very good experience for me because I learnt so much about that described period, the time between the years Zero and about Eighty after Christ. It enlargened my general horizon a lot.*

But how did it feel to you as a person who lives right now to have been writing a historical novel about the very complex and far-away topic of life and captivity of the Jewish people in the Mediterranean region around the lifetime of Christ?

■ I do not have a stable personality in my novels. There is not one person who could be identified as my voice. I am more like an actor in these various forms of my writing. I like to play with the possibilities. Everytime I write, I try to write something completely new and to go to a new form that I did not try before. I don't want to repeat myself.

■ *You are several people in one and also several countries in one, it seems to me. Furthermore, you are on one hand – now talking about Spiró, the real person – a teacher, an instructor of what in your private time you practice as an artist. In other words, there is an interesting cooperation between the analytical and the free, creative part of your mind. Can you elaborate on this a bit?*

■ I started in the seventies to lecture at ELTE and later at the Theatre and Film Academy. There was also the work in theatres: I was working eleven years in Kaposvár as a literary manager (dramaturg) and three years as a managing director at the theatre in Szolnok.

With teaching it was different. At that time, in the late seventies and the beginning eighties, the knowledge gap between the students and the teachers was not as big as it is now. During the first approximately ten years, I personally learnt a lot from the students, things which I could use for my theatre work. I also learnt how to be a professor, and I enjoyed all of this. But in the last decade, in this 2000 era, things went into a shallow direction. The students have less knowledge, but also their mentality has changed very much. They are not anymore interested in the things that I want to teach them. It is not a question of the number of the works they read but of the position which they take towards life. Somehow, they don't know what it means to be a human being. They are not at home in a family. They don't know what basic human relationships mean. It struck me when I was teaching one of the plays by Tchechow at the Theatre and Film Academy. Future dramaturgs and actors come from there. It was very interesting to see that they totally don't understand the relationship between two people. There, it were Gajev and Lopachin. Lopachin is a peasant, and Gajev is a nobleman. And they did not at all understand what it means when Gajev says: "Something is stinking here." They did not understand that it is a very big hurt. It is not a question of being an intellectual, it is not a question of anything. They just don't understand the basis of human relationships.

The writer as a voice for his people

■ *Let's go back to your start. In 1974 you came out with a very big success, the novel "Kerengő" (Cloister Courtyard), in which you portrayed the Hungarian poet Endre Ady who was a very genial person at the before-last turn of the century. He rebelled against several things in Hungary: the low level of the general state of mind, the political dependancy of Hungary, the fact that the genial human being could not get any understanding or respect. Why did you choose Ady?*

■ Well, I do love Ady's poetry very much; for me he is the greatest Hungarian poet. His poems are untranslatable into other languages. I know just one exception: Miroslav Krleža, the great Croatian writer who knew Hungarian perfectly, made a selection of Ady's poetry in Croatian language and that is congenial. In the novel I was not so much interested in his poetry in general but in two very poor books of poetry which he issued before he became a great poet. He was already some thirty years of age when he issued his famous "Új versek" (New Verses) which created the high esteem for him. They were a turning point in his poetic work. But those two poor books from before show that he was conscientiously working on becoming a genius. Basically, he was not talented!

I was interested in just this. So, I took a similar guy who is absolutely not talented but decides to be something, to make something out of his life, exactly what is not quite clear. But morally, he should be purified all by himself, to show that he was worth the gift of life. This is the point that interested me in Ady, not his poetry. This is my question: How is it possible that somebody creates himself from nothing into something?

■ *In Hungary as well as in other East-European countries, the writer in many instances was a voice for his entire people. This is how I always viewed Ady. In Hungary this was certainly true. How is it today? Do Hungarian writers still have this function in society?*

■ Unfortunately yes, at least a part of them. But it is not good for literature to play a role in this romantic tradition, and all my life I was fighting against it. I was interested in certain types of romantic writers and poets in my novels just because I wanted to describe this special state of mind. I think that it is faithful to our Hungarian and Polish and also some other mentalities. So, I went into this mentality a bit deeper. The main problem is that where social institutions do not function normally, some tellers, some seers, some poets substitute them, and it is a very poor situation when people have to believe in those persons instead of having functioning public institutions. Unfortunately, this is where we are in Eastern Europe till now.

■ *But in Germany, we also know this phenomenon. We have Günther Grass, and we used to have Heinrich Böll, and there was Group 47, all these people spoke up when it seemed necessary.*

■ Writers here are obliged to represent something: social layers, ethnic minorities, the whole nation, but first of all some sort of ideology. As for me, I don't want to represent anybody or anything. No politics, no ideology, just human relations are what I want to depict in my works. But unfortunately, you cannot completely fight this pre-modern, romantic expectation that is not going out of the narrow terms of community and ignores a man's right to be an individual. If the readers think that you are a priest, you find yourself in an uneasy situation. Most of the writers and poets in East Europe have no problem being thought of as priests or a spokesmen of some party. But I have!

■ *In 1989/1990 with the transition from socialism to capitalism we saw several poets and writers in Eastern or Central-Eastern European countries reaching important positions. There was Árpád Göncz as President of Hungary and Václav Havel in the same position in Tchechoslovakia, in Bulgaria you had Blaga Dimitrova who also played an important political role. Is this time over now?*

■ No, it is not over. But you cannot do anything against it when the social institutions are not there or not functioning properly and people want to have leaders to follow. Writers then often take these roles.

■ *Do you think that something like a public conscience has a part in this?*

■ Yes, but as far as I am concerned as a writer, my goal is to make people laugh and cry.

■ *Now, the theatre person speaks!*

■ Not only the theatre person, no, quite many people laughed reading my novels, and in the end, quite many of them cried. But it means that although I do deal with politics in my work – politics is an important part of life – I myself do not think politically. I have always been in opposition, but not politically. I was in the opposition during the Kádár years, but it was a spiritual opposition. I remained in the opposition in the new regime as well.

■ *As a free-thinking individual.*

■ Yes, but I certainly do not go into daily politics, partly because it would be against my taste, but partly because I don't have enough information about what is going on behind the scene. We have much more information about the past – getting back to the historical level – than about our present time. I don't know about what they do in the Oval Office in Washington because I am not present there and they will not tell me. I don't know about what they do in Moscow because I am not in the Kremlin, either. In the historical sources from two thousand or from one hundred years ago, we can find those sorts of important informations that we lack now.

■ *How does it feel to you as a writer when you work on a theatre play, like "Chicken Heads", "Quartett" or any one of the many other pieces that you wrote: does it feel different to you than writing a novel or an essay?*

■ Yes, there is a difference. Another part of my soul is being moved by prose than by plays. So I use different kinds of my capacity when I create novels or plays.

■ *Does this mean that you always think in images, in scenes or in dialogues?*

■ I should be able to see with my inner eye what is happening on stage. It is a long way to reach that capacity, and exactly that is the work I have to do. It is another type of burden that you have to carry. Let's take my novel "Captivity". I worked for twelve years on it. I spent ten years gathering the material while writing other things, and I did not know what it was all going to be like. Then I was writing it up in two years.

There are different types of burdens. Writing prose you have to type and rewrite again and again. The only difference between an amateur and a professional writer is that the amateur puts the text down just once, whereas the profi puts it down ten times.

■ *So, in other words, with your writing work you have the amount of patience that you lack with other people when they are trying to put something on stage?*

■ Yes. When you are writing a play, it is enough for a day to have one good sentence or one good vision. Then it means that you have really worked that day!

■ *As far as language is concerned, when I compare the language in your plays to the language in one of your novels, there is a very big difference. In your plays, you use very rough naturalism, and it is an entirely different set which we get – the set of the population, the language they throw at each other; you mirror the people that you present. So everything is different compared to the language you use in a novel.*

■ The whole thing depends on irony. In prose, you should have a certain dose of irony. You are telling a story and you are above the story. In prose, it is possible that you go into the soul of a person and out of it again. There is a play with this movement and that is for me the irony, the distance to the whole world which I am depicting. In drama, I cannot have any bit of irony at all because there, I have to go into a person up to the top of my head. There, I cannot feel different from the way they do! Furthermore, in a play, there is no sentence of mine. All the sentences are those of my persons. So, it is impossible to write a play with irony because you cannot be outside the characters.

■ *Influences are interesting. We talked about Ady. There is a strong poetic tradition in Hungarian literature. You have poets like Ady, Kosztolányi, Attila József, until recently there was György Petri. I have the impression that there is a reappearance of some of these big names in an epigonal shape. Who has been influencing your writing and how did it develop?*

■ Of course, every great writer influenced me when I was young. I was imitating a lot of them. Ferenc Juhász had a great impact on me when I was fifteen, sixteen. I was also writing poetry, short stories and other things. But I did not want to become a poet, I wanted to become a playwright. For me, for a very long time, until the middle of the eighties, the first and most important genre was drama. But in Hungarian drama you cannot find big names. There are some rather good playwrights but in general Hungarian drama is not as good as Hungarian prose or poetry. So, I was very free, I had a free choice and I was not imitating in drama. I could not know that the very best play so far written in Hungarian language was being written as I just started my carrier as a playwright. It is Sándor Weörös' "The Double-Headed Monster" which I consider to be the absolutely best Hungarian drama. Unfortunately, Hungarian theatres don't have the mental facilities to present it sufficiently. We even tried it in Szolnok but it did not work. My way of thinking in plays is not far from Weörös Sándor's way of thinking. He was also something like an actor and he played a lot of roles in his poetry as well, in fact he was a born theatre person. Unfortunately, the Hungarian theatres were not able to put his plays up in a good way, so after some disappointing experiences he stopped writing plays.

Every good writer had an impact on me, not just Hungarians. The two writers to whom I look up the most are Gustave Flaubert and Maxim Gorki. All of last year, I was gathering material about the last ten years of Gorki. His life was fantastic. There are extremely interesting sources that have come out of the archives of the KGB in the last twenty years. I hope that one day I shall be able to write about the last ten years of his life. I used some of his methods in "The Exes" and in "Captivity", and I developed them a bit.

There is another Russian writer whom I am obliged to, Andrej Platonow, a very great figure. Many of his short-stories have been translated into Hungarian. He had a special view on history and on religion and I am very interested in religion although I am a non-religious person.

There are some great East-European writers like Stanisław Wyspianski, the greatest Polish playwright. I have translated some of his plays into Hungarian. It was not an easy work because he writes in verses and has a very complicated rhyme-system. He is second only to Shakespeare. I could not use his methods, but I learnt from him how to be brave and free.

I am happy to have been or still to be the personal friend of two great Hungarian writers, one of them is György G. Kardos. His works have been translated into German and other languages. I recommend to read at least one of his works, "The seven Days of Abraham Bogatir", translated into German by Alexander Lenard, a German-Hungarian-Italian writer and translator. He is a big guy whose tragic life gave me the theme for my latest play. "Die Kuh auf dem Bast" is the German title of his best book, referring to the German idiom used by settlers in Central Brasil. He did not have an impact on my work, but as a person he was wonderful and very human.

The other Hungarian writer I am talking about is Imre Kertész. It is an honour to have been his friend since 1976. I have learnt a lot from him as an originally thinking man. But his literary works did not influence me.

We had nothing of the so-called Jewish tradition

■ *I wonder about the importance of the Jewish spirituality for your thinking, your mental development and for the process in which you have been finding yourself. In "Captivity" I learnt something which answered a question that I always had had in my mind; it is the question of the attitude of being the only "chosen" group of people around. Uri is the one who says that it makes no sense because every human being and every human entity has been equally chosen. The Jewish people invented this belief in a special historical situation when they were a minority and had no choice but to encourage themselves by this idea. So, I am very happy that you answered this question to me.*

■ I have nothing Jewish in me, I think. But I come from a family that is one hundred percent Jewish, according to the Nazi standards. My grandparents were absolutely Hungarian. They were not religious at all and they knew only Hungarian. They were poor people on both sides. My parents always considered themselves as Hungarians, although they were taken for Jews and they had to hide during the Nazi years. They had nothing to do with religions. My father was a believer of communism and remained a communist until his death. So, we had nothing of the so-called Jewish tradition. My mother told me when I was six years old: "You should know that we are Jewish which means that we are as Hungarian as other Hungarians. But if they call you a Jew, you beat them!" That was a very wise piece of advice.

I had no problems with my Jewishness because it was absolutely not interesting for me. Only when I found an interesting Polish topic, the story of a mystical sect, things changed. They had their own Polish redeemer, a re-incarnation of Jesus Christ, as they wanted to believe, called Andrzej Towianski. I wanted to write a novel about this special sect that all the great Polish Romantic writers belonged to, like Mickiewicz, Slowacki and others.

They lived in Paris in the fourties of the nineteenth century. Until the end of their lives they believed that this guy was really the second arrival of Jesus Christ. It was a very interesting sect. There were some Jewish people from Vilnius, a Polish and a Jewish town at the same time. Vilnius was at that time called "New Jerusalem" because there were so many Jews and such important Jewish people living there.

One of my protagonists in that novel "Messiahs" is Jewish, a historical figure, his father was one of the greatest printers in the diaspora. His name is Gershon Ram. President Obama had a guy from this Ram family in his staff, and Michail Romm, the famous Russian film director, also comes from this family. My Gershon Ram rebelled against his family. He first became a Chassid, then a follower of this redeemer, Towianski. He was baptized, met the Pope, went to Jerusalem to convince the Jews there to become followers of this new religion. He led a unique life, indeed.

While I collected all these materials it turned out that this Ram family was fighting against my family, the Spira's, who were also printers, not in Vilnius but in Grodno, another Lithuanian town, and they were also printing the so called "Jerusalem Talmud". My grandfather's original name was Spira, but officials misspelled it, so he became Spiro. The name comes from Speyer, a town in Germany where a lot of Jews used to

live. Quite a number of my family members were executed because of hatred and rivalry between these two printer's families, and many of them were sent to Sibiria.

So I became interested in the Jewish mentality, Jewish history and Jewish religion only when I was tracing down and trying to understand what was happening in this special Polish sect. But if somebody deals with the soul, the sentiments of the people, it is obligatory to deal with religion, and after all, one of the main religions is the Jewish one. Christianity cannot be understood without the Jewish religion nor without the Greek mythology.

■ *These questions are part of our common cultural heritage.*

For me it was also fascinating to understand from reading "Fogság" (Captivity) how many expressions from the Greek language are part of the Jewish rituals and institutions, like "Synhedrion" and so many others. I could also see that they are very much enlightened by the thoughts of Socrates – to me, Jesus is a prolongation of Socrates. But the Jewish traditions and rituals also have the tragic aspect of being methods of self-passivation.

■ I think that the Jewish religion of that time, two thousand years ago, was the most unpleasant religion we have ever had. It was too complicated. It was like a twenty-four-hours-sitting in jail. It demanded the whole day of absolute devotion. A revolution had to happen and it happened, this was Christianity. The Christian branch for some three hundred years existed within the Jewish religion. Anyway, the Jewish religion was sharply divided, with a lot of sects, with deep inside animosity and mutual hatred. This is what Jews and Christians equally don't want to confess until nowadays. Otherwise the sect of Jesus – it is not openly stated in the novel – was a normal Greek sect called "Pharmakioi" meaning: healers. These people went from town to town, from village to village and they were healing sick people. They were treating them according to the norms and who could be cured, was cured. The Jews took this knowledge over and Jesus, his brothers and some friends lived from it. They were not Essenians, they were just healers. I came to the conclusion that they were not a religious sect at all.

■ *Maybe this was just a very conveniant basis for ideological manipulation by a government and, of course, the Romans did use it this way.*

■ The Romans did not understand the Jewish religion properly. Superpowers usually do not know anything about what is going on in their provinces. They don't understand the local mentality, legislation and traditions. They make big mistakes because of the lack of this knowledge. The Romans were by far the most tolerant superpower we can imagine, but even they did not know.

■ *It is interesting how you compose "Fogság". The difference between Uri in Alexandria and Uri in Rome is tremendous. He really decays after a while from the Roman environment. He becomes rich, but mentally he is getting lost. At some point in time the novel just stops and it seems that he is just making his death plight, but this is being left open. It is dramaturgically very well mis en scène. But what about the Jewish war?*

■ It is mostly taken from a book by Josephus Flavius, the title of which is "The Jewish War". Flavius wrote two big books, the other one has the title "The History of the Jews". "The Jewish War" is about the war between 66 and 70.

The pogrom in Alexandria in 38 is also taken from contemporary sources. Philon from Alexandria who is one of my heroes in the novel, has written two basic books about it. Usually I try to be as near to what really happened as possible. I even don't use the word "pogrom", because it is Slavic and from later times. I have decidedly avoided to put later events – let's say from the 20th century – back into the story taking place in the first century.

The main difference between the writer of a history book and the writer of a historical novel is that the historical novelist tries to influence the reader not only by rationality but much deeper, into the emotions. I want the reader to feel something, to laugh and cry, to be shocked, to have fear, to sympathize with the protagonist, to identify with him. A historian does not have this aim. I want the reader to remember, so I create moving images which are easier to come up to the surface of his memory than some rational calculations that a historian uses.

What goes West from the East can be translated

■ *It explains to me a lot about yourself. I am trying to find out about György Spiró, the writer and what makes him go. Spiró the playright and Spiró the novelist go together there. One could put some of the scenes from the novel on stage as well. In other parts you have these thoughts where Uri tries to analyze things. So that is the analytical part. It is also an educational novel.*

Would you say that "Fogság" is the most important piece of work in your literary career so far?

■ I cannot judge. I have two other heavy novels, one is called "Messiahs", about the Polish sect I have already mentioned. It is very good because I had a lot of objectively good material there. The other one is "The Exes", my first big novel. It is also about a Polish topic, about a great Polish actor, Wojczech Boguslawski, the founder of the National Theatre in Warsaw, a really big guy. "The Exes" has just now come out in Poland in a good translation. Maybe, once upon a time they will translate it into German as well.

■ *The necessity of translation from Eastern European languages to Western ones is tremendous. There are certain pieces and certain figures of the literary history which I simply don't know. They come from Eastern European countries.*

■ In the twentieth century there were two great East-European writers that have remained rather unknown in the West. One of them is Tadeusz Borowski. He committed suicide when he was twenty-nine. He was the one and only guy who could really write about Auschwitz. He was there not as a Jew but as a Pole. What he writes about it, is really fantastic. It is a short-story book. When Imre Kertész was writing his novel, he remembered that the first thing he saw from the waggon when he arrived at Auschwitz was a socker playground. All the time he was trying to find out whether he was dreaming this playground or whether it was real. The only place where he could find the answer was with Borowski. He has read Borowski in the Hungarian translation.

The other writer I recommend to you is Verulam Shalamov. He is Russian, and he has written the "Kolima Stories". He spent some thirty years in the Gulag.

■ *Hungary has an especially good tradition as far as literary translation is concerned. How and where did you learn all the languages you know?*

■ Hungary was too tight for me when I started writing. I wanted to go to the West, but it was not possible that time, so I went to the East, and learnt quite many Eastern European languages. I found great writers and I wanted to popularize them in Hungary. I was absolutely unsuccessful in this. I have written a lot of essays, translated very much from these literatures, but actually nobody cares. Those people who still read books, follow the Western tendencies. What goes West from the East can be translated into Hungarian. But from the original without a German editor nothing goes into the Hungarian theatres or into the hands of the people.

Let's go back to Borowski. We have two books by Borowski in Hungarian. One of them appeared in '72 – this is the one we mentioned – the other one came out later, just a few years ago and it is much more complete. There are some selected poems by Borowski in this second volume that I translated. But these books are not available at all. My students had problems acquiring any of them when I gave a seminar on it. Great literature, but it has never been fashionable. It is not obligatory to know about it.

By the way, the Poles themselves don't like Borowski too much because he is critical of them.

■ *It is sad to realize that it is not always a lack of opportunity which is the reason for uneducatedness and insensibility, very often it is the lack of interest, the absence of the wish to know.*

Let's turn to György Spiró, the poet. I know that you have been writing some philosophical poetry.

■ Not much. I stopped writing poetry all together at some point in the eighties. My verses were rather like monologues of different roles in non-existing plays. So, I decided that I'd better write plays. Much more lyricism you find in my short stories. There, I felt more ready and free to be sincere.

■ *György Spiró, thank you very much!*

ULLA-LENA LUNDBERG

Marsipansoldaten: Finland at war

[Autumn 1939]

Göran goes off to the war as a volunteer and gives the Russians one on the jaw. Well, then. First there is training, of course.

Riihimäki town. Recruit Göran Kummel billeted with 145 others in Southern elementary school. 29 men in his dormitory. A good tiled stove, tolerably warm. Tea with bread and butter for breakfast, substantial lunch with potatoes and pork gravy or porridge and milk, soup with crispbread for dinner. After three days Göran still has more or less all his things in his possession. And it is nice to be able to strut up and down in the Civil Guard tunic and warm cloak and military boots while many others are still trudging about in the things they marched in wearing. The truly privileged ones are probably attired in military fur-lined overcoats and fur caps from home, but the majority go about in civilian shirts and jackets and trousers, the most unfortunate in the same blue fine-cut suits in which they arrived, trusting that they would soon be changing into uniform.

Göran, who is comfortably off, has no reason to grumble. He arrived at Riihimäki in a positive frame of mind, red cheeks, cheerful eyes, fully-packed kitbag on his back and his skis over his shoulder. The right routine has stayed with him from the Civil Guard, giving him a considerable advantage over the untrained and the green.

It would be unfair to say that Göran Kummel is a conscious timeserver. He just happens to be one of those whom officers notice: quick on his toes, background in the Civil Guard. It does no harm, for in other ways Göran is at a disadvantage. Even though there are all-Swedish formations in the Finnish army, both Frej and Göran have chosen Finnish units. It is Father's idea, for he doesn't want them to be like him, hopelessly Swedish-speaking in the Helsinki region where Finnish is advancing on a broad front. The argument, not to be like Father, has an effect on Frej, and Göran also sees the advantages of coming out of the war completely bilingual. In any case, he already knows more Finnish than Frej because of his summer practice in the coastguards. 'It's all going to go just fine,' he thinks without a care in the world, and it does, in a way. There is only the problem of his Swedish name.

It feels so strange, it sounds so peculiar that sometimes he doesn't recognise it. The hard 'G', the spiky 'ö', the truncated 'l' that requires an 'i' at the end. And although the language war has been put to rest, there are some gibes and taunts, which Göran takes in good spirit. What is worse is that he still has some way to go before he is completely bilingual. Though the Finns are supposed to be slow and taciturn, they can talk away something terrible , and sometimes the quick-thinking Göran Kummel loses the thread and has to bluff his way, not always with quite successful results. He manages his own talking better. Swiftly he picks up everyday idioms and expressions that would have made his Finnish teacher in Grani turn pale, but are perfectly acceptable at the elementary school in Riihimäki.

The milieu in which he is living is familiar. The school is home from home for him, the timetable and food are as they were in the Civil Guard. He has always been surrounded by boys. The smells are familiar, nothing repellent, but not enticing either, like the female smells of the haybarns.

More acrid where men gather. The smell of sweaty feet, that is really something, familiar from gym halls and changing rooms. Underarm sweat, too. The smell of dirt that becomes distinct before the Saturday sauna. The smell of urine from the latrine, old tobacco in one's clothes. The smell of rot-gut from the mouths of those who have had a night out and dared to get drunk.

And then the fresh smell of snow in the school yard, the pines, the horse-dung, the fumes from passing lorries, the smell of firewood wherever one turns, smoke from all of Riihimäki's chimneys. Finland at war.

Mealtimes are irregular right from the outset, for Riihimäki receives assiduous attention from the Russian airforce. There are no air-raid shelters under the school, so the recruits are ordered out to the forest when there is an alarm. There they watch the brickworks receive a direct hit, a stack of firewood start to burn and the glassworks sounds like a gigantic breaking of the ice when it is hit. It's like being at the cinema, but in reality. The lads stand and gape as at a giant-sized screen, only throwing themselves to the ground when a flying bomb explodes nearby: ouch, my ears!

It is undeniably war, but healthy lads with matriculation certificates and Civil Guard experience can't be squandered away like cannon fodder. They need to be trained as officers, and so Göran Kummel and those like him are selected for NCO training school. School is not something one can escape in this life, even though one thought one was joining the war in order to get the school dust out of one's lungs.

Göran also attracts attention in another way. His neat Civil Guard uniform is the reason why Sunday after Sunday he is detailed to the guard of honour that stands stiffly to attention at the heroes' funerals. One can't help being just a tiny bit flattered at being considered worthy of being displayed on solemn occasions. Washed as he has been taught by Mother, shaven and brushed, dressed in his finery and touchingly young, Göran raises the tone in the church. Still as glass, or almost, he stands with his gaze directed forward, but his features are soft and the lad in uniform as sweet as if he were made of marzipan. He is by no means unaware of the fact that Riihimäki's women and girls like to look at him. Furtively or more or less directly, and one doesn't need to be ashamed about that. The guard of honour stands like an emblem of those one is mourning: young, young men with soft features and living blue eyes, fallen for the Fatherland in their first bloom.

When one sees these serious young lads in the guard of honour one involuntarily finds oneself thinking that next time it may be them, and one wishes them every fortune and success in their own soldiers' career.

It is always cold, especially for those who must stand motionless at the hero's grave or in the cold chancel and look serious. Fortunately Göran's youth functions like an inbuilt steam-boiler that emits thick white steam from his mouth when he breathes, regularly, a message that the fire inside is kept at constant pressure. If one had the courage to put one's ear to his breast one would be able to hear the blaze rumbling in there, the heart like a horse on the race track, the speed steaming out of the pores.

One has such a desire to kiss such a young unknown man as he stands still, forbidden to move. One would so much like to put one's head against his shoulder, which he must not stir. It would be a comfort to feel if he is really as warm as he looks, if one could open his cloak and press oneself against him as he stands there and is not allowed to move away. It would mean a moment's serenity to stand there in the steam of his body among all the mourners in the church.

It is a fine custom, the guard of honour at the heroes' funerals. Often Göran himself is put in a solemn mood by the music from the organ and the words before the altar, and also by the sorrow at the graves where he can see himself inconsolably mourned. In addition, he learns a Finnish that is more grammatically correct and more standard in expression than the language spoken in the barracks. Göran's ear for language hears and registers, for he is accustomed to moving in many different circles and needs more than one vocabulary. After a short time in Riihimäki he can extend his condolences in Finnish, he can talk about heavy sacrifices and about the greatness and loftiness of being able to sacrifice one's life for the Fatherland. This sacrificial death shall never be forgotten by a grateful people that stands in sorrow by the coffin. In respect, and in the certain knowledge that the sacrifice was not in vain.

If by nothing else, one knows that there is a war on from the fact that the lads at Riihimäki are going to meet their deaths at the front. Alone among warring nations, Finland makes colossal efforts to ferry its dead home. Lads die during their attempts to rescue dead comrades from the fire-fights, but no sacrifice is too great, and the importance to the home front is enormous. He comes home, he receives an individual funeral, there is a place, a mound over his actual remains, where one can mourn and remember.

The guard of honour never say a bad word about the custom itself, though they groan when they are selected and grumble about the cold and the extreme boredom. When they themselves are dead heroes they won't object to others being ordered to be a guard of honour over them, they know that, and so they stand where they have been put. A rehearsal for what it will be like when it is oneself lying there, they never say that, but it crosses their minds. At any rate, it crosses the mind of Göran Kummel, who will be happy to be sent home and properly buried and mourned according to all the rules of the art.

It is the winter's indescribable cold that makes it feasible to bring home the corpses in those long transports the length and breadth of Finland. If one wants to open the coffin one will find a well-preserved, deep-frozen corpse that still looks like a soldier lying there. It is a miracle how they all come home, finding their way the last mile on to country roads and forest roads to the churches that lie hidden in the impenetrable pine forest that is Finland's camouflage uniform, dark-green during the summer half of the year and white during the winter, not a glimpse of a living creature. Yet there is a network of roads and paths like field-mouse burrows under the snow. Transports get through, coffins are carried in, mourners travel along these subterranean paths to their church. Its spire is invisible among the pines of the plot; the great spruce trees also give themselves a shake and hide the picture from us in a cloud of snow. You can hear them singing in there, as in a field-mouse's nest under the protective rind. Protected for a while by grass and roots they sing and mourn, listen and blow their noses, knowing each single person in the church, but being totally alone. Outside the lines of graves are growing. Especially in a small congregation one can see how many they are.

Under Finland's pines and snow the mourners also think about the living. They have the Russians on top of them, and the cold. They wonder how they are going to manage in the stiff-frozen forests where one can only dig in with the help of dynamite. Men home on leave have reported that where there are battles the forest has been shot away. Then a soldier feels quite naked, especially where there are no trenches. The forest is the Finn's soldier's cape, and if one pulls it off him, he dies.

The trainees in the barracks at Riihimäki also think about the cold, of course. And don't feel any the more comfortable in their poorly heated school rooms from knowing that the lads at the front are worse off. Each man takes his stand where he is put and grumbles about his own conditions!

Yet it's warming to hear the stories about how the lads at the front use the darkness, the cold and the snow to their own advantage and make the mighty Russian war machine idle, hiss, cough and die. In places like Summa one does not even need to waste ammunition. The whole world is talking about the Finnish encirclement technique. Ghostlike in their snow-suits, silent, the Finnish soldiers move across heath and fell in their ancient bond with the climate.

The wildernesses are enormous up in the border regions, and the Russians are afraid of the forest. Their motorised troops move along the roads, where it is easy to encircle them. Get them into a motti [encirclement], get them into the bag, tie the string. Even the trainees in Riihimäki can imagine the mercilessness of the action out there, and with part of himself Göran is thankful that he does not have to participate. With another part, the one that is turned outwards, he feels it intolerable to be hiding day after day like a hare in the forest while the Russians dump their bomb-loads. When one could be taking part where the decisive action is happening, among Finnish soldiers in snowsuits, silent and indomitable.

So he stays in his school room, has his bunk not too far from the stove, receives food, such as it is now, exercises without danger to his life and crams and attends lectures. In his free time he practises Morse code, for now he is in the signals corps and is going to train as a telegraphist. Luck is on his side, for even before the war one of his training options was that of telegraphist. Then he planned exciting years on the Queen Elizabeth; now he is getting the training completely free of charge, from the army. He still has fabulous luck, does Göran.

But if truth be told, he is also dying of boredom. Were it not for the bombing raids and the quick excursions to the forest, he would probably have got up to some boyish prank and been kicked out of the training school. Luck again, for Göran really has nothing against becoming an officer, even though he would rather be one right away. . ..

On 26 February the Riihimäki anti-aircraft battery has a stroke of inspiration and shoots down three enemy bombers. One plane comes down not far from that part of the forest where the lads lie hugging the earth: the attack comes early and the shooting down is unexpected: there is the plane whirring upside down and then lower in a spiral and then crash, into the forest.

The lads exult when they see that the plane has been hit and that thick black smoke is gushing out of it. Then they are quiet, for before the plane enters its spiral a parachutist and then an unfolding parachute detach themselves from it. For many it is the first parachute jump they have seen: the man falls quickly, and then there is a jerk, so that when the parachute floats out and stops him they almost think he has been shot.

The parachute is incredibly beautiful and silver-gleaming in the sun, larger than they imagined it. So beautiful that none of them feels like picking off the descending pilot, even if they had the ammunition.

STANO MAŠAR: AFTER GOYA, AFTER MICHELANGELO

So the man disappears into the forest and the parachute settles flat over the pines and seems to be sucked down, and is no longer visible. It is not so far from the place where the aeroplane carne down. Taking their bearings from the black smoke, the lads ski over there, true soldiers on the way to meet true enemies. But they have no true ammunition for the rifles they are toiling along with, and no authorisation. They ought perhaps to wait until the military police arrive, but where capturing paratroopers is concerned, everyone is both authorised and obliged.

So although they ski a little hesitantly, they ski on, and those who are in the rear press those who are in front, depriving them of the chance to stop.

It is not hard to reach the place where the plane has come down. Now they ought to do what they have learnt, that is, spread out in the terrain and then, with the greatest vigilance, approach the enemy target with weapons at the ready. But they ski in a body, those behind hard on the heels of those in front, and only spread out when they are so close that they have to avoid pieces of wreckage and remember that the plane that is belching smoke may explode. They also see blood, and when the ones at the rear press forward, the ones at the front get so close that they can see their first defeated enemies.

There are two of them, and they are dead as doornails. When the plane crashed they were thrown out into the snow. It is unclear whether they died when the plane was hit or only when it crashed, but in any case they make an ugly sight and look scarcely human in their brown flying helmets and brown leather jackets, with blood trickling along their trousers and over their boots.

'Ugh!' they all say. To death, that this is what you look like when you die. Most of them have seen a corpse laid out in a coffin, but this is their first sight of men who have just been killed. That you become so different, at the very moment you die: grey, at once rigid and relaxed, with the red as a knife-sharp contrast.

'Ugly Russian devils!' they say. 'Got what they were asking for. Bloody hell! A direct hit, and that's their lot!'

They are so unlike living human beings that one can only stare. To think that they fell straight into their arms! You look up at the sky and fried Russians tumble into your mouth!

There is guffawing, but no one touches them. Though they know that one of the things you do at the front is loot Russians you've killed. Take souvenirs and identity discs, sometimes boots that can be better than Finnish army issue. Weapons, of course. But now they can't get organised enough, and anyway when the enemy tumbles down in such a peaceful way they have no option but to leave the looting to the military police.

'We'll have to go and report this,' says Hämäläinen, who is a stickler for order. But he has to ski alone while the others stand and watch. He has not gone far when he stops, and shouts:

'This way, lads!' A breathless pause, and then half-choked, as though it were too much for their vocal chords: 'Here's the parachute chappie!'

They set off, and there is Hämäläinen, pointing upwards. In a tall pine tree there is a mass of tangled parachute cloth, and snared in cords and pressed into the fork of a branch, like a large young bird of prey not yet able to fly, a Russian paratrooper.

Alive. A plucked capercaillie waiting to be browned and popped into the pot. A fantastic capture, a prisoner with masses of information, caught by this little group of trainee NCOs crowding under the tree and moving to and fro on their clumsy skis. They behave like true civilians, so sure of their advantage that it never occurs to them that he, in this shackled position of his, may yet be armed.

Which he turns out to be. In a flash he has a pistol in his hand, raises it to chest height in spite of the ensnaring cord, takes aim and pulls the trigger.

Dead under their very eyes. Still in the same position, well-anchored, but dead as a doornail. His head was thrown to one side when the shot went off, that is the only difference. Like true civilians they stand and gape, saying nothing in their first amazement. Then a mass of swearwords in which they dress the first suicide they have witnessed.

And why? a voice says inside Göran Kummel's head, though he swears like the rest. So the little troop on skis, red-cheeked lads who are the apples of their mothers' eyes, can seem to someone seeing them from another angle so terrifying that he would rather shoot himself on the spot than surrender.

Perhaps this kind of thing is good for fighting morale, perhaps not. Not at least for Göran Kummel, who is used to being feted, courted and admired. That anyone should want to shoot himself before the sight of his open, friendly mug is really a bit thick. 'Ugh!' trainee Kummel says too, but does not hide the fact that he is shaken, for various reasons.

There is already a full mobilisation of effort in the forest. People arrive on skis, shouting, home guardsmen and police, firemen and finally also regular staff from the barracks. The lads point, describing what happened and growing cocky over their role of eyewitnesses. Like true civilians they jabber about how it might have gone: where he was sitting he could have picked off as many of them as he liked!

If he hadn't lost his nerve, the damned Russian. They themselves would have cold-bloodedly mown down anyone who got near and saved the last bullet for themselves. Ten Russians to one Finn, just like at the front!

They are not allowed to be present when the airman is plucked out of the tree and looted, or when the crashed plane with its dead Ivans is taken in hand, a crying injustice in view of the fact that it was they who saw and found both the plane and its occupants. They are ordered back to barracks, and return there on their skis, with excited squabbling. And are given a warm reception. Exercise as though it were a punishment, and a red-hot instructor in every lecture room. Instead of viewing them as heroes who have endured their ordeal by fire, the opportunity is seized to put them in their place. As though they had no right to be exhilarated at the sight of three fallen enemies, or to re-experience the excitement and the drama!

Through the window Göran manages to see a covered lorry driving into the barracks area and something being loaded off the back and carried down into the cellar. Those may be the bodies from the plane, guesses trainee Kummel, and then stops listening to the instructor, who swiftly notices it. But that humiliation, too, has a transition, and when it is evening Kummel and Sirén and Hämäläinen and Varis sneak down into the cellar.

There is a staff sergeant on watch, but he knows them and says it can do no harm for them to go and take a look. And there they lie. Two rough, badly knocked about countenances, stubble, worn and baggy uniforms. And then the chap with the parachute. Young, not much older than Göran. Nice new uniform, shiny boots. Smart and stylish, handsome features. Hole in the temple with blue round it, otherwise not much disfigured. Eyes half closed, manly clenched jaw, handsome profile. The whole fellow could be used as proof that death is nothing terrible.

'Did you see?' says Göran Kummel in admiration. 'He would pass for Wilhelm von Schwerin!'*

And afterwards he thinks about that a lot. That not all Russians are ugly swine. That it could have been him. There is no difference. That they are completely interchangeable. That everything in the world just happens to be as it is, and could equally well be the other way round. Without it making any difference. Ivan Kummel, Göran Ivanov. Dad a kolkhoz worker, Mum a teacher for the pioneer kids. Mum and Dad Ivanov teachers at the schoolhouse on the south coast.

For a while during the night Göran finds it hard to keep himself in himself. It is hard to keep to the fact that he has become who he is and must live in the situation he has arrived at, for the thought of all the other things he could have been is overwhelming. It is not so easy as where you go, tomorrow I go also. It is rather that one is only one, though one has the possibility of being everyone.

Would he himself, wondered Göran, have had such firm self-control that he would have been able to shoot himself? Would he not rather have experienced the same sense of unreality he was no experiencing on his straw mattress in Riihimäki? So that it would have felt superfluous and irrelevant to shoot the person he happened to be then, as he might equally well have been someone else.

Yes, Göran thinks a lot about the dead soldier, proud and vain like himself in those shiny boots and that new, well-fitting uniform. Nothing to be ashamed about in death, either. But he might have surrendered and gone on living! What have they been taught about the Finns? Bestial torture and no mercy? And so he shot himself, and Mum and Dad in the schoolhouse are mourning.

What with the visits to the farms around Riihimäki, with the bombardment and the firefighting and the shot-down Russian planes, with heroes' burials where one must fire salutes, with skiing reconnaissance in the area and more of such, trainee Göran Kummel gets enough variety to be able, if needs be, to endure the monotony of barracks life, the discipline and the extremely boring lectures.

But in telegraphy he shines, and also makes an effort, as he has his sights trained on his peacetime Atlantic steamer, luxury class. By March he is up to 60 signals a minute and so already has a second-class passage. His reward comes when the school is divided into two departments, one for telegraphy and one for telephony. Kummel is relieved to find his name in the exclusive company of the telegraphists, while most of the others see themselves demoted to telephone boys. Göran has nothing to look forward to but promotion, probably soon to the radio battalion.

In other words, things are going very well for Mummy's boy in Riihimäki, who does himself proud on pancakes and jam at generous farms, and on his return to barracks finds parcels from Mum: rusks and candies, pastilles and blueberry pies, on another occasion a jar of pickled herring and a real chocolate bar.

It is not bad being Göran Kummel during these March days of 1940, while his less fortunate comrades are trying to stop the Russians on the [Karelian] Peninsula. One cannot fault him for lack of foresight or being self-preoccupied, as he and his comrades are so poorly informed. One might think it ought to be a part of their training to follow how the battles are progressing and have the course of the battles interpreted to them, but the idea is clearly that at this early stage they are to learn that a soldier does not need to know the whole picture but only the bit of it he finds himself in. In the trainees' case that means the barracks and the dormitories, the bunks and accoutrements of which are daily pulled up and hurled about by zealous NCOs who teach the trainees order and obedience and no answering back. For that the whole dormitory is punished, and so one can rarely hear a sound.

It is only by the ever jerkier and unpredictable behaviour of the orderlies that they can conclude that it is not going any further. There is also something about it in the newspapers, but mostly in general phrases about strategic regroupings at the front. When Viborg has fallen, the lads find out about it from a newspaper someone has bought down in the market town. The orderlies are angry, and seem to be of the opinion that this is an irrelevant interruption of the screened-off barracks world, where the routines are followed even if Helsingfors had capitulated.

For this reason, peace comes as a total surprise. But they are not, as they have had reason to fear, the last in the land to find out about it. In the morning it is first-rate bombing weather, sunny and clear, and the trainees are ordered into the forest. Kummel and some of his companions take a good long tour of the forests all the way to Puukonkylä, where they at once find a friendly farm, and are invited in.

Still steaming and flushed from their skiing, they listen to [minister of foreign affairs] Tanner's speech on the radio. About the honourable struggle and the hard conditions for peace. About Karelia and Hangö. About independence preserved. The people at the farm are relieved, for they have a son in the war and can only hope that he is still alive. But the five lads don't know what to think, for what they think is so contradictory.

'Damn it, we're too late!' they say loudly and with perfect conviction. Inwardly they feel relief at not having to go to the front, for they have finally learned that people die there.

'Why did they have to settle on such bad conditions? We were invincible! All we needed to do was put in one last counter-thrust,' they groan, and think: 'Thank the good Lord the front held as long as it did. It came in the nick of time, but now at least something is left.'

'But Hangö!' shouts Göran Kummel, who has personal knowledge of the spur of land on the south coast, but has never set foot in Karelia. 'We can't have the Russians in Hangö!' while he reflects that it could have been worse, they could have had the Russians in the whole country.

Only one of them, Varis, is completely silent. And now they recall that he is from Viborg. He said nothing after the fall of the town, and he has hardly said a word ever since. Only Hämäläinen in the bunk alongside has kept account of the fact that he is from Karelia. So Hämäläinen says with perfect conviction:

'We'll take Karelia back, be sure of that! This isn't peace, this is a strategic ceasefire. When we've had time to arm ourselves, we'll have another go.' Though meanwhile he is thinking that if Finland retakes Karelia it will happen over his, Hämäläinen's, dead body…

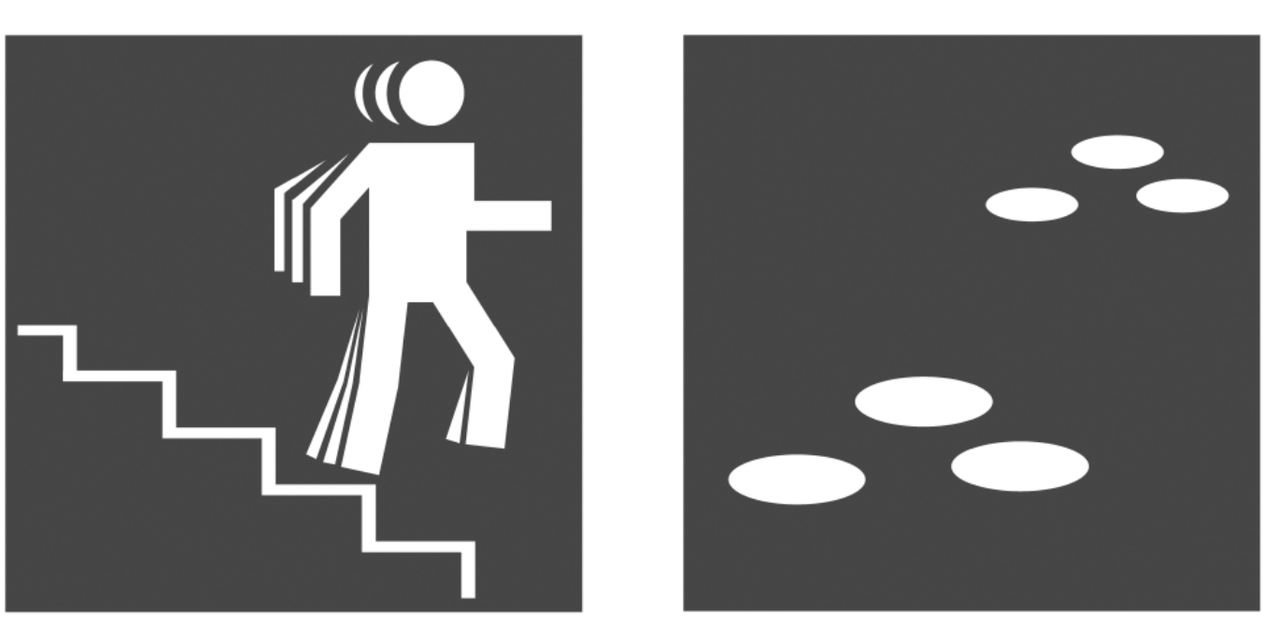
When they get to Riihimäki the flags are at half mast, and the radio is playing funeral music. But for the lads returning to their quarters in the school, what peace means is this:

When there is peace, the school is used for its true purpose, and the junior orderlies have not been idle. They have pulled up all the bunks in all the dormitories, raked together all the kitbags and loose tackle, and transported it all to a dormitory in the north barracks, to which they have been moved. There everything lies in a mighty confusion. On the first evening of peace, Göran Kummel stands with his comrades in misfortune, rooting and rummaging in the mountain of kit. No matter how hard he looks and searches, the towel, soap, toothbrush, the bundle of envelopes and the white woollen sweater with its reindeer pattern are nowhere to be seen. Others can record greater losses on this first evening of peace in the Republic of Finland, but Kummel's individual loss must be added to the sum of the misfortunes.

TRANSLATED BY DAVID MCDUFF

(*Books from Finland* Issue 2001. 3. Extracts from the novel *Marsipansoldaten*, 'The marzipan soldier', Söderström & Co., 2001)

* A young patriot hero in Fänrik Ståls sägner ('Tales of Ensign Stål', 1848–60) by the Finnish national poet J. L. Runeberg, who wrote in Swedish



STANO MAŠAR: AFTER DUCHAMPS, AFTER MONET

ALINA MOLISAK

The Jewish Nation

One of the influential figures among Polish-Jewish writers in the first half of the twentieth century was Jakub Appenszlak (1894–1950) – an editor, author, essayist, theatre critic, translator, and community worker. I would like to focus on three of his texts in different genres. What such different forms as verse, novel, and manifesto have in common is the issue of identity – the complicated relation between Polish identity and Jewishness. Appenszlak, though deeply involved in Zionism, claimed that Polish culture was naturally dear to Polish Jews since the Polish language was also the language of Jewish literature and daily life as well as being a system of signs and symbols which constituted the imagined Polish-Jewish community, so close to Polish Jews' hearts. Those signs and symbols can also be the models for shaping the modern Jewish national awareness.

In the first half of the twentieth century, literature written in the Polish lands can be characterized as trilingual (Chone Shmeruk, among other scholars, has written about that).[1] Works of prose, poetry, and drama were written in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish. Jewish periodicals (both in Polish and Yiddish) flourished from the beginning of the twentieth century, as did numerous publishing houses, theatres, bookstores, and cabarets (although the amount of freedom those institutions enjoyed differed before 1918, due to legislative differences in the various annexations).

Polish-Jewish authors can be characterized as those who wrote their texts in Polish and whose artwork was – in a more or less direct way – connected with the Jewish heritage.[2] It seems that, apart from the very significant studies by Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, too little academic attention has been paid to the Polish-Jewish part of the cultural heritage. The slow process of rediscovering and reinterpreting the works of authors who after the Holocaust were often forgotten or were treated as marginal and unimportant began in Polish contemporary studies on literature with the publications of Prokop-Janiec.

In my paper I would like to focus on the category of the Jewish nation, understood not as an ethnic or religious group, but as a separate national group, which, like other groups in Europe, was acquiring its own national identity through the heritage of the European Enlightenment and Romanticism. It is interesting that in literary texts written in Polish, Jewish authors tried to express that kind of symbolic community, one that was meant, in modern perspective, to bond the whole Jewish community. Since among literary texts written in Polish there are numerous examples of interesting literary descriptions of the Jewish nation connected with the idea of Zionism, I am not going to analyze all of them.

The notion of nation as an important idea that determined group identity appeared in European culture in the eighteenth century and gained significance under the influence of Johann Gottfried Herder's philosophy of the national state. Modern changes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe also included identity transformations and had an impact on the spread and popularity of the idea of nation. The closest changes and the origins of nation as such that Eastern European Jews could observe concerned the origin of the Polish national consciousness, which, in literature, was expressed by Polish romantic poets. Those changes, I believe, became one of the most inspirational sources for the expression of Jewish national identity.

The attempts to preserve social bonds and a sense of community as well as group identity among people living under different rules in the period of the Partition of Poland (from 1772 till 1918) became a model for a dispersed Jewish diaspora, especially at a time of the gradual decline of social bonds, which for centuries had been maintained by religion.[3] Poetry and prose as well as newspaper articles written in Polish by Jewish authors serve as good examples of the already mentioned approach to the idea of nation. Not only did writers express their opinions on that matter, but their attitude is highly interesting. Among those who postulated national autonomy and who emphasized the sense of community were acculturated – but not assimilated – Jews. The texts I would like to analyze come from the interwar period. The fact that they were written between the two world wars makes them even more interesting, because that was the time when, after the years of the Partition, a new Polish state appeared and a large group of Jewish citizens, who had lived under three different rules, Russian, Prussian, and Austro-Hungarian, became a part of the new country. Those among Jewish writers and columnists who had earlier undergone the process of acculturation saw in the Polish heritage a model that could become a bond that would unite the Jewish nation.

A Separate Nation

Jews treated the appearance of independent Poland as an opportunity to emphasize their own national identity. The sense of belonging to a nation gave some of them hope of convincing Poles that Jews not only were loyal citizens of the new state, but also that they were, as Poles, a nation, not a religious community only. Belonging to a historical community that lived in the Polish lands was often discussed in the press. In the twentieth century Polish Jews wanted to draw attention to their equal rights, the same as other nations had. In the leading article published in *Chwila* ["A Moment"], a periodical from Lviv, one can read: "Undoubtedly, Jews constitute a different part of society than Poles, though they are not foreign in Poland, where they have been living for 800 years … the notion of homeland as a land belonging only to Poles and intended for preserving Polish culture only cannot be accepted, regarding the fact that Poland is inhabited by a large number of other nations. …"[4]

There were numerous ways to emphasize the Jews' relationship with Poland as well as their emotional commitment to the country. Mieczysław Braun, one of the Polish-Jewish poets, in his poem entitled "11.XI.1929" (11 November is Independence Day in Poland and a national holiday) in an apostrophe to an anonymous tradesman, writes:

> Poland is close to your heart
> It rose as your independent homeland
> Let your old longings soothe
> The old Jew, not known by name.[5]

The poet, however, adds meaningful words in last lines of the poem. The last verses emphasize problems and disappointments that Jews experienced in Poland:

> Poland will become your Homeland
> In the day of general justice.[6]

Another poet, Jakub Lewittes, draws attention to the need to remember mutual experiences and to the fact that

> we are the children of one and only
> and indivisible.[7]

Although Lewittes in that poem does not avoid depicting differences and pain, above all he encourages all social classes and all national minorities to unite in defending Poland, because he sees the Polish land as a natural place for Jews.

One of the most interesting testimonies to the thinking of a Jewish nation is Jakub Appenszlak's journalistic text, a kind of manifesto from 1918. The year of Poland's independence refers symbolically to the statement of a Polish-Jewish author. By using Emile Zola's famous "J'accuse!,"[8] which was a significant voice of the French elite during

the Dreyfus trial, Appenszlak wrote in 1918 an accusation against Poland.[9] At the beginning of the twentieth century the fundamental crime of Poland, a land which once "received exiles graciously and gave human rights to disinherited,"[10] lay, according to the author, in the constraints on Jewish emancipation. In "Oskarżam!" Appenszlak claims that the source of aversion and antisemitic attitudes towards Jews could be traced in ancient times. He sees the fundamental offense in placing the Jewish community outside of society, in the lack of acceptance of a different social class that has existed for centuries (in contrast to the treatment of the bourgeois and peasants), as well as in the lack of awareness of the existence of a different ethnic group. What makes that guilt fundamental is, as the author expresses it: "your opinions about us."[11] In the Jewish historical memory, however, there is "never forgotten Polish charity," "a great loftiness" and awareness that the newcomers were granted princely and royal privileges. By emphasizing the generosity of the rulers Appenszlak asks a significant question about the benefits of this generosity, about a particular lack of impartiality in the reception of Jews in Polish lands, as the newcomers fulfilled important social functions, undertaking tasks that the gentry were not willing to perform.

Despite considerable service in the modernization of Poland and much evidence of patriotism during the Napoleonic rule as well as during Polish insurrections, despite shedding blood for Poland and in spite of the fact that "they loved Poland madly and died for it anonymously,"[12] the Jewish inhabitants of Poland remained second-class citizens. Appenszlak reproaches Poles for treating Jews as strangers from the beginning of their existence on Polish territory. He also points out Polish mistakes, such as an unwillingness to value the greatness of the Jewish nation and its service for the Polish state as well as its part in the creation of Polish culture. The exclusion that Jews suffered lasted so long that Appenszlak's accusations of "lack of respect for the nation" and separation from the majority of Polish citizens, despite Jewish service for Poland, might be justified: "[Poland] – ordered us to rot in a muddy ghetto, while our hands dug gold for her, while the spirit of our geniuses made her artworks alive."[13]

The author, however, admits that there were those who "pitied us and who were ready to save us if only we lost our sense of self,"[14] but he severely condemns all assimilationist projects. He demands that Polish society allow Jews to take part in social life without pressure to change their identity. Although Yankiel the Cymbalist and Berek Yoselevitch have their place in Polish historical memory, they function as symbolic figures; they were not allowed to speak for themselves.[15]

The more Appenszlak thinks about Polish history – the Partitions and the struggle to preserve Polish identity – the more bitter are his words, as he cannot understand why such a nation does not value the fact that Jews also have the will to be faithful to their heritage. Heroic Poland, which appealed to freedom and justice among European nations and, as Appenszlak emphasizes, pointed out mistakes that others had made – accusing France and Great Britain of lack of interest in Polish matters – did not devote "even one moment for justice for the Jewish nation."[16] Even the best and the most noble Poles (the author mentions Polish writers Reymont, Wyspianski, and Zeromski) were not able to look in a non-stereotypical way at their closest neighbors. Appenszlak's accusations refer not only to the past, but also to present Polish behavior, such as the boycott of trade or the ban on entering a park, so that a young man "dressed in a traditional Jewish robe who wanted to sit on a bench under the spruce and read maybe Adam Mickiewicz's poetry"[17] would be turned away. Pointing at Zeromski and thus at Polish elites *en masse*, Appenszlak asks a rhetorical question about the feelings that a reader might have while reading a passage from Stefan Zeromski's prose, which describes "Polish Jews as a marsh that cannot be dried, and even Swietochowski alone cannot help."[18]

Such a question is linked with the diagnosis of the Polish intelligentsia that it was not interested in Jewish heritage and culture and could not value the greatness of the Jewish nation: "And Zeromski, like the whole Poland, does not know that … one great poet – Bialik or Peretz – writes in a language of many people of this country, in a language that is foreign and unpleasant and he creates a great work of art."[19] According to Appenszlak Zeromski does not notice that the Jewish nation exists. It is worth emphasizing that Peretz and Bialik did not write in Polish; hence the phrase that they wrote works in a "foreign and unpleasant" language, which means the Jewish languages (Yiddish and Hebrew), might be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand such a phrase might express the need for the recognition of Jewish literature written in Polish, which might "give birth" to such brilliant writers as Peretz and Bialik. The second interpretation, more risky, is that the writers who write in languages "foreign" to Polish readers, in "unpleasant" Yiddish or Hebrew, are also a large part of the population.

The perspective of the text is a mutual Polish and Jewish future (remember that the text was published in 1918). Such a strong accusation is not meant to judge history, but to serve for the future: "for Poles to analyze it tomorrow."[20]

Painful Rejection

Appenszlak is aware that, paradoxically, Jewish Zionist aspirations are supported by those Poles who would like to see "Poland for Poles." He is also aware of the fact that this "fake friendship" hides a mask that is "twisted by antisemitic convulsions."[21]

Many scholars have written about the double role that antisemitism played. They have also pointed out that modern antisemitism, on the one hand, meant exclusion and referred to the idea of inferiority, while on the other it sometimes functioned as a factor that strengthened Jewish identity.[22] European modernization, which had its roots in the ideas of the Enlightenment and was linked to a relative tolerance for Otherness as well as giving hope for the equality of all social subjects, was, however, in favor of Jewish assimilation and acculturation. It should be remembered, though, that the nineteenth century brought to many states the crystallization of national ideas and that it often meant various forms of rejection or separation of Jewish communities. Anxiety over being marginalized and rejected could lead to the revival or at least the reinforcement of the bonds of Jewish tradition. Zionism, or rather its various variants, offered one of the most attractive perspectives for those in the diaspora who reacted painfully to modern dilemmas. Appenszlak's text quoted above is not only an accusation made by those who were "marginalized, disinherited and ignored," but, as the final lines suggest, also an expectation that the "Poland of tomorrow" would welcome Jews through an appreciation of Jewish national pride.[23]

Another poet, Eleazar Merchentraum, also wrote about his emotional relationship with Poland as well as about the experience of betrayal and rejection. In his poem entitled "Do Polski" [To Poland], although he declares feelings of love and attachment to the Polish land, nature, and culture, he also evinces a sense of bitter awareness

> I know, though, that noticing my sad love to you
> Your jealous children, me, the newcomer,
> With a treacherous blow of anger will knock down to a black grave
> And silence will hold me in arms of your heaven.[24]

Such a feeling of disappointment in the recently independent Poland is visible also in the press. In the years following 1918 on the one hand enthusiasm for Polish independence was often expressed in Polish-Jewish periodicals, but on the other there was also anxiety and fear of increasing antisemitism. What was most painful for Polish Jews was a total lack or at least a weak reaction from Polish government to anti-Jewish attacks.

The Polish Romantic Model

I have already mentioned that ideas given by Polish romantic poets constituted an important point of reference or a model for those who attempted to shape Jewish national identity and who looked at their community from the modern (in terms of their time) perspective. The cultural and literary heritage of the romantic period can be traced in more or less direct references in the literary works of different authors. I would like to draw attention to a few of such poets. Some interesting poems of Daniel Ihr were published in two Polish-Jewish periodicals – *Chwila*, mentioned earlier, and *Opinia* ["The Opinion"].

One of Ihr's poems that directly refers to Mickiewicz's heritage is a verse entitled "Do Gustawa" ["To Gustaw"].[25] Gustaw, one of the most important figures of Polish Romanticism, embodies all the features characteristic of a hero of the time: he is an outstanding individual who works alone and, what is vital, who undergoes radical changes, radical existential transformation. By rejecting painful personal experiences, he starts a

fight for the sake of everybody's good. His rebellion against reality is closely linked with enormous suffering and tragic personal experience. Gustaw, the figure addressed by a lyrical subject in Ihr's poem, seems to be someone who shares, in a way, the same lot with the lyrical subject:

I'd like to share a daily, bitter bread with you –
A true word …[26]

Encouraging words that are meant to force Gustaw to leave his current form of existence – "Stand up. Go out, wandering shadow, from the props room. Everywhere is darkness and dullness. In puddles twinkle, empty as witchcraft, flat and silver moons"[27] – are linked with an image of transformation. Hence, the point of reference for the lyrical subject is not the image of the romantic lover, but the figure of one who is able to express his suffering. There is also a particular hope that, despite differences enumerated in the text, the reader who gropes around will be led to a full existence, will find his own place.

In 1935 Daniel Ihr published in *Opinia* two poems entitled "Do polskiej mowy" ["To the Polish Language"] (*Opinia*, No. 11/1935) and "Do mowy hebrajskiej" ["To the Hebrew Language"] (*Opinia*, No. 13/1935), which constitute a whole. Why do they constitute one whole? They both refer to the basic element of literature, which is language (it is worth mentioning that they both were written in Polish). However, what is more important is the fact that they both are closely connected with the lyrical subject's identity and its transformations. The first poem shows the lyrical subject's attachment to the Polish language, which was spoken in his family home, in the most intimate relations, in the experience of motherly warmth, the language that was spoken by the protagonist for years. That "language of the Vistula and lime tree" became an important element of identity and for expressing his feelings.[28] The experience of rejection, deformation, and poisoned brotherly relations as well as evil aimed at the Other led not only to ignorance, but also to disappointment and loss of love of the land that was inhabited by various social groups:

Words sounded above the cradle
Had been crossed out by – pain, bitterness, anger.
Everything finished for ever
When blood – started.[29]

The second poem is devoted to the Hebrew language, and it is a description of a "wandering" existence in the diaspora. It is clearly linked with tradition, including religious tradition, and with the memory of the Jewish past. Those links are emphasized by references to Rachel's tomb, prayers as well as to "the night of Canaan," vineyards, camels, or "blue Yarkon." The Hebrew language is described as a mother who is calling her wandering children:

And you, mother, call me – I hear, I hear –
Among Slavic gales' groans
Between households and silence of closed hearts
I walk, your homeless son …[30]

The juxtaposition of those two texts clearly shows that the rejection of Polish Jewishness that was caused by the painful experience of being an outcast leads to a reinterpretation of one's own tradition. The time of longing for the Hebrew heritage becomes also the time of hope for a new shape of Jewish identity, hope for the new ability to express oneself in the language that seemed to be only the holy language, the one that united only those who prayed:

Gropely I walk through silence and twilight,
I know that you hold your bad son tight,
That lips get language, blinded eyes – sight,
You give them, the Hebrew language – the only mother.[31]

Published in 1915, Appenszlak's poem entitled "Mowie polskiej" ["To the Polish Language"] is a particular document that, on the one hand, gives evidence of enormous attachment to Polishness and, on the other hand, expresses a recognition of ideas in the Polish heritage that might also express a Jewish sense of identity. Polish romantic ideas of rebellion and aspirations for independence are a clear inspiration, a model, a path that Jewish inhabitants of the European diaspora could follow:

The Polish language! Made of Mickiewicz's storms and strong Norwid's anger,
You rose into a church of freedom. And now on the right hand-side of a Jew,
You are a sword of rebellion, a legion that fights for other people's matters.
Speaking you, the language, I voice my nation rising.[32]

Hence, Polish is meant to be an opportunity to voice a new idea, the idea of national revival. It is the language that is meant to serve as a way of shaping modern Jewish identity. Thanks to the visions of the Romantic poets – here, direct references to Norwid and Mickiewicz – Jewish aspirations for independence and longing for homeland can also be expressed. In such a perspective the power of the word turns out to be a creational power that is inextricably linked with the Polish language and culture.

The changes that the lyrical subject undergoes and that have clear hallmarks of autobiography are strongly linked with his upbringing framed in terms of his Polish heritage, including a vision of national revival:

Under the edifice of Poland I hold out the dawn of my youth in a doze,
With cheapskates and the bourgeois hoi polloi, until, in a coup
The war of nations – I saw the nation as the holy aim.
And You, Poland, gives me the example how to dig out the pre-spring.[33]

The national project becomes more important than belonging to the bourgeois – the class that was mostly responsible for the modernization of nineteenth-century society. In nineteenth-century Europe, emancipation of different social groups and debates on group identity, as well as activities leading to the definition of the nation itself, had a great impact on the appearance of the variant of national identity presented in Appenszlak's texts. The Polish model in Appenszlak's poem came from a romantic way, Mickiewicz's way, of creating the community and, undoubtedly, was strength-

[1] Chone Shmeruk, "Hebrew – Yiddish – Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture," in Yisrael Gutman, et al., eds., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), pp. 285–311.

[2] One of the first academic books devoted to Polish-Jewish literature was *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years as a Cultural and Artistic Phenomenon*, written by Eugenia Prokop-Janiec and published in 1992. Eugenia Prokop-Janiec also published a valuable and extensive anthology of poetry (*Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska: Antologia* [*The Interwar Polish-Jewish Poetry: An Anthology*]. During the following years younger scholars also studied the Polish-Jewish literary heritage. Their analyses have been collected in a joint publication, *Pisarze polsko-żydowscy XX wieku: przybliżenia* [*Polish-Jewish Writers of the 20th Century: An Introduction*], ed. M. Dabrowski and A. Molisak (Warsaw, 2006), while works of well-known Jewish artists, such as Bruno Schulz, or those written by assimilators, such as Julian Tuwim or Antoni Slonimski, have frequently been analyzed by many scholars.

[3] I think, with Benedict Anderson, that the decline of religious bonds made conditions favorable for the appearance of different bonds that defined the identity of social groups. From the last decades of the eighteenth century, the idea of nation turned out to be a longlasting bond. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, 2003).

[4] *Chwila* was published in Polish. The leading article that I quote was published in No. 273 (18 October 1919), p. 1.

[5] Mieczyslaw Braun, "11. XI. 1929," in Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, ed., *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, pp. 129–130. Translations of all poems are philological: Polska twojemu sercu bliska/wstała wolna ojczyzną twoją/niech sie dawne tęsknoty ukoją/stary Żydzie, nieznany z nazwiska.

[6] Braun, "11.XI.1929" (Polska stanie się twą Ojczyzną/w dniu powszechnej sprawiedliwości), p. 130.

[7] Jakub Lewittes, in Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, pp. 226–227. (dziećmi jesteśmy/jednej-jedynej/i niepodzielnej).

[8] An open letter written by Emile Zola to the President of the French Republic, entitled "J'accuse!," was published in 1898. The letter concerned not only Dreyfus, a Jewish French army officer who was falsely accused of treason and sentenced but who was vindicated after his second trial, but also the state of French society and relations between civil authorities and the army, as well as the use of antisemitism by nationalist right-wing parties.

[9] J. Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!" (I accuse), in *Almanach żydowski* (1918), pp. 125–130.

[10] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 125.

[11] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 127.

[12] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 128.

[13] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!"

[14] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!"

[15] Yankiel the Cymbalist – one of the main heroes in the national poem by Adam Mickiewicza, *Pan Tadeusz*. He is an example for a diasporic Jew that Poland for him is the real fatherland. The best known quotation of Yankiel the patriot is, "A decent Jew loves fatherland like a Pole." Even today Yankiel symbolizes Jewish patriots dedicated to Polish interests. Berek Yoselewitsch – (1764–1809), a Jew, the main figure in the Polish historical struggle for independence. He participated in the Polish uprising in 1794. A colonel in the Polish army and an officer in the Polish legion in Italy, he was killed in the battle of Kock. Maria Janion presents an interesting illustration of Yoselewitsch in the essay "A Jewish Colonel" in her book *Bohater, spisek, śmierć: Wykłady żydowskie* (Warsaw, 2009).

[16] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 128.

[17] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 128.

[18] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 129. Aleksander Swietochowski (1849–1838) – a journalist, writer, historian, and philosopher. One of the main figures of Warsaw positivism, a representative of Polish liberalism, a zealous rationalist, he was the spokesman of progress, education, and culture, and struggled for equal rights for women and Jews.

[19] Appenszlak,"Oskarżam!," p. 130. It should be added that by mentioning such names as Chaim Nachman Bialik and Icchok Lejb Peretz Appenszlak clearly indicates great writers who were revivers of the language (in Bialik's case it was Hebrew and in Peretz's case Yiddish).

[20] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 130.

ened by a cult of romanticism that dominated Poland in the interwar period.

In such a context the lyrical subject's declaration of return to "the old cradle, to the ruins of the Temple" is highly interesting, as the poem's persona describes his belonging to the nation of Israel, but at the same time, he expresses it in Polish. The lyrical subject wants to use the power of Polish in order to make a significant change. That "Jew educated in Poland" experiences Jewish identity by filtering it through the heritage of Polish Romanticism and the Polish language.

Dreams of the revival of the Jewish world, of a new life radically different from religious tradition and far from dwelling on suffering were thought to be fulfilled in a battle in which the power of art would be the weapon:

Let's sound the gong of Jewish art
The dregs of family and class
Take up arms, my people, take up arms!
Jewish nation! It's time! …[34]

The revival of the Jewish world was going to be linked with both the rejection of a closed religious group and the rebellion against assimilation. The call to fight for national dignity resembles the visions of Polish romantic poets. Certainly Appenszlak in his texts emphasizes that the chance for a Jewish nation is the Zionist vision. His approach to Zionism is more visible in his later publications. It seems important, however, that his whole activity before the Holocaust was linked with Poland – through the language and by the fact that he lived in Poland as well as by the tasks he performed there.

Appenszlak, as well as other Jewish poets who wrote in Polish, can be claimed as a representative of a particular generation. His experiences and the evolution of his conduct during his life were typical, which, as Renata Piatkowska reminds us, enabled Jakub Szacki to think up a term, "Appenszlak's generation," which referred to those who "on the Vistula banks dreamed about Zion."[35] Those dreams, however, were confronted by unpleasant reality, as at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries antisemitism increased and was gradually reinforced, not only in Polish but also in European society. Numerous Polish Jews who came from bourgeois families or from the intelligentsia and who belonged to "Appenszlak's generation" were aware of the fact that assimilation had proved a failure, and they experienced an open conflict. According to Andrzej Zbikowski, who analyzed antisemitic texts that played a vital role in the process of defining Jews as the enemies of Polishness worse than partitioners, the process of propagation of ideological antisemitism radically increased between 1905 and 1914. The propagation of antisemitism was accompanied by the boycott of Jewish trade (1912–1914).[36] Other important factors that had an impact on the attitudes of the members of "Appenszlak's generation," and which became popular among Central and Eastern European Jews, were Zionist ideas and the project of cultural autonomy that was propagated by the Bund. Hence, there were two innovative proposals for defining national identity that were in opposition to assimilation.

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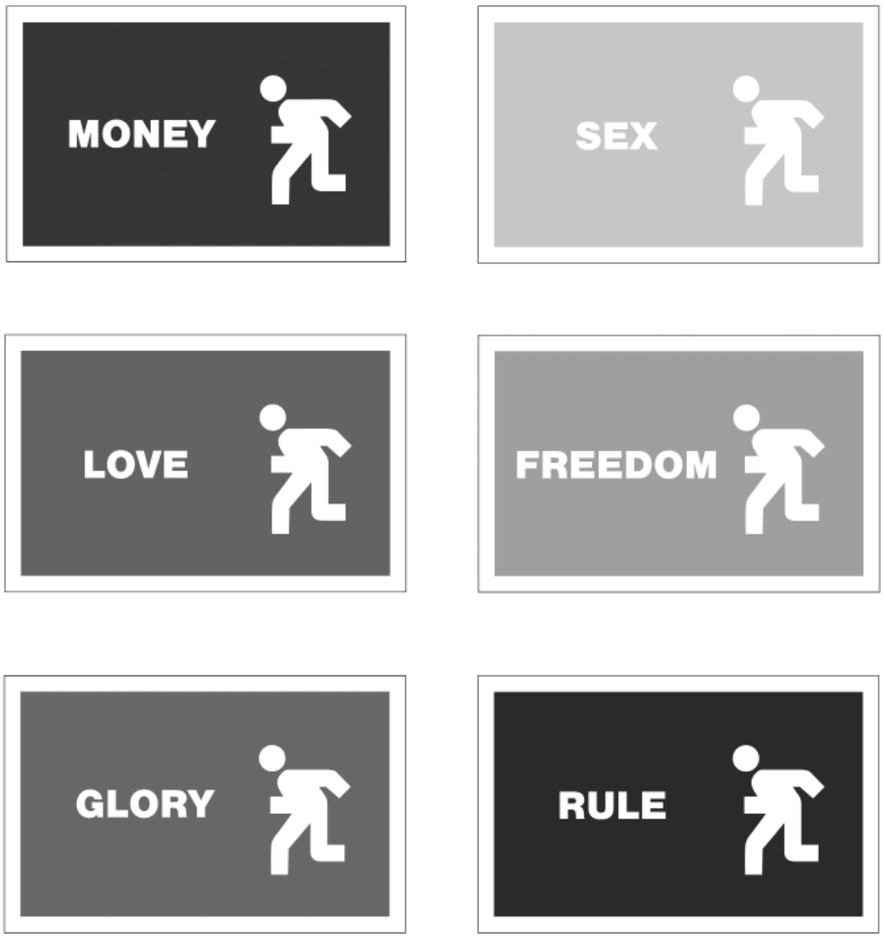

STANO MAŠAR: RUNNING

[21] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 130.
[22] See Michael A. Meyer, *Jewish Identity in the Modern World* (1990), p. 50 and others.
[23] Appenszlak, "Oskarżam!," p. 130.
[24] Eleazar Merchentraum, "Do Polski," in E. Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, p. 102. (Lecz wiem, że smutną miłość mą ku tobie/zazdrosne twoje dzieci mnie, jako przybysza,/ zdradzieckim ciosem gniewu złożą w czarnym grobie/i weźmie mnie w objęcia nieba twego cisza.)
[25] Daniel Ihr clearly refers to Adam Mickiewicz's drama "Dziady" [Forefathers' Eve], especially to its third and fourth parts (so-called Dresden Dziady, which were written after the failure of the November Insurrection). Not only the title, but also paraphrases of Mickiewicz's words indicate the direct reference.
[26] Daniel Ihr, *Do Gustawa* [To Gustaw], in Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, p. 388. (Chcę się przełamać z tobą zwykłym, gorzkim chlebem – /słowem prawdziwym …)
[27] Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowskal*, p. 388. (Powstań. Z rekwizytorni wyjdź cieniu błądzący/Ciemno wszędzie i głucho. W kałużach migocą/puste jak gusła, płaskie i srebrne miesiące).
[28] Daniel Ihr, Do polskiej mowy [To the Polish language], in: Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, pp. 393–394.
[29] Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, p. 394. (Słowa dzwoniące nad kołyską/Przekreślił – ból, gorycz, gniew/ Skończyło się na zawsze wszystko./Gdy się zaczęła – krew.)
[30] Daniel Ihr, *Do mowy hebrajskiej* [To the Hebrew Language], in Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, pp. 394–395. (A ty mnie matko wołasz – słyszę, słyszę/Wśród wichrów jęk słowiańskich,/Między domostw i serc zwartych ciszę/ Idę syn bezdomny twój…)
[31] Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, p. 396. (Omackiem idę przez milczenie i mrok,/ Wiem, że do serca przytulisz złego syna,/Że ustom – słowa, ślepym oczom – wzrok/Dasz hebrajska mowo – matko jedyna.) The poet invents words in Polish; the translator therefore has invented the corresponding words in English ("gropely," and on p. 116 "pre-spring").
[32] Appenszlak, *Mowie polskiej* [To the Polish Language], in: Prokop-Janiec, Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, p. 67. (Mowo polska! Z burz Mickiewicza, z twardego gniewu Norwida,/ Urosłaś w kościół wolności. A teraz w prawicy Żyda,/Tyś mieczem buntu, legionem walczącym dla cudzych spraw./Tobą, o mowo, dziś głoszę narodu mego powstanie.)
[33] Appenszlak, *Mowie polskiej* [To the Polish Language], in: Prokop-Janiec, Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, p. 67. (Pod gmachem Polski młodości ranek przetrwałem w drzemcie,/W liczmanach tłuszczy mieszczańskiej, zanim w przewrocie/ Wojny narodów – naród ujrzałem, jako najświętszy cel./I z Ciebie Polsko, przykład mi płynie, jak odkopywać prazdroje.).
[34] Appenszlak, *Mowie polskiej* [To the Polish Language], in Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, p. 68. (Niech sztuki żydowskiej gong dzwoni,/ Wyrzutków rodzin i klas,/Do broni, mój ludu, do broni!/ Narodzie żydowski! Już czas!)
[35] Quoted in R. Piatkowska, *Jakub Appenszlak jako współtwórca Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych* [Jakub Appenszlak as a co-originator of the Jewish Society of Propagation the Fine Arts]; the paper has not been published, but was given at the Conference in Wrocław in 2007 and later read in manuscript. See also J. Szacki, "Pokolenie Appenszlaka" (Appenszlak's Generation), *Nasza Trybuna/ Our Tribune I*, No. 9 (1951): 1–2.
[36] Zbikowski mentions mostly two texts, *Separatyzm Żydów i jego źródła* [Separatism of the Jews and its Sources] by Roman Dmowski, published in 1909, and Andrzej Niemojewski's *Skład i pochód piątego zaboru* [Composition and Origin of the 5th Partition], published in 1911. There were many more similar publications. See A. Zbikowski, "Antysemityzm" [Anti-Semitism], in J. Tomaszewski, A. Zbikowski, eds., *Żydzi w Polsce: Leksykon* [Jews in Poland. A Lexicon] (Warsaw, 2001), pp. 19–27.

IGOR OSTACHOWICZ

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Night of the Living Jews

We started with ice cream – I thought corpses didn't eat, but they do; only Skinny just had a Diet Coke, while the rest of us had a large portion each.

"So how does this deal work?" asked Chirico, shooting straight from the hip. Skinny tried to kick her under the table, but there was no need, because Rachel answered for herself, with a slight shrug, the way children talk about their parents' fancy ideas.

"They've got to do something to make me smile."

Chirico pondered this remark.

"So what's the point? Some sort of obligation to smile? Why should you have to smile?"

Rachel gave a deep sigh and stared into her ice-cream cup, aimlessly poking the long spoon into it. "Daddy would like me to go to heaven, but at the entrance you're supposed to smile, and I can't do it. Because of me he's stuck too."

"And what about the others, that whole underground city?" I cut in. "What are they still doing here?"

"It varies. The only people who are left under Warsaw are the ones who've got something wrong – most of them are in shock. They can't pull themselves together, some of them are angry with God and refuse to take another step forwards, some are horribly afraid they'll never understand it all, or even worse, that they'll have to be forgiving. There are also some people who worked for the police or were in the Sonderkommando – those ones have yet other reasons, but either way, they're all stuck here. They're waiting for some time to go by, and once you're dead time passes in a different way. My father is quite a different story – he's a tough guy, he's not in shock at all, he was in the Jewish Uprising, then the Polish one, and everyone respects him. He just stayed behind for my sake, because he doesn't want to leave me here on my own."

As I listened to Rachel, I became more and more convinced that something inevitable was going on. She explained that our troubles were occurring because something strange had happened, and lots of the dead people had been woken up – hardly anyone had been able to lie in peace in the earth for the past few days, they were all fidgeting, tossing and turning like somebody who can't get to sleep. The most badly warped of them had formed a group. This lot had taken a fancy to the idea of liquidating anyone they didn't like. They had seen the people they had once loved being exterminated, so now they wanted to see the extermination of everyone they didn't like. It was all starting to fit together in my mind. The fear came back to me that I had felt while I was down in the underground, and there was nothing I could do to restrain it – there were evil thoughts seething away in thousands of minds, both living and dead, and even if I were yet more indifferent than I already am by nature, and by the strength of my convictions, I was just as likely to cop it as anyone else, so I came up in goose bumps, though maybe it was the ice cream, plus the A/C.

"And there's magic too," Rachel went on. "Something's been disturbed, the order's been upset, it feels as if an immense force could end up in evil hands."

"But why aren't you smiling now, Rachel?" said Chirico, who liked the story, but on whom it hadn't made a major impression, because one, she hadn't been down in the cellar, and two, those weren't the sort of films she downloaded off the Internet. "You've had some ice cream and it's great here in Arkadia. I always smile when I come in here."

Rachel winced slightly.

"Because they're giving me strange looks." She was right. The customers at other tables were glancing at her with disgust, worse yet, the staff were staring at her with indignation and a sense of duty, and then finally I saw two security guards coming our way. Well, yes, it's not their fault, I justify them mentally – Arkadia isn't for tramps and scruffs, their job is to throw those people out of here, and Rachel happens to look the way she looks. So they come up and inform us that this lady must leave, because she's upsetting the other customers, and they're going to escort her to the exit.

"But why?" said Skinny, with a note of hysteria in her voice.

"Because she's upsetting the other customers," they repeated their stock reply.

"This lady has paid for her ice cream and she has a right to finish eating it," I remarked in a tone only mildly spiced with adrenaline. In theory it was a good idea, but the ice cream was almost entirely gone, which one of them pointed out with a stubby finger.

"Good grief!" exclaimed Chirico very loud. "Excuse me, but do we look like hooligans?"

"You don't, but this lady…" he said, pointing at Rachel, "…is upsetting the other customers."

"But this lady is a girl guide from a historical reconstruction group! Only an hour ago she was at the state commemorations! She shook hands with the Lady Mayoress, and now you want to throw her out?"

At that they were rather bewildered. That Chirico's really smart.

"It'll be a terrible scandal," I added. "Not just you, but your boss'll have to explain himself to the media too."

"I'll just go and get changed, I don't want to upset anyone," said Rachel with a sad look on her face.

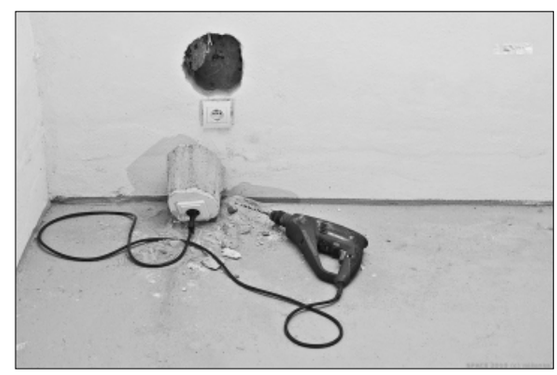
What a good actress – she immediately sensed what that was about, I thought in admiration, and at once realised she must have had to pull off some tougher tricks than that one in the days when she'd been in hiding. One of the security guards went off for a brief consultation over his walkie-talkie.

"All right, we're sorry." He even managed to force a crooked smile. "But once you've eaten your ice cream," he said, glancing meaningfully at the empty cup, "please go and change – we have to look after our customers' welfare."

And they were gone.

(excerpt from a novel)

TRANSLATED BY ANTONIA LLOYD-JONES
(COURTESY OF THE POLISH BOOK INSTITUTE)



STANO MASAR: FREE END

ANDRÁS FORGÁCH

Zehuze

In this excerpt from the novel of the same name, a Hungarian-Israeli mother addresses her daughter in Europe in a letter she never sends. Her monologue, covering a span of several years, alternates between family news and reports of daily life in postwar Israel. Forgách brilliantly captures the complexity of her attitudes towards the new Jewish immigrants, with whom she sympathizes but to whom she feels, as prewar settler, socially superior. While she realizes the newcomers are victims of an experience too hellish for her to imagine, her distaste for the burgeoning Zionist movement confuses her moral sense. Meanwhile, her faith in Stalin and the „cause" has an absolutism that sits uncomfortably alongside her sentimentality.

...of course when your Dad did come, he disembarked from the ship and was amazed that the Old Testament Jews here were the Bedouin, in their fabulous robes, their cheeks burnt to charcoal, this young trainee rabbi, they have been scorching under the sun for a thousand years, well of course, but even so *we* were here first, the Bible says so, we were here before everyone else, there was as yet nothing, but we were already here, let those who came along afterwards perish, it's there in the Tanach, for a handful of glass beads ten thousand *dunam*, furlongs or whatever, the Arabs play for *va banque*, all or nothing, us too, only more cannily, of course everyone denies it, every day the Jewish Agency issues irrefutable refutations, though it's also true that we then really cannot work, you too planted a marvellous plane tree on Rothschild Boulevard, it gives superb shade, Dad and I stood under it on coming out of the cinema the other day, we couldn't go any further, guess what a terrible stroke of back luck I had, I found a little sewing set that I intended for you, the case of claret-coloured morocco leather, a dream, it has a clasp with a gold chain, it would also serve well as a purse, and one could even keep photos in it, specifically made for travelling, there's a pyramid impressed on it, a Sphinx, I bought it in the bazaar, I'm burning with rage, seven reels of thread, ten needles, two little Swiss scissors, one nail clipper, a gilded thimble, I feel like tossing the whole thing in the bin, it's not enough that you're leaving, believe me, it's hard for a birth-mother, though I never was a good mother to you, I was selfish, frightfully so, but how can it be that while my heart feels heavy as a millstone I was also enormously relieved, because I feel sure that things there will be much better for both of you in the People's Republic, Robbie never found his feet here, and then he flares up at everything, he's too anti-*everything*, he has no patience, he doesn't want to go back to Romania, of course, not one of his folks is left there, so don't you dare ask permission to come back, the only reason we're staying is because to move house twice is rather tricky at this age, one will just have to stick it out, and see how industrious your mother is, follow my example, you haven't so much as set foot outside this place and I'm already sitting at my table, which is a marvel in itself, that I'm able to sit upon my bottom, that I have time and still have a bottom! and that I can draw breath in this heat, it's a warm May, like a blast furnace, the fan isn't worth a plugged nickel, it just whirrs away in the corner of the room, it's enough to shatter the ears, it doesn't allow any sleep, and the air doesn't stir an inch, the wobbly table's leg is rocking, the pen is ripping the paper, my eyes are hurting, not that that's stopping me from writing, with my blood pressure who knows where, there you are, the paper is so thin, airmail paper, blue, I can't even see the letters I'm writing, I'm furious, but if you were to ask Hannah, she would say the same, get as far away from here as possible, once she's finished school she, too, is going to look for a new homeland, today I've been run off my feet, that's nonsense of course, I rushed around like the lowliest maid on the estate to the comrades and the occupying force, into the Party office, out of the Party office, put a good face upon it, a permit for this, a permit for that, begging, keep smiling just because a few Jewish mums are looking to make a charity business in these times of war, to lay out the goods and organise a collection, running around in the blazing sun, my tongue hanging out, I don't have a horse, not even a miserable dromedary, only the cockroaches in the kitchen, I won't sit down on them, or on a broom handle either, transport here is lousy, rank, the rattletraps they have for buses shake the living daylights out of one, and I know I have a soul because by the evening there's none left, I'm just a puddle of heat and dirt there's not a shadow in the street by the evening my skin is as scaly as a crocodile's, what they ought to write on those rattletraps is All hope abandon, ye who board here, it hasn't got any better since yesterday, if anything worse, because, and mark this well, something can always be worse than it is, *zehuze*, that's how it is, if a bus comes, then I can't get on it, people from behind push me aside, and if it doesn't come, then one has to wait forever, and it is preferable to go home rather than spend one's non-existent money on a taxi, they're all sharks, all drivers, but even if I do manage to get on and I'm not immediately crushed to death, then you can be sure the bus will break down somewhere at the back of beyond where I have no business, on the far side of town in Cholon, or what do I know? in an industrial area, or everyone has to get out at the point of a machinegun, the Brits nowadays being not at all the gentlemen they were during the war, they're nervous now, because of course all the Jewish terrorists who are operating at present got their training from them in the great *milhama*,[1] and they're all offended since they liberated us from Nazi rule out of the goodness of their hearts, and this is our way of repaying them, the *milhama* isn't over for a second and already they've become the enemy, our lot picks up British iron logic, and now the Brits are frisking people in public on every street corner, and you have to produce your tattered papers six times to ID yourself wherever you go, they check whether you have a hand grenade under your armpit, or a Molotov cocktail up your backside, they're even shameless enough to grope about under the skirts of one's little girl, well just let them grope, I say, I have nothing to be ashamed of, old crone that I am, but I can't complain, let there be peace, anything is better than war or civil war, there's been enough *milhama*, but now tensions are high ever since we blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and seventy or more died on the spot there's no tranquillity, but anything can happen, Dad does not even allow me to say *they* blew it up, we always have to say we blew it up, even if we don't agree with it at all, in fact hate what our terrorists are up to, because they murder cheat steal without mercy, but Dad says that they too are what *we* are, I don't argue with him, I leave him be, that's his way of thinking, nice of him, because it makes us both the murderers and the victims, too, one can get one's fingers burned on that sort of mentality, says he, but he doesn't know any better because it's still better than if, than if, I don't know now what it was he said, better than what? this whole prayer wheel that has been going on here for thirty years, round and round, either they're doing the blowing up or it's us, either they're the murderers or we are, there is no air to breathe but we still have to live here, all I ask is that if you reply, my little girl, you too put down everything, but everything, that you see, that you are feeling, even your most secret thoughts, no beating about the bush, you know that there's no need to fudge issues with your mother, nuku hadova, as your grandfather, that wise old Solomon, used to say, Hannah, the little minx, has at last moved in with Norbert, she doesn't listen to me or to her father, who is putty in her hands, well, that's just as Hannah likes, she loves to tease her Dad, no doubt she wants a child, God bless them both, Norbert's a fine lad, only too old, and German, and a genius, but then if that semi-Nazi von Braun, the *jeke*[2] rocket engineer, can marry his 18-year-old niece, it seems that's the fashion, old goats gag for a tasty bit of young flesh, and meat's not to be had anywhere, bread not even for coupons, or cloth on the

black market, fruit has to be literally stolen, one has to haggle for eggs as if they were made of gold, and if you're brought a single orange from a kibbutz, that now counts as a huge gift, we're like monkeys, living on seeds, though of course if you look at the ads in the newspapers you'd think this was the land of Canaan itself, because there are rich folks, and how!, who summer on the Côte d'Azur then, when they get back, shoot their mouths off just like before, there's no shortage of events here, as usual there's something happening by the minute, no room to get bored, either they're expelling someone from the Party, or shooting someone else in broad daylight, your best friend emigrates, you have a bust-up with the other one that will last a lifetime, your relatives disown you and would gladly spit on you, one is blowing one's top even though one ought to be watching the blood pressure, Dad has forbidden all talk about politics at home, but he's always the first to start, because everyone here has gone crazy, everyone has gone crazy, and he repeats everything twice over, everything twice over, has two shots, two shots, instead of using his brain for once, here everyone is soft in the head, and not just the English, who never learn anything and never forget anything, but the poor dim-witted Arabs, the Jews too, I would take sides with my own kind, even the animals do that, but sadly I'm not enough of a patriot, patriotism is not in fashion in our family, well of course the Jews, too, are dim-witted, because they think they're so clever, and it's better I say nothing about the new Hungarians here, what do we have here, what kind of rabble do we have here, especially now, the ones who *aliyahed*[3] after the war, what a mixed bunch, how greedy, how money-grubbing, they thought this was the land flowing with milk and honey, they fell for all the humbug, now they can go and break stones or shoot, there are some decent people among them, to tell the truth, and some of them who went through the bottomless depths of hell, and do you know what I've come to realise?, the fact that someone has been to hell and back *is not enough to guarantee that he will be a better person for it*, in some cases he may be worse as a person, in others he may be an angel, but nothing is for sure, that's how it goes, *zebuze*, I don't know where the key to what makes people tick is hidden, everyone is what they are, *zebuze*, but then who am I to talk, people give me such odd looks, even though I'm right, with those martyr faces, it's enough to make my blood boil, but I was here and they were there, the tattooed number on their forearm, it's horrific even to think about, there's nothing one can do about it here, I can't change things now, that's life, *zebuze*, if I only knew your whereabouts now, but not a word, nothing, from you, you really might have sent a postcard from Alexandria! Alexandria means my youth! a week has gone by before I could get round to carrying on writing this letter, three times a day I hare down to the letter box, and it's quite senseless, because the postman would bring it up if there was anything, I can't breathe, he's a brick, he's snub-nosed and he stutters, he has a cute, fluff-covered face, and of course it has occurred to me, silly goose that I am, that I have no idea where to send this letter, I keep on writing and writing, to Bosnia or Budapest or Prague or the Balearics, *poste restante*, *poste restante* in Europe somewhere, as it is it's just like talking to myself, if I think about it, yesterday [3]only[2] three people died, according to the newspaper, but then one can't believe what one reads in newspapers, everyone writes to suit their own taste, it seems there's not just one but two sides, the Stern gang have robbed another bank, do you know that Irgun has also claimed responsibility for the British embassy in Rome? but of course who thought any different? sheer terrorism, one has to kill, Lenin said, the end justifies the means, but isn't it all the same why one kills, it would be best not to have to kill, and of course someone got stabbed in the Old Town, young boys dress in women's clothes, a kitchen knife in their hands, they'll slit anyone's throat, or out of patriotism, that kind of patriotism is very much in demand now, blood-stained patriotism, or because they're thirsting for half a farthing, Dad says that Flavius already wrote about this, he even read the bit out, it's dreadful how everything repeats itself, hotheads, the vengeful, fanatics, they don't believe in anything, on top of which the good old Grand Mufti talks utter rot, now there's someone who really should get lost, he's had a screw loose since, 26 of course, fanning passions ever since, he doesn't dare show his face round here, he sends word from Cairo, as far as he's concerned even the Nazis were fairly decent when it came to settling scores with us, the poor fellahin, the have-nots who have become outlaws overnight and are now not even allowed to work, let alone be given some land, they are starting to kill, a life isn't worth a plugged nickel, pure Wild West, then all those demobbed soldiers who don't want to go home, Polacks, Eyeties, so there's no way of knowing who shot whom, but what that car bomb did on Ben Yehudah Street was truly appalling, two British deserters to make it worse, 52 dead, and all because a Jewish lad is supposed to have seduced the fiancée of one of them, in the middle of the night, and the Brits do the only thing they know, the streets everywhere are closed down, barbed wire everywhere, they've completely barbed-wired themselves in, they live in terror of Molotov cocktails, their troops are confined to barracks lest they go over to either side, one this way the other that, the one because he's fallen in love with a Jewish girl or because he's a born anti-Semite, a triple ring of barbed wire around every office, with a tank and a sentry out in front, the sun may be blazing but a true Englishman never develops a suntan, his freckled face just turns red as a lobster, they deserve it too, the crown of civilisation, the British Empire, the whole Mandate can go to hell, along with its dual obligation, Churchill did a good job of bungling on this as well, it's said that he's so bored he paints landscapes, I find that hard to believe, a landscape painter doesn't lie, Hitler also liked to paint, ever since he ceased to be the prime minister he's been swigging non-stop, not that there aren't a few decent people among the British, handsome clean-shaven types, not smelly, they're always having a wash, frightfully polite, but when they're in a funk they, too, are all too trigger-happy, and bullets aren't choosy about who they hit, some chicken thief gets shot dead every day, but if they were to withdraw from here, like rats leaving a sinking ship, then what's that going to leave in its place? it's awful just thinking about it, a great vacuum, a hole with holes in it, even the hole is leaking, nationalism is poison, everyone against everyone, of course we hope for the best, but that lot don't let you pass even with the right papers, travelling between towns can take hours, you can't go from one village to the next, the right papers are just as suspect as false ones, there's a complete news blackout and a complete blockade of the country, there's no post anyway, so this letter will just be, I keep on writing and writing, not sending it off, it may be weeks before I post it, I'm feeling kind of restless and helpless, letter-writing calms me to some degree, and much as I'm glad that you've set off at last, happy as I am that you've got away from here, my heart still aches, I don't know myself what is the matter with me, because I'm not so old as to think that we shall never meet again in this stinking prole life, I don't feel old, not I, nor am I old, have you any idea how many men still lick their chops on seeing me, only today a good-looking young fellow comes up to me in the store and says he knows me from somewhere, and of course how would he? I just smiled and turned crimson, I reckon, blushing like a debutante, but nothing can come of it, your Dad is everything, I've fallen in love with him all over again, only my children happen to have grown up, that is the course of nature, and with you going away like you have, my darling daughter, I'm somehow left like a Moldavian Jew and his fur cap, damned if I have it, damned if I don't, so happy as I am that you have finally made up your mind, it pains me just as much, pains this hard, evil, heartlessly selfish mother's heart of mine, because the cause is all that interests me, the family takes second place, and then I've adopted so many girls and driven my own daughters away, that's what the evil tongues wag, and maybe they're right, though not really, I reckon everything I did with all of you was for the best, but obviously my heyday is coming to an end now that you're fleeing the coop, and that's what I'm sensible of, that's why my heart is hammering, Dad is already asleep but I can't, I came out here and lit a candle, but I can't read, because there's a total blackout, I don't want the house being searched, but up to now I've been twisting and turning, the interests of the working class are of no interest to me, the proletariat of the world is of no interest to me, or the radiant future, just one thing is of interest to me: how you and Hannah are, that my two daughters should be happy, now a big lump has been broken off my heart, I hate being sentimental, at your wedding in ,46, at Hanukkah, it's curious that I didn't yet feel it, with you sitting there, the veil over your head and in your white embroidered dress, and you smiled, the light fell on you like a diamond crown with that amazing apple-cheeked smile of yours brightening everything, in front of the splendid sideboard over which I am so envious of Rebecca, it was possible to glimpse at the sun, but not at you

1952

it may be something you and Hannah have agreed on, that now you are expecting you're turning grey as well, *jakirati*,[4] before you have truly lived, jakirati, my darling little daughter, what's the need for a third? I can understand Hannah, with her only just having married Dmitri, love is still a new thing, *ahava hadasha*,[5] they're ardent, billing and cooing, a child is needed to cement the link

more firmly, it's a joy just looking at them, it doesn't matter that it's 76 steps, Hannah all but flies up to the fifth floor, she daydreams about a house with a garden where every morning she will pick fresh latte off a banana tree, bearing in mind the housing situation here, that day will never come, though Hannah's very self-willed, the world may be a dreadful place, but people find it easier to put up with misfortunes if they are easy at heart and they have plans, that scallywag Dmitri may turn out to be a big chameleon, time will tell, I'm always telling him that if I got a pinch of paprika each time his hackles are raised, I'd never run short, angry people are frank, their anger shows on the tip of their nose, the Arabs say, I miss the Szeged air tremendously, the River Tisza at dawn, no matter, as they say there the big ball will be in Szeged, but only if it doesn't rain, if it does, it won't, and if it doesn't, it will, when I catch the fragrance of that finely milled red paprika that I keep in a linen bag right at the back of the shelf, then all the smells come flooding back to me, like for you oranges and the fragrance of cedars in the heat, and cardomom, halva, hoummus and the earth redolent of baking oleander that you can never enjoy because you developed that fever when you slept in the hay, and freshly picked figs, olives and gefilte fish with onion, and pomegranate trees and groves of gnarled olive trees.

That Dmitri, by the way, is an upstanding, straight dealing boy, if only it weren't for those uncontrolled temper tantrums of his, that Russian accent he has just kills me, that's how I can get him really annoyed, those two languages, Hebrew and Russian, are like two wrestlers, with one minute the Russian flooring the Hebrew, the next minute the Hebrew the Russian, some of our politicians came out when the tsar, the Little Father, was still on the throne, but they too weep for his return, in their opinion Stalin is even worse than the tsars ever were, which is nonsense, if you think about the pogroms, a reactionary thought, I don't even wish to waste words on it when the equal rights of Soviet citizens in everything is common knowledge, they no longer have to confront the spectre of assimilation, admittedly the Soviet Union isn't exactly backward about coming forward with its opinions when it comes to Zionism worming its way into everything, we're only too well aware of the curse of chauvinism and what it leads to, Dmitri hates it if I say *noo shto? gavarish parusskie?*[6] that's all I can manage, unfortunately, maybe I'll have a crack at it, so that I can read the works of Stalin in the original, if only it weren't for that Cyrillic lettering, it was quite enough boning up on Hebrew, ever since then I only scuff the paper with those printed letters, even though Father was most particular about his Alephbeta to make it easy for the kids, *haikari*, the main thing is that this time Dmitri really has taken a shine to Hannah, 3 goes at it he had to no avail, three is the Hungarian number for the truth, he has brains, he waited until all the dirty rivals had fallen by the wayside, one encore and our Hannah bloomed like the cactus that only flowers for a couple of days, but then it is heart-wrenchingly splendid, like a butterfly fluttering among the prickly thorns, one mustn't lay a finger on it, just marvel, Hannah is proud, awfully proud, unfortunately she immediately turns any trouble into an illness, she of all people, who knows so much about the psychological cause of every disease, now she's walking four inches above the ground, she's lovely as Cleopatra, it reminds me of the photographs that we had made, the three of us, in Tel Aviv, at Derkowitz's.

When we three, Hannah, you and I, went to make photographs at Allenby Street the day we heard the news on the radio about the siege of Stalingrad, the D-Day landings in Normandy, and the Arabs were cringing, the embers were smouldering under the ashes, casting off any pretence at humanity, the English sent the Jewish refugees back to certain death, a few Arab insurgents were executed, yet for a few moments the idyll nevertheless broke out in Tel Aviv, the wildest idyll at a time of the gentlest carnage, we went around arm in arm right along Bograshov Street, an overpowering fragrance of jasmine simply flooded out from the gardens, making our way in that concentrated scent was like swimming underwater, three women, a mother and her two daughters, you were going to study nursing in Beirut, because the world needed nurses, how pretty you are in your crisp white nurse's uniform, standing between your teachers, at the time you graduated, in that cypress-fringed garden overlooking the sea, like a sugar lump, the sun was dazzling, the trees were casting shadows, you two were laughing about something I didn't understand, there were times when you and Hannah could laugh so wildly that it hurt, my gosh, but how pretty you are in the picture! two radiant stars, two beauty queens, you with your piled-up chestnut hair, which the British wrote down as blonde in your passport, where on earth were they looking? and out of the three of us only you are smiling like the colour of water quivering delicately in the dawn, your hair a crown with tight braids round it, you're a queen with that apple-cheeked smile of yours, a juicy peach, in that low-cut, short-sleeved black dress, you in black, Hannah in white, me under you, scarf round my head, looking into the distance like into the past, my head over your heart, behind me eternally brooding Hannah in that lily-white blouse of hers, do you remember it? dear Mama sewed it, I embroidered a line of pomegranates all round the collar, blood-red pomegranates bordered with green leaves, you three, your Dad said proudly, as if we were all the same age.

That was how Dad flirted, though you were the one he adored, mother and daughters, that flatterer said, actually sisters, he only fell in love with me again because I gave birth to you, how proud he was to hold you up to the world, a startled infant with her eyes shut tight, sitting on a chair, there in the photo, in the Old City, sitting on a bentwood chair in the street, a pram next to it, a young Dad standing guard over your dreams, but 20 years later, each of us in the picture looking in different directions, three of us in three different directions, not one at the camera: you, brimming with confidence, like a wheat field, gently swaying in the breeze, floating like the moon in the sky, or the rising sun that before long will be shining full-blaze, me below you, head to one side, as if I had just been lightly slapped, and Hannah music personified, as if she weren't even there, brooding so sweetly, like a fawn ready to dart back into the trees, a gazelle vanishing behind rocks, a distant melody that is barely breathed and carries on resonating within us as if it were grieving, though there's no knowing for what, a perennial air of melancholy on her face, and tranquillity, too, a stillness of the abyss, how strange that she should be the most melancholy among us, who, if necessary, will leap up and hare over to the far side of town for medicine, meat, a book, a letter, for the most utterly trivial bits and bobs, even forgetting all about her injured leg, her temperature, her runny nose, runs, and runs and runs and yet she is the pillar.

You are going away, leaving me, up to Lebanon, to the North, in a truck with a tarpaulin, it was wartime all the same, there were several people with guns as passengers on the lorry, but when that photo was taken Derkowitz whisked it straight into the shop window, the whole world flocked to admire it, you two gave me back my beauty one last time, the three Graces, Dad said, the big fibber, yet my mood today is much better, for some reason, the sun has peeped out from behind the clouds, January is over and it is no longer pouring with rain, the tomatoes are ripening, the deluge is over, they say the harvest is going to be good this year, as you know that decides everything here, the tomatoes here are like the stock markets elsewhere, so let's enjoy it, spring is here, it doesn't matter that I'm the experienced wife of a canteen proprietor, a Mother Courage with heart disease, I'm dreadfully worried about Hannah, now she's approaching childbirth again, and you too, like she was almost crippled with Shulie, not so much by giving birth, the doctors could only shake their heads, wrinkle their brows, the quacks, our Hannah too almost bled to death, I didn't dare write this before, little Shulie's smile was what cured her, her womb, Hannah said, but in the end even that dope Norbert cleared off, there are no more threats or secret messages or reports to the police, no stranglings on street corners or shabby Party resolutions, Othello fell on his sword and didn't strangle Desdemona, let's hope he doesn't make good on his threat to kidnap his daughter, the thing with you and Robbie is completely different, you are comrades and friends, through thick or thin, and if Robbie is up in the air and has dropped out of favour for a while, and you get up at 5 o'clock in the morning to go across to the other side of town, to that draughty monastery or the factory, then there's a Party meeting late in the afternoon at MOM, then in the evening a residents' meeting in the stairwell, if you carry on like this, there'll be nothing of you left over for us, just a gnawed bone.

TRANSLATED BY TIM WILKINSON

(excerpt from the novel first published in eurozine)

[1] *Milhama* = war (Hebrew).
[2] *Jeke* = Kraut, German (Yiddish).
[3] *Aliyah* = ‚ascent' in Hebrew and hence the immigration of Jews to Israel.
[4] *Jakirati* = darling, dearest (Hebrew).
[5] *Ahava hadasha* = new love (Hebrew).
[6] What was that? Do you speak Russian?

KATEŘINA TUČKOVÁ

The Expulsion of Gerta Schnirch

Prologue

The edge of the rough road is crumbling into the ditch. The grass is growing through the gravel, the stroller's wheels jumping over the stones. A moment ago, her left foot had slipped on the slimy gravel. Her ankle is dull with pain; she must have strained a ligament. She tries not to put her whole weight on her foot. For several hours they have been walking slowly, just crawling, with strollers right next to each other, supporting each other from time to time, taking turns pushing. The road had been hardly visible for a long time now. Only now and then the light from torches or trucks would reach them, but then they clung together even tighter, sped up their tempo and covered the children with a coat hanging over the stroller.

She cannot guess exactly how long they have been walking. As though their journey had lasted centuries. Dawn is far ahead, though, so it could not have been more than a couple of hours. She is tired and so is her companion. Should she try to stop and rest?

A number of times they were passing by people sitting on the ground or on the suitcase they had been dragging with them. And a number of times they also saw a young man run toward them who cracked their skull with the barrel of his gun. She was scared to stop. She pushed herself to keep walking, despite the pain in her groin and left foot.

A girl next to her was whispering about thirst.

Gerta said nothing. She had water hidden for herself and for the child, and she could not offer when she did not know what awaited her. Even she was thirsty, but she kept quiet and continued dragging herself step by step, to God knows where.

God? She had stopped trusting him a long time ago. She used to pray to him, asking him for help, to do something. Anything that would change her life. Then she understood that God would not do this for her. But it was already too late.

Since then she hadn't prayed and did not think about God. She wanted to rely on herself even in moments such as this one. Not even God knows where they are herding her; only these furious young boys know, and maybe even they don't know. Such immature kids they are. She was suffocating with anger, their voices would reach her and get lost in the shouting of people in front of her. A couple of times she caught a glance of them on the tops of the passing cars. With their guns in the air they resembled the head of Medusa with its tangled hair of snakes. A snorting, angry Medusa, a killer with the evil, drunken gullet of a mob. Look at them and you will die. You will turn to stone or they will shoot you. She hated them, but that was all she could do. Only hate. And above all, not to let it show if she wanted to survive. She walked humbly next to her guide and kept quiet. The night was sliding into a grayish morning, and a procession of silent, tired people stretched around her. Their steps, the rustling of their winter coats and words uttered under their breath were interrupted only by the shouting of the guards, the cries of the wounded and now and then by shots. How many, Greta was unable to count.

Where did the terror start? In the moment when the flowers were falling on the bottom of mother's grave everyone could sense it, everyone knew already. Even father was uneasy despite still blindly believing.

When Gerta looked at him askance, she saw his effort, how he was straining all his facial muscles, how he bulged his eyes and hid them again by repetitive blinking, how he tried not to cry. But he should, Gerta thought, he should cry, throw the dirt from mother's grave on the bald top of his skull, from which the last blond hair was receding, he should smear it on his face, he should let it mix with his tears and above all he should call for forgiveness. That's what he should do. Not showing off in a uniform like a strutting pigeon and in honorary position following mother's coffin as it disappears under the clods of dirt. Don't throw her down there, stop it! Gerta wanted to shout but Friedrich stopped her gesture. He squeezed her arm so hard that she got scared. Friedrich is not crying either? How could he, the spitting image of their father. Gerta looked again in the deep hole from which here and there a dark grey coffin was visible. The funeral was modest. But, really, it did not begin with the funeral. The funeral, that was only one part in a chain of catastrophes that would come every month, every year, through the whole war.

And life before the war was so beautiful. Not only hers – also Friedrich's, father's and mother's, Janine's and Karl's, all their lives had had a sense and order, they were unfolding together, in unity, into the future, one whose contours Gerta envisioned in detail. In the winter of 1942 when mother disappeared under the Schnirch tombstone, the image of the future had begun to fall apart. The last certainty was stomped out on Corpus Christi in the year 1945. But this was preceded by many events.

II

The war was long. It began unnoticeably, without Gerta realizing, and it spread until it entered all corners of their life. It began with the cancellation of Mr. Kmenta's course and continued to crawl to their home, directly in their kitchen, where father laughed reading papers out loud, how they chased a naked Jew out of Café Esplanade so fast that he broke his neck at the bottom of the stairs. Mother started to cry then from such an undignified end to a human life. These moments did not go without shouting, just as when she gave a half a liter of milk to Mrs. Goldstein from next door, because she hadn't managed to do her groceries in the hours designated for Jews. At the time Gerta thought that these were catastrophes of their household, an earthquake taking place within the walls of their apartment, threatening the calm between parents. She prayed in her room so that Mrs. Goldstein might not come to see them when she needed milk again, she prayed so that mother would not soften at the sight of little Hana with her big dark eyes like first cracked chestnuts whom Mrs. Goldstein held in her arms. Or she prayed so that people would not sit around on the sidewalks with buggies filled with furniture, always causing sadness in mother's face. Just like every meeting with Mrs. Kocurová from the house next door, whose son Jirka, people say, shot himself because 'they' betrayed us. Gerta did not understand then why father sent mother in the bedroom while he explained it to a shocked Friedrich who had lost his classmate. He diffused any of his doubts with one word. He said: *cowards*. And Friedrich, father's Arian pride, their little Friedrich understood it, as always. Nothing could stand between him and father.

And that's how the war kept coming little by little, while Gerta tried to resist letting the changes into her life. Except Janine, whom she offered her own room when hers was taken by relatives expelled from Frývaldov.

– They had to run away from people like you, Janine explained, quietly looking down and refusing Gerta's offer, not even telling her how they talked about the Schnirch's at that time. Gerta shook her head as though she did not understand, she didn't know whom she meant, people like them. She had always been like Janine. She took drawing courses, she was preparing for high school and rather than pictures of Hitler in the windows of apartments and illuminated by shivering glows of candles, she was more interested in breasts exposed to the darkness of the room with tiny, protuberant areolas of nipples. In other words, her own life that upon joining a new school became so intriguing.

Every October morning of that first year of war, Gerta got up into a deep blue darkness, through which no single light gleamed, curious and looking

forward to a new day. The window through which she looked out onto Pressburger Strasse while getting dressed only showed an image of black shadows, thicker in places where the approaching light was screened off by the shadow of monumental sycamore trees. Gerta never stood by the window longer than necessary for getting dressed. The image of her mother's warm smile at breakfast preceded by a quiet clinking of the cups and spoons emanating from the kitchen made her hurry.

She closed the door of her room quietly, walked through the hallway and entered the dining room, where mother was putting bread covered with blue, checkered cloth on the table. Father was sitting at the table and, as he did every morning, was flipping through yesterday's paper. He would buy a new paper on his way to work, at Mr. Foll's newsstand that had changed owners that year, as they learned from a sign that said *Konrad Kinkel – Trafik.*

– Good morning, said Gerta. Mother nervously looked at father, then smiled at her, nodded and father answered: – *Grüss Gott.* He looked up at mother from behind the paper, shook the edge of the paper to give his gesture significance and went back to reading. Gerta curled up her lips into the shape of a wrinkled narrow heart, sent an air kiss to mother and spread them again into a wide smile. She loved her for being who she was, simple, warm, with a vast, soft chest and round, strong arms. Her mother was at her side, under all circumstances, even with the changes that Gerta didn't understand much. Unlike little Friedrich, who must have been born a know-it-all. With a refined *Weltanschauung* and with such a face as though father had split in two. He wore his hair parted the same way, he shut his eyes the same way when he smiled, and he did what was right before father even uttered a word. Friedrich was the real Schnirch, and that's why father saw him differently than he saw Gerta. Because with Gerta it had been different from her childhood.

She spoke both German and Czech like Friedrich, she sang *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* when father asked her to, as he stumped the rhythm with his massive shoe with a long white knee sock above it, and to his joy she wore *dirndl* with the little hat with a bristle. But she never was as valued as Friedrich was in his eyes, she didn't know why. For a long time she tried to win him over, to get his attention, but then something broke inside her. Until she understood that no matter what she did, she would never be as flawless as him. Once she realized that, she became obsessed with revolt and tried to deny everything that father brought to them, and the stronger she clung to mother. It must have been around that time when their household began to split - into the Czech and the German, and only her with her mother belonged to the Czech part. An abyss cracked open between Gerta and father. She put away the green *dirndl* with a brim of red flowers and all father's rules with it. One of the rules was the ban on speaking Czech, because father hadn't liked the sound of Czech for a certain time.

It must have been sometime in the spring of 1939 when he gave a long speech at home and ordered them to speak only German. Friedrich immediately agreed and hadn't spoken a word of Czech since then, not even when they were alone. But she found it absurd.

– Speak normally, she'd say confused when even mother served Sunday lunch in German. Mother, who used to speak Czech exclusively. It had never been that way, Gerta protested. It wasn't that she hated German, on the contrary, she loved the language. Besides, it was a natural tongue for her just like Czech. She spoke it outside while playing, at visits, at school or even in courses, depending whom she was addressing. She didn't think whether to speak Czech when she talked with her girlfriends or if to speak German when she saw father. Several times father got upset with her when he heard her speaking Czech outside and he made her stay in her room for the whole Sunday afternoon. And on occasion he went to the bedroom and came back with a whip and beat her with it without holding back. It was mother who took his hand and cried when he did that asking him to order her grounded and it was mother who saved her from it with a warm dinner. She served in German.

With sleepy *Grüss Gott* Friedrich came to the dining room. It was still dark outside the window in the wild garden of the courtyard, it was the same dark even when Gerta ate half of her slice of bread and father put down the paper and was finishing a cup of morning tea. Mother pushed a slice of bread with a thick layer of chives and tea in front of Friedrich and reminded him as every morning that he had gotten up late.

– *Die Zeit wird knapp*, so you don't have to rush, kids.

All three of them walked out into the damp and chilly morning together. Father would make them go faster by saying his *los, los,* but they all stepped outside at the same time, holding their collars up at their necks against the blustery cold wind. At the corner of Pressburger Strasse and Ponawkagasse they split. Father walked away through the park towards Adolf-Hitler-Platz, Gerta with Friedrich continued until Horst-Wessel-Strasse, where the Deutsche Handelsakademie was.

The fact that Gerta entered Business College was father's choice. If it were up to her she would have gone to a small school that opened a couple of years ago with extensive visual art instruction. She dreamed of painting designs for the ceramic bowls and jugs that she saw lined up along the windows in one of the studios at the open day she visited with mother. Or she wanted to make marionettes of goblins and fairies for which she would sew clothes from textiles with patterns that resembled Janine's drawings. Gerta saw studios for that too there. And then she saw the ones where enormous human figures from white and brown material stood on pedestals modeled as God had made them, and the ones with paintings of landscapes, fields and forests on easels, paintings of people that didn't resemble humans, not even at second or third look. She laughed at their square shapes and double-nosed faces. There were also paintings that Gerta couldn't decipher and even mother didn't know what they could represent. Gerta will never forget that visit, she was so fascinated by the abundance and diversity of the art she encountered there. She will never forget the smell that permeated the school and that stuck in her memory for long years, hiding in it the biggest adventure she could imagine.

That would have been her choice, but father decided that she should apply with Friedrich to the German Business Academy, because times were complicated and the nation needed efficient bureaucrats that he then could employ at the office of Oberlandrat where he worked.

And Gerta did not protest. To be an artist was a dream anyway, a dream that only those elect few can live, those who feel that they can't and are not able to do anything else but to follow their higher calling. And Gerta wasn't one of those people, because she was the daughter of Barbora Ručková and Friedrich Schnirch from Sterngasse and she knew how to draw with charcoal and pastel, some handicraft that mother had taught her, and at school she was good at math. Such people don't become famous artists, she'd say to herself, and in September 1939 she entered the German Handelsakademie and it was good that she did because they closed down the art school soon after that.

(sample translation from the novel by the courtesy of the Dana Blatna Literary Agency)

STANO MASAR: WAY OUT

VESSELA LYAHOVA

Refugees

Over the next few days, Neda kept expecting the three men to come back. Frightened, morose, she kept glancing around with deep, dark eyes, as if waiting for death itself. She quit going to work, she retreated upstairs, she didn't even set foot in the yard, nor did she let her daughter go outside. She couldn't sleep a wink at night. And if she happened to drift off, overcome by exhaustion, she would have nightmares of the most horrible, shameful violence. At such moments, she would awaken with a strangled cry, her heart pounding, and even though she knew it was just a dream, she could not calm down.

One day the doctor she worked for sent someone to check whether she was sick. The servant left, and Neda, as if this was just what she had been waiting for, got dressed, straightened herself up, grabbed the documents she had found amidst Georgi's papers, and went out, telling Maryam to keep an eye on the girl. The Armenian woman called after her through the door: "Where to?" but after not receiving an answer, she crossed herself and said: "Be careful!"

Dr. Andonis had patients, but when they told him she was here, he saw her immediately.

During those sleepless nights, Neda had thought about what she would say, what words she would use in front of the doctor. He was an educated, good man, he would understand where she was coming from. But he had no idea, not a single inkling, of what she had been through. So that meant she would have to tell him everything, from the beginning, starting with Georgi's death… When she saw the familiar house, however, and the clean waiting room with the wide staircase leading towards the rooms on the second floor, when she sensed the peacefulness of someone else's well-ordered life, she said to herself: what does he care about my nightmares! Hasn't he already helped me enough – once to have a child, then again to earn a living. What more could I ask of him! After all, he's only a doctor, not a magician! Hesitating, she was ready to turn back, but it was already too late.

Dr. Andonis received her in his office and, clearly concerned, asked her what was the matter.

Neda said the first thing that popped into her head: "I have to leave Greece," and fell silent.

She fell silent because she had uttered that thought clearly for the first time and was amazed that it sounded like an important and painful decision. She had been juggling all sorts of thoughts in her head, and actually had hidden this thought behind certain hazy beliefs: that she shouldn't be afraid, that she would manage, that she would stop at nothing to save her child, and Lord knows what else. Yet it was so simple: she would leave Greece. That was her salvation, that's what her tormentors wanted, that's what her relatives had been telling her to do, that's what Greece itself expected of her. She instantly felt relief. Of course, that meant the end! The end of that whole life: Drama, the white courtyard, her job at the doctor's office, the tidy white coat, Sunday visits to the cemetery… Neda swallowed and repeated again, now in a stronger voice: "I have to leave Greece."

"Why?" Dr. Andonis asked. The wave of mass emigration had passed. However, another thing was clear to him as well: jolts of political uncertainty always swept away the most defenseless.

"I had a close shave that made it clear to me that I, as a Bulgarian, have no place here."

"Your job here with me is guaranteed…"

"You are not the whole of Greece, Dr. Andonis," Neda said, shaking her head.

The doctor fell silent. Neda knew: there was no way he didn't realize what was going on in the country, how lawlessness reigned.

"I'm out of time, they'll come back any minute and they won't stand on ceremony with me," Neda continued, giving her tone a business-like edge so as to hide her enormous regret and grief. This helped him as well, so he wouldn't feel as if he were facing a painful farewell. "Unfortunately, I need money." Neda faltered, but only for a moment. "Would you be willing to give me a loan against this property…"

She reached into her purse and pulled out the folded papers. Dr. Andonis raised his eyebrows quizzically. He didn't say anything, he didn't even reach out for the documents.

"Before he died, my husband bought an orchard. Actually, that orchard is the reason they're tormenting me. He always said it would make a wonderful little farm…"

Dr. Andonis smiled uneasily and interrupted her: "Neda, I'm a doctor, not a farmer!"

She nodded, but looked at him with disappointment. She put the papers back in her purse.

"Of course. But I have nothing else to offer you nor do I have time to find someone to sell it to…"

He looked at her kindly, it seemed.

"I don't expect any kind of offer from you. Wait for me for a moment," he said and left the room.

Neda was left alone in embarrassed anticipation. She had to admit to herself that no one would buy a property in five minutes. So that means she had nevertheless come here to beg, to beg for help in the most humiliating way. But he did not acknowledge her humiliation in any way, he even continued addressing her politely, just as before. His nobleness had spared her from the awkwardness of her position. Yet he was also a Greek… She looked around. She was most likely seeing all of this for the last time. She felt sad and amused at the same time. She had sat on the examination table covered with a white sheet, the same white sheet she had later taken care of, washing it, ironing it, folding it… Everything was so familiar, even dear to her. She was not destined to be at home here.

Dr. Andonis quickly returned.

"You didn't tell me what happened, but I understand that it is something quite serious. I'm not going to try to change your mind, just know that you won't have an easy time of it." He took a wad of folded bills out of his pocket. "This is your salary for the past month," he said, handing her the money.

From the thickness, Neda could tell that it was quite a bit more than she was due. She straightened up and opened her mouth to protest. Judging her intentions from her expression, Dr. Andonis cut her off: "Please don't, don't feel obliged! In any case, I was very happy with your work. It's too bad you're leaving." He fell silent for a moment before adding: "Take care. I wish you happiness."

"Happiness?" Neda smiled bitterly. "Is there such a thing as a happy widow, doctor? Or a happy homeless person? Or a happy refugee? God willing, I'll bring my child across the border, hopefully happiness is in her destiny…

She turned to leave. He saw her to the door. When they were outside, he stretched out is hand and quietly, almost inaudibly, said: "I'm ashamed of what my homeland has done to you."

"I doubt we'll ever see each other again. But please know that my late husband and I did not approve of what they did to you when the Bulgarian authorities ran you out."

Dr. Andonis shrugged: "You know what? The saddest part of all is that they have sown hatred between us. Yet we are so alike."

Before she turned the corner, Neda looked back. The doctor was still standing in the doorway. She clutched her purse, containing the money amidst the documents, crossed the street with a decisive stride and never once looked back again.

TRANSLATED BY ANGELA RODEL

MARCO MAGINI

As if I were alone

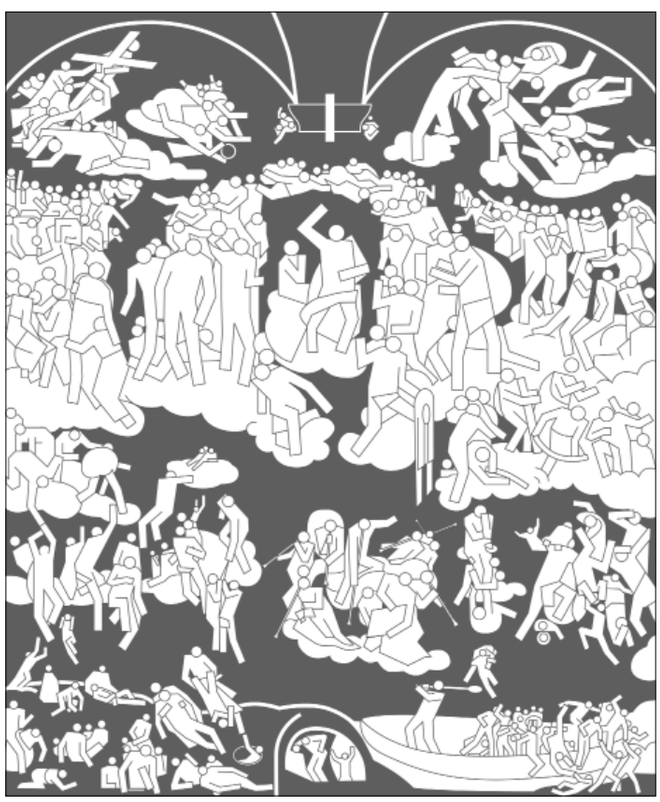
Dražen

The recruitment centre is in a damp primary school gym.

Irina does not understand why I came here, and how could she. She fell in love with a long-haired extrovert with a guitar slung over his shoulder and now she finds herself looking at him wearing his third military uniform. In the end, whom should I be at war against? I, who should be considered a true Yugoslav, practically one of a kind. I was born only a few kilometers from here, in the Serbian area of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to Croatian parents. Not that this made much difference to me. My generation never asked if the girl we were dating with was Serbian or Croatian, or if our team member was Muslim. Of course, you knew who observed Ramadan and who celebrated Christmas, but the country I was born in was too small to allow us to exclude friendships based on these details.

There are twenty or so of us in a row, all very young, it is clear that they are scraping the bottom of the barrel. Being a soldier at a time like this is the only safe job. If you are on the right side, you know your daughter will never go hungry and that no one will touch your wife. There isn't enough money left to listen to Irina's objections. The war won't last long; I just have to make sure I don't do anything stupid and I'll soon be back home. I'm no hero and I certainly don't intend to become one now.

My third uniform. At eighteen, during national service, I was trained in that mixed bag that was the Yugoslav army. I started in January 1990, and was posted to a base a few kilometres outside Sisak. Apart from the occasional hunt for turtle doves with my grandfather, that was the first time I had held a rifle. May 13th was a Sunday. Saturday was the only leave day but Sundays weren't so bad, given that we were all allowed to watch the match together in the barracks. There was a little television in the canteen, on a shelf two meters above the ground. That evening at the Maksimir stadium, Dinamo Zagabria was playing Stella Rossa. I'd never been a great football fanatic, but I had learned that if you don't want to find yourself alone, it is important to like what the others like. In the army, being different is ill advised; create as many friendships as possible if you want to spend your months peacefully. Seeing myself through today's eyes, I realise as well that I always felt self-conscious about being an eighteen year old from a small country town, who still hadn't much experience of life. We'd been talking about the match for days. There had already been unrest in Belgrade the year before and there was widespread fear that the recent election of Tudjman would further ignite bad feelings. Politics didn't interest me at that time and I still had no idea that we would soon be forced to take an interest. Growing up in the wake of Tito's death, my generation was much more interested in the musical break-up of 'The Police' than in a possible break-up of the Yugoslavian Republic. Federation, confederation: these were words that were a long way from our thoughts.



STANO MAŠAR: LAST JUDGEMENT

I remember the day that I eventually woke up to what was really happening in my country. I may not have understood, but I clearly felt that something had changed. I remember the Croatian fans invaded the pitch and Boban, the captain of Dinamo Zagabria, turned around, raised his head, took a running jump at the policeman and kicked him straight in the face; an instinctive defence with respect to what was going on. Of all the turmoil that happened that day, the riot squad kitted up in anti-riot gear, the injured lying on the ground, of all this I only remember Boban and his flying kick.

I have often asked myself if Boban was aware of the consequences of his gesture, whether he realised its significance. Probably not. That kick, transmitted and retransmitted on the television, was to end up taking on a life of its own, turning into something that was foreign to and independent from its perpetrator and his true intentions. That kick forced us to choose sides; it was impossible to remain indifferent to it. In that instant, Boban became the protector of the Croatian nation, the choice was to side with Boban or with the police officer: to decide, as Tujman said, whether it made sense for Croatia to exist or whether, as Milosevic was already shouting, the old Yugoslavia should continue as it was.

That kick became the only topic of mealtime discussions over the following days. For the first time in the history of the Yugoslav army, which until that time had been the main training ground for creating a nation, expressions such as "Turk" or "Croatian" were coined, derogatory names that began to trace invisible boundaries between us comrades-in arms. I believe it was then that many of my companions discovered they were "Croatians" or rather "sons of Croatia" as they were defined then by the new Prime Minister Tujman. I remember how deeply they were affected, although re-examining the facts today, I think I might interpret it more as a teenage infatuation, more like seeking an identity through a presumed difference than a real political ideal. As things stood, within a few weeks many people became public defenders of those they had elected, and declared their readiness to shoulder their arms were their requests not accepted. True to my desire for invisibility, I partook in long discussions in which I remained silent, attempting to separate the two contenders in the end when they finally raised their fists. Thinking back now to the last few months of my military service, my memories are fuzzy, as if I were watching my life as a spectator without having any involvement in it. The only thing I recall as clearly as yesterday is my impatience to go back home as soon as possible.

NORMAN MANEA INTERVIEWED BY CARLA BARICZ

The Great Work and the Compromised Man

MANEA, Norman

On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist (essays) Grove Press, 1994 (2nd ed.)

Romanian Writers on Writing (ed) Trinity University Press, 2011

The Fifth Impossibility (essays) Yale University Press, 2012

Compulsory Happiness Yale University Press, 2012 (3rd ed.)

The Black Envelope Yale University Press, 2012 (3rd ed.)

The Lair Yale University Press, 2012

The Hooligan's Return Yale University Press, 2013 (2nd ed.)

CARLA BARICZ ■ *Tell me a little bit about writing* The Hooligan's Return. *When did you decide to write a memoir? Did you know right off the bat that it was going to be a memoir? Had you decided to write before you visited Romania in 1997?*

NORMAN MANEA ■ I didn't want to write this book. I didn't want to write a memoir, in any case. I didn't like the idea of a memoir, but that's what I ended up with. I happened to visit an editor, and I told him a few stories about Romania. He was very interested, that's how people are sometimes, when you tell them stories about that other world, the Old World with its scandals and exoticism. He was very taken with my story, and he encouraged me to write it down. I then received a small note from that same editor. He wrote to say that he saw a book in the making, that he would be willing to publish it. I fought with him for six months; I wasn't in the business of writing memoirs. I wanted it to be a novel. I told him that I wanted to write with ink rather than blood. And he said, "No, Norman, it's better in blood!" I spent a long time thinking about the book, and it took me a long time to write it – years. Things got easier when I finally decided what I wanted to do with the structure. The book is a hybrid. It's not exactly a memoir. It's a hybrid form. It includes a section in which I retell the lives of my parents, before they had me: the past as fiction. Another section is a travel journal, which documents my 10 days in Romania, in 1997. So, it's really a combination of things. My American editor labeled it a "memoir," but in Germany it came out with the subtitle "self-portrait," in Italy it was called "a life," and in Spain they thought it was a "novel." It can be read in a lot of ways. In Romania, where I had a say in these decisions, I told them not to use a subtitle, just "The Hooligan's Return." I leave it up to the reader. Think of it as you see fit.

■ *What is it like to write your own life?*

■ The book has also been labeled a "novelistic memoir." Nothing that has anything to do with the past – and yesterday is already the past – can be recalled perfectly. It's already somehow foggy. Processes of memory are at work, and memory is fictive, weak, and ambiguous. What I wrote wasn't a perfect document. It was difficult. A memoir or a journal needs to be authentic and truthful. You shouldn't lie or wiggle around. You can lie as much as you want when you write a novel, but not in this case. Yet, the book is partially novelistic; I write about things that I think happened or that I know happened because documents told me, but which I did not experience myself. And even certain other parts of the book, like my description of childhood … Well, that was 70 years ago! Memory is a process which you cannot really own. You do what you can, you use whatever memories are still available to you, but the past is never exactly what you think it is.

■ *The year 2013 marked the 10th anniversary of* The Hooligan's Return. *If you were to sit down now, would you have written the same memoir? Would it have taken the same shape?*

■ I can't take any responsibility for possible actions. I cannot tell what would have happened … 10 years is a long time. That was another moment in my life and in my writing. Perhaps, I would still reject the idea of writing a memoir. The whole thing was a surprise for me. And, somehow, it was also a kind of … sadness. It's a sad time in the life of a writer when one book takes over all the other books, and you feel as you do when you have a number of children, and some of your children are handsome, accomplished, and social, while others are more isolated, quiet, and disliked. As a parent, you might be drawn to the latter, which are at a disadvantage. I, too, am drawn to my lesser-known works. Of course, I was shocked that the memoir received such great reviews in the American press. My memoir was not the sort of thing that people usually think of when they talk about the genre. It was partially fictional, and it was a complicated, Central European fiction. That type of writing can often seem coded and obscure, it belongs to another tradition. You have to learn how to read it. So I was very, very shocked and surprised that the book became successful. I received the MacArthur and the Guggenheim shortly thereafter, so I felt a bit like I was living the American dream, which is not a very comfortable thing for a writer. But that was that. Subject closed.

■ *I'm sorry that I'm going to continue asking about the favorite child, but what prompted you to call your memoir* The Hooligan's Return?

■ Well, it was because I wrote that article about [Mircea] Eliade, and probably for other reasons, too. I was vehemently attacked in Romania when I published that essay; I was called horrible names. I was a guy who felt very Romanian at heart, for better or worse. I had never wanted to leave Romania. Then, later on, I didn't want to go back. I had all of these complicated feelings about my homeland. And then, at that point, when I was attacked by everyone, I felt hurt. And I felt hurt that so few people stood by me. Even my close friends, people who knew me very well, didn't defend me.

■ *There was no public refutation of any kind?*

■ Not really. Look, when the press attacked me in '82, people told me – and they were right – that they couldn't defend me, that they couldn't say anything because no one would publish any sort of defense. Which is true, the press was censored. But later, in in '90 and '91, the situation had changed. It's true that in the first years after the revolution, life was very chaotic, and everyone was enraged with everyone else, so perhaps an explanation can be found. Nevertheless, I suddenly felt like a hooligan. I felt that, in a way, and only in a way, of course, my situation resembled Sebastian's, who had also been an assimilated Jew who loved Romania very much. His famous sentence, remember? "No anti-Semitic law can stop me from loving my country." The cases were very different, but they felt similar. His best friends in Romania were not Jews, they were Romanian, and they didn't defend him.

■ *Friends like Mircae Eliade?*

■ Like Eliade, like [E. M.] Cioran, like Nae Ionescu, who was Sebastian's tutor, his mentor. Sebastian couldn't separate himself from all of this. He was very much part of it all. At the end of his journal, he writes about an encounter with a Jewish captain in the American army, who was stationed in Bucharest. And thinking about this captain, Sebastian suddenly came up with an idea: "I have to go to America, and I have to work for Hollywood!" I don't know what he knew about Hollywood, but anyway, he had the feeling that what had happened to him should not leave him unchanged. Now, during the war, things were very bad for Sebastian, they were terrible, but he wasn't arrested, and he was not sent to a camp. He was not in Transnistria. I was in a camp, and I wasn't a Jew, I was just a little boy. I was a boy, I didn't know what a Jew was, at that point. But, there are still reasons to compare the two cases. I felt that I should appropriate Sebastian's rather scandalous title and name, and that I had to tell his story.

■ *Let's go back, for a second. You mentioned that you had been persecuted in '82 and '83. Can you say a few words about what happened?*

■ I published an interview in a provincial magazine in Oradea; it was a very good magazine, *Familia* [*The Family*]. I did an interview with a tough literary critic, who asked me several questions to which I replied honestly. I was honest, I said exactly what I thought about the official writers, who wrote exactly what the Party asked them to write, and I commented on the underlying communist anti-Semitism, which wasn't exactly the type of anti-Semitism the Legionaries had practiced. And it's interesting that all of this

happened because the editor-in-chief of the review was on an official visit to North Korea at the time. The assistant editor published the interview because his boss wasn't there. Afterwards, when the guy came back, he was fired. And the piece caused a huge scandal. These writers who wrote for *Saptamana* [*The Weekly*] and for the other nationalist magazines felt attacked, and they answered in turn. They had the Romanian press in their hands, and an entire campaign was launched against me. I was not allowed to write and reply in my own defense. I must say that, though this interview was published in Oradea, which is in Transylvania, and even though this smear campaign spread to the entire country, the papers in Transylvania never attacked me. In Bucharest it was a circus. In Cluj, Oradea, and Timi oara, no one attacked me.

■ *Why do you think that is?*

■ For better or worse, it's a part of Romania that is, in my opinion, more western.

■ *You wrote in your memoir that "in 1935, the year before I was born, I was the hooligan Sebastian – and so I would be fifty years after and then ten more years after that and another ten and all the years between." What do you mean by that?*

■ Did I say that in '35 I was Sebastian? I wasn't born in '35, so it's possible. In any case, I felt close to Sebastian, I felt that he was almost myself, that I embodied this phantom called Sebastian. I was moved by his story. He was completely assimilated into Romanian culture. He had many friends who were Christians, and despite what happened to him between '39 and '44, he did not become bitter. This was the interesting thing about his *Journal*. Compared to other books by Jews, books written in the same period, he maintained a type of detachment and a type of gentleness with which I very much sympathized. As I said, I was idiotic enough to not want to leave Romania. I could have immigrated if I had wanted to. My family remained in Romania because of me. I felt very rooted in the Romanian language and culture. This was my only home. And where should I have gone? Where? What should I have done? Things reached a point in 1986, when the situation in Romania became so bleak and unbearable that I had to leave.

■ *Tell me about your first reading of Sebastian. Were you surprised? Were you inflamed like your mother's cousin, Ariel?*

■ First of all, Sebastian's books were not available in Romania at the time. *How I Became a Hooligan* was not available; *For Two Thousand Years* was not available. What was available, and this was later, in the period of liberalization during the thaw, when the system began to rehabilitate a lot of Romanian writers who had been banned before were the plays and some essays. Then, his novel *The Accident* appeared. But that was it. His first novel, *The Town with the Black Locust Trees* had not been republished, *How I Became a Hooligan* had not been republished, *For Two Thousand Years* hand not been republished. I read these books in old editions. I was very much impressed by the latter two. Though *For Two Thousand Years* is not a great novel, it's a very interesting one. Sebastian deals with the Jewish question, and his point of view is not very different from that of his mentor, actually. Putting aside the anti-Semitism, what Nae Ionescu wrote in the preface was not completely different from what the book said. The book tries to demonstrate that there is no solution to the Jewish problem. The Marxist solution, with its Utopian dreams, the Yiddish solution of staying within the parameters of Jewish folklore, the Hebrew solution of reading the Torah and moving to Israel, the Stalinist solution – none of these solutions worked! And assimilation didn't work either, because you would always remain more or less a suspect in your own homeland. This problem appealed to me. Anything that doesn't have a solution appeals to me.

■ *You wrote in your memoir that you had read Proust and Joyce when you were younger. Was it in this thaw period?*

■ No, I read Proust earlier. There were two or three very good libraries in Bucharest. I found Cioculescu's extraordinary translation of Proust at the Institute for Foreign Relations. I read it there, before it was republished, in the early '70s, for the popular Everyman's Library.

■ *You say in your essay, "The Incompatibilities" that Sebastian's* Journal *is an account of the "rhinocerization" of certain Romanian intellectuals, whom Sebastian counted among his friends. You discuss Mircea Eliade, E. M. Cioran and Constantin Noica. Can you elaborate on the term "rhinocerization?"*

■ The word comes from one of Eugene Ionesco's plays, and Ionesco is an interesting case. He was not very political. In fact, he was one of the very few intellectuals in this group who did not condone this sort of right-wing nationalism. He said somewhere that when he left Romania, around 1939, and reached the Hungarian border, he felt that he was finally saved. At the end of the war, in '44, he wrote in his diary that he would never shake hands with Eliade, Ionescu, Cioran any of those people. Of course, later they became friends. That's exile. In exile, they suddenly felt like Romanians in Paris. And they were reconciled, and they started talking again. But as I said before, Ionesco felt differently during and right after the war. He says in his diary that "I could have become anything – I could have become a legionary, I could have become a dog, I could have become a base beast in that atmosphere." And then he wrote this play, *Rhinoceros*, which discusses the slow transformation of human beings into rhinoceros, meaning beasts. The only person who remains human is the guy who is not virtuous, who is a drunk, who is lazy, who doesn't work. All these other guys who display great principles, moral principles, become rhinoceros. But this man, who is human in his defects, remains human. This is the metaphor of the play.

The play was presented in the late '60s or early '70s in Romania, in a wonderful production with [Radu] Beligan in the leading role. For us, of course, it was anti-totalitarian and anti-communist, but it applies to all totalitarian systems. It's about the slow degradation and loss of real humanness. Up to the very end, the rhinoceros maintain that they are the very best, that they are patriots. It should be said that, in Romania, the right-wing movement that gained support in the '30s was very different from Nazism and fascism. Nazism and Fascism were atheistic movements, movements against the church. The Legionary movement was religious – Christian Orthodox. It was a different thought process: "The Jews have to be eliminated because we have to have this pure life, the life God wants us to lead, or Jesus, or whatever." In that way, it was similar to what the communist movement advocated. The communist utopian ideology was based on the idea of "the new man." This was a very dangerous idea, because real life is imperfect, we are imperfect, and when you ask us to be perfect, well, that's the first step towards terror and tyranny.

■ *Of course, Eliade's* Hooligans *is also all about creating the "new man." That's the goal of all the young people in the novel. They want to embody "the new man." And to do that, they constantly refer to Nae Ionescu.*

■ The Romanian extreme right emphasized the cult of death. Death was seen as man's greatest achievement. The moment of culmination was death. All in all, this was very different from the hypocritical, humanist socialist ideology. The left borrowed its humanism from the French Revolution. The right was completely against it; they had a much darker view of things. The Legionaries were the only ones who resisted in the communist jails and didn't compromise. Similarly, the communists were the only ones who survived the Nazi jails and didn't compromise. Both the far left and the far right had beliefs to which they fully dedicated themselves, for better or for worse. We, in a democracy, are told every day to be pragmatic, to find a way to get by, to compromise between the Democrats and the Republicans. And now, when both parties have become extremely ideological, they cannot reach an agreement. That's a problem. Nevertheless, even though democracy is not perfectly pure or moral, it is more human.

■ *I want to broaden the scope a little and ask about the many intellectual figures that you name in your work, people who made terrible, unforgivable compromises. I'm thinking of the young Mircea Eliade, of Emil Cioran, of Constantin Noica, and under communism, of Paul Georgescu, "the flying elephant." Do you think the work can stand independent of the writer? Or is aesthetic merit undermined by ideological compromise?*

■ The work can and should stand independently, in my opinion. There are cases when the work still has merit, despite the shortcomings of its writer. Human beings are not perfect, and there is something redeeming in the human being who, imperfect as he or she is, nevertheless struggles for a perfect work and creates a masterpiece. In my opinion, this redeems the flawed person a little bit. I think that the work should be judged for itself, and the defects of the writer should never be ignored. We can think of the writer as a teaching example. He or she can help us understand

difficult periods in human history; what the writer has to say should be dealt with, it should be debated. The great work and the compromised man are a human contradiction, and I am always for contradictions. They're more interesting than coherences. Of course, sometimes, it's very difficult to separate one from the other.

■ *Does this view hold up when pressure is exerted by those in power? I am thinking of the physically and mentally tortured woman in your short story, "The Interrogation." She agrees to the subject she is to paint because, otherwise, she will not be allowed to paint. Is this a different type of compromise?*

■ There is a big difference, in my opinion, between the choices you make as a free man and the choices you make under a totalitarian system. Eliade made his choice freely. At that point, Romania was still governed by a parliamentary system, the liberal bourgeoisie parties still existed; you could be in the Liberal party, or in the Peasant party. Or you could still choose to be completely apolitical. Eliade had a choice. If you are living under a totalitarian system, the decision is different. Your hand is forced. This is why I don't point fingers at people who were coopted by the communist government, because I can understand human weakness, and I can understand the difficulties of a human life in that type of system. What I cannot forgive or forget are the people who did terrible, horrifying things to other people. But if you compromised simply by going along, if you had a family, or sick brother, or mother, or a child, or you desperately needed a job, and you didn't hurt anyone, then that's something else. In my opinion, people are not destined to be heroes, and you should never force people to be heroes. We are human beings. Heroes make up a very small percentage of humanity, and even then, they're not human, they're one-dimensional. Not all people are courageous. I had this discussion a number of times in Romania. What do you ask of a poet? You ask him to write good poems. You don't ask him if he's betrayed his wife, or what political party he's voting for, or where he's having dinner. If he's a good poet, that's it. What do you ask of a human being? That's a hard question.

If you live in that type of society, then your choices are limited. If you are in jail, if you are under interrogation, it's very hard … I can tell you that I had a couple of meetings with the agents from the Securitate [the secret police], and they pressured me to collaborate, and I behaved well and resisted. But, when I went out into the street, I thought: "My God, if this would have gone on another 10 minutes, I would have broken down. I would have given them what they wanted." As a frail human being, you don't always know your limits. The main thing is not to put people in that kind of situation. Life is a continuous compromise, and when you impose rigid criteria, you cannot judge anything properly. There are some criteria that only computers can fulfill. In Romania, I heard the following definition of what a computer is: "A computer is that thing which cannot deal with vague ideas." But we should deal with vague ideas and compromises. For better or worse, we are not computers, or we aren't yet. Thank God, I won't be around if and when that happens.

■ *Can you tell me a little bit about the walking contradiction Paul Georgescu?*

■ He was an extraordinary man, and we were close friends. He was a great gossiper, and he always told me, "Look, I'm going to be remembered in the history of Romanian letters for the nicknames I've given to people. This is my greatest achievement." Of course, that's not true. He wrote some great books. We were not of the same generation, and he called me "the British liberal." We had wonderful discussions, and he was an extraordinary reader – a very sarcastic, cultivated man, who also happened to be genuinely funny. I met him through his wife, a truly beautiful woman. Their marriage was a contradiction in terms: she was this frigid, brilliant woman, and he was a complete hedonist. He liked to eat and to drink and to joke. He was very fat, a kind of Falstaff, and he had a mistress, and he took a taxi to see her. His wife would order the taxi and help him down the stairs! He moved with great difficulty, so she would even have to put him in the car! And his mistress is still alive! You can find her in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. She is the oldest woman to have been artificially inseminated and to have given birth to a child at, I think, 61 or 62! She was in the papers two or three days ago; she lost her home and bank account. I have no idea why. All the papers sent out appeals for donations, because she is an octogenarian, and because she is this special case … She shared Paul Georgescu's insane courage, and she did something special with her life.

I met Georgescu through his wife. I was in his wife's literary circle, not in his (he had his literary salon at his mistress' house). She read an article I wrote on Radu Petrescu, and then she called me. "I am Dina Georgescu, I read your article, you are a wonderful writer, I am a great admirer, etc. You should come over on Saturday evening, I usually have friends over." I began to go over monthly, and it was awful. Mainly because of her mother. Her mother was a Jew, from Bessarabia, who spoke Romanian with a very thick accent. At every literary meeting, she would bring out this cake, and the cake was so sweet that you could faint.

■ *Were you expected to eat it?!*

■ Yes! She usually placed a glass of white wine before each of us – it was an extremely sweet white wine. When I went home, I always said: "Now, I'm in desperate need of an onion!" It was very difficult to bear. Her circle was totally apolitical, artistic. She was very beautiful, but very cold. A great reader. She told her husband about me. And then, one time, she invited me over when Paul was at home. She said: "He wants to meet you." Later, I saw him from time to time, every month or so. From time to time, he would ask me to take him out of the city in my car, in my small Trabant. It was very hard to move him around.

I had long discussions with him about leaving or not leaving. He said, "Norman, yes, you were hurt terribly as a child, but don't go, you won't be happy. What will you do there, in that crazy American world?" He cursed me after I left, he said I was an American agent, but after a few years, he became sentimental and came around. He called my wife's mother and asked about me in a very friendly manner. He became more compassionate over the years. He was a wonderful, extraordinary man, though a dogmatist. He always told me: "Norman, I am not a Stalinist, I am with Trotsky." This was not better in my opinion; Trotsky was a bit more intelligent than Stalin, but that was about it. Anyway, his case is very different from Sebastian's. Paul was completely Romanian, he was Orthodox, but almost all his friends were Jewish. That's how he became a Communist! A wonderful character. He couldn't drink, his health prevented it, especially in his last years, so he got drunk with coffee. He drank 10 to 20 cups of coffee a day, until he propelled himself into a state of mania. Politically we were complete adversaries, and we couldn't talk about politics, he considered me a bourgeoisie, Liberal Democrat, but otherwise we were friends.

■ *I remember that you told me once that you had some qualms about being included in that 1970 Hebrew anthology,* Jewish Writers in Romanian*. Do you see yourself as a Jewish Romanian writer? Or just as a Romanian writer? Or do the labels seem completely unhelpful?*

■ When I came here I was shocked to see the bookstore shelves: women writers, gay writers, Jewish writers, Catholic writers, all the tags. In my opinion, a writer is defined by the language he or she uses. Language is the tool. This is what defines the writer. You are an American writer – gay, black, Hindu, whatever – if you write in English. The topic about which you write is your own business. So, in my opinion, I was a Romanian writer, and my ethnicity was my own business. Of course, it's not an easy problem to deal with, but it's my problem. Leave me alone with it. Even if I only write about Jews, as long as I write in English, I am still an American writer. I had this discussion at a conference in Brussels last year. The conference was entitled "How Do We Save Europe?" and I was on a literary panel. I said then what I am saying now. I am not a politician, but I think that, in order to give back to Europe its essence, you have to go back to the Napoleonic definition of citizenship. Napoleon was the first person to introduce the idea that you can be a citizen regardless of ethnicity or religion. This is also the American idea. The only thing that you are asked here is to respect the Constitution. Otherwise, nobody cares what you do, what you think. Everything else is your problem. Anyway, you can apply this to the writer. The writer's citizenship is his or her language. So, my homeland is the Romanian language. Of course I live here, and we're speaking in English, and I have an American passport, but I am still a Romanian writer. So, when I saw *Jewish Writers in Romanian*, I said, "What is this?! Did Moses send me here to write in Romanian? This is my home. I speak Romanian. I've never negated the fact that I am Jewish, but my writing belongs to the Romanian literary tradition." Since then, I've grown older. I've begun to question myself. I've gone through a lot of unpleasant experiences

in my life, and maybe there is a point to the tags after all. Maybe we can have sub-shelves within the main shelf of American literature, and that can be a way of sorting things, too. Now I have no idea what I think, and I am very pleased that I don't know.

■ *So, then, do we dismiss the idea that Jewish writers, writing in Romanian, are the inheritors of a "minor literature?" Does this term not apply?*

■ It depends who they are. You need to think of specific cases. You can't generalize. What's Jewish about me? I've been asked this a number of times. I am not a religious person, and sometimes I really wish that I was, I think it might have helped me. There are, of course, a number of definitions: one is Jewish if one's mother is Jewish – the father doesn't matter, ever, because who knows anything about the father, really – and if one is circumcised. Well, I can say "yes," on both counts. My mother was Jewish, and I apologize for confessing to the latter requirement as well. Anyway, does this make me a Jew? I grew up in a Jewish house, with certain Jewish habits. My parents were not very religious, but we went to the synagogue two times a year. I spoke Romanian with my parents and with my grandparents. So, am I a Jew? One definition of Jewishness that I do accept – and this is from the Talmud, as I've understood – is that a Jew is someone who is against idolatry. I accept this! And, I must say, I like it! I would like to be able to be in the category of people who have an ideal, but who do not become idolaters, who do not let their ideal become idolatry. So, perhaps, in this sense …

■ *Can you say a little bit about your first novel* Captives*, which is being published for the first time in English by New Directions?*

■ It's one of my biggest mistakes. It will be a disaster here.

■ *Because of the translation?*

■ No, because of the text itself. The book is extremely obscure and hermetic. I published it in 1970, and some people in Romania say that it's my best book. At that time, I wanted to do certain things with my writing. I wanted to have my protagonists – "she," "you" and "me" – be people who are defeated by life and by circumstances. These characters are not the great heroes of Romanian realist socialist literature. They are people who are neurotic, anxious, and depressed. I wanted them to be irredeemable. I wanted the socialist system to fail to recuperate or redeem them in any way, because the system always saw itself as moving ahead, regardless of past mistakes or bungles; it saw itself as propelling everyone into the future. And I wanted to say: "*No*, my characters are defeated." The writing itself is hermetic, so it can't really be manipulated. I realize that in this country, which is so different from the central European mindset that the book portrays, my novel may be a disaster. But it's not the first disaster I've dealt with in my life. So, we'll see. I struggled with New Directions. I wanted to give them another book, but they wanted this one. I have no idea how it will all turn out. But that's it. I am what I am. Imperfect.

(Published in the Los Angeles Review of Books*, February 2, 2014)*

KRISTIAN NOVAK

Black Mother Earth

I asked Zvonko, who was still standing as a shadow, leaning against the locker room, if we could go to his place, watch television, cowboys and Indians, watch empty beer cans, anything, just to keep me from thinking about Franco. He was kind of nervous and weak, he did not say a word on the way home and at home he drank glass after glass of water, constantly getting out of the armchair and coming back. I took off my sneakers and curled up on the sofa. It seems that at some point I dozed off, although it was still day, because I was completely calmed down and had a blank image in front of my eyes which in my reality was not often the case. The blank image was disrupted by a loud clump from the room next door; this was the sound evoking a huge fleshy bug, an insect the size of a horse banging against the wall of the room lamp. I sat up on the sofa. As if something inside of me had already clearly seen the scene I was yet to witness. The fear of what I would see was lesser than the fear of remaining forever petrified on that sofa so I got up on my feet and went into the hallway. Zvonko was hanging from a rope tied to the attic staircase. At first I did not see the rope as it was dark in the house, the rope was thin and it looked as if Zvonko was hovering. As if he still had the strength to pretend he was composed and decent, he silently flexed and jerked his hands on the noose. It somehow seemed he had changed his mind when he saw me. As if he realised that the only thing that would outlive him was the scene of his helplessness recorded in me. I ran to him trying to lift him by the legs. He was heavy and wildly waving his legs. I managed to grab both his legs a few times but every time he would kick throwing me a few steps back. No one uttered a sound, nor the two of us neither all of Zdravko's memories that were watching this bizarre picture. "Not again", I thought. I was nowdefinitely becoming a monster, even to those who defended me.

I would feel dizzy whenever I found myself in a very important situation. May be because those were the moments I had imagined a hundred times before, creating an imaginary picture of them, and when they became reality I had to switch in my head from a timeless construct to the present. His feet were clenching, the thumb aiming upwards and the other fingers downwards. I saw that because on one foot he was wearing a sock and a slipper while the other one was bare. I looked up and saw that his face was red and his tongue blue. His eyes were big. He was beautiful in some strange way.

When I was sure it was all over, I managed to lift him up for a brief moment, but he jerked his back one last time and kicked me back. Since I did not want to let him go, I lost footing on the ground and hang on to his leg. There was a crispy shot somewhere above me and it seemed to me that I had felt it also under my hands. It reminded me of grandma tearing and nibbling on a boiled chicken leg from the soup. His body was now completely still and I knew he was gone. My head was leaning against his groin and I felt moisture on my face. He took a leak, I thought. I moved a few steps back and sat in the corner never taking my eyes off him. He was swaying back and forth and flinched one more time although his face was already dead and still. He did not stick his tongue out and his eyes were not bulbous, at least not more than usually. He was completely serene and I was imagining that he could now see all those from the village who had left us these days and that he may even see my father. They were now all together and could laugh at what had happened.

I do not know how much time passed before they found me, I just saw that it was already dusk. I was lucky because no oneever came to Zvonko's house. That day precisely Pišta came to his house to borrow an extension cord for the light above the kettle. He came in and right at the door saw me sitting, my back against the wall and staring at the body with a petrified smile.

ANN APPLEBAUM

The region that experienced the worst

APPLEBAUM, Anne
Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–56
Doubleday, 2012

Once, in an attempt to explain the history of his country to outsiders, the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz described the impact of war, occupation, and the Holocaust on ordinary morality. Mass violence, he explained, could shatter a man's sense of natural justice. In normal times,

had he stumbled upon a corpse on the street, he would have called the police. A crowd would have gathered, and much talk and comment would have ensued. Now he knows he must avoid the dark body lying in the gutter, and refrain from asking unnecessary questions…

Murder became ordinary during wartime, wrote Miłosz, and was even regarded as legitimate if it was carried out on behalf of the resistance. In the name of patriotism, young boys from law-abiding, middle-class families became hardened criminals, thugs for whom "the killing of a man presents no great moral problem." Theft became ordinary too, as did falsehood and fabrication. People learned to sleep through sounds that would once have roused the whole neighborhood: the rattle of machine-gun fire, the cries of men in agony, the cursing of the policeman dragging the neighbors away.

For all of these reasons, Miłosz explained, "the man of the East cannot take Americans [or other Westerners] seriously." Because they hadn't undergone such experiences, they couldn't seem to fathom what they meant, and couldn't seem to imagine how they had happened either. "Their resultant lack of imagination," he concluded, "is appalling."[1]

But Miłosz's bitter analysis did not go far enough. Almost sixty years after the poet wrote those words, it is no longer enough to say that we Westerners lack imagination. Timothy Snyder, a Yale historian whose past work has ranged from Habsburg Vienna to Stalinist Kiev, takes the point one step further. In *Bloodlands*, a brave and original history of mass killing in the twentieth century, he argues that we still lack any real knowledge of what happened in the eastern half of Europe in the twentieth century. And he is right: if we are American, we think "the war" was something that started with Pearl Harbor in 1941 and ended with the atomic bomb in 1945. If we are British, we remember the Blitz of 1940 (and indeed are commemorating it energetically this year) and the liberation of Belsen. If we are French, we remember Vichy and the Resistance. If we are Dutch we think of Anne Frank. Even if we are German we know only a part of the story.

Snyder's ambition is to persuade the West – and the rest of the world – to see the war in a broader perspective. He does so by disputing popular assumptions about victims, death tolls, and killing methods – of which more in a moment – but above all about dates and geography. The title of this book, *Bloodlands*, is not a metaphor. Snyder's "bloodlands," which others have called "borderlands," run from Poznan in the West to Smolensk in the East, encompassing modern Poland, the Baltic states, Ukraine, Belarus, and the edge of western Russia (see map on page 10). This is the region that experienced not one but two – and sometimes three – wartime occupations. This is also the region that suffered the most casualties and endured the worst physical destruction.

More to the point, this is the region that experienced the worst of both Stalin's and Hitler's ideological madness. During the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s, the lethal armies and vicious secret policemen of two totalitarian states marched back and forth across these territories, each time bringing about profound ethnic and political changes. In this period, the city of Lwów was occupied twice by the Red Army and once by the Wehrmacht. After the war ended it was called L'viv, not Lwów, it was no longer in eastern Poland but in western Ukraine, and its Polish and Jewish pre-war population had been murdered or deported and replaced by ethnic Ukrainians from the surrounding countryside. In this same period, the Ukrainian city of Odessa was occupied first by the Romanian army and then by the Wehrmacht before being reoccupied by the Soviet Union. Each time power changed hands there were battles and sieges, and each time an army re- treated from the city it blew up the harbor or massacred Jews. Similar stories can be told about almost any place in the region.

This region was also the site of most of the politically motivated killing in Europe – killing that began not in 1939 with the invasion of Poland, but in 1933, with the famine in Ukraine. Between 1933 and 1945, fourteen million people died there, not in combat but because someone made a deliberate decision to murder them. These deaths took place in the bloodlands, and not accidentally so: "Hitler and Stalin rose to power in Berlin and Moscow," writes Snyder, "but their visions of transformation concerned above all the lands between."

Beginning in the 1930s, Stalin conducted his first utopian agricultural experiment in Ukraine, where he collectivized the land and conducted a "war" for grain with the kulaks, the "wealthy" peasants (whose wealth sometimes consisted of a single cow). His campaign rapidly evolved into a war against Ukrainian peasant culture itself, culminating in a mass famine in 1933. In that same year, Hitler came to power and began dreaming of creating *Lebensraum*, living space, for German colonists in Poland and Ukraine, a project that could only be realized by eliminating the people who lived there.[2] In 1941, the Nazis also devised the Hunger Plan, a scheme to feed German soldiers and civilians by starving Polish and Soviet citizens. Once again, the Nazis decided, the produce of Ukraine's collective farms would be confiscated and redistributed: "Socialism in one country would be supplanted by socialism for the German race."

Not accidentally, the fourteen million victims of these ethnic and political schemes were mostly not Russians or Germans, but the peoples who inhabited the lands in between. Stalin and Hitler shared a contempt for the very notions of Polish, Ukrainian, and Baltic independence, and jointly strove to eliminate the elites of those countries. Following their invasion of western Poland in 1939, the Germans arrested and murdered Polish professors, priests, intellectuals, and politicians. Following their invasion of eastern Poland in 1939, the Soviet secret police arrested and murdered Polish professors, priests, intellectuals, and politicians. A few months later, Stalin ordered the murder of some 20,000 Polish officers at Katyn and in other forests nearby as well.

Stalin and Hitler also shared a hatred for the Jews who had long flourished in this region, and who were far more numerous there than in Germany or anywhere else in Western Europe. Snyder points out that Jews were fewer than one percent of the German population when Hitler came to power in 1933, and many did manage to flee. Hitler's vision of a "Jew-free" Europe could thus only be realized when the Wehrmacht invaded the bloodlands, which is where most of the Jews of Europe actually lived. Of the 5.4 million Jews who died in the Holocaust, four million were from the bloodlands. The vast majority of the rest – including the 165,000 German Jews who did not escape – were taken to the bloodlands to be murdered. After the war, Stalin became paranoid about those Soviet Jews who remained, in part because they wanted to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust. At the end of his life he purged and arrested many thousands of them, though he died too soon to carry out another mass murder.

Above all, this was the region where Nazism and Soviet communism clashed. Although they had signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact in 1939, agreeing to divide the bloodlands between them, Stalin and Hitler also came to hate each other. This hatred proved fatal to both German and Soviet soldiers who had the bad luck to become prisoners of war. Both dictators treated captured enemies with deadly utilitarianism. For the Germans, Soviet POWs were expendable: they consumed calories needed by others and, unlike Western POWs, were considered to be subhuman. And so

they were deliberately starved to death in hideous "camps" in Poland, Russia, and Belarus that were not camps but death zones. Penned behind barbed wire, often in open fields without food, medicine, shelter, or bedding, they died in extraordinary numbers and with great rapidity. On any given day in the autumn of 1941, as many Soviet POWs died as did British and American POWs during the entire war. In total more than three million perished, mostly within a period of a few months.

In essence the Soviet attitude toward German POWs was no different. When, following the Battle of Stalingrad, the Red Army suddenly found itself with 90,000 prisoners, it also put them in open fields without any food or shelter. Over the next few months, at least half a million German and Axis soldiers would die in Soviet captivity. But as the Red Army began to win the war, it tried harder to keep captives alive, the better to deploy them as forced laborers. According to Soviet statistics, 2.3 million German soldiers and about a million of their allies (from Romania, Italy, Hungary, and Austria, but also France and Holland) eventually wound up in the labor camps of the Gulag, along with some 600,000 Japanese whose fate has been almost forgotten in their native land.[3]

Some were released after the war and others were released in the 1950s. There wasn't necessarily any political logic to these decisions. At one point in 1947, at the height of the postwar famine, the NKVD unexpectedly released several hundred thousand war prisoners. There was no political explanation: the Soviet leadership simply hadn't enough food to keep them all alive. And in the postwar world there were pressures – most of all from the USSR's new East German client state – to keep them alive. The Nazis had operated without such constraints.

The chronological and geographical arguments presented in *Bloodlands* also complicate the debate over the proper use of the word "genocide." As not everybody now remembers, this word (from the Greek *genos*, tribe, and the French *cide*) was coined in 1943 by a Polish lawyer of Jewish descent, Raphael Lemkin, who had long been trying to draw the attention of the international community to what he at first called "the crime of barbarity." In 1933, inspired by news of the Armenian massacre, he had proposed that the League of Nations treat mass murder committed "out of hatred towards a racial, religious or social collectivity" as an international crime. After he fled Nazi-occupied Poland in 1940, Lemkin intensified his efforts. He persuaded the Nuremburg prosecutors to use the word "genocide" during the trials, though not in the verdict. He also got the new United Nations to draft a Convention on Genocide. Finally, after much debate, the General Assembly passed this convention in 1948.

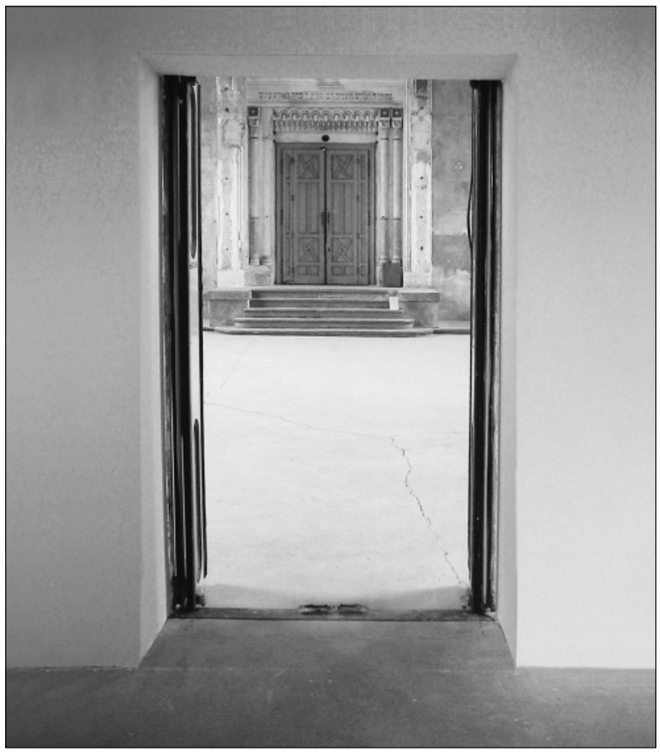
As the Stanford historian Norman Naimark explains in *Stalin's Genocides*, the UN's definition of genocide was deliberately narrow: "Acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." This was because Soviet diplomats had demanded the exclusion of any reference to social, economic, and political groups. Had they left these categories in, prosecution of the USSR for the murder of aristocrats (a social group), kulaks (an economic group), or Trotskyites (a political group) would have been possible.

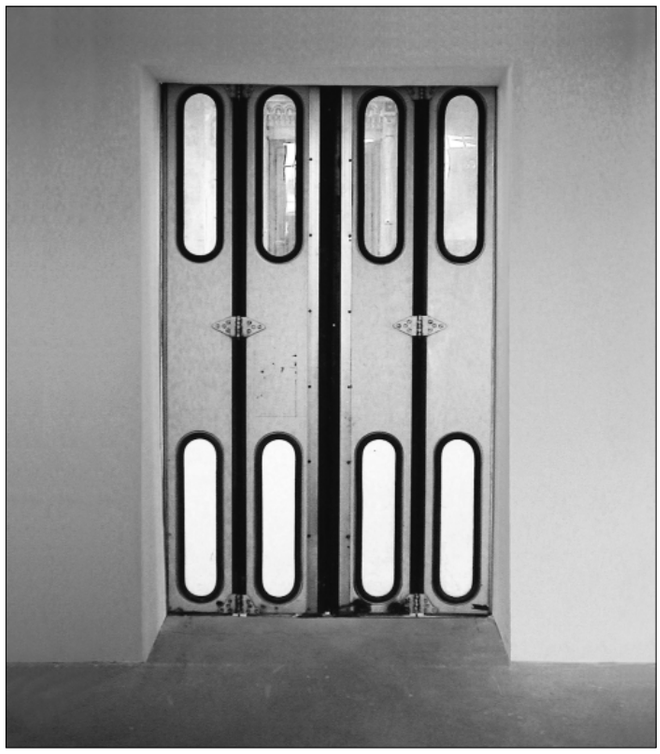
Although Lemkin himself continued to advocate a broader definition of the term, the idea that the word "genocide" can refer only to the mass murder of an ethnic group has stuck. In fact, until recently the term was used almost exclusively to refer to the Holocaust, the one "genocide" that is recognized as such by almost everybody: the international community, the former Allies, even the former perpetrators.

Perhaps because of that unusually universal recognition, the word has more recently acquired almost magical qualities. Nations nowadays campaign for their historical tragedies to be recognized as "genocide," and the term has become a political weapon both between and within countries. The disagreement between Armenians and Turks over whether the massacre of Armenians after World War I was "genocide" has been the subject of a resolution introduced in the US Congress. The leaders of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine campaigned to have the Ukrainian famine recognized as "genocide" in international courts (and in January 2010, a court in Kiev did convict Stalin and other high officials of "genocide" against the Ukrainian nation). But the campaign was deliberately dropped when their more pro-Russian (or post-Soviet) opponents came to power. They have since deleted a link to the genocide campaign from the presidential website.

As the story of Lemkin's genocide campaign well illustrates, this discussion of the proper use of the word has also been dogged by politics from the beginning. The reluctance of intellectuals on the left to condemn communism; the fact that Stalin was allied with Roosevelt and Churchill; the existence of German historians who tried to downplay the significance of the Holocaust by comparing it to Soviet crimes; all of that meant that, until recently, it was politically incorrect in the West to admit that we defeated one genocidal dictator with the help of another. Only now, with the publication of so much material from Soviet and Central European archives, has the extent of the Soviet Union's mass murders become better known in the West. In recent years, some in the former Soviet sphere of influence – most notably in the Baltic states and Ukraine – have begun to use the word "genocide" in legal documents to describe the Soviet Union's mass killings too.

(excerpt from a review on Timothy Snyder's and Norman M. Naimark's books in The New York Review of Books, October 28th, 2010)





STANO MAŠAR: TIME TO CLOSE

GREGOR SANDER

Winter Fish

It's morning, half past four and already brighter than twilight, past dawn but not yet day. I've slept well on the back seat of my car and I can hardly believe that I'm standing here. On Kanalstrasse in Kiel-Holtenau. The alarm of my mobile phone rang, still half asleep I pulled on my shoes and got out into the morning. Completely alone, not a soul to be seen. The houses are still dark. In front of me a couple of sailing yachts float beside a landing stage and beyond that, when one looks across the canal, the Förde glitters and in Kiel the street lights are still on. The leaves of the maple trees above me further mute the early light, but I'm certain it's going to be a fine day. A summer's day and very hot. A day like yesterday, when the air was dancing above the fields, the grass was honey-yellow and dry and I was surprised that the motorway didn't actually go as far as Kiel, that the last few miles are main road. I drove past the city centre and then across the bridge over the Kiel Canal, which lies far below, and it was bit like somewhere in America, a bit like the Hudson River, except that the river below here had been dug.

A car drives slowly along Kanalstrasse. A wine-red BMW estate. The man who gets out is wearing blue dungarees. He comes towards me and I think that surely a fisherman doesn't drive a BMW.

"Are you the son of my guy?"

"Your guy?"

"Well, Walter."

We shake hands and I say: "That's me. That is, not his son."

"What then?" asks the fisherman and laughs. He seems already very wide awake, his face is regular and his hair stands up like a grey brush. His features are neat and he doesn't look like someone who goes to sea. As if he knew what I was thinking, and as if he wanted to prove the opposite, he pulls a pipe out of his pocket and a small green plastic tobacco pouch. He fills the pipe, lights it and still doesn't look the way I had imagined someone who spends his days alone at sea. We both stand there awkwardly and I point to the canal, where right by the lock a fishing boat is tied up. "Yours?" I ask and it looks exactly like a fishing boat. White, with a steel railing, a wheelhouse and the wheel itself is made of wood. That's what I was prepared for.

"Yes, mine, but we're not taking that today. I go out to the open sea with it. When it's herring season or sometimes for cod. Today we're taking the wee one. It's in the harbour." He gestures towards the lock island in the middle of the canal and I nod and wonder where we are going to fish.

"Perhaps Walter has slept in. That happens to him now and again. Lately quite often," says the fisherman and that his name is Josef Neuer. I would really like a coffee. For a brief moment I would like to be sitting in my life, in my kitchen, and not be standing beside Josef Neuer.

Yesterday Walter had still wanted me to spend the night with him. "I kept an eye on you often enough, back then." But that was too much for me after the evening together almost twenty years later, and so I said something about a hotel and was glad to be able to leave. "Don't sleep in, my boy," he called after me, leaning against the door, drunk and eighty years old. A curious picture for me, who didn't really have one of him at all any more.

"Come on, let's go. Walter's been out with me often enough," says Josef Neuer and taps out the pipe on the heel of his rubber boot. We drive in his car through the gate on the lock island. He holds up an ID and says without looking at me: "Because of September 11th," as if that explained everything and even fishermen in Kiel-Holtenau had to register with the CIA when they enter a harbour. We cross the narrow iron bridge over the lock and the water of the basin bounded by metal walls is full of jellyfish. They crowd together like the sago in the cold cherry soup my mother made on summer days. "The wind's from the east," says Josef Neuer. "It pushes the creatures into the lock and into the canal. You catch hardly any fish in weather like this. It's been like this for days now. Everything full of algae and jellyfish." On a stretch of grass there's a small red builder's trailer and through the window at the rear one can see nets and buoys stacked up to the ceiling. Neuer unlocks the padlock and hands me out rubber boots and orange oilcloth trousers. "Should fit. They were my wife's and she wasn't big."

What did he say and what does his wife do on board? Isn't that bad luck? I think and then we go over to a small flat boat with an outboard engine and off we go, away from the lock, into the canal. Past warehouses, big concrete silos and a shipyard. In front of us the motorway bridge stretches high above. Four freighters in a row come towards us on the other side of the canal, slow as giant beasts. They're almost silent, only our little engine can be heard. The sky is dove blue and the silhouettes of the trees on the canal bank are outlined against the yellowish-red strip of light on the horizon.

"So you're still there," Walter had said, when he called me in Hamburg a few days ago, at my chambers. It was early evening and it was not unusual for me still to be sitting at my desk and working. The secretary had gone and as usual put the telephone directly through to me. The case in front of me was straightforward and the documents unambiguous, when the telephone rang and Walter spoke the sentence without any greeting.

I can no longer remember whether I was expecting someone to call, whether I was surprised that the telephone was ringing, or simply reached for it without thinking. Normally only Sarah rang at that time and we talked briefly. And if I was going to be much later, then she passed on the children to me, so that I could say good night to them. But Sarah wasn't calling me any more, not for weeks now.

I didn't recognise his voice. Perhaps that isn't even possible after such a long time. Walter talked to me as if I must know who he was and had been waiting for his call. "That's long ago," I heard myself say at some point, and I saw him in front of me in Güstrow. As he was loading boxes into the pale blue Ford Escort he had just bought in Hamburg and I was standing there and watching him. "Why are you going now?" I had asked him and he had replied: "You probably won't understand it."

"It's all over," I said. "You can go wherever you like and as often as you like." The garden in front of his garage was colourless and leafless. The year was drawing to a close, and I think I was particularly confused because he was leaving just before Christmas and as if he didn't have any more time.

Walter was sixty then. I was thirteen and he was an old man as far as I was concerned. We had only just got to know one another, six months earlier in Güstrow. My mother had moved there with me, as soon as she got a reference, just as she had done every time. We had lived in Leipzig for three years and now she wanted to give Mecklenburg a try. "It's nice and quiet. We've got Inselsee lake right at the door. The hospital has found a one and half room apartment for me. And in the summer you can already find new friends." She tried to cheer me up, but she didn't need to. I was glad to get away from Leipzig. I had no friends, or at least no one whom I would really miss, and the only thing I held against her was that in her hasty changes of location she never moved to Berlin again. Back to where she had given birth to me.

It was always easy for her to get a new job as a nurse and I don't really know what she was escaping. Whether it was restlessness, boredom, her way of dealing with being imprisoned in the GDR, or whether it was after all just a flight from the failed relationships in Leipzig and in Jena before that. She was only 32 when we moved to Güstrow, I had been born when she was 19, and none of her affairs got to the point that she had a second child. We remained

alone in a way. None of the men moved in with us, she kept me out of that. The cost was that I had to stay alone at home relatively early, because she had night duty or because she was with her boyfriend of the moment. When I woke up in the early morning, however, she was always sitting in the kitchen with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. She was still wearing her nurse's uniform with the name plate pinned above her breast, and she looked tired and somehow content. When I was at school she made my breakfast and in summer, in the holidays when we both came to Güstrow, we both slept until midday.

We went together to the swimming pool by Inselsee lake and I dived headfirst from the nine foot board, I hadn't dared do that in Leipzig yet. I bounced up and down a little on the board, looked down and was only afraid that I would do a somersault and land smack on my back on the surface of the water. The town was small and seemed like a village in comparison to Leipzig, even if it had a palace. Our apartment was in a panel construction building which had only four floors, and I really got a room of my own, small and narrow, with a view of the street and a lamp right in front of the window.

Walter lived nearby in a dilapidated villa. He occupied the ground floor and his garden had fruit trees, bushes and a big meadow. Behind our house the residents had little allotments on which they grew vegetables.

Walter worked in bed preparation at the hospital. That is, they brought the used beds down to him in the cellar, the beds in which a sick person had lain for days or had even died, and he disinfected them, made them up again and put them in front of his cubicle like cars in a parking lot. He had applied for an exit visa five years earlier and they had exiled him down here in the cellar. He had been head of the sterilisation section for years, then they had demoted him and put him in the remotest place there was in his department. He could have got out of the way, withdrawn and looked for another job somewhere. But he didn't want to do that. Holding out in the cellar was probably part of it. My mother got talking to him after another nurse had said to him in that windowless neon-lit corridor: "So you're still here." And he had roared back: "It's not my fault."

The fisherman throttles the engine and then turns it off completely. He probes the bottom with a long metal hook. We are close to the bank, which consists only of some raised sand and a couple of meagre bushes.

"Do you usually come out here with your wife?" I ask in the morning stillness, which is suddenly there after the engine was switched off. She isn't alive any more, I'm sure of that. I want him to tell it, and can't say why. He said, "She wasn't big". Wasn't

Josef Neuer has found the net and begins to haul it up. "We always went out together. For twenty years. When our lad left home, she came with me. 'What am I supposed to do at home?' she said. I wasn't at all keen on it, at first. And then she did know a thing or two. You set the nets here and the next day they were full. Man, I thought," he says and doesn't finish the sentence and doesn't pull the net in any further either. "And last year she didn't come with me once, because she wasn't feeling well, and when I come home, she's sitting there. Quite cold."

I look at him and don't regret my question. A car ferry with a bright red rump and the words "Danube Highway" on it passes us. Neuer follows it with his eyes and then hauls in the net again. He's wearing blue rubber gloves and the torn bodies of the jellyfish in the netting glitter in the sun like lumps of ice. At last a fish, one with dark green stripes on its back. It's not wriggling, but seems rather to be stretching. Neuer slowly untangles it and says: "Catch a perch, miss the rest." And then we both laugh.

"So what are you, if you're not Walter's son? My lad's coming, he said to me, and that you always used to be fishing."

"We were neighbours in Güstrow, perhaps more than that. Friends I mean."

"Perhaps friends?" Neuer folds the empty net like a piece of laundry and throws it down in front of him. He fills his pipe again and looks at me.

"Walter didn't say much about Güstrow and over there. But when he did say something, then it was about you and your mother. Never about the Stasi or any of that stuff. Always about your mother and what a stroke of luck that was for him. Such a beautiful woman at the end of his life, and that he could be like a father to her son. A fine boy he called you. Only that your mother didn't want to come to the west with him, even when the Wall came down. That she was too much of a coward."

"He was too much of a coward to stay," I respond and then I feel as uncomfortable as I did then, when I only thought it, as Walter was loading his things into the car and a little later disappeared for ever. I didn't want him to go, but how could I have said it to him?

"What did you mean earlier: My guy?" I quickly ask Neuer.

"That's just what one says. Walter helps me from time to time. When I sell the fish in Holtenau. Or sometimes he gets bait for me, things like that."

"My best friend is a fisherman here," is what Walter on the other hand had said, when he called me at the chambers in Hamburg, and that I should come and go out with them and fish. I agreed. I was greedy for everything which interrupted my routine, my work at the office and my life at home. Since Sarah had moved out, I didn't feel good there. Six months earlier I would have found a way to put him off.

On the day Sarah left me I went home as usual. Only later. That was the way we had arranged it, as we had arranged so many things in the past six months. Let the other have his say, ask questions, talk about oneself. The family therapist, whom we consulted at Sarah's request, at some point asked her: "Do you love your husband? You have to want to, otherwise we can save ourselves all this here." She really didn't know what to say to that and a few weeks later she moved out. The children lived alternately with her and with me, and when they were with me, I felt alien. As if I wasn't their father at all, more of an uncle. At least they still had their children's room, it looked the same as always.

The worst thing in the flat on the day she moved out were the impressions left on the carpet. A circle for a plate on which a flowerpot had stood, a rectangle for the Biedermeier chest of drawers, the small impressions made by the dining table chairs, that looked as if made by dog paws. I couldn't stop looking at them. It was as if my family had gone shopping or to some sporting activity somewhere. Only these impressions were new.

Yesterday Walter only wanted to talk about my mother. That was soon clear to me, once I was sitting in his attic flat in Kiel-Holtenau. I had driven from the canal bridge towards the water. The street wound downhill through a quarter of brick houses. Some had two gables and looked like two houses which were joined together. I drove right down, as far as the canal and parked by the lock island. Just where Kieler Förde meets the Kiel Canal there was a little café, an isolated building, likewise made of brick and stuffed full of sea-faring objects. It was late afternoon and inside a young couple were dancing the tango in a room in which chairs stood against the wall just as at a school disco. They were completely alone and the man wore a sand-coloured suit and the woman a knee-length dark skirt. Most of the guests, however, were sitting outside in the setting sun and drinking beer or wine. They didn't look like tourists, but not like people who belonged here either. Perhaps they were simply from Kiel and come across the Förde, just to drink a beer in the evening after work. I sat down too and soon didn't want to go again. A Russian ship docked right in front of us. The containers stacked on top of one another looked like toys which had turned out to be too large. A sailor jumped ashore in order to moor the ship. It was refuelled from a small boat and after a few minutes had departed again.

I felt as if I was in Holland or in England or in Denmark. I didn't know exactly but it was as if my reality had been slightly displaced, as if I was no longer on track. I liked it, it was all I had wanted from the day and had hardly hoped for.

But then I did set out and looked for Walter's address. He was very pleased when he opened the door to me. His pale blue eyes lay beneath bushy grey brows, there were tears in them and his voice shook a little as he embraced me and said: "How nice that you're here."

A little later in his kitchen he pulled an octopus out of the pot. I had just sat down and he lifted this huge creature up with a fork and placed it on a board like a trophy. I saw the little red suckers on the octopus' arms and the massive skin-white body. "You have to cook it with three red wine corks because of the tannic acid," said Walter as if he was revealing a family recipe to me.

He cut up the octopus and poured a mixture of olive oil, garlic and parsley over the small pieces. It tasted wonderful, hardly like fish at all, and it had a much more tender consistency than would have been expected from its appearance.

"That's the best fish that I've eaten recently," said Walter and just to say something I asked: "And you catch that in the Baltic?" - "Not at all," said Walter and ignored the question and then talked uninterruptedly about my mother. He had loved her and I knew it, could see it with my thirteen year-old

eyes, and also Walter made no secret of it. He was out of the question for my mother and that too was clear to me. I knew the type of men she preferred well enough, and they never looked like Walter. She liked him, but kept him at a distance. But he didn't let himself be put off, brought her flowers and in the evening stood at the door with a bottle of wine. We were never with him in the villa, and I think Walter also felt safe with us. He was not only fleeing his loneliness. On the first floor of the villa lived his successor, the new head of the hospital sterilisation section and he used every opportunity to harass Walter. Sometimes the lock on the front door had been changed, sometimes he played military marches at two in the morning and now and then the light was on in Walter's flat, even though he knew he had switched it off on leaving.

"And your mother? What's she doing now?" asked Walter and cleared the remains of the octopus from the table. It was still very warm and he was wearing a white short-sleeved shirt over a somewhat baggy pair of black cloth trousers. He had undone quite a few buttons of the shirt and one could see his soft old skin with its liver spots.

I turned my wine glass in my hand and looked at the rim which refracted the light of the candle. "She's doing well. She's living in Munich. Started a private care service and is making good money. She married again, an Austrian, who also works with her. And she had another child at the age of 38. 'I was a normal mother in the East, and now I am in the West as well,' she always says." I looked at him and knew that he didn't want to hear it, but I didn't want to make any allowances for Walter's feelings.

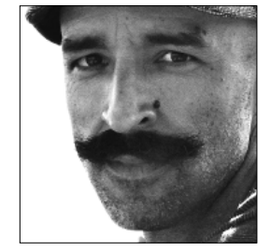
We went on to talk about the old days. How he had taught me angling, using a spinner for perch and pike, and how I squatted down and came very close the first time he showed me how to gut a fish. It was a silver roach, the fine scales of whose body made it look as if it was wearing chain mail.

I remember a day that summer particularly well. Long before the demonstrations in Leipzig and also weeks before the Hungarians opened the border. It was very warm, it was the weekend. The fence of our housing block beyond the allotments bordered on a park and in a field there men were playing football. Fat, unshapely men in loose knee-length shorts. In front of the fence I was sitting on the roof of the rabbit hutch, which belonged to one of the tenants of the house. I had one of the rabbits in my arm, a grey-white one which I had kind of adopted from the day of our arrival till when it was butchered just before Christmas. The roofing felt beneath me was warm and I was sitting cross-legged and my mother and Walter were standing behind me and we roared and shouted and spurred the players on. Then I saw the man who lived above Walter and did all those unbelievable things coming through the garden. He was wearing gym shorts and a white vest and he was holding garden shears in his hand. I had never seen him so close and as our eyes met, he briefly stopped short. At that moment my mother put her arm around Walter and also looked over, and that was the only affectionate physical contact there had been between them in those six months.

TRANSLATED BY MARTIN CHALMERS

(Sample translation by the courtesy of the Wallstein Verlag)

JESÚS CARRASCO



Out in the Open

The voice of a man a few meters from his hole brought the boy out of his reverie. It was the schoolteacher. He was talking to another man walking a little way off. The boy observed how his heart raced and blood pumped furiously through his veins. The pain, after hours hunched over, was driving him outside. He considered the option of bringing the matter to a close there and then and thus end his discomfort. He hadn't killed anyone, he hadn't stolen, he hadn't taken the Lord's name in vain. He was on the verge of lifting the branches that covered his hole in order to attract the attention of the men closest by. One of them would order to other to be silent before turning his head to aim his hearing in the direction of the noise. Their eyes would meet. They would advance stealthily towards the pile of sticks, unsure as to whether they would find a rabbit or the lost boy. They would then separate the branches and see him down below, hunched over on his stomach. He would pretend to be out cold, which, together with the flecks of mud, his damp clothes and filthy hair, would set the stage for his triumph. He would secure himself at least one moment of glory. Short-term gain for long-term pain. The others would then come, summoned by the men's cries. His father would soon make his appearance, panting, at first beside himself and ready for action. They would form a throng around the boy that would almost leave him breathless. A struck match, ablaze, no sign yet of the soft flame that must ultimately devour the wood. They would disinter the boy among shouts of joy. Around him, manly embraces would cause small clouds of dust to rise on the men's backs. Later, the return to the village on a stretcher among working men's songs and skins of warm wine, the father's chafing hands on the boy's small, brown chest. The joyful preamble to a drama that would carry them all to the inn and, later, each man to his home. In the end, the thick stone walls that supported the roof and cooled the rooms as the sole witness. A common prelude to his father's well-worn belt. A copper-colored buckle slashing through the dank kitchen air, as fast as it was incapable of catching the light. The image of his fake prostration at the bottom of the pit turned against him.

He recognized the sound of the schoolteacher blowing his nose, almost on top of his cave. A muffled honking that made his dry handkerchief ripple and which, at school, forced the children to suppress their laughter. The shadow of the man's skinny frame passed over his roof. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth while the man relieved himself over the pile of sticks.

He waited for a long time to pass from the moment the echo of the last voice to depart the area faded away. He wished to be sure not to encounter anyone when he lifted the branches, and was determined to hold out for as long as it took. The hours beneath the earth, his hair matted with the schoolteacher's urine, the hunger that washed over him for the first time, none of this was enough to make his determination waiver for the dark flower of his family still gnawed at his gut. He fell asleep.

When he awoke, the sun was at its highest point. The harsh midday light penetrated his roof of branches, bathing his knees in pale shafts of light, in which the dust hovered. He felt his muscles relax as soon as he opened his eyes and thought that it was precisely his body that had brought his dreams to an end. He calculated that he must have been down there for seven or eight hours and decided he needed to get out as soon as possible. Very slowly, he raised his head, his hair brushing the cover. His neck was like a rusty hinge. He sat up at an arthritic pace and parted a few twigs to scan his surroundings and confirm that no one was around. He could emerge and carry on northwards, where he knew of a watering hole to which the drivers led their mules to drink. Perhaps there he could hide among the reeds and take advantage of a moment's distraction to slip inside a salesman's cart, in among the pots and pans and underwear, only to reappear many miles from the village. He knew, however, that reaching the drinking hole would mean crossing open terrain in the full light of day with the occasional stack of stones as his only refuge. On the plain, any shepherd or hunter would recognize his feeble frame as that of the lost boy. He had therefore no choice but to continue hiding out until evening fell, when his wiry limbs could pass for a parched bush or a dark silhouette cast by the fading orange sun. He replaced the branches and curled up into himself.

ANA MARGARIDA DE CARVALHO INTERVIEWED BY ISABEL LUCAS

Frightening freedom

To have the freedom of form and language that journalism does not provide in a book about mismatches and imperfections. That's how Ana Margarida de Carvalho speaks of her literary debut, *Who Cares for the Hunger of the Sea*, and confesses having felt the dizziness of total freedom. Initially there was an invitation, and the fear to accept it. A journalist with the ease of writing does not guarantee a good writer and she not only knew that, but made sure she did not fall into the cliché of the journalist who also writes fiction.

But Ana Margarida de Carvalho, after 20 years of journalism, accepted and wrote a novel about "imperfections" from the memories of a survivor of a concentration camp in Tarrafal (Cape Verde). Fiction, it should be noted, with real facts and a precise geography in a registry that assumes itself as experimental.

PÚBLICO ■ It's a recurring question to a journalist who has only now started doing fiction: what did you set out to do with literature?

ANA MARGARIDA DE CARVALHO ■ Something I didn't ever have in journalism: an immense formal freedom. This book is full of imperfections, but also full of experiences It gave me this immense freedom to experience a language sometimes more rural, more Beckettian, sometimes more stripped, other more lyrical, or more absurd. It gave me great pleasure. To write at my will, with the words I wanted. Hence the book is a bit uneven. There was a novel that served me as a model, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles (1969), adapted for the screen by Harold Pinter (directed by Karel Reisz in 1981, starring Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons).

■ *It is one of the books of postmodernism. Why that one in particular?*

■ It is very innovative in the way of writing. There is a voice from the ninetienth century Victorian England. This without losing the look of the twentieth century. There's an influential narrator who meddles with the reader, who may want to reverse the march of things, and can afford to use the language he wants. I think it's fantastic that there was an adaptation in the 80's by Pinter and the extraordinary work that was done with these two voices, to get two different times and a free narrator, who intervened and could comment on the narrative.

■ *In your book, these two voices, each in their own time, are Joaquim, the survivor from Tarrafal, and Eugenia, the journalist who is going to interview him. What came first, the characters, the story, or the way to tell the story?*

■ Perhaps simultaneously. I had a very cinematic idea for many years. A man threw some love letters from a moving train and these letters were found by a messenger that would deliver them to the person to whom they were intended. That person ends up loving the messenger and not the author of the letters that eventually departs. That was my idea. From there I thought: I won't do it in an unreal country, in an unreal time. And I started looking for answers to questions. How does a person survive being held incommunicado for something like ten years? Being arrested? Which stage in history could someone be arrested and separated from society without any contact? During the dictatorship, in Tarrafal. How is it that a person would get in there? That is how I came upon the revolt of glassware workers in Marinha Grande, on January 18, 1934.

■ *The real meddling in fiction… Did you do a lot of research?*

■ In my news magazine, *Visão*, and whenever it was necessary to work on old antifascist resistants, I was almost always chosen and I did them with a lot of pleasure. I already had a storage of such stories. I met former tarrafalistas, man who had met in the revolt of Marinha Grande, heard many stories of resistance, of tortured people, of prison environments.

■ *Was Joaquim born out of this experience as a journalist ?*

■ I did not intend Joaquim as a tribute to those people and maybe this isn't completely fair. I wanted to do a book about imperfect people and this Joaquim is extremely imperfect, unhappy, annoyed at being there and acting on instinct. He only reacts through contradiction, denies everything. But I wanted the characters to change.

■ *Thus appears the love story?*

■ Or unloving. The boy meets girl story is about a boy that doesn't meet a girl, And a girl that doesn't meet a boy. There is no chance.

■ *You speak of Joaquim and Luisa. But there is another story, Joaquim and Eugenia. Another impossibility.*

■ Yes, they are two beings from different centuries. There is a little hint of something that approaches them, a twist that might possibly have happened, but that can not continue, because their love was truly impossible. Those are literarily the most exciting. It is much more a story of stubbornness and Platonism than physical closeness and sex. I did not want to go there.

■ *And why not?*

■ It is expected that women write about intimate things. I did not want to do that. May be giving some thought to what Orson Welles said, that he would never shoot someone making love or praying. I do not feel capable of writing such a scene, intimate, without falling into a cliché. And I did not want to expose anything … I think there are already too many things about me.

■ *In Eugenia, the journalist?*

■ Yes, some. It is perhaps inevitable. Starting with the pronoun *(laughs)*, an "I" which unmasks me *(laughs*). That 's not me, but I could have concealed myself better. She is also a journalist, although she works on television. In the beginning she was supposed to be just a frivolous journalist who does not care for anything she does, but the character eventually grew and achieved an almost parallel dimension to Joaquim.

■ *The cliché about the writer who says the character escaped him?*

■ Maybe the writers like to make the process, more romanticized, more mysterious. But I can't say that. I guess I always had enough control over her.

■ *The book is full of contagion from music, movies, other books…*

■ I let them be. I did not run from them. I took them. I feared that people would find that pretentious. There is a risk.

■ *How do you flee from self-censorship?*

■ Thanking the possibility to escape the standardization of writing that is increasingly the same, especially in journalism. To be abIe to do what I do is a frightening freedom, a sense of abyss. It gives you vertigo. I was full of insecurities until the last minute. I came to think that perhaps it was better to use a pseudonym and not assume the book, but that was a weird and preposterous idea. I showed the book to no one. It was an act I kept secret.

■ *Didn't you even say you were writing ?*

■ No. I showed one chapter to my oldest son. Showed an initial part to Maria do Rosário [publisher]. She told me to "advance" and gave me an instant assurance.

■ *And you didn't show it to your father [the writer Mário de Carvalho]?*

■ I showed him the first few pages. And after that the end, to see if there was any gross mistake.

■ *What was the reaction ?*

■ He does not shy away from making harsh criticism. When he doesn't like it, he get pretty ferocious. Maybe it's a family tick. We are not very lush in the manifestation of our emotions. He said: "I like it". It was a relief. It gave me some confidence.

■ *Do you perhaps feel like his heiress?*

■ I do not dare to make such comparisons. My father is in another galaxy. It has nothing to do with this book. But what inspires me, in fact, are the words. I like to see the genealogy of words and find new ones.

■ *Do you always write with a dictionary close by?*

■ Oh, yes. I really like dictionaries. The idea of finding the exact word is very important and I'm always searching for it. It is perhaps where I commit the most. Another thing I find very important is writing under a thrill. Not saying it's necessary to live the emotions of which I'm writing because that would make me go crazy. I don't think you should write in a neutral way. For me, the fastest way to get or cause me an emotion is listening to music or reading poetry. That triggers anything.

■ *When you were writing, did you envision an image of who could read it?*

■ No. Once Lobo Antunes told me something in an interview that I found very interesting. He told me that there are books that speak and books that hear.The books that speak are evil and those who hear are good.

■ *I wonder in which category you put yours…*

AMC: I wish my book is one that hears.

■ *This is a book dictated by memory.*

■ Yes, I wanted it to be. And so it is a book with almost no dialogue. That was the idea, to tell a story as if in thought. A drift. We think in a chaotic way and by association of ideas.

■ *Do you know Tarrafal?*

■ No. I did not think it was fundamental. I've documented myself, I met many people who came from there. My father was also a political prisoner. It was normal for me to have a parent in prison, during the dictatorship. I set forth to write a novel, not a journalistic document. The journalist who writes has a terrible stigma often associated with things that do not have any taste for. I told you that in this book there are no codes, no secrets and no shadows. I did not even try to make this a historical novel. Carlos Drummond de Andrade said that there are books that are meant to fill a space on the shelf. Obviamante it is not mine. I am an insignificant being.

■ *But from now on, for example, it will likely be on the shelves next to your father. As you both share the same literary name?*

■ If I arranged the books in an alphabetical order… My cupboards are crazy. I made a book. I'm glad if people like it, but I think it is full of imperfections.

■ *Do you re-read?*

■ I avoid it, because I get very distressed. I see things that I think I should not have done, beginner errors.

■ *Which ones do you mean?*

■ I won't tell to see if no one notices. (*laughter*). It has too much a fascination for freedom. There is the idea that a good book is one that rewrites itself. I didn't rewrite anything. Perhaps removed some part or another, but I did not have this depuration job. I wrote the first chapter and continued. If the good writer is one who rewrites, I'm still far from that stage. I still just write. And this thing of using several different languages, I find it to be beginners. As a kid who suddenly has a big space to play and wants to try everything. I did not write one of those books that I admire, that when you shake it, nothing comes out, because nothing in there is accessory. There are things here that could fall if we shake it.

(Published in the daily newspaper PÚBLICO, in May 2013)

HARALD DARER

If You Lie down with Dogs…

Mr. Norbert spends every morning at his breakfast table, chewing at leisure on his croissant, except for Fridays, the day on which a legal order requires him to attend the aforementioned Men's Outreach Clinic. Previously he had crammed it into his mouth so as not to be late for work, but now any pressure to arrive on time had fallen by the wayside, meaning that he no longer had to eat it in full automatic mode but focused, as he chewed, on the fact that he was, in fact, chewing a croissant. Three months ago he received a blue letter – the term the employees and workers used for the feared termination letter – from his longtime employer Wiener Linien Limited Partnership, prescribing a forced vacation for Mr. Norbert to enable his "convalescence," as the management of Wiener Linien Limited Partnership referred to it at the time. *Until the completion of his convalescence and a clarification of the causes of this most regrettable incident*, they explained, putting Mr. Norbert on alleged "sick leave" three months ago now, a period in which he has become quite accustomed to focused chewing of his croissant at breakfast time. On his left is a stack of newspapers, since he has also grown accustomed to reading the major Austrian dailies every morning – less out of interest in political or international events than as a way to pass the time, and because the monotony of this time-killing has made him crave to feel something through these mostly lurid, and sometimes gruesome stories he found in the human interest and panorama sections of the papers. On his right is his beloved mug of café au lait, without which he cannot even imagine (as he often says) beginning the day. On the floor beside his chair lies Kreisky. Kreisky is Mr. Norbert's wirehaired Dachshund, simultaneously his companion and only friend. Mr. Norbert takes his breakfast with Kreisky, and Kreisky alone. He is quite certain that Kreisky is the only possible partner for an intelligent conversation. So this is what a typical Norbertian breakfast looks like. In recent days, between the stack of papers and the mug of café au lait, there has lain a letter from the Retirement Insurance Office. So for three days, Mr. Norbert has stared at the unopened letter, unable to bring himself to open it, although his mother always admonished him *Never put off till tomorrow*, etc., etc. For Mr. Norbert, the primary reason not to open the letter from the Retirement Insurance Office is that the only two letters he has received in his entire life until now both contained awful news. What is more, another letter from the Retirement Insurance Office sent to a former colleague from work had proved to be a virtual sentence of death. This man had called every day before killing himself, despite the fact that, at the office in earlier days, he had never said anything to Mr. Norbert outside of the usual pleasantries like good morning, bon appétit, and goodbye. In Mr. Norbert's recollection, the man had done nothing but sit in the cafeteria, silently chewing on his sausage sandwiches. After his dismissal and the consequent adverse communication of the Retirement Insurance Office regarding his application, he was forced to take a job as ticket-taker in a movie theater, sent there by the employment bureau, as he related to Mr. Norbert. This was apparently enough for him to call Mr. Norbert practically every day to complain about this job that had been forced on him, as he put it. Drudgery and slavery – an abasement of humanity, in his words, adding that the combined cinema and shopping center was nothing but a feel-good concentration camp built by the entertainment industry for the mentally impaired. Voluntary mongoloids and the like, as he put it, his voice growing to a shout by the end of the call. Then he stabbed himself. For these reasons, Mr. Norbert has been avoiding opening the letter from the Retirement Insurance Office. In time, he thought, *in time*.

Naturally I am aware that you are here by court order. I will not pretend otherwise. Even so, you will be treated here just like any of the others who come voluntarily. But this will not work to your disadvantage; on the contrary, our therapy can only do you good. Take from it what you really need. Believe me, I'm speaking from experience. And experience has shown me that therapy sessions – even mandatory ones – can be a considerable help to the client in managing everyday life. But having the will to do it is an absolute prerequisite. Nothing works without the will. You must understand that. The courts may require you to show up here, but cannot force you to let yourself be helped, am I right? I always say that a wound needs to be bled. Some people say I'm too lackadaisical about it, but there you are: bleed it, clean it,

bandage it, and let it heal. Most of them won't let it bleed out. They just bind up the wound so no one can see it, and all of a sudden you've got a salad of pus. So nothing works if you don't bleed it, as I said. But you don't have to talk to *me*. Talk to someone else if that's easier for you. Someone you trust. Many people find that easier. And sure, why not? A dog is man's best friend, isn't that how the saying goes? You don't know where to start? Whenever and wherever you want to!

TRANSLATED BY JIM TUCKER

TOMÁŠ ZMEŠKAL

Love Letter in Cuneiform

The plane was of Russian make, old and creaky, and Jiří had the distinct feeling that the rivets holding together the sheets of the fuselage were experiencing material fatigue. When they flew over the border, the captain announced that they had flown over the border. As they made the approach to Prague, the flight attendant pointed out Karlštejn Castle on the right-hand side of the plane. Jiří gave his neighbor an apologetic smile and leaned across him to look out the window. From this height, it looked even more photogenic than on the postcards. A passage from the tourist guides suddenly came to mind: established in 1348 as a place of safekeeping for the crown jewels by Charles IV, King of Bohemia dash Holy Roman Emperor, known to the Czechs as *otec vlasti*, father of the nation, which was something between a title and a sign of respect. Impressive.

As the plane entered turbulence it began to shake and buck. Jiří regretted having eaten lunch instead of following the example of the Czech passengers and ordering beer or some other alcohol. The plane landed. It was drizzling rain. A bus drove across the runway to pick them up, and carried them to the terminal. They waited until a representative of the airline appeared, opened a door, and told them to have their passports ready. He said everything twice, in Czech and English. He made two mistakes in English, but his accent was better than the one of the airline representative in Paris, where Jiří had been on his last trip, and unlike his French counterpart, at least the Czech man was trying to make himself understood. Jiří took it as a good sign.

In the room next door were two glass booths with policemen sitting inside them. The passengers formed two lines and approached the booths one at a time, laying their passports down on the counter. The policemen's uniforms were dark green with red shoulderboards. No smiles. They looked strict, serious, funereal. Jiří's turn came and he handed the policeman his Czech passport. Of course it was written there that he had been born in London, so the officer carefully inspected every page, weighing it in his hand, then looked up at Jiří. Jiří gave him an encouraging smile. At the airport in Paris, everyone smiled. In Rome, Düsseldorf, even Israel, they smiled. Not in Prague. In fact the look on the policeman's face gave Jiří the feeling that he had done something wrong, so he stopped smiling in case the officer considered it an insult. After thumbing through the passport one last time, the policeman turned to the page with the personal information. "Born in London," he said. Jiří wrinkled his brow to indicate he didn't understand if it was a question or a statement. "Hmmm," the officer said. He picked up his rubber stamp and applied it to Jiří's passport with no change in expression. It dawned on Jiří that this man, in this airport, never smiled at anyone. Clearly his uniform didn't give him much opportunity. Its forest green was too much of a constraint. It was like he was waiting for an armored transport carrier to surface from a trench camouflaged in branches, so he could hop in and go barreling down the runway to defend some national interest. He tossed Jiří's passport onto the counter with contempt and called out: "Neeeeext!"

It wasn't a very encouraging beginning, Jiří thought. It had been over two years since the Velvet Revolution, but apparently the news hadn't reached the airport yet. But so what. This is my first time in Eastern Europe, I can't complain, Jiří thought, then quickly corrected himself. I mustn't say "Eastern." Mum and dad were always a bit touchy when it came to that. "Central" is better. Yes, that's it. Central! Central Europe!

He picked up his suitcase and duffel bag from baggage claim and walked out into the main hall. A crowd of about thirty people stood waiting for passengers from the London flight, five or so holding signs. None of them had his name on it. Květa probably hadn't arrived yet, Jiří thought. He scanned the hall one more time and went to change some money. He bought a can of Coca-Cola, sat on a bench, opened it, and took a sip. After ten minutes or so, the cluster of people waiting had dispersed. A gray-haired woman of about sixty stepped up to him: "Are you Jiří by any chance?"

Jiří looked her up and down. She had on a three-quarter-length coat with a fur collar that in England would have had its owner ostracized from society for cruelty to animals. Jiří tried to reassure himself it was fake.

"Yes. Yes, I am. Jiří Nováček," he said.

"I'm Květa Černá. I think I'm your aunt." She went out of her way to pronounce every word carefully. He was a foreigner, after all.

"*Dobrý den*," said Jiří.

"*Dobrý den*," said Květa, bending over to shake his hand. A reconnaissance of the cuffs on her sleeves revealed that they were fur as well. Glancing into her eyes as he shook her hand, he realized he had never seen eyes like hers before. Emeralds are green, aren't they? Jiří thought. Having never actually seen an emerald before, he couldn't be sure.

Květa gestured toward the door, and he followed her out with his bags.

Excerpt from Chapter 14, Love Letter in Cuneiform, by Tomáš Zmeškal Forthcoming from the Margellos World Republic of Letters series at Yale University Press

TRANSLATED BY ALEX ZUCKER

(Excerpt from the novel forthcoming from the Margellos World Republic of Letters series at Yale University Press)

STANO MASAR: AFTER BEUYS

ONDREJ STEFÁNIK

A Fingerless City

Peter stopped, with his lights trained on the No Parking sign. The trio got into his Toyota. Suspiciously, Peter threw a sideways look at Albert. As a journalist he was not pleased that their search team had picked up another member. Come to that, he wasn't thrilled with the She-wolf's presence either. The more people, the more problems. This was a serious matter, not an amusement for Edo's acquaintances. He started up the Toyota, and the engine squealed like a frightened pig. On the way Albert entered into debate with Peter. He presented his theory of ritual murders, of a conspiracy, and of a sect that worshipped Rubik cubes. Peter did not try to argue with him. He asked Albert what he thought of the fact that the psychopath was killing left-handers. Albert explained to him that the left hand is the devil's hand, which means that the Devil himself painted da Vinci's Annunciation; Microsoft too had come into being by the devil's hand, and some people simply don't find devils to their liking. Edo merely listened in silence. The car meandered through the streets for a while before they found the premises of the Elite Club of Left-handers. The Elite Club resided not in a castle but on the ground floor of an old five-storey apartment block. A bell marked Elite Club of Left-handers sat in a row with the bells of ordinary residents. There was a printed notice on the dirty glass of the main entrance. It was not of the classic type, announcing a residents' meeting or an inspection of gas meters.

Under the words NOTICE TO RESIDENTS there was a printed quotation from Nietzsche.

NOTICE TO RESIDENTS
For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as towards a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.

Brother Nietzsche

Albert and the She-wolf found this highly amusing. Peter was uncomprehending. Edo rang the bell. Peter introduced himself as Peter Sitárik, someone who had arranged a meeting here. The left-handers let them in. The doors were opened by a man of about forty in a green tracksuit combination. Edo had never imagined that any left-hander would make such an exotic impression on him. And yet the fellow looked quite ordinary, like an engineer, or a building foreman, or something like that.

"Hallo. Mr. Hrdumalakov is in the toilet, you'll have to wait for him in the meeting room," the fellow in the tracksuit informed them, pointing to the end of the corridor, then he slid through the four of them out onto the steps, slamming the door behind him. He looked like he was running away.

Edo examined the long corridor. It was too long, almost hospital-style. Strange to find it in an apartment block. Framed photos of people, evidently famous left-handers, hung on the walls. For example, Obama, Hugo Chavez, Gandhi, Benjamin Netanyahu, Benjamin Franklin, J. F. Kennedy, Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles, Rockefeller, and more. At the end of the corridor there was a wooden door – here there were no other doors. The quartet moved along the red carpet towards the solitary door. Beyond it they found a spacious living room with leather chairs and a massive table. Squeezed along the full length of one wall there was a smaller office table with a Mac and a large bookcase. By another wall there was something that looked like a small kitchen. Office, meeting room, and kitchen all in one. No more. Edo was wondering where in God's name the man with the name one couldn't remember had gone to the toilet. So far as he could make out, the entire elite club consisted just of one corridor without a door and this room. Albert was the first to sit down in an armchair. The others followed suit. After a while the door opened quietly and a grey-haired man entered the room, quite small, with the silver moustache and beard of the Emperor Franz Jozef.

"Good day, gentlemen... excuse me, naturally, I welcome the lovely lady also. Unfortunately I do not have very much time. In a while I have a meeting concerning our new logo. I'm curious to see what that fellow has come up with," he said in an affable voice, and successively offered all of them his little hand. He had a symmetrical face, carved into sharp angles like a wooden puppet.

"Is he a left-hander?" Albert asked. Peter looked at him with abhorrence.

"Who?" The Emperor did not understand.

"Whoever made your logo," Albert clarified.

"Naturally," the Emperor said, smiling pleasantly.

"Why do you think we're under threat?" he asked. He was looking around for the person who had called him.

"That Bratislava killer murders left-handers. I think you ought to know that," Peter said.

"Really? I didn't know that. Thank you for the information. And if I many enquire, which of you called me?" the Emperor asked, continuing to smile like a marvellous ancient from a fairytale. Peter had been expecting some more radical reaction from him than an amiable smile.

"I did. My name is Peter Sitárik and I write about that killer for the newspapers, but I mentioned that already when we spoke on the phone. These are my friends, they're helping me," Peter said, introducing himself and the others somewhat belatedly.

"Haven't you received any threatening letters or telephone calls lately? Hasn't anyone harassed or menaced you?" Peter asked.

"Wouldn't you like coffee or a mineral?" the Emperor asked, instead of replying.

The quartet declined.

"We haven't registered anything like that, no one has..." the Emperor said. Albert interrupted him. "I'd like a mineral water, after all," he said. Peter skewered him with his eyes. The Emperor rose, went to the small fridge and took out a half-litre plastic bottle of mineral water. He gave it to Albert, who didn't even thank him.

"How do you know that his victims were left-handers?" the Emperor enquired, just by the way, without any particular urgency.

"We know," Peter said.

"Don't you have any enemies, someone you expelled from your club, someone who might have a personal grudge against you?" Peter continued.

"It's more that we don't have sponsors," the Emperor joked.

"Why is he killing left-handers?" the She-wolf asked.

"That could have a number of reasons." The Emperor stopped smiling.

"For example?" Edo piped up.

"For example, that he's a frustrated right-hander," Albert replied on the Emperor's behalf, and continued, "May I also ask something?", aiming an ill-mannered finger at the Emperor, as if he wanted to shoot him.

"What are we going to do with the right-handers when we come to the helm? Will we send them to labour camps, or will we keep them to polish our boots?" Albert demanded. Everyone in the room turned pale.

DANIEL BANULESCU

The missing lady rowers of Lake Snagov

IN 1981, NICOLAE CEAUSESCU built himself a holiday palace on Lake Snagov. Shortly after the President began spending his Saturdays, Sundays and some weekday afternoons in his palace at Snagov, the lidos along the entire shoreline of the lake thinned out and then disappeared. The restaurants in the vicinity of the palace were closed down. Rowing or swimming in front of the palace when the Secretary General was in residence was banned. The buildings in immediate proximity to the palace were demolished, and any international flight paths that passed over the palace were diverted. From 1986 onwards, even the canoeing and kayaking lessons that had previously taken place on the lake were abolished. And so Marcel Sucu, who worked as a kayak instructor at the Willpower Sailing Club, not only had no more lady owers to tamper with, but had also been on the brink of becoming jobless. All the sailing clubs around Lake Snagov had been evacuated. In the end, Sucu Marcel not only didn't lose his job, but he also even sweetened his routine to the maximum. For three years he had been on permanent leave from work, with the exception of short periods, of between one week and three months, when he nonetheless had to attend kayaking and canoeing contests on the other lakes around Bucharest. In all the commotion of the changes, the equipment storeroom and boathouse of the Willpower Club had, by some error, remained in service. Having eluded the vigilance of the first evacuation measures and advantaged by the cessation of all sporting activities on the water, the storeroom continued to exist under the protection of inertia. And the two employees of the Willpower Club went on receiving their wages, because they had been assigned to this particular work point.

As early as October of 1988, White Swallow-Wort had asked Marcel Sucu to wangle it so that he was moved to the phantom storeroom. A month later, Sucu managed to get a transfer there, in the dual capacity of deputy trainer and storeroom man. In the end, he got to know the area, the rules, and the people as well as any local.

"You go in alone," said Sucu, elegantly unlocking the door of a permanently uninhabited two-storey villa.

"I'll go and open the storeroom, because there's a chance that no one will have turned up to work today."

"Where?"

"Wherever you like. Make yourself at home."

Left alone, White Swallow-Wort took his shoes off by the door and, with a gait that was more silent than a tomcat's, he examined first the ground floor and then the entire villa, from basement to attic. He chooses the first-floor drawing room, draws up a chair to the edge of the large window, and scrutinises Ceausescu's palace, exhibited in almost its entirety on the other side of the lake. He examines the white hulk of the palace, with its Spanish or Moorish details, not even he is sure which. Strangely, the palace has only one storey. There is a belvedere on the right side, the one furthest from him. On the other side of the building there is a fountain, whose tuft, like foaming champagne, he can glimpse above the roof. There are huge fields, the grass discoloured in places, where the helicopters land and take off. There are paths, mainly covered with white gravel, and mostly hidden from his view, masked by islets of shrubbery, with five-feet-high lamps mounted directly on the lawn, by clumps of trees, or by the annexes to the summer house, jetty and garages. On three sides, at the edge of the fields, the palace is surrounded by woods, and on one side by the waters of Lake Snagov, now gleaming blood red.

"So, we're going to shoot him just because we don't like his cooking?" says Sucu, settling into the second armchair, pointed toward the window through which dusk can be seen settling over the palace.

"Pardon?"

"Isn't he the one who decides what people put on their table? He's the one who draws up the menus for everyone. And no one in Romania likes what he eats nowadays. In a way, he's going to be shot because of his bad cooking."

"If you've changed your mind, tell me straight out, Mr Marcel."

"It's always good to look at a problem from as many points of view as possible. It brings you inner satisfaction. Ceausescu the cook, strolling among us with a ladle, from which he doesn't want to dish out any soup. All his soup goes to fatten foreigners… Have you ever known me try to wriggle out of anything? But you have to have an inner satisfaction, to view things in the world as strange as they are."

"How do they seal off the lake?"

"Always half an hour before Ceausescu arrives. A speedboat takes up position in front of the palace."

"Men?"

"Three, but that's not important. When Ceausescu goes inside the palace, another two small boats flank the first motorboat. And the guards deployed in the woods gather around the palace."

"What does that mean?"

"In the first line there are twelve men. I've counted them. Everything else is guesswork. Because the ones who advance into the woods don't show themselves. And a part of those who make up the team, without you knowing it, are locals, who just keep a watch glued to their windows."

"Don't they enter the uninhabited houses?"

"Not as far as I know. Three years ago there was a regulation that the Securitate had a set of keys for each uninhabited house in the vicinity. But now, it seems, it no longer applies."

"Fetch it here, please."

"WSW, hasn't anyone told you that all that nonsense with disguises can only bring us bad luck? Someone will give you a shove and you'll fall in front of a bus."

From the ground floor, Sucu fetches a voluminous fishing rod sleeve, made of waterproof khaki canvas, from behind the fridge where it had stood propped against the wall.

"Isn't fishing banned?"

"Yes, it is. But given that the undercover officers sometimes pretend to be fishing, no one abides by the ban. But Ceausescu, if he sees an angler, asks whether it's the fishing season. 'The comrade is going to prison,' he said with sadness, when he caught a lieutenant who was guarding him and pretending to fish outside the legal season. What could his superiors do? They banged the poor lieutenant up in 'University'. True, they didn't classify it as poaching, and after a while he received a pardon and they promoted him."

The bundle of rods inside the sleeve is tied up with three rubber bands. There are five simple and two telescopic rods. And hidden in the middle, like the axe in the bundle of fasces, there is a long-range Dubretskoy sniper's rifle with a heavy stock. White Swallow-Wort extracts the rifle, holding it with his right hand by the slot for the telescopic sight. He props the rifle vertically between his knees and fishes the sight from the sleeve, which is stashed in a receptacle that resembles a slender thermos flask. Finally, he removes the round metal ammunition case, stowed at the bottom of the sleeve, upon which the rifle stock and the fishing rods had been resting.

"Don't you want me to handle all that?"

"No."

Inside the round case there are three rectangular boxes, each with twelve bullets. Two are intact and sealed with a band of blue paper. The third, which opens like a packet of cigarettes, contains not smokes but eight bullets, steely grey and resembling the worn stumps of crayons.

"They're as I left them. I haven't touched them except to fetch them."

In February, White Swallow-Wort and Marcel Sucu had spent a week in the Făgăraş Mountains, training to fire the Soviet weapon with precision. In the mornings they set out from their cabanas, they journeyed for four hours on foot away from any hiking trail, and practised shooting only during storms. In this way, the cracks of the shots were inaudible, but the strong winds, blowing sideways across the line of fire deviated the projectiles. In the mountains, the great problem had thus been that only one in three bullets hit its target.

"Do you want me to stay here with you?"

"No, on the contrary. When do you have to go back to Bucharest?"

"Whenever I like. But in the evening they start getting grumpy. And after ten at night all traffic is forbidden in the area, unless by prior communication."

"Well, then…"

"In any case, he won't be coming this evening. If he comes, it'll be at five o'clock in the afternoon, six at the latest. So, you won't need to get up at the crack of dawn tomorrow. I'll come round at ten to wake you up, and we'll drink a coffee."

"No. I have a request. Don't come round until we've finished."

"Tell me straight out what it is you want."

"Behave exactly as you would normally. If I need you or you need me, we'll agree upon a signal. You know the terrain. What would be the most suitable signal?"

"Hm. If you want to call me, draw the curtain in the bedroom facing the storeroom. If I want to alert you to something out of the ordinary, I'll hoist the club flag on the pole and put a padlock on the cable, so that none of my colleagues can take it down."

"How many days can I stay here?"

"It's entirely up to you."

"And how long would that be?"

"Two weeks. The doctor has asked me to air the pipes and keep an eye on the blokes who'll be coming to change the radiators. They'll have to call me when they want to come, because I've got the keys."

"Will he be annoyed if I nibble things from the fridge?"

"He won't, but I will. How can you have come here without bringing your own food? Are you trying to do to me what Ceausescu does? That's our food on the bottom shelf of the fridge. You have two salamis, a kilo of spam, cheese, onion, fish and olives. Two jars of jam. Butter. You can use sugar and oil from their rations, because they're very obliging folk. In the freezer, you have eight loaves of bread, also on the bottom shelf. In the fridge there's also a pan of stuffed cabbage leaves, from Smaranda."

"Did you tell her what we'll be doing?"

"Absolutely. I told her, 'Woman, while one of us is shooting Ceausescu, the other can throw stuffed cabbage leaves at him. And so mind what you cook for the little'un !' Look here, I've been cultivating women in my garden since I was fifteen. And I've never had any nasty business because of some skirt. So keep your hair on, as far as Smaranda's concerned."

"Did you or didn't you tell Mrs Smaranda that I was coming to Snagov?"

"What do you think?"

"You tell me."

"Look here, WSW, it's you who ought to be taking a leaf out of my book when it comes to handling women. That's all I'm going to say."

"Alright."

"Satisfied?"

"Yes."

"All the thieves that end up in prison have women to thank. The only thief that doesn't trust them is Mr Marcel. Why do you think I get myself a new one every year?"

"I don't know."

"So I don't get attached to them. Once you get attached, you lose their respect. A woman is a man's joy, but she needs to be kept at your feet, like a dog. You don't tell a dog all about the films you've enjoyed. You give it orders."

"I didn't mean to make you angry."

"I never get angry at you."

"Thanks for the food. Tell Mrs Smaranda from me."

"Don't push your luck. If you stay for a week, what'll you do all that time?"

"I'll take a look outside. I'm curious as to how that lot guard him. How does he arrive most often, by helicopter or by car?"

"Both. More often by car. If he comes by helicopter, it means he's really bored and then, more than certain, he'll go yachting. In such cases, he goes alone."

"How long does it take him to get from the helicopter or car to the Palace? How long from the Palace to the jetty? What else do I need to know?"

"How do I know? He walks the same as anyone else. Perhaps a bit briskly for his age… Thirty seconds from the helicopter to the palace. Five seconds from the car to the palace, because it leaves him by the door… When he comes out of the palace and heads towards the jetty, it takes him a minute, because he has to cross the whole of that lawn. Not to mention when he goes for a walk. Ah, that's something I didn't tell you. For a while he had a very strange habit. Maybe he'll take it up again."

"What?"

"He and Elena dress up in hiking gear. Each has a rucksack laden with a few kilos of sand, and they set out at a brisk pace around the grounds, so that they will tire themselves and sleep better."

"I can't believe we could get that lucky."

"We won't. He gave it up. Elena probably nagged him too much. Since then he doesn't take her along. He takes the yacht out."

"Anything else?"

"There's just one thing we haven't discussed. To shoot Ceausescu is the easy part ; the hard part is not to be pulled down into the grave after him. After we liquidate him, how are we going to make your getaway?"

"Have you got any ideas, Mr Marcel?"

"Yes, let me shoot. Can you listen to me for two minutes without interrupting?"

"Of course"

"In the last three months I haven't come up with anything better. In the instant after the first shot, the whole area will be sealed off. Not even a bird will be able to get out. They'll leave no stone unturned. If I stay in the storeroom, I won't have any bother. On the other hand, if they catch you, who won't know where to run, the guard will tear you apart with their bare teeth for shooting him, they'll dip their handkerchiefs in your blood and dance around your corpse."

"If they dance nicely I won't mind… I sinned. Forgive me."

"If you remain in Bucharest and I shoot, it's our only chance. I'll whack him, hide the rifle and get away from the spot as fast as I can. I make my getaway through those tall reeds and from there I can look after myself. Only I know where to swim under water and where to come up, at the other end of the island, under the remains of the wooden bridge from the time of Vlad the Impaler. In the confusion that follows, I expect all the guards will come running here, and then spread out to comb the area."

"How old are you Mr Marcel?"

"You know. Why are you asking? Fifty-two."

"And you know how old I am. Twenty. And so I'm quite quick on my feet. What, are you afraid that if they catch me I'll betray you? You think that if they get hold of me I'll betray you. That's why you want to do the shooting, at least so that no one will be able to denounce you."

"When tortured painstakingly by someone who's good at it, no one can resist crumpling."

"Not even you?"

"Not even me. You can make anyone at all betray even his own father and mother under interrogation, in rhyming couplets and dancing on the corner of the desk like a ballerina."

"Maybe. But I've never crumpled."

"You've never had occasion. You were saved by two antiques, a crock tied to a piece of string and a hunchback."

"And now?"

"Alright, you shoot. But just you make sure you do two things for Mr Marcel. Hit the target. And if you end up signing statements, write my name without father's initial, because dad wasn't too happy when I took up thieving."

"You should hurry."

"There's still plenty of time. So, do you have an escape plan?"

"I don't have any plan. I have an idea. But I can't tell you it."

"I'm off. If I can help you with anything, draw the curtain."

"You said there was a telephone in this villa."

"In the ground-floor bedroom."

"Is it working? Has it been disconnected?"

"Defects can occur anywhere at all. But as long as I've been here, the telephones have never been down."

"Do you have a telephone at the storeroom?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then I have a life or death request to make of you : stay at work, on every working day, until six o'clock in the evening. Even this coming Saturday."

"Well then, WSW, at last you're talking like a lad with an undisturbed library."

"Here comes the most important part : even in the moment you see the motorboat that heralds Ceausescu's arrival, or even sooner, if you pick up any sign that he'll definitely be coming, make a telephone call to the number I'll give you and ask to speak with comrade Bagel."

"Is that all? What if he's not there?"

"He will be. When you're sure you're talking to comrade Bagel, tell him this, word for word : 'Comrade Ionescu says the plate is full.'"

"Why not tell him the cup is full? Or that the gun's gone off?"

"If you want to live to ripe old age, remember the words exactly as I told you."

"'Comrade Ionescu says the plate is full.' Will he say anything?"

"Then you hang up."

"The number?"

"59 55 55. I'll write it down here, but tomorrow destroy this."

"I learn from everyone. If you want to teach me a trade, I learn. If you order me to destroy it, I destroy it. 59 55 55. It's an institution. Look, here are the binoculars. You don't do crosswords, so I've saved you two 'specialist reviews'. This one's paracentric, something completely new, the bee's knees. This one's tubular. French and Korean. No one in Bucharest has anything like it."

White Swallow-Wort takes the two "specialist reviews", which are in fact two sophisticated mechanisms, wrapped in thin card, and he lays them on a pillow of the couch.

Preparing to bid him farewell, Marcel Sucu grasps his hand and does not release it all the while he speaks.

"WSW, if instead of killing you, they make you President tomorrow, take care what you cook."

"I'll consult with you."

"Not a bad idea. You'll be the head cook, and I'll be a consultant. For those impoverished compatriots of ours, we will cook steak and dessert instead of bones and bagels… But first of all, you'll have to give me back the lake. You'll tell them, 'Takethis here lake and drag it over to Mr Marcel's, but after you've filled it with lady rowers eager to train !' Goodbye ! Live like an American President, WSW !"

"Thanks. Let's meet again in good health, Mr Marcel."

"You can't. Either you'll end up more, or much less. From this business you can't come through merely healthy."

The blood-red glints of light from the lake reflected on the front wall and window of the villa have been extinguished. The two can now barely discern each other's faces.

White Swallow-Wort remained for another half an hour by the windowsill.

Marcel Sucu went downstairs and with his hands thrust in his woollen trousers he jingled the keys and coins therein, whistling as he went. The cold was beginning to bite, and Mr Marcel was wearing only his customary grey sweater, with two black stripes across the chest, moulded to his athletic frame. He kept thrusting his chin outside the edge of the turtleneck, like a skittish stallion.

Silence settled like sand strewn by a shovel over the two children of darkness.

TRANSLATED BY ALISTAIR IAN BLYTH

(Excerpt from Cel mai bun oman al tuturor timpurilor / The best novel of all time)

Marta Petreu

In Another Life

We could have talked. We could have mixed
our tears seed saliva sweat

We could have combined
book and flesh thought and guilt
Oho! how we might have dissolved ourselves
united as brothers
Yes. As brother and sister: incestuous twins
we could have tested
limit after limit
Shoulder to shoulder brothers ready to face fear at dawn
death that keeps growing and growing life yet to come

Yes. We could have macerated like the hide of wild game steeped in
mordant
softened and tamed
by one another
Tears and blood. Flesh and brain. Water and salt
Oho! we could each have liquefied the other
the way hemp disintegrates in the river
the way a body dissolves in pure caustic soda

Yes. I could have caressed you. I could even have
sung you a lullaby
I could have been your refuge. I could have killed you. Yes you-
brother lover child. I could have strangled you
with my own hands. We could have led each other hand in hand
to death
(Death. Impervious refuge. Maternal uterus. Common final placenta)

We could have talked. In another life of ours:
the next

TRANSLATED FROM ROMANIAN BY ADAM J. SORKIN AND BY CHRISTINA ILLIAS-ZARIFOPOL

Read more:
http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/crematorium#ixzz2xIgwWSyY

STANO MAŠAR: NARCISSUS

DAVID ZÁBRANSKÝ

Any Beach But This

CHAPTER ONE

>1

Democracy on the loose! – Here I am in the café of the Musea Nacional del Prado, thinking of Vienna.

Bartlett (the guy I flew to Madrid to see) warned me about Vienna. He said that's where Hitler learned to hate the Jews. 'He was born in Austria, but to get his show on the road he had to move to Munich. Vienna couldn't stomach his paintings – those amateur daubs of his – or his Nazism. Vienna's way is different: in-depth destruction. Instead of attacking from the outside, it destroys from within.'

Why go to a town where waltzes sound like marches and marches sound like waltzes? Why go to Vienna at all?

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The moment I landed at Schwechat I realized Bartlett had got it wrong. I was surprised at how fresh the Viennese air was. If Vienna were Lagos or Dilli there would be two Viennas – the tourist one and the real one – and being a tourist I would naturally have seen only the former. But Vienna is not Lagos or Dilli. What I saw was Vienna.

Italians strolled around in shorts, with bits of clothing round their waists and cameras round their necks. Austrians stepped out of cars and walked past palaces, past the unchanging backdrop of the democratic West that is everywhere the same.

Of course you are surrounded by history (this is Vienna, after all!) – so much history it can be quite daunting. All those pictures in the galleries, all those plays in the Burgtheater, all that music in the concert halls – it can get quite scary. But here in Vienna they lay that vast weight of history and culture on you so gently you hardly feel a thing.

Waiting, credit card in hand, in the queue at the Albertina ticket desk (my pockets full of fliers of every description, behind me a group of Italians in shorts and sandals arguing about their flight home, all around me modern art and architecture, the laid-back lightness of the West), I recalled Bartlett's words and had to laugh out loud – then apologize to the Italians. Neither in Vienna, nor in Italy, could anyone learn to hate the Jews: Freud's house is now a museum, and so is Mussolini's birthplace in Predappio.

(As we stroll through Vienna or Madrid or an Italian village, do we ever pass houses and apartments that will one day be museums? Sure we do. But won't they be the houses and apartments of movie stars destined to play Mussolini or Freud in some yet-to-be-made film?) I ordered a fresh orange juice.

(Madrid is awash with oranges – picked in Andalusia by Moroccans, Poles, Rumanians, Ukrainians, etc. The Moroccans stay on after the harvest, but the Poles, Rumanians, Ukrainians, etc. return home. So Madrid is more and more awash with oranges picked by Poles, Rumanians and Ukrainians, etc. and less and less with oranges picked by Moroccans. The Ukrainians pick oranges and go. The Moroccans pick oranges and want to stay. But what Spain wants is picked oranges, not Ukrainians, Moroccans, etc. Spain doesn't want any of them; it just wants the oranges they pick.

Da-da-da!

Dum-da-da-daa!

>

A couple of tables away I spot a young couple – honeymooners, lovers? I'm not sure about him, but she is certainly not Spanish. Her hair is too fair, her skin is too fair, her features too Slavic.

Her manner lacks a certain type of femininity natural to women born under a scorching sun. Her body is incapable of that rapidity, that severity and simplicity that seems to relax every muscle under their skins. Unlike Spanish women she has no vestige of the animal about her, of the beast that seeks out the shade. Her cheekbones are not prominent, her lips are not half-parted in a constant sucking-in of air, nor does her body remind you of a sculpted wooden torso. Unlike Spanish women she does not look like an animal tormented by sun and thirst. Nothing about her suggests primal suffering or physical thirst or physical fatigue. Or, for that matter, physical passion.

Unlike Spanish women she seems fluid, washed-out – in fact she reminds me of a watercolour, an artist's attempt to express disillusionment with the present, nostalgia, or at any rate some feeling that feeds on the past, not like the feeling I get when I look at those boldly striding Spanish women, confident in their bodies and clothes and gestures.

She gets up and goes to look at a poster for an exhibition in the Prado. Then, left foot turned out, hips relaxed, she starts fiddling with the end of the scarf draped casually round her neck, first winding it onto her finger, then unwinding it until the scarf hangs once more against her blouse.

She does this several times, until the scarf slips off her shoulder and drops to the floor. Quickly, glancing around in furtive embarrassment, she stoops to pick it up.

She's out of place here – she'd be out of place even in Vienna. Here years of democracy have eliminated embarrassment from public life without a trace. Maybe it survives as an endangered species in private life, in intimate situations. Maybe there is still a place for embarrassment and coyness in the bedroom (possibly as the most effective form of titillation, since it's the only place you'll find it). But on the street, in cafes and museums, in planes, trains and offices, it has become extinct.

Just as history disappeared in the West after the Second World War (since it only concerned those on the other side of the wall), then, crossing the finishing line with a casual wave at the last stroke of historical time (as the wall came crashing down) seemed to stop altogether – so, too, embarrassment has vanished and been replaced by absolute naturalness. Man is the measure of all things. In the post-war era Western man blossomed at an unthinkable pace. No democratic or humanist system in history has ever borne such luscious human fruits, so unselfconscious, so self-possessed, so natural. It was the naturalness of the Viennese, and of the tourists in Vienna, that transmuted the vast weight of culture and history into – dadada! – a bland amusement for tourists.

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Watching her – she's still looking at the poster for a Tiepolo exhibition – I feel increasingly sure she's not from Madrid, she's not from the West, and she definitely doesn't belong in the West.

Where does she belong? In the Eastern reservation. On the other side of the fence that still separates the West from the East (although historically speaking the East has collapsed and the West is helping itself to more and more of it). She belongs on the other side of the fence, in that place where occasionally they bark, but otherwise just gaze in envy, at the West.

'Hey, there's Polina!' says Bartlett, reaching over the table with one hand to shake mine while waving to her with the other.

'Sam's a teacher. Where was he born? Bradford. And Polina's from Ukraine. She was born in Ukraine and most likely she'll die in Sam's arms in Madrid. What a wonderful fate, eh Polina?'

Again she's embarrassed. She says 'they' don't want to disturb us.

'They met in Ukraine. She talked him into leaving Ukraine and taking her with him. Goodbye and good riddance! Said she couldn't lead a decent life in her native land, same as me in fact. Goodbye to all that. Grappa?'

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'She's not very natural,' I say, as he returns with two glasses. 'I was watching her. She kept twiddling her scarf round her finger. Then she dropped it and looked awfully embarrassed. She's out of place here. She doesn't belong in the West.'

'She doesn't belong in the West because she's not natural? Nonsense! She doesn't belong in the West because she's not original. Her main aim in life is to look the same as everyone else, but in her attempts to be the same she's never had to deal with the terrifying need to be different – which has now become absolutely suffocating, even here.'

'But fancy making such a fuss about a scarf! I wonder what she'd do if she were naked? Imagine: her blouse falls apart at the seams, her skirt drops round her ankles, she steps out of it; maybe she's still holding her glass; maybe it slips out of her hand and shatters on the floor, but she pretends not to notice and carries on walking round the room. She's just the same as before, except now she's naked. Then and only then will nobody doubt she belongs here.'

'Very original! Any crazy streaker who runs onto a football pitch gets his picture in El Mundo the next day. Nudity is the preferred political weapon of those who have no political power. –Imagine you want to cycle from Lavapies to Sol. You don't work in City Hall so you can't issue an order banning traffic from the Lavapies-Sol road. What do you do? You find someone who also wants to cycle from Lavapies to Sol, you strip off, and you cycle from Lavapies to Sol. 'Why strip off?', people ask. You tell them you want to draw attention to the deplorable lack of cycle paths and the deplorable behaviour of motorists. You talk gravely about a grave problem and pretend not to notice you're naked. You point a finger at the scandalous behaviour of drivers, and the next morning you'll be all over the papers and half of Madrid will be pointing at you. Scandalised cyclists will argue with scandalised motorists and scandalised councillors – but you, unlike them, will be naked, because being naked is the only way you can say something with any hope of being heard. Nudity is the price you pay for not being a politician.'

'But nudity stopped being original years ago! Most people are perfectly happy to undress anywhere, anytime. Being naked doesn't make you a star, it just makes you ridiculous.'

'To be original you'd need some physical defect. Maybe Polina's got only four toes on one foot?'

'Somehow I doubt it. No, if she really wanted to be what you call original she'd first have to do something about her clothes. She could start by going round this café borrowing stuff from people. The room would fall silent; there'd be expectant looks, catcalls, applause – depending on what she happened to pick. But none of that interests me. What I really want is for her to take her clothes off. I'd like to see her natural charm – after all, when we say 'personal charm' don't we simply mean naturalness? That's how I'd like to see her – naked, silent, natural.'

'Naked and dead.'

'So she couldn't talk about her originality.'

'As it is she wears so much lipstick she never dares shut her mouth.'

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They met in Ukraine. Sam worked in a language school. In those days he wore rings in his ears and nose. Now, when he shows you a photo of himself from back then, Polina dismisses it with a wave of her hand and an indulgent smile: 'Oh, that was ages ago'. But behind the wave and the smile there's a sense of revulsion, as if she felt like adding: 'That's not how it was!'

Revulsion, because those two loops of metal, which in those days represented freedom (piercing for an Englishmen meant you were somebody, while for a Ukrainian it meant you were nobody), she now found frightening, as if the beast that could be tied up by them –tethered so it couldn't move – was not him, but her.

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He was twenty-seven. At twenty-five he'd realised he didn't like living in England, and decided there and then to go to Eastern Europe. But after barely a year in a small Polish mining town full of vodka and 'lurid tumours' (as he called the new forms of advertising and dress, the new television programmes and shopping malls) he was convinced that Eastern Europe as such did not exist – there were only varying degrees of East. After barely a year he realised he needed more East, so he left Poland and went to Ukraine. The brochures they sent him about Charkov described Charkov as an ordinary Ukrainian town. Which is precisely why he moved to Charkov.

Ukraine was more bearable than Poland. One of his students was Polina, with her beautiful eyes and poor English. She was secretive, passionate, forever taking refuge behind the slowly crumbling barrier of language. For two years she'd been going out with an ex-schoolmate, who listened every night as she told him, in her mother tongue, about the foreigner who for some weird reason had ended up in Charkov. But gradually the mother tongue was replaced by motherly feelings. Ukrainian became the language they used to misunderstand each other, and before long their life together was so dull it had to come to an end.

She and Sam both longed for something different: she didn't want to speak Ukrainian with a boy she'd known since she was ten; he was looking for something deeper – something he could only find in another culture and another language.

They rented a flat together. He pampered her and spoke English to her for hours on end. Sam took his stay in Ukraine seriously, because Ukraine was different from England. He took Polina seriously, because she was different from his mother. She listened to him and didn't contradict. Laughing with those wide-open eyes of hers, she timidly repeated the English words she'd learnt – though her pronunciation was far from English. She had no inhibitions about crying, or about making love. He would stroke her neck and ask her if she knew the English word for what he was doing.

She was a part of all that was new and unknown and unfathomed. In her he saw the headscarf worn by every Ukrainian woman, the dollars sent home by every Ukrainian abroad, the Ukrainian delight in little things, all the thrift and impulsive generosity, all the poetry and half-empty shops, all the absurd old cars on all the absurd Ukrainian streets. She had a big soul, and into it he packed everything he saw around him. In falling in love with Polina he fell in love with Ukraine – and vice-versa.

He was patient. He learnt Ukrainian and drank her relatives' vodka. He was faithful and thought about the future. He knew his place was not in Ukraine, he knew he was and would remain a foreigner, he knew he'd always have difficulty understanding and making himself understood. He talked openly about everything he thought, but there was one thought he never spoke out loud. If he had, it would have been: 'We outsiders have to admire these people. They have no idea how beautiful their lives are compared with ours! – Or how quickly they'll ruin them if they keep copying us!' But it remained unspoken. Besides, Ukraine had no wish to hear such thoughts. Quite the reverse – Ukraine and Polina loved the West. And Sam loved Polina! So what else could he do but start learning to love the West too – or at least stop hating it.

What else could he do but discard a thought that anyway remained unspoken and yield to Polina's admiration for everything he had turned his back on? Wasn't Polina's soul big enough to contain not just Ukraine but the whole world? And wasn't Sam the loving parent, incapable of taking away from his beloved child the toy she cuddles at bedtime? Doesn't there come a point when the loving parent starts to see the once detested toy quite differently, through the eyes of the child? Is not the power of love so great it can sweep aside common sense and replace it with all-embracing acceptance?!

For that is what their love was: all-embracing acceptance – all, that is, except Ukraine. At first their love-songs were addressed to different corners of the world – Polina's to the West, Sam's to the East – but gradually their voices merged in a single deafening unison. Together they criticised Ukraine: the corruption, the squalor, the shabby people and politics. Polina spoke for both of them when she announced she wanted to get out. To Italy, or France. Anywhere but Ukraine. Yes, Ukraine was beautiful, but who'd want to live there if they didn't have to?

There's no future for us here! There's no future for me here! – And you can teach English anywhere.

>

Did he go back to the West with her? Yes. Because he loved her? No. He went back with her because he still had that vision of something he longed for.

He said he longed for something deeper, which he could only find in another culture and another language. But that wasn't strictly true.

What he really longed for was the need to make an effort, to be forced to avoid simplifications. He longed for problems. Ukraine had been his challenge. Now his challenge would be the West. For her sake, he told her, he would sacrifice himself.

He told her he would sacrifice himself (meaning that all of a sudden he would have no more problems), but in fact it was no sacrifice. He didn't care what sort of burden he shouldered; he only cared how heavy it was. He didn't care if it was a kilo of feathers or a kilo of iron.

If he was to leave, he would leave with Polina, and he could be quite sure that in the West he would have plenty of problems, since Polina was a Ukrainian and Sam was her lover. A relationship with a Ukrainian changed everything: going back to the West with a Ukrainian girlfriend did not mean going back to an old world of terrifying simplicity, but arriving in a new world of exciting complexity. Suddenly the feathers on the western side of the scales were heavier.

He sent letters to London inquiring about other places. 'No, Ukraine is wonderful' (he wrote in reply to the questions that came back) '– We just need a change. I met a girl here.' (he explained) 'Her whole family live here, but they all agree she should get out.' He took the rings off his face and before long he told her they were going to Madrid.

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For the first week they lived in the school, then they stayed in a hotel for a few months. Polina spent her days strolling down the wide streets looking at shop windows; Sam went to the language school to teach Spanish children, and in the evenings explored the city on his bike.

He got by with English, but Polina spent hours on end studying Spanish. At first she shed secret tears over her Ukrainian songs, but after a while Flamenco and Spanish folk songs took their place. She bought her first Spanish newspaper, El Mundo, which she painstakingly attempted to translate – at first word by word with a dictionary (a paragraph over her breakfast coffee, a whole page after lunch); then without a dictionary, trying to work out the new words from their context and writing them down on a piece of paper, and only later looking them up and copying them into a little notebook, with which she then sat on the hotel balcony, committing them to memory.

They looked for a flat in the city centre – Polina had fallen in love with Madrid and wanted to live in it. Every time they turned up at precisely the appointed hour, and every time the queue of applicants stretched halfway down the stairs. They started turning up an hour early, but the flats (all of which they liked) always went to someone else.

On Sundays they went to the Prado. Polina studied all the leaflets carefully before sliding them unfolded into her bag, over which she then placed a protective hand.

At first they were just worthless handouts. Later, at her request, they began buying ever more expensive booklets and catalogues. Her idea was to cover the walls with posters of famous exhibitions, reproductions of well-known paintings – but she said she wouldn't put them up until they had their own flat. Meanwhile she stored them under the bed in the hotel.

The only thing she put up on the hotel wall was a photo of them both in Ukraine, arm in arm in front of an Orthodox church – not only to remind her of Ukraine, but most of all to remind her that the hotel they were living in was not yet Madrid, just a more bearable Ukraine. Her purpose was less nostalgic than cautionary.

(extract from the novel)

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT RUSSELL

JÁNOS HÁY

The body of freedom

Every self-respecting person goes there, at least after high-school graduation. You get yourself a pair of jeans, a tee shirt, and sandals with leather straps holding the sole to your foot, the kind you would have worn at Woodstock. You travel only as far as Krakow by train, from there you hitch-hike, because there's so much freedom. Your hair is long, because you don't want to set limits even on your hair growth. That was how we planned our trip after graduation, in 1979.

Poland was freedom itself. Poland was the protest against the world in which we lived, the world we experienced as subjugation, as humiliating defenselessness, full of Russian soldiers, of suppressed truths, of people afraid to open their mouths. But the Poles were different, they had unfettered jazz, open theater, and the workers at the shipyards could organize themselves without a hitch, because the ships they manufactured were so enormous that they required workers nobody would dare confront or pick a fight with – or even compare mustaches with, said somebody was familiar with about Lech Walesa's big handle-bars.

We'll go there and get hold of uncensored record albums and Solidarność badges which we'll then wear here at home, of course only when nobody sees them, or else hidden by our coats, showing them only to our friends as we fold down the lapels, like secret police agents, so our friends can see which side we're really on.

We smuggled money across the border, since we would get three times as many zlotys on the free market as we would officially in the bank. We'll get off the train, explained those who'd already made the trip, and we won't even have to seek out the money changers, they themselves will rush us, ready to do business. No bureaucracy, just a friendly transaction. They need the money because, though their theater is more open, their shops are empty.

The way things worked under communism, each country had its own freedom, and in Hungary it was the freedom to eat.

The border guards pounced on our things, searched everything, but didn't find it. They didn't take apart the sandwiches, where in one of the rolls instead of Gyulai sausage, or rather in addition to that, they would have found our small amount of money, which we'd exchanged in Krakow upon arrival. That's really how it was: the moment we stepped off the train, the money changers were circling us and the other tourists arriving from Hungary. They were right where we were. We couldn't have avoided them, because if we happened to get past one, we would have bumped into another. They told us the price, which we knew to be good, in fact a little better than we'd expected. After all, we could only come out well in Poland, a tourist destination where the point is not how travelers can be fleeced, and anyway, *Polak, Węgier*… everyone knows that if the Hungarian nation has a friend in the world, it's the Polish nation.

Forints into zlotys. I double check. Hey, this is short, I say to the Polish guy, because it really was short. The money changers knew these few Hungarian terms: short, too much, how much; that was the extent of their Hungarian. He counts it again. *Prose barco*, he says, you're right, my mistake, and adds what's missing. Well, that's done, I thought when I found a quiet spot where I could put away my newly acquired fortune. If only the joy of having made such a favorable exchange could have lasted a bit longer. Moreover who, with as little experience in financial dealings as I had, would think of himself as being particularly adept in such matters? That's when it happened, I thought while holding the wad of

banknotes in my hand, when he counted it again, when he added the missing amount amidst apologies. We didn't pay attention to the correction that followed the initial transaction. Of course, that's when he skillfully switched the banknotes for pieces of newspaper cut to the exact size. (*Polak, Węgier, dwa bratanki*).

We had no money aside from the few tens covering the newspaper banknotes. All of us traveling companions pooled our money. We now couldn't decide in favor of the train. We had been free to hitch-hike, now we were constrained to hitch-hike. No problem, we're in Poland, we'll live on milk and bread for a month, but that didn't matter, we'd been starving for freedom, not fried meat. So we sleep in the stations: free lodgings. The police remove us. They don't mistreat us, just tell us that they'd already told us yesterday that sleeping in stations is forbidden, and they ask in Russian whether I understand. I understood, but the next day the whole thing started all over again. Gdansk, Gdynia, Szczecin, enormous ships, sea, sand, deck-chairs on the shore, the beating sun, strong winds. I saw the sea for the first time in my life. It was here that my field of vision was able to encompass, without concern, lands beyond national borders.

Then back again by way of hitch-hiking. How else? A brief stop at the Masurian Lakes, by now only with my girlfriend, the others left by train, having had enough of freedom, which in fact was too much for a youth from Buda, who was no jerk, he could imagine what going back in poor-quality vehicles would be like. These last few days are really for rest and relaxation, I said. Finally we won't have to be self-conscious about every little intimacy, given that the others couldn't do the same, they hadn't come with their girl- or boyfriends because they happened to be single. Moreover camping is free, we'll sit on the lake shore like real vacationers, I'll unpack the book I brought along for these peaceful days, the first volume of Lukacs's *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*. I thought it would go well with this kind of tour of Poland. We sat, exhausted from our nights spent in train stations. The book lay before me, open, but I only stared at the pages vacantly, art didn't become animated in me, I couldn't become the warrior facing religion, an armored modern St. George putting to the sword the false notions in people's hearts, so that he himself can finally move into the emptied space.

Every three days pass by, and at the time I didn't connect this fact to the passing of my life in general, because I didn't think of it as passing by, only as filling up. We've got to get going, we stand at the side of the main roadway, rickety cars are spewing exhaust next to us in the sweltering heat, for a full day we stand and no one picks us up. They must see me as German, I thought, because I'm so blond. Nightfall arrives, we go back to the camping grounds. Next day I make a Hungarian flag out of tee shirts and put it on my backpack. We're Hungarians, *Polak, Węgier, dwa bratanki*, I say to myself, but only one driver stops for us, a crazy man who would have done so anyway. There's no passenger's seat in the battered truck, just a large tool chest on which we bump and shake. He tells us he's been driving for two days straight and hasn't slept. The whole way I was watching his face, coughing and making other noises whenever I saw his eyes begin to close.

We had return tickets from Warsaw. Dead tired, we boarded the international express. There were young Poles in the compartment, drinking strong homemade vodka. They gave us some. When one of them thought I'd had enough, he began groping my girlfriend. "What'dya think you're doin', scumbag," I yelled and shoved him away (*Polak, Węgier*). The train slowed down, everyone became quiet, these were the border's moments of fear, replete with police, border guards, dogs. No one dared move, everyone had committed some transgression. This was the kind of world in which even someone who didn't know he had transgressed was a transgressor, because there were authorities who called attention to the transgression. They were more thorough than the Catholic Church, which still made threats only on the basis of the ten commandments. The authorities had thousands of commandments, and if you complied with a thousand, they would find a number one-thousand-and-one, on the basis of which you could be considered a transgressor. The doors were flung sideways on their rolling mechanisms, passport, door slams shut, door flung open, passport, door slams shut, closer and closer. Then it's our turn. We're asked for our passports, I'm going to get into a fight with this Pole, I was thinking, when we've crossed the border I'll smash in his face. The border guards stand a while, then say something in Polish, the compartment-mates grab their things. They're ordered off. The train starts out, I look out the window, the uniformed men are herding a group of fifty. They didn't succeed in getting across the border today, nor did the goods they were trying to smuggle across in hopes of some gain. I don't have to get into a fight, but the Pole is atoning even so, I thought, then felt ashamed.

I was like someone who'd been to Poland and obtained a little bundle on which freedom was inscribed. From then on I lived in the world like someone who'd gotten past initiation and become free. Though the true experience of Poland was only like the body of Christ during the elevation of the Host. Behold the body of freedom, Amen. A symbol whose reality was reinforced only by the imagination. But at the time this figment of imagination was reality, it was in this figment that we lived our lives, otherwise life would have been too much of a calamity. And when the lives of the Poles were constrained through various forcible measures, I felt as though something was being taken from me too. When they wound up in prison, when they hid printing presses and moved them from apartment to apartment, when they gave one another secret signals so as to recognize their own, then freedom was hiding out in my heart as well. And it hid out there for years to come, the way Hungarians had sought refuge from the Turks among the grassy clumps of the marshlands.

Nobody believed that the terrain of the imagination would all of a sudden slip into reality, that the former reality-fabricators would clear out, and in seemingly no time at all would toss freedom to us, to the Poles too, as if it were no more than some standard commodity. And in fact freedom became commodity. The shops filled up, the one-time empty shelves are caving, new shelves are built, because the old ones can't hold the amount that suddenly appeared. If you can buy it, you're free. Warsaw is no longer Warsaw, the Palace of Culture no longer dominates the landscape. Modern office buildings, the headquarters of large international corporations, are growing amidst the apartment blocks. My character Géza-boy knocked on the door of the Polish theater, at first the door was opened warily, just a crack, then wider, finally this autistic boy found a home, the Poles became his pals. His name is a bit different and his clothes are a bit different, but undeniably he has remained Géza.

We're on our way to Lodz by mini-bus, to visit the famous academy where the innovators of the Polish film (Wajda, Polanski, and who knows how many more) studied, those whose films it was a crime to miss, whose names were bandied about at intellectual gatherings. Whoever couldn't add to the comments on a broached name was discredited in the others' eyes. There is to be a graduation-exam performance of *Géza-boy*, then a discussion, I don't know what the topic is, poor English meets poor English, the double linguistic handicap magnifies the need for meta-communicative means. We understand one another exactly. Toward the end of the evening a teacher from there hands me a brick. What's this? I ask. He tells me he took it from the ruins of Israel Poznanski's palace. It has a monogram on it: I. P. This palace was in Wajda's film titled *The Promised Land*, which is about the cruelties of the birth of capitalism, which we've long forgotten about, because since then capitalism has become so devious that we don't even notice its presence, even though it governs every second of our lives. He says he's giving me the brick because I wrote this play. At the airport they don't understand why I'm taking a brick to Hungary.

I'm wandering about Warsaw, somewhere in the distance is the Vistula, I see the bridge, on the other side of which is Prague, of course not really, only the Prague of Warsaw. Most people who find themselves here don't think people live there too, in the downtown's old buildings, which of course are not old, since after the war nothing remained, or let's say no stone remained on another. In a shop there's a book showing their condition after the war side by side with pictures of the same scenes before the war and today. Though the book is in Polish, the pictures and dates tell the story. August 1, 1944, the Warsaw Uprising breaks out. The Russians reach the Vistula. They strike camp about thirty kilometers away, and watch passively for 63 days as the Germans put down the uprising, slaughter the people, then systematically blow up the city and carry off the surviving population. Of course it didn't occur to the Allies that they ought to help either. After that, what are we to make of peace, of the armies sworn to destroying evil, whose leaders beat their breasts

about exporting human rights and democracy to the countries with a deficit in democracy. What sort of political interests lie behind the deception? The retaliation goes on after the war as well. The heroes become the guilty, the despised subjects of the official powers. Then of course the demolished buildings are rebuilt, two small towns falling victim to the project, because old bricks were needed for the new construction. Give peace a chance, I hum to myself stepping out of the bookshop, because its impossible not to get over-sensitive in a situation like this. Later, while walking on Nowy Swiat (New World) Street, I wonder whether such traumas bring about the cohesion of belonging together, and if so, whether it is built upon mutual suffering and heroism or hatred of the enemy.

We're walking in the street, a Polish director beside me, from behind my friend is calling, she's a Hungarian director walking with another playwright. "The Slavs are in front," she says, "the Jews at the back." We laugh. "What did she say?" the Pole asks, "nothing," I say, "it's of no interest." Then again from behind: "You've gotten ahead of us again." "What did she say?" the Pole asks, "of no interest," I say. I yell back at her, "and you people are again making trouble in the background". We laugh, because we're fond of each other. "What did you say?" asks the Pole who, with a bunch of German ancestors, was about as much of a Slav as I was. "Of no interest," I say, we are in the age group who don't know English well. We were taught Russian. Aside from the Russians there were hardly any foreigners in the country. It seemed pointless to waste time studying a Western language. Of course, we haven't learned English well since then either. He had directed in England, he knew as much as he'd picked up, in addition to whatever he got from a few semesters in language school, "but there just isn't enough time," he says. "There isn't," I concur, "for me either," though there probably would be, but what's missing is the stick-to-itiveness.

My children don't like Warsaw, they don't feel what I do. Lots of modern buildings, and the old ones, well, they're nothing more than full-scale models. Of no interest to them is Chopin's non-beating heart, immured in one of the columns of the Holy Cross church, moreover preserved in brandy. "How different the Poles are," I say to them, "consider that we brought only Rákóczi's body home, but left his heart in Paris," and when I start elucidating the significance of this symbolic gesture, they turn away. I don't bother even mentioning the hearts of Reymont and Prus. "Who's that Reymont?" they'd ask, and I certainly wouldn't have succeeded with them by bringing up the colossal novel, *The Peasants*, so I say nothing, about the Nobel Prize either.

"Warsaw is everything," says my friend who translates my plays, "only the Poles know what Warsaw means. They have a Warsaw and a pope, and that bestows some kind of fundamental unity upon them which the Hungarians were never able to experience. The Hungarians have objects, at home and in their museums and sacred places, but there are no collective feelings that would raise them above all the daily spitefulness and preoccupation with possessions. The Poles aren't so driven by ownership," he tells me, "everyday joys mean more to them than expensive items, good shoes, entertaining guests. The Poles have so often lost everything, and had to flee so often, that to them the things Hungarians regard as important are insignificant." In fact, even his parents fled from Vilnius. "And there's no guarantee that tomorrow or the day after we won't have to move on. Poland was non-existent for as much time as it existed," he points out. "It was divided among so many so often that the past can hardly be found any more." I don't know whether the Poles are as my friend claims they are, or as another says, someone who is half Polish and half Hungarian, who says the reason he moved to Poland after his childhood in Hungary was that the Poles tell you what they think, and don't beat around the bush the way the Hungarians do. Or is it really true that Polish women are characterized by what a Hungarian friend of mine told me, that such warmth emanates from them, they can't but thaw the frozen souls of men. I don't know whether the Poles are beautiful, smart, or perchance lazy, according to the old stereotype. I don't know whether a typical Pole even exists. I don't know at what point we can say that something is what it is in general. Whether six out of ten do the trick, or are three enough? Isn't the point that, when we talk about a typical Hungarian or a typical Pole, we happen to be talking about how we want or don't want ourselves and others to be seen? Of course there is no typical Pole or typical Hungarian. In either case there is this kind and that kind. At the same time thought, thinking, comes to grief in particularities. Only by typifying and creating categories can thinking make sense of reality, which of course raises the question of how much of the real that reality really consists of.

We're going to the Palace of Culture. A performance of *Géza-boy* is to take place in this Stalin-baroque building which, it so happens, was a gift to Warsaw's inhabitants from Stalin, perhaps so they should never forget the Soviet army, their hands in their pockets, watching the destruction of Warsaw from the far side of the Vistula. To the Poles, theater is the prima donna of the arts, if a writer really wants to be somebody, he writes drama. Drama crowns the writer. I wore a small crown, and the Poles treated me accordingly. It is a contemporary piece, so of course it is performed on the main stage. Shakespeare or Moliere will be consigned to smaller venues sooner than a contemporary play will be. The audience is interested in the new, not how *Hamlet* can be staged for the thousandth time. Afterwards there's a party, of course the author is present. Drink up, drink up, they encourage me and refill my glass as soon as it's empty. I recall the train compartment from long ago, those hellishly strong vodkas. Drink up, and I drink. I drink with this person, with that person, eventually with everyone. Finally my friend says we've got to go or there'll be trouble. The trouble hit us on the street, because this vodka is so strong, its effect comes suddenly, like being whacked in the head with a crowbar, which happened alongside the taxi. The driver didn't want to take us, then came the director, who is also the head of the theater, but before the final reckoning he's whacked by the crowbar too. Another cab comes, this one takes us. "We're terrible," says my friend, a proper wife and mother from Posnań, but next day we can't remember what she said.

Between the Tatras and the sea, the topography seems to have vanished from the Polish landscape. We're cutting across the country: bad roads, slow progress, at least we don't get pulled over for speeding. We spend the night in Częstochowa. This is the first instance in my life when I feel that we're similar to the citizens of Europe's brighter half. I don't have to worry about my car breaking down, as I did for many years with Eastern-Bloc products or the shabby Western goods cast our way; the hotel is not cheap, but reasonable. In the evening we stroll in the city, surrounded by other tourists, we drink beer. On the way back to our hotel we come across a few out-of-control German youths. They're shouting. No telling why they even stopped at a pilgrimage site, they must have mixed it up with some other city, or else they had to drink so badly, they couldn't manage to stay on the train all the way to Krakow. And who do we think we are, I say to myself, resenting these Germans? After all, don't others also shout with abandon when, abroad, they relinquish the constraints that regulate their lives? We're like a bad teacher who picks on one kid, and that kid can eventually do anything. We consider ourselves circumspect and accepting, whereas we constantly organize the world according to categories, and react to impulses that reinforce those categories in us over and over again. In what way are we different from those who follow a rigid set of rules, for example the one-time Germans, the grandfathers of these young people? Is it that in certain areas of life we allow ourselves to indulge in rowdiness, or is it that we're just not consistent enough to definitively stick to a rule of conduct? Then, by the time we get back to the hotel, I'm at the point where the hotbed of every dark thought represents an attitude that is unable to accept a world governed by chaos and entropy, but instead ranks and systematizes everything whatsoever. In one of the symbolic sites of the Catholic faith, this is what's on my mind as I fall asleep, having lost faith in any kind of justice.

Next day, the monastery. Deeply devout people, healthy, sick, injured in body and spirit. Some come to give thanks for having been healed, others to coax healing from the miraculous Black Madonna. They long for healing, and if they long for it, this over-embellished black face will not rebuff them. Get well, she says, go ahead and get well! The centuries-old emotional tension hauled inside the walls takes hold even of the apostate visitor. For a moment I'm expecting a miracle, and I leap from the Jasna Góra, the Luminous Mount, into the true light. Then I fall back again when I step outside and observe the commerce built on spiritual entrancement, the accumulation of cheap devotional artifacts and miraculous kitsch for sale. Of course even I buy a small picture, just in case, after all I don't want my happiness to depend on a couple of zlotys.

It was then, on that trip, that I first felt that a Swedish, a Dutch, or a German writer would

behave similarly, but soon it became clear that I'm not a German writer, that a crisis was coming which would knock the bottom entirely out from under my homeland and that of the Poles, while the German, Swedish, and Dutch homelands would at worst be knocked only to the floorboards.

Nowadays is it Warsaw or Krakow? That's what's asked by those not entirely in-the-know, those who haven't heard that for a long time it's been Warsaw. But even so, Krakow's mystique has remained, especially for tourists, which we were at that point, now that the official program was over. Finally an old town, my children said. Yes, this truly is something, I said as a father should, praising to high heaven the place he brought his kids to. Cloth Hall, castle, dragon, what else would you need? Plus, I added, this is a Mediterranean city, like Rome. Rome it's not, they said, and anyway they don't believe this Mediterranean thing, and I shouldn't go insisting that I read it somewhere, because they already know that when they don't believe something, I say I've read it somewhere.

We're hungry. We've already walked all around, looking at the historic structures as befits tourists, following a guidebook, reading enough dates in one hour to complete an entire history course at the Eötvös Loránd University. The book of course takes this feeling of exhaustion into account. It tells the tired-out tourists where they can slack off a bit. In the old Jewish quarter we wander from synagogue to synagogue, this much we can still do before lunch, says the parent while the child remains silent. We're surrounded by the small old shops that have been converted to restaurants everywhere. There's something absurd in this, I say, all this revelry, all these tourists, where at one time so many lives were shattered. The kids don't understand, they see only the possibility of lunch. They clearly show that the drive to live overrides all emotional inclination.

The next day we go to where I never wanted to go, but I gathered my strength. For the sake of the kids I had to. *Arbeit macht frei* was written on the sign. Barracks, piles of shoes, eyeglasses, suitcases, crematorium. We've seen it a thousand times in photographs, if we come across it in a book, maybe we turn the page. The erstwhile factory of suffering has become a museum, but there is no one with a heart so hard as to remain untouched by the pain, suffering, and vast loss of life, which here seems to have soaked into the ground and sticks to the shoes of all who walk there, so that they should never be able to get out from under the prevailing responsibility. The Hungarian barracks were put together better than the rest, I say when we're back in the car, then later to the one who designed it (László Rajk), and I myself am taken aback by the stupid observation.

We're sitting in the car on our way home, we don't say much. I have the feeling this trip didn't turn out as I'd planned. Fathers have a tendency to set up a time-money-experience balance. And they're dissatisfied if they put the appropriate amount in one of the scales, but too little ends up in the other. Then a few years later the topic came up. The kids were surprised, they'd had enough of their parents, but they like Poland. They're just now planning to go there of their own free will, so that they won't have to comply with the parents' daily plans. They'll be able to roam freely about in this big country. They'll settle on the ground in the main squares of extraordinary cities, joining the other free young people who already settled down along side a guitar player, and they'll sing Polish and English songs with abandon. And they'll consume milk and bread. Milk and bread, I asked, and they answered yes. Ah-hah, I said, but I suspected that by milk they meant the smart-phone, and by bread they meant the friends rounded up at the Erasmus, but I didn't want to disturb the conversation. So they'll live on milk and bread, and it won't occur to them to waste their money in restaurants. They won't go out to the erstwhile Jewish quarter where, after all, it is absurd that Germanic retirees are merrily snacking above the memory of shattered lives. But, I say with a concerned parental countenance, no hitch-hiking, I wouldn't want that. Of course not, Dad, that's gone out of fashion. A couple of us will get together, a friend will get hold of his old man's car, I mean one of his cars. He'll let you guys take it? I ask, because I couldn't imagine myself doing so, true, I had only one car, and it was in pretty bad shape since that bygone Polish excursion. Of course, this is how things are nowadays, they said while I stared, perplexed and surprised, at how much the world has changed. So is that why there aren't any young people with backpacks on the side of the road all over Europe? That's why, they said, the backpacks are in the car trunk. Ah-hah, I continue looking at them bewildered, the way an elderly man would stare at some new technological device, his stare containing the memory of the old device, which he was still able to use, and the dread of the new, the dread of all those buttons, of the uncertainty about whether it's worth wasting time figuring out how the thing works.

TRANSLATED BY EUGENE BROGYÁNYI

STANO MAŠAR: ABOUT STAIRS

ROSA LIKSOM

Back in the USSR

LIKSOM, Rosa
Dark Paradise
Dalkey Archive Press, 2007

Crazeland
Heyne, 2001

Moscow hunched itself in the dry, frosty March night, protecting itself from the touch of the icy red sun as it set. The girl entered the train's last sleeping carriage, found her compartment, compartment number six, and breathed deeply. There were four beds in the compartment, the upper ones folded agains the wall, while between the beds was a small table, on the table a white table cloth and a plastic flower vase containing a bunch of pink paper carnations, faded by time; the shelf above the end of the bed was full of large, untidily secured parcels. The girl shoved her modest old suitcase, the one she had got from Zahar, into the metal luggage space under the hard, narrow bed; her small backpack she threw on the bed. When the station bell sounded for the first time, the girl went to stand by the corridor window. She breathed in the scent of the train, iron, coal-dust, the smells left behind by dozens of cities and thousands of people. Travellers and those who had come to see them off pushed past her, shoving her with their cases and parcels. The girl touched the cold window with her hand and looked at the platform. This train would take her through villages inhabited by deportees, through the open and closed towns of Siberia to the capital of Mongolia, Ulan Bator.

The man was sitting on his bed. On top of his white business shirt he wore a checked shirt that hung open. Under the folds of the white shirt there glimmered a sweaty, muscular belly. The man took a small orange from the table and began to peel it roughly. Once he had eaten the fruit he pulled out a much-fingered newspaper and said from behind it in an irritable tone: 'Young people are restless. No patience at all. All that dashing hither and thither. Everything goes at its own pace, time is only time.'

The man furrowed his brow and sighed.

'Look here. All you see is an old geezer whose melancholy soul is filled with a dull peace. Even his heart doesn't beat with emotion, but through sheer force of habit. No more crazy tricks, not even suffering. Nothing but boredom.'

The girl remembered her last night in Moscow: how she had rushed from one place to another, run down the long staircase to the metro and taken the Red line to the Lenin Library, run along its tiled floors through the museum-like hall and the labyrinths lined with bronze statues and climbed, via many steep escalators, up the Blue Line, taken the train past the Arbat, got off at a church-like station decorated with mosaics whose name she no longer remembered, and how she had, under the concrete arch, realised that she had forgotten her shoulder bag containing her train tickets and vouchers, and turned back, jumped from one metro train to another, gone through the stations where she had changed lines and, to her great amazement, found her bag at the Lenin Library stop; it was waiting for her in the middle of the window of the metro attendant's kiosk.

The train braked and stopped. Soon the engine began to jerk forward and the train set off again. And braked. And stopped. The engine pondered for a second, whistled cheerfully and moved decisively. The wheels jingled apologetically for a second but soon the train, determined, was speeding onward. The sun bounced back off the other shore of the snowfield, lighting up the earth and sky for a second and then disappearing beyond a limitless bog landscape. The man examined the girl with a sharp gaze.

'Your soul is filled with nothing but dreams? Well, there's no law against dreaming. Even Mad Ivan lies on the bench by the stove and dreams of a moving oven and of a table that lays itself, but this life, which people wiser than me call a transitory prison, is here and now. Tomorrow death may come and grab you by the balls.'

The man's narrow face shone with self-satisfaction. He had a fine mouth, narrow lips and a small scar on his chin like Trotsky's.

'Death can't be any worse than life.'

The man closed his eyes and pressed his lips tightly together. Then he began to hum.

'Don't be afraid of death, my girl, while you're alive, for then it does not yet exist. And when you are dead, it no longer exists.'

The girl was woken by the morning light. The man offered her a glass of tea and, putting a large lump of sugar in his mouth, stirred it with a paper-thin spoon, blowing for a long time before slurping the drink. The girl looked out at the landscape on the other side of the window for a moment. The sky was too blue, the snow too bright. In the shadow of a lonely rowan tree stood a small, blue cabin. In its garden stood an old man holding an iron handspike.

'I belong to the socialist camp, people like you no. People like me have attended all the camps: Pioneer camps, military camps, holiday camps and forced labour camps. My first forced spade was put in my hand when I was just a boy, when I took possession of a couple of cement mixers and carried them off from the factory. I knew I'd be put in chains, but all the same… The worst part was before they caught me, waiting for it. It's like spinning in the devil's cogwheel. When the worst has happened you just think that this is part of life. If only you didn't die of hunger or dropsy. The main thing I remember about it all is the vile smell of rotting fish.'

The frost-dimmed glimmer coloured the icy covering of a snake-like little stream gold. Around the thickets that grew on its banks rose a thick, smoke-like fog. The frosty willow stands stretched slenderly toward the brightly shimmering violet sky. A white-flanked deer ran out of the fog. Its little tail shook.

'My son is a complete renegade by nature. His heroes should have been Cosmonaut Alexei Leonov and General Karbishev, who the Nazis liquidated. But no. He dreamed of the followers of Yazov and is planning to move to West Germany soon as he can save, from his pay as a jobber's errand-boy, enough dollars to buy a foreign passport.'

The man seemed to collapse. A deep silence descended on the compartment.

'I wouldn't move to the other side even if they paid me a thousand dollars. It would be the same as moving a caged bird from one cage to another. I love this country. America is a dungheap that God's turned his back on.'

The sun swung up to the level of the merry, forested landscape. The compartment's melancholy evaporated.

'At home in Moscow I read the newspaper aloud to Katinka and in Ulan Bator to my workmates. Is it OK if I read? It would be a comfort to me. Even just a little bit.'

The girl nodded.

'Pile-up on the Moscow ring-road – five dead and twenty maimed, a coalmine exploded in the Ukraine – three hundred dead, an oil-pipe failed in Chelyabinsk – one thousand five hundred reindeer drowned in oil, and then a submarine sank in the Arctic Sea – seventy-one soldiers dead, a boiler popped in an old people's home – one hundred and twenty seven dead, a radiator split in a children's nursery – forty four children boiled alive, a passenger ship sank in the Black Sea – two hundred and six passengers drowned, a chemicals factory made its workforce redundant – an entire town was wiped off the map, a power station failed in Karelia – thirteen villages sank beneath the waves and seven hundred people were drowned, if an atomic power station tumbles down, a million people will die of radiation sickness.'

The man stopped reading and waited.

He straightened his back, turned the page and breathed in.

'Soviet pilots lost five cruise missiles on a test flight in Sahalin. It really does say that here.'

The train crawled forward as if apologetically. Against the milk-white sky, the glowing full sun brightened the clean slow. This continued for a couple

of hours; then the vainglorious sun was covered for a moment by black darkness. Siberia disappeared totally beyond the window, but slipped back into view again before anyone noticed. The wooden wall of forest grew black and frightening by the side of the track. When it ended, a broad view far away to the river opened up. On the open expanse of snow stood three houses, in front of them a smoke sauna gushing with black smoke. Outside the sauna, in the middle of a cloud of steam, stood a naked, stout, rubicund woman in bare feet. The man offered the girl some Pushkin chocolate. It was dark and fiery.

The man glanced out of the window and caught a glimpse of the woman.

'The pattern is crap, but it's well-sewn.'

The girl doodled for a long time before drawing, on her sketchpad, a Siberian village in the midst of an endless landscape. The man stared at the girl, his mouth slightly ajar.

'There was a man called Kolya who had a joke that he was always telling: in the army lads like us grew iron jaws, iron cheeks and an iron will. But the welded seams were so well botched that when I got out of the army my frame broke so badly that the only solution was a metre and a half of earth.'

The man went on laughing, but to himself, and had to wipe his damp eyes on his shirtsleeves. He knelt on the floor, took his wrinkled newspaper out from under his bed, folded it neatly and slipped it under his mattress.

'Another bloke called Kolya, whose dreams hadn't been realised, painted in white letters against a red background the question: What's keeping the happy future? He took this placard and went and stood with it in Red Square. He was there for three minutes before a military police car arrived and took Kolya with it. He was sentenced to twenty-five years, the same amount that our forefathers served in the army. And he lost his citizen's rights for five years. What's keeping the happy future! Even the Red Square's pigeons laughed at that!'

The fire-red afternoon sun spread across the wind-whipped sky. Enormous scraps of sleet fell behind the sun. The girl was looking for something in her backpack; the man was laying the table for their evening meal. They ate slowly and quietly, drinking well-brewed tea: black, Indian Elephant tea that the girl had bought in the foreign exchange shop. After the meal, the man would have liked to chat, but the girl wanted to be quiet. The man took a knife from under his pillow and began to scratch the back of his ear with it. The girl rested with her eyes shut. In this way they travelled through the whole dusky night, sleeping and waking in their own rhythm.

The boggy landscape gradually changed to a flat, even terrain: ruined stone foundations buried under the Siberian snow, collapsed wells, bird nesting boxes hanging from birch branches, villages where the dead windows of abandoned houses stared at the train. The caterpillar lorry of the local dairy centre had sunk into a snowdrift; in the field a horse floundered. Its back was as sway as an old sofa. It pulled behind it a hayrack where, instead of hay, there balanced a couple of buzzards, stiff with cold, tied together by the legs.

'My little friend, do you know what day it is today? It's cosmonautry day! Not cosmonaut's day, you see. And that is not all. Today is both cosmonautry day and the ascension day of our deceased great leader, today, the fifth of April. WE all remember that on the fifth of April fifty-three, oh no it was the fifth of March, the strong heart of the great driver of the train of history, Generalissimus Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin made such a strong protest that an hour later the funeral mechanism was in full swing. Joseph Vissarionovich was a man of such terror and steely wisdom that he is still frightening. Now girl, let us celebrate the death of Stalin, even if it is a month late.'

The man began to rummage furiously in his bag. As he rummaged, he calmed himself.

'I'm sure I'll find it, I'm sure I'll find it. A vodka bottle isn't like a needle that can get lost in a haystack.'

The bottle was not to be found in the bag, but under the mattress.

The man splashed vodka generously into both tea glasses, pushed one over to the girl and raised his own.

'Let us raise a glass to cosmonautry.'

The man refilled his glass.

'The next glass is to our compartment's magnificent young woman and other Finnish mummy-like female figures. A glass to beauty.'

He refilled his glass and set his features in official Soviet mode.

'Let us raise the next glass to the disputed great figure of world history, the deceased great leader of the Soviet Union, its iron father, the postal robber of Tiflis, the Jew of Georgia and the king of throat-cutters, Joseph Vissarionovich.'

The man drained his glass, bit off a piece of black bread and filled his glass again.

'Now let us raise our glass once again and it rises anew to the honour of the steel man. Thanks to Joseph Vissarionovich for making the Soviet Union into a strong industrial great power, for sustaining the belief in a better tomorrow and for the gradual relief of human suffering. A stick in the eye for remembering the past, and two for forgetting it…. A glass, too, to General Zhukov, the king of Berlin. Without him the Nazis would have turned Moscow into an illuminated reservoir and purged the globe of Slavs and other unhygienic races, including the Finns.'

The man drained his glass and splashed another drop of vodka into it.

'The Jews poured poison into the Great Leader's mouth, and even though I hate the Jews, I thank them for that fine gesture.'

The man drained his glass to the end and grimaced lightly at the window.

'I remember this murderer and peasant-basher's death very well. I was in year three at school with Petya. Primary school number five, there was no one or four. One had collapsed in the middle of a school day and construction of four had been left half done. One morning when we went to school, Valentina Zaitseva said that the father of all nations had fallen ill. That piece of information did not exactly touch a child's mind. The following morning the teacher told us that the Generalissimus was lying unconscious and that the doctors said there was very little hope. So what, we went on playing. On the third morning the teacher sobbed that now the father was dead. Some bright spark asked what he died of. The teacher said that if you keep too strong a hold on life, your breath stops moving and you can die of suffocation…. Me and Petya walked home from school arm in arm, the factory whistles sounded as if in a naval emergency, some men were crying and others smiling in the streets. At home grandfather looked somehow peculiar, naked and strange. I gazed at him for a long time before I realised that the bushy southern moustache had disappeared from above his swollen lips. Now a new life begins, grandfather said, handing us some pretzels. Grandfather was a party member and one of his favourite sayings was that during Stalin's time this was, for Communists, the most dangerous and most unhealthy place to live.'

The man rubbed his chin for a moment.

'There are thousands upon thousands of truths. Every bloke has his own. How many times have I cursed this country, but what would I be without it. I love this country.'

The penetrating smell of paraffin hung in the air of the compartment. It came from the full vodka glass which trembled on the table in time with the rattling of the train. The girl moved it away. The man followed the shaking glass with his eyes.

'Foreigner, you will offend me deeply if you will not drink with me.'

The man bit off a piece of pickled cucumber and stared at the girl, a sharp expression on his face. The girl glowered at the man and then turned her gaze to the floor.

'Mum always gave me vodka to drink when I was ill. I got used to the taste of vodka when I was a baby. I don't drink because I'm unhappy or because I want to be even unhappier, but because the serpent within me is always calling for more vodka.'

They sat in thought without looking at each other. The girl thought about her father and about the day when she had told him she was going to Moscow to study. Her father had gazed at her for a long time with a frightened expression on his face and then a tear had run down his cheek. Her father had drunk himself silly, barricaded himself in his Lada and demanded to drive his daughter to the station….

The train jumped violently on the points and stopped as if hitting a wall. They were in Atshinsk. Arisa, the train attendant, shouted that the train would stop for a couple of hours. The man did not wish to go out; all that would happen in the fresh air would be that his fine intoxication would evaporate.

The girl jumped on to the platform and headed toward the centre, which was dozing through its evening activities. She walked along a lifeless avenue to the town centre. A heavy sleet was falling. The town was dark and shapeless, damp and silver-grey, dishevelled clouds hung over the colourful houses, a white moon shone through the curly carpet of clouds. The girl stopped to look in the window of a grocer's shop. It could have been built by Rodchenko; packets of vermicelli dashed toward the sky like bolts of lightning. The girl felt something warm on her foot. A small mongrel stray dog had peed on her shoe.

The dog looked at the girl warmly with its button eyes, gave a bark and showed its gold canines. It took a couple of steps, stopped, and stared at the girl. The girl realised that the dog wanted her to go with it.

They walked along the deserted street. The girl could not hear the sound of her own steps, although the sleet changed rapidly to snow, which wandered lazily toward the Petrovskiye avenue, turned along a narrow side road and, after reaching the baker's corner, lost its force and dried away. The frost tightened its grip. The dog stopped and stood by a cellar window. The window opened and from within came a husky voice.

'How many?'

The girl thought for a moment.

'Two? Give Sharik a three-rouble note.'

The girl rummaged in her pocket for a note and, after a moment's thought, gave it to the dog. The dog snapped it up and disappeared through the window. Soon two unlabelled bottles of moonshine appeared on the window sill. The girl took the bottles, thanked the emptiness and walked along the ringing snowy tarmac back to the train. In the train she gave the bottles to the astonished man.

Humming, the man put the bottles into a special vodka pocket in his food bag and fell asleep. After sleeping off the worst of his intoxication, he began to set the table for supper.

When they had enjoyed a long and lazy meal, the man opened the compartment door.

'Let's let the world in.'. . ..

When the girl stepped into her compartment, the man was sitting on his bed wearing a pair of army long-johns, filing his toenails.

The girl offered the man a pile of newspapers that smelled of petrol. The man said the train would not be continuing on its journey until morning. This piece of information did not surprise the girl.

She sat for a long time on her bed, smiling. She looked at the man. The man's gaze was tired and dull, but even that seemed homely to the girl.

The clouds sailed across the darkening sky, bumping into one another. Finally night rolled, heavy and peaceful, over the train.

TRANSLATED BY HILDI HAWKINS

A stocky old car hostess appeared in the cabin doorway in uniform and handed each of them clean sheets and a towel.

"No spitting on the floor. The passageway is cleaned twice a day. Your passports, please."

Having received their passports, she left with a sneer on her face. The man nodded after her.

"That old bag Arisa has militia powers. She keeps the drunks and whores in line. It's best not to mess with her. She's the god of heat on the train. Keep that in mind."

He took a folded knife with a black handle out of his pocket, removed the safety, and pressed a button. There was a ringing of metal as the steel blade clicked and sprang neatly out of the han-dle. He put the knife carefully on the table and dug a large chunk of Rossiskaya cheese, an entire loaf of black bread, a bottle of kefir and a jar of smetana out of his bag. Last he brought out a bag of pickles dripping salt water and started to pop them in his mouth with one hand while he de-voured the black bread with the other. When he'd finished eating, he reached into the bag and took out a wool sock with a glass bottle of warm tea inside it. He looked at the girl for a long time. His eyes showed reluctance at first, then a greedy curiosity, and finally some degree of acceptance.

"I'm Steel Ironavich," he said. "Metal man and general laborer to the princes of Moscow. Vadim Nikolayevich Ivanov is my name. You can call me Vadim. Would you like some tea? It has vitamins, so it's good for you to drink a cup or two. I was thinking for a moment that they'd given this old codger a stiff sentence and put me in the same cage with an Estonian. There's a difference between the Finlyandskaya respublika and the Sovietskaya Estonskaya respublika. Estonian's are hook-nosed German Nazis, but Finns are basically made from the same clay as we are. Finlandiya is a little potato way up north. You people are no trouble. All the world's north-ern people are one tribe, a northern pride holds them together. By the way, Miss, you're the first Finn I've ever seen. But I've heard a lot about them. You Finns have prohibition."

He poured her a glass of black tea. She tasted it warily. He savored a small sip of his tea, then got up and made up his bed. He undressed modestly, taking off his outermost clothes, his thick black trousers with their narrow leather belt, his light jacket sewn from coarse fabric, and his white shirt, and folded them neatly at the end of the bed. He pulled on striped, sky-blue pajamas and crept in between the starched sheets. Soon his cracked heels and toes twisted from poor shoes and neglect emerged from under the blanket.

"Good night," he said with a bland look on his face, almost whispering, and fell immedi-ately asleep.

The girl was awake a long time. The tea glasses and their shadows moved around the dim cabin without lighting on anything. She had wanted to get away from Moscow because she needed a separation, needed her own life, but now she was already yearning to go back. She thought about Mitka, Mitka's mother Irina, Irina's father Zahar, and herself, how they were all doing. She thought about their temporarily shared home, which was empty now. Even the cats, Miss Dirt and Tom Trash, were gone. The engine whistled, the rails screeched, the rattling train pounded metallically, the man snored quietly all night long. The sound reminded her of her father and she felt safe. Finally, in the wee hours, as the shadows began to dwindle, she fell into a frothy, white dream.

She glanced at him, deep in his thoughts, and thought about Mitka and an early morning in Au-gust. They'd been sitting on a concrete bench at the edge of Pushkin Square blowing clouds of smoke, waiting for dawn, when a drunken gang of young people showed up and started to push and threaten them. They made their way out of the group and hurried away, but one bald-headed goon went after them and threatened to "knock the four-eyes' brains out". They were scared. They ran across the square toward the street, but a car appeared at the end of the street and she was sure that it would have skinheads in it, too. They ran down a side street, cut across a court-yard, and sprinted sweatily to their door.

"The first time I ended up in South Siberia was at the beginning of the sixties. It was at the time of the monetary reforms. A ruble wasn't worth anything, you couldn't get food with good money, and they were asking fifty kopeks for a pint at the beer stands. Around that time I was sitting in the canteen on a work site and shoveling in some slop with Boris, Sasha, and Muha Dog. A work official came in, this felt-booted bumpkin, and said comrade, go to Sukhumi, in the Crimea, southern Siberia, they need workers who can swing a hammer. He shoved a piece of pa-per in my hand and disappeared like he was sucked under the floor. I went and told Vimma thanks for the pussy and see you later, sweet old fat-assed bitch, and headed for the station and rode a rattly train across the wide open spaces of the Soviet Union. I ended up in Yalta instead of Sukhumi. They were building all kinds of little cabins, and when I told them I was a human ma-chine, a concrete hero from Stahanov, I got work immediately. It was the best summer of my life. I did nothing but hammer and whore. If you're wondering if it was humid there – you'd be wet through in about two minutes. Sometimes I went to the movies at the Construction Worker with some broad, watched adventure flicks. Three Men in the Snow. Lost in the Ice. And what was that one I liked... Three Friends on the High Sea. Whenever I remember that summer my mouth waters. You didn't fetter your life with reason back then. But then came this last bitch. Katinka. She warbled in her sugary voice, let me wash your shirt. That's when my life ended and I had nothing ahead of me but sinking deeper into a pit of alcohol and endless wandering."

A paled sun revolved on the horizon. The dusky forest rose up muttering toward a cloud-embroidered, unsteady sky. The man appeared in the passageway, and the girl went into the cab-in, felt the rumble of the rails, and fell asleep.

When she woke up, he was looking at her with a very offended expression on his face. She smiled at him, thinking about how logical the whole thing was. She had left Moscow because now was the right time to realize her and Mitka's shared dream of a train trip across Siberia, all the way to Mongolia. True, she was making the trip alone, but there was a simple reason for that.

The man had taken a worn deck of cards out of his bag and started to play solitaire.

"Georgians," he said. "They've got legs like giraffes and they know how to sell them-selves to guys like me so well that you forget you paid for it. An Armenian's history has beaten her down, made her a humble lesbian, a pleasant

companion who won't discipline her children. A Tatar only likes Tatars, a Chechen is a combination of an excellent baby machine and a drug dealer, the Dagestanis are small, thin, ugly, and smell of camphor and the foolishly proud Ukrainians are always plotting nationalist conspiracies in their horrible accents. You get to where you're deaf to it. And then there's the Balts. They cause all kinds of shit. It's no secret. They're too practical. They walk around with their mouths turned down, their eyes straight ahead."

He tapped his fingers on the tabletop. The girl coughed wearily, but he didn't take any notice of this indication of her thoughts.

The train sped whining across the flat, floating landscape, under a sky frothy with winter clouds. The living forest beyond an open field tossed a flock of sparrows at the sky. She calmed herself by watching the black, starkly drawn shadow of the train on the bright snow.

She thought about Irina, how she might be sitting in the smoking room of the advanced chemis-try institute, behind the Achievements in the National Economy pavilion, smoking a cigarette and getting ready for her next lecture. She thought about Zahar, who could see through her, and Mitka, who was good. A little kitten appeared in the corridor and looked at her beseechingly. She picked it up and held it and petted its rumpled fur. At the insane asylum, Mitka had said that so-cialism kills the body and capitalism kills the spirit but socialism the way we have it harms both the body and the spirit.

When Mitka turned eighteen, she and Irina had the task of finding food to cook for his birthday party. They had started gathering ingredients back in March, and had managed to find all kinds of things, but Irina wasn't satisfied. One morning they went out to hunt for groceries at six AM. They rushed through the dry, freezing weather to the Yelisev shop, but they didn't find anything there, not even bagels. They hopped onto a freezing tram, angry, and rode past the Boulevard and the snowy maples to the fragrant bread shop in Bronnaya. There they found two small pieces of good bread. They got on the trolley, which was so hot that they were covered in sweat, and trun-dled hopefully to Zachaczewski Lane. There was a grocery there where Irina had once found two cans of high-quality sardines. They didn't find anything, though, not even pickles. They stood for a moment in the windy street, uncertain what to do, where to go. They walked with frozen toes, arm in arm, to Lenin Street, but the trip didn't add any weight to their shopping bag. They made a quick run over to Timiryazev. There they found a bottle of cologne for Yuri, but nothing to eat. They swung by Chistiye Prudy on the bus, brought Yuri his cologne, and got two eggs from him. Why not go to the currency exchange shop? he asked. I don't have any dollars, the girl whispered, we already blew all of it, plus my stipend, at the beginning of autumn. Yuri yelled after them to go to the market, for God's sake, although he knew that there was nothing there. On Sokolniki Street they found two big jars of borscht, put them under their arms and headed proud-ly to the tram stop on Tverskoy Boulevard, and Irina glanced at her watch and said that she should have been lecturing at the institute a long time ago. A country woman was shivering in front of the paper shop and she bought a handsome gladiolus from her and handed it to Irina, and just as they were about to leave, the woman whispered that she had two chickens in her bag. Were they interested? Of course! Irina said, and settled on a price. They ran to the nearest metro station. Irina took the blue line to the institute and the girl went home on the yellow with her bag full of chickens. Zahar was home and she asked him to come in the kitchen and opened her bag and there they were, two mouth-watering, fluttering brown chickens with rubber bands wrapped around their beaks. Zahar looked at them and said that with a few weeks of seed feed they would be ready to stew. They took the squawking chickens into the bathroom. She laid some of the laundry on the bottom of the tub as a cushion. The wooden towel rack served as a perch. They called the little one Plita and the big one Kipyatok. The day before Mitka's party Zahar slaugh-tered the fattened chickens expertly in the bathroom and plucked them on the balcony. Then Irina taught her and Mitka how to cook chicken the Stalinist way.

A pale gray half moon chuckled above the snowy, silent, melancholy forest, keeping gleaming red Mars company. A little boy was singing to himself while he played with a painted whistle in the shape of a chicken at the other end of the train car corridor. When the nocturnal light of the moon dimmed and turned dirty, the girl returned to her cabin. She was hungry and tired.

The cabin smelled like Consul hair tonic, the kind you can buy at party hotel kiosks. The man looked at her from the end of the trail of scent, shy somehow.

TRANSLATED BY LOLA ROGERS

Extracts from the novel Hytti nro 6 ('Compartment no 6'), WSOY, 2011 (Book from Finland, 2011)

STANO MASAR: NEW WAYS

All about my Mother

ROTEM, Judith
Distant Sisters: The Women I Left Behind
Jewish Publication Society of America, 1997

She wore daring attire, lost herself in forbidden books and chafed under the stringent religious dictates imposed on women. Yehudit Rotem, a mother of seven, eventually left the ultra-Orthodox world and became a successful author. Upon publication of her ninth book, she talks about her extraordinary story with her daughter, Tamar Rotem.

As a child I never saw my mother writing. Who can write books when you have seven children underfoot?

She never recited the Shema prayer with us or sent us to do the ritual hand washing before a meal. Nor did she instruct us how to sit properly. Such petty matters were my father's department ("Put your feet down!"). You would never catch her going to the grocery store or carrying shopping bags. That's how she became the "prima donna" of the grocery store delivery boys, who worshiped her. She never devoted much time to preparing or eating food, and still doesn't. Cooking, like doing the laundry and cleaning, was a necessary evil, to be finished quickly before moving on to the really important things. Usually spiritual things. Of course, she put pots of food on the stove, cut vegetables for salad ("like in a restaurant," she would declare, when we complained about the overly large pieces), ironed and sewed buttons, and mended socks. There was no choice with so many mouths to feed, children to dress and worn-out socks.

I vaguely remember that once when I was a child she baked cakes (poppy-seed yeast cakes) for Shabbat. On the other hand, she studied and also excelled at buying and matching clothes. The whole clothing issue has been a serious matter in our family for several generations, comparable only to the big deal we made of books. Piles of books were purchased for every birthday and given to us after finding the afikoman at the Passover seder, but my mother still frequently took us to the central library in Bnei Brak. Until the fanatics burned it down in the 1980s. And every evening before we went to sleep, she read stories in installments to all of us — from eldest to youngest.

Her appearance was also entirely different from that of my friends' mothers. My mother looked at least 10 years younger than they did, if not more: slender, made-up, daring. When my mother walked along the streets of Bnei Brak, people would turn their heads. Local residents were simply amazed at how she looked in a dress with a tight-fitting belt and a long-haired wig. Not at all modest. As a teenager, of course, I did not see my mother's unusual appearance as an advantage. And I certainly didn't think she was "cool"; that was a word I didn't know at the time.

■ *Why did you decide to write about a subject that is so sensitive and hushed up in Haredi society?*

■ "In my first book, 'Distant Sisters: The Women I Left Behind,' which documented Haredi society, I wrote about the subject [of niddah] cautiously. I felt like I was walking on eggshells, if you know what I mean. Afterward I mentioned it indirectly in several of my books.

This time I felt a need to return to the subject, to speak about it without concealing anything. On the one hand people talk about it in secret, as though about the epitome of modesty – and on the other hand there are posters in the streets of Bnei Brak advertising rabbis who lecture on the laws of purity. What do they know about women, about their feelings? It infuriates me. As someone who writes about that world, I can't omit such a significant thing. But on the other hand, it also frightens me to write about it."

■ *What is the source of your fear?*

■ "From the day that you begin to develop any awareness, they pile guilt on you. This is an intimate matter, and it's as though I'm pulling aside the curtain and the screen, and invading an intimate space. Niddah and the laws governing marital relations are actually the most precious thing to Haredi society – the thing they hold most sacred and the most basic thing in their lives. They believe that the Jewish people owe their continuity to their observance of the laws of purity. When you're inside that society you lock yourself into a built-in framework called 'purity'; those who don't are automatically less holy and pure.

"In the book Shulamit doesn't want to know about sexual relations until the last moment. She finds the entire issue threatening and unnatural, because it's not part of the fabric of everyday life, in which there is no contact between men and women. It's a complex business, full of contradictions."

■ *How did you feel about those contradictions when you were married?*

■ "I didn't know about those halakhot [dictates] before my marriage, but it intimidated me. First they educate you not to go out with boys, and not to hang out with them, and then when you get engaged they tell you not to touch him or look him in the eye. And suddenly at night you have to do it. Before my marriage I thought it was death. That dying is preferable.

"There's something dissonant about it. Even in the fact that women are forced to leave the house in the evening to immerse themselves in the mikveh, which is an activity that is liable to expose them to everyone (they know not only when you go, but when you have relations with your husband). And therefore an effort is made to conceal leaving the house from girlfriends, sisters, from the children.

"I can't really say that I accepted that. But the scare tactics they use! That [if you don't go to the mikveh] the children will turn out to be defective, that if you deviate in the slightest from this thing, you're bringing down destruction. You don't dare to think differently, because, after all, you're educated in Beit Yaakov to think that women don't understand anything. That the men received the Torah and they teach us the way.

"I was insulted by this attitude toward me as a niddah, a forbidden woman. Today I don't believe I was the only one disturbed by it. But there wasn't a single female friend with whom I felt I could talk, without her running to her husband or to the mashgiah (the spiritual supervisor), and in the end they would give me a bad name. I felt abnormal. Am I the only one bothered by the fact that nothing will be put into my hands [by a man] because I'm impure – that the baby won't be taken from my hands when I'm 'forbidden'? Was I the only one who felt hurt when my husband separated the beds on the wedding night immediately after the act? That can't be. It's simply something that people don't talk about. Maybe now the talk has become more open, but it's still forbidden to criticize the system."

■ *Religious women talk about immersion in the mikveh as though it were the most wonderful thing in the world. In general they describe observing the laws of niddah as a surefire recipe for love.*

■ "Forbidden, niddah. Those words in themselves are an insult, in my opinion. When they tell you that you are niddah and impure because of blood that 'emerges from your source' – shouldn't you be insulted? Blood is the source of life. Without that blood you can't bring children into the world. The purest and most natural thing in the world, because of it you're impure. There are women who find justification for that. Look, two weeks a month they don't have to be preoccupied with the whole issue of sexual relations. They can read books in bed. In general, Haredi women glorify the entire issue. They'll say that the prohibition two weeks every month causes a sense of renewal. One of my interviewees in 'Distant Sisters'

told me that it's like getting married again every month. She got divorced in the end.

"You've just given birth and your husband is not allowed to say 'mazal tov' with a kiss and a hug. He has to keep his distance. He is not allowed to touch you with affection. When you sit at the table you have to place on it a hatzitza, a sign of separation. A hatzitza has to be something that doesn't belong on the table. A watch, for example, not a plate. Anything that will remind you of your rejected, impure, excluded status. There are people who may be able to accept things better than I do. I have only my own life, and that's what I tell about. And in any case, I was never like everyone else."

Traumatic transition

My mother was never like everyone else. I think that her rebelliousness from childhood was actually a natural and normal reaction to the chronic discord in her life. She was born to parents who didn't understand her and her needs, and grew up in a society that sanctifies uniformity, and has no place for individualism and creativity. At 18 she fled from the circumstances of her life – only to marry the wrong person.

Her parents were Holocaust survivors from Hungary who had become impoverished. Thanks to their "pedigree" – my grandfather was the head of Agudath Israel youth movement in Budapest – my grandparents and their daughters, my mother, aged 2, and her younger sister, were rescued in 1944, via a train organized by Dr. Israel Kastner. They thought they were free, but they arrived at the Bergen Belsen concentration camp where they stayed for seven months. Afterward they continued to a way station in Switzerland, and in the end they immigrated to Israel.

They didn't adapt to life in Israel. "Everything was contrary to their expectations," my mother recalls. "My father sent money [for the family] to Israel that ended up in other hands. He had to start from nothing, and was very bitter." At first he was proud of Yehudit, for her excellent command of Hebrew, while they could barely speak, she says. When guests came to the house, he would wake her up and put her in front of the guests to recite her poems, which were published in the children's newspapers of the time. But then the family moved to Bnei Brak, and everything changed.

"At first we lived in Givat Shmuel, in a small house with fruit trees, and an orchard opposite us. I would sit there in a little spot under an orange tree, and didn't go back until they called me to come home," my mother recalls.

The transition was sharp and traumatic. In the nondescript and unlovely city, in the strict Zichron Meir neighborhood at the foot of the renowned Ponovezh Yeshiva, they did not exactly welcome a girl wearing short gym pants. "They registered me for Beit Yaakov, which looked like a barracks, with grim-faced teachers who immediately forbade me to read."

Those teachers will appear in a more advanced stage of the plot, when they also become my teachers. My mother does have a good word to say for "the teacher Bracha," who taught her everything she knows about grammar and Hebrew. And that's no small thing. That same Bracha used to scold me and tell me I wasn't as good a student of Hebrew as my mother.

My mother used to get books in the home of her girlfriend, the Wallersteiners. "It was a family of Yekkes [German Jews]) who taught me the meaning of art and culture, and gave me books to read," she says. "In the Histadrut House, too, the librarians understood that I was one of those girls who has to read, and gave me three to four books each time. I used to read while walking home, but other girls reported me to the principal, and they called my father to reprimand him about his rebellious daughter. That created a great rift between us."

My mother's life story is part of the history of the growing extremism in Haredi society. "In my class they began to force the girls to wear long stockings. As I grew up, more and more restrictions were added. The indoctrination of girls to study at the teacher's seminary – so that as teachers they could support their yeshiva-student husbands – began then," she explains.

"I remember the day [Prime Minister David] Ben-Gurion came to visit the Hazon Ish [leading rabbinical authority Rabbi Avroham Yeshaya Karelitz], and the entire city was in a tizzy. We all ran to the home of the Hazon Ish, which was a small and rickety house."

At that fateful meeting the two leaders agreed that yeshiva students would not be drafted into the army, and that studying Torah would be their profession. Toward the end of elementary school they started to pressure my mother to register for Rabbi Avraham Wolf's seminary. He was the same rabbi who had offered the Hazon Ish to promote the education of girls, so that they would agree to support the men. And so, as Menachem Friedman, the expert on Haredi society, explains, the "learning society" was established thanks to the collaborative effort of the Hazon Ish and Rabbi Wolf.

'A tough breed'

But my mother, who rolled down her socks after school and would even sneak into the movies, decided that this destiny was not for her. Contrary to her father's wishes, she went and registered herself in a Haredi girls' high school that was quite liberal due to the very fact that they did matriculation there. Her father exploded with fury.

"My father, who admired Torah scholars and had a tendency toward extremism, began to study every day in a Lithuanian-style kollel (a yeshiva for married men)," she says. "He grew a beard and brought home new stringent rules. Somehow the rumor spread that I wanted to study in that school, and all kinds of rabbis came to the house – even Rabbi Wolf – to convince me to study at the seminary."

At the age of 13 she went on foot from Bnei Brak to the high school in Ramat Gan (she didn't have the money for a bus ticket): "A handsome bearded man opened the door and asked 'Child, what do you want?' I said, 'I want to register for the school.' He asked, 'Where's your father?' I told him, 'He doesn't want me to study here.' 'No. I asked where he's from,' he explained. I replied that he was from Hungary. He said: 'Oh, so that's the real reason.' He meant to say that Hungarian fathers are a tough breed. That was the principal I admired, Shaul Lustig. It was an expensive private school, but I got scholarships. All those years, for every little thing I did my father threatened to take me out of the school," continues my mother.

At the end of 11th grade he really did take her out. Meanwhile the prohibitions continued, against going to a youth movement, for example. She went in secret, and when she declared that she would do National Service, there was uproar.

"I had my pride. I left the school and completed a matriculation certificate and a teaching certificate in external exams, and because I didn't want to live at my parents' expense, I began teaching at the age of 17." She used to take several buses to her job in the immigrant neighborhood of Azaria in the Ramle area. During that same period she met my father.

"He saw me at a wedding and sent messengers to me. My parents weren't enthusiastic at first. But one day I came home from school on the motorcycle of a handsome guy who taught with me. He was Mizrahi [of Middle Eastern origin], and my Hungarian parents panicked and decided immediately that I had better get engaged. I was engaged for an entire year. I regretted it, but was afraid to break my promise. They warned me that breaking an engagement is worse than divorce, so I got married."

■ *I don't understand. After all, you rebelled all the time. You went by yourself to register for a high school where they didn't teach you how to support a yeshiva student. You could have studied at the university. So why did you marry a yeshiva student?*

■ "I wanted to get married to leave my problematic home. But I didn't really understand what it meant to be the wife of a yeshiva student. And on the other hand, who could I have married? Boyfriends from the Bnei Akiva or Ezra [religious] youth movements were out of the question. And boys of the type my father wanted – Haredi men who worked – had all been educated in the yeshivas.

"I was a very ideological girl, with values, and I aspired to a spiritual world. In the evenings my husband would explain the [Haredi] system and the way to me, and I was naive and wanted to accept God's kingship. After all, as a young woman you want to admire and worship your husband. He portrayed himself and the yeshiva students as spiritually elevated, and said the world would collapse if the voice of Torah was silenced for a moment. And you, the woman, had the supreme privilege of 'contributing' to the achievement of these lofty goals by your actions.

"My father forced his theocratic world on me. I told myself that as a Hungarian Jew who hadn't studied enough, he hadn't acquired the right hashkafa (religious viewpoint), but if I married a yeshiva student he would explain it to me. I thought there was some secret there that only I didn't understand."

My parents moved to a small community in the northern part of the country called Rekhasim. On top of the hill sits the Knesset Hizkiyahu yeshiva, which was the center of the lives of the yeshiva students' families.

"It was a wonderful community," my mother recalls. "I had wonderful friends there and the rabbi's wife, the widow Hannah, who ran the yeshiva, really adopted me. I used accompany her to the yeshiva kitchen and help her. I liked the life there. I became friends with wonderful couples and women … They had a phonograph and I had records. I used to bring my records, and we would both sit and listen to classical music together. Everyone knew that I read books. The mashgiah told my husband, 'I heard that your wife reads books. She's liable to think that life is like in the books.'"

Dead children

Until the age of about 12 I didn't know that my mother had given birth to two more girls who died tragically. Yaeli [the eldest] was born before me and Racheli was born after me. Of course I heard the rumors; Haredi society was like a small village at the time, and everyone knew about the tragedies. And what they didn't tell me, I figured out in my own mind. Only when I grew up did my mother begin to tell what had happened. Later she wrote about it at the end of the book "Kria'a" ("Mourning"), her most autobiographical novel. In almost all her books there are dead children.

"Until Yaeli was born I wasn't happy. Your father would observe a 'speech fast' (refrained from talking) every Monday and Thursday, and from the beginning of Elul (the month before Rosh Hashanah) until after Yom Kippur. During the High Holy Days he wasn't home. Yaeli's birth was compensation for everything I was missing. For me the child was light, sun, air, life. I didn't need anything. Until everything went wrong."

On Rosh Hashanah, when everyone was praying in the yeshiva, my mother entered the synagogue to hear the blowing of the shofar – one of the only commandments that women are obligated to observe. Outside older girls watched over the babies in their cribs. Yaeli, almost a year old, put her head between the bars of the crib and suffocated. My father was spending the holiday in another yeshiva. My mother ran from the top of the hill to the village below, with the lifeless baby in her arms. A yeshiva student was with her. Someone took them to the hospital in Haifa, where the baby was pronounced dead.

The second tragedy, the death of Racheli, happened when I was 18-months-old. I have no memories of it, and even when details of the first accident became quite clear, the fog was not lifted over the circumstances of the second.

"The second disaster could have been prevented. I begged your father not to leave me. But he insisted on going to the kollel. There were no neighbors in the building, there was no telephone, there was a storm outside and there was nobody to call. I was alone. The child turned blue and died in my arms. I thought that if it happened to me again, I wouldn't survive. But it happened. And I remained alive in spite of it."

My mother used to say that after her tragedies, she wanted to continue having children to compensate for what she'd lost. That's how she got to seven children [six girls and one boy]. But she also did this in the context of a society that had begun to adopt high birth rates as an ideology. To this day, when it comes to the number of children a family has, my mother is not as critical as on other subjects.

"After the Holocaust most of the families in Bnei Brak had few children," she recalls. "Only a few had big families, and they were looked down on. My mother didn't allow me to become friendly with girls from such homes, because 'their house is probably not clean enough.' In Rekhasim I discovered the beauty of large families and I liked the idea.

"Among the Haredim it became an ideology, for religious and demographic reasons. I had nothing to do with that. My pregnancies and births were easy. For me, they were the only outlet for creativity, self-fulfillment, compensation for emotional deprivation. I was happy with every pregnancy. I believe that the same is true of many women. Today women understand better than we did that it's hard to raise children. We were the first generation of redemption – or slavery.

"I'm glad to have had the experience of many children. That's my advantage. That enables you, when you start at a young age, to get to the cycles of life on time. To be a young grandmother. When my grandchildren get married I'll have great-grandchildren. I'm curious to know what that will be like.

"I think that the number of children shouldn't be determined by social affiliation. If a successful and loving couple knows how to raise children, why shouldn't they have a lot of them? But when it's done because of halakhic coercion rather than by choice, it makes me sad and angry."

'Rending and mending'

My parents often moved, but for most of our lives we lived in Bnei Brak. My mother continued to be the same rebellious child, even when she had children. Sometimes she skipped parent-teacher meetings ("You're good girls. I don't have time to wait in line"). Mainly she objected to the exaggerated preoccupation with modesty. She didn't feel she had to account to anyone. Certainly not to the teachers she used to have.

One day when I was in second grade, I came to school in such a short skirt that the teacher exploded. She immediately sent me out, but made sure to go home with me to reprimand my mother, whom she knew very well. When my teacher and I arrived at the house, it was morning and my mother was probably busy feeding her babies. When she heard the knock on the door she opened it only a fraction. "Yes?" she asked my teacher suspiciously, without noticing me; if she did, she didn't express any surprise. The teacher began to preach: How could you send her in such a short skirt? "What do you want?" my mother asked. "After all, she's wearing stockings. She's not naked." And she slammed the door.

She wasn't such a heroine when it came to her relationship with my father. She shed a lot of tears to convince him that I should learn to play the piano, or that I should attend the seminary in Tel Aviv instead of the one in Bnei Brak, which is stricter. I was also witness to her despair when she discovered, more than once, that he hadn't left her any money to buy bread and milk; because she didn't work and only raised the children, she was totally dependent on him financially.

The main character in my mother's story, Shulamit, also undergoes a major change. But I'm more interested to learn when the heroism began to erupt from the woman I know and remember – the one who lay in her bed during large parts of my childhood, with her eyes as weak as those of the biblical Leah, as it were.

"It was a process," my mother explains. "I became sickly when I arrived in Bnei Brak. I started to have stomach aches, I lost weight. I didn't want that life. When everyone went to kindergarten and school and I had time for myself, I started to feel the pain of a missed opportunity. I read 'Anna Karenina' and identified with her. In the book 'House of Women' I read about the despair of women in the suburbs and understood them. At every stage in my life I found the book that suited me at the time. The books shook me up. When I read 'Passages' I felt that I was part of a huge movement of people who make major changes in their lives. I was 'inside' the passage."

"Time doesn't dull …," says my mother finally, leaving half a sentence in the air, while we are eating vegetable soup. My sister Noa is filming us during the conversation, for a movie about the major rift in the family after my parents' divorce. But in spite of the presence of the camera, we somehow manage to achieve an understanding that is beyond words. There is far less than a generation between me and my mother. And, after all, she and I were there together, during a long chapter in the complex script of her life.

My sister, who is almost 10 years my junior, wants to know before she puts away the camera whether writing leads to healing.

"Every writer writes out of a wound," replies my mother. "I didn't invent that. I don't think the rift will disappear. It's an endless process of rending and mending."

(excerpt from a longer interview published in haaretz.com in 2012)

STANO MASAR: AFTER VELAZQUEZ

PAULIINA RAUHALA

A Heavenly Song

PROLOGUE

Aleksi stopped by the window to watch the sun framing the woman. Her corn-coloured hair was lit up into a golden halo. The wind caressed it and nuzzled it with abandon, whirled its apple scent. He wanted to do the same.

Aleksi wanted to examine the woman's laughter: how it began, carried on and ended. Her face became smooth and soft; she became the young girl Aleksi kissed clumsily for the first time, nearly exploding with love. That's enough, her cherry lips mouthed breathlessly, her trembling hands pushing him away. We have the rest of our lives.

The woman was laughing at the children. There was the four-year-old hanging onto the climbing frame, the woman looked like a torture victim when giving birth to her; there was the three-year old balancing on the swing, her arrival a little gentler; and the one-year-old, sturdy in his pram, had burst forth with a raised fist like Superman. The woman's pelvis, stomach and breasts had to endure a great deal. They remained Aleksi's own private nestling place for too short a time. She barely had time to open up to him, he barely had time to cherish her before they had a child, children.

The woman swung, light and care-free, and sang. The youngest one sat on her lap, the middle child on the next swing. She rose upwards like a swallow to sing in the blue sky of their home. She had no time to yearn or mourn. The world was beautiful. She was profoundly beautiful. Aleksi would have liked to swing with the woman, the two of them together.

The swing stopped. The warbling ceased, the sun disappeared behind a cloud. The woman's eyes clouded over, her cheekbones and temples showed shadows again and her body stiffened. She shook sand off herself and the children and they walked to the door. Time to eat. Meat balls, mashed potatoes and a salad of grated carrots and pineapple cubes.

In the hall, Aleksi held the woman tight. She looked at him, surprised, and gave him a friendly cuddle. She did not look or touch him with any ardour. Her stomach came between them, needed its own space. Aleksi wondered when she ceased finding the warmth of his skin restful and felt she needed strength to cope with conjugal love. How could her body summon up the energy to be a source of pleasure for a man when she swelled and shrunk, bore and nourished, woke up and stayed awake year after year. She should try to find the courage. Her body's softening and yielding had consequences, a thought hard to bury.

Aleksi wondered at what precise moment he started feeling that his love caused suffering; that though the woman remained by his side – faithful and industrious – she was gradually hardening and about to vanish.

Chapter 6

On my twenty-ninth birthday I get several presents: a pedicure, a neck and shoulder massage and a gift card for a posh department store. That means a whole day in town by myself.

I walk along the familiar cobbled streets and stop at the market by the sea and in the park split by a canal. I look at the world with the eyes of someone who has been away a long time: I am close and yet far. Was it always like this, is it still.

I am filled with longing and I am not.

I mirror myself against others and see my human reflection.

I am a free woman.

I do not buy myself an appearance, I do not construct a biography nor do I practice the art of controlling my life. My looks have, by and large, been given to me, the story of my life grows within me without a script, and in place of control, I concentrate on abandonment.

I stay away from the human market place. I have nothing to show off. I do not dress in layers of brand names. I do not eat small portions in expensive restaurants. I do not follow changing fashion trends, alter the interior of my home every six months or take up some intriguing hobby every autumn. Why does Eve's every part have to be remoulded? Lady fitness, dyed and artificial nails, Body Pump, bikini waxing and plumper breasts. My freedom consists of walking past the reconstructing parlours and advertising posters for women, my hair flowing back in the wind. I push a twin pram in a scented forest, pick chanterelles and blueberries with the children and go back home when it is time to eat. We walk on a beach barefoot, waves murmur their tales and the children come up with their questions when the sky is painted red with dusk and there is no hurry.

I am naked among other people. Anyone can count the freckles on my pale face, anyone can peer into my soul through my eyes, not masked by paint. But this world is only interested in the nudity of certain body parts – a face is not among them. The world takes no interest in a human being whose face is bare and whose body is clothed. Rarely does anyone give me a second glance in town, I have no trouble of that sort. I would shudder at a man's roving gaze on my body and the instant glint of assessment in his eyes.

This world loves to reduce the sexes into cartoon characters, special men and special women who only see their own reflections on each others' shiny surfaces. I love moderate men and moderate women who see nature in man and man in nature. I love men and women walking side by side in windcheaters on duckboards. I love men and women with rucksacks skiing one after the other on a fell. I love thin male bodies grown sinewy from work, I love female figures softened by motherhood. I love men with gentle faces reading a newspaper, I love women who sit in a rocking chair breastfeeding. I love evenings when children are asleep and quiet men take their wives' veined hands into their own and whisper 'this is good, please God lead us not into temptation'. I love stooped old people who lead each other by the hand to the post-box and the grocery store just as they have done all through their lives.

I have made love to one man during my life and I am not ashamed of it. I am not ashamed of love that has endured a tentative start. I am not ashamed of love that has survived everyday routines. I am not ashamed of love that does not get tired when children are born. I am not ashamed of love that does not shy away from ageing. I am not ashamed of love that is not merely a temporary commitment until better fortune and greater pleasure turn up. I am not ashamed of trust that has not been betrayed.

Chapter 7

On my twenty-ninth birthday I get several presents: a pedicure, a neck and shoulder massage and a gift card for a posh department store. That means a whole day in town by myself.

I walk along the familiar cobbled streets and stop at the market by the sea and in the park split by a canal. I look at the world with the eyes of someone who has been away a long time: I am close and yet far. Was it always like this, is it still?

I am filled with longing and I am not.

I mirror myself against others and see my human reflection.

I am a woman in chains.

I am a prisoner of my womb and I cannot plan my life beyond the next nine months. Menstruation constitutes my sole calendar. I bleed, I stop bleeding, I carry a child, I stop carrying and I bleed again and that is all I am permitted to expect.

I push a pram when maple leaves are bright yellow. When crocuses raise their heads out of the black soil, tiny new feet kick against my stomach. And when maples are yellow again, I fetch the carry cot, still free of dust, from the attic and fix it to the pram.

I lie on my back in a rowing boat without oars and wait. I wait for the waves and the wind to carry me ashore at last. I watch, silent and immobile, screeching seagulls swoop for fish; I see their strong, white wings taking them back and forth. On black nights I look at the stars and pray to God for a favourable wind and a kind weather. I curl up into a ball in my damp sleeping bag that cannot keep me warm. On bright days, I see glimmering water and a horizon with two shades of blue side by side and there is nothing more beautiful. But then another storm brews, rain beats down and the waves grow. My boat rocks, there is no land in sight and I feel sick.

I am a woman worn down by life and procreation, old while still young. I see a strange, pale figure in the mirror. It is hard to focus on her dimmed eyes, and her cherry lips have pleated edges. It is a frozen body that has encountered too much in too short a time. It has to suppress its internal din. It cannot hear sounds coming from outside very well either. Who spoke? What did they say? Where did the music disappear?

I am waiting for middle age as if it were a finishing line and I fear I am going to collapse on the running track of the gym in the middle of it all. I had to choose my sport when very young, without a single training lap. All I had in my mind was an image of women in a keep-fit class exercising gently. I found quickly that my body is poorly adapted to this form of exercise. My muscles are not firm, my stamina is nonexistent. The gym clock crawls desperately slowly. There are too many laps remaining, the number of repeat cycles is terrifying. Four times ten, three times twelve, two times fifteen. I pant heavily, my legs and hands filled with lactic acid. I have stitches on my left side. I cannot do many of the movements correctly even after all these years and they hurt. I stumble over my plimsoll laces, undone once again. I swallow back my tears and touch my battered knees and elbows, while my sisters with dainty legs gambol like a fresh herd of gazelles past me onto a new lap and chatter to each other, care-free. The air feels too thick to inhale. I want out.

I bitterly mourn the day when someone will sneeringly remark that I and my husband are ill-matched: one is old, the other one young.

Chapter 21

It is almost as if Aleksi and I were on a date.

It feels like a celebration in the car. For once, I am sitting at the front. No one is reaching out or asking questions from the back. Aleksi puts on Bach's Chorale *O Christ, our true and only light*. In our woollen coats and grey mitts with Lapp patterns we are again on our way to making our wedding vows in sight of God . I ask Aleksi to take the longer route – there is no hurry and no one is keeping an eye on us. Aleksi places his hand on my knee and I am the twenty-year-old Vilja again whose heart jumps when a man's hand makes a bird's nest on her knee, a blackbird's nest on a summer night. I hold my breath; sound of lute song and the warmth of a setting sun on my leg and I am lost for words.

It is just the two of us, he and I, far from home. We are sitting side by side on creaky office chairs, my forehead resting on Aleksi's shoulder. It was almost worth getting pregnant just for this, I whisper. I hope there is a queue and they are behind schedule. I wish for faulty equipment and nurses on sick leave.

We are surrounded by big-bellied, overdue women fed up with their condition, by women with smaller bellies stroking their stomachs gently, and by others with no discernible bellies, smiling expectantly, nurturing a secret inside. The men by their sides are caring, awkward. We barely notice them for we are alone and holding each other's hands.

Aleksi has come to each ultra scan. It is so important to him that he is prepared to send the children to the moon in a rocket to be able to be there. This time, the little ones went to Maria's, the big ones next door. I appreciate Aleksi's attitude although I offered again to go on my own – it is hard to arrange for childcare since no one is willing to take on four little ones. I want to come, I want to be with you, I want to learn to love the child now, he says and I feel a summer breeze blow against my cheek.

We are just like the others – we get no long lingering looks from anyone. They look at us and at this pregnancy kindly, without fleeting calculations in their eyes. They cannot see from us that we are already parents of a large family. We barely register their glances, for we are alone together and stroke each other's backs.

I am wary of the cold instrument that draws thick, shiny stripes on my stomach, I am not able to think of the tiny human creature or to listen to the nurse's words. Aleksi can tell me when this is all over. We will drink tea and eat raspberry tarts and take our time to look at the grey and white creature with a large head inside the black triangle of my womb, just as we have done before. We will go for a short walk in the woods close to the hospital. Aleksi will draw me close with his arm, like a sheltering tree, and we will converse softly. We are faced with challenges but we will survive. There are more wasteful ways of spending your life than bringing up your children.

I'll just get the doctor to have a look, the nurse says. I am struck by the words. I have heard them once before. They mean that the baby is dead. Then I will have to swallow pills to trigger off labour pains in my body and give birth to a beginning of a baby with match stick limbs. It will be born into a metal container so that it can be buried and the midwife can say she is sorry and the Minister can promise a reunion in heaven. Only this time the pregnancy is at such an early stage that pills may be enough. I won't have to give birth to it, surely not, I moan to Aleksi. He strokes my hair with his large hand. Don't worry yet, he replies. Perhaps it's better this way when we've already got so many little ones. Guilt washes over me like a cascade. Did the child die because I did not love it enough? Did it sense that it was not worth being born to this mother? Was it God's punishment?

Aleksi's clammy hand trembles in my hand and his dark eyes stare at the monitor, round and earnest. His other hand fidgets with his fringe. He looks like a rebellious artist the way his hair sticks up. The show must go one. His parting, plastered to one side, makes him look like a preacher. Dear sisters and brothers, you can rest secure in your belief. When did he get creases in the corners of his eyes? Why is the skin so dark round his eyes? When did his neck assume a hint of middle-aged sturdiness? Have his ears begun to grow a fraction of a millimetre each year? When did his chest become so robust? Where did the instrument of his five ribs vanish; I used to strum it on long, darkening nights to create soft, yearning songs that I will always miss.

Does he regret our vanished dreams and lost time? As young lovers, we sat in cafes for hours on end talking about books we had each read for the benefit of the other. He was Raskolnikov, I was Sonia. He was Jacob, I was Wanda. He was Werther, I was Lotte. When the sun set, we wandered, united as a four-legged and two-headed creature, along the seashore with his hand heavy on my narrow waist. We drank blackcurrant tea in his bedsit, ate pickled gherkin sandwiches and listened to Chopin's Nocturnes and Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concert. We were captivated by poems that were about us. Hear my soul speak: the very instant that I saw you, did my heart fly to your service. For Mercy has a human heart, Pity a human face, and Love, the human form divine. The pain of parting and the joy of anticipation coloured the railway station. Your arms, it felt so cold to leave them. Your arms I could melt into again.

Congratulations. There are two babies. One was playing hide and seek and didn't move for a bit, but now we've got a proper picture of them both and both boys are fine. They 're brothers, not identical twins.

Aleksi is white-faced. Aleksi's brow is furrowed. Aleksi sways. Don't fall flat on your face, you dimwit. I pull my panties on, one foot through one hole, the other through the other opening. Why did I not put on the shiny, black, lace-edged knickers in the morning; they would have been more beautiful than a devout woman's white cotton ones. I pull on my tights. First, I must remember to gather up the leg and insert the toes and not tug at them any old way, otherwise the Ultra Satin Tights will tear. Why do the tights have to be called 'ultra' something? I am about to leave the room in my ultra tights when Aleksi grabs my arm and points at a chair. My trousers are on it, oh-oh, how did they get to be there, seams straight, legs neatly crossed.

The doctor asks us to come back to the desk. I feel like laughing. I cover my mouth with my hands but still giggle and it does not stop, I begin to shake. I was just thinking of the ultra tights. I chortle at the doctor but he does not get the joke – a simple man. I wonder if life has made him bitter already or is he just being self-important. And Aleksi, too, has become an old sourpuss. That's your pictures, says the long-faced doctor and I feel like tickling him under the chin to find out if his facial muscles are frozen. The pictures

make me want to laugh even more. My tummy is choc-a-bloc! Do they knock their heads together? It looks as if one were kicking the other one's bum! I'm sure you realise this pregnancy requires closer monitoring – pearls of wisdom from the old killjoy – and if you need advice you can get it through the clinic. We'll manage, I respond, laughing. We've got a lot of experience; we've brought up four little ones at home, fully breast-fed, lots of love, clear boundaries, healthy and sturdy citizens each one. After all, family's the basic cell of society and its grassroots. Aleksi nods silently and leads me out. Have I forgotten I've hurt my leg? To make sure, I start dragging my left foot. Or maybe it was the right one.

I want two raspberry tarts and two cups of tea! I am laughing so hard I have to stop to cough. What a trick God had up his sleeve! He is a funnier man than I had thought. How can we have two boys? My cackling echoes in the corridor like a preacher's words at an outdoor assembly.

We'll give the tarts a miss. Aleksi finally manages to open his mouth.

We won't, we'll go and I'll have two.

Come on, let's go to the car.

Killjoy!

I am tired.

What sort of a man fails to offer tarts to his brave wife to celebrate a wonderful pregnancy.

It is a tired man.

If you are strong enough to sow, you will have to gather the corn, chauvinist!

Yes, you do but I don't feel like a tart right now. And I'm not a chauvinist.

Antti Sillanpää bought a diamond ring for his wife, though they were expecting their thirteenth.

That was Antti. I am what I am. You'll get a ring another time if it's that important.

Ah, don't you want any more children.

It's too big a question for us to think about right now.

Has your wife become so repugnant when she's with child that you don't want to been seen with her in public places?

No, you'll always be beautiful in my eyes.

Will you leave me, will you go like Pentti Korhonen, whose head was done in by a growing family and whose head could only come up with one solution: to leave, though he could have mail order rubbers without anyone noticing?

I won't leave, I won't go but we're taking the car home right now.

Chapter 33

When I enter the kitchen, I collide with something wooden and clanking. I switch the light on. In the middle of the floor there are two white cradles. They smell of fresh wood and paint. Their curved ends feature heart-shaped holes.

Aleksi went to work before I woke up. He has been going to a devout men's carpentry circle that meets in the workshop of the local school every Monday and stayed till late. I did not know Aleksi has become a cradle maker. If his equilibrium is disturbed at times, it does not take him long to regroup.

I look at the cradles, which are more beautiful than any I have seen before. They are the kind I have wished for since Kaisla's birth. The kind of cradle that is sturdy and has high sides and does not rock too violently. An old cradle song: 'Lullaby, and good night, in the skies stars are bright. May the moon's silvery beams, bring you sweet dreams.' Only, I wanted one cradle. Looking at two makes me dizzy. Looking at two makes me feel faint. I take two painkillersand two spoonfuls of cod liver oil. I swallow a fizzy vitamin C drink and eat a probiotic yoghurt, but I still have to go and throw up though the time for pregnancy-related sickness should be over.

I can already hear the shrill, panicky crying of two babies from the kitchen. Two gaping, crying mouths gasp for oxygen side by side on their white, lacy pillows Two pairs of outstretched arms are asking to be picked up at the same time and carried against my shoulder. It is hard for me to prepare breakfast for the other children in that din. I throw a bag of rye bread and a jug of juice on the table. Only bread and juice today. Mum has no time to make porridge now. Help yourselves to ham and cheese from the fridge. Lumikukka, take small bites so they don't get stuck in your throat.

I have to remove the cradles. Nice, thank you, I will say to Aleksi but I put them away to wait. The babies roar angrily as I carry the cradles to the attic. They kick against the sides with their thin frog's legs and thump the pillows with their small fists. Anxious, I throw a pile of old rugs over the cradles. I add a tarpaulin, a broken kitchen stool and two fishing rods. They go quiet. At first they hiccough, like children who have been crying too long on their own, with long trembling sobs that rack the whole body. Then they are silent. Did they die, suffocate? Did I kill them, did I murder them?

I cannot hear a sound. I sit down by a plastic Christmas tree and cry. Dear God. Save me and help me. Let me have peace.

When I raise my head, I see that the star at the top of the tree has collapsed and the bottom point is broken. Unlit electric candles dangle from the branches. I hear the children's alarmed voices from downstairs. God has ceased hearing my prayers. A God with ear protectors, a Heavenly Father with ear plugs. He helps those who are not excessively desperate.

What can I do about myself? Is there nothing! Beaten, I look around.

The attic is crammed with rubbish. It contains the worldly goods of many late relatives, a mountain of refuse bags filled with clothes and shoes, odd pieces of furniture and gardening tools, a greenhouse with a collapsed supporting bar, a perfect volley ball net with no stands, thick fur hats that resemble predatory cats or foxes in the dark, croquet mallets, tennis racquets, badminton racquets and ping pong bats. A big family with lots of children needs all sorts of equipment.

I glimpse a suitcase in the furthest corner, half-hidden by a colourful hammock. A suitcase!

The case is old, battered and made of brown leather; in addition to a zip, it is equipped with belt-like straps. I discovered it on the flea market while a student. It was supposed to accompany me to Novgorod and Venice, Rio de Janeiro and Reykjavik; it was supposed to show me the Great Wall of China, the pyramids of Kheops, Notre-Dame and Duomo di Milano, but I did not have time to use it once before it contained nappies, a dummy chain and a nursing bra.

I carry the suitcase, hidden by the hammock, into the walk-in closet. (. . .)

TRANSLATED BY FLEUR JEREMIAH

(extracts in sample translation from the novel by the courtesy of the publishing house Gummerus, Helsinki)

JØRGEN LORENTZEN

Ibsen and Fatherhood

LORENTZEN, Jørgen
A history of fatherhood in Norway: 1850–2012
Macmillan, 2013

Fatherhood and issues related to it occupy a central position throughout Henrik Ibsen's dramatic works. In his historical and romantic dramas, and not least in his contemporary dramas, Ibsen writes about fathers, the role of fathers in relation to their own children, and about how adult men are impacted by their relationship to their fathers. I can hardly think of a motif in Ibsen's works which is more recurrent than that of fatherhood.

Yet, fathers are not what we have been led to associate with Ibsen's dramas. Rather, most of us associate his plays with women fighting for the right to a life of freedom, or heroic men embroiled in great moral battles over truth, freedom, power – confronting hypocrisy and the double standards of bourgeois morality. The reason for this is rather obvious. Ibsen's dramas do not deal explicitly with fatherhood. It is not the relationship between fathers and their children that drives the dramatic plot. Instead, this relationship remains on the peripheries of the central action, or significantly underpins the action and relationships between characters that unfold on stage. Fatherhood is pervasive, yet remains discretely in the background. This, of course, makes it all the more intriguing to study. What is it that leads Ibsen to dramatize the relationship between father and child so consistently, without ever fully developing it as a theme? What part does the issue of fatherhood play in Ibsen's discourse on truth, freedom and other issues under debate? How and to what degree does he allow fatherhood to play a role in his dramatic works, and how is this played out in relation to motherhood, family and masculinity, both within his texts and beyond?

[…] *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck* are Ibsen's most clearly family-oriented plays. *The Wild Duck* was uniquely subtitled by Ibsen as "A Domestic Tragedy in Three Acts", and in a frequently quoted note about its theme he wrote: "Gregers' experience of a child's first and deepest pains. They are not sorrows over love; no, they are family pain – agonizing home circumstances – ". In a letter to publisher Fredrik Hegel when *The Wild Duck* was close to completion, Ibsen returned to this topic: "This play does not concern itself with political or social questions or with public matters in general. The action takes place entirely in the area of family life". Quite simply, Ibsen wanted to explore the dramatic workings of the family in both these plays, and this included the relationship between mother, father and child - not merely the relationship between a woman and a man, or between one adult and another. The children occupy a deliberate and central place in both plays; the focus here is on how children are damaged within the drama of bourgeois family.

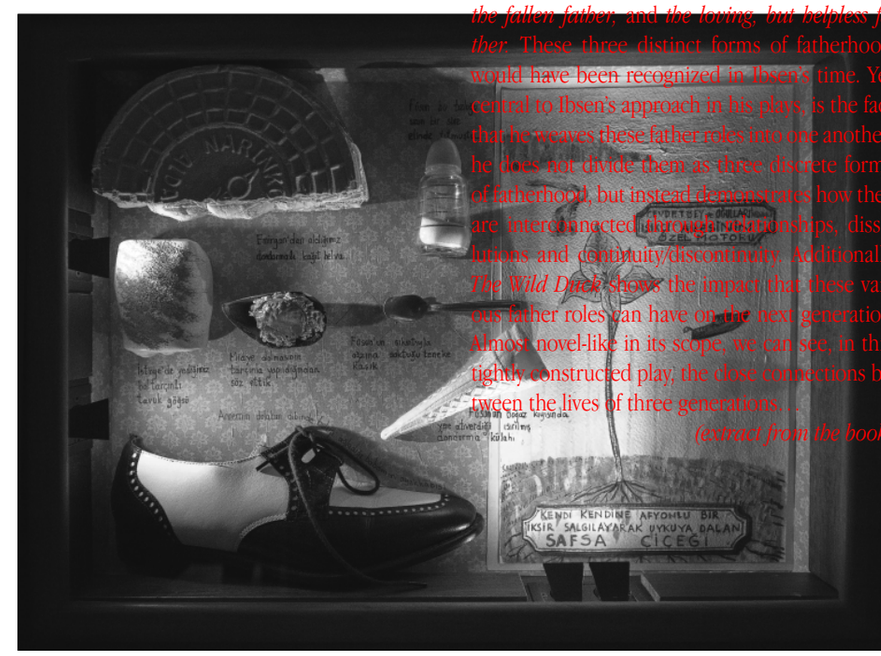
However, many critics have taken Ibsen's use of the term "family" at face value. It is not so much the family as a whole that is reflected in these two plays, but rather fathers and fatherhood in particular. In these two plays the word "father" appears far more frequently than in any of Ibsen's other works, – in both plays the role of the father the central theme. The protagonist on stage in *Ghosts* is, without a doubt, the mother, yet it is her relationship to society's father figures that lie at the heart of her despair and ultimate self-knowledge. To view this play merely as a family drama can obscure the fact that fatherhood is the subject under scrutiny in both these plays.

In some respects, *Ghosts* is a precursor to *The Wild Duck*. These plays are closely linked not only because they are Ibsen's two most explicitly family-oriented dramas, but also because *Ghosts* establishes the ideas about fatherhood which will be explored in *The Wild Duck. Ghosts* represent Ibsen's first direct critique of the patriarchal family. *Brand* (1866), *Pillars of Society* and *A Doll's House* problematize the father's role. Brand sacrifices his son, Alf, out of romantic idealism, while Bernick in *Pillars of Society* is willing to sacrifice his son, Olaf, for his own personal and financial interests. But in both plays the possibility is left open for these men to make restitution. In *A Doll's House* the father and mother have built a patriarchal home around their children, largely based on illusions, but when Nora has finally had enough and leaves, the father is left with both children - an ending which opens up the possibilities for a new and different kind of fatherhood.

[…] The problematization of fatherhood is taken even further a few years later in *The Wild Duck*, and it is this work I will now focus on. The question of who the protagonist actually is in *The Wild Duck* is a widely discussed issue. The play does not have one clear protagonist, as is the case in many of Ibsen's works. Which of the characters here, after all, possesses a sufficiently tragic dimension to emerge as the central gestalt in the work? Gregers Werle or Hjalmar Ekdal? Or perhaps Hedvig? The title of the play certainly makes us immediately think of Hedvig. But there is not just one wild duck in this drama; there are many, as we will see. Thus the play is difficult to interpret on the basis of the traditional theory of tragic drama, which generally takes the tragic hero's role as its point of departure.

In *The Wild Duck* the focus is not on any one individual, but on relationships between people and the consequences thereof. It is the familial relationships, and "family pains," that are in focus here, and more precisely, the family represented through the father-child relationship. In the *The Wild Duck* we meet three father figures in three father-child relationships: Werle-Gregers, Ekdal-Hjalmar, and Hjalmar-Hedvig. As the drama unfolds Ibsen shows us three types of fatherhood through these three different relationships. I will term these three forms as *the patriarchal father, the fallen father,* and *the loving, but helpless father.* These three distinct forms of fatherhood would have been recognized in Ibsen's time. Yet central to Ibsen's approach in his plays, is the fact that he weaves these father roles into one another; he does not divide them as three discrete forms of fatherhood, but instead demonstrates how they are interconnected through relationships, dissolutions and continuity/discontinuity. Additionally, *The Wild Duck* shows the impact that these various father roles can have on the next generation. Almost novel-like in its scope, we can see, in this tightly constructed play, the close connections between the lives of three generations. […]

(extract from the book)



INNOCENCE FOUNDATION

MARIA A. IOANNOU

The Gigantic Fall of an Eyelash

Man in the Suitcase

Her palm, the fingers, the nails and the joints remained snatched on the handle, almost embalmed.

It was decorated with golden details on the edges. She had bought it from an outlet store in America, at a time when spending half her salary on shopping was a matter of survival for a girl her age. She had been dragging it for years. The gold on the handle was no longer glossy. Her nipples shrunk and lost their beauty. Her breasts hung like withered branches, with the leaves and all.

A suitcase of 168 centimeters with two wheels and a partition.

Sometimes, it kicked and released weird half-heard sounds as if it hid a person inside: "Op...gr...bor...fu...of...co...shu...assho...fff"

Yet, people don't live in suitcases. And suitcases never burst into tears, some dark and colorless nights.

Her husband – married almost twenty five years – remained dangerously embedded in there. His body diminished day by day. He was given no food, no warmth. From time to time, he pushed the fabric, using both arms and legs, changing its shape. He opened two or three holes with the flame of his cigarette to breathe and therefore, the traveling suitcase puffed smoke, like a chimney.

His wife never smelled his cigarette smoke or the piss that flowed out of that suitcase. His violent beating, his suppressed yelling, his persistent and painful efforts to escape remained unnoticed.

"Op...gr...bo...ts...hun...thir...hi...shu...assho...cca...a..."

So he stopped. ".....s.....k.....ff"

Along with the poison he swallowed all words.

There were times when he felt nauseous, while she dragged him here and there, on the rough streets, in the washed car, on the fast treadmill of the gym, in the cart of a department store. But he never complained. He just took an embryo's position, sucking everything in, waiting to be reborn, humming an old lullaby song.

His wife continued to carry him with her freshly-done nails to luxurious spa resorts, furniture exhibitions, cottages and retreats, even in secret hotel rooms. There, he had heard it all and sickened. Her complaints. Not to mention her admiration for a man half her age. That asshole's flattering words, her sighing and moaning. He lost his temper but the suitcase was carefully sealed. It silenced all screams. That suitcase was now his home.

He no longer sobbed. He bit his lips though. Hard. Until they bled. A red stain mysteriously appeared on the fabric. The next morning, his wife would rub it with sponges and detergents, but the stain wouldn't go away. His wife would feel guilty and she would suffer.

"I bet he can't get an erection!", he would hear his secretary say to a new colleague, while rhythmically chewing her gum. Then they would both laugh. Really loudly. In his spacious office, on his leather chair, making fun of his collection (*who collects ship miniatures anyway?*), sticking the gum under a picture on the wall and opening his private drawers one by one.

It would be noon and the suitcase would still be attached to his wife's left hand. She would devour her goat's cheese salad and the kids would have pasta again, with vegetarian white sauce. He would starve but he would suppress any possible feeling. He would be exhausted and there would be no more strength to kick or push.

At nights, everything would change. He would no longer bear the silence, the darkness, the claustrophobic smell of plastic. He would punch, yell, burn the suitcase with his rage, he would melt it. The suitcase would get more and more flexible, with a thinner and more fragile surface and he would gain more space.

His wife would snore and a dog from outside would just bark at a stranger.

One morning, his wife would wake up. She would wash her teeth, put on her make up, get the kids ready for school, lick one tooth to remove red lipstick. She would chew a toast really fast and smell her skin to feel that asshole's after-shave on her body.

Then, she would smile, she would remember the suitcase on the right pillow of the bed and she would run, she would run to get it in order to reach school on time: 7:30 sharp.

This time the suitcase would not be there. The fabric would be torn on its lower part.

The crazy neighbor would talk about a suitcase with feet he saw running with great noise at midnight.

Yet, nobody would believe him.

And the suitcase would continue to puff...

TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR

Cellophane

DAD AND I chat away at night; he wrapped in cellophane.

When mum goes to bed I open the closet in the guestroom. I show him my new toys, the big remote control tractor and my teddy bear – and he fogs up the cellophane with his breath, grooving hearts for me with his nose. I try to come closer and kiss him in the Eskimo way, but I can't reach, and before too long the sketches on the cellophane will fade, there's no room for more. He stands there still, like Tutankhamun's mummy enclosed in wood. This reminds me of the boxes that keep the dead locked in. "The living can't stand the dead", grandma used to say. The living are afraid of the dead, that's why they shut them in a box, to keep them from waking up and seeking revenge like vampires do! My words.

. . . / Mum keeps to herself / I burnt a hole in the carpet with your lighter/ Sorry dad / Aren't you hot in there? / Why don't you speak? / Can you wrap me with you in this cellophane from the DIY store? / I love you dad / Today mum told me to shut up! / Yes. I'll be good / Yes. I promise!/ Leave me alone! she said/ Me too, dad. . . / Are you hungry? There's chicken if you want / Goodnight. . . / Will you talk more tomorrow? / I don't have any friends! Do you? / . . .

I spend several hours in the closet with him. I stroke his cellophane. He can feel it when I touch him, I'm sure he can. I can see the droplets on the cellophane. It's probably his sweat of joy. If it wasn't for me, he'd be bored in the dark. He tells me he can still hear the tires squealing.

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeek

But I mustn't talk about that.

I want to tell mum that dad didn't go away, that she must stop crying at night and yelling at me because dad is still here, with us, and I talk to him and ask him things and he answers. I want so much to tell her how he told me that there are billions of stars in the sky and that I can even be an astronaut if I want to (it doesn't matter that I'm nearsighted) and that I should never listen to anyone else because if I do I will only become what they want me to, and that the word "gay" means many things and the dictionary says, if I read it closely, that the word is used: *"(with a positive connotation) for someone who is happily excited"*. I also want to tell her that my having discovered dad wrapped up in cellophane in the closet makes me "happily excited" because if it hadn't been for me he would have died of hunger, thirst, loneliness, moth and thousands of other microorganisms.

Last night, dad and I chatted away for hours on end. I asked if he wanted me to take the cellophane off him so that he could move. He kept quiet.

This morning I found dad outside, thrown out in the large container that had SKIP written on it. He was still wrapped in cellophane, one arm sticking out.

I screamed "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah" and started to cry aloud.

Mum yanked me back into the house.

"It's just a suit, god damn it! A suit. . ." she said and shut herself in the toilet.

TRANSLATED BY DESPINA PIRKETTI

PATRYCJA PUSTKOWIAK

Night Animals

The deeper Tamara sank into the greasy, black paste of her own thoughts, the more she became disgusted by herself and by her own body. Her genitals – a dark, wet tunnel leading nowhere, giving a secret thrill to those who buy a ticket – were like a haunted house at an amusement park. When she was young she was told that one should refrain from having sex because it wasn't very Catholic, and later the exact opposite: Take and eat, all of you, of this body in which she was enclothed. It was sex that was now fashionable, a new religion that would lead her to a shrine of the greatest raptures. This festival of contradictory voices caused her to transform from a normal person bound in skin and worldview into a patient spread out on the operating table of an experimental doctor, tangled up in a million incongruous cables through which liquids were seeping into her, cancelling out each other's effects. She was ill, her blood was full of poison, all that she was able to utter was some kind of logarithm of despair and a soundless plea for help which – owing to the low content of the spoken word in silence – nobody was able to decipher. Sometimes it seemed to her that at night she was glowing with pain. Her skin sent a message, creating letters with the blue neon glow of her veins. But there was emptiness all around her, and the room only flashed momentarily with an unpleasant, bluish light – like in an Intensive Care Unit or a hospice. Oh, abandon all hope, ye who…

Resigning from sex was, therefore, some kind of liberation. But although she had won this battle against her body, there was another she wasn't able to win – against hunger. Her body demanded nourishment, and she – no matter how exhausted or hungover she was (unless it was a starvation hangover, during which one has no desire to eat) – had to feed it, her body was her unborn child making her life difficult. And once again: her body dealt her a rough blow, demanding a meal. Meanwhile, in Tamara's refrigerator the light and two bottles of vodka reigned supreme. She must have bought the bottles of vodka on the way home, since they hadn't been there the day before. Anyway, apparently it was possible to do light therapy to cure depression, Tamara had read about it in some New Age magazine – though she didn't really know how it was done.

She tried it the easiest way – standing by the refrigerator, she opened up her mouth, that casement window through which her unwanted life could slowly begin to leak out, and waited until the light seeped into her and filled her up completely. When she thought about this, she had reflections of a religious nature – to fill oneself with light, isn't this synonymous with becoming one with God? God is eternal light, God is love – she had heard similar stories during years of attending catechism classes, God is everything that isn't there – she could add, many years later. But this God residing temporarily in the refrigerator did not want to enter her at all, did not want to descend from the white, slightly scratched-up shelves, and besides it's cold – luminosity was supposed to dazzle and give warmth, but this one here mocked all efforts to convert, it didn't want to enter the body, it only treated it to well-known chill and humiliation.

Vodka has definitely treated me to much nicer things, thought Tamara, looking at the bottle of golden-red liquid that was standing politely in the corner of the fridge. But for a moment she couldn't allow herself some of that friendship, even total drunkards, like her, sometimes have to take a break and eat something. A hangover-hunger had just grabbed her, a hunger of the worst kind, when one craves spicy soup. In her mind's eye she saw a steaming Thai dish, an ideal mix of sweet, sour and hot spices. A bit of saliva dripped onto her parched tongue, but what to do? If only she had a broth cube and one of those rafaello sweets that were buried under the sofa, she could prepare some Thai soup for herself of her own creation. As if to spite her, these ingredients were missing, there was nothing, the only thing she could make was vodka soup, but she wasn't in the mood for that kind just then.

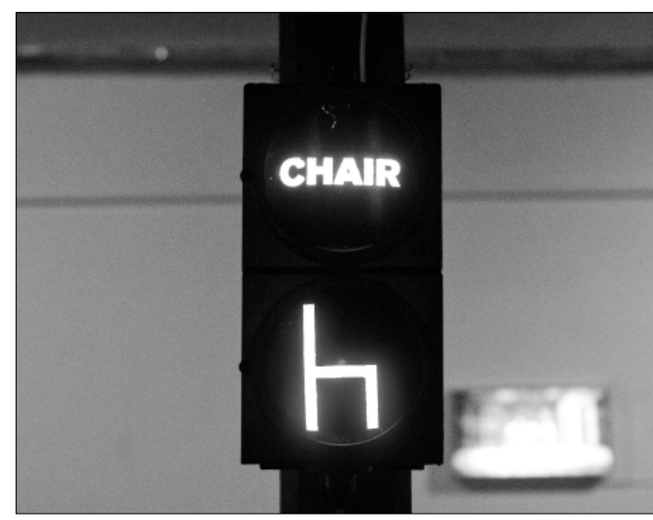
How lucky it was that she lived in a big city, not only that but a capital city, in capital cities you can find everything, including rich gastronomical offerings, which would be a sin not to make use of. It only takes one phone call and an hour later the Thai soup of her dreams lands in her home, covering a distance of a dozen or so serpentine, tangled-up streets covered in a thin layer of dust, along which slide the shoes of random passersby, dogs' paws and everything that sticks to them, from dust to microorganisms.

With a bowl of soup balanced on her knees, she turned the TV on. She got sucked into an American program devoted to the problem of the decay of the human body after death. Tamara slipped into her mouth a spoonful of tasty Thai soup while the program's host presented to the camera a human head in various stages of posthumous decomposition; first it's completely normal, next worms appear on it, in fact not only one kind, but several different kinds, judging from their colours, and in the end the flesh disappears and only clean, white bone remains, the kind you can see in horror films or *Hamlet*.

Next came a section of the program devoted to getting rid of what had so little luck in life as to actually die – well, it happens to everyone. It was possible, for example, to bury such a thing in a coffin, prices range between X and Y, you don't have to wait long to receive your order, wood of the finest quality, satisfaction guaranteed. Those who don't like the company of underground worms or find the processes of putrefaction unpleasant can decide otherwise – better during one's lifetime, later it could be too late. These days cremation is carried out in a cremation oven with at least two chambers, the construction of which allows the next of kin to directly observe the corpse being placed into the oven, which among some may arouse unpleasant associations; time to free oneself from the sticky tentacles of one's memory and choose a road towards progress. The oven can be fuelled by oil or gas, the burning process is supervised by a computer, so it is completely automatic. After burning, the ashes are crumbled in a separate machine into a fine powder before they're put into an urn. And later the urn is given to you to take home, the whole thing doesn't cost much, it's time to consider this nice alternative to a traditional funeral – the world is helpful and wags its tail at us, often bringing good new ideas to us in its muzzle.

TRANSLATED BY SCOTIA GILROY

(with the support of the Polish Book Institute)



STANO MAŠAR: AFTER KOSUTH

YAEL PIEREN

Stork bite

One

My flat measures twenty-two metres square. I have taken its precise measurements on the day the keys were handed over, even before starting to furnish the space. I stacked my few boxes, small, neat and carefully labelled, outside the door. I stood about in the empty room for a long time, looking at the bright spots on the wall where pictures used to hang and following the fine cracks in the ceiling. I did not feel any hurry to fill this empty room. I felt well at ease with the idea that the former residents had left their traces.

It is a little larger than the landlord has granted me according to the contract. That is why I have overlooked the fact that the tap at the sink cannot be closed properly. For a few days, it was just about all right, by now, its a long time since I have heard any drip at all.

There is a little table with two chairs by the window facing the street, at which I have a cup of coffee in the mornings. The bed with the white linen, directly underneath the sloping ceiling, was handed on to me by the woman next door. Cutlery, plates, cups, pots, light bulbs, bed table, clothes rack, leather shoes – all are either gifts or on loan.

I would like to have every item replaced with one of my own specific choice in the foreseeable future. An old beer glass serves for this purpose on the kitchen counter; I put my redundant small change in there. The glass is a gift, too. So far, it contains very few coins. I find unlocked bikes everywhere and I take them into my possession for a short time before returning them to the same place. This way, I believe, it is not a theft.

I have brought my slippers, my identity card and a few of my dresses. I am badly prepared for winter. My only coat is not really warm, rather beautiful, with a gigantic collar playing around the shoulders, no hood, the sleeves reaching just about down to the wrists. I own neither gloves nor a scarf, nor warm socks, and I have never belonged to those girls who slip on thick jumpers because of the cold.

A comb lies on the washbasin next to the shower, which I use to disentangle my hair after getting up. I wash them with the same liquid soap I use for cleaning my clothes. The simplicity of my everyday life pleases me. Sometimes, when no attentive eye is following me, I will wear jumpers, shirts, trousers and dresses for such a long time that I could stand them upright in a corner. I then put them into a paper sack, carry them down the road to the launderette and spend the afternoon watching them spinning around in the drum. There are seven of them. Two black jumpers, a white shirt, a pair of jeans, two summer-dresses, a blue one and a red one, and my coat. My underwear, of course. Perhaps even my hat will be included in the count.

The snow globe on the windowsill is also a present, the only thing I do not want to replace. My brother took it for me as a little boy. Strictly speaking, he nicked it, in a toyshop. I was troubled by a bad conscience for years after finding out, absolutely wanting to return it. I infected my brother with the great compassion for the elderly shop owner. She never had any customers. She always sat behind the counter goggling out of the window through thick, dirty cobwebs. In my childish dreams, the critters were her only companions; she talked to them and chose her lunch from the surplus of miserably perished insects. We went up and down in front of her window a few times, without ever entering the shop. He did not dare and I did not want to hand over my snow globe. Then, the owner died. A small label at the door communicated her unexpected demise, I remember it well. She died amidst her wooden building blocks, cards, board games, cuddly toys and dolls, just like that, in a single moment. Everything remained in its place for a long time, dust raging around the untouched pieces. It took almost a whole year until the shop was cleared. They drew up with a lorry and disposed the toys in large black sacks. Ever since, I have seen this present as my rightful possession.

It lies next to the only book, which I could bring myself to purchase; almost three-hundred pages full of wrongly drawn maps, errors about the face of the world, now exposed to ridicule by our modern technology. Turning the pages, I imagine the fear of falling off the edge of the earth, or the pride of inhabiting a clearly overwhelming spot of land, now stuck forlornly underneath a continent on today's maps.

It is one of the few books altogether in my flat. When I arrived here, I thought of taking them with me when they are on display in the street, and of stacking them alongside the wall, but now I somehow do not want to keep a single one of them, once I have read it. I put them back where I found them, or I push them indiscriminately and without a note into strange letterboxes. Under my bed remains only, what was swept underneath while cleaning and then forgotten.

Sometimes I think that I am living very much in accordance with our human nature in this small flat and in the space and time surrounding it. Also living in accordance with the nature of our society, today. I take things with me, I am given them, I use them and I put them down again.

There is hardly anything I feel attached to. Of course, I am proud of my little round table and its two chairs, but then again, it would not bother me if they went broken. I love wearing my coat and turning up the collar, it seems to me as if I was walking much more upright in it than otherwise; the way it swishes around my legs allows me to ignore the cold easily. Nevertheless, I do not believe that I would be sad, if the seam would tear or if someone just took it away. That is how it is: things do not mean much to me. They are like food, which I ingest, digest and secrete again. The mechanism of wear and tear is a necessary evil, if one wants to live. I cannot remember ever having felt an aversion to this fact. I have always liked living.

Asked about my belongings, I will elaborate, explaining that I own a lot. Perhaps, because there is actually very little and because I know all of it down to the smallest detail. However, it is also possible that I have become used to simply taking things for myself, assuming in moments of arrogance that almost anything could belong to me anyway, if I only wanted it.

My most precious possession would be my snow globe.It really is. Turning it, I imagine my brother, needle-sharp in outline and very alive.I would not even need it for that purpose, I have a fabulous memory, it would probably not even require a particular effort to simply call him to mind; but it is a ritual, I would not have it any other way. He is only supposed to be back again in this snow globe for a brief moment, no matter how often I turn it during the day. He is not supposed to haunt about. I do not want to live with ghosts.

TRANSLATED BY TRUDE STEGMANN

STANO MASAR: GALLERY

HIDAS JUDIT

Hotel Havanna

Diet Forte

"Good Lord, your belly is pretty big ," the man says as he watches his wife from the sofa. The woman is sitting on a high stool, eating dinner with the kids. She tries tucking in her belly, tries to sit up straight, but the stool is too uncomfortable, it's murder on her back. She had no idea that her husband also thinks she's fat. When she'd complain about it, he'd always calm her down. "I like you just the way you are," he'd say, and kiss her forehead.

"Why is it so hard to understand," the woman says, her mouth full. "I've got plenty of other things to worry about. I work from morning to night for the rest of you. Have you any idea what my day is like? There's kindergarten, and also school, half an hour there, half an hour back, twice a day. And then there's the house to look after, the cleaning, paying bills, taking care of official business. (…) Whose got time worrying about her stomach?"

The woman gets up from the counter. She's hoping she'll look slimmer standing up. She puts the food back in the icebox. The exchange she's just had with her husband has taken away her appetite, anyway. "I barely eat anything any more," she says, more to herself than to her husband. "I just nibble on what the children leave on their plate." Her husband is still watching her from the sofa in the kitchen, seeing her from below. From there, her thighs and buttocks are looking huge, too. I don't know why she's so upset, he's thinking to himself. She's the one that keeps asking. And lately, she's looking old, too. She's grown a double chin and she's got bags under her eyes. But he wouldn't dare telling her that, it was a huge mistake being honest just now.

"Go and say good night to dad," the woman says before she bundles the kids off to bed. She's feeling proud of herself for having remembered her husband like this after such a hurtful remark. She's thinking that if they should ever get a divorce, she wouldn't be like most other women, who turn the kids against their father.

In bed, she reads *Snow White* to her daughter. Her mind is not focused, though, and her voice seems to come from a distance. She can feel her insides move, she's bothered by her love handles resting on each other, and the sweat that settles between them. Starting tomorrow, it's time for a strict diet and exercise, she's thinking. "In Auchan the other day I saw a Réka Rubint fitness DVD on sale. Next time I go shopping, I'll pick one up.

In the morning, she asks her husband for twenty thousand forints. "Again?" he asks, whereupon she takes offense. "Why? Do you think I spend it on myself? I do nothing but economize," she counters. "Besides, I'm fed up with having to account for every fillér." Her husband suddenly feels ashamed and hands her the twenty thousand. But in the car he's thinking that it's just not right the way it is. He keeps telling his wife that it's time she went looking for work, but she brings up the children. He can veritably hear what follows every time. What would become of them, they'd be left to their own devices, it would be detrimental, they'd turn out just like the others, because that's why the country is in the state it's in, that's why everybody walks all over everybody else. It's what they learn as children, and that's why she can't go looking for a job. She's not about to her own children end up like that.

What's there to say? the man is thinking. He doesn't want them to turn out like that either. On the other hand, it's high time he reduced his pace. He's over forty-five, but he hasn't got a single quiet weekend, he's often got to work even then. Month after month, he sweats blood to make ends meet. There's the private school, bills to pay, new clothes for the kids, the installments on the car. It's too much to ask of a safety technician!

The children, at least, will learn the meaning of sacrifice, he told his wife the other day, but she just shrugged. She doesn't care. There's no talking to her. There never was.

In the coming weeks the woman tries her best to lose weight. She won't eat after six, and even during the day, only vegetables and meat. She takes wheat grass pills to cut down her appetite. She schedules a couple of mornings when she exercises. It takes quite an effort, she hasn't exercised in years, but she does her best. A week later she gets up on the scales. Eighty-five kilos. The same as before. "No matter," she says, "it takes time." Two more weeks go by. The woman feels much lighter. Her belly looks less flabby, too, and her clothes seem looser on her. Eighty-four and a half kilos. "That's impossible," she fumes, "I was expecting two or three kilos at the very least." She's less enthusiastic, but holds out for another two weeks. The scales go up to eighty-five kilos again. The woman fights back her tears. She can't stand it any more and takes out a bar of chocolate she'd brought the previous day to reward herself for having lost weight.

She feels like flinging the scales out the window and cutting off her protruding belly. Yes, she should cut it off with a big butcher's knife, she thinks. All she hears is "I'm tired, I'm tired," and her husband is off to bed before she can finish with the housework. Or else, she waits in vain for her husband to come into the bedroom. I'm lucky if we sleep together once a month, and usually, I have to take the initiative even then, she thinks. What am I to do now? How will I lose weight? Maybe I should take a knife to my stomach or jump out the fourth story window, because the extra pounds will never disappear! Then out of the blue, the solution strikes her. That's it! Cut it off. Or better yet, suck it out. She must go to a plastic surgeon! That would do it. The pain is of no consequence.

She sits down at the computer to find out the details of the surgical procedure. There are so many offers, she can hardly chose among them. *"Look twenty years younger! Get rid of cellulitis the easy way!"* She can just see herself with a thin waist. Or walking in the park with the kids. She waves to her acquaintances, who whisper behind her back about how fabulous she looks. She imagines her husband, who is looking at her once again the way he did at one time. But when she sees how much it will cost, the wind is taken out of her sails. "No, it won't work, we'll never be able to pay for it!" But she keeps looking. Meanwhile, she takes out another bar of chocolate with nuts and begins munching on it. As the sweet taste spreads in her mouth, her spirits revive.

She tries Google again, and sees something intriguing among the most popular pages. She clicks on it. A porno film. Whose been looking at it, she asks herself. My son is far too young. Then suddenly, she stops chewing. Pieces of nut are still swimming in her mouth, but she forgets to swallow. So that's what he does at night! That's why he won't sleep with me! He's probably cheated on me, too, no doubt, except he hasn't admitted it yet. And why? Just because I'm slightly overweight?

(…)

At night, she looks at her husband as if he were a stranger. She hates him for being ungrateful, and for the secret, which is now her secret, too. But she decides to stand up to him. She's determined to win the next round. She's up to here with all the sacrifice. She must get her hand on the money!

(…)

The next day she visits the website again. She searches through the films (…) She spots an ad. *"Are you at home? Got a web camera? We have the ideal job for you!"* She clicks on the details. They're looking for women. Age and figure of no consequence. She makes some calculations. Surely, they must pay well. Fifteen or twenty times, and she's sure to have enough money for the procedure. But then she relents. She's not fit to stand in front of a camera any more. They probably would reject her. Besides, that's no job for a decent housewife. What would her kids say? Or her mother? They probably would never talk to her again. But she can't let such an opportunity slip away. (…) After all, what's the big deal? It's just housework in the buff, she tells herself.

It's not like cheating, it's just a way to earn some money. Then she thinks that for all she knows, she might even continue doing it once she's got the money. She wouldn't have to beg all the time, like a child.

In the weeks to come, the man notices surprising transformations in his wife. She seems to have grown more youthful. She holds herself better, her hair is always combed and neatly tied in the back, there's a light application of lipstick and eye shadow on her face, and instead of a sweatshirt and pants, she's wearing a blouse and a skirt. He doesn't see her as fat as before. She seems to harbor a secret. One night when the man comes home, she and the kids are already sitting at the counter. The woman turns briefly to greet him, then her husband sees nothing but the back of her neck with those silken brown hairs. It's been ages since I last noticed, he's thinking. He feels he must kiss the back of her neck. But the woman averts him, a habit she's picked up of late. The man has asked her whether anything is the matter, if he's done something wrong, but she just smiles and assures him that everything is fine, except she's tired, she's got so much to do. And so, there's nothing for it, he sits down by the computer again. How nice it would be to watch it along with his wife. But that's out of the question, the man is thinking, surely, she'd threaten him with divorce. (…)

TRANSLATED BY JUDITH SOLLOSY

ALIDA BREMER

Oliva's Garden

The taste of olive oil asserted itself in my memory. I knew that the letter writer was not talking of those pale yellow, thin, virginal oils in tiny, elegant, Italian bottles, but of those vividly green, viscous, slightly bitter oils, reaching me in Germany in Fanta or Cola plastic bottles; my father sends them to me whenever an opportunity arises, he buys them from the market-women in Šibenik or Split, I then decant them into dark green mineral water bottles.

My father has smuggled quite a few goods across EU borders for that matter: an octopus, for instance, which was taken out of the ice in Dalmatia in the early morning, arriving in Westphalia the next day thawed just on time, because you either have to beat an octopus after the catch against the quay wall for a sufficient amount of time, or – since the beginning of the technical era – you have to freeze it, in order to get it soft enough for an octopus salad. There was also a leg of smoked ham with very little meat left on it, together with a little pouch of pinto beans, which my father – hardly out of the car – set up for a *pašta-fažol*, a bean-pasta stew, originally known under the Italian name of *pasta e fagioli*, a fact which would have merely roused my father to indignation, so I have never brought it to his notice. This dish can only be a success, if one has a ham shank from the Drniš region for the stock at one's disposal. The number of hams from Drniš is now somewhat limited, particularly since Ratko Mladić was given his general's rank for certain services in – of all places! – this region, before moving on to Bosnia and Herzegovina; this time, therefore, my father brought along for me not a whole ham, but merely the bone.

While I was studying in Italy, he once had had a portion of cooked chard with potato cubes, seasoned with olive oil and a hint of black pepper transported by ferry to Ancona and then on to Rome by train. Upon arrival of the meal in my Roman room on an April evening, the bearer of this present told me that my father, confronted with her remark olive oil and chard, let alone potatoes, were really to be found in Rome as well, had replied dryly: "But not such."

He transported smoked sausages from Vrlika, fresh, round pieces of cheese, reminding me of Mozzarella, a remark he dismissed with a disdainful gesture declaring Mozzarella would taste like soap, he sent almonds, walnuts, pears, anchovies, milk-fermented cabbages, indispensable for cooking *sarma*, a dish originating undoubtedly in the Turkish *dolma* – but how can the foreign origin stand up to our indigenous refinement!

When the news of mad cow disease in Europe had also made it to my town of birth, my father called, asking worriedly, whether I thought a pilot flying from Split to Düsseldorf would be prepared – of course for some remuneration, and if he, an old man, asked very politely – to take some thinly cut schnitzels with him to Germany? His brother had just slaughtered a calf, and because I would become either poisoned, crazy or anaemic in Europe in the long run anyway, these little schnitzels from a healthy calf could at least save me for the time being. If the pilot had no objections, he would bring small, suitably packaged portions of meat to him at the airport once a week, but then again, good calves being rare, so my father, he would surely be able to find something regularly, whether pig, veal or lamb, it would always be of the best quality, he could also get hold of decent chickens and naturally of fresh eggs, too, he would happily assemble a packet respectively for the pilot as well, needless to say that he would meet the pilot's goodwill with his own. I would just have to drive the 120 km to the airport and receive his consignments there.

Luckily, I could talk him out of the idea, by mentioning with great regret my doubts regarding the flexibility of today's Croatian pilots, a completely different breed compared to the good old Yugo-bus drivers, who transport guest workers back and forth for days.

Quite often, his consignments ended up in the rubbish. The smoked ribs exuded an unpleasant odour, moths flew up from the flour, it dripped out of badly closed containers and stank of fish, the mussels showed dark discolourations in their sagging yellow flesh, the homemade wine tasted of every heat wave and all the shaking it had been exposed to in the car boot. Only the spirits and oils remained unharmed by transport.

Now, there opened up the prospect of an oil production of my own!

TRANSLATED BY TRUDE STEGMANN

(extract from the novel written with a Grenzgänger-grant of the Robert Bosch Foundation)

RODERIK SIX

Flood

This is the end.

I am standing by the water's edge, peering at the flat horizon. Next to me lies the large red kayak, its nose half-submerged in the water. It splashes, hollow-sounding, against the hard, plastic hull.

And it is still raining. It is a gentle rain that leans into me, a rain you can actually see slanting in the sky. A dismal curtain, prey to a listless wind. Drops are falling into the two cockpits of the red kayak, but that is no problem. I will simply haul it up a bit later and turn it over. In between the two openings is a handy, practically watertight compartment. It is empty at the moment.

The bank is not exactly a bank. No pebbles, reeds or mud. No jetty or bollards, but paving stones. Nearby, a zebra crossing recedes into the water, its final white stripe like rippling marble, a treasure from another world.

Somewhere between the horizon and me, the gothic towers rise above the steely water surface, forsaken, like fancy cakes at an abandoned buffet. The jet-black birds are nowhere to be seen, but that does not mean a thing.

Behind me, far behind me, stands Torres. Cold, dripping with damp, glistening, as though someone had dipped the building in slime. I try not to think about it.

The gap is still there too. Right now it looks like a ridged tube, a passage of wet wool, revealing the merest suggestion of light. No bright yellow halo, just a greyish hole in the cloud cover, little more than an inflamed wound that refuses to heal.

No rainbow today. The light is not bright enough. Thank goodness. The wealth of colours was getting on my nerves. The cheery spectacle was just as inappropriate as a peacock on a dung-hill.

[…]

The city has given up the fight.

Its buildings are being eroded by the incessant rain. Increasingly, large pieces of debris obstruct the pavements; the concrete crumbles when you kick it. Occasionally, in the distance, you hear thunderous rumbling and creaking, followed by the roar of falling bricks. Clouds of grey dust billow beside the façades of the townhouses until the rain beats them down again. When it happens nearby, the ground shakes beneath your feet. These days it is better to walk down the middle of the road.

Closer to the water's edge, the houses are subsiding. The foundations are slowly softening and the walls are starting to warp, as if someone had taken hold of the frame and was wringing it like a cloth. Gripped by a bizarre hankering, the buildings list towards the lake until they collapse and get swallowed up by the water.

Plant life is teeming.

Strange plants are appearing out of sewers, sporting leathery leaves that grow to a terrifying size, big enough for a human to lie in were it not for the razor-sharp thorns at the end of each vein. Little stands in their way as the plants take over roundabouts and squares.

The upper parts of some façades are completely covered in tall grass that sways in the wind. The vertical lawns are not unlike a winter coat keeping the buildings nice and snug. If it were not for the constant rain, they would undoubtedly glisten with dew in the mornings. In the afternoon you would see bees and butterflies skimming across them. But flowers are nowhere to be seen.

The bottom floors, where the light is even dimmer, are covered in thick, sticky clusters of moss; hard knobs that grow out of the vents and remind me of broccoli.

Other plants look like garlands as thick as a man's arm; a jumble of tough spears coiling and twisting into a long khaki sausage. They stretch right across the street, linking houses through front doors, split letterboxes and broken windows, like a new system of piping, or even a new communications network. Sometimes they take possession of an entire car. After slipping through a door they fill it to bursting. A couple of days later the vehicle will have disappeared. A green tangle the size of a garage and some pieces of glass on the road are all that remain.

The plants are best left alone. The green spears are extremely sticky and leave your skin burning when you rip them off. Not to mention the itching caused by the downy hairs. Once they get into your clothes, you scratch yourself silly and there is usually nothing for it but to burn them in the barrel and plunder a new wardrobe.

The crescent-shaped stings on the man-sized leaves look like the claws of prehistoric monsters. Take an axe to the growth and a viscous beige substance will seep from the stems, smelling of rotten eggs and making your eyes water. The stench is unbearable.

The streets are theirs now. I am forced to make lengthy detours to get back to Torres and once there I have to walk the same path in the courtyard every day to keep it more or less passable. The table salt I sprinkled in the beginning has no effect. Washed away by the rain.

I clamber back up through the labyrinth that the plants have created and that changes shape from one day to the next.

The roundabout has turned into a public garden. Only the white flagpoles are unassailable as they jut into the sky. At the top, the fabric has long since rotted away.

This is no man's land.

In front of the gutted supermarket the plants are gratefully using the barricade of shopping trolleys as a climbing frame. The metalwork has all but disappeared, leaving just the odd orange handle with coin lock and a couple of rubber wheels.

Down the front of the sandwich bar I can just make out a greasy handprint, like a greeting from a bygone era. I give a small wave back.

I embark on the final ascent, the steepest section, the mountain where Torres is situated. The windows of the houses along the way have all been boarded up. Where the doors are open, nobody is home.

We must not harbour any illusions: soon this city will be gone, turned forest, a jungle where we do not belong. We have been rendered obsolete, redundant chunks of meat, which, at best, may serve as compost.

From now on it is better to be a tree.

TRANSLATED BY LAURA VROOMEN

(extract from the novel, sample translation by the courtasy of the Flamish Literature Fond)

HASSAN PREISLER

Brown Man's Burden

My name is Hassan Preisler. I've participated in forums where subjects like equal treatment, diversity, inclusion, and integration, are on the table. Veritably, I'm an actor, but I put on my conference jacket and dress shoes, trim my beard, and give talks on my childhood, and show film clips of other people of color who also feel inferior, and I sit on panels with other people of color who, like me, are paid handsome fees to describe how it feels to be colored, in a white world. We sit in town halls, theaters, cinemas, museums, libraries. Anywhere a room can be found, a conference held. Just like Blackwater milked the war chest, the soldiers of the integration industry have had free rein to run drive bys and open fire on civilians in the name of the cause. With their graying hair and balding heads, politicians, CEOs, producers, directors, and consultants sit opposite me. Their shirts are expensive and their collars stiff, and although they sit and I stand, they still hover over me, but the corners of their mouths are dry, and their hands are in tense grip of the flimsy plastic water cups they raise to their lips, and the cups are subsequently refilled by subservient smiling volunteer workers. The tall gentlemen are scared of the tribunal, and it has subpoenaed me as a witness, and we are in Nürnberg, Johannesburg, and the Haag, and we all rise when the great integration monster comes in writhing through the doorway in its long black gown and its white cross-collar and wig, shedding its name in front of our very eyes, turning into the inclusion monster, smiling, and I'm called to the stand, and I'm no longer a foreign worker, I'm a guest worker, and I'm no longer an immigrant, I'm a new-Dane, and I no longer have a minority background, I'm of intercultural descent, and I'm no longer a first- or second- or third- or fourth- or fifth-generation immigrant, and I'm allowed to blindfold the tall gentlemen and spin the cylinder and let the trigger click with the muzzle against their temples. "Arm yourselves with patience", they say, and "think of that time when we had a black woman give the weather forecast", one of them says, with his bald head, glasses, and beard, and he holds me closely against him, and I'm stuck in his grip, and I don't know which leg to stand on, because he smells just like grandfather Mogens, but he looks like the picture from the history book of the officer in the red uniform in Delhi, who mows down my Indian forefather with a hand-cranked Gatling gun, while my Indian forefather shouts, "Long live the revolution", in Urdu, because he wants to be lord of his own manor, and we pull ourselves free, and I'm at my wits' end.

I meet my May on New Year's Eve at an ad agency party, and she's invited by the twins, Mads and Andreas, and I'm invited by Who Knows, and I arrive with a bird formation of women behind me, and it's me breaking the wind, and I do it in a tuxedo, and I'm flying high just now, because it's been a long time since I've listened to Hassan, and he's got lots to tell, since back in Beirut Yalda packed her bag and flamenco dresses and left, and in Aarhus he played to empty seats and a two star review from The Aarhus Post, and in the north of Copenhagen, his grandfather Mogens collapsed on the crapper with a lump in his skull, and they pumped him up with cortisone and wrapped him in white and lay him high up with a panoramic view over the highway, and grandfather Mogens let go of his personality and pointed to the window and said to mother, "Those Hobbits just drive on and drive on", and grandfather Mogens withered slowly in his bed, and his eyes sank deeper in their sockets, and his skin sagged lower around his skull, and grandfather Mogens signed off open-mouthed with a scanty sigh, "Ah", and we departed with him from Utzon's Church in benign Bagsværd, and the priest with the long beard let me read the speech I wrote to grandfather Mogens and his picture book beautiful Birthe, whom he met when grandmother Else shrank into herself, and I stood up and walked down the aisle and unfolded my piece of paper, and I leaned against the coffin to support my trembling legs.

Some years later, at Fælledgården nursing home, picture book beautiful Birthe died with memories of none other than men, men that were greedy, and men that were generous, and the greediest had a name which sounded something like bam-bambam, and the most generous had a name which sounded more like bamboom-bamboom-bamboom, and I manage to visit Birthe just in time, and we look at pictures of grandfather Mogens, and we drink tea and eat cookies, and she says, "Who is it you are again?", and I say, "I'm Hassan", and think, "I've been here before", and I'm back with grandmother Else at Møllegården nursing home, and grandmother Else says, "Who is it you are again?", and I say, "I'm Hassan". I can't bear visiting grandmother Else, but with a little help from my guilt I drag myself up and take the train to lazy Lyngby and the city bus to the lake, and I get off, and I open my umbrella, and I walk past a boy scout cabin and an antenna tower, and I get there, and the smell of fragrance-free washing powder and tasteless instant mashed potato powder reel me in through the drab sounding sliding door, and there are corridors of red bricks, and floral patterned patchwork in wooden frames, and slippery linoleum floors, and I see the day room from a long distance, and I halt for a second, for today grandmother Else is up and around, and today grandmother Else is holding court, and grandmother Else is traveling to far away places, taking the others with her, and she seizes the day, and she paints the dayroom red, and she is Karen Blixen and Emma Goldman and Asta Nielsen, and I take a step into her story, and, "Here comes my cousin Hassan", she says, and "he's from India. Maharaja", and grandmother Else is proud as the pope.

(extract from the novel, sample transation by the courtesy of the Danish trt Center)

DUBRAVKA UGREŠIČ

We are barbarians

UGREŠIČ, Dubravka
Europe in Sepia
University of Rochester: Open Letter Books, 2014

Karaoke Culture
University of Rochester: Open Letter Books, 2011

Baba Yaga Laid An Egg
Grove Press, 2010

Nobody's Home
University of Rochester: Open Letter Books, 2008

The Ministry of Pain
Ecco Press, 2006

Lend Me Your Character
Dalkey Archive Press, 2004

Thank You For Not Reading
Dalkey Archive Press, 2003

The Museum of Unconditional Surrender
Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998

The Culture of Lies
Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998

Have A Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream
Viking Penguin, 1995

Fording the Stream of Consciousness
Northwestern University Press, 1993

In the Jaws of Life and Other Stories
Northwestern University Press, 1993

We are barbarians. The members of our tribe bear the invisible stamp of Columbus on their foreheads. We travel west and end up east; indeed, the farther west we go the farther east we get. Our tribe is cursed.

We settle on the outskirts of cities. We choose them so we can gather up our tents when the time comes and set off again, move farther west to get farther east. We live in grey, crowded, cheaply constructed prefabs that encircle the city centre like keys on a castellan's ring. Some people call them ghettos.

All the settlements are the same. We can be recognized by the round metal satellite dishes sticking out from our balconies, the devices that enable us to feel the pulse of the people we have left behind. *We*, the losers, are still at one with the lifeblood of the land *we* abandoned in hatred. *They* don't have satellite dishes; *they* have dogs. *We* are afraid of dogs. At twilight *their* dogs go out onto the balconies and bark *their* messages to one another. The barking bounces back and forth against the concrete buildings like ping-pong balls. The echo drives them mad. They bark even louder.

We have children. We multiply dangerously. Kangaroos are said to have one of their young in tow, another in their pockets, a third in their wombs on the point of bursting out and a fourth, in the form of a barely fertilized egg, waiting to take its place. Our women are as big as kangaroos: they have their numerous offspring in tow like the keys on the ring of a castellan's wife. Our children have straight necks, dark complexions, dark hair and black eyes; our children are clones, the males little men, the spit and image of their fathers, the females little women, the spit and image of their mothers.

Here we bring neatly packed food home from Basis and Aldi and Lidl and Dirk van de Broek; there we buy wholesale, in bulk. Our fish markets reek of fish, our butcher shops of blood. Our shops are dirty: we buy meat from large plastic barrels filled with brine. We finger everything, pick at it, poke at it, turn it over, listen to it and then drag it from stall to stall. The bazaar is the very heart of our existence.

Our settlements are like oases: they satisfy our every need. They've got nursery schools and elementary schools and driving schools; they've got post offices and filling stations and telecom centres offering cheap rates to the home country; they've got dry cleaners and launderettes and beauty salons, where our people cut our people's hair; they've got coffee shops, where the young can get their hashish, and the other youth centre, Turkse Pizza; and they've got our place of worship and two or three of our pubs for the men. We've got our pubs; they have got theirs. The zones are sharply delineated. No tourists find their way to us, except when lost. As for the high life, the 'canal people', they say they need a low-life visa. And what would they do here anyway? So they stick to their part of town and we to ours. Everyone feels safer that way, more at home.

We are barbarians. We are the flipside of the perfect society, we are its thumb-nosing jack-in-the-box, its demi-monde, its ugly underside – its parallel world. We wade through its shit, canine and human; we confront its rats in our early-morning and late-night peregrinations. The wind comes to us to blow litter through the air: the plastic bags we leave behind, the Mars, Kit-Kat and Snickers wrappers our children drop. And every morning seagulls come to dine on rotting junk food, magpies to peck at Turkish pizza.

Our young men are wild and sullen, full of anger. At night they converge in the concrete wasteland like packs of stray dogs and let off steam till the small hours. They chase one another across abandoned playgrounds, swinging on swings, jumping and shouting; they yank receivers out of public phone booths; they hurl stones at car windows; they steal whatever they can lay their hands on; they play football with empty beer cans that sound like machine guns; they ride their motorcycles like maniacs through the settlements. Night-time is their time. We hide and tremble like mice: their caterwauling makes our blood run cold. The police give our zone a wide berth; they let the screams eat into us like acid. Our young men are quick with their knives: their knives are extensions of their hands. Our young men are champion spitters: their spittle marks their territory as dogs' urine marks theirs. And they always run together, in a pack, like village curs.

Our young women are quiet. That their very existence is an embarrassment to them shows clearly on their faces. Hair hidden under kerchiefs, eyes fixed on the ground, they slip through the city like shadows. If you happen to see one in a tram, she will be hunched over a prayer book chomping the sacred syllables like so many sunflower seeds. She will soon alight, looking neither right nor left, and scurry off, still mouthing the text, her lips in constant motion, like a camel's.

Our beetle-browed men congregate around turquoise-domed concrete mosques that look more like day-care centres than places of worship. In summer they squat against their mosque, scratching their backs on its walls and seeking relief from the heat (though there is no sun). They mill about, sniffing at one another, circling the mosque, hands behind backs, pausing, shifting their weight from one foot to the other, patting one another on the back, embracing when they meet, embracing when they part, and when on special holidays the mosque is full they overflow onto the asphalt and kneel there facing east. Like a dog its bone, our men gnaw their mosque from dawn till dusk.

And when the sky comes down so low that it touches our heads, when the barometer sinks and the air is so humid we breathe through gills, then our bodies grow heavy and fall to the bottom, where there are no zones, where we crawl about on all fours, spent like fish after spawning. And only there, at rock bottom, do our scales graze one another, do our fins meet as we pass, do we press our gills to those of another.

We are barbarians. We have no writing; we leave our signatures on the wind: we utter sounds, we signal with our calls, our shouts, our screams, our spit. That is how we mark our territory. Our fingers drum on everything they touch: dustbins, windowpanes, pipes. We drum, therefore we are. We make rackets, rackets as painful as toothaches. We bawl at weddings and wail at funerals, our women's convulsive voices battering the concrete façades like tempests. We break glasses and go bang: firecrackers are our favourite toys. Sound is our alphabet, the noise we produce is the only proof that we exist, the only trace we leave behind. We are like dogs: we bark. We bark at the lowering grey sky weighing down on our heads.

We are sleepers. The members of our tribe bear the invisible stamp of Columbus on their foreheads. We travel west and end up east; indeed, the farther west we go the farther east we get. Our tribe is cursed. Returning to the lands whence we came spells our death; remaining in the lands whither we have come spells defeat. Hence the endless repetition, in our dreams, of the departure sequence, the moment of departure being our only moment of triumph. Sometimes during our short walk home from the mosque we are overcome by sleepiness and find a bench beneath a tree doing its best to grow. The air is moist and warm, the neon moon full, the night sky navy blue. And so we fall asleep in the concrete oasis under the concrete tree and rerun the departure sequence for the umpteenth time. We take up our tents, hoist our bags on our back, and up comes a gale and churns the desert sand, and our silhouettes start to fade, and we vanish altogether in the thick curtain of sand.

TRANSLATED BY MICHAEL HENRY HEIM

(extract from the book Ministry of Pain)

HATICE MERYEM INTERVIEWED AMY SPANGLER AND İDIL AYDOĞAN

"Literature is the spice of life"

■ *How would you describe yourself and your work to an audience that doesn't know you at all?*

■ There was something Fethi Naci said about Turkish literature. I do not totally agree with him but I like descriptions of literature which draw parallels with other areas of life. He said that Turkish literature was like Turkish football. But that Turkish football had recently left Turkish literature behind. This was back when they became UEFA champions. I think that they're on about even footing now with Orhan Pamuk. It is difficult to talk about your own work. But I have always thought I resembled Turkey. I used to think this back when I was a child too. Where I stood in my class in school as a kid, my position in the places I worked, all my feelings of deficiency in my relationships, my lack of self-confidence, my weaknesses, lack of knowledge, I have always felt incomplete. And now that is how I see myself on the literary scene. I find myself insufficient and incomplete. But I'm now aware that all these deficiencies can be seen as a kind of unique flavour. I don't really know. What I mean is; literature is something I do without really knowing. It's not really something I do knowingly. When I worked in the bank I did that knowingly, that is the sort of work you do knowingly. I believe this is how real authors write. So I'm sort of flattering myself here. But I also know that I do it wrong, and that it's incomplete. I mostly find my narrative ability insufficient. I want to tell someone's story. I want to write about a friend, my mother, a cat, a dog, a bird, good and evil, all human feelings, and I find myself insufficient in describing all of them. But I force myself. And I know that this is exactly what pushes me to write. I have never been satisfied with my writing. And I don't think I ever will be.

My grandmother was of a Kurdish family, full of wonderful stories

■ *What were you like as a child?*

■ My parents got divorced when I was five. I went to five or six different primary schools. We moved around a lot. My mother and father had a truly passionate relationship. They were divorced but they wouldn't stop seeing each other and it wasn't because of me. There was this constant tension because they just wouldn't let go of each other. I was actually a lost child, amid all that tension. But I remember that I had turned that loss into an advantage back then. I was a curious child, I was interested in things. I remember back then that I had developed an extraordinary imagination. I went to boarding school from the age of five to eight. But then I moved in with my grandmother and in doing so met an extraordinary woman. My grandmother was the daughter of a Kurdish family and she was a treasure full of wonderful stories. And I was always special to her, perhaps because my mum and dad were divorced. She had seventeen grandchildren and I was her favourite. She would always say that she loved me most of all in front of everyone. Hatice is different she would say. And I loved her every bit as much as she loved me. She had this book which I haven't managed to find yet, Turkish translations of surahs from the Koran. They were short stories or anecdotes that had been retold. She would make me read them every night. In Turkish. She didn't speak Arabic herself. She didn't perform salaat, she was Alawi, and never spoke a word of Kurdish. She was a thoroughly assimilated Kurd. She didn't like Kurds but she was a Kurd herself. Anyway, she is someone I will always deeply miss. Not because she was my grandmother, but because she was a person so full of stories, the kind of person I wish I could be around all the time. She had this suitcase under her bed. And in that suitcase there was a sack, and in that sack forty other small sacks, and inside each small sack was a stone, and each stone had its own story. I haven't written her stone stories yet, but I hope to someday. Each stone had its own tale of goodness, evil, treachery, in which virtues were praised and vices were condemned. She would tell me their stories. Once upon a time, each of those stones used to be other objects, say like, it was a grain of rice, but it had turned to stone, an olive seed, but it had turned to stone, because… well there are millions of stories which I won't tell you now. Some of them were objects that turned to stone after a person had done evil to some other person. Can you imagine being eight years old and living with a woman who tells you stories like that? Before then, because I went to boarding school, I never knew what it was to play outside. Then I moved in with my grandmother, and she lived in a remote area on the suburbs of İstanbul, where then there were only empty land and fields. There were small houses on those vast fields. I was a talented child when it came to organising games and getting my friends to play them. I would tell the other kids stories, make things up, lie to them, trick them. Witch stories, Jinn stories… Stuff like, an old man used to live in that deserted house, he had a bucket full of gold coins… and after dark, we'd all go on an expedition to the house where the old man used to live. That period of my childhood was wonderful. I flew kites in those fields. They were the years when I felt free. But then on the other hand, there was the tension caused by my mother and father. They got back together when I was eleven. I always say this, and today I am saying it as a mother: sometimes, it is just better for parents to stay away from each other. When my parents got back together, I entered a very dark, depressing period. From the age of eleven until I graduated from college, I was in a state of paralysis, a sort of coma, I was numb. You know when you can't see the world clearly, when nothing ever seems right, a truly unhealthy state. When I think about it today, I still get upset to think how that curious child who made up games and had a boundless imagination that allowed her to make up and tell all those scary stories disappeared and was replaced by this numb person. But I don't know, maybe it was a necessary period in the process of my becoming who I am.

I was going to travel the world

■ *So when exactly did you begin writing? Did you write when you were young?*

■ Well, I used to write poems when I was in secondary school. Very short, sweet little poems. I mostly wrote poems about nature. But I really started writing when I was in university. Suddenly I had this great desire to keep a regular diary, and so I felt the need to write in that diary until my arm just about fell off. I just couldn't stop. I wrote everything in great detail. It was very tiring though. I just wanted to write simple diary entries, but I couldn't. And then, in my last year, I started writing short stories, but I didn't tell anyone, and I didn't send them off to any literary journals or anything. To tell you the truth, I didn't even know that such a world existed. But after I started writing, I felt this great sense of relief. For the very first time. Then I graduated and started working in a bank. I was living a life I had never wanted for myself. And then I met Metin. He is a caricaturist and a writer, a humorist, as you already know. I had him read my early stories. I'd ask him to have a look at them, and then we'd discuss them together. Afterwards, I sent those stories to a competition at the literary journal *Varlık*. And I received an honourable mention award. After I received that award, a process of recovery began for me. That's what I would call it. And after that I quit my job at the bank. And then I went to the UK.

■ *Yes. We were going to ask you about that. Tell us a bit about your experiences there.*

■ I went as an au-pair. What I really had in mind was to stay there for a couple of months, and from there I'd go to France, and from there to Malaysia, and from there to New Zealand. I was going to travel the world. I worked as a cleaner in

several different homes. I was unbelievably happy. I woke up early in the mornings, at seven o'clock. I'd do the cleaning until twelve. And then I'd take a shower and then, well I was in the countryside in north London where there were these huge parks extending as far as the eye could see, and so, I'd grab a book, like one of the novels in Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*, and I'd just let go and lose myself in the deep love stories of *Justine*, or *Clea*. It was wonderful. I read a lot of books. I worked a lot. I had decided to become an author when I left Turkey. I felt that it was too late, that I was too old. But when I think about it today, I was only twenty-three. But I felt that it was too late for everything and that I was incapable, not fully equipped. I stayed there for six months. I can honestly say that it was the most productive period of my life. I was fascinated by the difference between mental and physical labour. Physical labour is truly amazing. When you're physically exhausted and you take a shower to cleanse yourself, and then you turn your gaze to the world with those weary but keen eyes and return to your own tranquil or not so tranquil state of mind and begin to observe and analyse things again, this had made me extremely creative. I returned with a great number of drafts of short stories. And I was physically recovered. The process of my becoming a writer has been a process of recovery. Before I decided to become a writer, I was an unhealthy person. After I started writing, I could feel that I was getting better. I still don't feel fully recovered but… I have managed to break free of all that chaos. I now feel a lot better.

■ *Tell us about your first book,* Siftah.

■ In *Siftah* there are several sacks, several stones that belong to me, and I feel as if I sometimes delve my hand into that book and pick one of those stones out. *İnsan Kısım Kısım Yer Damar Damar* is something I took from there. It was also the source for *Sinek Kadar Kocam Olsun*. I think it will always be my fountainhead. The stories in *Siftah* are amateur, not very well written, the language is perhaps a bit sloppy. But it is still my source and there are still a few things I think I could pick out from there and write. None of those stories are connected to each other and when I look back today, I can see that each was written in a distinct moment of delirium. Looking back now, I see them not as distinct stories but as distinct states of mind that all belong to me. They are all immanent, embedded in me, and the last thing to arise from there was Kozluk, and now other things will arise. I'm working on a few things now.

■ *And then* Sinek Kadar Kocam Olsun Başımda Bulunsun *appeared in 2002.*

■ Yes. Well, first I wrote this story which consisted of short paragraphs each on a different woman's experience. They begin; if I were an Imam's wife, if I were a butcher's wife… and so on. It was published in the literary journal *Varlık*. After it was published, the editor Enver Ercan called me and said 'Meryem, a few people have called me about this story, some of these people are prestigious authors, others are readers who said that they loved it.' I had more to write anyway, so I decided to make that short story into a book. So I wrote more and when I had thirty pieces, I had it published as *Sinek Kadar Kocam Olsun Başımda Bulunsun* in 2002. It was published by İletişim. And something I could never have imagined happened. The book sold a lot of copies. In the first week it was reprinted three times. In the first month it was reprinted five times and this went on throughout the rest of the year. And I think it will always sell well as long as it's advertised properly. But that's not what really matters, the sales I mean. The women I wrote about in that book were all common people. The greatest praise I received for that book was something my friend who works in Arkadaş bookstore in İstiklal told me. He said 'Meryem, you should see the women who come to buy your book, their hands are all sore and they look like they've just finished doing the washing up, and have stormed out to get your book.' I was so happy. This was such great praise. Every author would want this. I mean, it's not just about selling well; it's about quality, who really reads your books.

■ *So how did you get around to creating Kozluk?*

■ I didn't really do it consciously. I mean, I didn't set out with the idea to write a book about the poor. But then again this was something in my unconscious that kept pestering me. Both because I have a background in magazine publishing, and because of my family background. My family is from Sivas, they immigrated to İstanbul in the 60's and although it has been fifty years, and fifty years is a very long time, they are still divided amongst themselves as those who have managed to adapt and those who haven't. You can't really say that they are of the wealthier class. So I know all that I know from my personal experiences. Therefore I am familiar with poverty, and as magazine publisher, as a person who is socially responsible, as a person who has a point of view in life, and as a person who has a point of view that definitely leans to the left, I know that this problem exists in Turkey and I'd like to tell the stories of these people. I know these people and their problems very well. I know what they laugh at. I see you have a question for me there (*peeping at our notes*), who is Zümrüt, who is Elmas? Zümrüt is the common name for all the women I know that are like her, Elmas is the common name for all the young girls I know that live in the shanties. Cavit, the name for all the idle, unemployed, aimless, weak and feeble men. And his weakness is not just about money, he is spiritually weak as well, he feels feeble, and that's why he keeps saying that he has no one to lean on. But I tried to write about them in blatant honesty, portraying all their cunningness and everything. I wasn't trying to glorify poverty or trying to get the reader to feel sorry for them. I wrote about them clear and simple, showing all their cunningness and shrewdness, their slyness, and their cheerfulness. And the parts I enjoyed writing the most were chapters which showed how simple and ordinary objects were of vital importance to them. But I didn't sit down to write a three hundred page novel. I started writing a story, as always, and it just kept going. It could have gone on forever. That's why I found it so difficult to finish. They always say you need some understanding of engineering to write a novel, they say you need some sort of academic background. A novel is sort of like a project if you come to think about it. It's a building with its base and roof, a beginning and an end.

■ *A construct.*

■ Yes, a construct. And within that construct I became deaf and dumb. I wanted to finish it but I just couldn't, and I didn't know where it was leading to, their life just kept on running. It's morning, it's evening, they wake up, they go to bed, the baby cries, there's the disabled girl… I could have gone on forever. There's so much to write about in Kozluk.

■ *We wanted to ask you about the relationship between translator and author.*

INNOCENCE FOUNDATION

■ I have to confess that up until recently, I had never given it much thought. Because since the publication of my first book, I have known and been told by everyone, that I write in a very local language. I have been told that my writing is so local and that I use so many Turkish idioms and proverbs that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for my work to be translated into another language. A lot of people have told me that all the flavour would be lost; the text would no longer be the same, but a recreation of the translator. So I've only recently started thinking about this. I think it can be possible if the author and translator spend plenty of time together (of course this can only apply to authors that are still alive), get to know each other better and get a grasp of the daily language each uses. I'm saying this, but I have no idea if it's true. Ok, the text has to be of primary importance, but the way an author expresses herself can be an assistive element for the translator. How the author speaks, where she looks and what she sees. Other than this, I really have no knowledge.

■ *Well, the local language, idioms and proverbs you use do cause a certain unfamiliarity when translated. Or else the text loses its originality. I always ask myself what my mother would have said in that certain situation. But if I use the idioms that my mother would have used, then the text is something totally different.*

■ I have thought about that, I haven't come to any sort of conclusion, but I can tell you about what I thought. I could write the same story, any of my stories, plain and translatable. Any author could do that. This is a matter of preference. But when you're in a tumult as you write, as you create something, sometimes you write in a delirium, real fast, and you read through it and do some editing afterwards. But when you've finished writing and all these idioms and proverbs have rightly found their place, you can't go back and take them out thinking, 'What if it's ever translated?' The moment you think this, you become a bank clerk making calculations, and I dropped out of that. The terms used in a bank are universal. That's what makes Literature so valuable. I mean, it's those idioms and proverbs that make the Turkish Turkish, the German German, the French French, and the Argentinean Argentinean. And I do believe it is possible. I mean, those idioms can be translated. Perhaps it wouldn't be easy. But they do say that English is a language that has forty thousand words, whereas in Turkish we have far fewer words. So there must be some sort of equivalence. It's impossible for there not to be. There has to be a saying in English for*İnsan Kısım Kısım Yer Damar Damar*. Something that means the more different people there are, the more different ideas and thoughts you get. Something that would give the same flavour.

■ *Are there writers in Turkey you think are not being given the attention they deserve?*

■ There are writers in Turkey that I would like to see come to the forefront. They're generally not found literary enough. Either because they are considered too marginal, or found to be too simple. Therefore, they are not believed to be worthy of respect. I see that there is wider diversity in European and American literature. On the one hand you have huge and heavy, serious literary texts, and on the other you have works in which marginal lives are told. We praise both. We love both Bukowski and any other important author in American literature. We accept everything when it's foreign, but when it's native, it's a whole different story. When we come to talk about literature in Turkey, we begin with Tanpınar and end with Orhan Pamuk, and sometimes stick in Latife Tekin and Yaşar Kemal. *This* is literature. Well, no it's not. There are such peculiar lives. Perhaps the only author who has told the story of how different and colourful lives are lived here in Turkey is Metin Kaçan, in his Dolapdere story, *Ağır Roman*, and I'm sure you'll remember the tremendous impact that that novel made. There are people today who lead really different lives. Especially around Beyoğlu, there's a seriously rich subculture. And I want them to be known. There's the schizophrenic writer Sibel Torunoğlu. There's Mehmet Kartal, the man is a murderer, a real murderer. Take William Burroughs for example, when he does it, we praise him to the skies, but when our own authors do it, we don't see it the same.

■ *How would you comment on the relationship between literature and society in Turkey today?*

■ Literature played a primary role for us in the past, in the period that corresponds to my childhood. Then I grew up, I reached the age of twenty-five or thirty, and opened my eyes to a world in which literature flowed outside real life. As if it were some sort of sector. The butchers' sector, the banking sector, the textile sector, and finally, the literary sector. There is no such thing. Literature is not a sector but something that embraces all aspects of life; it is the spice of life. This no longer exists, but I am one of those who believe it can be revived.

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DISCUSSIONS

KARL SCHLÖGEL

Europe tests its boundaries

SCHLÖGEL, Karl
Moscow, 1937
Polity Press, 2013

Russian-German Special Relations in the Twentieth Century
Bloomsbury, 2006

A searching movement

With the disappearance of the Iron Curtain – the Great Border – the whole system of coordinates in Europe has changed. The East no longer exists, writes Karl Schlögel, but what has emerged in its place is neither the old nor the new. It is a no-longer and a not-yet.

When I am away at a university in the south or west of Germany and tell people that it is only eighty kilometres, or just under an hour's train journey, from Berlin to the Polish border, my words are always greeted with a disbelieving silence. People have the strangest ideas about what is „behind" Berlin. You can judge the extent of the feeling of foreignness by the astonishment many people experience on their first contact with „the East". They are amazed when they visit Cracow for the first time, and they can hardly believe their eyes when confronted by the Warsaw skyline with its new skyscrapers. The fact that Cracow is one of the oldest university cities worthy of being mentioned in the same breath as Padua, Oxford and Heidelberg only becomes comprehensible when one has been there. Hardly anyone knows that Riga, the capital of Latvia, was one of the leading centres of European Art Nouveau along with Brussels and Barcelona, and people are absolutely thrilled when they finally make it to Leningrad/St. Petersburg and find it hard to believe that this centre of European culture is situated so far away and so very much outside the Western European horizon. This applies not only to people with average perceptive powers but also to high-level European politicians. The image of Europe is still focused on the West. When we speak of the „new Europe", we think first of Brussels, Strasbourg, Luxembourg or even Maastricht, but certainly not of Prague,Warsaw or Budapest, although it was from there that the whole of Europe began. And hardly anyone thinks of Kiev, although it was once known as the „mother of all Russian cities" and the centre of Slavonic Christianity. Our awareness of Europe is, generally speaking, asymmetrical. Eastern Europeans are far more interested in Western Europe than the other way round. During the past decade, millions of Poles, Czechs and Russians travelled to the „other Europe" and acquired first-hand information and impressions, but there was no comparable movement from Western to Eastern Europe. This is not only because the infrastructure is better or there is more to see in the West, but also because we in the West are comparatively uninformed and disinterested. Even though it is partly true that the East is more „backward" and not as modern, that is no reason for the absurdly fanciful ideas we have about Eastern Europe. When we read the reports, we sometimes gain the impression that the East consists of nothing but chaos, crime and collapse, and we are surprised, when we actually go there, to see that children go to school, do their work and lead, admittedly strenuous, but otherwise normal lives. In short, east of Berlin is also Europe, a different Europe that still has to be discovered and assimilated.

Eastern and Western Europe are moving closer together. There is a new network and a new system of coordinates. With the disappearance of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, the whole system of coordinates in Europe has changed. In Berlin I see cars with number plates from Latvia, Russia, the Ukraine and, of course, Poland. The distances have shrunk. Cities that were once complete strangers have become neighbours. It is only just under five hours from Berlin to Prague or Warsaw, and two hours to Stettin or Posen. The airline network has changed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Nowadays you can fly to many cities in the Russian provinces. Europe is acquiring a new network. I observe it on the German-Polish border, where the caravan of stationary lorries is often sixty kilometres long. The whole of Europe is represented at these truck stops, with lorries from Barcelona and Helsinki, Naples and Vilnius, Rotterdam and Samara, Teheran and London. New main traffic routes and corridors are emerging, and new borders. Although the Great Border – the Iron Curtain – no longer exists, there are many new small ones. Anyone travelling from Berlin to St. Petersburg via the Baltic States now has to cross four borders where there used to be only two.

The inner centre, the inner axis of post-war Europe, was the Iron Curtain, the Wall that divided everything up and gave Europe a bipolar geography. The Wall was the principle of order in divided Europe. This is different now. The old historical regions of Europe are drifting apart, sometimes peaceably, as in Czechoslovakia or the Baltic States, sometimes more violently, as in later Yugoslavia or the ex-Soviet Union; and perhaps also in Western Europe, where, quite unexpectedly, a passionate desire for national independence has reappeared. In Europe, the historically different regions are re-emerging more strongly than ever: Northeast Europe around the Baltic Sea, for example, an area that bears the stamp of the Hanseatic League, which experienced an astonishing revival after the elimination of the split, is dreaming the dream of Hong Kong: in the double city of Copenhagen/Gothenburg, in Kaliningrad/Königsberg, and in the greatest urban agglomeration on the Baltic, the five-million city of St. Petersburg. And Southeast Europe, the catchment area of the region's most important capital, Istanbul, which – despite the religious differences – includes part of the Black Sea region, the Aegean Sea and the Balkans, extending as far as Bucharest and Sofia. Even in the south of Russia, on the Crimea and in the Ukraine, one feels something of the influence of the Ottoman-European metropolis, and I believe that it is not only Islamic fundamentalism but also the modernization potential and power of the metropolis with a population of twelve million that is important. Then there is Eastern Europe in the real sense, i.e. the Russian Federation, Belarus and the Ukraine; here, too, the order of things is changing. I do not think there is any doubt about the advancement of Moscow to a Global City of the Eurasian world, but Minsk and Kiev will also play an important role in the network. They will be the modernization centres of their region. Finally, there is Central Europe, i.e. the region which cannot be precisely defined. This was the area that was most badly damaged by the division, yet it is coming together again very fast – towns such as Milan and Vienna, Budapest and Bratislava, Warsaw and Vilnius, Lemberg and Cracow, Prague and Munich. Despite the twentieth-century disasters in which the essential and integral elements of Central Europe disappeared – above all the Jewish and German Diaspora – a strong consciousness of a communal history and tradition that is open to modernization still prevails. The real Western Europe with its centres of Brussels, Luxembourg, Strasbourg and – especially – London, Paris and Amsterdam, with the great „Blue Banana" axis from Manchester via the Rhine and Frankfurt am Main to Marseilles, Barcelona and Turin: this is the genuine, dynamic centre of the unification of post-war Europe, and it will probably remain so. It is in many ways the European coast of the American-transatlantic world, just as Hellas was once situated on the Roman-dominated Mediterranean. And Southern Europe, where the Eternal City and the heart of Old Europe beat and beats, the centre of the Occident. This overview is not complete. It is merely an indicator of the fact that this polarized Europe of old has dissolved into a multipolar Europe, and that we must learn to reckon with these differences, these centrifugal forces, and also with this strength.

Europe cannot be comprehended simply in terms of statistic data or details of distances in kilometres, for it is a phenomenon of the mind, of the collective memory, of national traumas and longings. This, of course, applies particularly to a difficult and strained relationship such as that between the Germans and the peoples of Eastern Europe. After centuries of inspiring and fascinating cooperation, a phase of unprecedented destruction followed in the twentieth century, in which the old network of German cultural relationships broke down. After the German war and German rule from 1939 to 1945, things could never be the same again. Even half a century of peace cannot simply erase traumas of this kind. War, persecution, occupation, philosophical war with the revocation of all the previously valid norms, genocide, and finally the reaction to all this in expulsion and ethnic cleansing – all this has left deep marks. On the other hand, each generation creates its own image of the world and of the past. With the new experiences that we make today, a new history is emerging. The rising generation of Europeans is re-mapping Europe. And it may be that on this map the present plays a greater role than the past that the young people know only from hearsay.

The disappearance of the East brought the end of the old West hot on its heels. Europe was what it was through the whole of the post-war period be cause of the division of the world. Post-war Europe consisted of the opposites of „democracy and dictatorship", of „capitalism and socialism", of „freedom and oppression". These were the ideological codes for the existence of two hemispheres, two different ways of life. The division determined the mental economy of the continent. It defined the alternatives and the lack of alternatives. We always had to decide. Post-war Europe's

solution was the either-or, the unambiguity, the yes or no. Now the East no longer exists. What has emerged in its place is neither the old nor the new. It is a no-longer and a not-yet. It is no longer a dictatorship, nor is it a real democracy, perhaps a „dictocracy". The unambiguity has vanished. The West has lost its enemy in the East. The barbarians, without whom the West apparently cannot live, come from other parts of the world today. The mirror that the West gazed into has disappeared.

The new Europe did not spring from Zeus's brow but is growing up from below. There is a lot to be learned from the new East. In the past ten years the people of Eastern Europe have experienced and been involved in great changes which everyone feared would end in a political and social catastrophe. Despite the terrible wars in Yugoslavia and the Caucasus, the „transformation" was, by and large, peaceful and humane. Although the living conditions of an entire society changed drastically and sometimes brutally, there were no revolts or rebellions or militant conflicts. People showed a high level of social discipline, political wisdom and patience. Confronted with almost hopeless everyday situations and rapid changes of living conditions, they did not lose their nerve, they did not succumb to hysteria and panic, and they developed a remarkable capacity for creative improvisation. This growing Europe is not identical with the strategic plans for Europe drafted in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg. The central planning activities are still bound up with the „expansion of Europe". There are several illusions in this formulation. Firstly, the expansion of the European Union is not the same as the expansion of Europe. Europe is also those parts that do not belong to the EU. Eastern Europe is also Europe. What the essential „core Europe" can learn from Eastern Europe is above all faith in the ability of institutions to renew themselves, in the strength of the basic activities of the civil society, and the improvisational power and ability of countless individuals. Societies like the Polish one, for example, have shown that far-reaching and enduring changes which are desired and understood by the people themselves can be realized in collaboration with them. It is this faith in the self-assured independence of the civil society that is the most important condition for the success of the new Europe.

TRANSLATED BY MAUREEN OBERLI-TURNER

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ALEŠ DEBELJAK

The Perils and Hopes of a European Identity

DEBELJAK, Aleš
The Hidden Handshake: National Identity and European Postcommunism
Rowman & Littlefield, 2004

Reluctant Modernity: The Institution of Art and its Historical Forms
Rowman & Littlefield, 1998

Twilight of the Idols: Recollections of a Lost Yugoslavia
White Pine, 1994

It is a hot summer afternoon and the crowds of tourists are seeking shelter in the shade of the glistening streets of the Umbrian town of Assisi. I am pushing a stroller with a thirsty one-year old baby in front of me, my five-year old girl wants a sandwich and my three-year old son would like to see the dragon on the door hook of the San Francesco Hotel from close. So our family takes a turn to the hotel lobby; perspiring, in khaki shorts, with swollen bags of diapers and picture books, chattering chaotically, we make our way past the solemn modernist paintings on the walls, the bored receptionist and the temptingly luxurious armchairs. Surprisingly gentle music can be heard from the invisible loudspeakers. Although we only pass the lobby and settle on the terrace I am suddenly overwhelmed by a recurring experience. What overcomes me is that same feeling of uneasiness I have regularly experienced in the big hotels of Western Europe and the United States. It is a feeling of uneasiness and vague trepidation that the porter will mercilessly throw me out if I only take one wrong step – which will fatally reveal that I am not familiar with the code of communication and with the spontaneous self-confidence that marks people who know their rightful place in the world. While it may not be immediately obvious that I am an "Easterner", "a Slav" or someone from "the Balkans" and my physiognomy may not say much about my ethnic origin, the insecure movement across the parquet floor nevertheless exposes me. The political economy of insecurity manifests itself in the most minuscule gestures and facial expressions. In my cautious approach, it is not only the experience of socialist poverty which accompanied my student hitch-hiking trips to Western Europe, but, above all, a bitter experience of the hidden non-recognisable identity – which is not the same as being unnoticed. No, this is due to a lack of context and a network of symbolic, cultural and mental signs that could allow the identification of the region I come from. I have a feeling that I owe something to somebody and that it is not my place to be at the parlour table where I could be idly flipping through the pages of today's issue of *l'Esspresso* and the *International Herald Tribune* . Instead, my place – for which I was supposed to be grateful – is at best somewhere outside, on the limits of the acceptable public space, on the terrace, not exactly on the street yet certainly not in the comfort of air-conditioned luxury. This has been reserved for the chosen ones. And I sense that this is not only my personal experience that whispers in my ear, but also the historical – and surely problematic – collective narrative of the region and nation to which I belong.

My American wife is not hampered by these mental obstacles. In principle, all hotels the world over are the same: they serve travellers and meet their needs for food, drinks, safety, familiarity of the language and shelter, perhaps even enjoyable company. Granted, my feeling of frustrating unease may have arisen from personal psychological idiosyncrasies. I will be hard-pressed, however, to believe that this feeling is not hinged, too, on the legacy of communism as a collective environment of customs, styles of behaviour and sediments of social-moral division that had set a privileged nomenclature apart from the anonymous "working class". Moreover, I am increasingly certain that my insecurity is rooted in the no less important fact that the very name of my country, in the hotel lobby in particular and in everyday discussions of people from the street in general, still elicits incomprehensive looks at best and suspicious or even scornful ones at the worst. Slovenia and – without much exaggeration – all of East and Central Europe as a category of everyday public language in the "developed democracies" does not belong into the dictionary of recognisable topography and even less so into the acceptable and accepted form of social recommendation. Since Slovenia is not linguistically domesticated, it cannot expect to be civilised. It is still too unknown, foreign, different.

Both, other social legacy of communism and cultural heritage of "the Other Europe" – as the current post-communist world was once so aptly called by Czeslaw Milosz – still represent the uncertain disturbance or the incomprehensible murmur in the languages of respectable European society. Europe itself – as a civilisational habitus – is exactly the framework in which the countries of the eastern part of the continent project their political, cognitive and emotional aspirations. They measure the depth of their collective pain on its terms, yet they are not its self-evident and integral part. We, who come from the region of blurred spots on the maps, from the birth places of tribal consciousness and fanatic hatred, eastern backwardness and Byzantine corruption, primitive passions and gripping mythical stories – we are, above all, a disturbing figure wherever we turn up.

Us and them

Western Europe has increasingly been able to usurp the historical idea of Europe as a whole by way of political institutions of the Cold War and cultural mechanisms of the production of meaning in the last fifty years. A network of procedures by which the metaphysical mandate has been designed to show the truth and standards of appropriate conduct, has referred to the heritage of Enlightenment and to the professional ethics of responsibility when discussing political co-operation, economic and legal integration. However, it tacitly enhanced the exclusive nature of the European idea. This attitude could – since the time of Crusades – be seen in the persistently negative relations with Muslims as a stereotype for all that is "foreign", for all that does not belong to European civilisation, as Tomas Mastnak brilliantly demonstrated in his book *Christendom and Muslims*. I do not intend to speak here about the special case of Islam in Europe, which is certainly one of the key reasons for the passivity of Western Europe in solving the Balkan crisis and in the almost completely accomplished genocide over the Bosniacs. The Muslims are but a painfully evident metaphor for something that is – without being self-evident and without large conceptual problems – not easily integrated into the symbolic context of the European habitus that is spontaneously recognisable in Western European public. The Muslims are just a provisional, though not mistaken, example for a foreign element which is represented (to different degrees of acceptability) by post-communist lands at the end of the millennium. The predominant form of language, which allows for this exclusivity is not fixed. Regardless of different historical configurations, it derives instead from the fact that modern "Europeanism" as a *forma mentis* was shaped in the period of the Cold War.

Therefore the parameters of selections, which govern the main, if not all, spheres of life in Western Europe, are essentially still marked by the binary assumption of "us" versus "them", as David Kideckel argues in his *Us and Them: Concepts of East and West in the East European Transition* . I do not claim that we are dealing with one kind of public rhetoric only. The plurality of views take place within the supposed framework which is more or less widely accepted among both the elites and the general public. It is assimilated into the horizon of expectations and is part and parcel of interpretative models that account only with difficulty for the changing European map in the geopolitical sense as well as in the sense of cognitive mapping. This cognitive mapping does not cease to reach for well-worn and persistent stereotypes and clichés. And what is more persistent than the stereotype of East Europe as the "Other Europe", as a place of shabby characters and corrupt psychopaths or potentially dangerous beggars with a disregard for rules of decency and law-abiding conduct?

Indeed, it would not be excessively radical to argue that before it has attained any positive unified substance in economic, political, cultural and social terms, Europe as a mental space has already been articulated negatively, by the publicly and institutionally perceived need to contain the common enemy on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The homogenisation of Western Europe could only take place *per negationem*: not by definition of what it is, but on the basis of determining the boundary and by defining what it is not. The physicality of the boundary between "the free world" and "the empire of the red star" has strengthened and legitimised the fearful asymmetry of Europe by its walls, barbed wires, mine fields and trigger-happy guards. In such a context, the mental structure of European identity remained determined by the "foreign" element, by the damaged and the damaging. Moreover, even the positive substance that eventually came to be construed throughout the last fifty years in Western Europe has been put into the service of boundary-maintenance.

Philosophical thoughts, images of cultural creativity and the production of meaning did not suffice when a devastated Western Europe needed to get back on its own feet and to acquire a considerable degree of consolidation after the Second World War. The representation of "Europeanism" had to be based in the impersonal logic of self-propelling principles that have the capacity to provide at first sight a dividing line at the most tangible, direct and therefore the most accessible level. The gospel of the accumulation of capital, that is to say, the procedures of trade and business conduct in the chapters of the Marshall Plan and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), both formulated a few years after the end of the Second World War, played a major unifying role in Western Europe. They came to be accepted as repositories of formative, binding and functionally significant values. Having built more on the developed tradition of industrial capitalism than on the achievements of social democracy, these values have been assimilated in the daily habits of peoples. They have thus set up

the general standard against which all attempts at shifting the social, moral, aesthetic and ideological boundaries are cast as deviant or subversive – as abnormal.

Western Europe as a carrier of these norms and standards has began to translate them into a series of institutions and procedures that were to guarantee their life and the life of those people that honour and uphold them. The European Union, while by no means the only transnational body on the old continent, surely deserves to be seen as the pre-eminent project wherein the aspirations to ensure European commonality are embedded. It is through the EU that Western European countries participate in the formidable task: in the apparently neutral and bureaucratic methods by which standard conduct and norms of conceptual and imaginative appropriation of experience are increasingly transposed into the growing body of formal regulations and procedural rules. These regulations are invested with the belief that they guarantee not only a particular way of doing business and conducting political, economic and social affairs, within and between the member states, but also provide a transcendental meaning for the norms and values they support. In this regard, the triumph of capitalism and democracy after the "velvet revolution" in 1989 was seen as the confirmation of the universal status these norms and values seemingly possess.

However, ten years after the "velvet revolution" and after the violent break up of Yugoslavia, it has become clear that non-reflected "co-ordination" between the "European" symbolic, moral, political and social values on the one hand and the "European" capitalism on the other can no longer be maintained by the line of least resistance. The Pandora's box that was opened after the collapse of the Berlin Wall cannot be closed again. While fanatic nationalism arises in the east part of the continent, and on the basis of old – although not necessarily generally recognisable – ethnic traditions many new countries are born, Western Europe continues to turn a blind eye to the return of a suppressed history, since it insists on the position that the period of the "spring of nations" has been left far behind. It seems that the painful history of the nineteenth century with the unification of the German Länder (lands), the patching-up of Italian provinces ("We have Italy, now we need Italians", exclaimed Massimo D'Azeglio notoriously) and brutal ethnic homogenisation of the French state is nowadays completely forgotten. If these past nationalist movements had been integrated into the symbolic horizon of Europe more clearly, it would not be so easy either to get the impression that nationalism of big countries is legitimate, while in small and new countries the alarm bells have to ring immediately. The nationalist history of Western Europe had to be suppressed inevitably, if the process of integration was to begin at all. The former nationalist nations thus became enthusiastic Europeans under the cover of economic prosperity and a politically strong consensus on the inevitable progress of the "common market". It was in an effort to facilitate precisely this progress, that Winston Churchill based the reconstruction of the European family of which they became members, on a prospective partnership between France and Germany in his famous 1946 speech at Zurich University.

France and Germany, which today represent the leading force of European integration and investment in a strong Europe – though for different reasons – have more or less buried their nationalist animosities by facing the demons of their own totalitarian history (Vichy, the Third Reich). Today, their visions of a future EU structure differ, since they are based on their own particular history (the republican tradition of a strong state in France and a tradition of constitutional checks that were designed to make another Holocaust impossible), which does not, however, prevent us from discerning a common denominator of their essential European efforts: they focus on the nationalism of the fat purse. I don't want to be misunderstood here. I hasten to say that there is no doubt that a historical reconciliation between these countries represents a significant achievement of political deliberation worthy of profound respect; but it would be wrong not to recognise the primacy of the economic logic as the basis of reconciliation between two traditional adversaries. It was precisely the economic integration of Western Europe that was truly essential to Jean Monnet's original idea. Political motivation in guaranteeing a lasting peace between the traditionally hostile countries is possible only if a potential war is not only conceptually incomprehensible, but "materially impractical". The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the mother of today's EU, established in 1951 in Paris by the "original six" (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), became the first truly supra-national organisation "with teeth" in post-war Europe. The master narrative, on which the legitimacy of the post-war Europe is based, was formed in such a way as to prevent renewed catastrophic breakouts of imperial chauvinism and ethnic grandomania, the scars of which needed a long time to heal. Economic funds should be used within the project, process and progress towards unification for achieving a political goal. This political goal is a renunciation of force in the resolution of disputes among the members of the Union.

The creation of the European "community of peace" is therefore predicated on a pragmatic consideration which demands to be teleologically justified. Telos of peace as the supreme value provides an *irrefutable language of necessity* that is embedded in the foundations of the European unification. Due to the effective resistance to external globalisation, such a unification is inevitable if it is to ensure the liberalisation of the intra-European market, to establish habits of institutional co-operation and foster the reduction of mutual cultural and societal suspicion. Economic integration will provide a feeling of mutual dependency among peoples, thus preventing that the necessary conditions for the psychology of fear may occur and will thus hopefully eliminate the breeding ground for a recurrence of the catastrophe because of which Warsaw and Berlin, Budapest and Petrograd were destroyed fifty years ago. The factors which impede global trade and a constant flow of capital are to be abolished, the international conflicts are to end: this is the mantra which is not necessarily heard every day; it works, however, as an obvious assumption of each discourse expressing the intention of "Europeanism". The less you hear it, the more it actually works.

Elusive Common Dreams

In this light, we have to consider the possibilities for the construction of a common template for an inclusive European identity that will have a wide public appeal. Here, too, West European preconceived notions and excessive reliance on integrating effects of "economics" alone undermine more than invite a construction of a viable and shared master narrative. Moreover, the hegemony of the economic nature of the EU continues exactly to the extent to which the comprehensive and rationally organised attempts for the EU to formulate a "common mental framework" are marked by failure. Joint projects such as, for example, the cultural capitals of Europe that foster mutual understanding between European nations, Erasmus and Tempus scholarships designed to encourage the circulation of scientific research, international human rights workshops, and support for building of the democratic mind in the public at large – all these and many other applicable and welcome forms of European co-operation will hang in the vacuum of particularist engagement, if they are not going to be anchored in the common grand narrative. What do I mean by that? I have in mind a substantial and imaginative framework of general identification, that material for "common dreams" which could give all the citizens of Europe a certain minimum of existential meaning and emotional density by which we recognise the adherence and commitment to something which transcends us as individual persons with particular identities. Let us make no bones about it: I do admit that such construction is utopian. It is hinged on the search for balance between the ethnic or cultural tradition on the one hand and on the loyalty to supra-national, over-arching cultural habitus on the other. Yet I can't bring myself to believing that "a reciprocity of horizontal transactions" – as Karl Deutsch described integration that gives each member equal access and a say in the affairs of the whole – can be established without mutual acceptance of a common, publicly shared sphere within which the reciprocity can be conducted.

However, my own experience and consideration of the genesis of national identifications as the strongest modern form of collective allegiance speak about the fact that "Europeanism" cannot be an effective unifying idea unless it wilfully and systematically reaches into the heritage of all European nations. As such, "Europeanism" would have to meet several demanding standards such as inter-generation continuity, perpetuated by a common cultural amalgamation of distinct ethnic traditions, reinforced by a shared memory and the expectation of a common future, as Dominique Moisi suggested in her essay "Dreaming of Europe". In other words, "Europeanism" would have to provide a symbolic order wherein a centripetal force might have the capacity to diminish – though by no means abolish – centrifugal forces of primary identifications one feels as a Pole, German, Catalan, Croatian, Scott or Italian. The emotional charge in these building blocks of "Europeanism" in *statu nascendi*, is here of course undeniable. Varieties of totalitarian nationalist abuse, to which the mobilising power of collective emotional ties in nineteenth century West Europe and in twentieth century East and Central Europe have often been subjected, need not disqualify them from equation. In fact, the dominant political currents in the European "age of extremes" reveal copious evidence in support of the claim that primary national identifications based on shared self-perception of ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage, have certainly become winners in the competition for popular allegiance, reducing to mere options those identifications that

are based on social class or lofty ideals of abstract cosmopolitanism.

"Europeanism" is thus nothing but an "invented tradition" (Eric Hobsbawn) which contains weak hopes that its far-reaching and inclusive agenda might appeal to a majority of individuals and peoples in Europe. So far, alas, precious few efforts have been made to construct such common, master narrative. In part because Europe lacks a common natural language and because it abounds in different national, ethnic and cultural traditions, "Europeanism" does not figure very highly on anyone's list of priorities. Moreover, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that systemic and institutional integration of the European continent increasingly parts ways with cultural integration. It is thus with an understandable sense of regret that I state the obvious: to date the EU has not succeeded in building a satisfactory series of images, values and ideals which do not concern only our immediate existence and its difficulties and joys. "Europeanism" as an orderly constellation of aspirations, values, images, attitudes, convictions and concepts that, when successfully welded together, provides sources of individual inspiration and grants meaning to collective behaviour – such a "Europeanism" is not yet on the horizon. Yet, I am convinced that it needs to be contemplated and consequently imagined together lest we, rich West Europeans and poor Central and East Europeans alike, find ourselves in an undesirable situation. We will share the institutions and agencies for unharnessed financial and labour transactions but our respective cultural spheres will have remained condemned to a life of mutual tolerance, which is to say, mutually encouraged passivity and lack of active interest in each other's immediate experience, as Will Kymlicka suggests in his book *Multicultural Citizenship* . Without a broad social consensus on legitimate and thus publicly generally accepted presence of a grand narrative, in which the Europeans recognise themselves exactly as Europeans and not exclusively as Poles, Germans, Lithuanians or Croatians, the experiments according to its constructions have to resort to abstract postulates. Therefore it is not unusual in this context that the "common mental framework", in which the rich experience of the European cultural diversity would be symbolically integrated and re-modelled, has greater difficulties as regards its form and substance than the "common market". John Stuart Mill in his *Considerations on Representative Government* states this need in a classical formulation: "Among a people without fellow feelings, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist".

Supra-national identifications presuppose the recognition of the necessity of multiple loyalties. Insofar as diversity of cultures has traditionally been a key element of Europe's greatness, this very diversity should be reinforced and celebrated. Forging new European identity as a complex and hybrid "invented tradition" calls for recognition of ineluctably multiple identities of which "Europeanism" may possibly be designed. There is of course an element of wishful thinking here: multi-layered identities should allow for simultaneous celebration of local, national and continental elements. It should not be impossible to be at the same time a Catalan, Spanish and European. Fundamental allegiances need not be exclusionist allegiances.

Alas, the current strategies of ongoing negotiation on the shape and character of "Europeanism" are to a large degree guided by a profound distrust of particular and national identifications. This distrust may rationally be understandable, but it is epistemologically unacceptable in the globalising world in which "Europeanism" is but a particular identity itself. That is why it is impossible to fashion any kind of common ground of shared European identity if one is forced to eschew the fecund local, particular markers. If one shies away from the troublesome dialectics of particular and general, the only sustained answer will have necessarily remained abstract and ultimately non-committal. If one wilfully avoids engaging the relevance of cultural habits and values of different nationalities of Europe, one's "Europeanism" will end up looking hollow, simulated and non-substantive. Neither the appeal of the European Commission nor the universal civic and ethnically blind nature of Europe's supra-national institutions possesses the power to inspire citizens since they are too hollow to mobilise socially and too immaterial to spark spontaneous affection.

A word of caution is needed here, however. Europeanism as an attitude may help us in the effort to find egalitarian, democratic and vibrant communities that render individual life secure and meaningful, but Europeanism as the requirement "from above", as *pro forma* cosmopolitanism, is more likely to rob us of our concreteness and our lived immediacy, unlocking a potential that may ultimately benefit the less wholesome aspects of yearning for the community and identity. If anything, European twentieth century gave us the power, as is evident with hindsight, to recognise a huge potential of primary identifications. It makes no sense to attempt to dismiss them with a liberal disdain. Our attachments, after all, start parochially and only then grow outward. To bypass them in favour of an unmediated "European" identity is to risk ending up nowhere – feeling at home neither at home nor in the world.

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GYÖRGY KONRÁD IN CONVERSATION WITH ANDREI PLESU

Ego sum civis europeus

ANDREI PLEŞU ■ Crisis has its good sides.For instance I know Romania is going through a crisis, I know Hungary is going trough a crisis, we all know, the European Union is going through a crisis, if all this crisis creates the opportunity for me to meet you and have a chat with you, it's not that bad.

GYÖRGY KONRÁD ■ *Once I had the opportunity to introduce your talk, and I said Andrei Pleşu angel researcher and minister for foreign affairs. And this was no metapher, this was the fact.*

■ Once I was introduced in a German context as Engelsforscher, what made me very angry, because everybody thought I were doing research on Friedrich Engels. By the way there is some connection between the angels and the ministry for foreign affairs. Angel in Greek means mercury i.e. ambassador. That means I did not went too far from my field of research.

■ *Would you be ready to state about yourself: Ego sum civis europeus.*

■ You ask me if I could admit I'm a good European citizen, and I think, I have no choice.

But there is one definition of being European which in my mind is the best one can find.

I found a book by a French writer living in Berlin, Jacques de Witte, and he has drown my attention to a painting from the 16th century, a painting of a Nederlandish painter Jan Mosard, who is painting West Indian landscapes and it is about Europeans invading the new territories of America. And in these paintings the good guys are those, who are invaded, and the bad guys are the Europeans. We are in the 16th century already.

And then Jacques de Witte has start to say: this characteristic of the Europeans to accept that they might be the bad guys, is something very important and very specific. It is not a sign of superiority, but it is a sign of specificity.

Europeans have invented Eurocentrism, but they also invented anti-eurcentrism.

Europeans invented colonialism, but they also invented anti-colonialism.

Europeans were curious about other cultures and nations, beyond etnocentrisms, and they went there, and they invented orientalistics, africanistics. It were Europeans who visited everybody out of interest, out of curiosity. Sometimes in a very brutal way.

But it is also Europeans, who were not that much visited by others they visited them. But this is not the case any longer. Now we are visited by many people from outside of Europe.

Anyway, this capacity of Europeans to have „une meauvaise conscience", a bad consciousness, a guilt feeling, this is very European. And I think we have forgotten this characteristics of Europe.

If we Rumanians would learn to have some guilt feeling about ourselves, if in Hungary Hungarians would learn to have some guilt feelings about themselves, if the EU would learn to have some guilt feelings about itself, then we all would be very European.

But it seems a rather difficult task to be.

Europeans have done horrible things. Think of the 20th century with 2 world wars, with holocaust, with gulag and so on.

But it is always European to regret and to try to make it good again, to oppose this attitude.

The opening speach of this gathering goes in this direction.

I mean we accept we had been bad guys several times in our history. This is a very healthy way of contemplating ones history.

So I am a European citizen, because, I hope I don't make a proof of vanity, I feel guilty a lot of time every day on different issues, even o nprivate issues I tend to fiel guilty.

This does not mean I recommend everybody to become neurotic, to complain every day that everything is wrong on his side. No, but still I would prefere melancholy to euforia.

■ *I like this answer, because you said actually that to be European means to be paradoxical. And as our profession may be to write novels, this means that we see the paradoxical character of human beings, and countries. And we have to stress sometimes with even darker colours the paradoxical character of the European history of the 20th century. The 19th century was probably nicer. The beginning of this 21st is questionable. We cannot speak about it with a certain safety. But if we speak about the 20th it is evident that the most terrible things have happened in this part of Europe and at the end a part of it became a little bit reasonable and sober.*

(Extract from the introductory discussion of the 2nd Budapest debate on Europe hold on September 27, 2013 at the Academy of Sciences organized by the Szechenyi Academy of Arts and the German Academy of Language and Writing)

AUTHORS

ANNE APPLEBAUM ▪ (b. 1964) is a Polish American journalist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author. She studied at St Antony's College, Oxford before moving to Warsaw, Poland in 1988 as a correspondent for *The Economist*. *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–56*, was in 2013 shortlisted for the PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award.Anne Applebaum-Sikorska became a Polish citizen in 2013.

DANIEL BĂNULESCU ▪ (Romania, 1960) officially debuted in 1993, six years after his first debut attempt was halted by the Ceaucescu regime, who were unhappy with the references to sex in his poems. In his current work sexuality plays a major role, often tied to religious references. Bănulescu grew up in Bucharest, where he studied engineering, but now he works primarily as a writer and journalist.

ALIDA BREMER ▪ born in Split/Croatia in 1959, obtained her PhD at Saarbrücken with a comparative study on the topic "detective novel". She writes essays, prose and poetry in German as well as in Croatian. She has translated many books by Croatian authors into German.She was granted the „Grenzgänger"- scholarship for her novel by the Robert Bosch Foundation.

JESÚS CARRASCO ▪ was born in Badajoz in 1972 and then he moved to Seville, where he has been living since 2005. He has been working as an advertising editor, activity he combines with writing, since 1996. *Out in the Open* has established him as one of the most remarkable debut of the international literary scene. The novel, which has been enthusiastically received by the best foreign editors, even before being available in Spain, was published in thirteen different countries.

HARALD DARER ▪ was born in Styria in 1975. After completing an apprenticeship as electrician he starts writing at the age of 30. Since then he has published numerous works and has received various prizes. Harald Darer lives and works in Vienna.

ALEŠ DEBELJAK ▪ is a poet and essayist, head of the Centre for Cultural and Religious Studies, University of Ljubljana. He recieved his PhD in social thought from Syracuse University. His publications include: *Dictionary of Silence*, *The City and the Child*, *Reluctant modernity: the institution of art and its historical forms*, *Anxious Moments*, *Twilight of Idols: The Tragedy of Yugoslavia* and *Individualism and Literary Metaphors of the Nation*. Debeljak's work is translated internationally and he has been awarded among others the Slovenian National Book Award.

ANA MARGARIDA DE CARVALHO ▪ was born and raised in Lisbon, where she studied Law, getting a degree at the Universidade of Lisboa (UL). Journalist for more than 20 years at 'VISÃO', the main Portuguese newsmagazine, she signed several reports and received the most important national awards on Journalism. Currently, she is working at the Cultural section, also as a Film Critic and co-administrating 'Final Cut', VISÃO's cinema website. She has worked on television, signed the column 'Elevator Talk' and written film scripts and a theatrical play. "Que Importa a Fúria do Mar" is her first Novel.

ANDRÁS FORGÁCH ▪ (b.1952 in Budapest) studied history and philosophy at the Eotvos University, Budapest, worked in theatre between 1976–1984 and 1995-97, and since 1984 has been a freelance writer, playwright, translator, and author of three novels.

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JUDIT HIDAS ▪ was born in 1976 in Budapest. She has been working in various fields which contribute to her collection of stories to tell. She was among the 3 finalists for the 2012 Petri Award, a prestigious Hungarian prize for young talents. She is the Hungarian participant at the European First Novel Festival in Budapest.

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JØRGEN LORENTZEN ▪ (b. 1956) is a Professor at the Center for Gender Research at University of Oslo, Norway. He has written several books and articles within the field of gender theory, cultural studies, literary analysis and masculinities, most recently Män i Norden: Manlighet och modernitet 1840–1940 [Nordic Men: Manliness and Modernity, 1840–1940]; Kjønnsforskning. En grunnbok [Gender Studies: An Introduction], and Maskulinitet [Masculinity]. He has been the project leader of several research projects, an active participant in gender debates all over the world, and a frequent speaker on issues relating to gender and masculinities.

ULLA-LENA LUNDBERG ▪ (b. 1947) is a Finland-Swedish author living in Porvoo, Finland. She was born in Åland and is a qualified ethnologist. She has published a huge range of works encompassing poems, documentary novels, travel writing and novels. Her Swedish language books have been translated into several languages, including Finnish, Danish, German, Russian and Dutch. She is author of the novel *Marsipansoldaten.*

VESSELA LYAHOVA ▪ (b.1961) has published short stories and theater reviews. *Refugees* is her third book and her first novel. It was nominated for the Helicon National Literary Prize for Prose in 2013. *Refugees* is an epic tale about the fate of the Bulgarian minority in Northern Greece and its expulsion from the region during the Second World War. Italy attacked Greece in 1940, putting an end to the peaceful life of several Bulgarian families in Drama and the vicinity. How they survived the war, their hopes that the Aegean Region would be annexed by Bulgaria, their view on the civil unrest in Greece, their forcible relocation to Bulgaria, the attempts to change their sense of ethnic identity, and their resistance to repression – all of this forms the novel's intricate, gripping plot.

MARCO MAGINI ▪ (b.1985, Arezzo) graduated in International Economic Politics at the London School of Economics. For study and for work, he has lived in Canada, the United States, Belgium, Turkey and India. Today he resides in Zurich, where he works in the field of climate change and sustainable economics. His first novel *As if I where alone* retelling of the massacre in Srebrenica and of the subsequent trial at the International Criminal Tribunal was finalist at the Calvino Prize in 2013.

NORMAN MANEA ▪ was born in 1936 in the Romanian province of Bukovina. His life and work were marked by his early years in a concentration camp, his afterlife under communist dictatorship and exile.His novels, short stories, and essays typically draw from his experiences with totalitarianism and his later life as a writer in exile living in the United States. His works have been translated into more than twenty languages. Yale University Press recently reissued his novelistic memoir *The Hooligan's Return* as well as his novel *The Lair.*

HATICE MERYEM ▪ (b. 1968) is an Istanbul based novelist and short story writer, and former editor of the literary magazines *Okuz* and *Hayvan*. Her books include the novel *Kisim Kisim Yer Damar Damar* (2008), and the short story collections *Sinek Kadar Kocam Olsun Basimda Bulunsun* (2008) and *Siftah* (2000) Recently, she has been working on scripts for tv series and contributing to the feminist publishing house, Ayizi. Her book *May I Have a Fly-Sized Husband to Watch Over Me* was welcomed in Europe and translated into German and Hungarian.

ALINA MOLISAK ▪ is a Polish literary historian specialized on Polish-Jewish literature. She teaches at the Department for Polish Literature at the University of Warsaw. She was coeditor of the volume *Polish and Hebrew Literature and National Identity*. Warsaw: Elipsa, 2010

KRISTIAN NOVAK ▪ (1979) was born in Baden-Baden, Germany. He attended primary school in Sv. Martin na Muri and grammar school in Čakovec.

Graduating in Croatian and German Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb in 2005, he earned his Ph.D. from Postgraduate Linguistics Studies in 2011. He holds a lectureship with the Department of Croatian Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Rijeka and teaches also at the Department of German Studies in Zagreb. Novak's chief areas of research include historical sociolinguistics, multilingualism (Croatian–German language and culture contacts) and national identity.

SOFI OKSANEN ▪ was born in 1977 in Jyväskylä Finland. Her father is Finnish and her mother is Estonian. So far, Oksanen has published four novels, all of them international bestsellers, and two plays. She has received several international and domestic awards for her literary work. Latest was the Swedish Academys Nordic Prize for her body of work. She will be the Guest of Honour writer at the Budapest International Book festival this year.

IGOR OSTACHOWICZ ▪ (b. 1968) graduated in international relations. He has worked as a paramedic at the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, as a manager at a number of companies, and for the past few years as a civil servant. At present he is secretary of state in the Polish Prime Minister's office, where he writes the Prime Minister's speeches and acts as his adviser and public relations manager.

ANDREI PLEŞU ▪ (b. 1948) is a Romanian philosopher, essayist, journalist, literary and art critic. He has been intermittently involved in politics assuming the roles of Minister of Culture (1989–91), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1997–99) and presidential counsellor for external affairs (2004–05). fter the Romanian Revolution of 1989 he was one of the founders of the "New Europe College" an institute of advanced studies, and of the cultural magazine *Dilema* (now *Dilema Veche*). He worked as a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bucharest and is now a professor at the University of Bucharest, where he teaches art history and philosophy of religion. His book *On Angels – Exposition for a Post Modern World* was published by Cross Meridian / Berlin University Press in 2012.

HASSAN PREISLER ▪ is an actor, director and writer. He is a founding member and artistic director of the theater company DanishDanish. *Brun mands byrde (Brown Man's Burden)* is his first novel. Winner of Denmark's most significant debut prize. The sophisticated, democratic, supremely informed, super advanced Hassan lives in New York City and Berlin and Beirut and London and Copenhagen. Wherever he goes he blends in with the crowd of hyper globalised individuals.

PATRYCJA PUSTKOWIAK ▪ (b. 1981) is a Polish journalist and writer. Her literary articles were published in such leading Polish magazines as Polityka, Wprost, Lampa, Bluszcz and Chimera. She also published her short stories in various Polish literary magazines – her first short debut appeared in the prestigious "Twórczość". In 2013 she was a finalist of The International Short Story Festival in Wrocław and her story was published in the festival short story collection "Pin i zielonym". In 2013 she also released her first novel – "Night animals" (W.A.B.) which has been highly acclaimed among Polish literary critics.

PAULIINA RAUHALA ▪ (b. 1977) has an M.A. from Oulu University and works as Finnish teacher. She lives in the northern city of Oulu with her husband and three sons. She is the Finnish first novelist with her book Heavenly Song about a family in a very religious community.

JUDITH ROTEM ▪ was born in Budapest to a very orthodox Jewish family. As a baby she was one of the 1684 people who were saved by Dr Kastner. After 7 months in a concentration camp and 10 months in refugee camp, she and her family arrived in Eretz Yisrael. When she was 18 she married a young Torah scholar and became a teacher while he continued studing. Over the next 12 years she gave birth to 9 children, two of whom died in infancy. Despite all this, she did not give up on her dream of becoming a writer. She struggled to overcome many difficulties and eventually succeeded in creating a new life with her children, outside the ultra-orthodox society. She is the author of 9 books. Her books have been translated into English, Italian, German and Hungarian.

GREGOR SANDER ▪ born 1968 in Schwerin, is a German writer, he lives in Berlin. Sander was suggested as Hildegard Elisabeth Keller's competition sponsor. His novel with GDR life stories *Was gewesen wäre* was published in February 2014 at Wallstein Verlag.

KARL SCHLÖGEL ▪ (b. 1948) is a German historian and essayist, professor of Eastern European history at the Viadrina University, Frankfurt/Oder. His latest publication is *Terror und Traum. Moskau 1937*, for which he has been awarded the Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung (Leipzig book prize for European understanding). As a visiting fellow, his residencies have included Budapest, Oxford, Munich, Uppsala, and Berlin. His many books have been translated into English, Russian, Polish, Spanish, Dutch and Italian.

RODERIK SIX ▪ (b. 1979) is a Flamish writer, he works as a literary critic for Flemish magazine *Focus Knack*. With his first novel *Flood*, he has won the Bronzen Uil 2012, the prize for the best debut novel in the Dutch language.

GYÖRGY SPIRÓ ▪ (b. 1946) is a Hungarian writer, playwright, and essayist. He was teaching Slavistics and Central European Literature at the Budapest University ELTE. He is a member of the Széchenyi Academy of Literature and Arts.

KATEŘINA TUČKOVÁ ▪ prose writer, curator. She was born in Brno in 1980, she studied Czech studies and history of arts at Masaryk University in Brno. She is an author of the writer Věra Sládková´s monograph and of three pieces of prose: *Montespaniáda* (2006), *Vyhnání Gerty Schnirch* (2010) and *Žítkovské bohyně* (2012, Josef Škvorecký Prize).

DUBRAVKA UGREŠIĆ ▪ (b. 1949) studied Comparative Literature and Russian Language and Literature at the University of Zagreb, pursuing parallel careers as a scholar and as a writer. In 1993 she left Croatia for political reasons. She has spent time teaching at European and American universities, including UNC Chapel Hill, UCLA, and Harvard University. She lives in Amsterdam where she is a freelance writer and contributor to some American and European literary magazines and newspapers.

DAVID ZÁBRANSKÝ ▪ (b.1977) is a Czech prose writer, he graduated from Charles University in Prague in media studies and law, to which he devoted himself until recently, working exclusively in the non-governmental sector. He has worked for Poradně pro občanství [Counselling Centre for Citizenship]. His novel, *Slabost pro každou jinou pláž* (*Any beach but this* with the sub-title *Poznámky k moři, smíchu a duchu doby*), won a prize in the category Discovery of the Year in the literary competition Magnesia litera.

TOMÁŠ ZMEŠKAL ▪ (b.1966 in Prague) works as a writer, translator and a secondary-school teacher of English literature. For this debut novel, he was awarded the Josef Škvorecký Award and the European Union Prize for Literature.

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DISCUSSIONS ON EUROPE

Magyar Lettre Internationale is the Hungarian version of Lettre Internationale, a European cultural journal published in several countries and languages, founded by Antonin J. Liehm in Paris 1985. **Members of the board:** Béla Bacsó, Péter Esterházy, Márta Fehér, Ágnes Heller, Imre Kertész, György Konrád, Mihály Kornis, Endre Kukorelly, Péter Lengyel, Lajos Parti Nagy, Sándor Radnóti, György Surányi.

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The publication: EUROPEAN WRITERS' MEETING: HUNDRED YEARS OF EUROPE consists of discussion papers, background materials for the April 25, 2014 event. An English supplement of Magyar Lettre Internationale published for the European Writers's Meeting connected to the 21st Budapest International Book Festival

SOMEWHERE IN EUROPE

European Novel Series of L'Harmattan, Budapest
with the support of the EU Literary Translation Programme

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Education and Culture DG

L'Harmattan

The Dutch Foundation for Literature, Crossing Border festival & Brody Studios, Budapest present

Café Amsterdam

Drop in at 'Café Amsterdam' for three nights of debates, interviews, movies and music, with well-known and up-and-coming authors and musicians. Come by for a night devoted to the graphic novel with the melancholic but funny American artist Ben Katchor, or a lively discussion with German novelist Timur Vermes and Dutch bestselling author Arnon Grunberg. Attend an interview about family ties with novelist Toine Heijmans and listen in to a conversation between Gábor Csordás and Frank Westerman about idealism and utopias. Enjoy the music of brilliant singer-songwriter Dyzack, and see for yourself what Dutch professor Douwe Draaisma has to say about your memory – plus many more exciting events! Take note of the dates and come along to feel the characteristic vibe of an Amsterdam café in Budapest.

For the full program see:
www.letterenfonds.nl/cafe-amsterdam
(as of May 10th).

When
We look forward to welcoming you on 29, 30 and 31 May from 7.00 p.m. until 11.00 p.m.

Where
Most (though not all) events will take place in the Brody Studios at Vörösmarty utca 38 in the 6th district. Exclusively for 'Café Amsterdam', Brody Studios will open its doors to everyone – members and non-members.

Tickets
Tickets are on sale for 700 HUF (students and members) or 1000 HUF (non-members). Tickets will be available at Brody Studios reception (+36 126 637 07).

Café Amsterdam is part of the Budapest Essentials Festival

Európai Bizottság

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European Writers' Meeting
with the guest writers of the Book Festival Millenáris, Friday, April 25, 2014

panel discussions

HUNDRED YEARS OF EUROPE

10.00 – 11.30

Hundred years of Europe – War and Peace
Aleš Debeljak, Alida Bremer, Kristian Novak, Marco Magini, Ana Margarida de Carvalho, Alina Molisak, Spiró György
chair: Csordás Gábor

12.00 – 13.30

25 years without the Iron Courtain
Sofi Oksanen, Konrád György, Norman Manea, Ulla-Lena Lundberg, Daniel Banulescu, David Zábranský, Háy János
chair: Barna Imre

14.30 – 16.00

Individual and collective choices and life strategies in the enlarged Europe
Rosa Liksom, Judith Rotem, Pauliina Rauhala, Jørgen Lorentzen, Yael Pieren, Patrycja Pustkowiak, Hidas Judit
chair: Gács Anna

16.30 – 18.00

Europe from a global perspective
Hassan Preisler, Tomáš Zmeškal, Kateřina Tučková, Vessela Lyahova, Jesus Carrasco, Harald Darer, Maria A. Ioannou, Roderik Six
chair: Forgách András

with English-Hungarian simultaneous translation
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