



SPRING 2019

A PETITE LITERARY JOURNAL

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 1

HOMAGE TO AN IMMIGRANT MOTHER

BY MARK AXELROD

Because I am a first generation Jewish Ukrainian-American, I have wanted to do an edition of *Mantissa* not only devoted to the Holocaust, but to the Ukrainian pogroms as well. My mother was born in Kyiv (Kiev), which is only a few hours from Velyki Sorochyntsi, and she was raised in Shpola, which is a shtetl several hours from Kyiv. Kyiv is almost equidistant between Shpola and Velyki Sorochyntsi – the birthplace of Nikolai Gogol.

My grandparents escaped the pogroms in the early part of the 20th century and traveled through Romania, where my uncle was born. Eventually, they reaching Philadelphia. The journey was tortuous, but less tortuous than living in daily fear and violence. One of the worst of the pogroms occurred in Shpola on May 27, 1919 when my mother was seven-years old. My mother never spoke of this nor did my grandfather. The following comes from the testimony of a man named Krasiansky who survived the attacks: “The pogrom was perpetrated by bands of neighboring peasants (from Lebedyn (city in Sumy, Oblast), going under the flag of Captain Grigoriev. A band of about 150 to 200 men appeared on Monday evening, May 26, went around to the synagogues, and commanded all the men to go to the station. Close to 1,000 Jews obeyed without question and collected at the station. There they separated out the old men and declared they were going to shoot them. When cries and entreaties arose, the bandits stated that they would let them live if they would get them a certain quantity of provisions and money (sugar, tea, flour, etc.).

Two hours’ time limit was began at the station of Tzvetkovo (12 versts (verst=0.66 mile from Shpola), and the gang got frightened and left. On the next morning (Tuesday, May 27), a reconnoitering party came, and, finding that there was no one in the town, informed the gang of the fact. They immediately appeared and began to loot. The population, in a panic, scattered and hid. All the Jewish dwellings and some shops were plundered (at the beginning of the year there had been a great fire in Shpola and almost all the stores were burned). They stole goods, clothing, and underclothes, and spoiled and destroyed what was left.

On the same day, fourteen Jews were killed, mostly by firearms, some, accidentally, by stray bullets. The local peasants at first hid the Jews, but then began to say that they were afraid themselves. They took no part in the pillaging. Crosses were placed on the doors of non-Jewish dwellings. In the evening Soviet forces arrived and forced out the bandits.

Three weeks after the first pogrom a detachment of Grigoriev soldiers visits with yellow flags passed by Shpola, and about twelve men entered the town, looted (valuables, watches, and money; they didn’t stay long enough to get much) for several hours, and barbarously killed three. One four-

teen-year-old girl was beaten and raped. She was operated on in the hospital, but died. Later it was said these bandits who entered the town were disarmed by their own commanders.”

And this is just one story of the pogrom in Shpola. The numerous pogroms carried out in Kiev and their associated atrocities are too numerous to mention here. Stories such as these are commonplace when discussing the pogroms, but often get little attention because of the Holocaust. However, these horrible events survive in memory—if nowhere else.

My mother died when I was fourteen—too soon to know her well, and too soon to understand the horrors of her past. She never told me about her childhood either because the memories were too difficult to bring up again, or because she wanted to spare me the horrors of what she endured. At this point in my life, however, it seems relevant that I write about the past that leads me to the novel, *A UKRAINIAN ODYSSEY*. The novel is somewhat of a departure from what I generally write, primarily because of its historical and biographical components. It is not only based on my family’s sufferings in and escape from Ukraine, but also a kind of homage to my literary “mentor” Gogol whose rather fantastic surreal fictions (e.g. “The Nose”, “Viy”, “The Overcoat”, “Nevsky Prospekt”) have often been the inspiration for my own fantastic surreal fictions. The objective is to integrate both the history of my family, and the influence of Gogol, who uncoincidentally plays a role in the novel, as does his mentor, Alexander Pushkin. I am including an excerpt from the novel, some short stories by Lamed Shapiro devoted to the pogroms, and finally, excerpts from the invited authors to the Fowles Center series.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

MARK AXELROD 1

FICTION

GIORGIO AND NICOLA
PRESSBURGER 03
Homage to the Eight District

MARTIN MAKELL 06
The Kike from Jew Street

CLAUDIO MAGRIS 08
Blameless

TADEUSZ BOROWSKI 15
*This Way for Gas, Ladies
and Gentlemen*

CHRISTOPHE BOLANSKI 18
Safe House

DACIA MARAINI 20
Train to Budapest

MEMOIR

BORIS PAHOR 10
Necropolis

MARK AXELROD 12
*The True and Absolutely Unbelievable
Story of Kiy*

BIOGRAPHIES

ABOUT THE WRITERS 22

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge those who have helped make the publication of MANTISSA possible: President Daniele Struppa, Dean Patrick Fuery, Dr. Joanna Levin, and Dr. Eric Chimenti.

This Issue was created by Chapman University's Ideation Lab. Special thanks to Aimee Bowen, Mark Schneider, Caitlyn Mumaw and Cassandra Taylor.

Look for Volume 5, Issue 1
in the Spring of 2020



HOMAGE TO THE EIGHT DISTRICT

BY GIORGIO AND NICOLA PRESSBURGER

The walls were bought by the Jews of the Teleky Market at the beginning of the century for the greater glory of God · and so as not to have to cross the boulevard, beyond which stood the nearest temple. The big premises of the block, half-way down Grand Transport Avenue, had until recently formed an emporium. Appropriate works of transformation and consecration had to be carried out. The windows being walled in, the offices of the Community could be located on the upper floor. And the ground floor became the temple for the merchants of the Eighth District.

This place was grand and full of mystery. When I went there for the first time, an astounding universe was opened to me, wherein the men that I saw every day haggling, arguing, toiling, appeared to me in their prayer shawls like rows of larvae streaked with black. I myself felt different there, and the space, the air, the light took on special forms and functions. I couldn't take it all in at one glance, so vast was this chamber, ranged with columns, pictures, lamps and galleries, and all crammed with worshippers. Many times I later explored this mysterious world, but always a bit at a time; now the pulpit, now the part 'down there', now that ·to the left of the entrance'; without ever being able to construct a proper map of it in my head.

The light was quite dim, and from that magical atmosphere strange apparitions would emerge, as if from nowhere. I was greatly impressed by the silvered hands which shone over the Torah, just as I was always startled and frightened by rolls of parchment pulled out from the scintillating vestments. I conceived of those white-clad bodies as another form of life, different from our usual one (it was already 'usual', and I was only five!), with its own pulsations and customs, and a light tinkling sound, without rhythm, which couldn't be heard anywhere else.

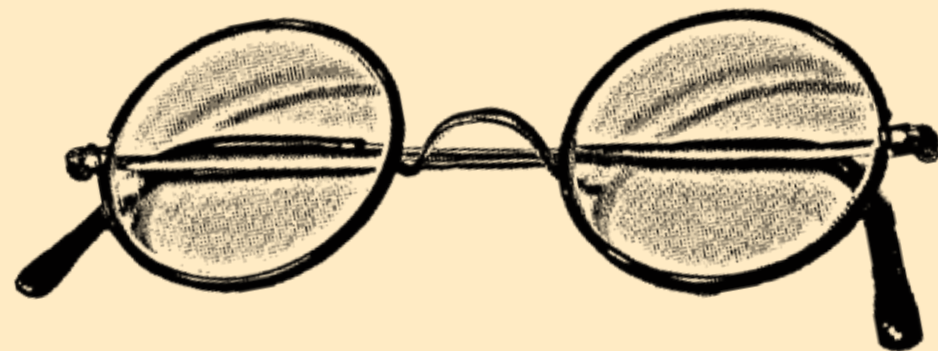
Yes, that temple of the market Jews had something of the substance

of the Temple of Heaven and of Solomon's Temple, eternal treasure of the Jewish people. How such a shining light could fall upon this spot, the belly and cesspool of Budapest, as are all the markets of all Babylons · that is the mystery of Divine Mercy. However, so it was. Every Friday I would see my father and my uncles, rapt and transfigured, bowed over their prayer books, rocking their torsos rhythmically to and fro in search of an ecstasy that never arrived. Covered in their tales, or prayer shawls, they would have seemed all alike if it had not been possible to gather, even there and in that moment, their essential characters: the mildness of one and the hurried seriousness of another; the stern severity of those who thought themselves better than their fellows and the overbearing sonority of those in haste to better themselves; the gloom of those without aims or desires; the fears of the old who had reached the end of their lives.

These mysteries did not awaken alarm but, rather, an unappeasable thirst for knowledge. Whilst the temple 'up there' was filled with the faithful at prayer, the one 'down below', lower by a couple of feet, formed the domain of the children, who celebrated Friday evening by chasing about and shouting, as they embarked on adventurous explorations: every brown-painted backboard was a Pillar of Hercules, and the space between two benches a continent, different from the others in its inhabitants, in the presence or absence of children, and in the length of the tales of those at prayer. The language spoken in the temple was quite strange to me, as it was for nearly all the children and most of the adults (knowledge of Hebrew had been lost for at least a generation), but you could distinguish various dialects. On one bench the verses would be recited with monotonous rapidity; on another, in an inarticulate murmur from which only the name of the Lord emerged distinctly; on another, with loud but punctilious clarity. I would observe each person, drawing conclusions about his character and his importance. If I met a child, I would greet him and we would explore together, up and down the temple, around the pulpit, right to the uppermost limits. Until they began to sing in unison,

at the top of their voices, "Lecho daidi, licras calla", "Come, friend, to meet the bride", the greeting for the coming feast-day and the closing song for Friday evening.

Occasionally, however, this fascinating and joyful world would assume an awesome face. The day of Kippur, for example, when the Torah was carried in procession through the temple, and at its passing the Jews covered their heads with their prayer shawls, my heart would be filled with terror; and also at New Year, when the shojar, or ram's horn, was blown, at that raucous sound, precursor of the eternal awakening in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, I would peer under my eyelids at the crowd hidden under their tales and feel myself far from there, among many beings already dead, who awaited a joyful resurrection. Sometimes I hadn't even the courage to look: I too tried to hide my head, burying it in my father's shawl, sure that within a moment something tremendous would occur, something beyond all my fears, the end of the world.



Then these moments would pass and the expectation of the terrible event, the arrival of the Eternal One amongst us, or of an archangel or some other representative of His, would be put off till next year.

Another fear of mine, even less explicable, was aroused by the aspect of the women's gallery, those few times we were sent there with a message for my mother or one of the aunts. This happened most frequently on the day of Kippur, when all the family was in the temple and there was sometimes a detail still to be decided about the supper. The women's gallery was very narrow, set on the upper floor and separated from the rest of the temple by a fine grille. There the women were seated, all in rows, with their faces half-covered by handkerchiefs or veils. A little pale with fasting, they seemed in that half-light as if already risen to

a new life, but risen with a more severe aspect, without love, as if they had been endowed—so I felt—with the power of life and death over all children and all humanity. Once I looked down through the grille into the temple. Those below suddenly took on the look of poor ignorant insects over whom, from up there where I was at that moment, it would be easy to cast spells or curses.

Once I was back among the benches, among the children and the prayer shawls, this fear passed quickly, giving way to the peculiar, solemn joy of one who is exploring the mysteries. Because there, in the temple, apart from these moments of anxiety, the notion of evil, even if I had known its full significance, could have had no proper place. Neither the irreverences of the children, nor the reprimands whispered by the cantor between one verse and the next to these disorderly brats, had the slightest flavour of malevolence. As if my soul were armoured so as not to feel any contrary forces,

prohibitions or impositions, any restraints upon my person. I had a sensation even of contentment, austere and deeply felt, which I hoped would last me through eternity.

Instead, this mysterious world was to be overturned at a stroke, that day in 1944 when we were obliged for the first time to enter the temple without the reassuring · presence of our parents. One morning in late autumn my mother dressed me up, entrusted to me and my brothers a paper bag, with a few bits of bread and roast goose inside, and accompanied us as far as the door of the Community Hall. The complex discussions of the grown-ups the preceding evening had been aimed at explaining to us that we would be quite safe there, because the King of Sweden in person had bought that building and bestowed on it a special

protection, so that the Germans were forbidden to cross the threshold in any circumstances, and the same applied to the local Nazis and anyone else who wanted to harm us, the children of the Jewish community. What nobody explained to us was that we would be alone, desperately alone, and for a time that no one could estimate. At the door of the hall, Mother let go our hands.

A skinny woman with thick glasses took us in charge, and when I turned about Mother had vanished, as if some magical force had made her invisible. "Where did she go?" I asked the community secretary, anxiously. "Don't worry, just come with me," she replied. We passed in front of the temple door, but I had time for only a glimpse of the interior; instead of going in, we continued towards the upper floor, where lay the offices of the community.

We were received in a big room whose window shutter was carefully closed. It had two doors, apart from the front one: one of them, a double door, simply led to another room like the first and the second, a single door, led into a long corridor. The double door stood open and in these two rooms, destined to be our abode for several months, we found most of the children known from the temple or from families befriended during the little parties organized by the mothers in times of peace. We had passed many hours together, but now all of us felt strange towards one another. We scarcely looked in each others' faces; there we were, thoroughly inhibited, not knowing what to expect.

Days, weeks and cruel months lay ahead of us. That evening, mattresses were spread on the floor of

the two rooms and some horsehair covers thrown over them. We passed the night stretched out side by side, silently. In the morning, the community secretary took everything away and from the depths of the corridor appeared the rabbi with his assistant, to give us lessons in Scripture. Nothing of that religious instruction remains in my memory. We were in the hardest captivity that a bunch of children can expect to suffer, deprived of affection, well-being, proper food, and in our souls there was no trace of guilt or any other explanation of the ills we suffered. The menaces and severity of the Good Book seemed to us injustices, tremendous injustices. Our food was distributed at midday in milk bowls: a brownish soup made with stock cubes, beans or cabbage, according to the day.

Gradually orders ceased to affect us. We gave up every habit, every rule. We no longer slept on the mattresses. Whoever felt tired just threw himself on the ground and fell asleep; whoever was hungry turned to the wall and ground his teeth. We didn't even respect any longer the regulations about our bodily needs. The latrine, accessible from the second room by a small corridor, never cleaned by anyone, was brimming with excrement. One day, tired of waiting in line, I fouled myself, standing up in my pants. I carried around this load of dung for a whole month, until the Liberation.

Not even the authority of the secretary or the rabbi counted any longer. In February 1945, while the fighting grew fiercer around us, we rebelled. We had been shut up for at least three months in the community's premises, hungry, filthy, full of fleas. It was a

revolting meal which set the fuse. Our cabbage soup was full of worms. Not one of us children managed to swallow it. With empty stomach and trembling body, I burst out crying. But it was not really crying. From my throat burst bellows of protest like the roars of a bull, violent enough to shake the door and the shuttered windows. Soon my voice was joined by those of my brothers and all the other children. "I'm hungry!" cried one of them. Many others copied my complaints and began beating their fists on the wooden floor of the rooms. Ludwig Grosz, now a doctor in America, tore the clothes off his back; the bespectacled Maurer pissed on the floor; some children began vomiting gobs of stinking gall. Then, like the exterminating angel, the rabbi appeared in the depths of the corridor. He smothered our hysterical cries with one stentorian shout. Swinging one arm, he knocked a bunch of children to the floor; eyes flaming and body crouched, he burst among us, ready to knock us down or break us in two. "If he's so strong, it means he hasn't been eating worm-infected cabbage, but something better," I thought. And perhaps I even said it, because a moment later I felt myself swept away as if by a gust of wind, an explosion of energy hit me in the cheek and I fell unconscious to the ground. I spent many days like that, stretched out and void of strength. When I came to myself, I learned of the end of the revolt from the faces of the other children, all pale, disconsolate and deprived of any flicker of vitality. The only concession we won was the abolition of cabbage. As I remember it, from then on we were given nothing but beans.

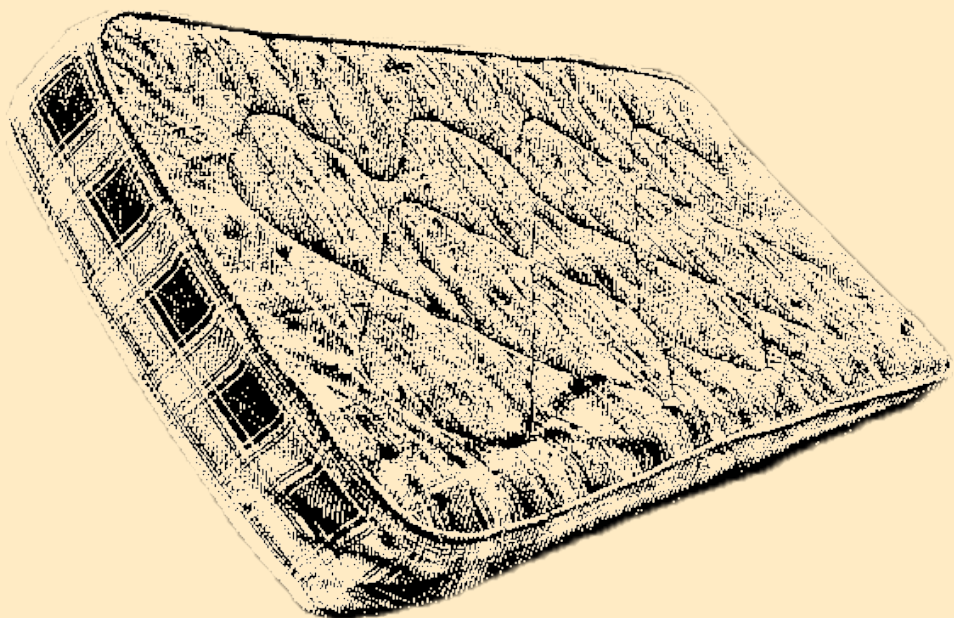
It was still winter when we finally left our prison and place of refuge. We had endured day after day of a real witches' sabbath. The time came when the rooms of the community were lacking even electric light. The hanging lamps which had lit our rooms now dangled useless from the ceiling; just two strips of daylight filtered through the blinds to give us a small field of vision. Even the water was now cut off, and for three days and nights we heard the cannonade drawing ever closer, shaking the walls of our rooms. This was the first time that I saw fear in the eyes of the rabbi, until the moment of

decision arrived. "We must send them away from here," he said, not to us but to the secretary. "It's both just and advisable." Soon after this exchange, we children were thrust into the overcoats abandoned on our arrival and conducted downstairs. We were taken outside in groups. As for me, I was one of the last. I stopped dead at the door of the temple. It was the first time for ages that I saw the light of day. I lifted my eyes. Two planes were fighting in the grey sky overhead. I saw red tracers speeding from one plane towards the other: two battling angels soared in a sky immersed in the thunder of bombardment. Then, in an instant, the two angels disappeared behind the roof of the temple, still exchanging their red arrows of gunfire. And a moment later an unspeakable thunder shook us and all the buildings around. The bomb had fallen quite nearby. The spectacled Maurer and many more of my companions of those months were carried off by the Angel of Death in that terrible explosion. I still ask myself why.



But I didn't even expect answers to anything when I again visited the temple and the community, many years later. I told myself that the universe is growing old and we will need other worlds, not this one, to find again the joy we knew when we were children.

It was absent-minded wandering which carried my steps into that street. Lifting my eyes to the peeling facade, I saw written in Hebrew: Bet Keneset, the meeting house or synagogue. I crossed over. The low doorway was not as I remembered it. I pushed open the swinging doors easily but had great difficulty in finding the right passage. When I was finally in the temple, I felt my throat contract. The inscrutable architecture of many years before had disappeared, as if the shrinking of the Jewish population of the district had



even decimated the brickwork and the tiles. The place of sacred gatherings was now cramped, faded and wretched. Where were the columns? I could see only two supports thrown up in the middle of the chamber. And the benches? Many were broken, and almost all had large areas of paint missing, which exposed their real construction in a greyish and riddled wood. Only the railings of the pulpit had been polished, along with the ante-room to the tabernacle. The floor consisted of broken or cracked bricks, and on the walls dust had darkened the whitewash. This looks more like a witches' coven than the temple of the Lord, I thought. Here was no lodging for joy; here only misery presided, and it had sunk its teeth deep into the place.

I went up to a bench and put my hands on it. For a moment, it was as though a sudden light had driven the darkness from my eyes. I saw a flock of Jews rocking themselves and murmuring their prayers; the space stretched out into the far distance, and the bells of the Torah could be heard softly tinkling. The Jews were covered in their tales up to the tops of their heads and white clothing was visi-

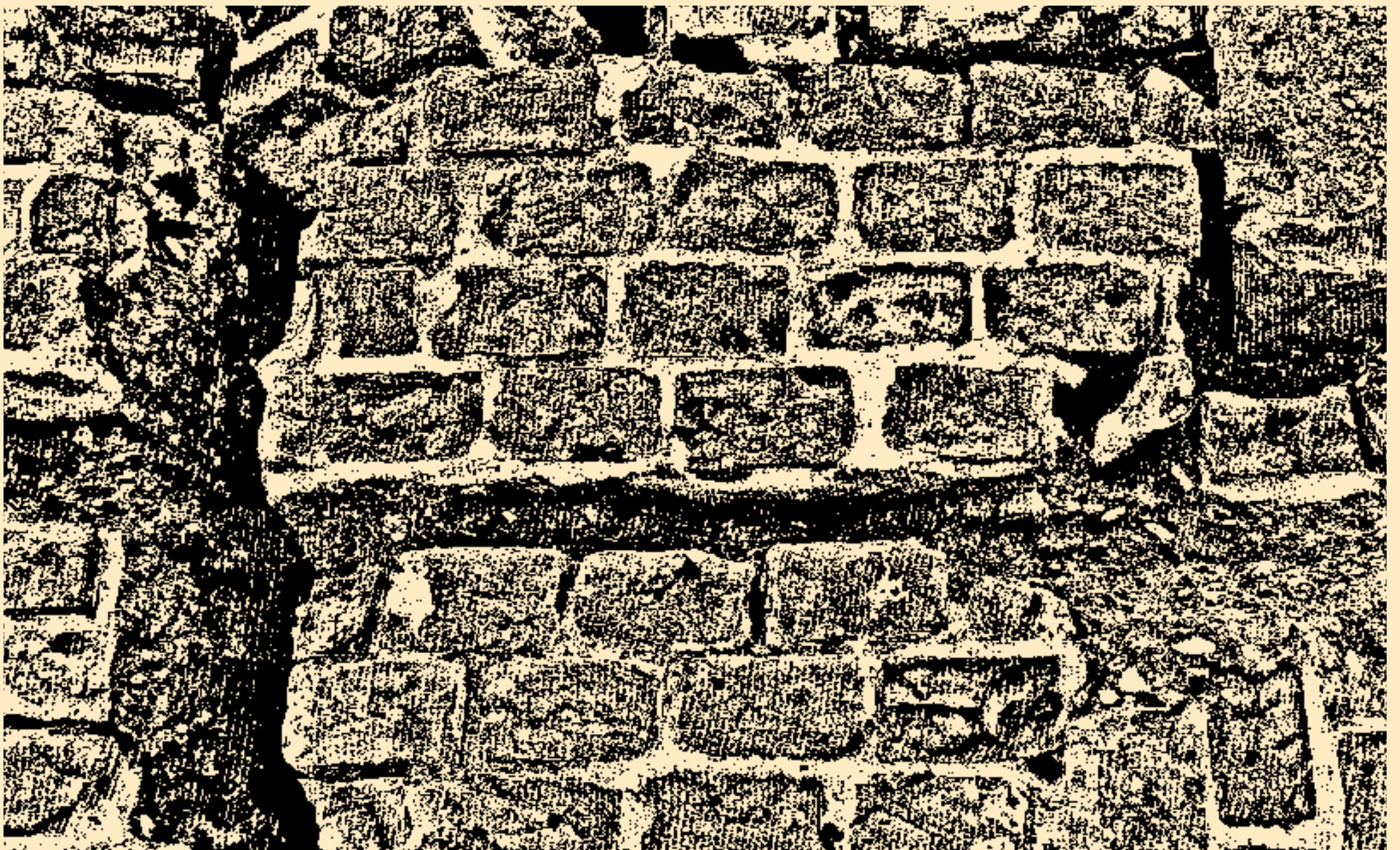
ble beneath them. "Come and pray with us," I heard someone whisper. I shuddered, because that voice could not be disobeyed, the call of the dead being sacred and fatal.

A tremor passed over me and darkened my sight once more. The praying flock vanished, but an old man was coming up behind me. I gave another start and jumped backwards. "Are you looking for something?" he asked me, taking at the same time imperceptible steps towards me. I scrutinized him and felt my eyes fill with tears. I soon recognized Samuel Stern, the cantor of long ago. His face was shrunken and the eyes seemed veiled. "Are you looking for something?" he repeated.

"Uncle Stern, how are you? I'm one of your old pupils," I murmured. It was he who had taught me to read Hebrew. But Stern continued to gaze at me interrogatively. "I came just to visit the temple!" I shouted, to overcome his deafness and suspicion.

"Ah, there's nobody here," was his sole reply, "few people come now. Most of them died, during the war." I shouted again that as a child I too had frequented that temple; he just

stood there perplexed. For Samuel Stern the living no longer existed, only the dead. Perhaps it was my voice: for a large piece of old stucco fell from the ceiling, breaking into dust at our feet. I was startled, but the old man didn't bat an eyelid. "The limewash ..." he said. I stroked his cheek with a caress before departing. I wanted to go up to the community's rooms, to see again the place of my childhood sufferings. But the staircase was no longer there. I could see only a walled-up niche. Once in the street, the enigma was solved. The upper floor now had a separate entrance and housed a state company. For me, all things considered, it was a relief not being able to enter that room of long ago. I should have met myself as a child, and that child would have demanded what I had done with the rest of my life. "I saved myself," he would have asserted, "and you, what have you done with the stolen years?"



THE KIKE FROM JEW STREET

BY MARTIN NAKELL

So this Black dude walks in with his buddy the Kike from Jew Street and I look up cause I'm washing glasses and I says who the hell are you two even though I knew for sure I knew em both what I'm not blind deaf and dumb you know I seen em both on the street a hundred times but they never come into my place before I figure they know better and I think well either they don't know better or they're tryin ta pull my chain and then I think you're not just off the ship yesterday so I go over to the other end of the bar to move the baseball bat closer to me and to give the little snipes a peek at it and they see it I know they see it, especially the Black dude who's not a small guy not at all and I know he's been around the block you can tell that on a Black dude and I don't care what the price of his shoes or the cut of his cloth which the Jewboy probably bought for him anyway and you watch he's the one who'll pay for the bill the Kikes what gotta always look like they got the dough whether they do or they don't whoa what's this coming in the door the Black dude's squeeze is who and she's the real ghetto too tight ass and just as tight a snatch don't you know so up the trio sashays up to the bar like a ménage a trio I'm tellin ya and the Black dude he orders up three Glenlivet - 25! - two on the rocks and one neat for himself.

So I looks em over, the three of them there, waiting for their fancy-ass drinks, and I says OK, I says, it's on the house and I'll toast to you three myself. And when I got the glasses up, a neat for myself, and I make a toast like this I knew a Jewish guy once nice real nice guy you know got himself in trouble with the mob.. Fed the poor bastard the Jew to the fishes. After which they come in here to celebrate. I'd seen em in here before. Tell me they like to come in here every time they have a celebration. And then one of em says to me, you know what he says, he says today we're celebrating a birthday and I says whose and the mpbster he says Adolf's birthday, Adolf Hitler's. And they all laugh and of

course I laugh with them. Then I stopped and we all were quiet for a second, for more than a second, looking each other over. Then the Jewboy breaks the silence and he says, I knew Adolf Hitler. Damned quiet after that. Nobody knew what the fuck to say then.

Then the Black squeeze she says if my friend Amotz here says something, he doesn't fool around. Now what kinda Kikey fuckin Raghead name is Amotz? Amotz, I'm askin ya. And I got my hand wrapped round the bat. Where? I challenges the wise-ass little bastard. Where'd you know Adolf Hitler? In Auschwitz, Amotz says. Don't ask, the squeeze says again. I coulda wrapped those long black legs around my back I tell ya. So what can I do with that kinda sass but I says what you doing in whereverAusch with Adolf fuckin Hitler. Don't ask, Black Beauty says. Then Amotz himself he says real casual but real serious to me he says, if you truly want to know I'll tell you. Kinda shut me up he did, and not many people ever shut me up, I'll tell you that. And I see that guy Amotz, he's sitting there with his eyes closed now. He looks goddamn peaceful, you know, like he's got something I ain't got. Some kinda peace or some kinda power I ain't ever seen. I relax. My grip on the bat loosens. It even falls, leaning up against the bar. OK, I says to him, so OK so yeah I truly want to know.

Opening his eyes, kinda slow, adjusting to the light of a bar in the afternoon, empty but for the three of them and me. He's sizing me up. Then he starts in: Auschwitz, he says, in Poland, was an extermination camp. Hitler sent people there, most times crowded into cattle cars. From the day it opened to the day it finished over a million maybe a million and a half of us died there in those gas chambers. Amotz stopped. He closed his eyes. I'd heard about all that shit, but a lot of people said it never happened, said the goddamn Jews made it all up. How'd I know? I didn't really care, tell you the truth.

When Raghead opens his eyes this time, he's a different man. I don't know. I can't explain it. Still a Jew. But a difference. He goes, I arrived in Auschwitz on June 14th 1942. June 14th, he repeats it. Like what? Like I can't hear? I hear fine. It was a chaos of the demi-gods, he goes on, the stench of bodies burning. Smoke rising from the chimney. They put me to work. All day everyday daylong there is screaming. The guards, some of them, they like to pick on kids, 12 - 13 year olds - the little ones. The first time I saw them beat a kid with billy clubs I threw up. Then I stood there crying, sobbing. Those two guards saw me, heard me, looked over and came toward me. The kid runs away. No matter what happened to me I don't care the kid runs away. It happens again. Then again. Then again. Now, I'm known as The Weeper of Auschwitz, the Savior of Children. Here, he stops. He's exhausted. I'm spinning...is this guy for real? Who cares? What's real? In my bar at 3:30 in the afternoon, whatever you say, if you say it right, it's real. I thought he would start crying. He didn't. He was saying it just right.

One day, he says, they haul me out into the yard, two big soldiers. One on the left one on my right. And there's Adolf Hitler, Adolf Hitler. They walk me over to him, and he says to me: Cry.

I can't cry. The Fűrher told you to cry, one of his aides, pistol in my face, says to me. You better cry. But Adolf Hitler, he says, No. Leave him alone. Bring me a boy. No! I beg Hitler. Don't do this monstrous thing. And the tears howl from my eyes! And like God begging man, the tears and the wailing arise double and triple and more from my eyes and my mouth. It's too much for me. I weaken. I fall on my knees to the



ground. Adolf Hitler puts a hand on my right shoulder. Here. Right here. And Hitler says, to all assembled: don't touch this man. He is beautiful. A Jew is showing you pathetic excuses for Aryans how to be a man and what are the depths of mankind. I love this man. He is one of my treasures. Tomorrow, you will shoot him. He can live tonight in a greatest beauty, the tears of his own death. And that, Amotz says to me, is how I knew Hitler.

In Auschwitz. I didn't ask Amotz how he got away. It didn't matter. He was telling me the truth. So I walked around the bar and I faced him and he stood up and I think he thought I was going to throw him out of the place, my place. And the truth is I didn't know what I might do. The baseball bat still behind the bar. My pistol in its niche by the sink. and I stood there and in front of a Mr. Black man and his high-horse Black lady, I cried. I was a frightened little boy, myself. Mr Weeper of Auschwitz was saving me and my white ass. I couldn't stop. My guts were crying. My mind was crying. Christ my fuckin imagination and my momma were crying in me clawing to get out through my eyes. Me, who never cried in my whole life for nobody or nothing. And

here I was like crying for every little goddamn child on earth. The woman, she stands up and she puts her hand on my shoulder, just like Adolf Hitler done to Amotz. A hundred more tears get released.

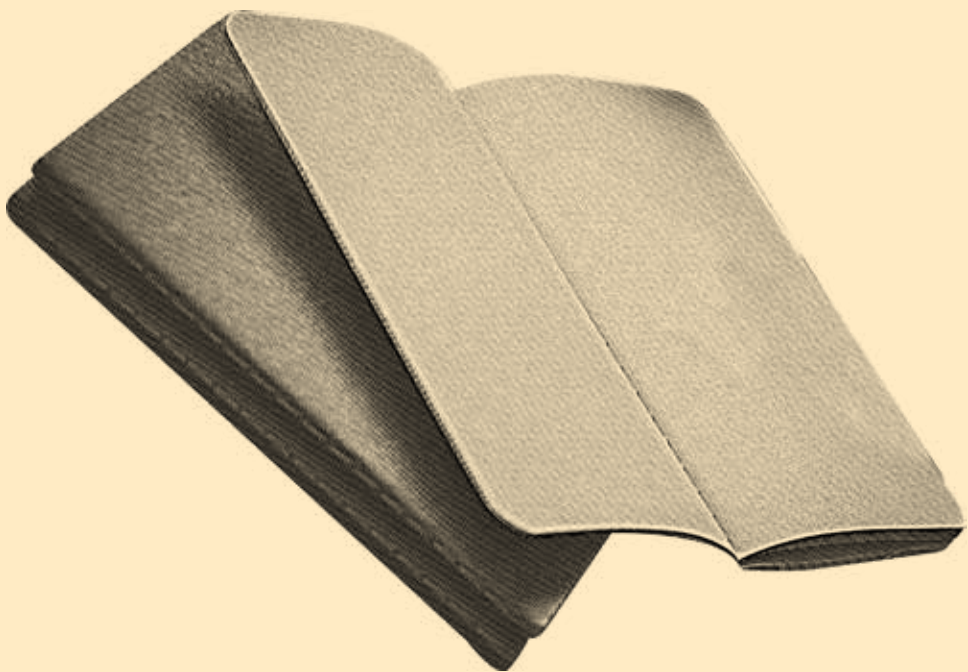
Now what the fuck you doin sitting there reading my story and you not crying. I gave out my angry heart here, revealed it to you as a gift. And I ain't won't never get it back. So what you doing? You too busy? Too shut up? This ain't no little TV show or nothin. Cry, you. Cry for your life. I ain't crazy! If you can't cry with me now, you crazy you frozen you the one let them kids get beat up and killed. And who am I? Now I'm a kid what gets beat up and killed that's what.



BLAMELESS

BY CLAUDIO MAGRIS

Perhaps a mere conjecture, of course, those scribblings that so agitated his heirs—though they weren't the only ones—and which strangely enough had been the only notebooks of his to have disappeared, had ended up being burned in the funeral pyre in his warehouse, well hidden somewhere though to no avail; those pages in which it was said that he had recorded the writings jotted on the walls and in the toilets of their prison by inmates about to die, also by fire, in the Nazi cremation oven at the Risiera, the only crematorium in Italy, right there in Trieste. Later, in tranquil times of peace, a coat of lime had been applied to those walls and to the names presumed to have been written on those walls. After war comes peace, which even has the white color of a sepulcher and of the whited sepulchers in the heart.



It seems, however, that he had seen and copied those writings before that, at least some of them; even the names, it was whispered, the vile names of collaborators in high places or good friends of the executioner at any rate, scratched on the walls of filthy latrines by victims on the brink of death, later erased by lime—quicklime, white, innocent and caustic to the flesh—and later still perhaps erased again by the fire in his warehouse, a destructive fire that cleansed all filth and restored a false innocence to the most sordid, abominable infamy, to wretches protected forever by the disappearance of their names dissolved in lime and reduced to ash, illegible to human

judges, like the magistrate who'd had to conclude the investigation of the Risiera's crimes with what amounted to no conclusion; illegible maybe even to higher judges, they too robbed of any material evidence, and certainly illegible to the children of those perverse murderers, unaware that at one time those names had been corroded by lime or crumpled by flames; on the contrary, proud to bear the respectable names of their fathers who had borne them when the victims—whom they had propelled or maybe only observed going to a horrific death and whose fate in any case had not perturbed their indifference—had written them on the walls. Names erased and therefore honored forever.

However, Luisa thought, it was actually a good thing that some people—judging by the letter to the newspaper as well as statements by the vice president of the Foundation, Dr. Pezzl—believed or feared that some of those danger-

ous papers might still be around. Just as well, *timor Domini initium sapientiae*. To the discomfiture of many, people were finally beginning to speak about that infamy, the old rice factory in Trieste where the Nazis had slaughtered, or sent to slaughter, several thousands of individuals in a general silence that went on even after the end of the war. And it was partly thanks to the persistence of that singular man and his maniacal searching, which in his case was illuminated by the fury of a prophet angry with his infamous people and zealous in his desire to expose the infamy. Dr. Pezzl, replying to one of the many letters in the *Corriere Adriatico*,

had written, for example, that “there is perhaps no need to announce these journals before they, or what may ultimately remain of them, have been cataloged and classified and before having considered the possible timeliness of declassifying several passages of a delicate nature, that it might still be too early ...”

Too early for whom? If anything it was too late; at least for him, having now passed on to a better life—which wasn't difficult, given how he had lived, though maybe for him, however ... —too late in any case for those others, who in all those years had had time to wash their hands of the blood or filth of those other hands, even more bloodstained than theirs, which they had so cordially shaken countless times during the Nazi occupation. Too late, moreover, because after so many years they too, along with their names whitewashed on the walls of the Risiera or burned that night in the warehouse, had gone to the other world, at least many of them had; they must not have been children even then, in the final months of the war, so by now they'd probably already been given the death penalty, whether they were guilty or innocent. Justice, at least capital punishment, is the same for everyone.

That other fine portrait? Worthy of Picasso, the splotch a kind of brownish eye, staring and teary, its pupil the point where the little ducts containing hydrothermal fluids mix with the mineral solutions. An agate 130 million years old, not very different from the MRI image of a cerebral infarction area. The cerebral infarction of a fifty-seven year-old man, lava that has congealed in 130 million years, there's not much difference. I imagine that when I am no longer able to read and understand what I have written, which is happening to me more and more often, my eyes will become squinty and fierce like that splotch on the agate. Captain Giessen, when he parleys with the bishop, also has a look like that, severe and vicious, the gaze of an owl. Is it possible to remember when it was still an amorphous mass, not living, fiery lava that slowly crystallizes, a spent volcano that will become brain? A longing for fire and eruption, for life that annihilates

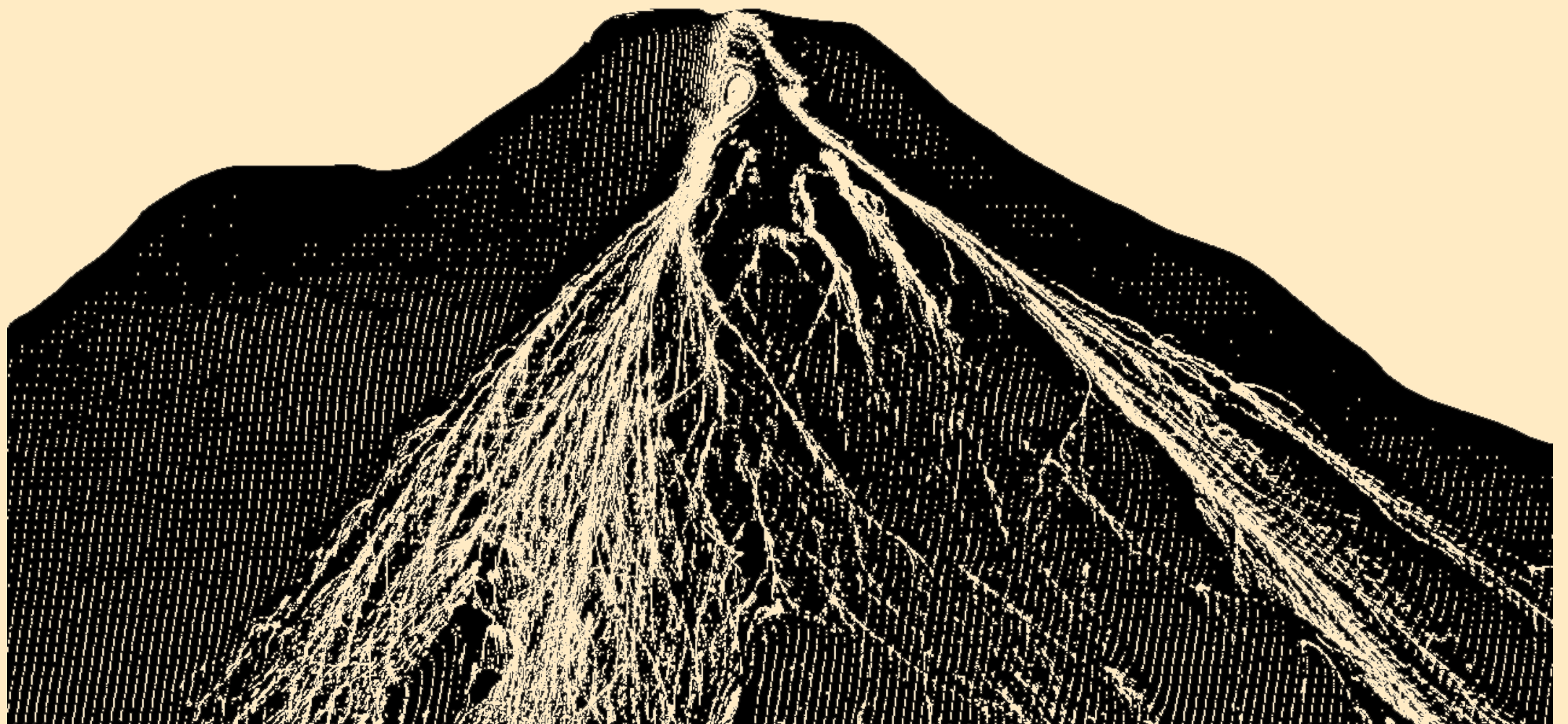
and is annihilated; this is what war craves, the ancient yearning to rape stone and lichens. The primordial slime has slowly solidified and built up in the brain as well, whereas it takes very little to turn the glioblastoma back to sludge, though German Command hasn't yet realized it, it doesn't know that at its headquarters everything is now consumed.

At German Command reality is viewed with the fixed, dilated eye of the agate even more millenary than the millenarian Reich and everything rages around it at supersonic speed, the eye whose rearguard is surrendering is unable to follow things that are changing so chaotically and frenziedly. But it is also difficult for others to follow and categorize things, to keep up with their acceleration. Liberation lasts one second and it's already occupation, the victory is already defeat. Not only does the agate's eye find it hard to pass from the fifty-one hostages hung by the Nazis on Via Ghega to the Titoists' blasts against defenseless people on Via Imbriani. The eye hardens even more, it survives in the fossilized geode—the eye of anyone, of no one—like the totem survives, though to those who built it, not for very long. God creates man, man creates the gods and the gods decree that man's fate be death. Every living thing wants to live, the body mutilated by the bomb crawls agonizingly toward shelter to escape another bomb, the mouse flees from the cat or the hawk swooping down on him and the gazelle runs from the lion, but all mice and all gazelles want to die even though they don't know it, the lemming flees but legend has it that lemmings commit suicide en masse. Life wants to die and war comes to its aid; compassionate war mother of all things, the mother rabbit that eats her young returning them to the contentment of darkness and nothingness.

Cells are ready, at any time, to self-destruct. Some are destroyed by the enemy, others destroy themselves so as not to succumb to the enemy, just as men kill themselves in prison so they won't talk when being tortured, and therefore to save other cells. Partisans who are captured do not talk. Ercole Miani, who led the units of the Justice and Freedom Brigade and was tortured by the Fascist

torturer Collotti—providentially shot on the spot shortly afterward—did not say a word. When the Italian Ministry later had the bright idea of conferring a post-mortem honor on Commissioner Collotti—an honor accorded to someone who attaches an electrical cord to the genitals of a chained man fighting for freedom, one end on the glans and the other in his mouth, then turns on the current, and for this years later gets a medal, maybe to hang between his legs like a lovely pendant if he were alive, fortunately he's been stone dead for years, God sees and provides—the tortured Miani returned his own gold medal, given that they awarded one, though maybe not gold, to his torturer. The government would restore it to him posthumously when he too was dead, a post-mortem medal, like the murderer's. With decorations *melius abundare quam deficere*.

Yes, in a torture cell men kill themselves. Die rather than talk. Suicide to defend humanity, life; to oppose the death drive that pulsates in every cell. The Resistance is resistant; better to die than obey death.



NECROPOLIS

BY BORIS FAHOR

It's a Sunday afternoon, and the smooth and sinuous asphaltstrip that leads ever higher into the mountains is not as desolate as I would have wished it to be. Cars pass me or return down into the valley, toward Schirmeck, and the volume of tourist traffic disrupts, defiles, even, the calm I had anticipated. Admittedly, my car and I are now a part of the motorized procession. I had hoped that if there was no other traffic but me, my former intimacy with this place would keep my intrusion from distorting the dreamlike images that have lived untouched in the shadows of my mind ever since the war. I realize that some vague resistance is forming in me—resistance to the fact that this mountainous region, such an integral part of our inner world, should be laid bare, made accessible. My resistance is tinged with jealousy, because these outsiders are coming to sightsee in the place that witnessed our anonymous captivity. But—and I sense this unmistakably—their eyes will never see the abyss of desolation that was our punishment for believing in man's dignity and freedom. At the same time I feel an unbidden and gently persistent satisfaction that this mountain in the Vosges is no longer the site of a distant, self-consuming fury of destruction; that it has become, instead, the destination of endless crowds which, naïve and guileless though they may be, are sincere in their wish to experience just a hint of the inconceivable fate of their lost brothers.

Maybe in the ascent here there is something of the fervor of religious pilgrimages to the remote peaks of holy mountains. But nothing in this pilgrimage is even remotely connected to the blind idolatry that Primus Truber so fervently opposed when he exhorted the Slovenes to discover their own inner enlightenment and not spend themselves in superficial, pompous ritual. People all over Europe are coming together on high mountain terraces where human evil wrung victory after victory out of human pain and nearly set the seal of permanence on destruction. It isn't the search for miracle that brings these modern pilgrims. They come here to tread on truly holy ground,

to pay homage to the ashes of fellow creatures who by their mute presence have raised, in our hearts, an immovable landmark of human history.

On the sharp turns I probably do not think of the rocking of the truck as it brought back a box from Marki.rcb containing our first corpse. At the time I didn't even know I was sitting on such sad cargo. But the frigid air would have paralyzed any thought before it could form. No, I most certainly do not think of any of the images that persist in me, tangled and crowded like a withered and moldy bunch of grapes. Through my windshield I watch the strip of smooth asphalt before me and would rather it be some old, buckling, pothole-ridden road leading into the authentic world of

the past. But I can't deny being spoiled and selfish and like any other modern driver accustomed to the comfort of a smooth ride at high speed. I try to visualize a mountain highway in Slovenia comparable to this serpentine road from Schirmeck to Struthof. I picture the switchbacks leading to Vrsic—but there the road opens onto a panorama of rocky peaks which is lacking here. The road from Kobarid to Dreznica? That could almost be a match. But then again, not really, because there is no Km here, with its blinding cliffs. Maybe this road through the Vosges is most like the winding road that rises up out of Kobarid to Vrsno. There the forest also gives way now and then to scenic views of the valley below, which never seems that far away. And there are no cliffs, just a constant alternation of dense forest and rolling grassy field. I can't remember whether the pines on the slopes of Vrsno are the same as here. Probably not.

The road still leads uphill, although here and there accompanied by the whiteness of hewn rock; as in any place where human

implements have wounded the earth's green flanks and dug into its accumulated, hidden wealth.

To the left, a long, wide stretch of open ground appears, and it leads to the entrance. Some day this stretch will be lined with trees. Now it's jammed with buses and cars I can't help thinking of the huge parking lot outside the caves at Postojna. As best as I can, I resist the image of aging Swiss and Austrian tourists. Gray-haired wives possessively clutch the straps of their old-fashioned purses and rotate their heads in the direction of the tour guide's voice, like chickens startled from their little tasks. The most honest thing I could do now would be to drive away and return tomorrow morning, when the more humdrum atmosphere of the work week can be expected to have a less jarring effect on these isolated, step-like terraces. But tomorrow other landscapes have been mapped out for me, and I walk toward the entrance, conscious that I am depending mechanically on my quick and hectic schedule instead of taking in the surroundings first. I feel a gentle nostalgia for that undisturbed, timeless composure in which a person can relate himself honestly to the earth and sea, to streets and houses, to the faces and lives that fate brings him in contact with. But impatience drives us feverishly on, and we receive only superficial impressions, which disperse like water spraying from the prow of a motorboat. In the end we take comfort in our nostalgia for permanence, as though the awareness of that disfiguring loss was itself a kind of wealth. Which perhaps it is. And may always have been, although today we are actually impoverished by the abundance of experiences. We've done the precise opposite of what bees do. Scattering pollen over a million objects, we persist in hoping—despite the quiet voice time to replenish our abandoned hive.

It's absurd, but I almost feel that the tourists walking back to their cars can see the striped jacket wrapped around my shoulders and hear my wooden clogs crunch on the gravel of the path. This is a sudden flash, the kind that confuses past and present. There are moments when an invisible but powerful force stirs within us; others can sense it—as the presence

of something unusual in the air—and they shudder like a boat in an unexpected wave. I may well be showing something of my former self. At this thought I try to focus on my stride. It bothers me that my sandals are so light and my step so elastic, more than if I were wearing canvas shoes with thick wooden soles. As I did then.

The door, strung with barbed wire, is closed, just as it used to be. Nothing has changed. Only the guards are missing in the towers. You still have to wait at the door. The only difference is that now a watchman emerges from a wooden hut, unlocks the door, and at carefully measured intervals allows groups into his pitiless mountain corral. Thanks to this procedure calm reigns on the camp's descending terraces. The July sun steadfastly keeps watch over the silence, and only occasionally, somewhere far below, the words of a tour guide echo like the halting voice of some evangelist risen from the dead.

The watchman recognizes me, which is surprising; I didn't think he would remember my visit last year. "C'est va?" he asks. It is just enough to strike a note of intimacy, separating me from the swarm of tourists. He's dark-haired and plain, short and sinewy and animated. If he had a helmet and lantern, he'd make a perfect miner. But he's intelligent, too. It's obvious that he is embarrassed, feels uncomfortable with me, a former inmate. After all, he earns his living by conducting tours through the land of our death. So I take the ready permission that he gives me to proceed alone into the region of barbed wire not just as a sign of his comradely regard but as his way of getting rid of me promptly. More the latter. Nor do I resent it, knowing that I myself could never speak to a fellow visitor, even one who had been with me in the place of crematoria. I would be afraid of slipping into cliché at every word. It's impossible, anyway, to talk about death—or love—with anyone but yourself. Death and love allow no witnesses.

When he speaks to the silent crowd as their tour guide, he is in fact speaking to his memories, a monologue of self-revelation. It isn't clear whether this release satisfies or calms him to any degree. I imagine he feels even more ill at ease after



such testimony—certainly lessened. But I am grateful to him for letting me walk through this inaudible world alone. I feel superior, satisfied with the special privilege that comes from my former status as an outcast. No as then, separateness and silence. For despite the crowds and our herd like existence, each of us lived in isolation, in his own mute darkness.



some day we must find a contemporary Collodi to tell children the story of our past. The question is, will he be able to impress a child's heart without injuring it with the evil, and guard it also from the temptations of the future? On these steps, which bend at each terrace like great stone knees, we reverted to a pre-rational state. This happened as the cytoplasm in our cells and the marrow in our bones dried up, like a jellyfish on gravel. Then the steps loomed before us like a flight of stairs in a belltower. There seemed to be no end to the succession of terraces. Another reason it took us an eternity to reach the top was that our feet, though our legs were like sticks, had swollen into white, fleshy lumps.



I am incapable of measuring the distance between myself and the steps, familiar and close as they are in the sunlight; I sense only the pall of nothingness that hangs over them. They are simple, as the emaciated arms were simple that carried and set the stones they are made of. They once seemed steeper to me. The adult returns to the land of his childhood, only to discover how small the buildings of his memory really are, forgetting that he measured the world from Tom Thumb's perspective. But it wasn't in our childhood that we went up and down these stairs; our helplessness was greater than a child's, for we lacked the advantage of innocence. Each of us, in his nakedness, in his withered skin of a hungry animal burning itself out in captivity, each day calculated the distance between the ovens and his emaciated rib cage, his sticklike arms and legs. I could use Carlo Collodi's wooden boy as a metaphor, since Pinocchio, too, was fated to be seared by flame. But his gentle creator replaced the damaged parts, which no one ever thought of doing for us. No, Pinocchio is inappropriate here, yet

THE TRUE AND ABSOLUTELY UNBELIEVABLE STORY OF KIV

BY MARK AXELROD

Kiev, my grandfather told me, was called the “mother of Russian cities,” and from where it sat, perched atop Mikhailovskaya Hill, overlooking the winding blue-green Dnieper, he added, “it could see all the sights swept before it.” The metaphor was an appropriate one. According to my grandfather, the city received its name from the legendary Kiy, first Prince of the Polyni, who, with his brothers Molot and Gvost, founded the walled city and began to reign over it sometime in the early tenth century. As legend has it, Kiy and his brothers were giants of men whose physical and carnal appetites were never quite sated and whose predisposition to violence was the seed from which the city flourished. At least my grandfather believed that was the reason.

From the banks of the Dnieper, one saw the Andreyevskaya Church, its graceful towers rising high above Kiev with columns adorned with decorative summits, condescendingly peering down upon the lush green forests and the fertile plains of the humble Kreshchtaya valley. All the churches seemed to be like the Andreyevskaya Church: fortresses of vision fortified with gleaming gold and white marble ornaments; however, in some curious way their gaze did more to disquiet the residents rather than console them. At least for the Jews. But of all the churches in Kiev, the one that held the most terror for the Jews was the Balyeznsky Church, for it was in Balyeznsky Church that the curse began.

As my grandfather retold it, the church was haunted with what Kievan Jews called “the evil eye of Kiy.” It was said that Kiy was accidentally blinded in one eye by a stone thrown by a Jewish child. Allegedly, the elderly Prince had just finished his afternoon prayers and was leaving the Balyeznsky Church when a number of children were having a snowball fight outside the massive church doors. One child, Shlomo Tsuriss, realized that he could throw the snow farther if he took a stone and imbedded it in the snow. As the Prince exited the church, Shlomo flung the snowball which, slipping from his tiny hands, accidentally struck the Prince in his right eye. Kiy grabbed his eye and howled with pain as the blood spurted from the socket onto his stiff, gray beard. Shlomo, terrified by what he had done, ran away, never to return to the church site until an adult. Years later, after Kiy had long since died, Shlomo returned to the church where, as a child, he

had blinded the old man. For some unknown reason, Shlomo was compelled to revisit the old church for it was there that Kiy was laid to rest.

As he entered the massive cathedral, he noticed two parishioners crossing themselves, before exiting through a side door. He walked to the front of the church gazing up at the center of the main cupola, over a hundred feet high, and the inlaid blue and gold mosaics lining each of thirteen domes. At the foot of the altar, Shlomo noticed the concrete sarcophagus which held the remains of Prince Kiy. There was an eerie silence in the church, a silence that was compounded by the fact that he was the only one there. Shlomo bent over and began to read the inscription on the tomb when he suddenly felt the floor begin to tremble. The vibrations started gently, but soon became more violent. The sarcophagus too began to vibrate; slowly at first, then much quicker. Shlomo stepped back. Then, as if suddenly hit with a huge hammer, the concrete tomb began to crack. Shlomo jumped to one side as the coffin burst open with a horrible crash and the corpse of Kiy sprang up. It was the most hideous sight Shlomo had ever seen. The gums of Kiy’s mouth were black and oozed a viscous yellow pus that covered what few teeth remained; his lips, stiff and parched by the decades of death that dried them, were contorted in such a way that the upper lip reached one nostril and the lower one his chin; and the hollowed, decayed socket was stretched with shriveled vestiges of parched skin. Screeching wildly, Kiy’s imprecations spilled from his blackened mouth and filled the domes of the church as he gesticulated madly, waving his long bony fingers the nails on which were over four inches long.

Suddenly, the windows began to rattle in their casings, then they shattered, plunging to the church floor in massive chunks; the icons and mosaics swirled in a maelstrom that hurled the candles, ornate vases and wooden pews against the marble walls; the doors broke from their hinges and the belching stench of death filled the church with a great green smoke. Shlomo was pinned to the floor by an unseen force. He struggled to free himself, but could not



move. Kiy leaped from the coffin and opened the abyss that was his mouth until it stretched the width of the church.

“It was you who stole my eye” he bellowed. “Now you shall pay my vision!”

And from out of his mouth, like a newborn infant squeezing from the womb, oozed an eye. An eye that continued pouring from Kiy’s mouth in one continuous flow and as it did it became larger and larger until the eye filled almost the entire church. Shlomo kept screaming for help, but the swirling of the wind and the crashing of the windows only drowned out his pleas. Blood spurted from the immense eye, filling the aisles with thick crimson pools. Shlomo splashed about as he kept screaming; the blood stained his clothes, his hands, his face; at times, he’d swallow it, and it would instantly

And so it was said that from that day on, the “Eye of Kiy” espied upon all the Jews of Kiev and that the vengeance of the eye would not be sated until all the Jews had been consumed. It was also said that on certain nights, even as far away as Smyrtevo, one could see the blinking eye of Kiy from behind the domed cathedral windows, looking left then right for any Jews who might be near.

“That is why there’s always been tsuriss for the Russian Jews,” my grandfather said. Tsuriss: suffering.

And such was the tale my grandfather told me. A tale so horrible not even Gogol could have told it.

The moments that followed the assassination were anxious ones. Alexander III, who upon hearing the fact that one of the assassins was a Jew and was still alive, hast-

to one of the officers and said in a voice bereft of sadness, “Strangle him.” The crowd went silent as the Cossack nodded to his leader then grabbed Kohshkoh by the throat and choked him with such force that witnesses recalled hearing bones crack before the blood spurted from Kohshkoh’s mouth and onto the black sleeves of the lieutenant. Only when Rodion Romanovich Kohshkoh’s head fell limp to one side, the blood oozing out the corners of his mouth, soiling his black waistcoat, did the masses begin to cheer. Alexander returned to his carriage and rode off.

After his father’s assassination, Alexander left St. Petersburg for his country palace at Dyetsky Manesh, a quiet village on the Dneiper River. The palace, modeled after Versailles, was Alexander’s favorite retreat, and as a child he used to come and sit beneath a sculpture of The Bronze Horse-

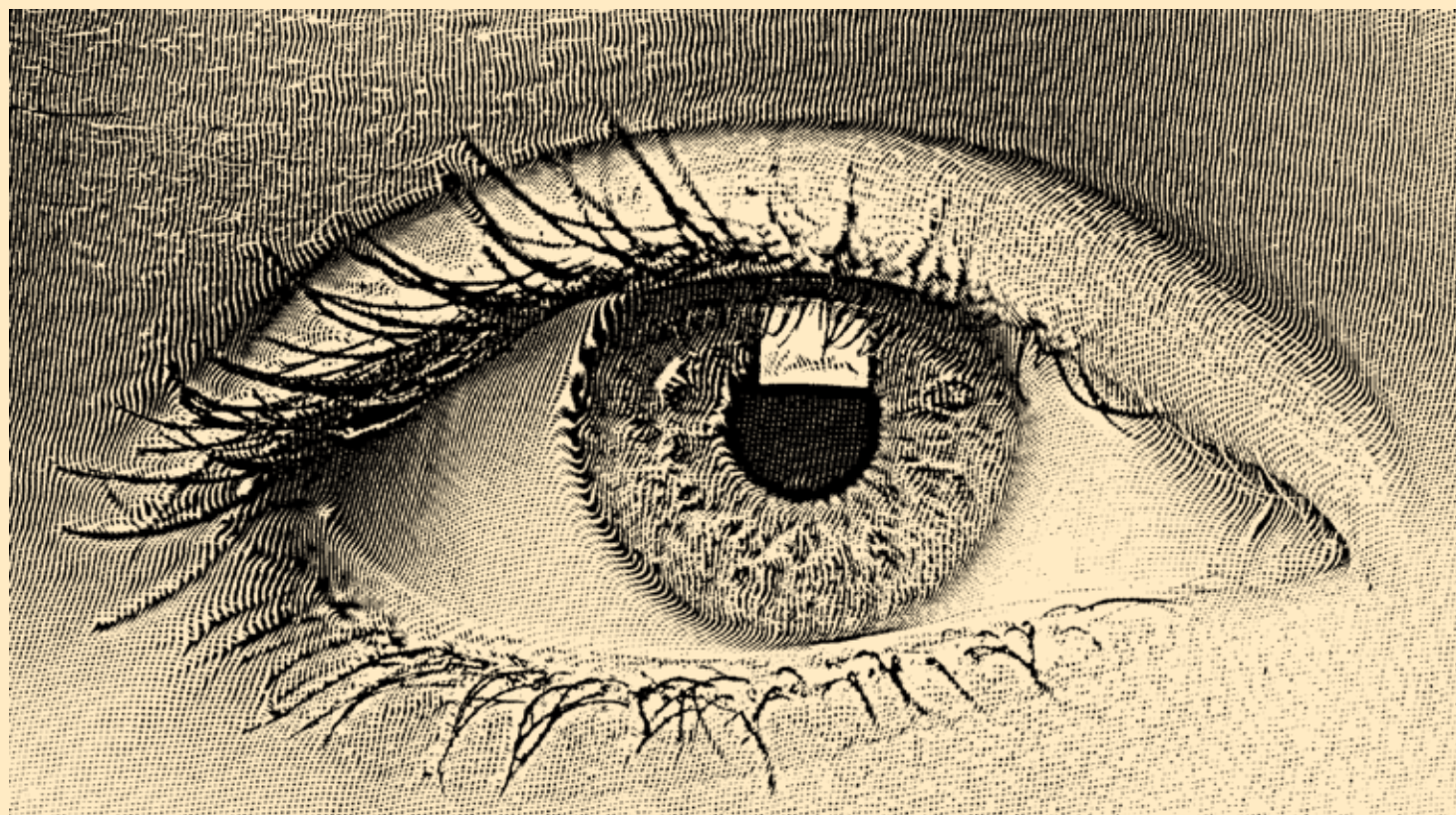
made of Camelote marble, was decorated with gilt-bronzes by Lucien Bafreur and above it hung a portrait of Alexander II painted by the famous French portraitist Marcel Flagorneur. From the ceiling, five chandeliers, adorned with sparkling crystal links imported from the city of Verrieres, hovered over the long, rectangular mahogany table around which sat fifteen men in chaises of carved and gilt wood. When drawn, the heavy floor-to-ceiling burgundy drapes, which graced each of ten windows, allowed no light.

The men rose as Alexander walked into the hall and were only seated after Alexander nodded for them to be seated as well. The discussions began without hesitation, and the lines were quickly drawn between the liberal and conservative elements. On one hand, Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov, the liberal party leader, was proposing a program of moderate reforms and a plan of popular representation which had gained the approval of Alexander II shortly before his death. Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov was a much-esteemed leader. A man of medium height, who always dressed in dark English suits, fashionable cravats, and patent leather shoes, Kirsanov was approaching fifty. His neatly combed, graying hair shone with a light luster, like polished silver; his face was generally free from wrinkles and his eyes, soft and almond shaped, cast a feeling of warmth on all those who chose to meet them.

“It would be,” Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov began, “a continuation of the advances our beloved Alexander II had made. Such a continuation of his reforms would be a tribute to his memory.”

“Nonsense” barked Constantin Pobyedonostzev from the opposite side of the huge, oval, mahogany table. “This idea of popular rule is preposterous. It encroaches upon the sacred prerogatives of the autocracy. Those programs cannot be implemented. Besides, such a reformation would benefit the Jews, who we all know were behind the slaughter of our beloved Alexander II.”

Alexander bit his lower lip at the mention of his father’s name. Constantin Pobyedonostzev knew how to manipulate his leader, since he



congeal on his lips and tongue. Finally, when the eye had grown to capacity, it blinked ever so slowly and as it locked onto Shlomo’s eyes it began to consume him. Shlomo could feel his whole body being swallowed by the massive eye to the laughing delight of Kiy, who was standing above Shlomo, defecating. Only when the eye had consumed Shlomo’s entire body, the soul and spirit, only then did the winds begin to cease. Only then did the pews, the icons, the glass, the fractured coffin all return to what they were before. Only then did the doors rehing themselves in time for evening vespers, leaving no trace of what transpired that afternoon.

ily returned to Ekaternina Canal accompanied by a whole regiment of lance-carrying Cossacks. By the time he had arrived, thousands of citizens had come to the site of the assassination where the stains of the previous hour were still fresh upon the street. When Alexander stepped from the carriage, he looked at the remains of the carnage, knelt down, swiped some blood on his finger and stared at it as if he recognized the royal color of his father’s life; then he looked up at Kohshkoh, who, still impaled on the birch tree, was barely breathing. Alexander walked over to the remaining assassin and wiped the vestige of regal blood on Kohshkoh’s face, then turned

man, reading Pushkin and imagining whether he too would someday become the hero Peter must have been. During his two-week stay Alexander engaged in a number of secret conferences with members of the government; however, it was at one such meeting in the opulent setting of the Tsar’s conference room that the most important issue of the day had come up.

It was two o’clock in the afternoon when Alexander arrived in the huge Hercules drawing room, the walls of which were covered in marble of blue and brown hues, staggered with twenty pilasters made of gilt-bronze pedestals and Corinthian capitals. The fireplace,

was not only the procurator-general of the Moly Synod, but was also Alexander's tutor when, as a professor at the University of Moscow, he taught the then crown prince the rudiments of political and social. Constantin Pobyedonostzev was almost eighty; tall, frightfully thin and slightly hunchback, his shriveled face was cut with deep creases in his hollowed cheeks and forehead; his sunken eyes, glazed with darkened circles and sacks of limp flesh, gave one the impression that his life was one continual struggle against the triumph of serenity. Whenever he was in public Pobyedonostzev generally wore a cardinal red robe and was escorted by an entourage of somber assistants, flanked by what he called his "sacred guard." And at all times he carried with him an ebony cane with a golden knob at one end and a golden nib at the other. His aides could always tell the Holy One's mood by the way he held his cane: the higher his hands were on the cane, the more strongly he felt about the subject at hand. Constantin Pobyedonostzev was the major proponent of an ecclesiastical police state of his own design and was adamant about his position arguing that "enlightenment and political autonomy are harmful to the motherland."

"The people," Constantin Pobyedonostzev continued, "must be enjoined to a state of patriarchal submission to the authority of the Church and of the temporal powers. Furthermore, the Greek



Orthodox people must be protected against the heretical influences of alien religions and races which must occupy in the Russian monarchy the most inferior

of social positions."

"You cannot be serious, Constantin Pobyedonostzev," Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov asked with a puzzled expression on his wrinkled forehead and a tone of partial disbelief.

"I am deadly serious!" the old man exclaimed, his fist clenched tightly around the golden knob of the cane. "There can be no room in Russia for those mendacious and insidious diseases that will undermine the integrity of the motherland."

"You cannot mean the Jews," said Kirsanov, who, among other things, had worked quite diligently at convincing the law and medical schools to accept more Jewish students.

"That's exactly who I mean!" screamed Pobyedonostzev. "Who do you think is at the root of our problem? The Jews! Who has infiltrated our religion and deteriorated our moral fiber? The Jews! Who has taken from us one of the greatest leaders our country has ever known? The Jews!"

"But Constantin Pobyedonostzev, we all know that the Narodnaya Volya was made up almost exclusively of non-Jewish intellectuals and university students. Zhelyabov is not Jewish," Kirsanov emphasized with a slight grin, attempting to defuse the angry monk.

"But who killed the Tsar! Kohshkoh. A Jew! And where did they plan it in, in..." Pobyedonostzev hesitated as if trying to remember the place. In frustration he started banging his cane on the floor.

"Helfmann. Hestia Helfmann," an aide whispered to him.

"In Hestia Helfmann's apartment!" the old man repeated, beginning again as if he hadn't stopped. "Another Jew! And what was their motive? This was their motive." And Pobyedonostzev removed from beneath his robes a copy of Hippolyte Lutostanski's book and raised it in the air. "They murdered the Tsar so they could drink his blood, that's why! So they could use the emperor's body fluids in one of their disgusting pagan rituals. Look, look it's all here."

And Pobyedonostzev flung the book across the polished table. It slid in front of him as he glanced at the title.

"I am familiar with the book Constantin Pobyedonostzev, but everyone knows that Father Zossima has totally refuted..."

"Don't confuse me with your facts Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov!" Pobyedonostzev interrupted. "The truth is that the Jews planned the regicide of Alexander II the way they planned the regicide of our beloved Father Jesus Christ! And that my dear Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov is a fact beyond dissension," Pobyedonostzev said, pointing his gold tip cane at the liberal leader and smiling a crooked smile that disclosed a set of stained yellow teeth.

The room went silent. Except for an occasional cough or a cleared throat, no words were spoken. For the entire dialogue, Alexander sat with his hand over his mouth, first looking at Kirsanov then at Pobyedonostzev, his mentor. At the conclusion of the deliberations, the majority of those in attendance agreed that "no concessions would be made to any revolutionary movement by initiating reforms," that "under no circumstances would the government abolish the police state" which was a counterbalance to the idea of a free state prevalent, as Pobyedonostzev concluded, in "the rotten West," and that "the Jewish problem would be handled in the most expedient of manners." The conference adjourned.

In early April, Alexander, after lengthy deliberations with Pobyedonostzev, presented in his imperial manifesto that "the voice of God hath commanded us to take up vigorously the reins of government, inspiring us with the belief in the strength and truth of autocratic power, which we are called upon to establish and safeguard. Therefore, I call upon all my faithful subjects to eradicate the hideous sedition prevalent in our great motherland and to establish a new age of faith and morality."

Pobyedonostzev could not have been happier since the methods whereby faith and morality were to be established and guaranteed were soon made known in what was erroneously called "The Stat-

ute Concerning Enforced Public Safety," a statute that conferred upon the capital governors of St. Petersburg and Moscow (and upon many provincial governors) the power to legislate special laws, which superseded the established laws, as well as to arrest and deport to Siberia, without due process, any and all citizens suspected of "political unsafety." The phrase was purposely left ambiguous.

Slowly, the change in attitude towards the Jews became more apparent. The assassination and the imperial manifesto had tended to move the masses of the Russian people into a reactionary direction. The press adopted a more hostile attitude towards the Jews. Governmental emissaries from St. Petersburg began to make visits to cities within the Pale Yelisavetgrad, Odessa, Kiev and entered into secret negotiations with the police officials concerning a possible "outbreak of popular indignation against the Zyhdhs" intimating the undesirability of obstructing the will of the Russian people by police intervention. Rumors were rife about an impending punishment against the Jews, more anti-Semitic newspaper articles appeared on the front pages, an imperial decree was imminent. Such were the events leading up to the days before Easter.

One April afternoon, while having an afternoon tea with Pobyedonostzev, Alexander said, "Shall we never be rid of the problem?"

Pobyedonostzev smiled.

"Certainly, your Highness, but let us not concern ourselves with such distasteful matters before the Winter Palace Ball. Such things will take care of themselves...in due course."

Pobyedonostzev raised his cup and once again smiled the same incorrigible smile that both repulsed and fascinated Alexander: repulsed him as a student and fascinated him as a Tsar. It was a smile that could only have ingratiated itself with no one other than the Devil.



THIS WAY FOR THE GAS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

BY TADEUSZ BOKOWSKI

All of us walk around naked. The delousing is finally over, and our striped suits are back from the tanks of Cyclone B solution, an efficient killer of lice in clothing and of men in gas chambers. Only the inmates in the blocks cut off from ours by the 'Spanish goats' still have nothing to wear. But all the same, all of us walk around naked: the heat is unbearable. The camp has been sealed off tight. Not a single prisoner, not one solitary louse, can sneak through the gate. The labour Kommandos have stopped working. All day, thousands of naked men shuffle up and down the roads, cluster around the squares, or lie against the walls and on top of the roofs. We have been sleeping on plain boards, since our mattresses and blankets are still being disinfected. From the rear blockhouses we have a view of the F.K.L.-*Frauen Konzentration Lager*; there too the delousing is in full swing. Twenty-eight thousand women have been stripped naked and driven out of the barracks.

Now they swarm around the large yard between the blockhouses.

The heat rises, the hours are endless. We are without even our usual diversion: the wide roads leading to the crematoria are empty. For several days now, no new transports have come in. Part of 'Canada' has been liquidated and detailed to a labour Kommando-one of the very toughest-at Harmenz. For there exists in the camp a special brand of justice based on envy: when the rich and mighty fall, their friends see to it that they fall to the very bottom. And Canada, our Canada, which smells not of maple forests but of French perfume, has amassed great fortunes in diamonds and currency from all over Europe.

Several of us sit on the top bunk, our legs dangling over the edge. We slice the neat loaves of crisp, crunchy bread. It is a bit coarse to the taste, the kind that stays fresh for days. Sent all the way from Warsaw-only a week ago my moth-

er held this white loaf in her hands ... dear Lord, dear Lord ...

We unwrap the bacon, the onion, we open a can of evaporated milk. Henri, the fat Frenchman, dreams aloud of the French wine brought by the transports from Strasbourg, Paris, Marseille ... Sweat streams down his body.



'Listen, *mon ami*, next time we go up on the loading ramp, I'll bring you real champagne. You haven't tried it before, eh?'

'No. But you'll never be able to smuggle it through the gate, so stop teasing. Why not try and "organize" some shoes for me instead-you know, the perforated kind, with a double sole, and what about that shirt you promised me long ago?'

'Patience, *patience*. When the new transports come, I'll bring all you want. We'll be going on the ramp again!'

'And what if there aren't any more "cremo" transports?' I say spitefully. 'Can't you see how much easier life is becoming around here: no limit on packages, no more beatings? You even write letters home ... One hears all kind of talk, and, dammit, they'll run out of people!'

'Stop talking nonsense.' Henri's serious fat face moves rhythmically, his mouth is full of sardines. We have been friends for a long time, but I do not even know his last name. 'Stop talking nonsense,' he repeats, swallowing with effort. 'They can't run out of people, or we'll starve to death in this blasted camp. All of us live on what they bring.'

'All? We have our packages...'

'Sure, you and your friend, and ten other friends of yours. Some of you Poles get packages. But what about us, and the Jews, and the Russkis? And what if we had no food, no "organization" from the transports,

do you think you'd be eating those packages of yours in peace? We wouldn't let you!'

'You would, you'd starve to death like the Greeks. Around here, whoever has grub, has power.'

'Anyway, you have enough, we have enough, so why argue?'

Right, why argue? They have enough, I have enough, we eat together and we sleep on the same bunks. Henri slices the bread, he makes a tomato salad. It tastes good with the commissary mustard.

Below us, naked, sweat-drenched men crowd the narrow barracks aisles or lie packed in eights and tens in the lower bunks. Their nude, withered bodies stink of sweat and excrement; their cheeks are hollow. Directly beneath me, in the bottom bunk, lies a rabbi. He has covered his head with a piece of rag torn off a blanket and reads from a Hebrew prayer book (there is no shortage of this type of literature at the camp), wailing loudly, monotonously.

'Can't somebody shut him up? He's been raving as if he'd caught God himself by the feet.'

'I don't feel like moving. Let him rave. They'll take him to the oven that much sooner.'

'Religion is the opium of the people,' Henri, who is a Communist and a *rentier*, says sententiously. 'If they didn't believe in God and eternal life, they'd have smashed the crematoria long ago.'

'Why haven't you done it then?'

The question is rhetorical; the Frenchman ignores it.

'Idiot,' he says simply, and stuffs a tomato in his mouth.

Just as we finish our snack, there is a sudden commotion at the door. The Muslims scurry in fright to the safety of their bunks, a messenger runs into the Block Elder's shack. The Elder, his face solemn, steps out at once.

'Canada! *Antreten!* But fast! There's a transport coming!'

'Great God!' yells Henri, jumping

off the bunk. He swallows the rest of his tomato, snatches his coat, screams 'Raus' at the men below, and in a flash is at the door. We can hear a scramble in the other bunks. Canada is leaving for the ramp.

'Henri, the shoes!' I call after him.

'*Keine Angst!*' he shouts back, already outside.

I proceed to put away the food. I tie a piece of rope around the suitcase where the onions and the tomatoes from my father's garden in Warsaw mingle with Portuguese sardines, bacon from Lublin (that's from my brother); and authentic sweetmeats from Salonica. I tie it all up, pull on my trousers, and slide off the bunk.

'*Platz!*' I yell, pushing my way through the Greeks. They step aside. At the door I bump into Henri.

'*Was ist Los?*'

'Want to come with us on the ramp?'

'Sure, why not?'

'Come along then, grab your coat! We're short of a few men. I've already told the Kapo,' and he shoves me out of the barracks door.

We line up. Someone has marked down our numbers, someone up ahead yells, 'March, march,' and now we are running towards the gate, accompanied by the shouts of a multilingual throng that is already being pushed back to the barracks. Not everybody is lucky enough to be going on the ramp ... We have almost reached the gate. *Links, zwei, drei, vier! Mutzen ab!* Erect, arms stretched stiffly along our hips, we march past the gate briskly, smartly, almost gracefully. A sleepy S.S. man with a large pad in his hand checks us off, waving us ahead in groups of five.

'*Hundert!*' he calls after we have all passed.

'*Stimmt!*' comes a hoarse answer from out front.

We march fast, almost at a run. There are guards all around, young men with automatics. We pass camp II B, then some deserted barracks and a clump of unfamil-

iar green-apple and pear trees. We cross the circle of watchtowers and, running, burst on to the highway. We have arrived. Just a few more yards. There, surrounded by trees, is the ramp.

A cheerful little station, very much like any other provincial railway stop: a small square framed by tall chestnuts and paved with yellow gravel. Not far off, beside the road, squats a tiny wooden shed, uglier and more flimsy than the ugliest and flimsiest railway shack; farther along lie stacks of old rails, heaps of wooden beams, barracks parts, bricks, paving stones. This is where they load freight for Birkenau: supplies for the construction of the camp, and people for the gas chambers. Trucks drive around, load up lumber, cement, people—a regular daily routine.

And now the guards are being posted along the rails, across the beams, in the green shade of the Silesian chestnuts, to form a tight circle around the ramp. They wipe the sweat from their faces and sip out of their canteens. It is unbearably hot; the sun stands motionless at its zenith.

‘Fall out!’

We sit down in the narrow streaks of shade along the stacked rails. The hungry Greeks (several of them managed to come along, God only knows how) rummage underneath the rails. One of them finds some pieces of mildewed bread, another a few half-rotten sardines. They eat.

‘*Schweinedreck*,’ spits a young, tall guard with comcoloured hair and dreamy blue eyes. ‘For God’s sake, any minute you’ll have so much food to stuff down your guts, you’ll bust!’ He adjusts his gun, wipes his face with a handkerchief.

‘Hey you, fatsol!’ His boot lightly touches Henri’s shoulder. ‘*Pass mal auf*, want a drink?’

‘Sure, but I haven’t got any marks,’ replies the Frenchman with a professional air.

‘*Schade*, too bad.’

‘Come, come, Herr Posten, isn’t my word good enough any more? Haven’t we done business before? How much?’

‘One hundred. *Gemacht?*’

‘*Gemacht.*’

We drink the water, lukewarm and tasteless. It will be paid for by the people who have not yet arrived.

‘Now you be careful,’ says Henri, turning to me. He tosses away the empty bottle. It strikes the rails and bursts into tiny fragments. ‘Don’t take any money, they might be checking. Anyway, who the hell needs money? You’ve got enough to eat. Don’t take suits, either, or they’ll think you’re planning to escape. Just get a shirt, silk only, with a collar. And a vest. And if you find something to drink, don’t bother calling me. I know how to shift for myself, but you watch your step or they’ll let you have it.’

‘Do they beat you up here?’

‘Naturally. You’ve got to have eyes in your ass. *Arschaugen.*’

Around us sit the Greeks, their jaws working greedily, like huge human insects. They munch on stale lumps of bread. They are restless, wondering what will happen next. The sight of the large beams and the stacks of rails has them worried. They dislike carrying heavy loads.

‘*Was wir arbeiten?*’ they ask.

‘*Niks. Transport kommen, alles Krematorium, compris?*’

‘*Alles verstehen.*’ they answer in crematorium Esperanto.

All is well—they will not have to move the heavy rails or carry the beams.

In the meantime, the ramp has become increasingly alive with activity, increasingly noisy. The crews are being divided into those who will open and unload the arriving cattle cars and those who will be posted by the wooden steps. They receive instructions on how to proceed most efficiently. Motor cycles drive up, delivering S.S. officers, bemedalled, glittering with brass, beefy men with highly polished boots and shiny, brutal faces. Some have brought their briefcases, others hold thin, flexible whips. This gives them an air of military readiness and agility. They walk in and out of the commissary—for the miserable little shack by the road serves as their commissary, where in the summertime they drink mineral water, *Studentenquelle*, and where in winter they can warm up with a glass of hot wine. They greet each other in the state-approved way, raising an arm Roman fashion, then shake hands cordially, exchange warm smiles, discuss mail from home, their children, their families. Some stroll majestically on the ramp.

The silver squares on their collars glitter, the gravel crunches under their boots, their bamboo whips snap impatiently.

We lie against the rails in the narrow streaks of shade, breathe unevenly, occasionally exchange a few words in our various tongues, and gaze listlessly at the majestic men in green uniforms, at the green trees, and at the church steeple of a distant village.

‘The transport is coming,’ somebody says. We spring to our feet, all eyes turn in one direction. Around the bend, one after another, the cattle cars begin rolling in. The train backs into the station, a conductor leans out, waves his hand, blows a whistle. The locomotive whistles back with a shrieking noise, puffs, the train rolls slowly alongside the ramp. In the tiny barred windows appear pale, wilted, exhausted human



faces, terror-stricken women with tangled hair, unshaven men. They gaze at the station in silence. And then, suddenly, there is a stir inside the cars and a pounding against the wooden boards.

‘Water! Air!’—weary, desperate cries.

Heads push through the windows, mouths gasp frantically for air. They draw a few breaths, then disappear; others come in their place, then also disappear. The cries and moans grow louder.

A man in a green uniform covered with more glitter than any of the others jerks his head impatiently, his lips twist in annoyance. He inhales deeply, then with a rapid gesture throws his cigarette away and signals to the guard. The guard removes the automatic from his shoulder, aims, sends a series of shots along the train. All is quiet now. Meanwhile, the trucks have arrived, steps are being drawn up, and the Canada men stand ready at their posts by the train doors. The S.S. officer with the briefcase raises his hand.

‘Whoever takes gold, or anything at all besides food, will be shot for stealing Reich property. Understand? *Verstanden?*’

‘*Jawohl!*’ we answer eagerly.

‘*Also los! Begin!*’

The bolts crack, the doors fall open. A wave of fresh air rushes inside the train. People ... inhumanly crammed, buried under incredible heaps of luggage, suitcases, trunks, packages, crates, bundles of every description (everything that had been their past and was to start their future). Monstrously squeezed together, they have fainted from heat, suffocated, crushed one another. Now they push towards the opened doors, breathing like fish cast out on the sand.

‘Attention! Out, and take your luggage with you! Take out everything. Pile all your stuff near the exits. Yes, your coats too. It is summer. March to the left. Understand?’

‘Sir, what’s going to happen to us?’ They jump from the train on to the gravel, anxious, worn-out.

‘Where are you people from?’

‘Sosnowiec-Bedzin. Sir, what’s going to happen to us?’ They repeat the question stubbornly, gazing into our tired eyes.

‘I don’t know, I don’t understand Polish.’

It is the camp law: people going to their death must be deceived to the very end. This is the only permissible form of charity. The heat is tremendous. The sun hangs directly over our heads, the white, hot sky quivers, the air vibrates, an occasional breeze feels like a sizzling blast from a furnace. Our lips are parched, the mouth fills with the salty taste of blood, the body is weak and heavy from lying in the sun. Water!

A huge, multicoloured wave of people loaded down with luggage pours from the train like a blind, mad river trying to find a new bed. But before they have a chance to recover, before they can draw a breath of fresh air and look at the sky, bundles are snatched from their hands, coats ripped off their

backs, their purses and umbrellas taken away.

‘But please, sir, it’s for the sun, I cannot ...’

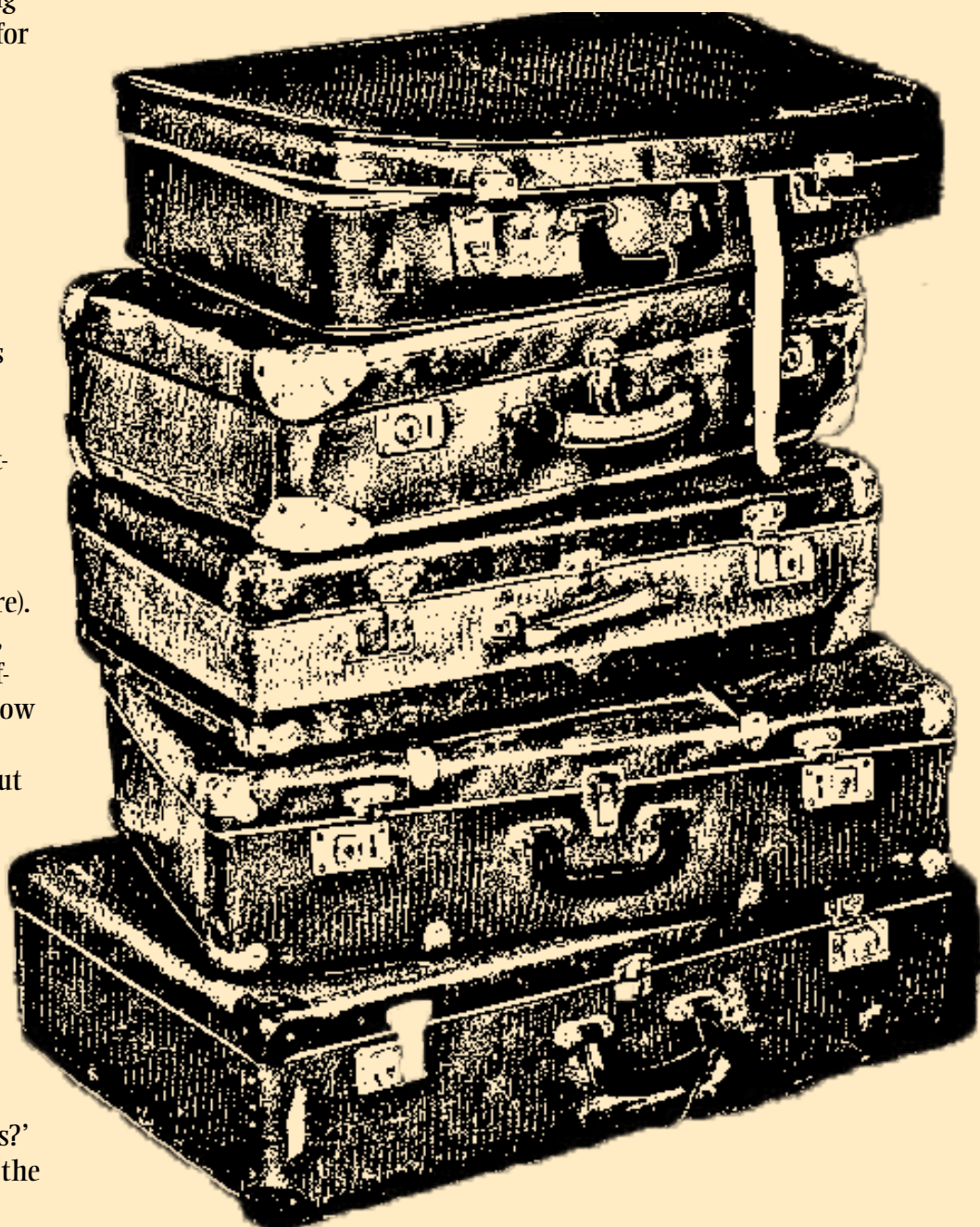
‘*Verboten!*’ one of us barks through clenched teeth. There is an S.S. man standing behind your back, calm, efficient, watchful.

‘*Meine Herrschaften*, this way, ladies and gentlemen, try not to throw your things around, please. Show some goodwill,’ he says courteously, his restless hands playing with the slender whip.

‘Of course, of course,’ they answer as they pass, and now they walk alongside the train somewhat more cheerfully. A woman reaches down quickly to pick up her handbag. The whip flies, the woman screams, stumbles, and falls under the feet of the surging crowd. Behind her, a child cries in a thin little voice ‘*Mamele!*’—a very small girl with tangled black curls.

The heaps grow. Suitcases, bundles, blankets, coats, handbags that open as they fall, spilling

coins, gold, watches; mountains of bread pile up at the exits, heaps of marmalade, jams, masses of meat, sausages; sugar spills on the gravel. Trucks, loaded with people, start up with a deafening roar and drive off amidst the wailing and screaming of the women separated from their children, and the stupefied silence of the men left behind. They are the ones who had been ordered to step to the right—the healthy and the young who will go to the camp. In the end, they too will not escape death, but first they must work.



SAFE HOUSE

BY CHRISTOPHE BOLANSKI

It would be wrong to see his act as merely a reflection of the self-hatred common in part of the Jewish intelligentsia back then. In his life, it wasn't a disavowal but instead another way to reconcile being Jewish and French. A way to impose a little bit of order on his interior chaos and even get back to his roots. Through scripture, he discovered Abraham's sacrifice, the exodus from Egypt, the judgment of Solomon, a whole universe he'd been deprived of.

He was also a pious man. As soon as his work was finished, he read the Bible or the most famous spiritual authors. Like Saint Francis de Sales, an early member of the Counter-Reformation. His Introduction to the Devout Life, with its echoes of common sense and its debonair tone, was what my grandfather used as a guide for his every moment. Like his medical journals, he examined it with a ballpoint pen and a sheet of paper for notes. He was just as serious, just as attentive, just as willing to learn. He spent whole days bent over his old spell books, weighing each word, looking for ancient secrets like a God-fearing man studying the Torah. In the bottom of his heart, he carried the same distrust of the world. He, too, lived a beggar's life. He had nothing, was attached to nothing. He lived in terror of doing the wrong thing, of committing a professional mistake, of hurting someone. Every answer he discovered led to new questions. His faith was wracked by doubt and full of fervor. His joyful exclamations were never without a serious foundation. He would have made an excellent Hasid-just among the just.

But this man was not very Catholic. I suspect he even invented his own personal cosmogony. Because he realized the uniqueness of his beliefs? His religious practices remained furtive. He practically hid them. I have no memory of him kneeling, his hands together, his head bowed. The prayers he said before dawn were confined to quiet hummings. He never spoke to a divinity directly. He preferred to contemplate it from within, like a mystic. It was a solitary pleasure. He rarely went to mass and almost

never entered a confessional. More often than not, he stayed on the cathedral plaza, sealed in the Fiat with his crippled spouse. Did he prefer study to sermons? Or did he feel unworthy of entering the Lord's dwelling? Had this godless Jew become a churchless Catholic?

Despite all his efforts, he never managed to leave this inbetween. He wanted to enter an eternal, Christian France. He was knocking at the door of a house that didn't want him.

In the eyes of the occupiers and of the Vichy government, his certificate of baptism had no value. "In terms of race, it doesn't change anything, just as a hundred baptisms can't make a Negro into an Aryan," wrote a doctor who was a member of the Institute for the Study of Jewish Questions, an agency created by the Gestapo for propaganda purposes. Little by little, the avalanche of decrees stripped him of everything he had become, leaving him nothing but a single three-letter word stuck to his chest. A frantic succession of German ordinances and French laws competed to more rigorously orchestrate his social death in preparation for his future disappearance.



Why did he go back to Paris? At the end of May 1940, with the German invasion underway, he was on leave in Desertines. At the bedside of Jean-Elie, who had just come down with early symptoms of tuberculosis, and near Luc, who had just been born. When the defeat was announced, he decided to take the wheel of Hotchkiss and get back to his unit as quickly as possible. He knew that if there were an evacuation, the Percy

military hospital he was attached to would be pulled back to Royan. History doesn't say how he managed to drive through a country in complete disarray with a sick child, a newborn, and a handicapped wife. How did he cross the Loire in advance of the enemy troops, weaving between masses of refugees, and escaping bombs from the German Junkers? Of this frantic flight, Jean-Elie remembers only a night spent in a deserted chateau, abandoned by its owners, left at their disposal by a friendly housekeeper.

Captain Doctor Boltanski eventually finds his regiment at Ronce-les-Bains, a seaside town in Charente-Maritime. His superior, seeing him reappear out of nowhere, asks him where he's been and what he's doing there. He's suspicious, basically accusing him of spying: "how did you know we were here?" he says. The suspect defends himself, "but an officer told me ... He isn't welcome. All around him, people are talking about the "fifth column" of traitors from within. They already hold "Jews and foreigners" responsible for the defeat. He is put on leave without pay on June 18, 1940, four days before the armistice. What does he do then? He

could have hurried to reach the future "free zone" in the south or tried to move abroad. He must sense that the atmosphere will soon become suffocating. Instead, he puts on his civilian clothes and goes back home. He calmly returns with his family to a city that has become the heart of the Nazi regime in France.

From then on, he submits to the demands of the new authorities.

For each census, he goes to the police station on the rue Perronet or to the prefecture. He fills out forms that will soon be in the hands of arresting officers. He tries to fit his degrees and his ranks of military service into the tiny space provided on the official papers and understands, from their placement, that this information carries no weight against other responses: name, religion, racial background of parents and grandparents. He conscientiously fills out the list of assets, not forgetting the land in Mayenne inherited by his spouse. With the same care he gives his patients, he receives the interim administrator appointed by Vichy to take care of his fortune, clearly wears his label on the left sleeve of his coat, respects the curfew, obeys the ticket checker in the metro who tells him to get in the last car.

He does what everyone else is doing—he follows orders. Out of habit, out of loyalty. He continues to rely on the state. The law is the law. A good student to the end. His life conforming to a perpetual examination. To pass, it's enough to apply oneself, to respect orders, to eke out a maximum number of points on the written part and brilliantly ace the oral. He repeats that he has a good record. He believes that his medals, his titles, his career will protect him. The torrents of hate? The rising horror? Those are the fault of the Germans. His France, which he'd never stopped serving, wouldn't hand him over to the enemy.

What exactly did he know? He's aware, of course, of the names Draney, Compiègne, Pithiviers, Beaune-la-Rolande. Everyone is talking about the camps. At least everyone who thinks they might one day end up there. Even if he doesn't know the specifics, he realizes that hundreds of people, wearing stars like his, leave each week on armored trains going east. He must have heard the English radio report the massacre of seven hundred thousand Jews in Germany and in the conquered territories of Poland and Russia. He understands that a machine has been set in motion, and though he feels its unstoppable nature, he minimizes the risk. He tries to persuade himself that other camps, work camps, this time, awaited those who have been deported: "It's not serious. They leave on the train

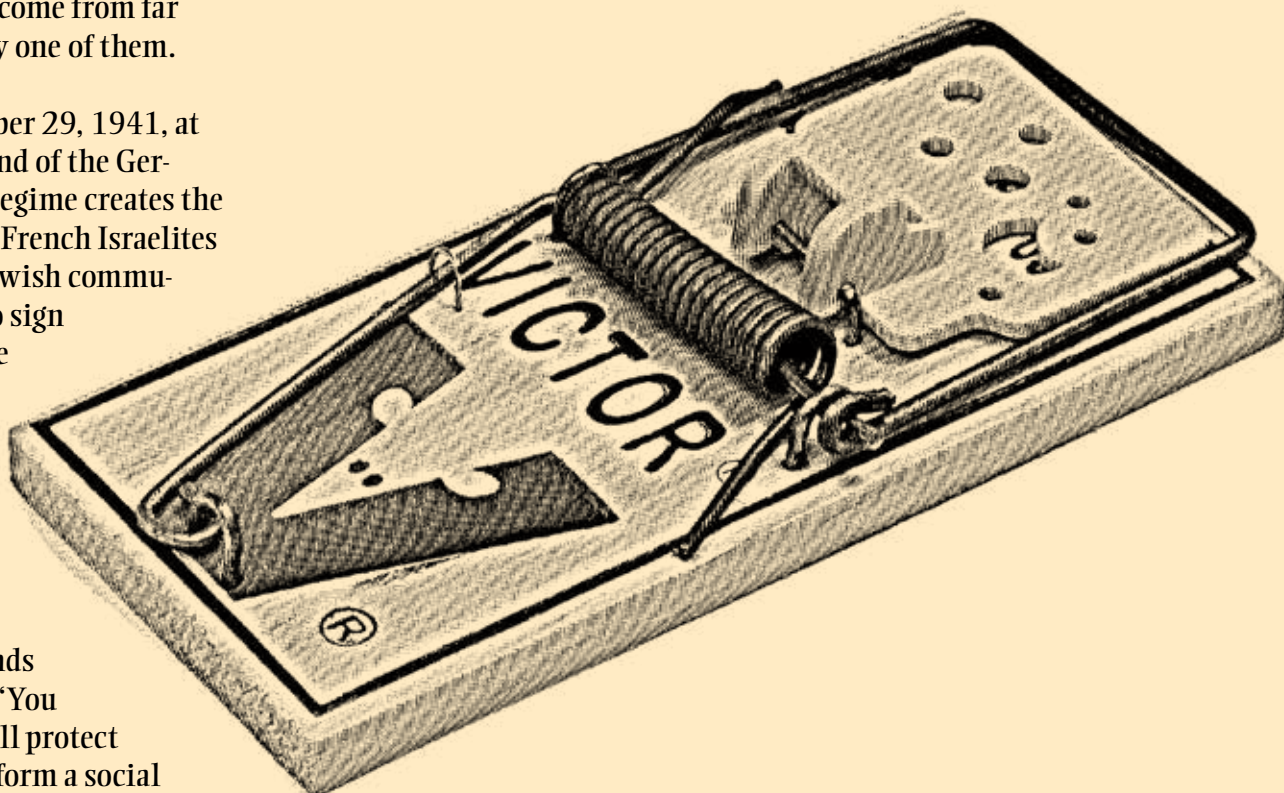
and they come back;’ he says one day. Is he simply trying to comfort his family?

Slowly, his world crumbles. The space around him becomes smaller. As if he’d been caught in a black hole. Cafes, restaurants, tea rooms, the bois de Boulogne, bois de Vincennes, public gardens, theaters, cinemas, stadiums, pools, sports clubs, markets, concerts, businesses (except between three and four in the afternoon, exactly when most of them are closed), museums, libraries, exhibits ... the places he’s forbidden to enter multiply. He’s not allowed to leave greater Paris, and he has to give notice of any change of address within forty-eight hours. First his car, then his quadricycle are confiscated. His group of friends, his so-called social fabric, also shrinks. Acquaintances, colleagues, former students, when they don’t share his fate, they flee as if he were diseased. Some French people, seeing his cloth patch, offer their sympathy. Most of them seem largely indifferent.

In the heart of the war, he understands his Jewishness. It all comes back to him. How could he not side with the victims? He discovers his unknown brothers. He helps them as much as he can, treating them free of charge, offering medical care, responding to their calls for help, agreeing to write them fake referrals if it can save them, unlikely certificates that attribute what has become a mark of infamy to a medical procedure rather than a ritual act. He comforts them with words that rise up from childhood, words that come from far away. He is finally one of them.

When, on November 29, 1941, at the express demand of the Germans, the Vichy regime creates the General Union of French Israelites to organize the Jewish community, he decides to sign up. He wants to be part of it. Out of solidarity, and out of discipline too. All Jews were required to be members. One of his doctor friends encourages him: “You have to join. It will protect us!” He could perform a social service, make himself useful,

while still following the rules, one more time. One time too many. This Judenrat, based on the model that already existed in the ghettos of Eastern Europe, is an ambush. Its directors and staff, despite the ‘legitimization’ cards that theoretically exempt them from the roundups and internments, are all eventually deported. His spouse finally persuades him. “Don’t do that;’ she begs, “That’s madness!” She convinces him not to write his name on another list. Especially not that one. Her instinct is right. This organization, stamped with respectability, formed for the most reputable ends, and advertising its absolute legality, is nothing but a mousetrap.



TRAIN TO BUDAPEST

BY DACIA MARAINI

Magdalena Ruthmann Orenstein escaped the gas chambers. He had discovered this too, but not from the survivor he had heard on the radio and later tracked down and interviewed. But rather from the diary of the widow of an SS officer who, seven years after her husband's death just before the camp was liberated, and after starving in a hovel among the ruins of Berlin, had found a publisher for her diary of the years 1944-1945. Its title was *Auschwitz*, and its subtitle *I Was There Too*. It was not the memoir of a surviving inmate, but of a woman who had lived with her SS officer husband in a little house all flowers and pretty curtains at the edge of the camp.

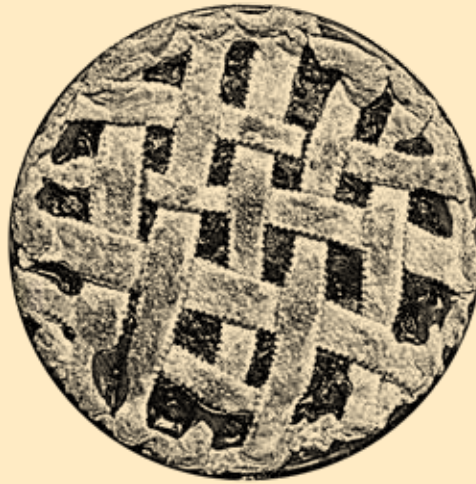
This woman had described how as a young bride she had lived in Bremen with her young husband who had started as an ordinary soldier in the Wehrmacht. Then with the growth of Nazism she had found herself first the wife of an SS-Hauptscharführer (Chief Squad Leader) and then of an SS-Untersturmführer (Junior Storm Leader or Second Lieutenant) and finally, transferred overnight to Berlin, the wife of an SS-Obersturmführer (Senior Storm Leader or First Lieutenant), which had made her very proud indeed. During these years three children had been born, of whom the youngest, Adolf, was a most beautiful blond child with blue eyes, just as recommended by the great Hitler. When her husband the SS-Obersturmführer received relocation orders he did not tell her where they were to live. It was only when they got there that his wife understood that they had been transferred to a work camp for Jewish prisoners. It was almost impossible for Aryan women even to pronounce the word 'Jewish' at that time. When they could not avoid it, they felt bound to add a grimace of disgust. According to the newspapers they all read, the Jews had been responsible for every kind of wickedness: as born loan-sharks they had stolen money from poor Austrians forced to struggle all day for a living, and had made secret pacts with the enemies of the fatherland, plotting to kill the Aryans and create a country in their own image. They were violent and domineering and

wanted to impose communism, meaning the immediate and total confiscation of all private property, with the possible shooting of anyone who kept back anything at all for themselves, even a ramshackle old bicycle. On top of this they were usually physically ugly, with hooked noses, prominent negroid lips and greasy black hair. This was how they were depicted in caricatures; stooping, bony, hunch-backed and hostile, ready to grab any poor unsuspecting Austrian and suck his blood by sinking two canine teeth as sharp as corkscrews into his neck.

She herself, Frau Margarethe von Bjeck, had been as convinced as anyone that these Bolshevik Jews were a threat to the people of her country and that it was right that they should be interned in work camps in occupied Poland and that her husband Otto, as an SS officer, should have been sent to help run one of these camps. It was a great honour for her young SS-Obersturmführer, who ranked only below the camp commandant who was an SS-Sturmbannführer (Storm Unit Leader or Major). To have been entrusted with such a position was evidence of force of character, a powerful sense of duty and total loyalty to the Fuhrer. Her husband had explained this to her as he opened the doors of their charming little house with its handmade wooden furniture, with little hearts carved into the backs of the chairs, armchairs upholstered in seablue velvet, wrought-iron beds and embroidered curtains. He had told her she must never speak to anyone except her neighbours, the wives of other SS officers, must look after the children and never ask him anything about his extremely important and highly confidential work. She had obeyed, passing her days indoors with her family or, with her husband's permission, being driven in an SS car to a nearby farm village, to buy something for herself and the children. Their daily provisions were brought every morning by a member of her husband's staff: milk, bread, meat and vegetables for the whole family.

From the windows of her little house on the edge of the camp, Margarethe could see birch trees silhouetted against the sky, and a pen full of geese whose angry and noisy squabbling could often be

heard. Large geese with flat yellow beaks who produced gigantic eggs that she mixed with flour to make excellent pies, both sweet and savoury. The vegetables always came in boxes; sometimes asparagus, sometimes white cabbage, sometimes red cabbage. Sometimes she longed for a change, but she never complained.



Her husband, loyal to his country, never talked about his work at the camp. In any case, she had no curiosity and would not have wanted to go and look for herself. She stayed at home making her sweet and savoury cakes with apple or cabbage, and when she ran short of butter she sent to the camp kitchens for lard. A fat, yellow lard enclosed in tall narrow tins with red labels stuck on the top. She must never confuse them, a Polish cook once whispered in her ear as he brought her daily supply of food, with other tall narrow tins with purple labels that contained a gas in solid lumps called Zyklon B. She had gone to the trouble of remembering this but had been too lazy to think about it. Now she realised it had been an obedient sort of laziness, this not wanting to know, typical of SS wives. Better for wives to keep well away from secrets that might be dirty, even if in their hearts they believed

them necessary to safeguard the fatherland. They must be shameful secrets, or they would have been discussed openly. Instead, in their identical little houses with their embroidered curtains, little drinks cabinets and cuckoo clocks, the men never spoke of what was happening in the camp. It was as if, when they came home and pulled off their boots and laid aside their stiff peaked caps, they were leaving behind disagreeable and sometimes filthy duties that could not be avoided. In those little houses with their gardens and flower beds, they ate, played with their children and made love to their young wives, as if living on islands of happiness suspended in space and time.

One day when there wasn't a single cloud in the sky, Frau Margarethe decided to go and pick some of the chicory she had seen growing luxuriantly in the fields round the camp, for the savoury pies she made with the goose eggs. She took a small knife and a basket lined with waxed paper. She put on a flowered dress that made the most of her slim waist—the bee, they had called her in the little town of Bremen—and a pair of shoes made with the orthopaedic cork heels that had taken the place of leather during the war. She felt cheerful and happy. She had made love with her husband the night before, after months when he had claimed to be too tired to touch her naked body. But last night he had kissed her again and again, and for once there had been no sign of the smell of permanganate she now so often associated with young Otto. The children had not woken her in the night and she had got up in the morning happy and well-rested, ready for the little domestic duties of the day.



While picking the chicory she had become aware of a strange smell of smoke. A smell she had never noticed in her own house ' even when she opened the windows. A sweetish, feral smell, a smell which as it began to fill her nostrils seemed increasingly distasteful and disagreeable to her. She had raised her eyes, trying to make out where it was coming from, breathing the air deeply. But all round her was nothing but fields, wet grass, birches with streaky trunks and, some distance off, the walls of the camp. When the light wind that had carried the smell to her nose seemed to change direction, she had gone back to gathering chicory.

But after ten minutes or so the wind began blowing in her direction again and she had been assailed not only by the nauseous smell but by a puff of dark grey smoke that had seemed to adhere to her skin. She touched her naked arm with her hand and felt something she did not understand on her fingers. When she looked more closely, she realized it was ash. An almost imperceptible greasy ash giving off a disgusting smell.

Looking towards the camp she had noticed the chimney for the first time. It was not visible from her house, or even from her little garden. But from here, from this field where she was picking chicory, she had suddenly seen the tower in its full grandeur. It was belching out turgid grey smoke streaked with white, a bloated, greasy smoke that settled in an adhesive film.

Why did they insist on calling it a tower if it was a really a chimney? Something entered her mind like a secret, hidden memory. Suddenly she remembered words she had not understood at the time when she heard them. Words her husband Otto had spoken one evening to another officer on the telephone. Something about an oven 'that is not working as it should, two of the furnaces are out of order and what are we going to do with so many bodies waiting?' What had he been talking about, her SS officer husband Otto von Bjeck? In that moment a suspicion crossed her mind: what was the chimney for? Why did it pour out all that stinking smoke?



ABOUT THE WRITERS

MARK AXELROD

Mark Axelrod is a graduate of both Indiana University and the University of Minnesota. He has been the Director of the John Fowles Center for Creative Writing for which he has received five National Endowment for the Arts Grants. He has received numerous writing awards including two United Kingdom Leverhulme Fellowships for Creative Writing as well as screenwriting awards from the Sundance Institute, the WGA East, and the Nicholl Fellowship. He recently received awards from the Irvine International Film Festival, the Chicago International Film Festival and the Illinois International Film Festival for his screenplays.

CHRISTOPHE BOLTANSKI

French journalist and writer Christophe Boltanski worked for the *Libération* newspaper from 1989-2007. Since 2007, Boltanski has worked for a weekly French news magazine called *Le Nouvel Observateur*. He has written several essays, and a novel titled *The Safe House*, which uncovers the story of one family during the Nazi invasion of their neighborhood. Boltanski's novel has been deemed "a literary sensation" (University of Chicago), and has won the Prix de Prix.

TADEUSZ BOROWSKI

Borowski is a Polish poet and short-story writer noted for his vigorous, desperate search for moral values that might withstand such realities as the horrors of the Nazi occupation.

Born into a Polish family in the Ukraine, Borowski went to Poland and in 1932 settled in Warsaw. During World War II he started to write poetry, publishing in 1942 his clandestine collection *Gdziekolwiek ziemia* ("Wherever the Earth"). He was arrested and sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1943 and then deported to the Dachau camp in Germany. Borowski's concentration camp stories were based on his own experiences surviving Auschwitz and Dachau. In spare, brutal prose he describes a world where the will to survive overrides compassion and prisoners eat, work and sleep a few yards from where others are murdered; where the difference between human beings is reduced to a second bowl of soup, an extra blanket or the luxury of a pair of shoes with thick soles; and where the line between normality and abnormality vanishes. Published in Poland after the Second World War, these stories constitute a masterwork of world literature.

CLAUDIO MAGRIS

Claudio Magris is an Italian writer, scholar, and critic who was one of the leading writers and cultural philosophers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Magris completed his studies at the University of Turin, where he also taught from 1970 to 1978. Thereafter he taught German literature at the University of Trieste. His numerous studies have promoted central European culture and the literature of the "Habsburg myth." He translated works by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen as well as works by Heinrich von Kleist, Arthur Schnitzler, and many other German-language writers. In *Blameless*, Magris affirms his mastery of the novel form, interweaving multiple themes and traveling deftly through history. With a multitude of stories, the author investigates individual sorrow, the societal burden of justice aborted, and the ways in which memory and historical evidence are sabotaged or sometimes salvaged.

DACIA MARAINI

A native of Italy and award-winning author, Dacia Maraini, left her country for Japan in 1938 to escape the growing Fascist regime under Mussolini. Although Maraini and her family successfully fled Italy, they were sent to a concentration camp from 1943-1946 while in Japan. Maraini's family eventually returned to Italy, which is where her career began. Maraini published her first novel, *La vacanza*, in 1962. In 1963, she published *L'età del malessere*, which won the International Formentor Prize and was translated into twelve languages. Also active in the realm of theater, Maraini co-founded a theater run only by women, called *Teatro della Maddalena* during the 1970s. Over the course of the next several decades, Maraini went on to write over 60 works, including 20 plays and 16 novels. Maraini's ability to combine historical elements with the personal has been praised by critics-- especially in her text, *A Train to Budapest*, which tells the story of an Italian journalist who embarks on a trip to Auschwitz and Budapest in 1956.





MARTIN NAKELL

Martin Nakell's writing cuts across genres, from fiction and poetry to prose poetry. His books include *The Myth of Creation* (1993), *The Library of Thomas Rivka* (1997), *Two Fields that Face and Mirror Each Other* (2001), *Form* (2005), and *Settlement* (2007). Awards include an NEA Interarts Grant and the Gertrude Stein Award in Poetry for 1996-1997; he was also a finalist in the New American Poetry Series for 1999. He teaches creative writing courses at Chapman, but is known as well for his courses on James Joyce and twentieth-century poetry. He leads an annual summer course to Italy. Nakell received a BA from Cal State Northridge, an MA from San Francisco State University, and a DA (Doctor of Arts) from SUNY Albany.

BORIS PAHOR

Boris Pahor is considered one of the best known Slovenian writers. His fame in Europe stems from publications about the atrocities in Nazi concentration camps, but in Slovenia and among the Slovenian minority in Italy he is well known for his social and political engagement, in addition to his writing. Pahor spent the last fourteen months of World War II as a prisoner and medic in the Nazi camps at Belsen, Harzungen, Dachau, and Natzweiler. His fellow prisoners comprised a veritable microcosm of Europe: Italians, French, Russians, Dutch, Poles, Germans. Twenty years later, when he visits a camp in the Vosges Mountains that has been preserved as a historical monument, images of his experiences come back to him: corpses being carried to the ovens; emaciated prisoners in wooden clogs and ragged, zebra-striped uniforms, struggling up the steps of a quarry or standing at roll call in the cold rain; the infirmary, reeking of dysentery and death. *Necropolis* is Pahor's stirring account of his attempts to provide medical aid to prisoners in the face of the utter brutality of the camps and of his coming to terms with the ineradicable guilt he feels, having survived when millions did not.

GIORGIO AND NICOLA PRESSBURGER

Giorgio Pressburger and his twin brother Nicola were born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1937. At the age of nineteen, they immigrated to Italy, where Giorgio began working as a theater and television director and wrote in his free time. The brothers wrote two books together before Nicola passed away and Giorgio continued to write on his own. Much of their writing addresses questions of identity and destiny. *Homage to the Eighth District* introduced the brothers into English, and their unusual composition for two pens has impressed readers across Europe and America for its high dignity and perfect artistic control.

SUBMIT YOUR WRITING TO
THE SPRING 2020 ISSUE
OF MANTISSA!

THE NEXT ISSUE IS
DEVOTED TO

UKRAINIAN AND
RUSSIAN LITERATURE

