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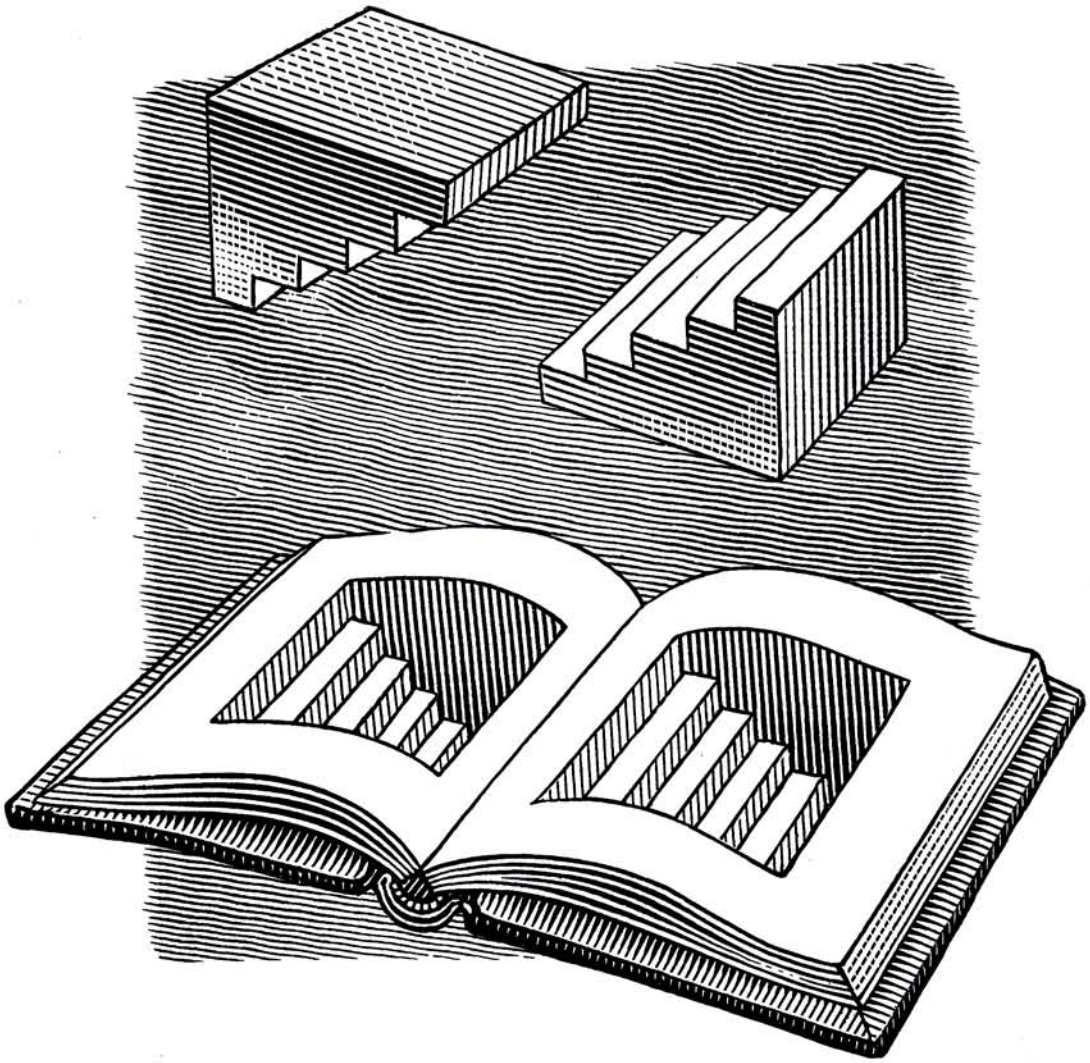

ON THE FUTURE OF AESTHETICS

published by the Nietzsche Circle

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On the future of aesthetics

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COARCTATE:

ANTIGONE'S RETURN AND SELECTED POEMS

A VERSE DRAMA AND LYRIC POETRY

BY MARK DANIEL COHEN

INTRODUCTION BY CAMELIA ELIAS

"In this sense, one can contend that what Cohen has achieved here is simply to have written a classic. The text speaks to us all. It speaks everything, and lets everything itself speak."
— Camelia Elias, from her introduction, "A Touch of Tongues"

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My public projects are different: they do not have a single place or home where they can be seen. Although in my mind they form a single narrative that evolves from one work to the next, it is difficult for the average art lover to appreciate it. They are located in faraway places, and to see them all you would have to travel to India, Israel, Europe, Canada, and many parts of the USA-no small task. Ilan Averbuch

The work of artist/sculptor Ilan Averbuch creates a comparison between the new world and the remains of an old one, the contemporary and the archaic. It deals with the world around, breaking the limitation of the modern white box-the gallery, the museum-and venturing into a context.
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HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

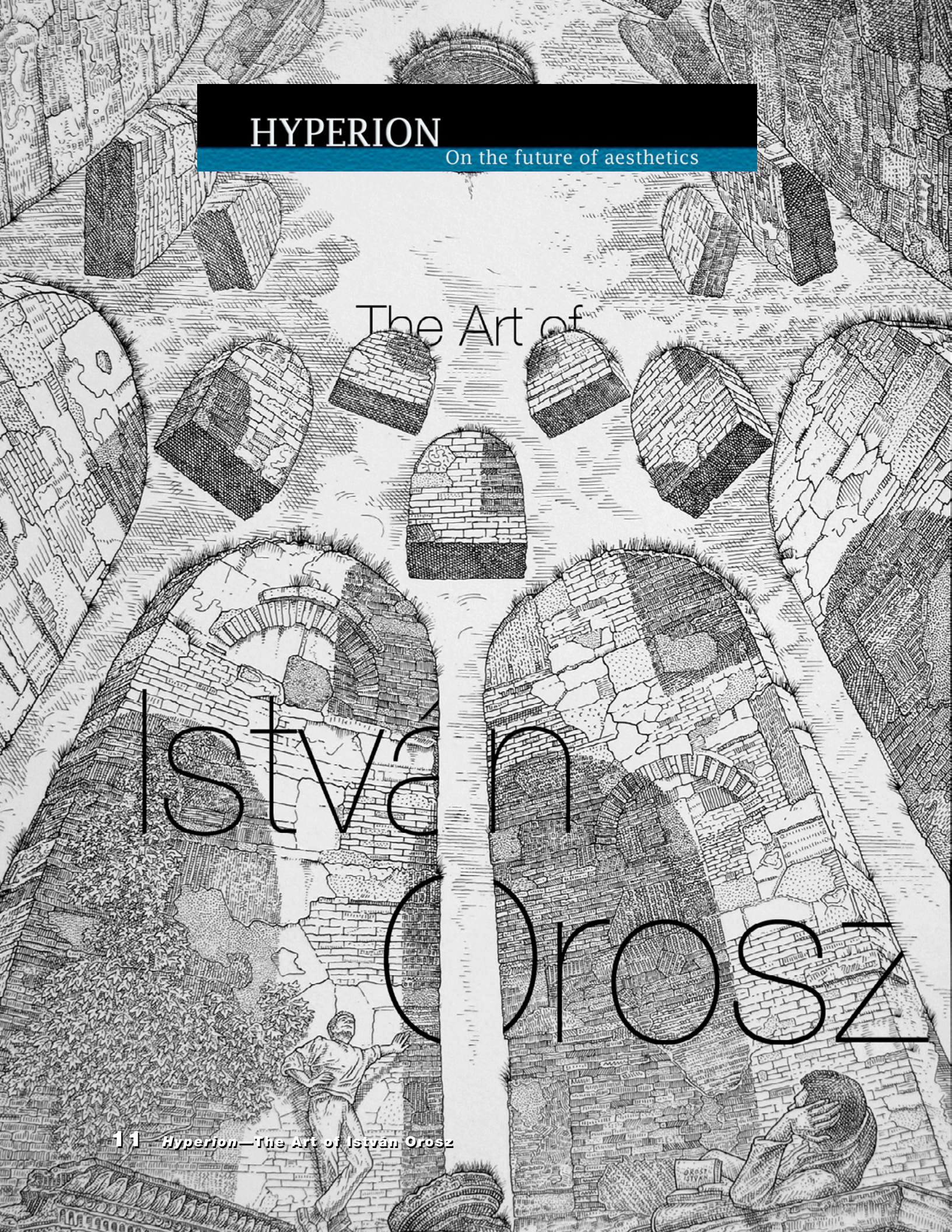
Thought . . . to the Purpose

"Consider a discipline such as aesthetics. The fact that there are works of art is given for aesthetics. It seeks to find out under what conditions this fact exists, but it does not raise the question whether or not the realm of art is perhaps a realm of diabolical grandeur, a realm of this world, and therefore, in its core, hostile to God and, in its innermost and aristocratic spirit, hostile to the brotherhood of human. Hence, aesthetics does not ask whether there *should* be works of art."
—Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation"

It has ever been the discomfort of serious thought to observe the otherwise universal equation of natural events and human actions. And it is not an irony that the equalizing has not rendered human behavior a natural force, with no more moral significance than a hurricane, or sunshine, for our willfulness has never been delivered to doubt. Rather, it has inflated our thoughts to the stature of the commandments of a god, and everything human becomes as much a *given* as is nature itself. We become as unquestionable as gospel.

There is no comprehensive scientific view of human nature, for science can inquire only the *how* of things, not the *why*—it takes what it probes as given—and we are always at the wrong end of the microscope. If philosophy has any lingering function, if there is any role for it that science has not appropriated, it is to ask questions science cannot address. It is to engage the "should" factor.

Aesthetics has been something of the "science" of art, in that it has inquired into what it would not judge, or, more to the point, it judged works of art as examples of something it would not think to judge—art itself, art *per se*. Hence, every individual judgment a *non sequitur*. And thus, *Hyperion* is dedicated to asking the unasked questions, to thinking what has been the unthinkable, to engaging the "should" factor: should art continue to exist, and why, works of art should be phenotypes of precisely what, should art be transformed into something unrecognizable, or, should it be relegated to the scrap heap of history.


HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics
The Art of
István Orosz

Special Section:
The Art of István Orosz

edited by Kristóf Fenyvesi
and the editors of *Hyperion*

Introduction: István Orosz
Changing the Geometry of Thought

by Mark Daniel Cohen

> I was just going to say, when I was interrupted, that one of the many ways of classifying minds is under the heads of arithmetical and algebraical intellects. All economical and practical wisdom is an extension or variation of the following arithmetical formula: 2+2=4. Every philosophical proposition has the more general character of the expression a+b=c. We are mere operatives, empirics, and egotists, until we learn to think in letters instead of figures.
>
> They all stared.
>
> —Oliver Wendell Holmes

If the purpose of art is to punish its palms against the doors of perception, then a rail is wanted to channel, past every possibility of ingress, to corridor the revelation around the faults of nothing more than madness, to guide it down the braiding line to something of the truth. It is not an inclination towards rationality over feelings, for reason can wind as

feverish and frenzied as the more familiar, no more frequent rages of affection. It is rather a rigor for the mind, a necessary discipline to deter us in our urge to the insanity of unending self-delusion, to patronize ourselves, to pander every thought to our constant desire for blandishment and commiseration, and to head the intellect, untrusting of the ballast of common observation, around the drop zones of nothing but psychology.

The so-far perennial, far-too-unquenchable religious impulse aside, it is a peculiarity and distinguishing feature of the modern world that we expect of art a penetration into realms otherwise beyond our reach. We expect the sublime, which, regardless of the variety of meanings to the concept prior to our age, has come to signify a parting of the veils. Art as the royal road to truth, even if the truth of the matter is that there is none, an equivocation that remains unequivocally an answer. But which veils?—the seemingly vaporous things become difficult to distinguish among, and the relentlessly infantile impulse to talk about ourselves turns out to be the never so subtle or sublime subtext in everything we think. Our most personal and frequently most trivial concerns—our passions, apathies, and anxieties—make up the template by which we understand everything our minds address. As observed in the texts by István Orosz, whose art and writings these notes serve to introduce, “Man originally entered into the world in such a way that he would see himself in things. He is incapable of seeing, feeling or comprehending anything as independent of himself. He can only correlate every experience with himself.”

The credible objective is not to forestall our self-absorbed disclosures, but to manage to concern ourselves with something more at the same time as we continue to babble about the something less—to make our claimed concern into the subtext. That difficult piece of intellectual acrobatics—to move our minds outside ourselves—has been a periodic enterprise of advanced thought, amounting to the initiation of science. We find it first in the Ionian school, particularly on the part of Aristarchus, the first proponent we know of Heliocentrism, an idea out of favor if not mind for nearly two millennia, according to Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, until Copernicus and Galileo acquired it again.

The issue at hand has not been merely the center of the solar system but the center of the universe—that is to say,

ultimately whether humanity is at the center of the universe, and, (in an ultra-modern turn of thought) more ultimately, whether mind is at the center of the universe. The matter at issue is whether we can escape the perspectivally imposed illusion that the universe is arranged in an expanding sphere of perception with us at its core—an impossibility on the face of it and which impels the problem of "The Other"—whether the universe must be set in a stretching sphere of perception around each of us, regardless of the incorrigible appearance of things.

The heart of the thought, and thus the heart of the scientific view, is that the truth of things is as they are understood from the outside, not from within, the truth of them is not how they appear to be unto themselves but how they comport with the systematics of a larger reality—not as they are appreciated, but as they are conceived. It is as much as to move (as once we needed to) from the view that physical laws are comparable to human statutes to the realization that they are nothing related. (Only one requests obedience; planets do not choose their orbits.) The more direct attempt to escape from the provinciality of our perspective—to elude not merely the Ptolemaic system but the human-centered viewpoint, the appearance of the world that the positioning and functioning of our sense organs compels it to possess—was conducted probably first by Helmholtz in his mathematical and scientific investigation into Kant's Transcendental Idealism, his attempt to determine how our sense organs and our minds construct the space, time, and causal relations we perceive and, from that, infer what we can say about the raw material they begin with—what the world is like apart from our perception of it.

However, it is more to the point here to look for the beginnings of a true violation of the barriers of normative human perception in the expansions of geometry—material that Helmholtz worked with—starting with Gauss earlier in the nineteenth century. It was thoroughly evident to Helmholtz, for one, that alternate geometries, such as n-dimensional geometry and non-Euclidean geometry, would be impossible to perceive if they were the pattern of our world—space must appear flat to us, not simply because we mentally, or even physiologically, construct it that way, but because the physics our perceptual apparatus obey force the illusion. If space were curved, light would curve with it, and our eyes still would seem to track the light back along an apparent straight line, as we

now know does in fact happen. Objects appear to be, as they self-evidently must, directly behind the point at which the light from them hits our eyes, even if the object is somewhere very else and the light bent with space on its way to us so as to hit our eyes as it does. Far more simply—light is appearance.

Which can be said to make the point, after a fashion, that was Kant's broad stroke with the Transcendental Idealism: that the formulaics of experience and conception are imposed on us and cannot be said to be of the world inherently. The world as it is unto itself is impossible to perceive, but what did not come to Kant was what followed in mathematics—the movement from measurement and arithmetic to a more thorough reliance on algebra, on the use of variables so as to make it possible to propose rationally formulations that would be unvisualizable, beyond perception—to make it possible to conceive a world so structured as to be impossible to perceive, to conceive according to pure reliance on formula, without reliance on or reference to even hypothetical sense impression, to even the mind's eye. The intellectual trend was so emphatic that even the autocrat at the breakfast table could recommend it as a general tonic by mid-century, and before the end of the century, the full flood was approached in the project to axiomaticize arithmetic, to demonstrate it to be a logically coherent, internally reliant system that did not employ observation even for its premises—to demonstrate mathematics to be *a priori* analytic and entirely free of the specifics of the world of experience in its formulation and its limitations, even as it maps the world of experience and, potentially and with a full draft of presumption drawn, the world as it is beyond experience, beyond common observation.

And art as well turned towards the possibilities of the revelation by means of mathematics, towards what the world might be like were the geometries of more than three dimensions or of curved dimensions the truth of things. It is a seeking of ontological insight that is possessed of the fresh air and unimpeded breath of self-possessed rationality and free of the dizzying dengue of mysticism, and for all the art infused by the religious impress—the influence of theosophy put a variety of stamps on a variety of movements around the turn of the century—there is a clear line of works impelled, or at least propelled, by mathematical thought. The history of them is covered in detail in the excellent book (presently out

of print) *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, by Linda Dalrymple Henderson.

During that period, there were a large number of books on the subject published in Europe and the United States, some of which we continue to read: *The Time Machine*, by H.G. Wells, and *Flatland*, by Edwin A. Abbott, for two. It can be argued as well that several movements in the visual arts, specifically movements into nonrepresentational abstraction, were oriented from one angle or another on the idea of an altered geometry of reality.

Of course, to employ the means of visual art to this purpose is to take what had been in the ages of religious art on the low simmer of a conundrum and bring it to the full boil of a paradox: to attempt to visualize the now demonstrably, as Helmholtz knew, unvisualizable. Abstraction can be said to gesture in that direction by mere suggestibility, but if so, it also can be said to be nothing other than a displaced paradox: trying to symbolize the innately unsymbolic.

The inescapability of the paradox—perhaps a redundancy—is maybe due to the double reversal at its core: thought, which was rooted in the observable, transformed into pure equations then to be brought by visual art back into the visualizable, the experiential—thought transformed from figures into letters transformed again into figuration. It was the movement into algebraic thought that opened the possibility of advanced geometric thought, and the attempt to simulate advanced geometrical experience. Abstract art might be an attempt to answer: what did the time traveler see?

But more fertile could be, for it would be and is far more directly engaged, the attack through the art of paradox: the art that renders impossible objects and situations, projective geometries, visual paradoxes, optical illusions, structural conundra, reflective anamorphoses, and other forms of visualized inexplicabilities.

This is the art tradition to which István Orosz belongs, and of which he is one of the leading practitioners.

Orosz is a Hungarian artist who works in a wide variety of graphic media. He is a painter, printmaker, graphic designer, illustrator, and designer of theater, movie, exhibition, and political posters. He also works as an animated film director.

He is known internationally and primarily as a mathematically inspired artist, an artist of geometric ingenuity, who employs many forms of visual paradox, executed with traditional printing techniques such as woodcutting and etching, to produce “impossible objects” and other optical illusions that present on a flat sheet of paper clear two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects that could not possibly exist. One can see that, in “reality,” one could not see them.

Since 1984, Orosz has used the pseudonym “ΟΥΤΙΣ,” which is Greek for “nobody,” and more specifically is the false name Odysseus took when he tricked Polyphemus, the Cyclops, and put out the creature’s one eye. Orosz has said that the name refers to “some kind of attack upon the eye.” One might also read it as referring to a shattering of the human perspective, a piercing of the human projection upon the visible scene, an act that accomplishes just what Antigone sought: to remove one’s face from the mirror, so as to transform a mere reflection into a vision, and, as every moment of destruction is also an initiation—until it’s not—see what is behind the focus on one’s self.

Orosz is part of an artistic tradition that is barely identified and rarely acknowledged and assessed in art history, although it is widely known and extraordinarily popular. This kind of work is comparable in its reputation to a statue everyone has seen and no one thinks about—a sculpture that prompts the response, when one is told the name of the sculptor, “so that’s who that is.” The touchstone of recognition here, the artist who is the best known of Orosz’s predecessors, is M. C. Escher. The lineage stretches back farther than that, and the starting point is a question of personal judgment. The heritage Orosz has taken up includes Arcimboldo, Dali, Magritte, one famous example by Hogarth, Duchamp’s impossible bed, arguably the phantasmagoric prisons of Piranesi, and more recently, formulations by mathematicians, such as the Penrose Triangle created by Roger Penrose, among many others.

It is an obscurely known artistic tradition, but it is an imperative one, for it is a distinctly intelligent one. As Orosz points out in one of his texts, this kind of artwork has been a function of “serious intellectual speculation.” Orosz’s writings display such a stamp of penetrating speculation—an impressive exercise in sheer thoughtfulness—and he

discusses the lineage at length.

It is best to let him deal with these concerns himself—they are his inheritance and he speaks of them with the implicit authority of a master, the authority that comes of authenticity. The one other matter worth remarking on in these notes is the point of such artistic speculation: the pay-off, the benefit to the viewer. Why do this?

It has been said that time is the medium of thought—one of the few things said about time that makes any sense. Similarly, geometry is not merely an object of thought; it is also the medium of thought. Thought always possesses a geometry that structures it, that essentially it is. That geometry is its principle of progress, and thought is a dynamic system, not an inert structure (which is why any theory of representation is inherently inadequate for "representing" thought). The geometry inherent in thought is so obvious a matter, so simple a quality, that, as with all simple things, we tend to look right past it. But we sometimes acknowledge it when remarking almost idly—we talk of following a "line of thought."

One example, a common one, of the geometry of thought and how we simply assume its nature: we take for granted when making an argument that, with every step of thought, with every point made, we move farther away from our starting point. A good (well-formulated) argument will get us "somewhere." This is specifically a geometric assumption, and it is not the only one we might employ. Assuming all forms of process lead one farther on, in a specifically distance metaphor, is comparable to failing to realize that if one flies a plane due east from New York and stays on course, eventually one will end up where one began. Sometimes returning to one's beginnings, like a destination coming up over the horizon line, is not the mark of an error—sometimes, it is a closing of the circle.

The "point" here is that changing the geometry of thought is a prodigious accomplishment, something very rare and very difficult to describe, and true revolutions of thought are rooted not in the development of new ideas but in the devising of new structures for arriving at ideas. This was achieved by Einstein, specifically in his application of the Lorentz transformations, and by Bohr and Heisenberg in the theoretical foundation of

Quantum Mechanics. It also was done in overt fashion—done as the overt achievement—by Gödel, giving us a new method for testing the logical consistency of a logical system.

Einstein said that a good question is a question that has an answer. To develop new ideas is merely to provide new answers to standing questions. That is no small thing, but it is not the greatest thing. To change the geometry of thought is to replace old questions, questions that we could not answer, with new ones, potentially, ideally, with questions that are answerable. Currently, Hawking and Mlodinow are making precisely that point with regard to Quantum theory and the new M-theory that has developed, at least in part, from it. Questions that were unanswerable, almost beyond phrasing—such as that regarding the beginning of time itself—become answerable through being changed in their substructure, in the structure by which the entire matter is approached, by being thought through in a different way.

The works of the artistic lineage Orosz participates in, the art of geometric ingenuities and impossible objects, can be considered probings into the limits of the imposed, flat, three-dimensional imaging of our perceptions—as can the best of abstract art. Probings are not answers, but they are far more serious than answers. They are where all serious thought begins. There is a certain playfulness to thought when it pursues what is most difficult to chase: something utterly different in nature and capability. Otherwise, we do nothing more than rework standard questions and pat answers. This kind of serious playfulness, the kind that Orosz practices, is how we test boundaries, and penetrate them.

István Orosz has had several exhibitions in the United States. Even so, and despite his reputation in Europe and having been the recipient of several awards, he is not as well known here as he should be. *Hyperion* is proud to have the opportunity to publish a number of his graphic works and a selection of his writings. We also offer several special *Ex Libris* bookplate designs that Orosz created for *Hyperion* readers. The *Ex Libris* bookplates are available here, for free, as jpg and pdf files that can be downloaded and printed out, for use in your diminishing quantity of finely printed (real) books. For our readers and ourselves, we thank István Orosz for his generous gift.

Lessons on Semblances

Lesson 1:
The Eye of the Cyclops

Foreword to the works of
István Orosz "Utisz"

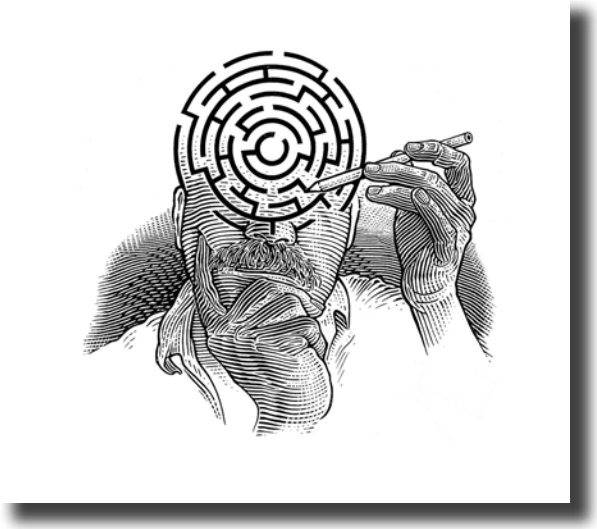
by Kristóf Fenyvesi

Editor's Note: *Kristóf Fenyvesi has been the curator of the Ars Geometrica International Conferences and Workshops, which take place in Hungary, from their beginning in 2007. In that capacity, he organized an exhibition of Orosz's work in 2009, for which the text below served as an introduction. Fenyvesi brought Orosz to the attention of the editors of* Hyperion *and helped us select the works that appear in this issue.*

There are many different eyes. Filippo Brunelleschi's eyes, Galileo Galilei's eyes, René Descartes' eyes, István Orosz's eyes . . . even the Cyclops has an eye! A single round-shaped eye right in the middle of his forehead with which he looks upon the world and which is also the center of his world. This eye creates a clearly defined, precisely measurable, that is, geometrizable world. It creates a world in which relationships can be clearly perceived (in Latin: *perspicere*) and where a strict hierarchy of consecutiveness, an unquestionable hierarchy reigns. With its single eye the Cyclops sees one kind of truth. By a single glance he maps everything in a centralized perspective that gets into his field of vision. Perhaps this is why he stops at the phenomenon, "there are only facts," and maybe this is also why he is predisposed to viewing signs as unambiguous assignments. For every single mode of seeing in itself is an interpretation. Therefore the Cyclops means things by names and names by things. The key to his power is precisely this unambiguousness. The strength of the Cyclops, however, is therefore also his weak point, since if Somebody suddenly appears who has learned the way and knows how to transform perspective, because it is in his fingers, then

He is capable of anything in the world of the Cyclopes. For Him it is enough to have a carefully calculated reference point, even in the form of an inventively selected Name, to be able to become invisible for an entire army of the one-eyed and accomplish everything that he has planned. But who could this person be, who is able to see the world with a view that Nobody can in the world of the Cyclopes? Who could be resourceful enough to be able to recognize, to nail this weakness down? It is the person who knows where to poke: be it a pen, a sword or a glowing log in his hand. The counterpoint to the gigantic Cyclops, the non-Cyclops proper, can only be Ulysses with a human size and a human look. When the game begins, the view is disintegrated and things and names get mixed up with one another; this is when the prophecy comes true. The "Cyclops self" believed to be omnipotent and perpetual falls into a whirling precipice from the top of the visual pyramid and finds itself in the middle of the labyrinth of Nobody (Greek: *ΟΥΤΙΣ*, *Utis*). However, hidden in the pattern of wandering and temporariness with an ultimate sense, even the Cyclops can only find the exit of the labyrinth with Ulysses' look.

The exit that leads—inconceivably—to the center of the *same* labyrinth. Because, as we have learned: there are many different eyes. Filippo Brunelleschi's eyes, Galileo Galilei's eyes, René Descartes' eyes, István Orosz's eyes . . . even the Cyclops has an eye!



István Orosz, *Self-mazed man,* 2000
ink on paper, 30 x 30 cm

Texts by István Orosz

Editor's Note: *The following texts, written by the artist and translated into English by Adele Eisenstein, originally appeared in the volume* István Orosz: A lerajzolt idő / The Drawn Time*, which was a bilingual volume printed in Hungarian and English, published as a limited edition in Hungary in 2008 by Tiara Press. That edition is now out of print. The publication of these writings in* Hyperion *constitutes their only present availability in English. They appear in* Hyperion *with the kind permission of István Orosz.*

Drawn Time

> If you section, as far as I can judge, anywhere,
> There will always be a moment,
> When in a still image on the record of time,
> An arrow advances toward a heart.

You will certainly remember Zeno of Elea, who invented the proof that the image formed by emotions in clever situations is deceptive. I have tried to evoke one of Zeno's parables in this old fragment of poetry. His famous paradox of the motionless arrow is perhaps an appropriate point of departure to speak of the relationship between my work and time. The arrow paradox, of course, is only the second most famous—after the renowned race between Achilles and the tortoise, at the end of which the swift-footed hero slinks off, defeated, the symbolic arrow of shame in his heart, while there is a more real arrow in his heel—but this is already another story, if you will, the blood and flesh arrow of another dimension.

But now we have to imagine only a single flying arrow, and for now it is not its target that is important. At any point in time the arrow remains at a given point in the air. This moment has no temporal range; consequently, the arrow is at rest. With similar reasoning, it is foreseeable that in the moments to follow it is also motionless. Since this can be proved for any moment of

time, according to Zeno, the arrow does not move at all: its flight is merely illusion. As a practising animation filmmaker, I am confronted with such things on a daily basis. If I were to animate an arrow that was shot, I would have to draw on a sheet one at rest, and then on another one another arrow, just the same as the previous one, but still not exactly the same. In principle then, we could draw as many as we would like, so that we could reduce them until the movement between them would be infinitely small.

Zeno, and the primeval animation filmmaker break down time into the mere *now,* similar to some extent to the way we should interpret space in the allegory of the tortoise as the mere *here*. This certain *now* and *here* comes into being with the infinite division of the range of time and space, sliced all the way until they cease being a continuum. In other words, Zeno reduced the continuity of time—and together with this, that of space as well—to the sum of countless slices of time and space. Insomuch, however, as discontinuity in this case means “timelessness,” and “spacelessness,” in following him, we would be compelled to deny the existence not only of motion, but at the same time, of time and space. Before we settle the matter with a simple wave of the hand, let us recall that independent of Zeno, one of the past masters of Zen in China, Hui-shi, also arrived at a very similar conclusion, moreover in connection with a launched arrow. And simply as an encore, I will mention that according to German philosopher Eugen Herrigel, it is the Zen Buddhist exercises of archery that lead most closely to an understanding of existence.

Sometimes I believe that the paradoxes judged to be unacceptable by the rational mind are perhaps suited after all to allow us with their aid to surmise more from the world than we could comprehend through traditional logic. We receive sceptically seemingly obvious assertions, and we believe in them that there is another, hidden reading of the world, which though we experience more circuitously, sometimes the search itself already promises more excitement. Can the trajectory of the arrow be checked; is time reversible; can something be redeemed, which we feel to be irredeemable?

I was born in 1951, a strikingly undistinguished year even among insignificant years, whose heroic emptiness I illustrate with the title of the volume of the emigrant author, Arthur

Koestler: *Arrow in the Blue*. The book, which happens to have been written precisely in 1951, naturally was not published in Hungary. In my infancy, there was a picture that I always gazed at, long and shuddering. There was an album among the many books of text and few of pictures of my parents, and in it was a picture with an arrow. I seem to recall that my mother's name was written on the upper corner of the title page, although my first memories in connection with this picture derived most certainly from the time when I could not yet read. An old man with a kind face sat in the forest, protectively reaching toward a deer that seemed to flee towards him seeking shelter. Between the trees—I can almost see him now—another man is also visible, who targets the fleeing creature with his arrow. Even up to this point, the picture gives one the shudders, but that which however was most seductive, and due to which I practically ran from the picture, so that some sort of unspeakable compulsion drove me back immediately, was to come only afterwards. The arrow is already in the heart of the peaceful man stroking the deer, the guileless—while he waits with forgiving patience, for the arrow to be shot. The very same arrow that the evil one has not even yet launched. Since then, I learned just who was the gentle martyr: Saint Giles, the Benedictine monk, protector of the disabled and lepers, but I must confess that ever since, I have been haunted by the vision of the arrow that was not yet launched and yet inflicted a mortal wound. I have perhaps even dreamed of it. Or perhaps I just would have wished that a dream were to reverse the order of events, that which we deem natural? Since the dream is capable of this—moreover, perhaps this is precisely how it works: inverting time. Time progresses from the future toward the past, or if you like, the clock revolves in them from right to left. Who has not woken with a start from a dream to a sudden noise, which blared in the dream as the result of lengthy events ensuing from one another? What else could explain this, if not the reversal of the direction of time, of its symbolic arrow? From the future in the direction of the past, we proceed from the consequences toward the causes, we could actualise "our future is passing" with the title of Gáspár Nagy's volume of poetry, and we might think further to the iconic Father Florensky, Stalin's most innocent victim, who exemplified the path to God precisely with the theological explanation of inverted time.

In my films, in which there is also real time, historical

questions sometimes arise, and thus the problematic of historical time appears. I attempted to reverse the linear flow of time in my film, *Ah, America!*; I reflected upon events of the recent past in my film entitled, *Mind the Step!*; and the individual representation of time in the film *Panoramas of Time* was its own. Disconnectedness of time, and intensive, emblematic compression are generally symptomatic of animation film techniques. Events occur alongside one another, in connection with each other, somehow condensing time, as space observed through the viewfinder of a strong telephoto lens is also compressed, and things that are near and far land alongside each other. When I began my career, I existed in exactly this strange state of timelessness. They endeavoured to separate my generation from the historical past with artificially raised caesurae, while it was not acceptable to doubt the historical future. Since I was young and healthy, even the time coordinates that I experienced personally did not have a great influence on me. During this time, many emigrated from Hungary. They went to live in other countries. The question came to my mind: would it be possible to do just the same in terms of time? To be transplanted somehow in other eras? I readily imagined myself within the course of historical time: Renaissance, Baroque, Mannerism…

In my youth I had often heard the expression to “read between the lines,” or to look on the other side of things. It was clear that the most important artworks had multiple meanings, at least two, and it was even more obvious to me that the more difficult it was to discern a meaning, the more significant that meaning was. The correlation of the pictures of dual meaning with time was obvious. They meant different things depending upon whether you regarded them from near or far. If one view presented a portrait, the other was a landscape. In such cases, the viewer becomes a co-author, as it is up to her/him to seek the pertinent viewpoint. While s/he searches for this, s/he must also experience her/his own temporal and spatial coordinates. S/he also identifies her/himself. And this is not always so simple. Even real three-dimensional objects can have different meanings if we look at them from elsewhere. The majority of my spatial paintings are at the same time real steps. This spatial form with its representation of repetition concerns time from the outset. Its levels are the keys on the keyboard of time. The columns and colonnades, which are

recurring elements of my pictures, fill exactly the same role, but due to their repetitive nature, the projection of shadows and reflections are also a type of time-formula. We are familiar with the correlation between the flow of water and time—you cannot step twice into the same river—and naturally the mirror-images of water-inhabitants are also the preservers of time. And only one step more is required to reach symmetries from mirror-images. I use the plural because there are many types of symmetry, but their common denominator is that they are all directly related to time.

When I draw similar architectural impossibilities, in actual fact I am experimenting with the visualisation of spatial paradoxes that are never independent of time. The levels of reality and imagination building upon each other, their strange loops intertwining in each other often produce the illusion of endlessness—or timelessness. Viewing them together, for me it is only in this way, in the metaphysical aura of their succession, that time has been rendered self-evident, the determining role of time made visible. It is also possible, however, that it is only for lack of something better that I call this time. Those who are astonished to find that, looking into Heraclitus's river, it is not into the face of their own reflection that they gaze will perhaps call this melancholy, or the enigmatic sorrow of geometry, the majestic solitude of symmetries, the eternal doubt of the inhabitants of mirror-images, or they will perceive the hopeless Platonic relationship of perspectives with the infinite.

While I searched for the correlations between my own works and time, I also had to face the Augustinian dilemma: What is time? If the question is not asked, I know precisely what it is, but if I have to express it, I would be incapable. But I am a visual artist, and so if I cannot tell it in words, I can try to draw it. I wanted to describe graphically that the barely discernible rhythms of the human body, the throbbing of the bloodstream palpable in the pulse, and the movements of the stellar systems describable in complicated formulas all conform to the very gauge. Yes, finally I surmise that I could have used another word instead of "time," but there are some names that are traditionally forbidden to speak, and in writing it is also better to omit them…

Absences

> We put thirty spokes together and
> call it a wheel;
> But it is on the space where there is
> nothing that the usefulness of the
> wheel depends.
> We turn clay to make a vessel;
> But it is on the space where there is
> nothing that the usefulness of the
> vessel depends.
> We pierce doors and windows to
> make a house;
> And it is on these spaces where there
> is nothing that the usefulness of the house
> depends.
> Therefore just as we take advantage
> of what is, we should recognize the
> usefulness of what is not.
> (Lao Tse: *The Tao Teh King*, chap. 11, trans.
> Waley)

One of the central themes of Eastern Wisdom is "nothingness," about which Lao Tse, the Chinese sage who perhaps never even existed (his name simply means: "Old Master") wrote the lines above. The short verse might serve as a written emblem of the Taoism hallmarked by the name of Lao Tse, as it expresses in words that which the often depicted Yin and Yang symbol relays: the real and the spiritual world, negative and positive forms, the unit linking the "is" and "is not" with each other, postulating each other's existence.

Before I begin with lengthy explanations of my own *Absence*-pictures, and of the inverted world that I try to portray, I will write about a few boring technical details. The bulk of those works is printed graphic, and within that, a special genre: with photogravure, a reproduced picture. Among others, such procedures include: etching, engraving, dry-point, mezzotint, photogravure, and their common feature is that the graphic artist rubs paint into the actual absences, the eroded grooves carved from the printing-block, which are then lifted out from the negative form of the moistened paper stuffed into

the grooves. The positive lines appearing in the artwork are the filling-ins of the negative arcs created by the graphic artist, in actual fact the images of absence made visible, the embodiments of nothingness.

Much has been written on the significance of absent things, and the role played in the arts by silence, often referring first precisely to Taoism, then from intervals in music, through the obscurity of ballads based on intermissions, all the way through to the great Nothing appearing in Malevich's Suprematism and symbolising wholeness. I watched the cult film of my high school years, Antonioni's *Blow-Up,* so many times that I believed that I myself saw the secret between the silver granules of the photos enlarged to infinity, that hairline void extending over the border between nothing and something, which was perhaps the visual representation of the uncertainty above the cognizability of the world, and I listened together with David Hemmings at the end of the film to the sputtering of nothings flung as a tennis ball. Oh, how many times had different sorts of absence-visions excited me—and sometimes disturbed me? The arc of the elastic of a sock above an ankle, two red crescents on the bridge of the nose marking the place of eyeglasses, or the absence that remains white on a suntanned body when a bra is removed.

Practising artists know, or they should know, that with every artwork that they produce, they also lose something from the created world. Builders of a football stadium carve out a large piece of it, like the jewellers who chisel fine necklaces, but does even one of them actually notice that which disappears in the course of their work? Does the robust grandstand reach the calm landscape, which it conceals from the window of someone disabled, or the strand of pearls decorated with diamonds, if it covers the small indentation between the two collarbones, the small concave formation (can we call this an absence?) that my gallant male predecessors once dubbed the "salt-cellar"?

Upon excavating the volcano-stricken Pompeii, the archaeologists found absences in the form of people of petrified ash. Empty impressions of the disintegrated victims of the catastrophe. As the negative form is the warning presence of loss, it is always more tragic than the positive, and the excavators could not even bear to look for long, filling the anthropomorphic cavities with plaster, thus resurrecting

the Pompeiian inhabitants as lifelike sculptures. Did they even ruminate on what these citizens beaten by fate might have desired more? To remain spiritual forms of absence as mementos, or to afford solace to the tourists in a sculpture park exposed to the public: death is that which always happens to others.

“Upon a branch of nothingness my heart sits trembling voicelessly”—we read in the most tragic lines of Attila József, and how unusual is the force of the poetic image: we can see, or at least we believe we see the evidently invisible. Upon reading another poem, *Consciousness,* the notions of existing and non-existing are likewise fixed in the imagination as an objectified, sensory vision: “Only unbeing can branch and feather, / only becoming blooms at all; / what is must break, or fade, or wither.” When I began to draw my *Absence* pictures, I thought of just this emptiness, virtual nothingness appearing in the imagination, and I wanted to depict the negative moulds of reality, the Void that invisibly embraced them.

I chose edifices and architectural details with which, alongside their responses to the negative-positive form, I could draw the viewer with me into some past epoch, into the historical network of the association of ideas. The embeddedness of cultural history, and the artificial break that occurs from there, their characteristic components of content, and the associative relations of the formal-geometric gesture can shade the image in such manifold ways, that even I would not be able to follow every thread. And of course, I would not even like to. If I could have one wish in connection with my own visual artwork, then first and foremost I would ask for my pictures to begin to live an autonomous life, and for content to be found in them that I never would have even thought of. Each of them should meet in the zone concealed behind the frame and the pass-partout, they should respond to one another, and I should not understand their dialogues better than anyone else.

Ancient Rome appears in many of my pictures, with the first pieces of my *Absence*-series also reflecting the Eternal City. A triumphal arch, an aqueduct, a colonnade headed with tympanum, and of course, the cupola of the Pantheon. More precisely, in all these edifices, absence is drafted, elaborated and rendered visible. Spectacular nothingness. The yawning, enormous aperture on the summit of the cupola, in the place of the oculus the suspended massive stone disk. Worn down,

decayed, a thousand years old. Would it be possible to find a more sensory form—an elevator—toward the descent into the past? Or to the break from dimensions? How could I have experienced the paradox of the black hole, if I had not stood there day after day, my vertebrae stiffening, beneath the disk of the falling night, imagining, perhaps even awaiting the embrace of inverted gravitation of accentuated times. I learned that the material density of the celestial bodies called black holes approaches infinity, expanding toward the zero. That is the point at which absolute Nothingness reigns. I learned this, but I can only imagine Nothingness if I can depict it. I draw the negative of nothing. I say, this is something, this is—the inverse of—nothing.

Ágnes Nemes Nagy, in analysing the emptinesses in Attila József's string of verse, *Consciousness,* employs a surprising architectural comparison to explain the absences between the words, lines and stanzas. "The poet… extends the pauses between the stanzas to be as airy as possible, like a broad colonnade. But who would be able to recite the spaces between verses of colonnade proportions? In order to use the space between the columns, we must still carve out the columns. While the poem is written more or less for the spaces between the lines, the lines themselves must be written as well." When this analysis of poetry found its way to me, I had already completed my work, had already printed my engravings, and still I had the feeling that Nemes Nagy had wanted to come to my aid, or rather as if she had designated a task beyond time—and death—for me. And I thank her. With the exception of a brief conversation, I never had a relationship to her, and I barely knew her personally; nevertheless, that geometric attitude elevated to poetry, which stands closest in connection with her name, was extremely determining for me. "Art is one projection of the comprehension of the world, and it is just perhaps especially a geometric projection." I learned also this sentence from her, from her essay entitled *The Geometry of Verse*. And from whom else could she have taken this?: even now, she strolls at the side of Plato, this inscription above their heads: "No one should enter, who is not familiar with geometry."

Gardens and Labyrinths

> And the Garden comes, as if in a dream,
> and begins to grow in the night,
> breathing, misting, spreading its vines,
> like a cancer in the forest of the body.
> In unfathomable layers
> grows its labyrinth: secret diagram,
> erected, ruined, erected anew
> moon-struck ancient face—replica
> for happy Botany…

I am searching for a time, but in vain; yet it would have been good to find it, so that I don't have to cite by heart the story, the often-quoted tale in which the painter puts down his brush, steps into the landscape, sets off among the bushes of the freshly painted picture, on one of the meandering trails into the distance, and disappears into the dusk setting over the garden, or is swallowed by the fog enveloping the labyrinth. The aerial perspective—as the jargon has it. He is lost before our *external* eye, but of course the *internal* eyes follow, since there within us he continues to stroll on; lost, or simply not found for an eternity. He promenades in the labyrinth that is transformed into cerebral furrows. It is not even necessary to take great pains to readjust the form: it is easy to see a labyrinth in the convoluted coil of the Moebius-strip of grey matter. There he roams; the wind subsides about him, and the birds fade away, as suits the nature of already drawn pictures.

In a word, I would begin with the tale of the painter lost in his own picture, though the original has to be found in the precise quotation: needle in a haystack. Searching through the bookshelf is doomed to hopelessness, since the cardinal leading principle goes like this: "there is still a space large enough to accommodate the selected third volume of Borges." Something like this has a greater chance of emerging from the drawer for bed linens, or from behind the refrigerator. I could say that we live on a *gallows;* in fact, I will say it, because it will come naturally to my writing on labyrinths. In a word, a *place of loss*. Please, just read (because we have nevertheless returned somehow to the bookshelf) the section of approximately a half-metre of spines: Kafka, Tamás Morus,

Joyce, Santarcangeli, M. C. Escher, Umberto Eco, Szentkuthy, the Odyssey and another Borges. As it happens, exactly that which contains *The Garden of Forking Paths,* as well as *The Book of Sand,* in both of which it is just as possible to get lost between the letters as in a veritable labyrinth.

The garden is eternal nostalgia. It is a summons of the desired world, and a resurrection of Paradise. The order presumably designed in Creation also casts its imagination onto the Garden of Eden, and this is why then, alongside natural forces, the laws also appear. The geometric networks are projected onto the garden, and the labyrinth takes form. Accompanying myths, religions, and rituals, it is one of the most ancient motifs. As far as desire for order is logical, just as human is the wish for freedom, which often precisely in return for order manifests itself as the contrast of geometric, symbolic, and allegorical representations of order. The enigmatic point of the labyrinth is the crossroad, and the constraint to choose that appears at the intersection: this is the blessed and cursed emblem of man who yearns for freedom, and who is condemned to freedom. The possibility of going astray, the knowledge that at any time, we may decide in error: this renders the wandering in the labyrinth at once beautiful and desperate. To enter through the gate of the labyrinth means simply to step out of time, to break away from the world, to accept solitude and to surrender ourselves to the unknown forces of destiny. To its severity or its benevolence. But to err in the labyrinth is both a cultural lesson and an intellectual adventure. S/he who undertakes it can feel s/he winds Ariadne's thread together with Plato and Dante, with the cathedral-building Freemasons, and with Piranesi, Gaudí, and Picasso.

The most beautiful garden experiences are related to Italy: in Tivoli the Villa d'Este Gardens, Prince Orsini's garden in Bomarzo, or that of the Pitti Palace in Florence: the Boboli. It is not difficult to recognise that these gardens exist also within time: the trees grow with broad spreading branches, ivy runs along the walls, the fountains are overgrown with pond scum and the statues with moss. It is to no avail that I see them in their youth as projected onto the monitor of my imagination; the romanticism of fallible, ancient gardens is more fascinating. Kicking at the forest litter, I hum with Csokonai (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz: "To Solitude"): *"Delight in such a place to roam / And for a poet to feel at home."* And for my type of

draughtsman.

The beautiful Baroque gardens blur with the gardens of my childhood: the promenade in Kecskemét with the tramping of football, the oak forest in Szepezd with the rustling of the wings of stag-beetles, and of course, the park on Hargita Street, where the densest, most velvety nights seeped from the boughs of elderberry. I know that it is not easy to convince that these gardens are in my drawings; yet, I would even swear upon it. They are all there, separately and simultaneously. The gardens, or at least the aberrations and solitudes learned from them. Their invisibility corroborates them. And the secrerts with which they entrusted me. The face of Happy Botany. The ancient verse, which I invoked above is painfully true: the fountain, the angel, and perhaps I am also real in it:

> …
> Somewhere there it must be
> in the navel of this labyrinth,
> mysteriously black,
> as black as ebony,
> the deep, hollow well.
> An angel digs it every night,
> it is audible within, the whiz and sizzle
> of the light of the falling stars.
> There lives a turtle below,
> growing for a thousand years forgotten,
> what got into the boy,
> who once might have been me.

Should I continue to search for the tale of the painter who disappeared into his picture? The origin of the story? Perhaps I would only arrive at crossroads opening onto each other. Once, when I read about it, I always happened upon newer entrances. X wrote that he knows it from Y, and Y heard about it from Z. Accompanying was an infinity of allusions, and perhaps there, in infinity, where the paths of the labyrinth straighten out to become parallels, the wind subsides, the waters cease to flow, and gravity is exhausted, there the painter ambles along, dragging his long beard, as an ancient likeness of our future wise grandchildren, and his breath made visible casts a wrinkle on the translucent glass block of eternity.

Hidden Faces

> Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
> By th' mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed.
> Methinks it is like a weasel.
> It is back'd like a weasel.
> Or like a whale.
> Very like a whale.

There are pictures which it is not enough to simply look at: a measure of intuition is also required for their perception. From the above text, it seems that Polonius possessed just this ability, or at least he played as if he did, in order to satisfy the provocative Hamlet. Of course, this capacity can also be developed. "Nova invenzione di speculazione," i.e., the new method of speculation—proposed Leonardo, as if he wanted to offer a mission for the revival of art, whose essence was that artistic imagination could find new, rich imagoes in splotches of plaster work, cumulus clouds or coloured pebbles.—"One only has to throw a sponge full of paint at a wall, and it will leave a stain, in which beautiful landscapes can be seen, human faces, different kinds of animals, battle scenes, cliffs, seas, clouds and forests and other such things." If we can believe some of the research concerned with the beginnings of the arts, already prehistoric man in Altamira set to work in such a way that he got an "insight" into the image of the animal to be painted on the relief of the cavewall, and its pigmentation. If this is indeed how it happened, the explanation pertaining to the theory—namely that this intuitive method of working would be some sort of primitive creative form befitting prehistoric man—can hardly be substantiated. Such depiction would postulate the presence of a combination of two fundamentally different representational systems—let us call them iconic and symbolic, or quite complex cerebral function. The scientists would most certainly say that the synchronised function of the more intuitive right hemisphere and the more deliberate left hemisphere is the key.

The majority of "intuitive" pictures, or those of double meaning, which 21st century man brings into connection with playfulness, were often the result of serious intellectual

speculation. It would suffice only to recall the strange, allegorical compositions of Giuseppe Arcimboldo. To our eyes, the portraits constructed from natural forms, animals, and plants are facile, playful brainchilds, although we can also see in them the essence of Mannerism condensed into an emblem. He painted his most characteristic pictures in Prague, in the court of Rudolf II, whom many considered to be insane. Sublimated decadence, apolitical isolation from the one standpoint, and a mental force of attraction expanding across all of Europe, open to every novelty, and even a quite free cultural atmosphere, if we consider the other side. Mediaeval magic and modern natural sciences fit well together in Prague, in fact, often merged together. Kepler, Bruno, Dee. The worldview of the natural scientists bustling about Prague was fundamentally anthropomorphic: they imagined the universe as a single living, gigantic organism, which does not obey external physical laws, but is rather driven by the spirit striving for harmony.

To perceive the human in the environment, to discern that from the microcosmos to the macrocosmos which resembles man, and to endeavour to depict that. And vice versa, as well: to discover nature in man, the universe on a small scale. In fact, Arcimboldo attempted to evoke the thinking of Rudolf's natural scientists and philosophers with the tools of painting. If one is well-versed in the sphere of thought of the era, the birth of Arcimboldian "anthropomorphic painting" is not in the least surprising; moreover, it was predictable—practically calculable. If we seek the origins of the Arcimboldian solutions, the transformations—how the objects will become portraits and the landscapes figures, it is worth mentioning Ovid, and the *Metamorphoses,* which was once again rediscovered about this time, and which was used as a "pagan Bible," with many treating it as the source from Balassi to Shakespeare and Raphael to Rubens.

The fact that the Archimboldian pictures are literally metamorphoses: sea creatures, plants, fruits, or just a stack of books that transform before our eyes into a human portrait, is evident, but they also metamorphically cross over into the language of artistic representation. Just as sentences are built up from words of autonomous meaning, the "phrase" of the Arcimboldian picture is constructed in the same way. All the depicted real objects are in actual fact the words used for the denomination of that certain super-real creature. This

concerns a lifting out of the empirical world, and this ensuing staircase of reality obviously bears a correlation with Platonic ideas on the one hand, and with Surrealism on the other... "Two representations in a single picture," or as it was phrased by the rediscoverer of the 20th century, Salvador Dalí, "two truths in a single position." Furthermore, two "truths" opposed to each other. Since the large-scale exhibition in Venice in 1987, for which they attempted to gather many such images which demonstrated similar effects, art history has designated this method the Arcimboldo effect.[1]

Many years ago, during my poster-drawing studies at the Academy of Applied Arts, it came to my mind that precisely the poster, which we often see from a great distance, and at other times we practically bump into, this mural advertising would be an especially suitable medium for representations of double meaning. One image for the distant observer, and the other for the one who is willing to come closer. The revival of the genre could also have come to my mind, since until then the poster had been considered as the most clear-cut entity to be drafted and to least incur trouble or wasted energies. Also for reasons of content, it was exciting at the time to raise the question of multiple representations in a single picture, since we were living in the era of censors hunting for hidden messages. Or was it already the era of the vexation of censors? In the case of the so-called applied arts—my acquired profession of poster and book illustration and the like—the problem of curtailed independence also always emerges. Well, I believed, perhaps naïvely, that with the second, the mask of the often concealed depiction, I could enjoy greater freedom. Of course, understood within the capaciousness of the notion of freedom was also the compulsion nestled in the possibility of choice: we have to decide: here are not ready panels, but only possibilities. The viewer is actually a partner in creation: s/he takes a stand alongside one of the meanings of the picture. Or does not accept it and gives up. We are sentenced to freedom. Perhaps it is not by chance that Shakespeare characterised Hamlet, this herald of existentialism, who was tending toward despondency, with the habit of seeing images in the irregular forms of clouds.

The phenomenon of a hidden image within the image is a specific case when the technique of anamorphosis aids in concealing or discovering the secret. In art history, we use the expression "anamorphically distorted" for those compositions

which have been distorted to become unrecognisable through a sophisticated geometric construction; yet if we examine them from a particular viewpoint, or if we place some sort of object with a reflective surface on top of them, then the hidden image appears after all—resuming its original form. In accordance with two methods of this "retransformation," there are two types of anamorphism. The first, which was employed already in the early Renaissance, is the group of so-called perspectival anamorphoses, while the other—which appeared only during the period of Mannerism and the Baroque—is the reflective anamorphoses. Shakespeare was certainly familiar with perspectival anamorphosis; moreover, a few lines from Richard II refer so obviously to anamorphic distortion, that we can rest assured that the technique called "perspective" was not unknown to theatre-goers in a London either.

> For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
> Divides one thing entire to many objects;
> Like perspectives, which rightly gazed upon
> Show nothing but confusion, eyed awry
> Distinguish form…[2]

I have been engaged with anamorphoses for quite some time (I drew the first sometime in the second half of the seventies), but naturally not only the resurrection of this antiquated genre stimulates me, but I also experiment with its continued development. "Nothing but confusion," we read from Shakespeare; but I would like if instead of the "confused depiction" there was a basic anamorphic depiction as well, and this image of autonomous meaning would gain a new sense, a second meaning, if we were to inspect it from another point-of-view. If we regard my etching entitled *Shakespeare's Theatre* straight on, as we do traditionally, we see a London theatre from the late 16th century, with actors, audience, on-lookers.[3] If, however, we stand to the right side of the wide panorama, and we look from a very flat angle, so that the wide picture tapers into a slender, vertical ribbon, then the elements of the theatre disappear: more precisely, they transform into a portrait of William Shakespeare.

In another picture belonging to the group of reflective anamorphoses, the virtual portrait of Edgar Allan Poe appears

in the mirror, moreover in such a way that the horizontal elements of the drawing, appurtenances of the illustration for *The Raven* create the details of the portrait. If we lift the cylinder, the face disappears, and the empty, yawning room remains, together with the scattered objects, shadows, and the dreaming-remembering man inclined toward the face. The anamorphic technique, in fact, corresponds to the poetry composition model suggested in Poe's essay entitled, "The Philosophy of Composition."[4] The artist should first dismantle and deform reality, then with the aid of fantasy and the intellect, fashion a new, but unreal world from these elements of reality. In this creative work—at least, according to Poe—there is no need for so-called inspiration, nor is there a place for irrational melancholy or for subconscious instincts. The arts should be delimited from uncontrollable emotions, creativity should be led by the intellect, and thus, pure art can be produced on a purely mathematical basis. Whether we re-read his poetry, or Poe's self-dissecting study expounding the origins of *The Raven,* the feeling strikes us that Poe was deliberately concealing something: it is as if the mystical-metaphysical obscurity of his poetry and the cleverly provocative brain-storming of his *The Philosophy of Composition* were merely aiming to divert attention: lest we detect the despondent agony of a conflicted soul, lest we take seriously the first person singular narrator of the poem, and naturally, lest we identify him with Poe. While I attempted to work with the deliberateness and calculation recommended by Poe, I too suspected the obstacles to this scholastic consistency. And I would like to continue to believe that the "inexplicable" plays a role in every creative work, and not a trifling one. I think that Poe, too, however much he tried to hide it, was of the same opinion.

Mirrors and Reflections

> It was in a mirror, at some time, in some place, that the first act of recognition occurred, the point when man stared into the ocean, saw his face in its infinity, grew anxious, and began to ask, 'Who is that?...'
> Sándor Márai: Casanova in Bolzano

Who would not be tempted, would not be thrown into a fever at times, trying to visualise the world fettered to the three dimensions of existence, on the two-dimensional plane, or even in the four-dimensional hyperspace? Beautiful as it may be, the undertaking is futile: foredoomed to failure. For all intents and purposes, we are unable to imagine our visible world other than in its three dimensions, neither from here nor from beyond. Even when thinking of points, lines or planes, we always do so as parts of space; moreover, let us admit, when we envisage the notion of time, even then it is along endless networks oscillating in space that nostalgias projected into the past and the future haunt us. There is one single component of our created world, one physical and metaphysical entity that is an exception, and that is the mirror. The mirror and the mirror-image. Behind the luminous surface, the replica of reality without dimension, existence faced with itself, visibly three-dimensional, yet its planar image, the dividing line that can touch the whole universe. Not space—only its husked vision, not depth—only its releasing mystery, not creation—only its symbol divested of dimensions: the mirror. Albeit obscurely, nevertheless through the mirror we can recognise the world. *Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate*…[5] And perhaps it can be represented through the mirror.

When we seek the origins of artistic representation, the mirror-image is generally the first to be mentioned (as the counterpart to the cast shadow). Did Narcissus know—who fell in love in the trace in that obscure, illusory replica, rippled by waves, who looked back at him from the mirror of the river—that the mirror-image that had just been born would also grow old with him? Perhaps he suspected so, but nevertheless secretly hoped that the facsimile would with some sort of artifice remain ageless and outlive him. It is this belief, the hope in immortality, that sustains occupation in art.

Man encloses the plane of creation into an angle of 180 degrees. To put it another way: our basic condition is the mirror—our sentence, and our fate, is just that. Man originally entered into the world in such a way that he would see himself in things. He is incapable of seeing, feeling or comprehending anything as independent of himself. He can only correlate every experience with himself. "*My poems hope to sing*

of universes, but never reach beyond my lonely cell"—wrote Mihály Babits, and this immodest attitude, whether acknowledged or not, prevails in every author. *"Thinking functions in such a way that one thinks one's self, art in such a way that it becomes conscious of itself, and the poet will be a poet by beholding himself. To compose poetry, to reflect, to look in the mirror ... all these ultimately are one and the same."* This narcissistic recognition formulated by Valery brought on perhaps the most significant change in the arts: the open acceptance and declaration of self-reflection, and it is conjecturable that societal alienation from the arts was also a consequence of this proclaimed isolation. Nowadays if someone depicts a mirror, or a reflection appears in the picture, either consciously or instinctively, it speaks about art itself. Of course, I suspect that it has always been this way.

The painter's master is the mirror—wrote Leonardo at one point, and we can choose as we like among the many possibilities to comprehend the sentence left mysteriously open. In the professional circles, they often recommend checking the finished work of art by looking at it in the mirror. If the picture is good, its mirror-image should also work. The mirror can come into play as a device to aid perspectival drawing. There is a sketch of Leonardo in which a draughtsman fixes the picture of the object depicted on a mirror, and he draws around it. This solution is quite similar to the presumed procedure by which Brunelleschi invented the technique of perspectival depiction.[6] And of course, the quotation can also be comprehended philosophically: it is the task of the artist "*to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature.*"[7] We can also observe that concealed in the slightly old-fashioned word "speculate" is the Latin *speculum,* i.e., the mirror. The primary meaning of the verb was to watch, to scrutinise, which, of course, is closely related to the mirror, but by now in the European languages rather the secondary meaning referring to meditation, excogitation entered. The French *spéculer* (= argue, profiteer), the English *speculate* (= ponder), and the German *spekulieren* (= reason, profiteer) all stand close to the Hungarian *spekulál* referring to cogitation. Among my works engaged with mirrors and reflections there are those that evoke older well-known mirror representations. I have produced graphic paraphrases of the famous convex mirror of Jan Van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait,* and that of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*.[8] My compositions employing

mirrors belong to the most curious, or if you like, the most *speculative* portion of the anamorphoses.

For a good number of years, I have engaged in the slightly naïve, slightly mystic offshoot of the depiction of perspective that was so popular in the 16-17th centuries, then became a forgotten genre. Art history uses the terminus technicus for such amorphic illustrations, without meaning, that take on significance from an uncommon viewpoint, or on the cloak of an object of reflective surface they expose their secrets. The *viewer* of an anamorphosis, and not only—in following the infamous saying of Duchamp—the artist, completes it; he "does" it himself, identifying also his own viewer's nature. As he discovers the exact viewpoint, as he recognises the image that is re-distorted to become intelligible, at the same time, he also defines his own spatial coordinates. The viewer of an anamorphosis observes not the sight appearing on the retina, but rather the correlations between the artwork and her/himself. S/he should concentrate on where s/he finds her/his place in the space created by the work of art, or more precisely that designated by the visual rays diverging from the work, and on what sort of mutations the movements of the meaning of the image lead to. While this occurs in the physical space, s/he also involuntarily observes the reception in her/himself, if you like, the mental mechanism of "artistic pleasure" in the spiritual space generated by the anamorphosis. The viewer who makes contact with anamorphoses might feel more independent, but also more vulnerable. For s/he has awakened to the altered position: now it is not her/him standing at the centre of the world. On the one hand, s/he senses the wonder of the creation of the image, but also the fact that s/he is left alone with the illusion that appears in her/his consciousness, but does not even exist in reality.

Perhaps familiar with my mirror-plays and my reflections with these games, I came to the mind of Bruno Ernst[9], who decided to send me the drawing that he had originally intended for Escher. He sent me a pencil sketch, depicting a mirror and a portal, moreover, in such an artful arrangement that the area behind the opening of the gate can only be seen through the mirror. He had originally destined the idea for Escher, offering it to him to make a lithograph based on the design, but the sickly artist could no longer do the work. In effect, the mirror-cylinder for anamorphoses fills exactly the same function as the mirror in the Ernst-sketch, since both

render the hidden meaning of the image visible. In the first case, the mirror is a part of the drawing, while in the other, it is a real object, independent of the picture. This however, is not the definitive difference, but rather the nature of the image appearing in the mirror—the "picture within a picture." As opposed to the two-dimensional "reality" of the drawing, the image of the anamorphosis is merely a virtual phenomenon, which cannot be grasped either in the horizontal figure, or on the surface of the placed over it mirror. It coasts somewhere on the rollercoaster between the retina and the cerebrum. We might say mysteriously that it is a "speculation" of two-and-a-half dimensions, referring again to the correlations between *speculum* and *speculari*.

Based on the Ernst-sketch, I produced a number of works. I would say that among them, my etching entitled *The Well* remains closest to the original conception of Bruno Ernst and M. C. Escher, at least if I think that they wanted to show a fabled landscape behind the portal. The "fairytale" attribute refers to carefree youth, as I tried to portray a panorama of the Amalfi bay, where Escher spent such beautiful periods. I formed the bleak environs on this side of the portal in such a way that they would conceal a 1934 self-portrait of Escher, which was could be rendered visible with the aid of a mirror-cylinder, i.e., anamorphically. The etching-anamorphosis was made in 1998, for the one-hundredth anniversary of Escher's birth, and its first public presentation was at the centennial Escher Congress in Rome.[10] In my lecture, I expressed that although I had prepared the etching, nevertheless I think of *The Well* as the work of the three of us: Ernst, Escher, and myself. While I will admit that there is a measure of ostentation in this formulation, nevertheless I will continue thus: in every artwork born in the present, somehow, within, hidden, perhaps unintentionally, are the countless layers of cultural history, deposited one upon the other. Sometimes they may be discerned, similarly to the wall of a profoundly deep well.

Under the Pretext of Impossibilities

> —I can't believe THAT!—said Alice.
>
> —Can't you?—the Queen said in a pitying tone.—Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.
>
> Alice laughed.—There's no use trying, she said: one CAN'T believe impossible things.
>
> —I daresay you haven't had much practice, said the Queen.—When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.
>
> (Lewis Carroll: *Through the Looking-Glass*)

Do you remember Josef K.? Kafka's novel, *The Trial,* was a cult classic of the era, when I mainly spent my time reading, and time seemed endless, as opposed to space, which was narrow, articulated by closed and dense prohibitory signs. In the course of the narrative, once K. visits a painter friend, who as it happens, lives in a district that is at the far end of the city, namey in the corner falling farthest from the offices of the dreaded court. When K. prepares to leave after the visit, the painter proposes an exit in the tiny garret or so-called studio, which K. had not even noticed until then. Only by climbing on the bed was it possible to go through the door, which naturally opens onto exactly the wide corridor of the courthouse offices. Kafkaesque—we referred in those times to such twists, and then we added Orwellian, but of course, the absurd short stories of István Örkény could have also come to mind.

If I would like to explain, at least to myself, why I ever even began to deal with so-called impossible objects, or at least with these constructions that can be easily drawn on two-dimensional paper, but cannot be built in our three-dimensional world, a possible explanation might be found in that queer background world, sometimes playful, sometimes oppressively bleak, that appears in the works of the authors mentioned above.

If we seek the visual art equivalent of the impossible and tragic space closed in on itself of *The Trial,* we might recall *Prisons of the Imagination* (*Carceri d'invenzione*). According to legend, the twenty-two-year-old Giovanni Battista Piranesi began his series of *Prisons* etchings when he was ill with malaria. According to interpretations, it could only have been attributed to a high fever that he had pushed off so far from a "normal" depiction, drawing such distorted constructions impossible to build, reminiscent of multilevel labyrinths, of such strange structure. Large, oppressive architectural spaces appear on the etchings, with the exception of a few staffage figures roaming out of their element, strings of halls virtually devoid of people, which, though each reflects such a capricious, spectacular, fantastic world, we experience as a living organisam—to borrow the analogy from Victor Hugo: for enormous brains.[11]

If we don't seek such ancient analogies of the visual art representations of impossible situations, generally it is M. C. Escher's name that comes up. The Dutch graphic artist's notorius lithographs, particularly his masterpieces referred to as "the most Escheresque Eschers" by Bruno Ernst, *Belvedere*, *Waterfall* and *Ascending and Descending* come to mind first. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of M. C. Escher's elder son; George said that his father had a Piranesi album, and it was evident that the frequently turned pages of *Prisons* reproductions influenced his work. Naturally, much more rational, calculated working phases preceded Escher's lithographs than the creation of *Prisons*; the passion for creating atmosphere is practically lacking from them completely, and yet with his intervention, artistic tendencies of the late 20th century that could be apostrophised as a Piranesi-Renaissance are consummated, which are represented by the works of Shigeo Fukuda, Jos de Mey, or even Tamás F. Farkas; moreover, even the artist who is considered today's most direct incarnation of Piranesi often cannot avoid completely Escher' mediating role: Erik Desmaziéres. Of course, impossible objects can also emerge from the hands of clumsy draughtsmen, at least according to Hogarth, who wrote this beneath an amusing engraving, in which visual paradoxes were collected into a bouquet: "Whoever makes a design without the knowledge of perspective will be liable to such absurdities."[12]

Erudite mathematicians have also participated in the

construction of visual paradoxes alongside the artists—and sometimes even before the artists. Most probably the best-known and "simplest" impossible object is the "tribar." It has been used so often in the visual arts, design, advertising, and even in fields of psychology, has become such a familiar symbol over the course of the 20th century, that by now it almost does not even enter our minds to inquire into its origin. Scholars generally refer to the unusual triangle as the *Penrose Triangle,* because it was the later celebrated mathematician Roger Penrose who published it first.[13] In 1956, still a student, Penrose was introduced to the works of Escher at a show in Amsterdam, and under this influence, he began to draw "impossibilities," and to dissect paradoxes from a mathematical angle. Penrose could not have known—moreover, at the time, nor could Escher, that a young man living in Sweden, Oscar Reuterswärd, who had engaged with impossible objects for quite some time; in fact, he had already invented and drawn the "tribar" decades previous.[14] Alongside Roger Penrose and Reutersvärd, we should not forget other scientists, as well as the names of other forms made famous. Such is the Necker Cube[15], the Blivet[16], the Duchamp painting made infamous as the "Impossible Bed,"[17] or simply the recurring staircase, invented by Lionel Penrose, Roger's father.[18]

Of course, it is also valid to mention these antecedents in connection with my own work, among them the inspiration of Escher's *oeuvre*. I could not meet personally with Escher, as he died just when I, in Budapest, at the Academy of Applied Arts, began my acquaintance with the highlights of geometry under the instruction of professors Dénes Gulyás and Ernő Rubik. I felt as if Escher was a distant relative, when I worked with his own papers, as well as when I could arrange a solo show as one of the first guest artists at the Escher Museum opened in The Hague. [19] I also had only an indirect connection with Oscar Reutersvärd, called the "father of impossible objects." Bruno Ernst sent his last letter to me, which he had written shortly before his death, and he asked for my help in deciphering a passage in the letter. Reutersvärd ruminated on the realisation of new "impossible figures," differing from the ones until then, which so far he could see only with his inner vision, though—as he wrote—if he would succeed in drawing them, he "would even be capable of depicting an inside-out Eiffel Tower."[20] The text containing scanty concrete

information, yet interesting implications set my imagination in motion, and it had an indisputable impact on a few of my works, though I could never be sure if I had truly proceeded, following Reutersvärd.

To truly construct the “impossible objects” in three dimensions would be that which was perfectly inconceivable, wouldn’t it? Well yes, and no. Shigeo Fukuda undertook to build sculptures that are just like Escher drawings as viewed from a certain point, but be careful: the magic works only and exclusively from that specific point; if the viewpoint shifts, then the trick is revealed, and what was just a perfectly arranged composition transforms into a cavalcade of tangled building elements. In parallel with Fukuda, a number of European and American artists have also recognised that the forms alleged to be impossible are unfathomable only for a traditional school of thought determined by convention, while in a more artful reading—if you will, with anamorphic vision—they are not unrealistic. These works—among them, more than one paraphrase interpreting Escher pictures—were presented together at the international exhibition series organised for the one-hundredth anniversary of Escher’s birth.

I have met Fukuda often and we have also taken part in exhibitions together several times. At an opening, when I referred to him as my master, he eluded the compliment by saying: we had a common master. Presumably we both had Escher in mind.

Is it lying if the artist depicts a space and places objects in it that contradict the customary vision? Is it escapism if he invents a world for himself in possession of unknown laws and new rules, so that he can cross over from the hated old into this? And does he not do all this, he doesn’t allow the trickery concealed in the image to be so easily noticed, sometimes calling attention himself to the cunning solutions, so that he will be caught as soon as possible?

Corner house at the intersection of Andrássy út and Népköztársaság útja. Those familiar with recent Hungarian history can determine precisely, on the basis of the title, the verbal paradox concealed in it, just when the etching would have been made. It is not easy to decide whether the picture represents a corner house, or a courtyard, if the lines indicate convex or concave forms. We might call it a question of

viewpoint, entrusting judgment to the psychologists: whether we were born for freedom, or rather for slavery.

I am prepared to concede that the universe of paradoxes is not equally alluring to everyone. A well-known story about Einstein occurs to me, who returned the Kafka volume he had borrowed from Thomas Mann with the following words—as it happens, exactly that one about Josef K., which I mentioned in above: “I was unable to read it: human thinking cannot be that complicated.”

NOTES

[1] The exhibition, *Metamorphoses of the Face from the 16th to the 20th Century* was arranged in the spring of 1987 in the Palazzo Grassi in Venice.

[2] William Shakespeare: *Richard II*, II.2, 16-20. In the original English, the word “perspective” at the time related to every procedure in connection with spatial representation and the production of spatial illusion, including anamorphosis. In all certainty, they also referred to the famous skull of Holbein’s painting entitled *Ambassadors* in this way too, which is only rendered visible if one regards it “obliquely and from a distance.” The influence of this 1533 painting may have reached as far as Shakespeare, through the works of such ambassadors as William Scrots and Nicholas Hilliard. The word “anamorphosis” appeared for the first time half a century after the staging of Richard II, in 1650, in the volume *Magia Universalis*, employed by a German Jesuit called Gaspar Schott. In its contemporary translation, the overly general word “perspective” would be misleading, which is why I have used the expression” anamorphic diagram.”

[3] We can imagine the Swan Theatre made on the basis of a drawing by Johannes de Witt in this way.

[4] In his essay of literary theory entitled *The Philosophy of Composition*, Poe gave an account of the birth of “The Raven.” In the essay, he claims that never before has anyone before him written down the creative process with such sincere detail; i.e., writers—especially poets—usually prefer if the world regards their creations as the fruit of some sort of noble fever, some ecstatic intuition, and they truly shudder at the thought of allowing the public to have even a glance behind the scenes. When Poe attempted revealing the *modus operandi*, he reached the conclusion that a literary work could be written also with cold calculation, on a mathematical basis, and should truly rather be prepared that way.

[5] Paul the Apostle: “For now, we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face.” (I Corinthians, 13:12)

[6] The punctured panel depicting the Battistero in Florence, which had to be viewed through a mirror in order to produce the illusion of perspective, was lost over time. We are familiar with it only through the descriptions of Manetti and Vasari. My installation entitled *In memoriam Brunelleschi* was an attempt to reconstruct the process.

[7] Shakespeare: *Hamlet*.

[8] *Johannes de Eyck fuit hic*, etching, 1998; *Velázquez spectaculum*, etching, 2002.

[9] Dutch mathematician and art writer. He was born Hans de Rijk.

[10] In 1998 La Sapienzia University in Rome organised the congress and exhibition in connection with the centennial of Escher's birth. The conference lectures were published by Springer in 2002 under the title, *M. C. Escher's Legacy*. The exhibition material was published by the periodical *Leonardo*.

[11] "Le noir cerveau de Piranese / Est une béante fournaise / Ou se melent l'arche et le ciel, / L'escalier, la tour, la colonne; / Ou croît, monte, s'enfle et bouilonne / L'incommensurable Babel!" ("The dark brain of Piranesi / bugyogo, sötét, tátongo katlan, / kavarog benne a boltiv meg az ég, / a lépcsö, a bástya, az oszlop, / növekszik, dagad és forrong / az oriás bábeli mindenség!")

[12] Hogarth wrote this in 1754 beneath an etching, in which he collected 16 obviously visual impossibilities and countless graphic goofs. With the picture intended for the book cover, he supposedly wanted to ridicule an aristocrat patron of the arts.

[13] Roger Penrose published the drawing of his triangle in the February 1958 issue of the *British Journal of Psychology*. Escher made his lithograph entitled *Waterfall* on the basis of the drawing.

[14] Quotation from Reutersvärd's letter to Bruno Ernst: "In my Latin class (in 1934), I drew a few versions in the margins of my textbook. I tried to draw 4, 5, 6, 7- and 8-pointed stars as precisely as possible. One day I drew a 6-pointed star, then joined cubes to its sides. I got a surprisingly interesting form. Then I added another 3 cubes, so that I could complete the figure as a triangle. Immediately I realised that what I had before me was a paradox."

[15] Swedish scientist Louis Albert Necker drew and published it in 1832.

[16] Impossible object also known as the Devil's Pitchfork or Devil's Tuning Fork, or poiuyt, in which two poles become three.

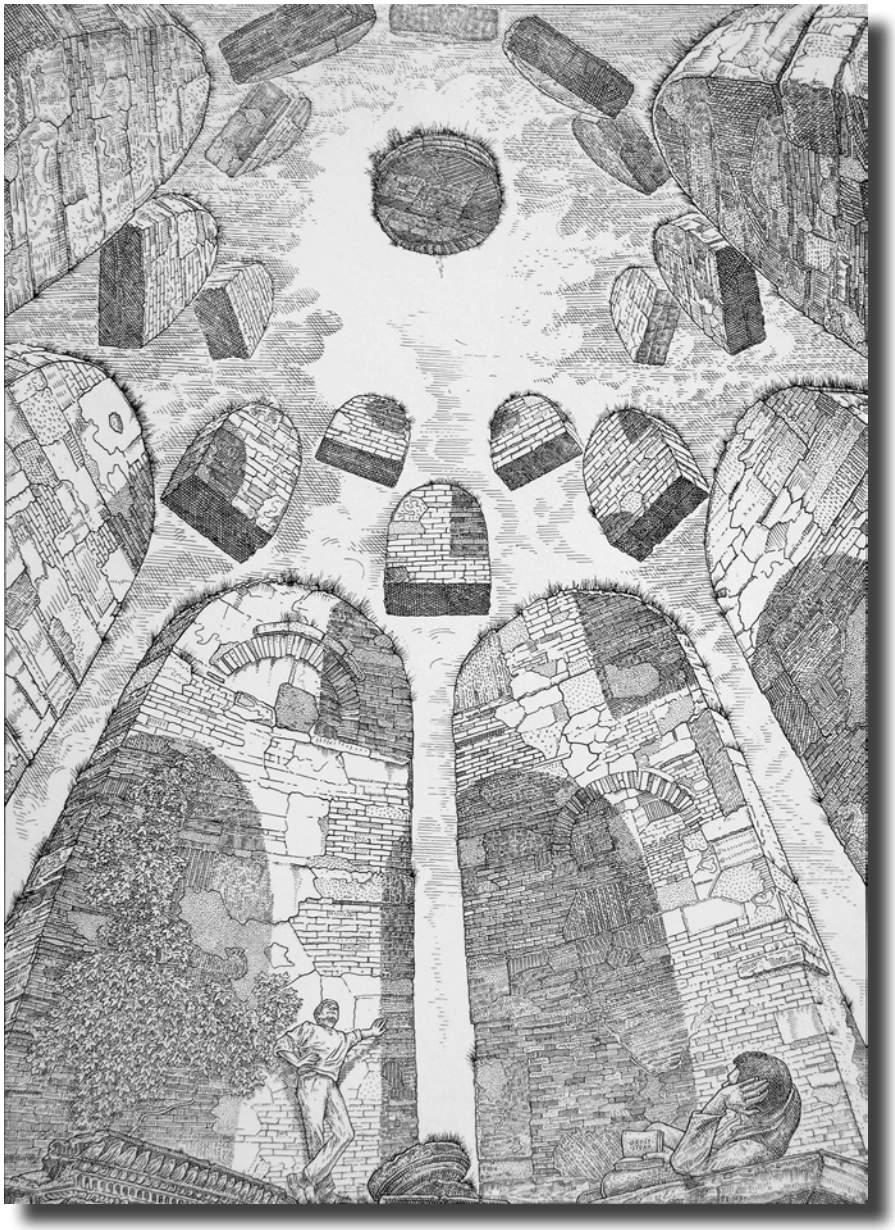
[17] "Apollinaire Enameled" is the caption of Marcel Duchamp's painting from circa 1915, in which the painter parodies the double-entendre hidden in the axonometric depiction.

[18] The impossible staircase also appeared in the February 1958 issue of the *British Journal of Psychology,* together with the tribar invented by Roger Penrose. Upon seeing the drawing, Escher produced his lithograph entitled *Ascending and Descending*.

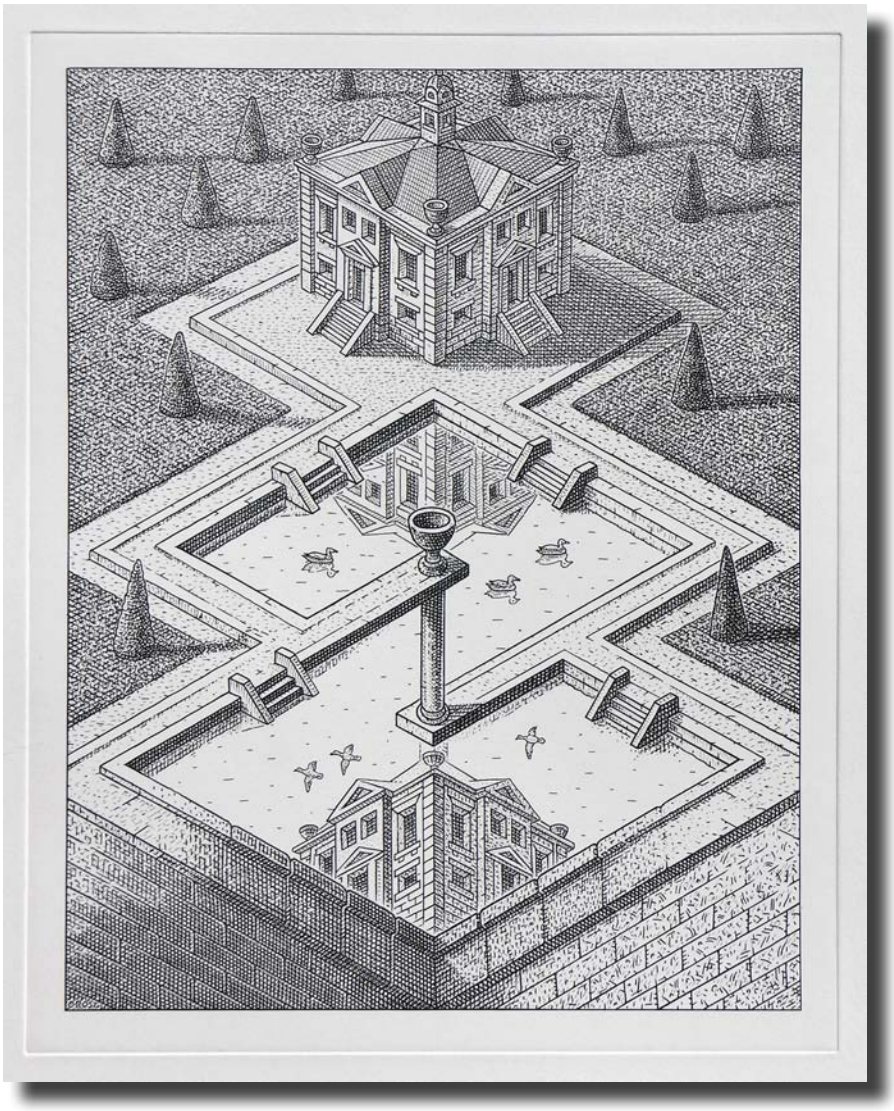
[19] In addition to an Escher sketch, Bruno Ernst gave me blank sheets of paper that he had found in Escher's estate. In October 2005 my exhibition entitled *Orosz bij Escher (Orosz at Escher's)* opened at the Escher Museum in The Hague.

[20] "Since some weeks I am industrious, productive and innovative. Above all I am on the track of a quite different and another type of impossible figure, I can see it for my inner sight. It mixes up what is near and distant in an overwhelming way. I hope that I perhaps will carry out and realise this "discovery." I have gone through series of trials and errors, but not yet achieved a "credible" result. When I will succeed, perhaps I will be able to draw an inside-out Eiffel tower." (1 April 2001)

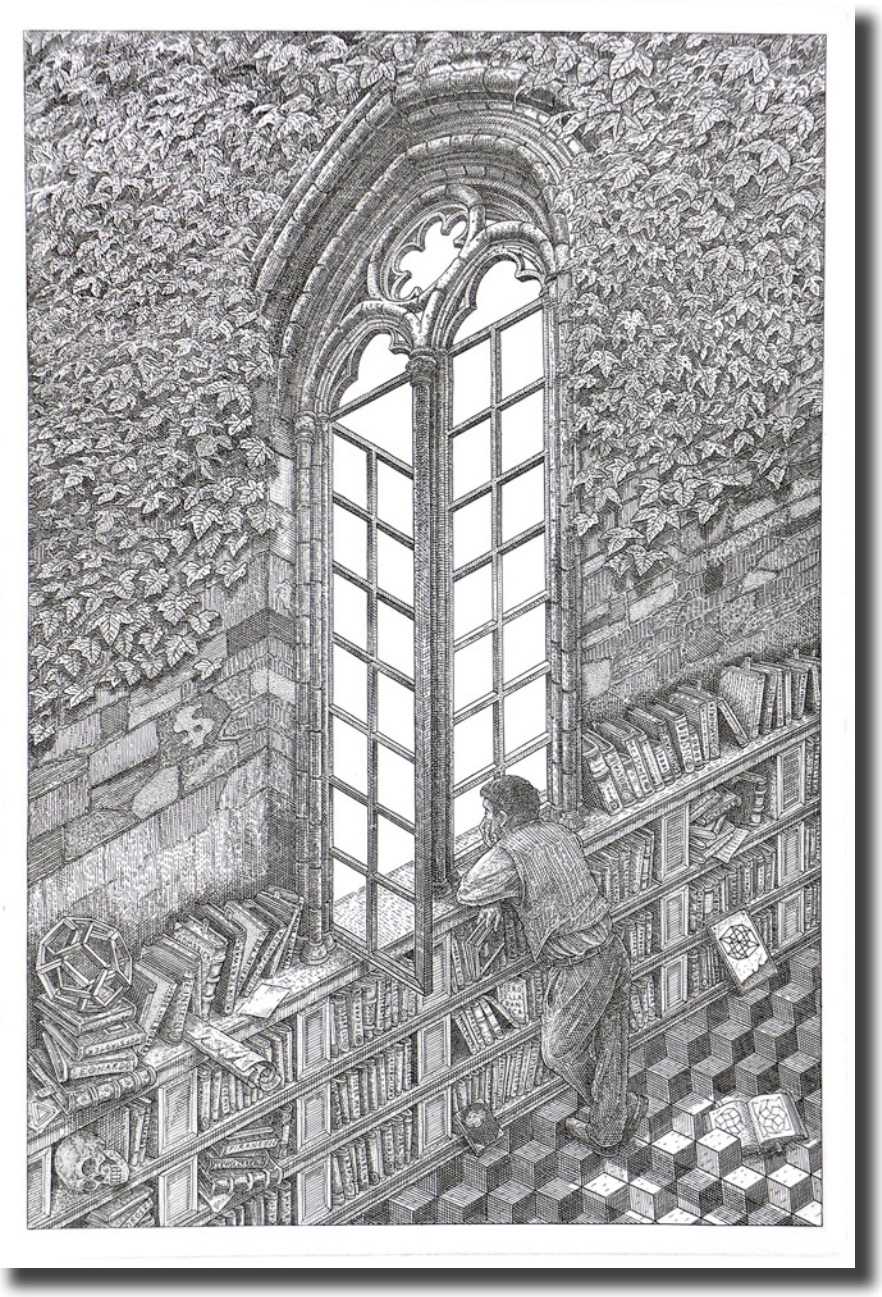
The Art ...



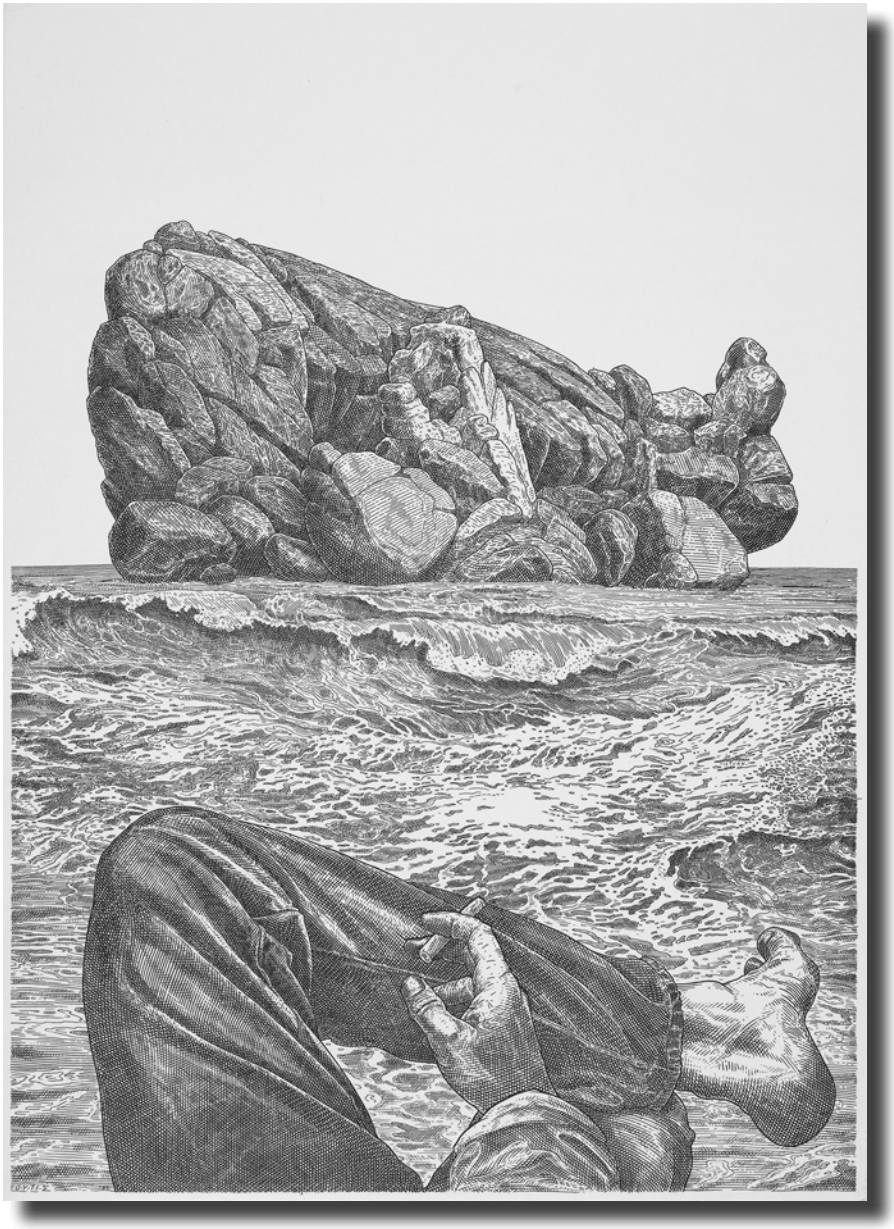
István Orosz, *Absence (Cupola),* 2006
etching, 298 x 395 mm



István Orosz, *Chateau,* 2005
etching, 300 x 370 mm

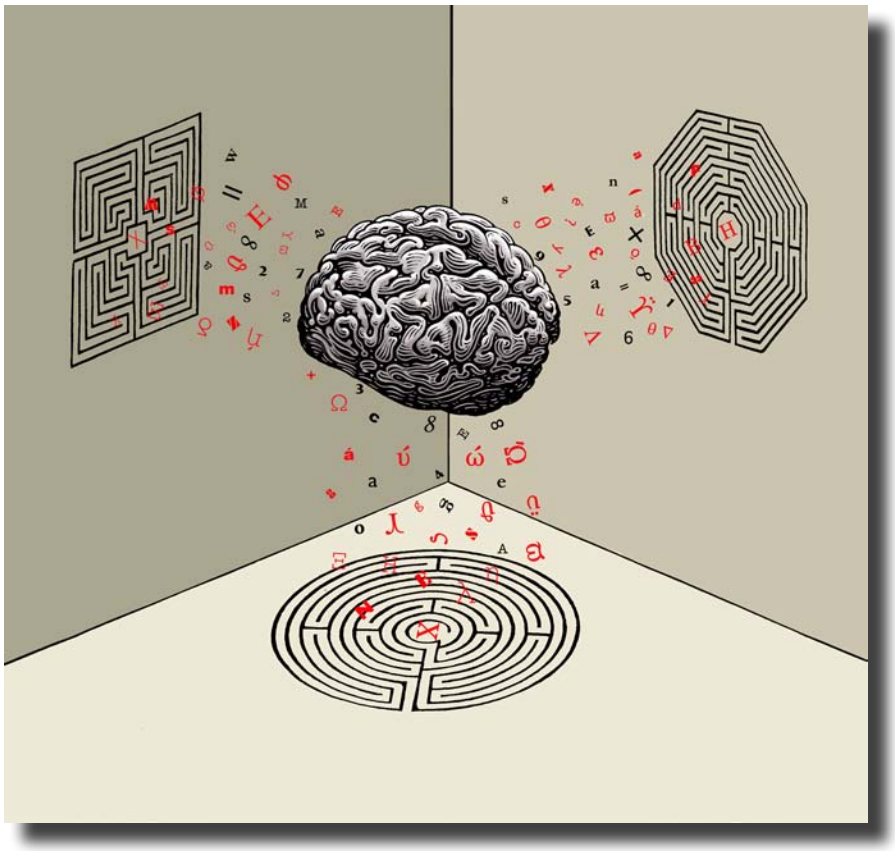


István Orosz, *Library,* 2005
270 x 400 mm

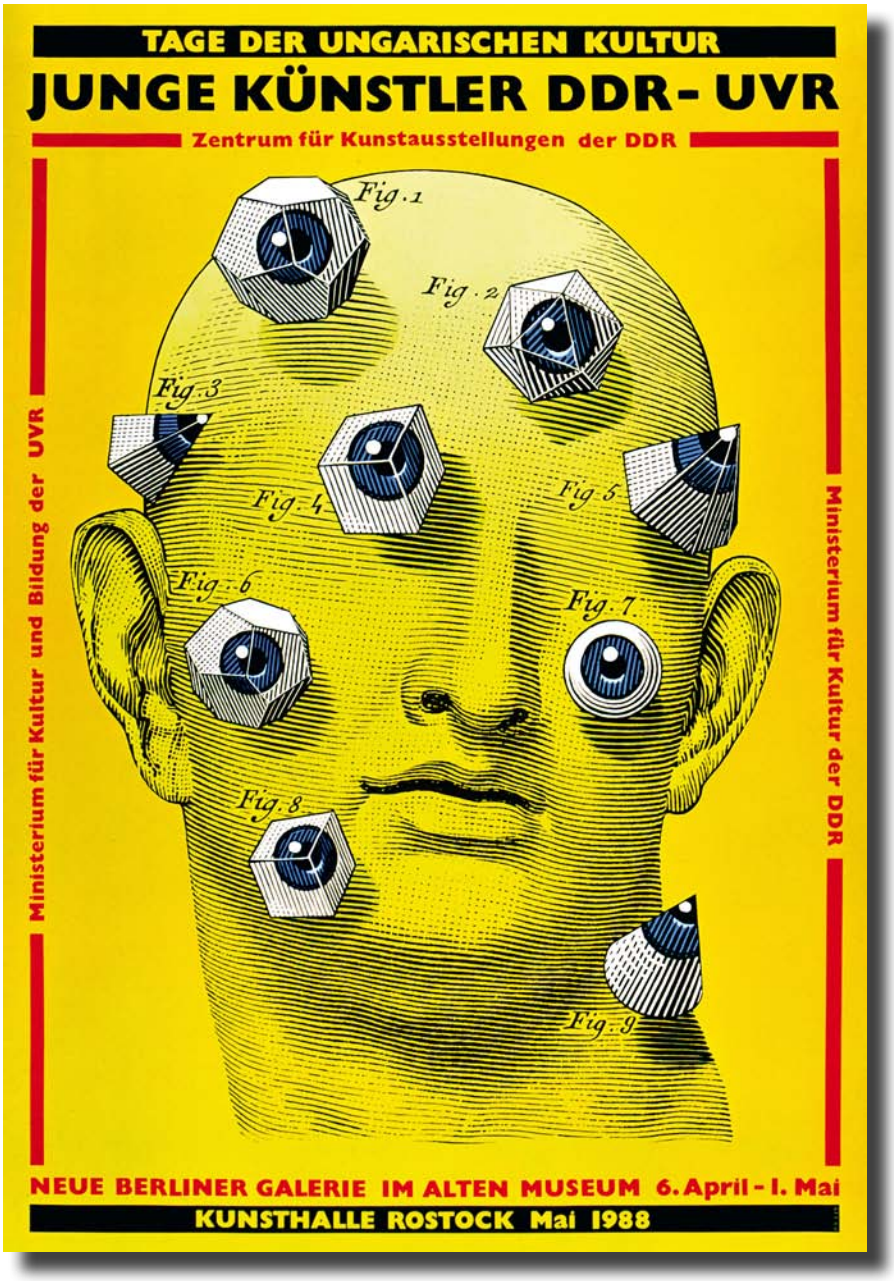


István Orosz, *The Island,* 1993
etching, 310 x 428 mm

István Orosz, *David and Goliath,* 1996
etching, 335 x 280 mm

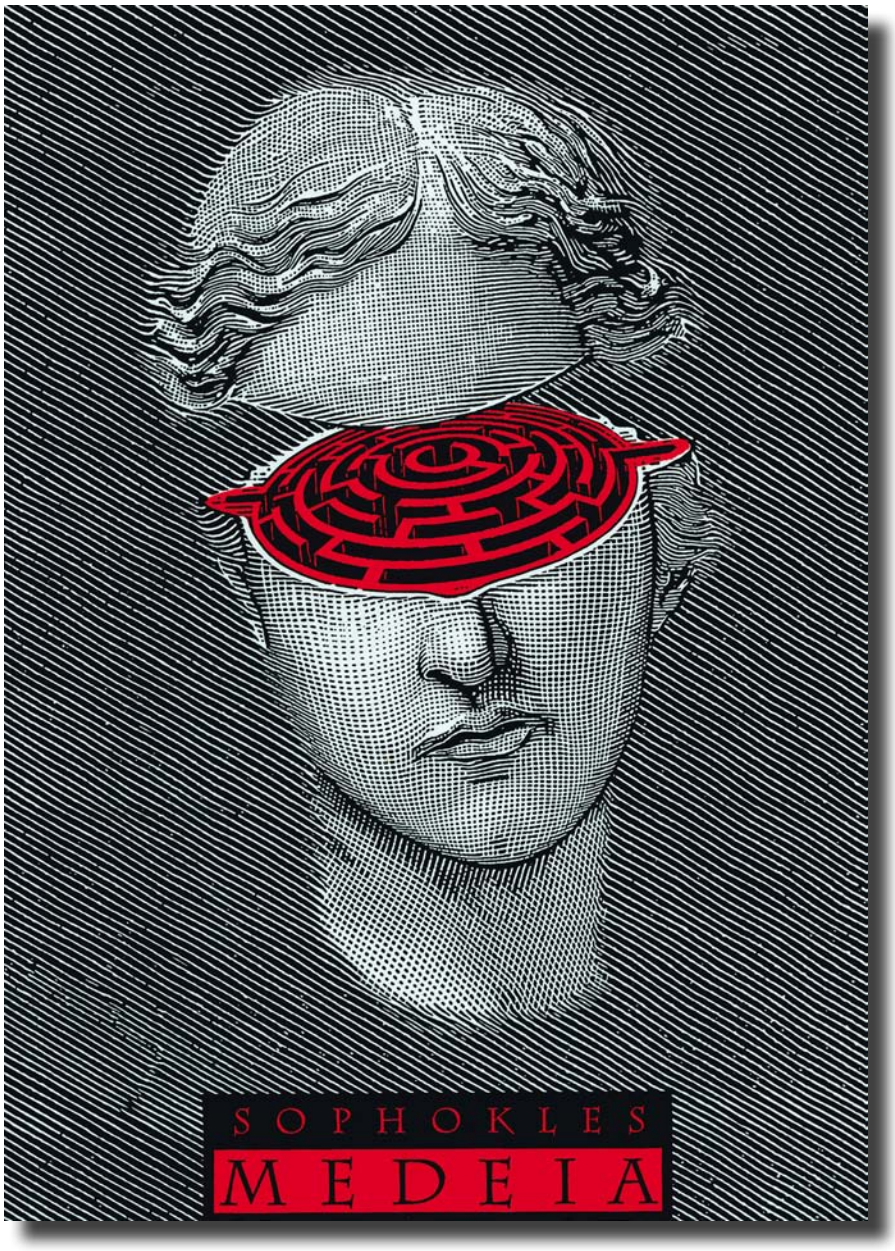


István Orosz, *Einstein*, illustration, 2005
India ink and aquarell, 350 x 300 mm

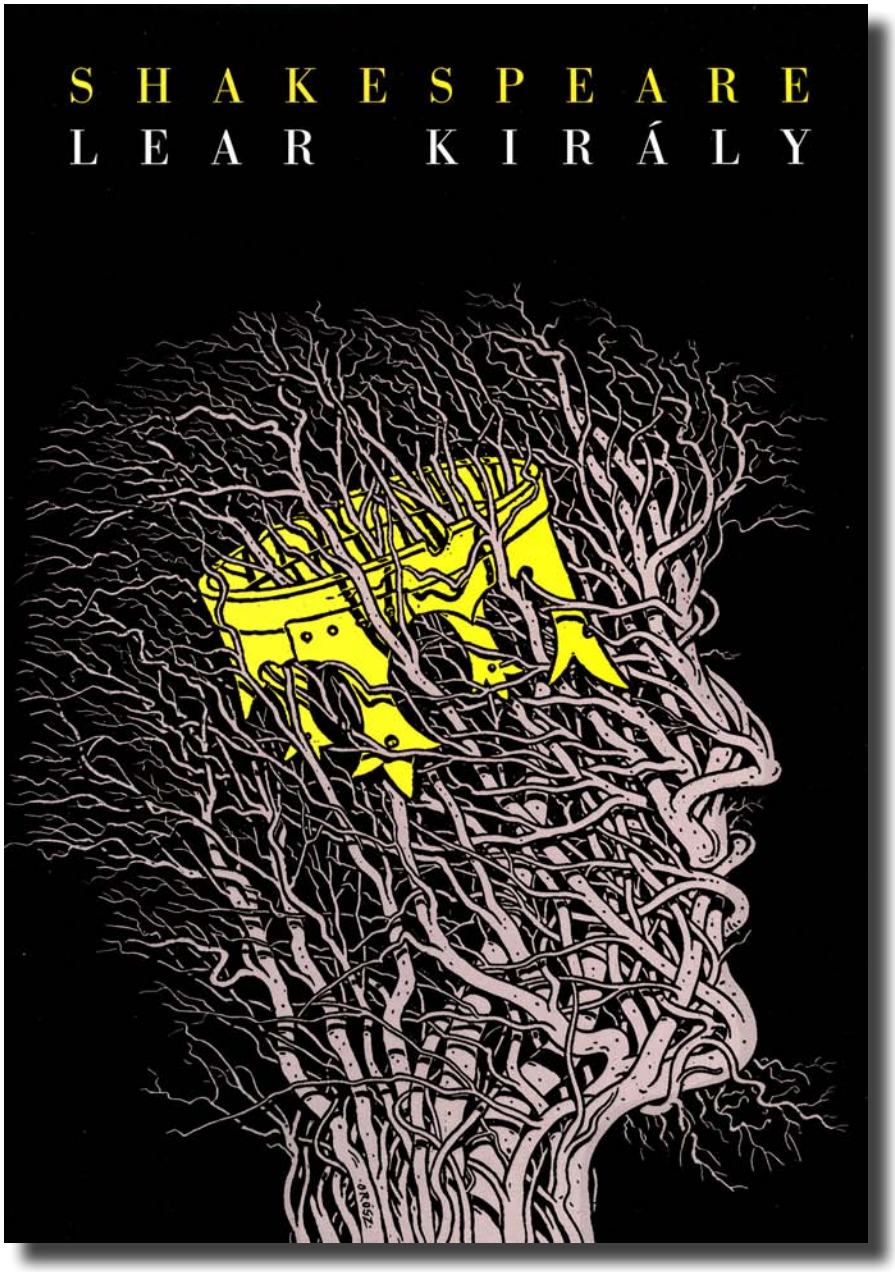


István Orosz,
***Exhibition of Young German and Hungarian Artists,* 1998**
offset poster, 700 x 1,000 mm

István Orosz, *Oidipus, 1998*
offset poster, 600 x 800 mm



István Orosz, *Medeia,* 1998
offset poster, 600 x 800 mm

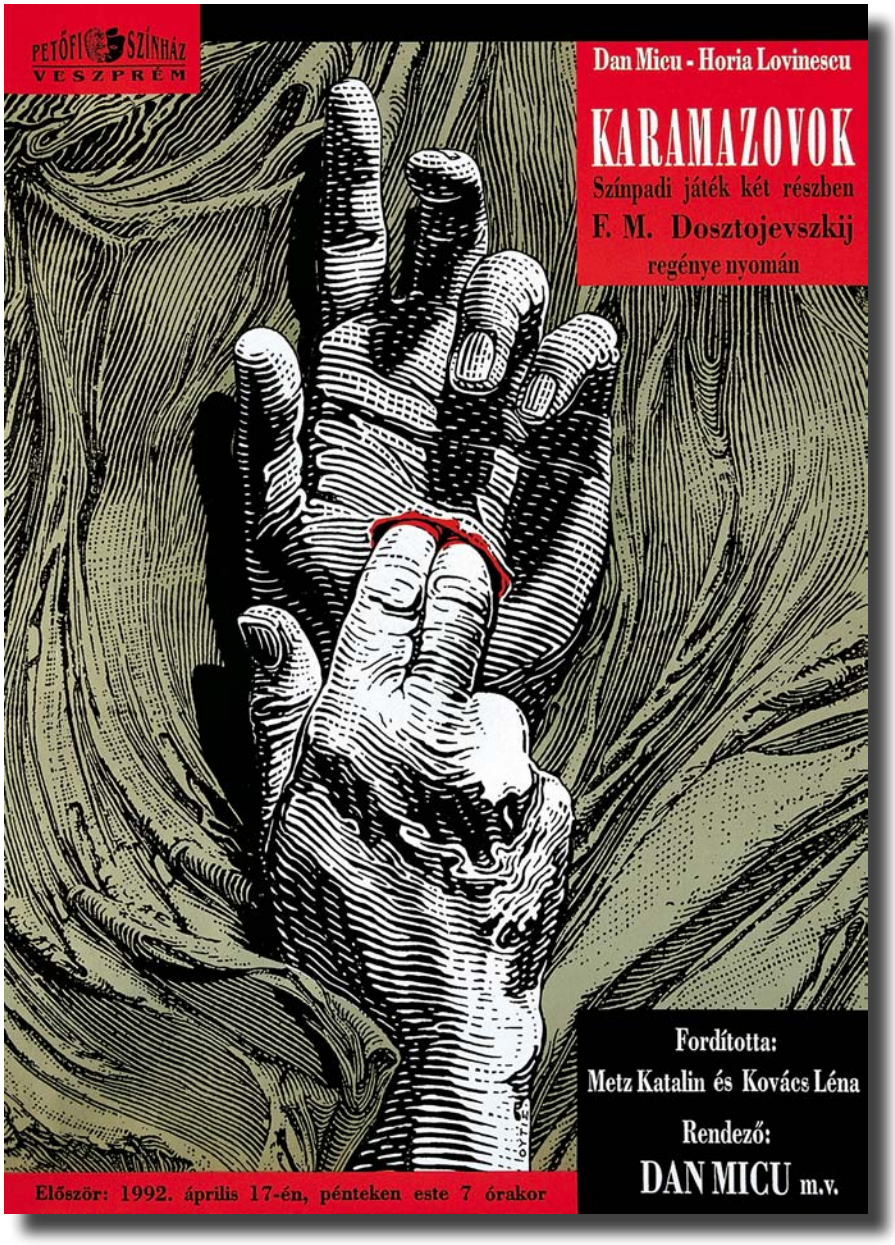


István Orosz, *King Lear,* 1993
offset poster, 700 x 1,000 mm

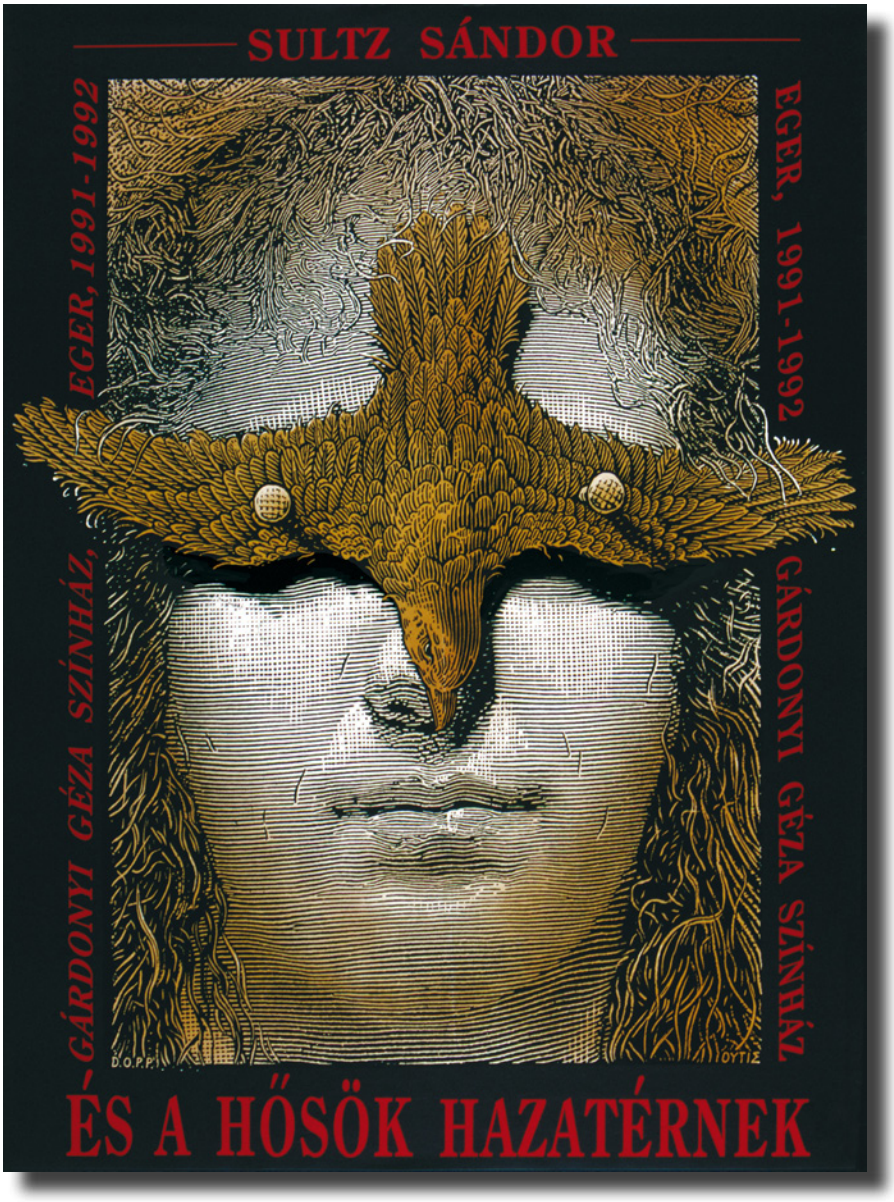
István Orosz, *Macbeth,* 2000
offset poster, 700 x 1,000 mm

István Orosz, *Faust,* 1988
etching, 110 x 110 mm

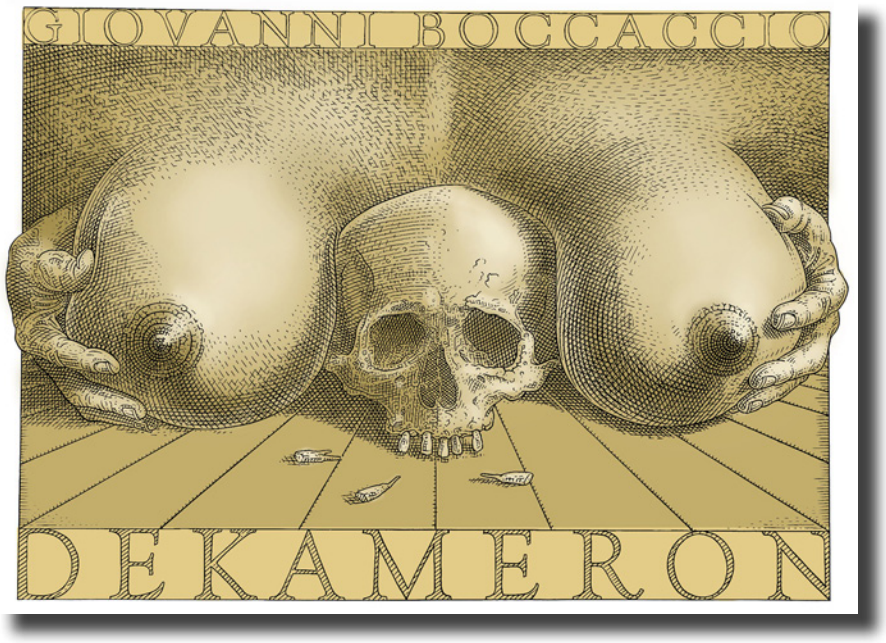
István Orosz, *Durer in the Forest,* 1987
etching, 500 x 358 mm



István Orosz, *Karamazow Brothers,* 1992
offset poster, 600 x 800 mm



István Orosz, *Heroes are going back,* 1992
offset poster, 600 x 800 mm

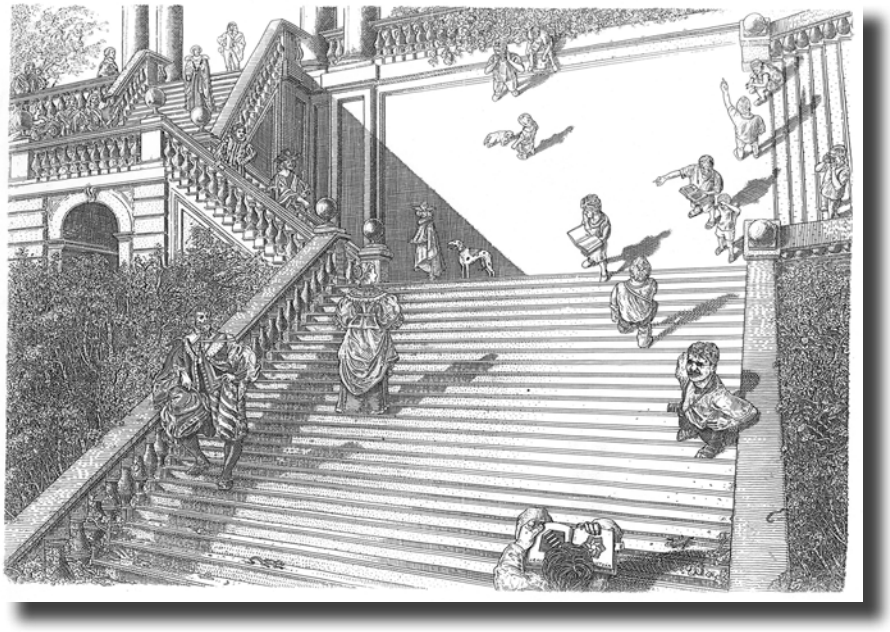


István Orosz, *Decameron,* 2005
India ink and aquarell, 350 x 280 mm

István Orosz, *Siegfried,* 1996
offset poster, 1,000 x 700 mm

István Orosz, *The Raven (Edgar Allan Poe Anamorphosis),* 2006
India ink, aquarell, 360 x 500 mm
mirrored cylinder, 60 x100 mm

István Orosz, *Anamorphosis with Column I.,II.,* 1994
etching, 550 x 395 mm, mirrored cylinder, 60 x 100 mm



István Orosz, *Time Sights,* 2000
etching, 557 x 395 mm

István Orosz has designed three *Ex Libris* bookplates for *Hyperion* readers, for use in your ever diminishing collection of real (printed, physically manifest) books. To download the bookplates as either jpg or pdf files, please go to www.nietzschecircle.com/exlibris.html.

2010. November

PTE Hall of the School of Medicine
Uránia Cinema
House of Arts and Literature
Dominican House

3–6.
[Wednesday-Saturday]

- ***Lajkó Félix & friends***
(Brasnyó Antal - Dresch Mihály - Szandai Mátyás)
- ***Mercan Dede & Secret Tribe***
- ***Boris Kovac és & LaCampanella Orchestra***
- ***Söndörgő – King Naat Veliov*** *(Kochani Orkestra)* ***– Herczku Ágnes***
- ***Yakaza Ensemble***
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What She Knew, a new reconsideration of the Oedipus myth, premieres in December 2010

George Hunka's play is the first full theatrical production of the theatre minima company

George Hunka's play **What She Knew**, a one-woman play centering on the character of Jocasta in the Oedipus myth, will have its world premiere on **December 1, 2010, at manhattan theatre source, 177 Macdougal Street, in New York City**. **Gabriele Schafer** performs the solo work, which runs Wednesday–Saturday at 8.00 pm through December 11. The play is the first formal theatrical presentation of the **theatre minima** company. All tickets will be $18.00 and available online through the manhattan theatre source web site at http://www.theatresource.org or by calling (866) 811-4111.

Press previews are Wednesday, December 1, 2010, at 8.00 pm and Thursday, December 2, 2010, at 8.00 pm.

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theatre minima Website: http://www.theatreminima.org

For further information, contact George Hunka (ghunka@theatreminima.org or 917.656.3591)

Image: *Oedipus and Jocasta*, Joel-Peter Witkin.
Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago / Bruce Silverstein Gallery, NY.

Sensationism:

Contents of each sensation:

a) Sensation of the exterior universe.
b) sensation of the object sensed at the ti
c) objective ideas associated therewith.
d) subjective ideas associated therewith (
mind at the time).
e) the temperament and mental basis of th
f) the abstract phenomenon of consciousnes

Thus each sensation is a cube, which may
as set down upon the side representing F,
side representing A upwards. The other si
course B,C,D and E.

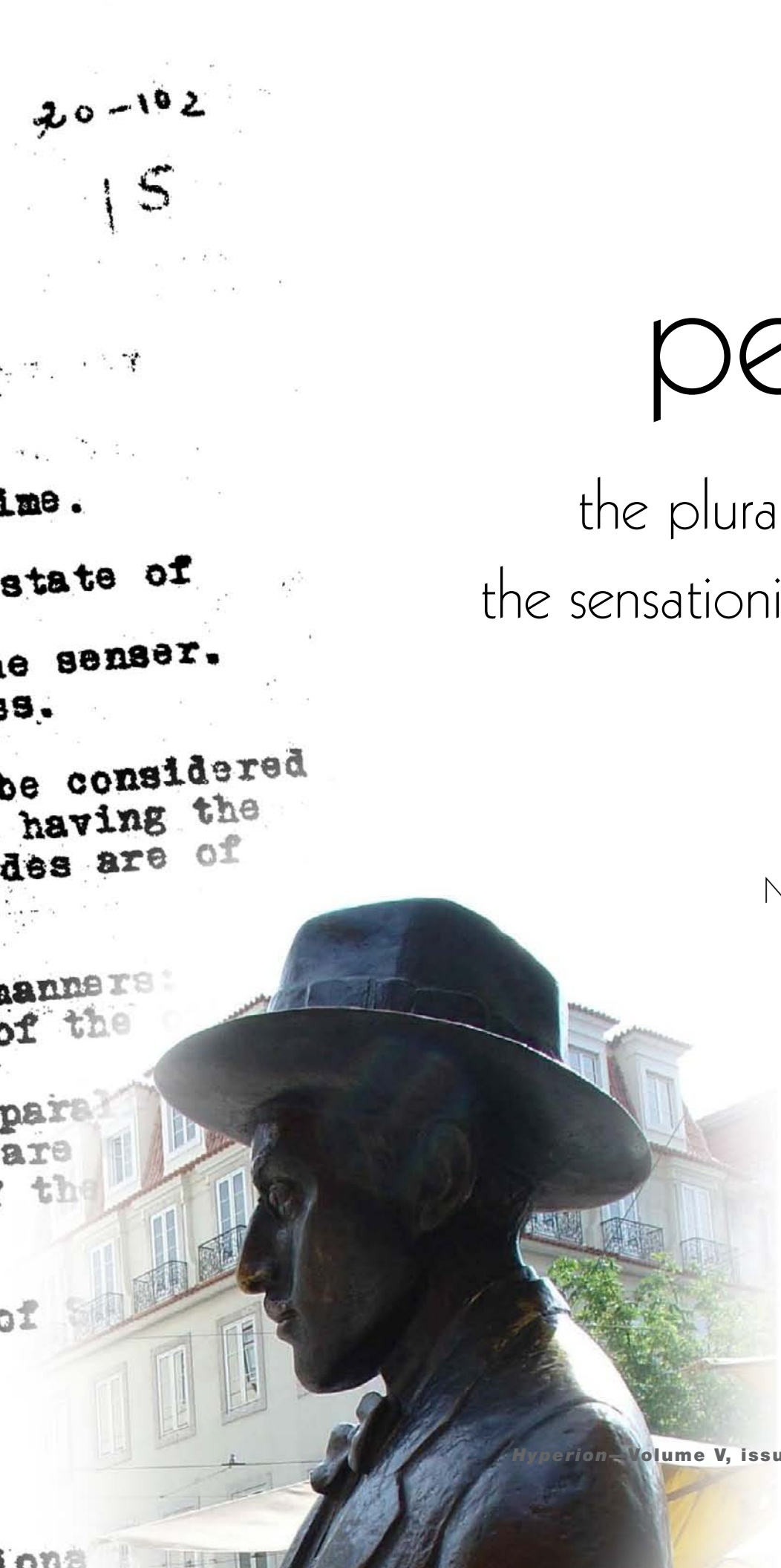
Now this cube may be looked at in three
(1) on one side only, so that none
is seen;
(2) with one side of a square held
the eyes, so that two sides of the cube
(3) with the apex held in front of
that three sides are seen

From an objective standpoint, the Cube
is composed of:
Ideas = lines
Images (internal) = planes
Images of objects = solids

pessoa

the plural writing and the sensationist movement

Nuno Filipe Ribeiro
New University of Lisbon



I—The pluralistic writing of Pessoa

In the work of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) one finds the construction of a pluralistic writing. Pessoa creates, throughout his work, a multiplicity of heteronyms, among which Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de Campos are the best known. A heteronym is a literary character with its own worldview, ideas, way of writing, and its own works, that is, with its own literary style. As the matter of fact, in the text entitled *Aspects,* which was supposed to serve as an introduction to and explanation of the heteronymic work, one reads:

> You should approach these books as if you hadn't read this explanation but had simply read the books, buying them one by one at a bookstore, where you saw them on display. You shouldn't read them in any other spirit. (…) That doesn't mean you have the right to believe in my explanation. As soon as you read it, you should suppose that I've lied—that you're going to read books by different poets, or different writers, and that through those books you'll receive emotions and learn lessons from those writers, with whom I have nothing to do except as their publisher.[1]

Thus Pessoa produces a multiplicity of texts written in different styles and attributed to his different heteronyms. The *Keeper of Sheep* signed by Alberto Caeiro and the *Book of Odes* written by Ricardo Reis in a Horatian style are just some examples of the multiplicity of works created by Pessoa and attributed to his heteronyms. But Pessoa's creation of a pluralist writing has a complex structure. Besides the heteronyms, one finds in Pessoa's works the development of writings produced by semi-heteronyms, such as *The Book of Disquiet* attributed to Bernardo Soares and *The Education of the Stoic* signed by the Baron of Teive, as well as a set of texts attributed to a team of sub-

[1] Fernando Pessoa, *Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa (edited and translated by Richard Zenith)*, New York, Grover Press, 2001, pp. 4-5

heteronyms, like Thomas Crosse and I. I. Crosse. The difference between a heteronym and a semi-heteronym consists in the fact that while the heteronym is different from the author who created it not only in its way of thinking and feeling but also in its way of writing, the semi-heteronym is different from its author only in its way of thinking and feeling but not in its style. That is what Pessoa actually expresses in a text entitled *Preface to Fictions of the Interlude*, in which he explains the construction of his semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares:

> (…) Bernardo Soares, while differing from me in his ideas, his feelings, and his way of seeing and understanding, expresses himself in the same way I do. He is a different personality, but expressed through my natural style (…).

The same is asserted in the text about the creation of the semi-heteronym Baron of Teive.

The sub-heteronyms play, on the other hand, a completely different role in the literary work of Fernando Pessoa. The sub-heteronyms are literary characters entrusted with the task of translating from Portuguese into other languages and writing essays about the works of the heteronyms and semi-heteronyms. Thus the labor of the sub-heteronyms is to divulge the works of the other literary characters, and their existence is strictly attached to that labor.

Pessoa establishes, just as well, connections among his heteronyms, semi-heteronyms, and sub-heteronyms. In the case of the sub-heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa, there is an obvious connection between them and the heteronymic personalities, for their task would be the translation and divulgation—through prefaces and essays—of the heteronymic work. But the heteronyms remain also related among themselves. In a text entitled *Notes for the Memory of my Master Caeiro*, written under the name of Álvaro de Campos, one finds an explanation of the relation between the various heteronyms. Among Pessoa's writings one can also find prose texts, written by the hands of Caeiro's direct disciple Reis and of his philosophical follower Mora, concerning the relevance, the novelty, and originality of Caeiro's poetry. There are, just as well, the texts of the quarrel between Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos concerning the definition of art. The work of Fernando Pessoa presents many examples of this kind of connection among his literary characters.

However, underlying Pessoa's construction of all these heteronyms, semi-heteronyms, and sub-heteronyms is a large pre-heteronymic work. In the famous letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, from the 13th January 1935,

concerning the genesis of the heteronyms, Pessoa says:

> Ever since I was a child, it has been my tendency to create around me a fictitious world, to surround myself with friends and acquaintances that never existed.[2]

The first public appearance of the heteronyms occurred in the first number of modernist Portuguese review *Orpheu*, in 1915, where Pessoa presented for the first time the *Opiary* and the *Triumphal Ode* of Álvaro de Campos. But by that time, he had already conceived and written under the name of several literary characters. In the early writings of Pessoa, one finds English and French poetry and prose under the names of characters such as Charles Robert Anon, Alexander Search, and Jean Seul de Méluret. One can also see among Pessoa's early manuscripts, from 1902–1903, the projects for a Portuguese journal entitled *O Palrador* [*The Twitter*], in which were supposed to cooperate several literary characters, such as Dr. Pancracio, Luís António Congo, Eduardo Lança. Pessoa has written under more than 70 names, developing almost all the literary genera in the most multifarious art of style. Besides poetry and fiction, Pessoa has written about politics, sociology, philosophy, even about astrology and occultism, creating projects for treatises, discussing the tradition, and proposing new interpretations for the subjects he discusses.

Nevertheless, Pessoa's construction of a pluralistic writing doesn't come to an end with the creation of the literary characters, that is, with the creation of his heteronyms, semi-heteronyms, sub-heteronyms, pre-heteronyms, and with the development of the several literary genera that he had at his disposal. Pessoa also creates several literary movements—such as neo-paganism, dynamism, intersectionism. He placed his literary characters within those movements and developed the several literary genera according to the principles of the movements he created. Thus the significance of the sensationist writings of Pessoa appears in the context of the development of new literary movements, as well as of the principles for the development of a multiplicity of literary genera.

II—The "dramatic literary space" as "drama in people"

With the creation of the heteronyms, semi-heteronyms, sub-heteronyms, and the development of a multiplicity of literary genera and of a plurality of styles, Pessoa constructs a new image of the literary space. The literary space is no longer conceived as a homogeneous space. The creation of a multiplicity of

[2] *Idem*, p.254

literary characters and of a plurality of styles results in the development of a heterogeneous literary space, and the image that Pessoa finds for this new conception of literary space is the expressed through the notion of "dramatic literary space." Actually, that's exactly what Pessoa says about his writing in the text entitled *Aspects*:

> There are authors who write plays and novels, and they often endow the characters of their plays and novels with feelings and ideas that they insist are not their own. Here the substance is the same, though the form is different.[3]

According to Pessoa, the point of departure for the constitution of a dramatic literary space is the notion of drama, of dramatic play, of the *substance* of drama, but with the alteration of the structural *form* of a dramatic play. But what does mean by "the substance of drama"? What's the meaning of the alteration of the structural form of a dramatic play to constitution of a dramatic literary space?

In the *Essay about Drama*, written by Pessoa himself, one reads:

> The drama, as an objective whole, is organically composed of three parts — the people or characters; the interaction of those people; and the action or fable, by which and through which that interaction occurs and those people appear.[4]

What specifically characterizes the dramatic plays is the fact that the characters, the interaction of the characters, and the fable through which that interaction occurs are gathered in a unique text, unified by an organic whole. The unified organic whole constitutes the form of the dramatic play. With the creation of the heteronyms, semi-heteronyms, sub-heteronyms, and the establishment of relations among all those literary characters, Pessoa changes the form of the dramatic play. The interaction among the heteronyms is no longer gathered in a unique texts, that is in a unified organic all. The several literary characters, that is, the various heteronyms, the interaction among those characters, and the action through which the interaction occurs are not confined to the borders of a unified dramatic play. Pessoa not only develops a multiplicity of styles but attributes to each style a certain personality, with a different name, a different biography, as well as different works, expressing different ideas, different literary and philosophical points

[3] *Idem, Ibidem*

[4] Fernando Pessoa, *Poetical and Prose Works, Vol. III*, Porto: Lello & Irmãos—Editores [In Portuguese] p.106 (We are responsible for all the translations.)

of view. The construction of the literary characters and the attribution of a certain style or, at least, of a certain work to each literary character produces a fracture in the dramatic form, that is, a fragmentation of the drama. In that way, what Pessoa creates with his heteronymic work is not a drama in acts, but what he calls "drama in people."

III—The Sensationist Movement and the plural literary space

Sensationism is a literary and philosophical movement conceived by Pessoa, on the one hand, to give a certain unity to the multiplicity of literary movements that were emerging in Portugal at his time and, on the other hand, to justify the development of a plurality of styles in his own work. Built on a distinctive philosophical position devised by Pessoa that takes sensation as the essential reality for us and the point of departure for the artistic creation, the sensationist movement was to establish the principles for the constitution of a dramatic literary space, that is, for the constitution of a literary space with a plural structure. That is why Pessoa gave so much relevance to the movement and to the establishment of the principles of sensationism in the context of the development of his writing. According to Pessoa, the sensationist movement is conceived as a cosmopolitan movement. Sensationism admits all styles. Actually in a text concerning the sensationist writing, one reads:

> Sensationism rejects from classicism the notion — actually more characteristic of the modern disciples of pagan writers than of themselves properly — that every issue must be treated in the same style, in the same tone, with the same exterior line outlining their form.[5]

In another text about sensationism, one also reads that "all the styles are permissible,"[6] that "there's neither simple nor complex style, neither strange nor ordinary style."[7] Thus the relation between sensationism and the literary tradition is not a relation of exclusivity. Sensationism includes features of all the preceding literary movements. Pessoa discusses the literary tradition and enumerates the several origins of sensationism. But the relation between sensationism and the literary tradition is not one of pure and simple acceptance and inclusion of the all the aspects of the preceding literary movements. Sensationism only accepts the affirmative aspects of the preceding literary movements, that is, all the aspects that don't limit the

[5] Pessoa's texts concerning sensationism (translation Nuno Ribeiro), [20—105,106]

[6] Pessoa, F., *Sensationism and Other Isms*, Lisboa, INCM, 2009 [In Portuguese], p.184

[7] *Idem, Ibidem*

artistic creation, excluding their negative side. Actually, in a text concerning the relation between sensationism and the artistic tradition, one reads:

> Spinoza said that philosophical systems are right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny. This, the greatest of all pantheistic affirmations, is what sensationism can repeat in relation to aesthetic things. Though supreme perfection (which is unattainable) is only one, yet relative perfection is several. Homer is as perfect in this way as Herrick in his, though the Homeric way is a far superior one. The sensationist admits joyfully both Homer and Herrick to the great brotherhood of art.[8]

[8] Pessoa's texts concerning sensationism (translation Nuno Ribeiro), [20—114, 115]

Thus, the cosmopolitan aspect of sensationism, the fact that it accepts the affirmative side of all the preceding literary movements and doesn't claim for itself neither the monopoly of a right way of feeling nor of a right way of writing are the principles for the constitution of Pessoa's plural literary space.

Selections and Translations from Pessoa's Sensationist Writings[9]

[9] For the transcription of the original texts, we've consulted the following work edited by Jeronimo Pizarro: Fernando Pessoa, (2009) *Sensationism and other -isms*, INCM: Lisbon [edited in Portuguese: *Sensacionismo e outros -ismos*]. Nevertheless the decisions in the transcription of the texts, as well as the translations, are entirely our responsibility.

Provenance of the texts:

The texts selected and translated here were published by Jeronimo Pizarro in: Fernando Pessoa, (2009) *Sensationism and other -isms*, INCM: Lisbon [edited in Portuguese: *Sensacionismo e outros -ismos*]. Some were originally in English and others were written in Portuguese. The ones in Portuguese are indicated as such in footnotes and were translated by Nuno Ribeiro. The English ones follow the example of Jeronimo Pizarro in his edition of *Sensationism and other -isms*. The facsimiles of the texts were taken from Pessoa's Archive, which is deposited in the National Library of Lisbon (Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa), under the designation of E3. The citations presented in brackets correspond to the numbering of the papers as presented in E3.

Editorial Principles:

For the transcription of these texts, we've followed the criteria employed by the Pessoa's Critical Edition, that is, the final intention of the author. We've ordered the texts according to thematic affinities. The titles employed for each group of texts are entirely our responsibility. We've tried to present the text as cleanly as possible. So we've decided to exclude the critical apparatus.

The signs used are:

[…]—deliberate empty space, left by the author

1—Letter to an English Publisher

[20—86, 87]

Sir,

The purpose of this letter is to inquire whether you would be disposed to publish an anthology of Portuguese "sensationist" poetry. I am aware of how enterprising you are in the case of new "movements" and this emboldens me to make this inquiry.

It is possibly not very easy to explain in such a number of words as may

legitimately be contained in a letter precisely what the movement called sensationism is. I will try, however, to give you some idea of its nature; the extracts which I am enclosing, and which are translations of sensationist poems and parts of poems, will probably fill in the inevitable blanks of this cursory explanation.

First as to derivation. It would be idle to pretend of sensationism that it comes direct from the Gods or dates only from the human souls of its creators, without the human concourse of forerunners or influences. But we do claim for it that it is as original as any human movement—intellectual or other—can be. That it does represent, both fundamentally (in its metaphysical substance) and superficially (in its innovations as to expression) a new species of *weltanschauung*, we have no hesitation in claiming. As, I will not say founder, (for these things must never be said), but at least he who is chiefly responsible for it, I owe it both to myself and to my fellow-sinners to be no more modest over the matter than social usages absolutely require.

As to derivation, then, the enumeration of our origins will be the first element towards anything like an integral explanation of the movement. We descend from three older movements—French "symbolism," Portuguese transcendentalist pantheism, and the jumble of senseless and contradictory things of which Futurism, Cubism, and the like occasionally expresses, though, to be exact, we descend more from the spirit than from the letter of these. You know that French symbolism is, and are of course aware that it is, at bottom a carrying to extremes of romantic subjectivism, and it is besides a carrying to extremes of romantic liberty of versification. It was further an extremely minute and morbid analysis (resynthetized for the purposes of poetical expression) of sensations. It was a "sensationism" already, though a rudimentary one in relation to ours. It threw the world out of focus in obedience to those mental states the expression of which would have been incompatible with the normal equilibrium (balance) of sensations.

From French symbolism we derive our fundamental attitude of exclusive attention to our sensations, our consequent frequent dealing in ennui, in apathy, in renouncement of the simplest and sanest things of life. This does not characterize all of us, though the morbid and probing analysis of sensations runs through the whole movement.

Now as to the differences. We reject entirely, except occasionally for purely aesthetical purposes, the religious attitude of the symbolists. God has become for us a word that can conveniently be used for the suggestion of mystery but which serves no other purpose moral or otherwise—an aesthetic value and no more. Besides this, we reject and abominate the symbolist incapacity for prolonged effort, their inability to write long poems and their vitiated "construction."

[10] The ode that Pessoa refers to is "Intimations of Immortality."

[11] Gap in the original.

Portuguese "transcendentalist pantheism" you do not know. It is a pity, because, though not a long-standing movement, it is an original one. Suppose English Romanticism had, instead of retrograding to the Tennysonian-Rossetti-Browning level, progressed right onward from Shelley, spiritualizing his already spiritualistic pantheism. You would arrive at a conception of Nature (our transcendentalist pantheists are essentially poets of Nature) whose flesh and spirit are entirely mingled in something which transcends both. If you can conceive a William Blake put into the soul of Shelley and writing through that, you will perhaps have a nearer idea of what I mean. This movement has produced two poems that I am bound to hold among the greatest of all time. Neither is a long one. One is the "Ode to Light" of Guerra Junqueiro, the greatest of all Portuguese poets (he drove Camoens from the first place when he published "Patria" in 1896)—but "Patria," which is a lyrical and satirical drama, is not of this transcendental-pantheist phase. The "Prayer to Light" is probably the greatest metaphysico-poetical achievement since Wordsworth's great "Ode."[10] The other poem, which certainly transcends Browning's "Last Ride Together" as a love-poem and which belongs to the same metaphysical level of love-emotion, though more religiously pantheistic, is the "Elegy" of Teixeira de Pascoaes, who wrote it in 1905. —To this school of poets we, the "sensationists," owe the fact that in our poetry spirit and matter are interpenetrated and inter-transcended. And we have carried the process further than the originators, though I regret to say that we cannot as yet claim to have produced anything on the level of the two poems I have referred to.

As to our influences from the modern movement that embraces cubism and Futurism, it is rather owing to the suggestions we received from them than to the substance of their works properly speaking. We have intellectualized their processes. The decomposition of the model they realize (because we have been influenced not by their literature, if they have anything resembling literature, but by their pictures), we have carried into what we believe to be the proper sphere of that decomposition—not things but our sensation of things.

Having shown you our origins, and curiously, our use of and differences from those origins, I will now more expressly state, as far as that is possible, in a few words, what is the central attitude of Sensationism.

1. The only reality in life is sensation. The only reality in art is consciousness of the sensation.

2. There is no philosophy, no ethics, and no aesthetics even in art, whatever there may be in life. In art there are only sensations and our consciousness of them. Whatever love, joy, pain may be in life, in art they are only sensations; in themselves, they are worthless to art. God is a sensation of ours (because an idea is a sensation) and in art it is used where the expression of certain sensations—such as reverence, mystery, etc.—[…].[11] No artist can believe

or disbelieve in God, just as no artist can fall or not fall in love with joy or pain. At the moment he writes, he either believes or disbelieves, according to the thought that best enables him to obtain the consciousness and give expression to this sensation at that moment. Once that sensation goes, these things become to him, as artist, no more than bodies which the souls of sensations assume to become visible to that inner eye from those whose sight he writes down his sensations.

3. Art, fully defined, is the harmonic expression of our consciousness of sensations; that is to say, our sensations must be so expressed that they create an object that will be a sensation to others. Art is not, as Bacon said, "man added to nature"; it is sensation multiplied by consciousness—multiplied, be it well noted.

4. The three principles of art are (1) every sensation should be expressed to the full, that is, the consciousness of every sensation should be sifted to the bottom; (2) the sensation should be so expressed that it has the possibility of evoking—as a halo round a definite central presentation—the greatest possible number of other sensations; (3) the whole thus produced should have the greatest resemblance possible to an organized being, because that is the condition of the vitality. I call these three principles (1) that of sensation, (2) that of suggestion, (3) that of Construction. This last, the great principle of the Greeks—whose great philosopher did indeed hold a poem to be "an animal"—has had very careless handling at modern hands. Romanticism has undisciplined the capacity of constructing that, at least, low classicism had. Shakespeare, with his fatal incapacity to visualize organized wholes, has been a fatal influence in this respect (you will remember that Matthew Arnold's classical instinct guided him to an intuition of this). Milton is still the great Master of Building in poetry. Personally, I confess that I tend ever more and more to put Milton above Shakespeare as a poet. But I must confess—in so far as I am anything (and I try hard not to be the same thing three minutes running, because that is bad aesthetic hygiene) I am a pagan, and I am therefore rather with the pagan artist Milton than with the Christian artist Shakespeare. All this, however, is passim, and I hope you will excuse its insertion into this place.

I sometimes hold that a poem—I would also say a painting or a statue, but I do not consider sculpture and painting arts, but only perfected artisans' work—is a person, a living human being, belonging in bodily presence and real fleshly existence to another world, into which our imagination throws him, his aspect to us, as we read him in this world being no more than the imperfect shadow of that reality of beauty that is divine elsewhere. I hope some day, after death, I shall meet, in their real presences, the few children of these I have as yet created and I hope I shall find them beautiful in their dewy immortality. You may perhaps wonder that one who declares himself pagan should subscribe to

these imaginations. I was a pagan, however, two paragraphs above. I am one who no longer is as I write this. At the end of this letter I hope to be already something else. I carry into practice as far as I can that spiritual disintegration I preach. If I am ever coherent, it is only as an incoherence from incoherence.

2—Sensationism in comparison to other literary movements

[20-114, 115]

Sensationism:

Sensationism differs from common literary currents in that it is not exclusive, that is to say, it does not claim for itself the monopoly of right aesthetic feeling. Properly speaking, it does not claim for itself that it is, except in a certain restricted sense, a current or a movement, but only partly an attitude, and partly an addition to all preceding currents.

The position of sensationism is not, like that of common literary movements like Romanticism, symbolism, Futurism, and all such, a position analogous to that of a religion, which implicitly excludes other religions. It is precisely analogous to that which Theosophy takes up in respect to all religious systems. It is a well-known fact that Theosophy claims to be, not a religion, but the fundamental truth that underlies all religious systems alike. As such, theosophy is in opposition of course to those parts of religious systems that exclude other systems and also to those parts of religious systems that seem to vitiate the fundamental attitude called religious. That is why Theosophy, while it does not oppose Protestantism as such, opposes it insofar as it is opposed to Catholicism, and why it cannot accept such theories as that of eternal penalties, which vitiate, in its opinion, all that is fundamental and true in the sense of the worship of God's creation.

Even so, the opposition of the sensationists is relative to all artistic movements. It holds, of them all, or of almost all (for we must not allow this term "artistic movements" to be applicable with a universal generosity to every snake that raises its head above that of the other in the literary pitcher of modern confusion), that, in their essence, they are right. Spinoza said that philosophical systems are right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny. This, the greatest of all pantheistic affirmations, is what sensationism can repeat in relation to aesthetic things. Though supreme perfection (which is unattainable) is only one, yet relative perfection is several. Homer is as perfect in this way as Herrick in his, though the Homeric way is a far superior one. The sensationist admits joyfully both Homer and Herrick to the great brotherhood of art.

There are three central tenets of sensationism. The first is that art is supremely constructed and that the greatest art is that which is able to visualize and create organized wholes of which the component parts fit vitally into their places, the great principle that Aristotle annunciated when he said that a poem was an "animal." The second is that, all art being composed of parts, each of those parts must be perfect in itself; as the former was the classic principle of unity and structural perfection, this is the romantic principle of "fine passages" in what it contains of truth, and excluding the error that makes this all, without attending to the higher classical principle, that the whole is greater than the part. The third tenet of sensationism, qua aesthetics, is that every little fragment that builds up the part of the whole should be perfect in itself; this is the principle which is insisted on through exaggeration by all those artists, of which the symbolists are part, who, being temperamentally incapable of creating neither great organized wholes nor even (as the romantics) large eloquent stretches, put their activity into the eggshell (nutshell) of producing beautiful individual lines or very short perfect lyrics. That is beautiful indeed, when it is beautiful, but it is dangerous to fall into the impression that is anything but the lowest part of art.

These are the tenets of sensationism, qua artistic philosophy. That is to say, these are the tenets it upholds in so far as it accepts all systems and schools of art, extracting from each that beauty and that originality that is peculiar to it.

But sensationism is not only a philosophy of art; besides its attitude of universal acceptance of what is beautiful, it presents an originality of its own. If it were only an aesthetic attitude it would have no right to call itself anything—sensationism for instance—anything save a bald, though lucid, artistic philosophy.

Qua novelty, sensationism has three other tenets, and it is here that it begins to be sensationism proper.

It holds, first of all, that society is spiritually divided into three classes, which sometimes coincide, and more often do not coincide with the "classes" commonly so called. It divides those classes into aristocracy, middle class, and the people, but the division, as will be seen, has no (necessary) relation with the common division of society into these elements. For the sensationist, the aristocrat is the person who lives for art, and for whom all things, material or spiritual, have value only in so far as they have beauty. Religion, morality, spirituality—all these things are worth the beauty they have or that can be extracted from them. They are neither true nor false; they have no interest, for the aristocrat, apart from their aesthetic interest.

For the middle class person, in this classification, the basis of interest for anything is political. The value of everything, for him, is in the relation of the political values he sees in it. It does not matter what his idea of politics is; it

may be high or low, just as the aristocrat's idea of art and beauty may be high or low, the essential thing being that art is the important thing for him. So for the middle-class man: politics is the one important thing for him, whether he may be a Herbert Spencer or John Jones, a common voter.

The plebian attitude involves no direct interest except a material one. All socialists and most anarchists are structurally plebeians, because they are preeminently occupied with economic considerations. The age of economists is the evil age of art, because the age of plebian feeling must perforce be the evil age for aristocratic sentiment.

Sensationism stands for the aesthetic attitude in all its pagan splendor. It does not stand for any of those foolish things—the aestheticism of Oscar Wilde, or the art for art's sake of other misguided people with a plebeian outlook on life. It can see the loveliness of morals just as it can understand the beauty of the lack of them. No religion is right for it, or any religion wrong.

A man may traverse all the religious systems of the world in one day, with perfect sincerity and tragic soul experiences. He must be an aristocrat—in the sense in which we use the word—to be able to do it. I once stated that a cultured and intelligent man has the duty to be an atheist at noon, when the clearness and materiality of the sun eats into all things, and an ultramontane catholic at the precise hour after the sunset when the shadows have not yet completed their slow coil round the clear presence of things. Some people thought that this was a joke. But I was only translating into rapid prose (this was written in a newspaper) a common personal experience. Having accustomed myself to have no beliefs and no opinions, lest my aesthetic feeling should be weakened, I grew soon to have no personality at all except an expressive one, I grew to be a mere apt machine for the expression of moods which became so intense that they grew into personalities and made my very soul the mere shell of their casual appearance, even as theosophists say that the malice of nature-spirits sometimes makes them occupy the discarded astral corpses of men and frolic under cover of their shadowy semblances (substances).

This does not mean that every sensationist should have no poetical opinion; it means that, as an artist, he is bound to have none and all. That excuse of Martial's, which has roused the ire of many people alien to the […][12] of art, "… vita proba est," that though his art was impure, his life was not, reproduced after by Herrick, who wrote of himself "his muse was jocund, but his life was chaste," is the exact duty of the artist towards himself.

Sincerity is the one great artistic crime. Insincerity is the second greatest. The greatest artist should never have a really fundamental and sincere opinion about life. But that should give him the capacity to feel sincere, nay, to be absurdly sincere about anything for a certain length of time—that length of

[12] Gap in the original typewriting. Deliberate empty space in the original.

time, say, which is necessary for a poem to be conceived and written. It is perhaps necessary to state that it is necessary to be an artist before this can be attempted. It is of no use to try to be an aristocrat when you are a born middle-class man or plebeian.

[20—105, 106]

The Sensationism

Sensationism rejects from Classicism the notion—actually more characteristic of the modern disciples of pagan writers than of themselves properly—that every issue must be treated in the same style, in the same tone, with the same exterior line outlining their form. Sensationism doesn't agree that a work of art should always be simple, because there are feelings and concepts that, by virtue of their complex nature, are not susceptible to a simplified expression without betraying themselves with such expression. There are certain profound concepts, certain vague feelings that are, for sure, susceptible to such literary treatment, but this is the case neither with all feelings nor with all concepts. Consequently, the sensationist disagrees with the classical attitude of the limitation of his vision of things. The concern with a clear vision of things, as the concern with simplified expression, is sometimes an aesthetical mistake. Not everything is clear in the exterior world. Finally sensationism doesn't accept the fundamental theory of Classicism—that the intervention of the temperament of the artist must be reduced to the minimum. It interprets the aesthetical principle that is the basis of such affirmation but which is disparaged in that affirmation in another way, in the way it should be interpreted. The artist interprets through his temperament, not by what is particular in that temperament but by what is universal or universalizable in that temperament. This is different from eliminating as much as possible the temperamental factor, as the tenacious classic people desire or aspire; the artist, on the contrary, must put much emphasis on the temperamental factor (though more in certain subjects than in others), as long as he doesn't use the ununiversalizable[13] sides of that factor.

Sensationism rejects from Romanticism the basic theory of the "moment of inspiration." It doesn't believe that a work of art should be rapidly produced, at a stretch, unless the artist has accomplished (like some in fact accomplish) to have a spirit disciplined in such a way that the work of art is born in its construction.

From symbolism it rejects the exclusive concern with the vague, the exclusive lyrical attitude and mostly the subordination of the intelligence to the emotion, which actually characterizes that aesthetical system.

From Classicism it accepts the construction, the intellectual concern.

[13] By this word we translate the Portuguese word "inuniversalizável" which corresponds to a negation of the word "universalizable." Thus we've tried to reproduce the meaning of that Portuguese word by using the prefix "un" before "universalizable."

From Romanticism it accepts the pictorial concern, the sympathetic, synthetic sensibility before things.

From symbolism it accepts the musical concern, the analytical sensibility, it accepts the profound analysis of the states of the soul, but tries to intellectualize it.

Sensationism affirms, primarily, the principle of the primacy of sensation—that the sensation is the only reality for us.

Therefrom departing, sensationism notices the two kinds of sensations that one may have—the sensations that apparently emerge from the exterior and the sensations that apparently emerge from the interior. It realizes that there's a third order of sensations, which result from mental work—the sensations of the abstract.

By asking what the aim of art is, sensationism realizes that its work can be neither the organization of the exterior sensations, because that's the aim of science, nor the organization of the sensations that come from the interior, because that's the aim of philosophy, but consequently the organization of the sensations of the abstract. Art is the attempt to create a reality completely different from that which the apparently exterior sensations and the apparently interior sensations suggest to us.

But art must obey the conditions of reality (that is, it must produce things that have, as much as possible, a concrete look, for, considering that art is creation, it must try to produce, as much as possible, an impression analogous to that which the exterior things produce). Art must also obey the conditions of emotion, because it must produce the impression that the strictly interior sentiments produce, which is to thrill, without leading to action, the feelings of dreams, let us be clear on this point, which are the interior feelings in their purest state.

Art, since it must gather the three qualities of Abstraction, Reality, and Emotion, cannot leave the consciousness of itself as being the abstract concretization of emotion (the emotive concretization of abstraction).

Thus the subject of art is neither reality (actually there is no reality but only artificially coordinated sensations) nor emotion (actually there is no actual emotion but only sensations of emotions) but abstraction. Not the pure abstraction, which generates metaphysics, but the creative abstraction, the abstraction in movement. While philosophy is static, art is dynamic; that is actually the only difference between art and philosophy.

By abstract concretization of emotion, I mean the emotion that has to look like reality to have some relevance, though not the concrete reality, but the abstract reality. Therefore I do not consider painting, sculpture, and

architecture, which intend to accomplish the emotion in the concrete, to be art. There are only three arts: metaphysics (which is an art), literature, and music. And maybe even music…

3—Metaphysical Principles of Sensationism

[20-103, 104]

Sensationism:

1

There is nothing, no reality, but sensation. Ideas are sensations, but of things not placed in space and sometimes not even in time. Logic, the place of ideas, is another kind of space.

Dreams are sensations with only two dimensions. Ideas are sensations with only one dimension. A line is an idea.

Every sensation (of a solid thing) is a solid body bounded by planes, which are inner images (of the nature of dreams—two-dimensioned), bounded themselves by lines (which are ideas, of one dimension only). Sensationism pretends, taking stock of this real reality, to realize in art a decomposition of reality into its physical geometrical elements.

The end of art is simply to increase human self-consciousness. Its criterion is general (or semi-general) acceptance, sooner or later, for that is the proof that it does tend to increase self-consciousness in men.

The more we decompose and analyze into their psychic elements our sensations, the more we increase our self-consciousness. Art has, then, the duty of becoming increasingly conscious. In the classical age, art developed consciousness on the level of the three-dimension sensation—that is, art applied itself to a perfect and clear visioning of reality considered as solid. Hence the Greek mental attitude, which seems so strange to us, of introducing concepts such as that of the sphere into the most abstract abstractions, as in the case of Parmenides, whose idealistic conception of a highly abstract universe yet admits a description of it as spherical.

Post-Christian art has worked constantly towards the creation of a two-dimensional art.

We must create a one-dimension art.

This seems a narrowing of art, and to a certain extent it is.

[14] Gap in the original typewriting

[15] Gap in the original typewriting

Cubism, Futurism and kindred schools are wrong applications of intuitions which are fundamentally right. The wrong lies in the fact that they attempt to solve the problem they suspect on the lines of three-dimension art; their fundamental error lies in that they attribute to sensation an exterior reality, which indeed it has, but not in the sense the Futurists and others believe. The Futurists are something absurd, like Greeks trying to be modern and analytic.

2

What is the process to be adopted to realize sensationism?

There are several—at least three defined ones:

(1) intersectionism: the sensationism that takes stock of the fact that every sensation is really several sensations mixed together;

(2) […][14]

(3) [...][15]

How do these three processes realize sensationism? Intersectionism realized it by attempting to realize the deformation that every cubic sensation suffers by the deformation of its planes. Now every cube has six sides: these sides, looked from the sensationist standpoint, are the sensation of the exterior object as object, qua object; the sensation of the exterior object qua sensation; the objective ideas associated to this sensation of an object; the subjective ideas associated to this sensation—i.e., the “state of mind” through which the object is seen at the time; the temperament and fundamentally individual mental attitude of the observer; the abstract consciousness behind that individual temperament.

4—The Contents of Sensation

[20—102]

Sensationism:

Contents of each sensation:

a) Sensation of the exterior universe.

b) Sensation of the object sensed at the time.

c) Objective ideas associated therewith.

d) Subjective ideas associated therewith (state of mind at the time)

e) The temperament and mental basis of the senser.

f) The abstract phenomenon of consciousness.

Thus each sensation is a cube, which may be considered as set down upon the side representing F, having the side representing A upwards. The other sides are of course B, C, D, and E.

Now this cube may be looked at in three manners:

one side only, so that none of the others is seen;

with one side of the square held parallel to the eyes, so that two sides of the cube are seen;

with one apex held in front of the eyes, so that three sides are seen.

From an objective standpoint, the cube of sensation is composed of:

Ideas = lines

Images = planes

Images (internal) = planes

Images of objects = solids

Looked at in the first way, the cube of sensation resolves itself to a square, so that the basis of art will be ideas, and images of objects qua mental images. This is classic art, which contrary to what is thought, does not go directly to nature, but to the mental image thereof.

[…][16]

5—Sensationism as an artistic movement

[88-11][17]

To feel is to create. To act is just to destroy. To understand is only to deceive oneself.

To feel, resembling a passive fact, is to be active, because it is to have the

[16] Because of its incompleteness, we omit in the corpus of the page the last sentence, which is: "Looked at in way 2, the cube of sensations resolves itself."

[17] Originally in Portuguese

consciousness of feeling. To have consciousness of feeling is to be a way of feeling.

The objective universe is a simultaneous hallucination of the sensoria, an abstract average of the illusions.

The unique reality that is is that the word reality has no meaning (at all).

To act is to interfere with the general illusion, to disturb the order of the universe.

The dynamic is the stoppage of the static. The movable is what doesn't move. The subject is the object of itself and this is not true.

To see one thing and to imagine one visible thing are identical phenomena. The only difference between both is the spatial placing of the visualized image. The exterior world is a hallucination in common, an average-creation of the summed up imaginations.

The unique true reality is sensation. The unique absolute reality is the difference between sensation and feeling.

[88-12][18]

1. Sensation as the essential reality.

2. Art is the personalization of sensation, that is, the substraction[19] of sensation is to be among the others.

3. 1st rule: to fell everything in every way. To abolish the dogma of personality: each one of us must be many. Art is the individual aspiring to be the universe. The Universe is an imagined thing; the work of art is the product of imagination. The work of art adds the fourth dimension of the superfluous to the universe. (?????)

4. 2nd rule: to abolish the dogma of objectivity. The work of art is an attempt to prove that the universe is not real.

5. 3rd rule: to abolish the dogma of dynamicity. The work of art aims to settle what is transitory just in appearance.

6. These are the three principles of Sensationism only considered as art.

7. Considered as metaphysics, Sensationism aims at not understanding the universe. The reality is the fact that things can't be understood. To understand them is to misunderstand them.

[18] Originally in Portuguese

[19] "Substraction" («substracção», in Portuguese) is a neologism created by Fernando Pessoa from the word "substratum." By employing this expression Pessoa means "the constitution of the foundation of a sensation." Thus, according to the text, to be a sensation is to exist among other sensations.

[20-107][20]

1. The basis of all art is sensation.

2. In order to pass from the mere meaningless emotion to the artistic emotion, or one susceptible of becoming artistic, that sensation must be intellectualized. An intellectualized sensation follows two successive processes: the first is the consciousness of that sensation, and that fact of existing the consciousness of a sensation transforms that in a sensation of yet a different order; it is afterwards consciousness of that sensation, that is: after being conceived as such—which results in the artistic emotion—the sensation turns out to be conceived as intellectualized, which gives her the power to be expressed.

Thus, we have:

The pure sensation, as such;

The consciousness of the sensation, which gives that sensation a value and, therefore, an artistic stamp;

The consciousness of that consciousness of the sensation, whereof results an intellectualization of an intellectualization, that is, the power of expression.

3. Now every sensation is complex, that is, every sensation is composed of more than one simple element of which it seems to consist. It is composed of the following elements: (a) the sensation of the felt object; (b) the recollection of analogous objects or others which inevitably or spontaneously attach to that sensation; (c) the vague sensation of the state of soul in which that sensation is felt; (d) the primitive sensation of the personality of the person who feels. The simplest of the sensations includes, in an insensible way, all these elements.

4. Consequently, when the sensation becomes intellectualized, it becomes decomposed. Because what is an intellectualized sensation? One of three things: (a) a sensation decomposed by instinctive or directed analysis in their component elements; (b) a sensation to which one consciously adds any other element that doesn't exist in her, not even indistinctly; (3) a sensation that one distorts on purpose so that one may take a defined effect from her, which didn't exist primarily. These are the three possibilities of the intellectualization of sensation.

[88-14][21]

All sensations are good, as long as one doesn't try to reduce them to action. An act is a sensation that one throws away.

Act inwards, picking with the hands of spirit the flowers just at the margin of

[20] Originally in Portuguese

[21] Originally in Portuguese

life.

To fight the mental slavery represented by the association of ideas. To learn how not to associate ideas, how to break the soul in pieces. To know how to simultanize the sensations, how to spread the spirit throughout itself, diffused and spread.

We have a big dynamic indifference for the social and political life. As much as we become interested in those things, they only interest us so that we construe transitory theories, unexpressed hypothesis over them.

IZHAR PATKIN

Judenporzellan

Izhar Patkin:
Judenporzellan

text by
Mark Daniel Cohen

published by
The Tefen Open Museum
in Tefen, Israel

The Judenporzellan are a series of artworks, created by Izhar Patkin, which reflect on the life of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. In his essay, "The Artist and the Philosopher," Mark Daniel Cohen examines how personal tragedies are inevitably embedded in the abstractions of pure philosophical speculation. The volume presents the essay in English, German, Hebrew, and Arabic.

"There are tragedies that linger in the dim, dusky abyss between our thoughts and our lives. They are quiet tragedies, subtle and intimately nuanced sadnesses, silent desolations, and they reside in the gap between what we can imagine and what we must experience, between what we wish in the soft and voiceless darkness of our secret hopes and what we are forced to accept in the harsh daylight of the circumstances we can never completely control."

— from the essay "The Artist and the Philosopher," by Mark Daniel Cohen

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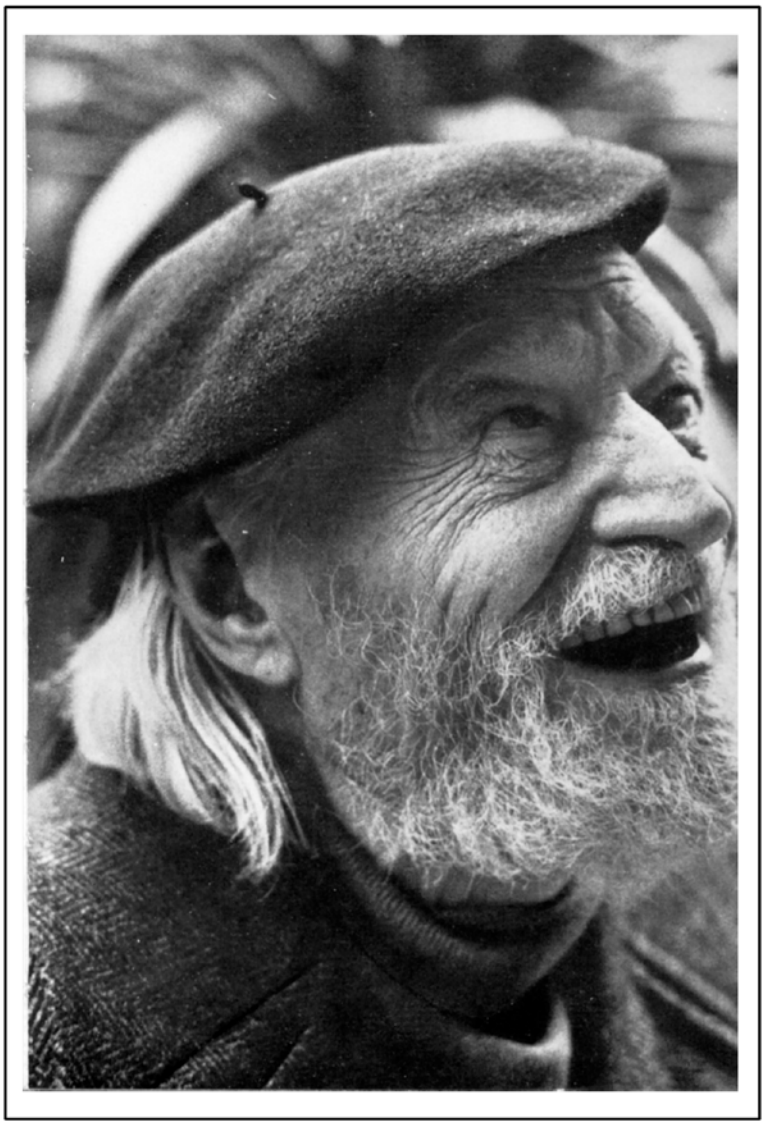
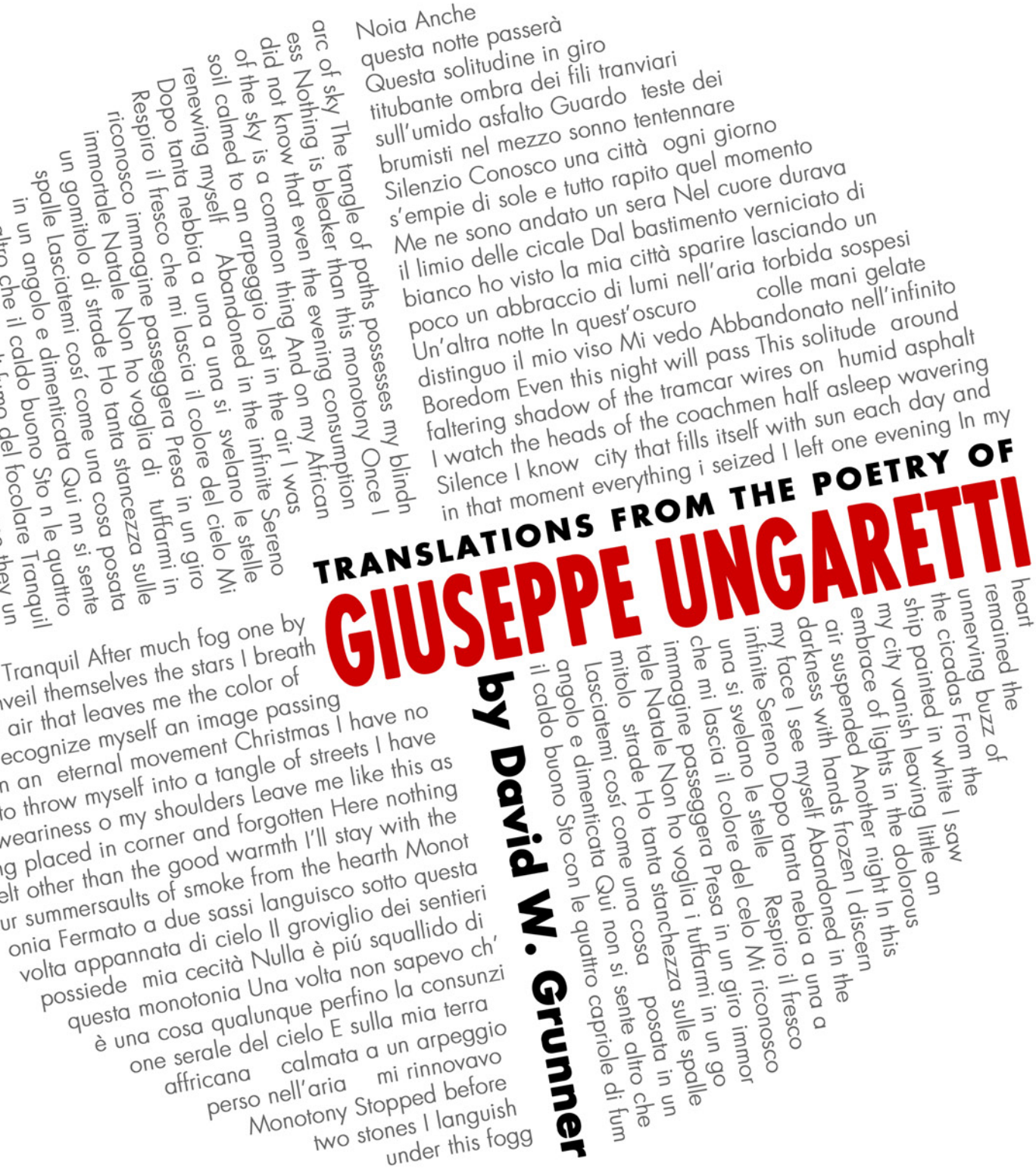


HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics



Noia

Anche questa notte passerà

Questa solitudine in giro
titubante ombra dei fili tranviari
sull'umido asfalto

Guardo le teste dei brumisti
nel mezzo sonno
tentennare

Boredom

Even this night will pass

This solitude all around
faltering shadow of the tramcar wires
on the humid asphalt

I watch the heads of the coachmen
half asleep
wavering

Silenzio

Conosco una città
che ogni giorno s'empie di sole
e tutto è rapito in quel momento

Me ne sono andato una sera

Nel cuore durava il limio
delle cicale

Dal bastimento
verniciato di bianco
ho visto
la mia città sparire
lasciando
un poco
un abbraccio di lumi nell'aria torbida
sospesi

Silence

I know a city
that fills itself with sun each day
and in that moment everything is seized

I left one evening

In my heart remained the unnerving buzz
of the cicadas

From the ship
painted in white
I saw
my city vanish
leaving
little
an embrace of lights in the dolorous air
suspended

Un’altra notte

In quest’oscuro
colle mani
gelate
distinguo
il mio viso

Mi vedo
abbandonato nell’infinito

Another night

In this darkness
with hands
frozen
I discern
my face

I see myself
abandoned in the infinite

Sereno

Dopo tanta
nebbia
a una
a una
si svelano
le stelle

Respiro
il fresco
che mi lascia
il colore del cielo

Mi riconosco
immagine
passeggera

Presa in un giro
immortale

Tranquil

After much
fog
one
by one
they unveil themselves
the stars

I breathe
the cool air
that leaves me
the color of the sky

I recognize myself
an image
passing

caught in an
eternal movement

Natale

Non ho voglia
di tuffarmi
in un gomitolo
di strade

Ho tanta
stanchezza
sulle spalle

Lasciatemi cosí
come una
cosa
posata
in un
angolo
e dimenticata

Qui
non si sente
altro
che il caldo buono

Sto
con le quattro
capriole
di fumo
del focolare

Christmas

I have no desire
to throw myself
into a tangle
of streets

I have much
weariness
on my shoulders

Leave me like this
as a
thing
placed
in a
corner
and forgotten

Here
nothing is felt
other than
the good warmth

I'll stay
with the four
summersaults
of smoke
from the hearth

Monotonia

Fermato a due sassi
languisco
sotto questa
volta appannata
di cielo

Il groviglio dei sentieri
possiede la mia cecità

Nulla è piú squallido
di questa monotonia

Una volta
non sapevo
ch' è una cosa
qualunque
perfino
la consunzione serale
del cielo

E sulla mia terra affricana
calmata
a un arpeggio
perso nell'aria
mi rinnovavo

Monotony

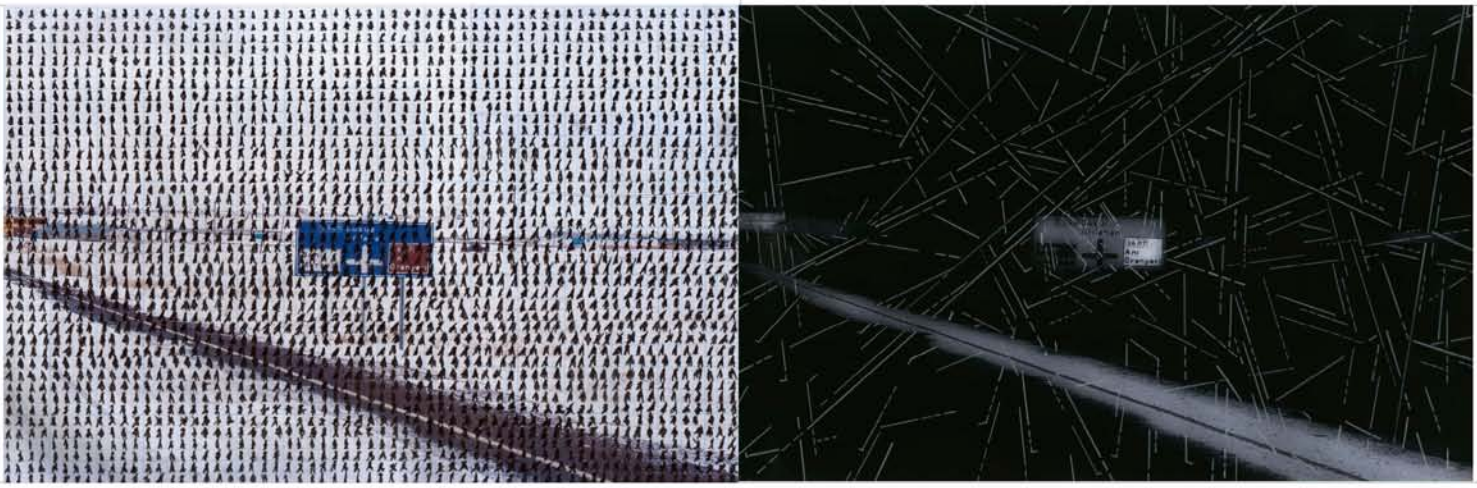
Stopped before two stones
I languish
under this
fogged arc
of sky

The tangle of paths
possesses my blindness

Nothing is bleaker
than this monotony

Once
I did not know
that even
the evening consumption
of the sky
is a common
thing

And on my African soil
calmed
to an arpeggio
lost in the air
I was renewing myself



Population 2646 - Snow Irritating by Silva Ajemian and Aslihan Demirtas; digital drawing from Remains Connected:The Bridge at Ani series

Blind Dates Project

As a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary exhibition the Blind Dates Project explores the traces of the peoples, places and cultures that once constituted the diverse geography of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922). Curated by Defne Ayas and Neery Melkonian, the exhibition is comprised of fourteen research-based new artistic collaborations that mediate experiences across time, space and contested (art) histories.

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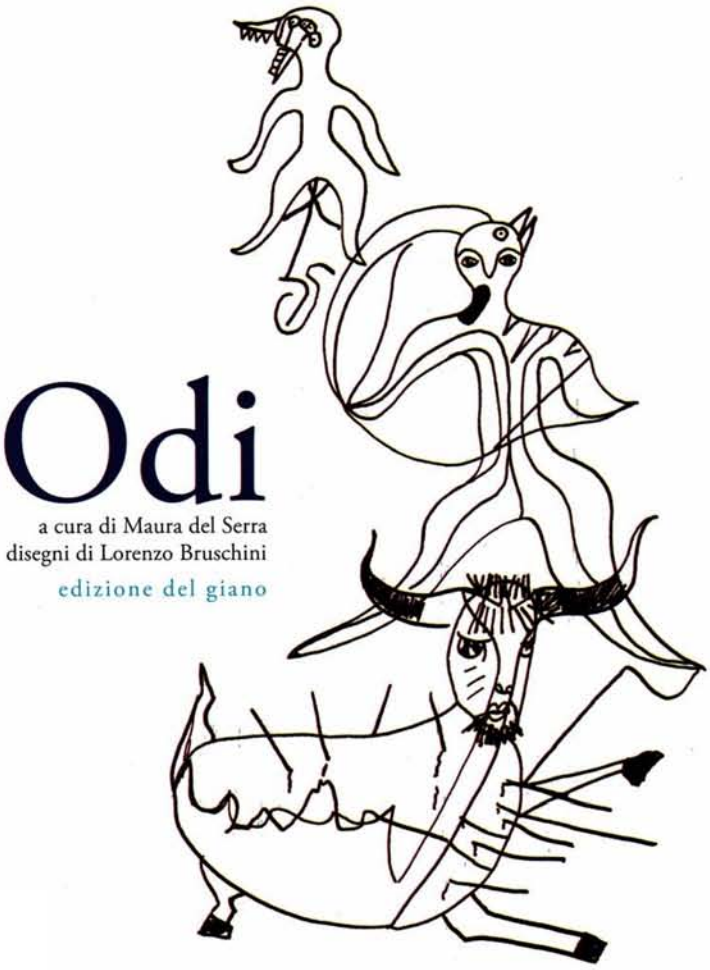
Pratt Manhattan Gallery November 19th, 2010 through February 11, 2011

Victor Segalen



Odes

by Victor Segalen

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HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

MELANCHOLY IN THE MIRROR: THREE READINGS OF BAUDELAIRE

JEAN STAROBINSKI

TRANSLATED BY CHARLOTTE MANDELL
INTRODUCTION BY RAINER J. HANSHE

Introduction: Transforming Melancholy

by Rainer J. Hanshe

> One finds the cult of evil as a political device, however romantic, to disinfect and isolate against all moralizing dilettantism.
>
> —Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism"

Jean Starobinski should need no introduction but despite the fact that, in Europe, he is regarded as an intellectual peer of Foucault and Derrida, his work is hardly ubiquitous let alone as pervasive an element of theoretical and critical discourse, at least this side of the Atlantic. While perusing the shelves of even the most intrepid bookstores in New York, one will find nearly all the texts of Foucault and Derrida, but Starobinski's will rarely be in evidence, certainly not in abundance. In Starobinski's texts, as opposed to those of Foucault and Derrida, there are few radiant methodological concepts to easily seize upon, thus, paradoxically, in spite of the limpidity of his style, his work is perhaps more intractable than that of his peers and therefore difficult to readily assimilate and adopt and deploy. Even if when appropriated the complexity of Foucault's and Derrida's terminology is not always sustained or reduced to interpretive catchphrases, notions such as *différance*, trace, governmentality, biopower, etc. lend themselves to swift absorption. Even though before the phantasmagoric linguistic display of thinkers like Foucault and Derrida Starobinski is less psychedelic, more sober, and therefore not as attractive to the intellectual counter-culture, he is always compelling and, in both senses of the term, no less brilliant. He has implemented a precise, philologically grounded criticism of texts and fundamental aspects of literary experience.

Aside from his concern with literature, medicine, and the arts, on several broad themes—the use and denunciation of masks, sumptuous gifts, melancholy—he has developed a general form of comparative literature that does not separate evidence from theory. He was the youngest member of the "Geneva School" of "critics of consciousness" and the one most interrelated with, and to some degree challenging of, the discourses of Foucault and Derrida. After studying classical literature and medicine at the University of Geneva,

he worked for a few years as a doctor assisting in internal medicine, then in psychiatry. Following the publication of his book *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle* (1957), the book of his most well known in America, he was appointed professor of the history of ideas and French literature at the University of Geneva. He received the Balzan Prize in 1984 for his outstanding contribution to the knowledge of French and European culture through his research on literature, psychoanalysis, and linguistics, which reveals a subtle intellect and profound knowledge of numerous authors of different historical periods. Other works of his translated into English include *A History of Medicine* (Michigan: Hawthorn Books, 1964), *The Invention of Liberty, 1700-1789* (Cleveland: Skira, 1964), *Words Upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand De Saussure* (New Jersey: Yale University Press, 1990), *1789, the Emblems of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), *The Living Eye* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), *Blessings in Disguise, or, the Morality of Evil* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), *Enchantment: The Seductress in Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), and most recently, though first translated and published in 1985, *Montaigne in Motion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Among his distinctions are the Prix de l'Institut de France (1983), the Premio Tevere (Roma, 1990), the Goethe Prize (Hamburg, 1994), the Nuova Antologia, as well as the Prize Karl Jaspers of the University and the town of Heidelberg.

The brief essay before you now, "Melancholy, at Noon," is the first section of Starobinski's *La mélancolie au miroir. Trois lectures de Baudelaire* (1990). Not previously aware of it ourselves, this book was brought to our attention by Fulya Peker, a frequent contributor to *Hyperion*, who read it in a Turkish translation. Although it has been translated into Italian and German, too, and the former with a preface by no less than Yves Bonnefoy, there is as of yet no translation into English. The following excerpt was translated expressly for *Hyperion* by Charlotte Mandell, known for her translations of Blanchot, Nancy, Genet, Proust, etc.

As a philosopher, but more especially as an historian of medicine and a trained physician, Starobinski's literary perspective on melancholy possesses an unusual combination of methodological rigor and cultural nuance. One of his earliest books is *A History of the Treatment of Melancholy from Earliest Times to 1900* (Thèse, Bâle: Acta Psychosomatica, 1960), and melancholy has continued to remain a primary and essential theme for Starobinski. *La mélancolie au miroir* is thus the continuation of a long-standing and persistent concern with melancholy. The methodology of the book combines philological precision, speculative theory, and history of ideas. This work on Baudelaire has multiple resonances and is an important contribution not only to Baudelaire studies, but to studies of melancholy as well, a work which follows in the line of Burton's classic *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Sontag's *Under the Sign of Saturn*, and Margot and Rudolf Wittkower's *Born Under Saturn:*

The Character and Conduct of Artists. Along with Benjamin's *The Writer of Modern Life*, which, surprisingly, was translated into English only several years ago, Sartre's seminal study *Baudelaire*, and both Eliot's and Adorno's work on the poet, Starobinski's *La mélancolie au miroir* is one of the most significant and formative studies of one of the founding poets of modernity or the modern sensibility as we know it. However, despite its importance and its being listed in the University of California's fifth volume of the history of the human sciences (Routledge, 1992), it is little known in America and other English speaking countries. Even the *Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire* neglects to mention Starobinski's work, a significant oversight. In reaching across various disciplines, Starobinski's text appeals not only to lay readers interested in Baudelaire and in poetics as such but to those in French Studies, Comparative Literature, and English, if not even those in the medical community and those concerned with literature and medicine and narrative medicine. It appeals to the artist as well, to all artists concerned with their role in the world, even to the artist who remains *contra mundum*. To truly assess one's epoch, one must sustain a *Pathos der Distanz*. To stand with one's back to civilization, or with civilization to one's back as a friend once said to me. The modern man as Jung declared is "the man who stands upon a peak, or at the very edge of the world, the abyss of the future before him, above him the heavens, and below him the whole of mankind with a history that disappears in primeval mists. The modern man [...] is rarely met with. There are few who live up to the name, for they must be conscious to a superlative degree. Since to be wholly of the present means to be fully conscious of one's existence as a man, it requires the most intensive and extensive consciousness, with a minimum of unconsciousness." It is for these reasons then that we publish this excerpt, and in the future that, with sufficient funding or donations, we make a translation of the entire work available.

In the following excerpt, Starobinski shows how Baudelaire reinvented melancholy to divest it from its associations with a self-pitying form of romanticism, evident for instance in de Musset and Verlaine. Similar to the way in which Paul de Man regarded Baudelaire, in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," as both foil and inheritor of Romantic discourses, Starobinski shows how Baudelaire's clinical, in a way morbid, but also highly ambitious and speculative concept of melancholy disposed of Romanticism in order to reuse Romanticism in a darker, more urban, and more overtly allegorical milieu. What informs Baudelaire's conception of melancholy in part, and suffuses it with such darkness, his 'satanism' *per se*, is the failure of the 1848 revolution and its humanistic ideals. The hypocrite reader, and twin of the poet—despite his insight, he does not escape—who suffers fierce assault in the poet's 'Au lecteur' with which *Le fleurs du mal* commences, is a "dainty monster" (the dandy is thus not merely effeminate but grotesque, too, and dangerous, as threatening as a monster) surrounded by a bestiary that includes jackals,

hounds, scorpions, vultures, snakes, etc. The human has become monstrous, and later in the century this monstrosity will receive incandescent expression in Rimbaud's *Saison en Enfer* and even more ferocious expression in Lautréamont's *Maldoror*.

Outlining Baudelaire's knowledge of the tradition of melancholy, Starobinski analyzes how Baudelaire transformed the concept, endowing it with new attributes particular to the crises and conditions of his epoch. In turning from the figurations of melancholy as formulated by Dante, Charles of Orleans, and Milton and forging his own unique figurations, such as making misfortune a vital part of beauty and thereby departing from the classical notion, and celebrating *volupté*, Baudelaire gave new vigor to melancholy. Hence the flowers of evil are the flowers of a virile but crepuscular beauty, not evil in its common sense, but the *Stimmung* of those broken from fortune, the misfortunate, a mood evident in the countenance of Bernini's *Damned Soul*, and in the litanies of Baudelaire's fallen angel.[1] In representing the youth of his time, in articulating as he claimed its "spiritual agitation," Baudelaire etched into melancholy its destructive element, the threat of decay that all misfortune brings, the instance of twilight, when everything gleams, irradiated by the hypnotic cerulean of the sun, the sky, and the oncoming darkness crossing during that magical hour of evening. But the spectacle of such beauty contains death, it is death in part which suffuses it with its radiance, and that is part of what makes the sublime so captivating. In Baudelaire's melancholy, we have a new sensibility. Sartre argues that such melancholy is a form of solipsism, a defense mechanism or shifting away from and abandonment of an all too terrifying modernity. Is it not actually a direct turn *towards* modernity, in fact, a *confrontation* with twilight, that is, with the destruction of one era and the birth of another, with all its sacrifices and loss of blood, therefore—*an opening*? Like a void expanding before us. Baudelaire may not be a *poet engagé* in Sartre's sense, but he is not solipsistic in failing to meet such criteria. There is something far too psycho-biographical in Sartre's judgment, for the quotidian man is not he who forges the form in the fire. In divesting melancholy of self-pity, Baudelaire did not seek comfort, but the concretization of the tragic. In the solitude of the work of art, "we discover" as Blanchot said "a more essential solitude. It excludes the complacent isolation of individualism; it has nothing to do with the quest for singularity." It is, I would assert, a form of poetic power. Seizing a rifle isn't the only form of engagement. To return to Jung in concluding, "The man whom we can with justice call 'modern' is solitary. He is so of necessity and at all times, for every step towards a fuller consciousness of the present removes him further from his original 'participation mystique' with the mass of men—from submersion in a common unconsciousness. Every step forward means an act of tearing himself loose from that all-embracing, pristine unconsciousness which claims the bulk of mankind almost entirely." Baudelaire suffered no such unconsciousness.

[1] For a particularly, and rightfully, unsettling recitation of *The Litanies of Satan*, see the recording of the same name by Diamanda Galas (Mute Records, 1982; 2001). Recitation however doesn't sufficiently convey the style of Galas' performance of the poem, which is volcanic, a ferocious *incantation* in the spirit of Artaud and Carmelo Bene.

Melancholy in the Mirror: Three Readings of Baudelaire

Jean Starobinski

Translated by Charlotte Mandell

I

"Melancholy, at Noon"

Melancholy was an intimate companion of Baudelaire. In *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the introductory poem "To the Reader" clothes the grotesque and repellent figure of Ennui in majesty. The "Epigraph for a Condemned Book" that comes later is even more explicit:

> Peaceful, bucolic reader,
> Sober, simple, well-meaning man,
> Throw away this saturnine book,
> Orgiastic and melancholic.[1]

Surely the very word 'melancholy,' and its direct descendant, the adjective *melancholic*, had become hard to utter in poetry: these words were suffering from overuse. They had been linked too often with solitary contemplation, in landscapes of cliffs or ruins. Commonplace sentimental remarks also relied on it. In "Fusées" ("Rockets"), after a list of affectionate "caprices of language," we find: "*Mon petit âne mélancolique*" ("My little melancholy donkey").[2] In his verse, Baudelaire uses this dangerous word only rarely, and then judiciously. (This is not true in his prose, his critical essays, or his correspondence, where the same precautions are not required.)

Expressing melancholy without saying the word 'melancholy' too often requires you to fall back on synonyms, equivalents, metaphors. It poses a challenge to the poetic task. Adjustments must be made, in the lexical domain first of all. The word 'spleen,' from English, which had taken it from Greek (*splên,* seat of black bile, hence of melancholy), designates the same malady, but by a detour that turns it into a sort of intruder, both elegant and irritating. French vocabularies had welcomed it even before the words *dandy* and *dandysme* (almost its accomplices, as we shall see) were introduced. The place of

[1] All texts by Charles Baudelaire are cited according to the edition of the Oeuvres complètes, edited, collected and annotated by Claude Pichois, Paris: Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 2 volumes, 1975, 1976. (Abbreviated as *O.C.* in the notes that follow.) [All translations of the Baudelaire texts cited are my own.—Trans.]

O.C., I, p. 137. Cf. the overview presented by Pierre Dufour, "*Les Fleurs du Mal*: dictionnaire de mélancolie," *Littérature*, No. 72, December 1988, pp. 30-54.

[2] *O.C.*, I, p. 660.

spleen, in the *Fleurs*, is dominant: it figures not in the poems themselves, but in the titles. The poems entitled "Spleen" ("Spleen et Idéal" in the first section), without uttering the word 'melancholy,' can be regarded as so many symbols or periphrastic blazons of melancholy. They express it in other words, in other images: they allegorize it—and it is hard to decide if allegory is the body or the shadow of Baudelairean melancholy. I will not be able to avoid speaking about this again in the course of this study.

From his earliest poetic attempts, Baudelaire knew quite a bit about melancholy: he had experienced it subjectively, and he knew the rhetorical and iconological resources a long tradition had employed to interpret it. In the poem he addresses to Sainte-Beuve, around 1843, Baudelaire proves his aptitude for "drinking," as he says in the same text, "the distant echo of a book." The evocation of the "ennuis" of his school years gives rise to a beautiful entrance onto the stage of allegorized Melancholy, and the reference to Diderot's *La Religieuse* literarily allegorizes allegory itself: the figure seen is the fictive figure of another captive youth, exposed to the worst tortures behind the walls of a convent. School, convent: two aspects of the same cloistered melancholy:

> It was especially in summer, when leaden rooftops softened,
> That those great walls blackened with sadness abounded […]
> Season of daydreams, when the Muse clings
> The whole long day to the clapper of a bell;
> When Melancholy, at noon, when everything is drowsing,
> Chin in hand, at the end of the hallway—
> Her eyes darker and bluer than [Diderot's] Nun
> Whose obscene distressing story is known to all
> —Drags a foot made heavier by early sorrows,
> Her brow still damp from the languors of her nights.[3]

"Chin in hand" (see figure 1, Georges de La Tour's "La Madeleine Terff"), as we know, is the symbolic gesture that has been studied, in numerous texts, by Panofsky, Saxl and their successors.[4] Noontime is the hour of the demon and acute *acedia*. It is the time when the seemingly triumphant light summons an attack by its contradictor; the time when the extreme vigilance prescribed for the mind is captured from the rear by somnolence. Slowness, heaviness are some of the most constant attributes of the melancholic person, when he is not given over to complete immobility. In countless earlier texts, the *slow step* is one of the main signs of the melancholic *habitus*. In Baudelaire's poem, the "foot made heavier," while renewing this traditional image, also attests

[3] *O.C.*, I, "Lettre à Sainte-Beuve," pp. 207-208.

[4] Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, New York: Basic Books, 1964. See also: William S. Heckscher, "Melancholia (1541): An Essay in the Rhetoric of Description by Joachim Camerarius," in *Joachim Camerarius* (1500-1574), *Essays on the History of Humanism during the Reformation*, Frank Baron, ed., Munich: W. Fink Verlag, 1978, pp. 32-120; Maxime Préaud, *Mélancolies*, Paris: Herscher, 1982.

that the poet has not forgotten the feet of Suzanne Simonin (Diderot's Nun) wounded by the shards of glass her persecutors scattered in her path… As to the bell, while it might make one think of the woman who sees herself in the Dürer engraving, it also prefigures the women who "leap with fury" in the fourth "Spleen."

Like Diderot's heroine, the Melancholy allegorized by Baudelaire is young: her "sorrows" are "early"; she knows languorous "nights." She belongs to the "Lesbians" (the continuation of the poem is the obvious proof of this) whose chief bard Baudelaire wanted to be; he even envisioned inscribing them on the title page of his collection. At first glance, there is no resemblance to the personifications we meet in Dante, Alain Chartier or Charles d'Orléans: Melancholy (or *Merencolie*, or *Mère Encolie*) appeared in them as an elderly, hostile woman dressed in black, bearing bad news. Nor is there any analogy with the angel or muse of contemplative life, invoked by Milton in *Il Penseroso*. But in the figure outlined by the young Baudelaire, something remains of these previous incarnations, even if only the persistent typological name and the grave slowness.

Melancholy allegorized in the past animated not only anthropomorphic figures; it was also inscribed in things, in aspects of the world. For Charles d'Orléans, remember, it is the cold "wind" of winter, the "Dedalus prison," the "forest" where one lives as a hermit, the "well most profound" [*puis parfont*] where the "thirst for Comfort" cannot be quenched.[5] In the series of text-testimonials that guide me, this well prefigures from afar the stream over which, in *As You Like It*, Jaques the melancholic droops and cries, in an attitude that resembles that of Narcissus. Charles d'Orléans' "puis de ma merencolie" is also the "deep well" to which King Richard II, in Shakespeare's tragedy, compares the crown he must give up, at the bottom of which, like a bucket made heavy with water, he sinks, full of tears; Richard II, in this same scene, has a mirror brought to him, to read the marks of his sorrow in, before he smashes it.[6]

This is a good moment to remember that the iconological tradition of melancholy has at times linked a mirror with it, along with the gaze focused on the reflected image. That the mirror was a necessary accessory of coquetry and also a symbol of truth should not make us think that it is less properly employed if it is placed before the eyes of a melancholic. A stronger motivation emerges from this multivalence. Coquetry, in the mirror of truth, is futility, a perishable image. And there is no melancholy more "profound" than the one that rises up, faced with the mirror, before the evidence of mutability, lack of profundity, and hopeless Vanity.[7]

Did the young Baudelaire know this from the "library" on which his "cradle" leaned,[8] from the "engravings" with which he was "in love"?[9] The fact remains that in the poem dedicated to Sainte-Beuve, two scenes with a mirror follow

[5] Cf. Jean Starobinski, "L'encre de la mélancolie," *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, March 1963, XI, pp. 410-423. Particular emphasis is placed on the rondeau "Ou puis parfont de ma merencolie" (No. CCCXXV in the Pierre Champion edition: Charles d'Orléans, *Poésies*, 2 vol., Paris: Champion, 1927, Vol. II, p. 477).

[6] *Richard II*, act IV, scene I.

[7] See G.F. Hartlaub, *Zauber des Spiegels. Geschichte und Bedeutung des Spiegels in der Kunst*, Munich: R. Piper, 1951. Especially pp. 149-157. See also Hart Nibbrig, *Spiegelschrift*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987.

[8] "La Voix," *O.C.*, I, p. 170.

[9] "Le Voyage," *O.C.*, I, p. 129.

the appearance of Melancholy personified. A mirror of solitary pleasure [*volupté*], and an equally solitary mirror of pain. Melancholy appeared at noon. Baudelaire's first mirrors belong to evening and nocturnal hours; they are celebrants of a perverse pleasure:

> —And then came the unhealthy evenings, the feverish nights,
> That turn their bodies into girls in love,
> And make them contemplate in mirrors—sterile pleasure—
> The ripe fruits of their nubility—[10]

These lines, we know, will reappear in "Lesbos," somewhat modified ('contemplate,' notably, will be replaced by 'caress'). Addressing Sainte-Beuve, Baudelaire seems to have introduced the word '*volupté*' the better to evoke his reading of Sainte-Beuve's "story of Amaury," and the better to confess that the reading of *Volupté* led him to examine himself: 'scratch' then comes to take the place of 'contemplate':

> And in front of the mirror I perfected
> The cruel art a nascent demon gave me,
> —from Pain to fashion a real pleasure—
> To make pain bleed, and to scratch your wound.[11]

Of the insistent association Baudelaire made between melancholy and the mirror, we see proofs in other textual similarities. I will give only two examples at the moment.

A stanza (lines 29 to 36) in "Jet d'eau" ("The Fountain") can be read as the exposition of the musical theme:

> O you, whom night renders so beautiful,
> How sweet it is for me, leaning over your breast,
> To listen to the everlasting lamentation
> Sobbing in the pools!
> Moon, resounding water, blessed night,
> Trees rustling all around,
> Your pure melancholy
> Is the mirror of my love.[12]

[10] *O.C.*, I, p. 207.

[11] *O.C.*, I, p. 208. Pain, as allegorized entity, forms part of Melancholy's escort. Occasionally it is Melancholy's substitute. It allows us to distinguish between real and false melancholy. Hégésippe Moreau "will cry a lot over himself"; but he "did not like pain; he did not see it as beneficial"… (*O.C.*, p. 158 and 160).

[12] *O.C.*, I, p. 161.

The second testimonial is the famous page of "Fusées," where Baudelaire defines his ideal of beauty, and the melancholic component whose presence seems necessary to him. A simple allusion would indeed have sufficed, if it only involved recalling an "aesthetic of Misfortune" (which Pierre Jean Jouve, closer to our time, will appropriate in turn). But I would like to quote these lines, because we hear in them the word 'melancholy' and the word 'mirror' calling to each other, and because, later, I will let myself be guided by the conjunction of these two terms:

> I do not maintain that Joy cannot be associated with Beauty, but I do say that Joy is one of its most commonplace ornaments—whereas *melancholy* is so to speak its illustrious companion; thus I can scarcely conceive (might my brain be an enchanted mirror?) a type of beauty where there is no *Misfortune*. — Based on—others will say, 'obsessed by'—these ideas, one can see how it would be hard for me not to conclude that the most perfect type of virile Beauty is *Satan*—as Milton presents him.[13]

In the lines preceding the passage cited, Baudelaire had analyzed the beauty that could most confer seductiveness on a female face: he had also called here for a mixture "of voluptuousness and sadness." He desired "an idea of melancholy, of weariness, even of satiety," and added: "A woman's face is a provocation that is all the more attractive if this face is in general rather melancholy."[14] Baudelaire knows, of course, all the danger of melancholy. And in what seduces him, he knows how to read the "surging bitterness, as if stemming from privation or despair," or again: "spiritual needs, ambitions darkly repressed."[15] To interpret this repression, we don't need the commentary of Freud, but of Baudelaire himself, when he speaks of "this humour, hysterical according to the doctors, satanic according to those who know a little better than doctors…"[16] The ambivalence is complete: Baudelaire has "cultivated" his "hysteria with delight [*jouissance*] and terror," but he wants to be "cured of everything, of misery, illness and melancholy."[17]

Yes, this "brain" of Baudelaire's is indeed an "enchanted mirror": on the subject of his definition of Beauty, he cannot prevent himself from evoking, in that same page, "the ideal type of the Dandy." Dandyism has the beauty of a twilight plunged in mourning. We read, in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (*O.C.*, II, p. 712): "Dandyism is a setting sun; like that fading star, it is superb, without warmth, and full of melancholy." The dandy, whose main concern is his toilette and his search for the personal sublime, "must live and sleep in front of a mirror" (*O.C.*, I, p. 678). In *La Fanfarlo*, drawing the portrait of his

[13] *Journaux Intimes*, *O.C.*, I, pp. 657-658.

[14] *O.C.*, I, p. 657.

[15] *Ibid*.

[16] "Le Mauvais Vitrier" ("The Bad Glazier"), *O.C.*, I, p. 286.

[17] *Journaux intimes*, *O.C.*, I, pp. 668-669.

hero, Baudelaire writes: “A tear was germinating in the corner of his eye at some memory; he went over to the mirror to watch himself cry” (*O.C.*, I, p. 554). Samuel Cramer plays the comedy of emotion for himself. At the end of his adventure, we find him “sad, and sick with blue melancholy” (p. 578), and possessed by “the sadness we are thrown into by the awareness of an incurable, constitutional illness” (p. 580)… Something we must note here: linked with dandyism, with strange pleasure, with the ritual of the toilette, the gaze in the mirror is the aristocratic *privilege* of the individual who knows how to make himself the performer of himself. It is a real sacrilege that Baudelaire denounces in the prose poem “Le Miroir”: a “horrid man” claims to have the right to be mirrored, “according to the immortal principles of 1789”!

Maura Del Serra

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

TRANSLATION

İKİNCİ YENİ

(SECOND NEW)

—Turkish Poetry in Transmission—

translated by Fulya Peker

In the history of Turkish literature, poetry has been the most important form of oral and written expression, yet maybe the most neglected one. From the Divan Poetry of the Ottoman palaces to the Folk Poetry of the Anatolian lowlands and the Social Realist Poetry of the Turkish Republic, it is possible to witness a continual transformation in Turkish caused by the cultural and political transmission between the Middle East and Europe. After World War II, the short circuit in the nervous system of the world not only gave birth to new global conductors but also new forms of conductivity in languages, in other words the renewal of the world order sparked new currents in the word order. In Turkey, the *Garip* (*strange/forlorn*) poetry movement, also called the "first new," stripped poetic expression of its traditional rules and emphasized simplicity while addressing the growing masses; subsequently *İkinci Yeni* (*Second New*) resisted the tendency of writing poetry that conversed with the common sense and aimed at fusing together poetry and philosophy.

The *İkinci Yeni* movement reached its peak during the 50s and 60s as a response to the *Garip* movement and the Social Realist poetry of the 1940s. Along with the leading poets of the movement—Edip Cansever, İlhan Berk, Cemal Süreya, Turgut Uyar and Ece Ayhan—many other established poets of the time were also carried by the tidal waves of the *İkinci Yeni* and began writing poems inspired by this momentum. Today, many contemporary poets still cannot help but gaze out of the windows this movement opened up in poetry. The name *İkinci Yeni* was first used by Muzaffer İlhan Erdost to characterize this specific form of poetry in "İkinci Yeni," a short essay published in *Son Havadis* on 19 August 1956. Although there are specific poets who were accepted as representatives of the *İkinci Yeni* movement by critics, and although some of those poets were very close friends, there is no manifesto or book that they wrote and signed together. Moreover, they never launched themselves as a collective movement under a given name. Although each *İkinci Yeni* poet can be identified with his own unique color and style, it is evident in their poetry that there is an underlying common struggle they were engaged in: that of resculpting Turkish as used poetically.

Many of the leading poets of this movement were at the same time translating works of European philosophy and literature into Turkish, and this influence is apparent in their experiments on new poetic patterns and textures. Inspired by the European avant-garde, some of the principal aspects of *İkinci Yeni* poetry include the breaking of word order and grammatical rules, deformation and fragmentation of words, the usage of free association, abstraction, ambiguity, clashes of antonyms/synonyms/homonyms, the creation of synaesthetic

experiences through metaphoric indulgences in a Surrealist texture, etc. Stripped of meaning and reason, in *İkinci Yeni* poetry the sensual experience of words appeared to be more dominant than the linear narrative style of earlier Turkish poetry. While moving towards a Heideggerian connection between thought and poetry, these poets tended towards composing language with a new notation that broke the frame of learned patterns of thinking led by reason, freeing the words from their calluses by creating novel equations that would trigger a new form of poetic experience. In terms of content, *İkinci Yeni* poetry was existential and the poets were digging deeper into the alienation and introversion of the individual. Although their works gained approval and respect as time went by, such poets were often reproved by certain critics of the time for turning their backs on society and being obscurantists, formalists, and solipsists, and their poems were denounced by some as absurdist, euphuistic and elliptical.

Experimental forms of Turkish poetry are in many ways literary binoculars through which it is possible to explore the philosophical and linguistic transformations experienced in Turkey, where the circulation of the air between the east and the west is most powerful. Through translations a broader experience of this circulation will be possible and the transitions in Turkish poetry will gain more recognition with readers less familiar with it. In offering the translations of the following poems, which are not widely known or available in English, I would like to draw attention to one of the most important transitions in Turkish poetry. Although there are many other extreme examples of *İkinci Yeni* poems that reflect the playfulness of literary transgression, to help the reader recognize the underlying philosophical aims of the *İkinci Yeni* movement I have chosen to present poems that only crack but do not shatter the frame of reason. Resisting the fragmentary nature of a descriptive survey, this would be a better start for non-native linguistic farming in a foreign soil, as it is never possible to truly digest a poem through a single translation.

İLHAN BERK (1918-2008)

AĞAÇLARDAN ARKADAŞLARIM OLDU

"Adlarla doldurdum sessizliği." Şeyleri kodladım. Gökyüzünün, ağaçların çocukluğunu bilirim. Ağaçlardan arkadaşlarım oldu. Hâla da var. Samanyolunu anlamadım. Sayıları da. (Sayılar daha bulunmamış gibi davranıyorlardı.) Yalnız sekizle (5 + 3) içli dışlı oldum. (Kim olmamıştır ki?) Biraz da sıfırla (Sıfırın bulunması kolay olmamıştır.) Üç için çok kötü şeyler söylenmiştir. Niçin? Bilmem. Bilmek sayıdır. Bir de biri tanıdım. Bir ile düşünülmüyor. Bazı sayılar suçlu doğmuştur. Bir, bunlardan biridir. Anlamadan sevdim taşları. Çakıl taşının adıyla biçimi arasında hiçbir ilişki kurulamamıştır. Oltu taşının geçmişini bulamadım. Olsun. Gizem her şeydir. Kimi sessiz harfleri sökemedim. (Harflerin tini sessiz harflerde gezer. Kızılderililer bilir bunu.) Kuşlarla gittim geldim. Kuşlar sayıları bilmez, yusufcuk hariç. Doğu'da atların düş görmediğini anladım. (Homeros'da atlar ağlar.) Yürürken gördüm dağları. Dağlar yürürken düşünüyorlardı. Tanımak usu durduruyor. Dünya bizimdir! diye konuşuyorlardı aralarında sümüklüböcekler. Anladım diyemem. Anlamadım da. Sümüklüböcekleri okumalı.

Sen ırmaklardan söz ederken konuşuyor ırmaklar, otlar gözlerinde. Zaman bir izdüşümdür. Bir yerlere yaz bunu. Tinin dışarıya penceresi olmadığı doğru değildir. İsa'nın hayaleti hala dünyanın üzerinde dolaşıyor. (Yalnız soruyorum. Sormak için yazar insan.) Gençliğini bilmeyen sabah tökezler. Gül ki adıyla vardır. Taş adını yüzü bulununca aldı. (Duvarcıların avucunda taş bunun için döner durur.)

Ben senin gözlerine dönmek istiyorum. Sonra da ... Sonra diye bir şey yoktur. Tarih dışıdır, sonra.

THERE HAVE BEEN FRIENDS I MADE WITH TREES

"With names I filled the silence." I codified things. I know the childhood of the sky, the trees. There have been friends I made with trees, there still are. I did not understand the Milky Way. Nor the numbers. (The numbers were pretending to be unfound as yet.) Only with eight (5+3), I became intimate. (Well, who didn't?) With zero, too, a little. (Finding zero has not been easy.) Very bad things have been said for three. Why? I don't know. To know is a number. One more; I got to know one. One cannot think with one. Some numbers were born guilty. One, is one of them. I loved stones without understanding. No relationship could be established between the name and the shape of pebbles. I could not find the past of black amber. So be it. Mystery is everything. I could not decipher some consonants. (Spirit of letters wanders around in consonants, American Indians know this.) I came and went with birds. Birds don't know the numbers, except the dragonfly. I understood that horses do not dream in the East. (Horses do weep in Homer.) I saw the mountains while walking. Mountains were thinking while walking. To get to know stops reason. "The world is ours!" the snails were talking amongst themselves, I cannot say I understood. Nor I did not understand. One should read the snails.

As you speak of rivers, talking rivers, grasses in your eyes. Time is a projection. Write this down somewhere. It is not true that spirit does not have a window facing out. Christ's ghost is still roaming around on earth. (Only asking. One writes only to ask.) One who does not know one's youth, stumbles in the morning. Rose exists with its name. Stone got its name when its face was found. (That is why stones keep turning around in the palms of the masons.)

I want to turn to your eyes. And then... There is nothing called "then." Then, is out of history.

TURGUT UYAR (1927-1985)

KURTARMAK BÜTÜN KAYGILARI

Sularsa akmak birgün birgün birgün
Birgün dağlara çıkmak birer birer dağlara çıkmak birgün
Çıkmak çıkmak birer birer birgün dağlara dağlara birgün
Birgün birer birer dağlara
Ah nasıl dağlara birgün
Ey birgün
Çiçek açmak birgün
Dağlara dağlara birer birer dağlara

Otları büyütmek birgün
Birgün köyler kentler yıkanık damlar geri dönmek birgün
Birgün yeni dönmek
Birgün dağlara çıkmak birer birer çıkmak çıkmak
Su yürümek güneş bilmek
Yeniden orda otlarda orda yeniden orda orda
Bitkin birgül bulmak ve geri dönenler birgün
Ey yorgun atlar, sayı bilmiyen çocuklar
Ey bütün hazır elbiseciler ey,
Birgün olmak, küskün keşişlerden olmamak birgün
Dağlara dağlara çıkmak sular köprüler sular birgün çıkmak
Eski kaba arabalardan inip birgün çıkmak
Dağlara dağlara dağlara başka hiç
Birgün dağlara.

TO SAVE ALL THE WORRIES

Waters to flow one day one day
One day to climb to the mountains one by one to climb to the mountains one day
To climb to climb one by one one day to the mountains to the mountains one day
One day one by one to the mountains
Ah, how to the mountains one day
Hey one day
To blossom one day
To the mountains to the mountains one by one to the mountains

To raise the grasses one day
One day villages towns washed rooftops to return one day
One day to return anew
One day to climb to the mountains one by one to climb to climb
Water to walk sun to know
Again there on the grasses there again there there
To find an exhausted rose and the returned ones one day
Hey, tired horses, kids that don't know numbers
Hey all confectionists hey
One day to be not to be one of the sullen hermits one day
To the mountains to the mountains to climb waters bridges waters one day to climb
To get off the old coarse cars one day to climb
To the mountains to the mountains to the mountains nothing else
One day to the mountains

EDİP CANSEVER (1928-1986)

MASA DA MASAYMIŞ, HA!

Adam yaşama sevinci içinde
Masaya anahtarlarını koydu
Bakır kâseye çiçekleri koydu
Sütünü yumurtasını koydu
Pencereden gelen ışığı koydu
Bisiklet sesini çıkrık sesini
Ekmeğin havanın yumuşaklığını koydu
Adam masaya
Aklında olup bitenleri koydu
Ne yapmak istiyordu hayatta
İşte onu koydu
Kimi seviyordu kimi sevmiyordu
Adam masaya onları da koydu
Üç kere üç dokuz ederdi
Adam koydu masaya dokuzu
Pencere yanındaydı gökyüzü yanında
Uzandı masaya sonsuzu koydu
Bir bira içmek istiyordu kaç gündür
Masaya biranın dökülüşünü koydu
Uykusunu koydu uyanıklığını koydu
Tokluğunu açlığını koydu

Masa da masaymış ha
Bana mısın demedi bu kadar yüke
Bir iki sallandı durdu
Adam ha babam koyuyordu.

THE TABLE WAS QUITE A TABLE, HA!

The man, filled with the joy of living
Put his keys on the table
Put the flowers into the copper bowl
Put his milk and egg on
Put the light coming in through the window on
Sound of the bike, sound of the wheel
Softness of the bread and the air he put on
The man, on the table
Put the things happening in his mind
What does he want to do in life
That he put on
Whom he loves whom he does not
The man put those also on the table
Three times three is nine
The man put on the table the nine
Window was near, the sky was near
He reached out put eternity on the table
He was wanting to drink beer for days
He put the spilling of the beer on the table
His fullness and his hunger

The table was quite a table, ha!
Did not complain after this much of a burden
It swung a few times, then stood still
The man went on putting on.

CEMAL SÜREYA (1931-1990)

BENİ ÖP, SONRA DOĞUR BENİ

Şimdi
utançtır tanelenen
sarışın çocukların başaklarında.

Ovadan
gözü bağlı bir leylak kokusu ovadan
çeviriyor o küçücük güneşimizi.

Taşarak evlerden taraçalardan
gelip sesime yerleşiyor.

Sesimin esnek baldıranı
sesimin alaca baldıranı.

Ve kuşlara doğru
fildişi: rüzgarın tavrı.
Dağ: güneş iskeleti.

Tahta heykeller arasında
denizin yavrusu kocaman.

Kan görüyorum taş görüyorum
bütün heykeller arasında
karabasan ılık acemi
—uykusuzluğun sütlü inciri—
kovanlara sızmıyor.

Annem çok küçükken öldü
beni öp, sonra doğur beni.

KISS ME, THEN GIVE BIRTH TO ME

Now
it is shame that is shelled
in the ears of blonde children.

From the plains
blindfolded lilac scent from the plains
turns that little sun of ours.

Overflowing from houses from patios
comes and settles in my voice.

Limber hemlock of my voice
variegated hemlock of my voice.

And towards the birds
tusk: wind's attitude
Mountain: sun's skeleton.

Amongst the wooden sculptures
The infant of the sea is huge.

I see blood, I see stones
amongst all statues
Incubus warm novice
—milky fig of insomnia—
does not leak into beehives.

My mother died when I was little
Kiss me, then give birth to me.

ECE AYHAN (1931-2002)

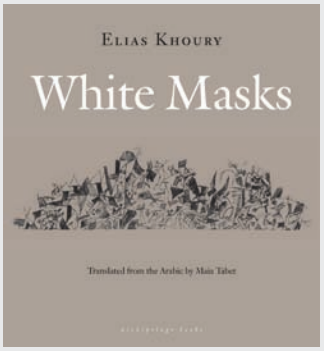
BİR ÖLÜ MACAR CAMBAZ

Sonra korkunç gülümsemeler bitti
Sonra hiç kimseyi göremedim
Herkes beni arıyordu.
Bir ölü macar cambaz buldu beni buldu beni
Samyeli esiyordu denizden.

ONE DEAD HUNGARIAN ROPE-WALKER

Then the horrifying grimaces ended.
Then I could not see anyone
Everyone was searching for me.
One dead Hungarian rope-walker found me found me
Sameyel was blowing from the sea.

archipelago books



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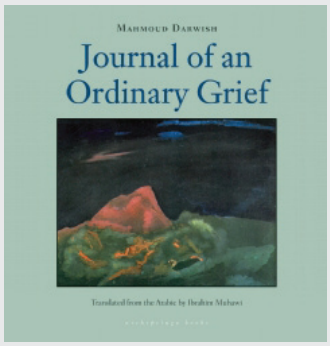

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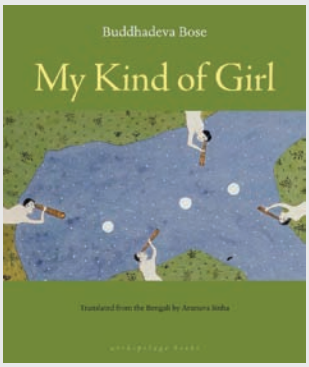

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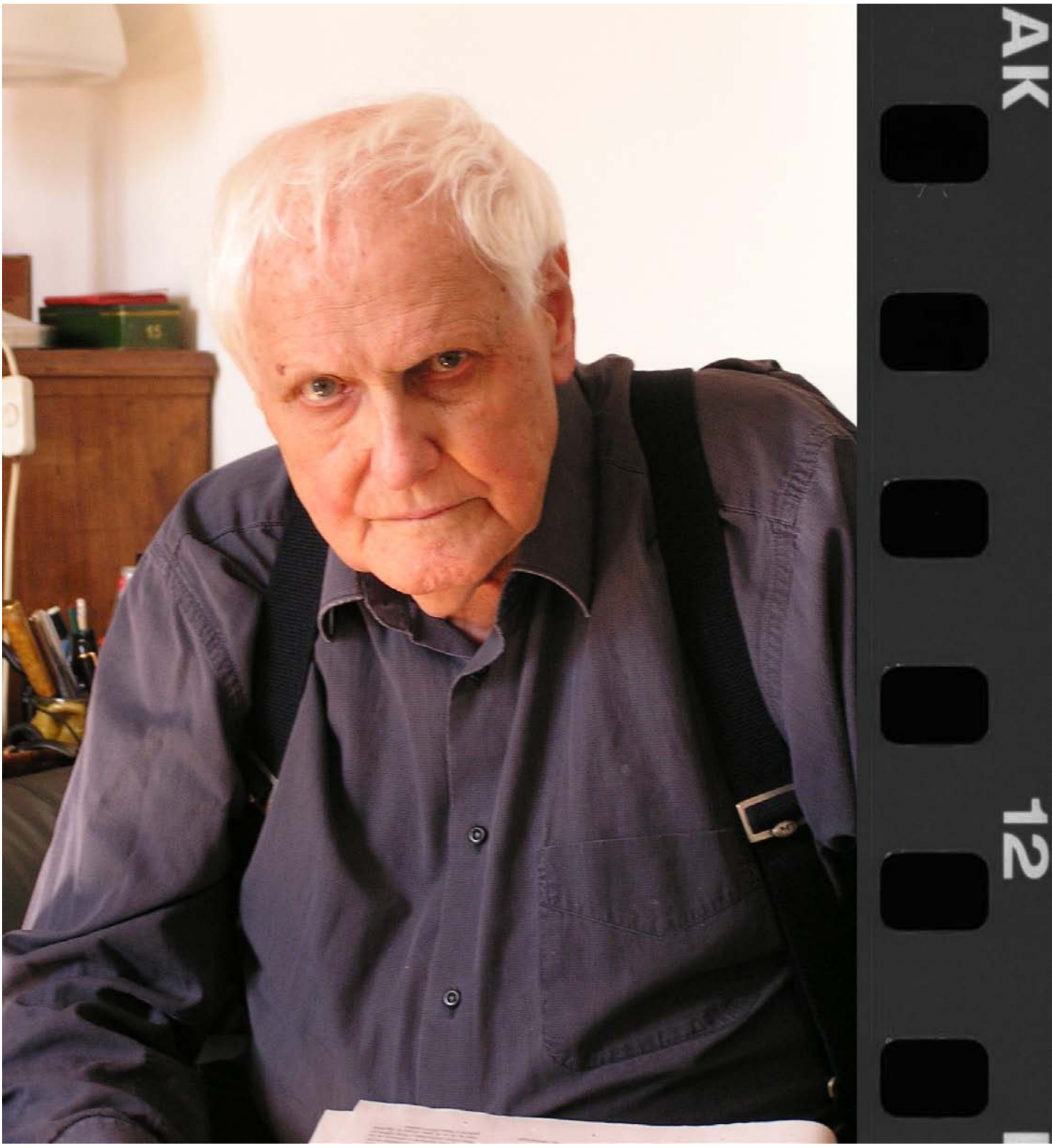
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On Film and Freedom

A conversation with Miklós Jancsó

by Maria Bogdan

So Much for Justice, Miklós Jancsó's new film opened the 41st Hungarian Film Festival in Budapest this past February. This conversation happened before the opening, in a reflective mood that basically describes Jancsó's approach to life in all aspects.

I have known him personally for 11 years now after he became my tutor at the Academy of Drama and Film. When talking about filmmaking, we always ended up having conversations about life, society, and freedom, as we did this time too when we discussed Jancsó's new film.

In spring of this year, the 88-year-old Hungarian film director received yet another award for his life work at the Slovakian Febiofest International Film, TV and Video Festival in Bratislava. Jancsó has continuously made films since the fifties. He first made documentary newsreels and soon started to make feature films including *The Roundup* (*Szegénylegények* 1965), *The Confrontation* (*Fényes Szelek* 1969), *Red Psalm* (*Még kér a nép* 1972), *Private Vices, Public Virtues* (*Vizi Privati, Pubbliche Virtú* 1975), *The Dawn* (1986), *Blue Danube Waltz* (*Kék Duna Keringő* 1992), and *The Lord's Lantern in Budapest* (*Nekem lámást adott kezembe az Úr Pesten* 1998). Through his original style of cinematography and storytelling—using long shots and improvisation—he made a revolution in film language.

New/Old Style

Q: *Your film* So Much For Justice *opened the Hungarian Film Festival this year. The film represents a new style in relation to your films of the last twelve years, known as the 'Kapa-Pepe films.' (The films Jancsó made since 1997 are based on two characters called Kapa and Pepe played by Zoltán Mucsi and Scherer Péter Hungarian actors.)*

A: Well, I guess you know me enough to know that I usually don't think so much in advance about my films. The so-called new style just happened. The last six films that I've done in the previous few years were funny, ironic films, built on two actors and their humor. This new film is basically a story, but contains a lot of irony as well.

Q: *Why did you feel like changing?*

A: It is not about a change in the style. The *Kapa-Pepe* films started to lose their original sense, the last two parts became a bit serious. In this aspect my new film can be characterized mostly with a serious attitude rather than with irony, which characterized the previous six ones. So I don't think that it's a change in style. Film is quite a primitive genre. It lasts usually for one and a half or two hours. This amount of time is not enough for making people think through things in a very deep way, like what you can reach with a book or by other genres. Basically we are always telling stories. Even if we don't want to. In this aspect the *Kapa-Pepe* films contain fewer stories.

My new film is, let's put it in this way, a historicized film. It's rather a reflection on history. The characters are not like the ones in the *Kapa-Pepe* films. Some of my friends with whom I worked together on my old films are still alive and active as actors, and in my new film they are the basic actors. A long shot lasts for eight, ten minutes; the actor appears in the beginning, in the middle, and also in the end of this period of time in different dresses, while other things are happening too. This way of shooting can be done only if the actors you are working with are your friends at the same time.

Q: *How did you see, was it easy for your old actors, like György Cserhalmi and Lajos Balázsovits, to get back into your style of making films?*

A: They didn't have to get back, it was evident for them. They took it so naturally. And the new actors—Gábor Nagypál, Csaba Pindroch—I was working together in this film with for the first time really got to like this style.

Q: *Why did you choose the Hungarian* King Matthew *(*Mathias Rex*) as a topic for your new film?*

A: The idea was not mine. There was a renaissance anniversary in Hungary three years ago, and I was asked if I wanted to make a film about King

Matthew, who was a big renaissance king in Hungary. This is how everything started, but it took some time for the scenario and the film to be born. At the first moment I didn't really want to make this film, because Matthew was really a great king. He was the last great Hungarian king. So the question was, "What shall I make of him as a film? Should I make an anthem of a great king?" Somehow it's not my style to do that, and in the meantime that would require a lot of money. Finally it didn't become a renaissance film. It is a reflection on history. I think so…

Q: *In general, each of your films reflects somehow on current events. Is that the case with this film too?*

A: It's never on purpose. I never do it on purpose. If it looks like that I deal with actual topics in my films, then it's probably because these are eternal topics I deal with, topics that have always been present in society since the beginning of world. Maybe this is the reason…

Hollywood

Q: *I've been thinking of what would happen if you were called to Hollywood…*

A: They don't call me there. They never did that.

Q: *Well, let's say they do. What do you think about your style, would it change?*

A: I cannot really envision this, but presumably I could not make a film in the way that they make films in Hollywood. First of all it's because I improvise a lot, as you know very well. It has always been like this: I wrote the scenario — for about 30 years Gyula Hernadi helped me in brainstorming the stories, but basically it was always me who wrote them[1] and in the end I could never fulfill what I wrote down.

On the other hand, the expression 'Hollywood film' usually refers to something which mostly just entertains. I take a quick note here for the record that the last movie of Tarantino differs quite basically from this stereotypical meaning, and well, that film is really worth mentioning. But in general people who go to movie theaters don't want to feel sad or to think. Although once there was a time like that, when people wanted to think through what they saw while sitting in the cinema, but nowadays it cannot be considered an intention. People just simply want to have fun. This is why films mostly have a good ending. There are only a few films where the main character that is bad doesn't get punished in the end. Usually these entertaining films of nowadays are folk tales. Our folk tales usually have happy endings. So the smallest boy always wins and the green eyed prince always defeats the dragon. When it's cold outside and people are just sitting inside and they have some spare time, they prefer to

[1] Gyula Hernádi, 1926 – 2005, author, close friend of Jancsó.

hear and see the good only.

Q: *According to this your films don't follow the scenario of the folk tales. But I think that even nowadays, films that are not typical of Hollywood, films like your films, can still be entertaining for some people.*

A: Well, I don't know if my films could be seen as entertainment. But yes, there are other films like mine that make you think when you sit down and watch them. So watching the film means thinking at the same time, because there is something in the film that you must think through. This means that you must exist within the film; it doesn't matter if you like the story or not.

Q: *As I know there's always a long period of preparation that you go through before you start shooting a film, even if you improvise a lot. This new film of yours also provoked me to read about some of its details; for example, I didn't know that King Matthew and Vlad Tsepes lived in the same age and that they knew one another….*

A: Yes, and they were probably relatives, too. This new film is a story that contains a lot of facts from hundreds of years ago, but it's not an information film. There are episodes in it from that era, but it doesn't inform you about how exactly everything happened. And it's not necessary to know all those details, because the story can be followed without them. But in the meantime, it's assigned to the audience to identify the characters while watching the film. It's not trendy; nowadays people are not used to this challenge because films in general are not like this now, not to mention television. In the past, it meant a wider scale of people who wanted to think. In the previous political system, when the world was divided basically between two political powers, the Russians made mainly propaganda films, and besides there were others who tried to make films in a different way, and used symbols. This means that nothing had its original meaning. *The Round-Up* is like that. If you watch that film you see that it's about a group of bandits who were fighting for the freedom of Hungary during the last years of 1800 and they are being captured. And in the meantime you know it, and the audience knew it in the past, that in reality the film was about something else. That it was about Hungary in 1956. It's about what happened in Hungary at that time. Everybody had that association and thought that it was a story about 1956.

Q: *But you had to sign a paper at that time in which you certified that the film was not about 1956.*

A: Well, in those times… Yes, I had to declare that it was not about 1956.

Q: *And they all knew that it was not true.*

A: I think so… But I don't know why they let me make that film, I do not know the reason…

Democracy and freedom

Q: *What do you think about democracy? I've just read an interesting definition which says that there is no democratic state if people don't feel at home and don't feel that they have a future in that place.*

A: A lot of things are necessary for this. It's essential not to starve. If it's a constant problem for someone just to survive through the day then he won't start thinking about how the system functions. If someone is excluded from that society then he doesn't start thinking about whether he is part of it or not. And there's another important thing called manipulation. It's a certain type of a man who has this power of manipulation. Not everyone has it. Just look at the U.S., not everyone is a millionaire there or has a successful life; it even happens there too.

Democracy means also when people are not defenseless and the lords cannot oppress them. Well, in the meantime it is true that there are situations in the world that cannot be described with words. For the children of today it is very hard to explain for example how it was when the Soviets came to this country. By declaring that everyone is equal they created a kind of democracy here in Hungary. It has just turned out later on how this democracy functions in reality; that there are some who are more equal than others—as we say this… So it's still a question of how to explain what it means that today you don't have to kiss the hands of the lords. You just cannot describe that relationship.

Q: *In the time of the previous political system in Hungary when a lot of things were prohibited, how could you preserve this universal way of thinking that is constantly reflected in your films, expressing a strict critique of Hungarian society in the meantime?*

A: I don't know why this is. For sure big luck is essential for life, and it was essential for me to get here, and to live in times when I was permitted to make those films. I was able to make them for several reasons. No one knows why. Those who let me make my films at that time have died already and this brought the explanation with them into the grave. Well, it was not only me who could make such films. There were others like Károly Makk and Marta Mészáros. We don't know; it's not possible to find out why they let us make them.

Faith

Q: *What do you think about faith?*

A: There should be heaven. If there wasn't heaven or if it wasn't good, then it's for sure that somebody would have come back already to tell it.

It's very hard to accept that we are born without wanting it and then life ends

once. It's terribly hard. Mainly when you start from a disadvantaged situation. This is why it's necessary to have something which gives a meaning to life. For example in Africa in some of the tribes in the past the leader made rain. Once he was not able to make rain, someone else took his duty and position. And how is it connected to faith? Well, in a world like ours you must believe that there's another one, too.

Q: *What is it that helps, that gives you strength in hard situations?*

A: It's important to take things with irony because they will pass on anyway. The other thing that helps me is what the Nazarene said: Treat others as you want to be treated. So you cannot harm others if you don't want to have a bad life also. Well, unfortunately the world is not like this in general. Hernádi always said especially at the time of the changes in Hungary that capitalism would come and there would be billionaires too who would help the poor ones. He just didn't know that it's just not like this.

Rituals

Q: *Do you have a special ritual that you do when you make a film?*

A: No, I don't have anything like that.

Q: *Then how do you refer to the fact that you usually don't watch your films after they are done?*

A: It's not a ritual. Let me tell you a story: I had just seen my film *The Round-Up* in London. It was in 2008 when some of my films were released there on DVD, and they organized screenings together with discussions. I was told that the print was very nice, so I went to check it and then I stayed and watched the film. It was funny because I have forgotten many details already, but when I watched it I still knew its mistakes… Since my films are mostly improvisations there are a lot of small mistakes in them. It's mainly because there are many things related to the story and the scene I find out on the day and at the place we are shooting. There are some mistakes in my new film too, but I'm not going to tell what they are to anyone now. Maybe in two or three or more years I will. So all in all it's not about perfection; I just know why the mistakes in the film are annoying. I already know at the time I'm making the film what those mistakes are that wouldn't be in the film if we had more money or more time for making it. Well, because of the improvisation the same mistakes might happen even if the circumstances were ideal. In my case the film is never the film that is written down in the scenario. I always tell the actors not to learn the dialogue written in the scenario because it's not certain if we will use it. We have the story and there are some parts of the dialogue that remain, mainly if there are citations. In my new film there are many citations, even from the Bible.

Q: *Did you use improvisation in your first films?*

A: Not really. My first two films were not improvised so much. These are *The Bells Have Gone to Rome* and *Cantata*. I haven't seen them since they were done. My third film, *My Way Home*, was already improvised to a large extent.

Q: *How did the idea of the long-shot come?*

A: I don't know exactly. I used to say that I didn't learn how to make a film. At the time when I started to deal with filmmaking, usually future film makers first worked as assistant directors in films, and like this they learned the basic details of the different parts of filmmaking, like editing. I never learned this because I was never an assistant director to a film. I learned montage while doing documentary films but there the content is different.

Q: *Your long shots always make me think of dancing…*

A: I got that opinion already, from abroad in the past that they are dance-films. They said it especially when 500 people were acting in one scene…

Family

Q: *You mentioned that friends are very important for you when making your films. Now what I can see is that it can be said about your family, too. For example your wife Zsuzsa Csákány has been your editor for a long time now.*

A: Yes, for 30 years now she has been my film editor.

Q: *How does it influence your work?*

A: Regarding filmmaking my films are not really montage films. The editor doesn't have too much work in films that are made by long shots but can come up with a solution if it's necessary. For example, in my new film there were two long shots that had to be cut for some reasons. But most of the time in the case of my films the editor has much of her work in doing the post-production. In the case of the *Kapa-Pepe* films, the editor had more work to do. And it's important to mention that the editor, personally my wife, is the first critic of the film, too, because she is the first who sees the material as a whole.

Q: *In your new movie, your youngest son David was working together with your wife in the post production. Your oldest son Nyika was the director of photography, your daughter Katalin was the costume designer, and your grandson, Jákob, plays the young Matthew. What was it like to work together with your family members?*

A: Feelings towards family members don't influence the production. I have worked together with Nyika already many times. Katalin started to work as a costume designer at one of the films of her mom, Márta Mészáros, and in my new film she made a great job of exploring the era of King Matthew. And about Jákob—I have seen him in his school play where he played Mac the Knife in

The Threepenny Opera, and he was very good in that. Then he told us that he would like to play in the film and asked for a role. It turned out that he has a real sense of playing in front of the camera. It's interesting to see that there's something in him… The actor should never play but should show itself, his/her personality, which is not empty. An actor should have character.

Q: *Has art been always present in your family, among your parents and grandparents?*

A: No, not at all. I'm the only one who has been doing something totally else. I have a law degree. And at the same time I always wanted to be a theater director. This came from childhood. I was a scout, which was also a great form of role playing. Then later on I participated in the dance house movement where I was designing and after that I applied to the Academy of Drama and Film. And the reason why I became a film director? ... It was absolutely by accident. It was at the end of the forties when I applied and was accepted to the Academy. By that time there was no entrance exam, they just called us for an interview. At the interview two old men were sitting and talking to me. One of them was Béla Balázs. After a while he said: Be a film director. And this was the how I became a film director. And it really happened like this!

Q: *Didn't you start to protest by saying that you wanted to be a theater director?*

A: No, I didn't. Well, at that time, others and I didn't really know what exactly film directing and scenario meant. I remember when once I was in Kolozsvar (Cluj) as a scout in a camp, there was a kid writing something at the table. I turned to him and asked what he was doing. He answered that he was writing a scenario. What is that? I asked. And like this he started to talk about film and that he would be a film director. Well, he really made it afterwards. And me, when I first finally saw a camera it was when I started to work in the film studio.

Q: *If you were young now what occupation would you chose?*

A: I cannot say. I have no idea what would I do with my life if I was young right now.

Q: *You never wanted to be an actor?*

A: Well, no. I am a very bad actor. I'm afraid on stage so much.

Q: I'm asking this because you appear in some of your Kapa-Pepe *films.*

A: Oh yes. First we found out with Hernádi, to do it once just for fun, and then later on I did it some other times, too.

Q: *Many times in a way that has something to do with death.*

A: Yes, I'm making fun of death…

Further Thoughts on Contemporary Film-Making

Miklós Jancsó

Introduction

by Maria Bogdan

Miklós Jancsó is one of the major reformers of film language, and of the concept of the filmmaker in general and in Central East Europe. His reflective personality not only defines him as an artist but indicates an attitude that characterizes him in the everyday life as well. He (through his films) is always actual—his interpretations of reality always refer to the perpetual nature of society. This is why his messages always find their way to the audience, at any time.

The still active Hungarian film director, who turned to 89 at the end of September, received four lifetime achievement awards this year at different international film festivals all over Europe (Bratislava's Febiofest International Film Festival, Split Film Festival, Jameson Cinefest Miskolc, and Viareggio Film Festival).

*His essay is a stream of thought about his new film and about film making nowadays. The text is collected and edited by Miklós Jancsó into an essay form from his previous answers to questions in connection with his new film (*So Much for Justice*!). In this form, the text was given exclusively to* Hyperion. *It was written originally in Hungarian and then translated into English.*

'…A historical film? Not really. In reality my last film is a reflection of history. Of a period in history. I have done many films like this. Those who saw them have the chance to think a little bit. And in the end they could have always realized that these films are not really historical films. But more, these films want the audience to reflect on what they saw.

And why this type of film again?

The whole world has started to forget its past. Sometimes, everyday people are not just manipulated by lies but are prevented from learning about their past. A friend of mine from France gossiped that president Sarkozy wants to abolish history teaching in schools. I hope it is just gossip because those who don't know history are sentenced to re-experience it.

The film *So Much for Justice* wasn't a low-budget film according to what we understand by "low-budget" in this country. We spent about two million dollars on it. Well, I know it may sound ridiculous in some other places of the world, but here in Hungary it is not easy at all to collect that amount. And this is what I never do alone. On this film, my producer was József Berger. He is a young man with wide networks in Europe and lots of friends. I have to attribute this film to him and his connections. …

... There are a lot of first-time filmmakers showing up. All of them can make films. They were born with a camera already in their hands. The new generation discovers how to take a photo before learning how to write and read. Such a cultural transfer rarely happens in history – probably the invention of book printing was something like this. But it wasn't as radical as film.

So Hungarian films nowadays are interesting. And even the older generations of Hungarian film directors are significant.

But for who or what for are we making these movies? Regarding the budget, even the trendiest films are on the edge when the production is done. It's not me who states this. I heard it from a producer. Well, it's also true that there are some grandiose young filmmakers who can travel around the world with their films. There are a lot of film festivals all around the world, and we participate in many of them.

But can we impress the audience and can we convince them to spend their money on us? Films nowadays are not as interesting as the ones of the past (except the films of some geniuses). Well, yes, in the past films were messages from the darkness. They meant something like what Iranian, Korean or Romanian films mean today. Recently a well-known politician asked me why the Hungarian films weren't as famous as they had been before. I told him: The iron curtain should be brought down again. He laughed.

For those who didn't live under the past political system, it is hard to explain how it was. Thank God, they didn't feel it on their skin. Or they were lucky to leave for other countries.

Do I cry those times back? Hell, no! Was it easier to make films then? It is always a challenge to make a film; it's not scrambled eggs. Well, there are a few who burn even that too, but in that case, I suggest they not start cooking.

The great master Géza Radványi (*Somewhere in Europe/Valahol Európában*, 1947) always said that a real film director is one who can make his next film, too. And who cares if it's hard both financially and socially to make it? Behind the iron curtain we always cited repeatedly, as if we had said a mantra, the lines of Attila József (Hungarian poet): Come, oh Freedom, you bear me Order! /Jöjj el szabadság! Te szülj nekem rendet ("A breath of air!/Levegőt!" 1935)

So Freedom, the new order, has come, and it is necessary to be able to live under these circumstances, too. And I am able to.'

Miklós Jancsó 2010

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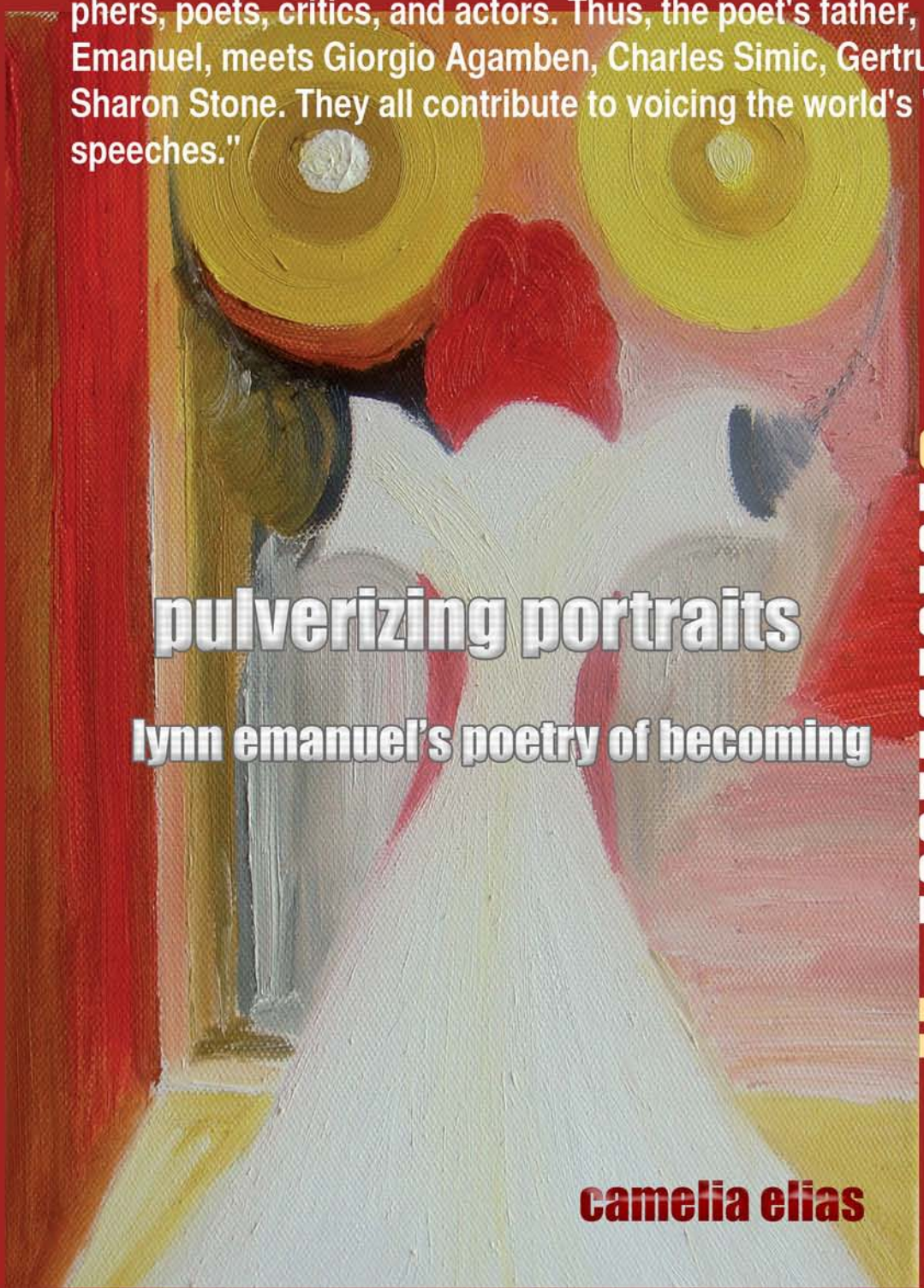

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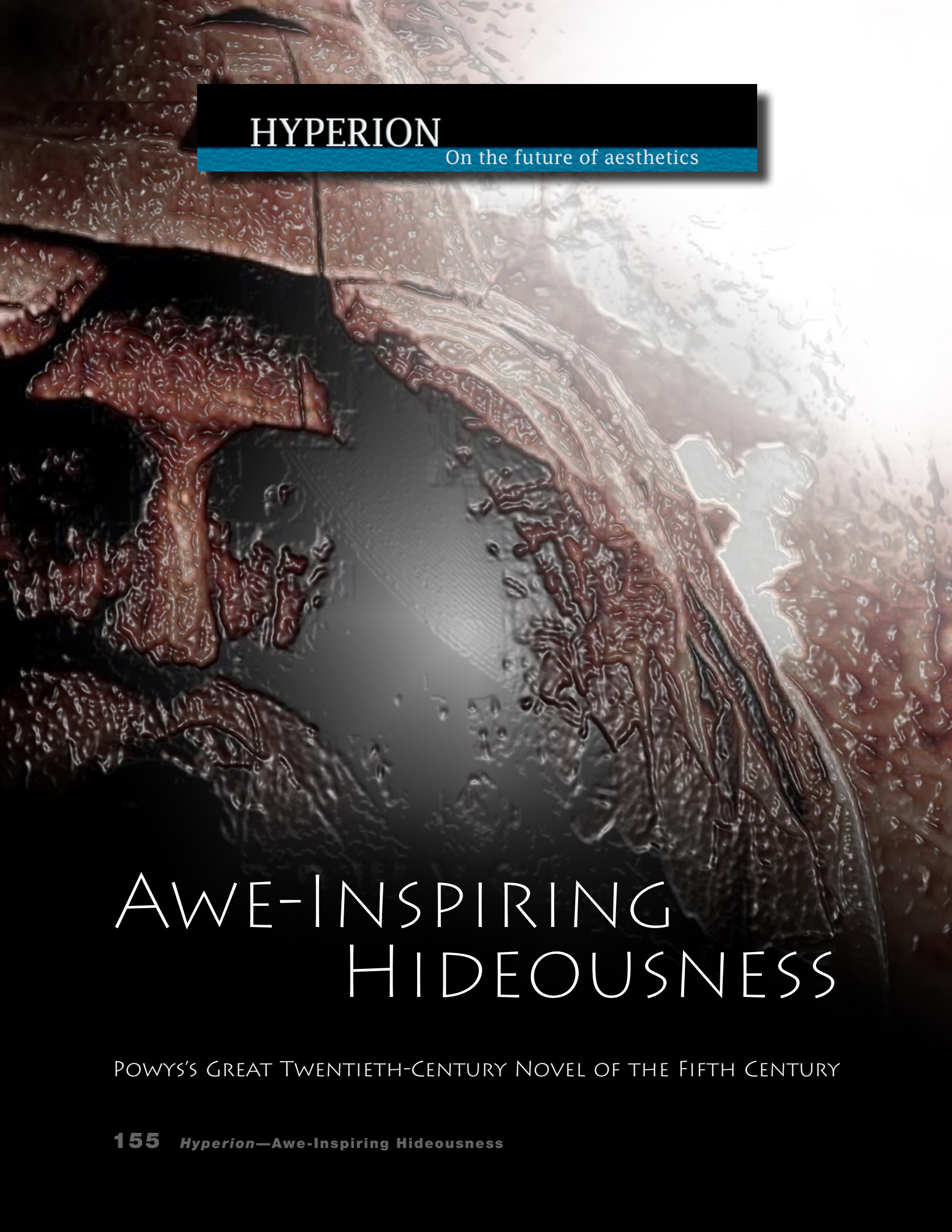
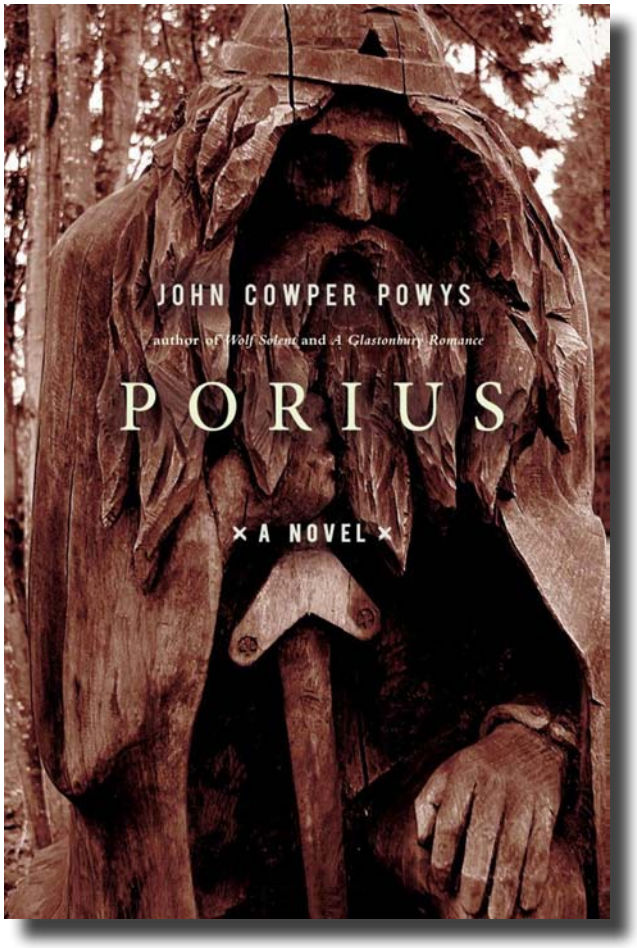


HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Awe-Inspiring Hideousness

Powys's Great Twentieth-Century Novel of the Fifth Century



Porius

John Cowper Powys

Overlook Press, 2007

reviewed by Nicholas Birns
Eugene Lang College
the New School

John Cowper Powys (1872-1963) has always been a far more difficult writer to assimilate than to read. Though it is frequently complained

that not enough read him, in fact some do, not many, but those few of fierce ardor. But he has never entered the common parlance of highbrow literary conversation, instead being both beneficiary and victim of periodic 'revivals' more often than not designed to promote him for some ideological or commercial reward extrinsic to Powys's own vision. None of this has made a dent in his inassimilability, although Powys has reached readers not so much through organized campaigns but through fortuitous pickings-up from random bookshelves; an adept general reader of my acquaintance encountered Powys's *Wolf Solent* two years ago when he was past 80, and it gave him a jolt as few other books had done. Readers who read Powys do not find him hard to read at all—they are fascinated—the problem is not that individuals but the culture has not found a way to read him, has seen him under the sign of his own inassimilability. If this is so, then *Porius* is the most Powysian novel, because it is the inassimilable of the inassimilable, the book least talked about when a Powys revival is mooted, the book least likely to be taught—as opposed to the shorter *Wolf Solent* (1929), teachable if one, as I did in 2000, allots three weeks to it—or to be offered as a representative sample of Powys's genius—*A Glastonbury Romance (1932)* is better for that. Different theories have been advanced for the inassimilability of *Porius*. Jerome McGann, in a 1995 *TLS* article, spoke of *Porius* as a novel so ultimate that it burst the form, leaving any further attempt to write novellas as at best recuperative; whereas a book like *Ulysses* innovated upon the novel, or pastiched it, *Porius* exploded the form so much that to read it would be to dwell upon the bursting of the possibility of writing fiction. In a 1997 issue of *Powys Notes,* Charles Lock, pointing to the use of "gwork" as the Cewri word for "fighting and struggling" (570) in chapter 27, "The Homage of Drom." The outrageous dissonance of "gwork" so horrendously upset the outside referee, Norman Denny, consulted by the original British publisher of the novel, and Lock used this as a base to position "gwork" as emblematizing the glorious indigestibility of the work. Both McGann and Lock, in essence, argued that *Porius* cannot be domesticated, that its wildness, its challenge to normative ideas of morality and perception, is so great that if we were to embrace it we would have to jettison those attributes of the novel which have enabled it to continue as a living phenomenon and, in the 'right' hands, be both commercially lucrative and socially sanctioned.

All this is undeniably true. But this new edition of *Porius,* substantially enlarged and overhauled from the original manuscripts, and edited by Morine Krissdóttir, Powys's biographer and the leading scholar of his work, as well as by Judith Bond, raises the opportunity to find other motivations behind the way criticism has so flagrantly neglected this work. The text, presented in Krissdóttir and Bond's edition, whose issuance is the acumination of a series of reissues of Powys's major novels from the admirable Overlook Press, is not a pure reconstruction from the original. Rather it is a re-expansion of the previously

published editions, incorporating the vast majority of the portions left out by earlier truncation (which, because it was based on the idea that the novel as submitted was too dense and ambitious for an audience, was really a kind of censorship). But spelling and grammar are made consistent with normative uses, and the text in general is made 'presentable.' So this is an enhanced and in many ways redeemed *Porius*, and certainly the most authoritative version and the one closest to the author's intention. But, as McGann would be the first to argue, it is not the only possible 'authentic' *Porius*, and future editors may well come up with different *Poriuses* that, like new translations of Dostoyevsky, might continue to incite debate and interest and renew the pertinence of a novel felt to be especially difficult to digest.

Beyond the sheer strangeness of the novel, it might be well to historicize *Porius*, (perhaps a potentially dreary exercise but such a flagrantly inventive text can tolerate some historicization that might drain a lesser book of all vitality). Indeed it is well to historicize it in two separate ways: with respect to the 499 AD of its setting and the 1951 of its publication (in fact, the text was complete by 1949). The 499 date is meant to signify being on the verge of a century's end, just as Powys, even in the 1940s, was prompted by the apocalyptic horrors of World War II to think of the upcoming millennium. The millennial resonances continue even after the turn of the millennium has passed; the last conference in the U.S. devoted exclusively to Powys took place at the World Trade Center in May 2001, and the support staff that facilitated the meeting fled for their lives from the Towers four months later, fortunately escaping intact. But the millennial aspect of just a garnish; the fifth-century setting puts the book not just in the Age of Arthur (or, as it might be called nowadays, "the long fifth century," but in an interstitial context, after the waning of Roman rule, before the rise of an English national identity, and in a period of history traditionally neglected by the mainstream and left to be valued by eccentrics and connoisseurs of the strange and obscure. Brochvael praises the forest people for not aspiring after a "Golden Age" (194), and those writers interested in the interstitially early medieval have similarly been, as Brochvael says, "beyond it."

Indeed, even somewhat pulpy bestsellers set in this period—such as Gary Jennings's *Raptor* (1993), or the mid-twentieth century novels of Alfred Duggan, have a strangeness about them, an aspect of fantasy. It is indeed hard to write realistically about this period as so few records survive from it and these lack other orderly or inspirational virtues we normally look for from history. All this makes the era inherently destabilizing. A writer of idiosyncratic tendencies such as Powys could very plausibly find an imaginative home there, and Powys signals this by his delight in the representative arcana of the age, the cameos he gives to figures like Boethius (159, 391) and Sidonius Apollinaris (392), whose fastidious Gallo-Roman elegance most likely, Powys admits, had been gathered to the next world by the 499 of the novel's setting.

But Powys was also doing something specific with respect to the history and legend in of the period. It is set in the Age of Arthur, a conceit whose allure has always been that Arthur probably did not exist, but that so little is known of the Britain of his time that his existence cannot totally be ruled out. The Arthurian idea has served as a safe semi-legendary space to play out constitutive dilemmas of the European. But *Porius* is not in fact a very Arthurian book—certainly not as compared to John Heath-Stubbs's *Artorius* (1972) or T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1938-1958)—and in a book surprisingly sympathetic to so many contending forces, the Arthurians do not come off that well: the "new Arthurian cavalry" (38) is seen as somewhat of an unwelcome innovation, their relentless pursuit of battle yielding an arrogance that Porius, our protagonist, does not especially admire. Indeed, Powys historicizes Arthur and mystifies his milieu, making Arthur and his retinue more matter-of-fact and their distant surroundings more colorful, in such a way as to disestablish the centrality of Arthur with respect to his own 'age.'

Indeed, though Porius is (somewhat Sir Walter Scott-style) Arthur's cousin, the Arthurian cavalry (too early to be 'knights') are seen with wary though suspicion, and as a kind of alien body, not unlike their portrait as an ethnically distinct Sarmatia cadre in the 2004 *King Arthur* movie. In truth, Powys is far more interested in Merlin (Myrddin Wyllt) than in Arthur, and the master-disciple relationship Merlin usually has with Arthur in the legends is here largely between Myrddin Wyllt and Porius.

This is not just, though, a turn from the Arthurian to the more primally mythic. It is to some extent, as Powys makes clear that Romano-Britons like Arthur are not at the core of the novel's imaginative vision, their places taken by more aboriginal figures such as the Cewri (giants), called the real prehistoric aboriginals of Wales (25) the Gwydyll-Ffichti (Scots and Irish, or proto-Scots and proto-Irish, but distinguished from the Britons-Brythons, who, though also Celtic, are not only more Romanized but more 'European' in outlook), and the forest people, repeatedly identified as non-Aryan and with connections to the Mediterranean basin and to Africa (Iberian or Berber). These less heroic but more instinctual groups provide the novel's spirituality and strangeness, leaving the Arthurian world as, by contrast, a far more conventional, workaday enterprise—which the giant exception of Myrddin, whose magical craft is far more akin to the unfettered energies of the more fiercely wild people. Yet again, *Porius* does not simply favor myth over history. Porius is said to be the great-great-grandson of Cunedda, an attested historical figure who is claimed in the cultural linage of both Wales *and* Scotland. Cunedda is a much more reliably real personage than Arthur ever shall be, and in linking Porius to his lineal descent, Powys is making sure his protagonist has one foot in the referential world, even as his other is certainly in the fantastic. Moreover, there are all sorts of links in the book to the remnants of the larger Mediterranean world—Porius' grandfather, Porius Manlius, is still as much a Roman of the

mos maiorum—of the old, severe, pagan ways—as it was possible to be in the late fifth century AD. Furthermore, there are still links with Constantinople, a motif that often crops up in Arthurian fiction, as if to make the point that Britain has a connection with the East unadulterated by the attempted mediation of Western Europe, particularly the Roman papacy. Indeed, the Byzantine connection has a pronounced anti-Papal tilt, were, as Brother John goes to Constantinople to combine in support of the Pelagian 'heresy,' of individual choice—that individuals can strive for the salvation of their soul—as opposed to the Augustinian 'orthodoxy' of guilt and original sin—that individuals are doomed from birth because of Adam's and Eve's transgression and can only be redeemed through the radical grace offered by Jesus Christ.

Yet despite taking one side in controversies within Christianity, the outlook of the novel is overwhelmingly non- and even anti-Christian, which is especially notable because so many of the Victorian novels set in this or slightly adjacent periods were conversion-novels depicting the rise of Christianity, which served to compensate for whatever social disruptions were chronicled in the books. Powys is not disdainful of Christianity and understands the enabling role it has played in Western cultural and intellectual history. Yet the thrust of the book is one of straightforward protest against the "new Three-in-One with its prisons and its love and its lies," which, with a quasi-Nietzschean flourish, will "only last two thousand years" (261).

Porius indeed—and this is its second temporal subversion—is part of the late, mythic, less canonical phase of modernism, in which the emphasis was less on irony, disjuncture, and innovation of technique than on totalizing mythic syntheses, somewhat verging on the parodistic. This is the difference between the Joyce of *Ulysses* (1922)—whose taking place in one day in Ireland in June 1904 is paid tribute to by *Porius*'s taking place in Wales in one week, from October 18 to 25, 499—and that of *Finnegans Wake* (1939), and the caustic and elegiac 'The Waste Land" (1922) and Eliot's more serene and harmonious "Four Quartets" (1944). *Porius* can also be seen as part of the New Romanticism of the 1940s, which yielded in poetry such figures as Heath-Stubbs and Sidney Keyes, and which betokened a general interest in the Celtic and the fantastic seen in T. H. White and also in J. R. R. Tolkien, whose *The Lord of the Rings* (1953-5) is a weird counterpart to *Porius*, even containing some of the same names (e.g., "Teleri," originally from the *Mabinogion*, used by Tolkien as a name for an Elvish people, by Powys as that of "The Half-Woman" who provides the title of Chapter XXIX). Powys has all the overt sexuality and apparent reference to the modern world Tolkien positions far more obliquely, yet the works undeniably exist in a strange kinship.

Part of the 1940s valuation of the Celtic (not particularly shared in by Tolkien, but certainly by such figures as White and Heath-Stubbs) is that the Celts were not Germanic. Whereas England had defined itself in the nineteenth

century by its sturdy Anglo-Saxon roots, with the Celtic as a mild, melancholy supplement, in the twentieth century, with Germany as its main enemy, the Celtic aspects of the British heritage were pushed to the center. Indeed, the only ethnicity, in *Porius*'s multicultural, ethnically overlapping panoply, to not be 'fairly' treated is the Anglo-Saxon. In a book with few villains (and this alone pulls it out of the conventional historical-novel category), the Anglo-Saxons, largely offstage characters, are not seen benevolently, their exclamation such as "Wasseil" and "Drincheil" (194) seen as barbaric, and it is assumed throughout the novel that, whatever their other differences, the Romano-Celto-aboriginal peoples of Britain will make common cause against the Saxon enemy. 499 is not just an apocalyptic, end-of-century date but also the fifty-year anniversary of the first Saxon invasion, led by the quasi-mythical brothers Hengist and Horsa. Powys's multiculturalism is, in an English sense, an odd one. It is multiculturalism for everyone except the Anglo-Saxon. Powys fully knew this could never be a reality for either his Britain or Porius's, and despite his close identification with Wales, Powys was mainly English by descent and had only lived in Wales for less than 15 years when he wrote the novel, spending his childhood and early adulthood in England and many of his mature years in the United States. But the novel was written when any sort of pride in the Germanic was, understandably, at a low ebb, and Powys's splaying of identities while stowing the Saxon on the ethnological back shelf is an eloquent dissent from the organic race-mysticism that had stood behind Nazi ideology. This Powysian posture, for all its eldritch interest in Druidic mystery, is actually quite patriotic, and Powys was in a strange way an old-fashioned British patriot. The Celtic is a continuation of the Roman and a precursor to modern Britain. "Eternus, Edernus, Edeyrn," (21) the mantra chanted by Porius on the first page of the novel to image his great-grandfather and the region to which he gave his name, also traces the linguistic way that Roman names became Celticized and later emerged as indelibly British; the memory of "Claudia" in the name "Gladys" is only one example of the Eternus/Edeyrn kind of linguistic mutation. But it also fostered a more general idea of heterogeneity. Powys deliberately includes Jews and even Arabs in his ethnic kaleidoscope. (In the case of the Jews, this is very nearly historical, as Jews were certainly in Gaul at that time and could plausibly have crossed the channel.) At a time when exclusivist racial rhetoric was a live danger, Powys braided together a plurality of mentality, of sexuality, of psychology, *and* of ethnicity. He constructs a Britain not just simply English or simply stolid and well-behaved, without succumbing to alternate essentialisms. This cosmopolitanism, deepened by Powys's interest in other kinds of multiplicity, may well be why Powys has fascinated not just those interested in the Celtic and mythic—for whom he frankly, and despite appearances, does not provide he usual fare—but critics such as George Steiner who are responsive to Powys's never-ending quest for *heterogeneity*.

Porius himself, our protagonist, is an inherently 'multiple' figure. His grandfather is a Roman, his mother a Gwydyll-Ffichti, he has Brythonic, Cewri, and forest people descent. Porius as a figure also spans generations. Porius is young, written by an old man, but there is also a Porius about Powys's age when he was writing the book, Porius's grandfather Porius Manlius, whose name begins and ends with sounds that, together, make "Powys." The younger Porius is far more mystical than his stoic old Roman grandfather, a man of the new age (despite his aversion to Christianity—not the old, a man of mysticism not of philosophy—yet he is also the true heir of the elder Porius. Porius, as many critics have pointed out, is also 'porous.' Though in many ways the novel is a traditional *Bildungsroman*, as Porius, growing up in a time of stress and change, works out the influences of various family and older-mentor figures, experiences an intense, true love with Morfydd, the daughter of Brochvael, while also having other sexual adventures along the way—not so far different from the norm that it cannot be graphed on a spectrum running from David Copperfield to Augie March. The novel concerns the adventures, loves, influences of the young, impressionable Porius. McGann has termed *Porius* a romance, and, for all the different species of femininity and sexuality in it, Porius is still—and this is not a condemnation, rather a testimony to the accessibility of its spirit—a boy's book, but neither innocent nor didactic but filled with the energy of a youth responsible enough to negotiate the perspectives it will have to choose between in life, and resilient enough not to be awed or cowed by them. But Porius as a character is not simply open to experience; he often engages in lengthy, introspective musings, where he corrects earlier misunderstansdings or realizes implications of his own experience. This is what Steiner meant when he spoke of the book as combining Shakespeare and Henry James, although Porius's musings do not at all seem like interpolated anachronistic streams-of-consciousness but simply what an intelligent fifth-century Briton might think if he stood aside from himself at times. This can be seen in a crucial passage from Chapter XXIV, "Birth and Death."

> ….his own mind swung back to what he had just seen which was the first birth he had ever witnessed in his life.
>
> He had differed since his infancy from all previous members of the prolific Cunedda family by taking an interest in animals. Of horses, of dogs, of sheep, of cattle he knew as little as it was physically possible for the only child of a born huntsman like Einion ab Iddawc to know. Then as he had been entirely removed from the circumstance of any birth in his association with his mother, his foster-mother, and his betrothed, his knowledge of the singular and startling accompaniments of birth was practically nil. (504)

What's first notable about this passage is how clear and accessible it is; indeed, it is quite approachable, with the exception of the Celtic names and references, which in many ways lay a false trail of difficulty for a text that, notwithstanding them, is not hard to read. A very helpful *Readers' Companion,* a glossary/annotated guide to the novel, compiled by the distinguished Canada-based scholar W. J. Keith, is available online (www.powys-lannion.net/Powys/Keith/companion.pdf). What is also apparent is the combination innocence and self-consciousness in the musings of *Porius*, related in a way halfway between the Jamesian limited third-person point-of-view and the Victorian omniscient narrator. Porius looks back in introspection, in self-consciousness but what he looks back upon is his ignorance of birth. Since he has not had any experience of birth, he cannot really know his own birth, the conditions under which he came into the world, but this does not prevent him from being very conscious of what he *does* know. In addition, the terms of the world Porius recounts are medieval, and the sorts of animal birth Porius has not seen are just what medieval Europeans would have had the possibility to experience, but the way he thinks about them, without being inappropriately modern, stands far more out of the immediate situation than any medieval mode of reflection would. Porius's whimsical wondering-aloud to himself, his side-commentary, relates directly to the reader above the novel's myriad of event and reference.

Oddly for a novel of the age of Arthur, and one that again is, in an edgy way, a romance and a boy's book, *Porius* is not action packed, and probably this is the biggest difference from comparable mythic romances. The novel has no villains, no metaphysical antagonisms; it is rather a *tour d'horizon* of Porius's anarchic fifth-century world, filled with happy, rogue discoveries, almost "the explorer's delight" of the Seven Seals section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The suspense in the book is mostly episodic, seldom stretching from chapter to chapter; the fiction's animating issue is the self-definition of Porius, namely who he will love and what spiritual path he will follow. Yet though these have *Bildusgsorman*-style determinate answers—he will love his cousin Morfydd and follow the lore of Myrddin Wyllt—several other possibilities are sampled. Spiritually, these include Christianity and Mithraism—the religion of the Arthurian soldiers—as well as the lore of the Cewri and the forest people and adjacent yet competing beliefs of the poet Taliesin and the tale-telling Henog of Dyfed. Romantically, these include Creiddylad the Giantess, whom Porius has sex with in one of Powys's bravura passages, intense without being at all purple or pornographic. Powys's critics have at once exulted in the transgressiveness of this scene and been faintly abashed by it, as in truth in overall torque the implications of the passage are little different from the typical arc of the Western domestic narrative, as the male protagonist engages with and then rejects an unsuitable woman before settling, or re-settling, on a more conventional partner, and the strapping Creidyllad is

only a slightly more unpresentable 'other woman' than is Circe or Calypso. Indeed, the more bracing channeling presented by Porius's experience is not anything explicitly sexual at all, but rather the cognitive reach of his 'cavoseniargizing'—a word totally invented by Powys—where the gulf between body and soul becomes "temporarily bridged" (93) in an omniprevalent ecstasy. Cavoseniargizing is an extremism of sexual pleasure to all of life, or a redefinition of life's un-sexual pleasures so that they attain a concentration usually associated with the sexual. Cavoseniargizing is post-Freudian or anti-Freudian, and not necessarily in the direction of the expansion of instinct; cavoseniargizing is about freedom and non-reduction, which in Powys entails a certain de-sexualizing. Cavoseniargizing extends the animal pleasures of sexuality to vegetative and even mineral life, and this extension makes it more polymorphous, yet also more chaste, more holy. Samuel Menashe illustrated this mentality in "Pagan Poem": "I would break all vows/ That bind me to your bed/ If I could make out/ With one pine instead." Except that Powys would extend this from a pine to the granite and gneiss beneath it.

It is the cavoseniargizing rather than the liaison with the giantess that gives the novel's sexuality its unconventional aspects—bearing in mind that the main relationship, with Morfydd, is not only conventionally heterosexual but lyrically and decorously so, a Victorian editor could take these passages alone and fashion them into a quite moving meditation perfectly acceptable in nineteenth-century moral terms. But there are dimensions to Porius's sensory experience beyond what he and Morfydd share. Some have tried to cast Powys as gay; he was from all evidence not literally so. But he was not heteronomrative either, and his horror at heterosexual copulation (he used a different term) is well documented. Porius is fervidly interested in Morfydd but not possessive of her; when she seems as likely to end up with his friend Rhun, Porius maintains a casual, even cavalier attitude, as if he would want to stand with more conviction in defense of his love but is too detached and too removed from full bodily awareness to do so.

Similarly the poet Taliesin (like Cunedda, an attested if shadowy historical figure) rhapsodizes about:

> The ending-forever of the Guilt-sense and God sense
> The ending forever of the Sin-sense and Shame sense
> The ending forever of the Love sense and Loss sense (478)

He intones against just the sort of Christian sexual restorations on the verge of taking power, proleptically arguing for a twentieth-century neo-pagan transvaliuation of normative values. Yet Taliesin is said to have no sexual

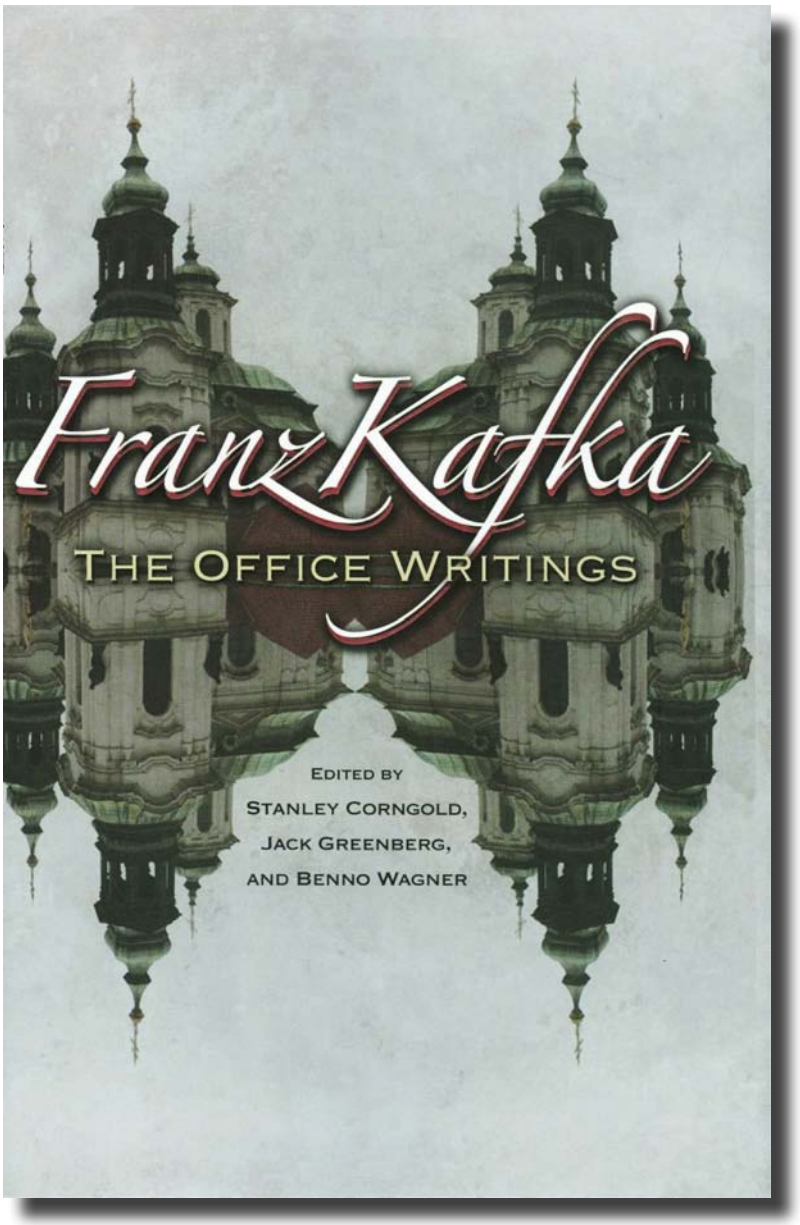
feelings at all, and the repudiation of guilt and anxiety is concomitant with an abstention from sex as such, altogether. The Henog of Dyfed is Taliesin's great antagonist on most issues, but with regard to sex he merely substitutes disgust for indifference, it being said of him that "All intercourse with the opposite sex" (388) was "so distasteful to him" that a woman being in any kind of sexual relationship with a man is, to him, virtually tantamount to her being raped. The novel, in other words, does not unequivocally affirm sensual liberation as the antidote to bourgeois or Christian inhibitions; indeed, the parts of the book most categorically sexual occur in Porius's courtship of Morfydd, which again is very much, in the conventional sense, "romantic."

The aforementioned Henog of Dyfed comes close to being the *raisonneur* of the book. As said before, Powys, in his mid-seventies as the book was written, was too old to be Porius, so he must be someone else, must be the Henog. This is not to say that Powys is notably *not* Porius; an intriguing link is that he had only lived in Wales for less than 15 years when he wrote the book—so as an actual, or adoptive, 'Welshman' Powys was, in the late 1940s, no more than a teenager himself! But the Henog, in his crotchetiness, his intellectual ambition, and, most of all, his preference for narrative over poetry as the privileged vehicle of imaginative art, is surely the actual Powys's self-projection. Notably in only one of many Greek-Celtic puns throughout the book, the "hen" in "Henog" plays on the Greek word for "one." *Porius* is a highly Greek book, remarkable in that, in its represented time, the only aspect of Greece available to the Britain of 499 was, as Powys depicts, Christian Byzantium. *Porius* is suffused with Homeric references, Brochvael's recollection of the Homeric term *aisima*, or "decency in fate" (204), of the "moly" (220) that cured the madness of the men enchanted by Circe, of the blinded Cyclops (223). True, all of these associations are made by one character, Porius's uncle-cum-father-in-law Brochvael, and are kept apart from the consciousness of the protagonist, but it cannot be denied that Brochvael's Homeric predisposition was also shared by Powys himself. As Powys's very last work, even after *Porius*, becomes more fantastic, even more incoherent, it also becomes more Homeric.

Porius has one of the most memorable final utterances, "There are many gods; and I have served a great one." Porius's self-evaluation of the week that has been elevates Myrddin to the level of a god, restores him to his rightful place (as equivalent to Saturn/Cronus) away from his immediate service to Arthur and deference to the Roman/Christian ideals he represents (and which Powys, again, does not scorn, preferring them to the Saxon; he merely diagnoses them as incomplete). Porius admits both plurality, that Myrddin is not the only possible god, that he does represent the only possible set of values which deserve loyalty. But Myrddin deserves loyalty, potentially more than any other comparable object, and most important, he deserves loyalty from Porius. Porius's respect for Myrddin is the indispensable backbone of his

animate self. It is not a totalizing claim, but Porius is defending the integrity of his own beliefs and the life experience that has ensued from them. There is also a domestic marriage-plot-ending aspect to this last line, as Porius thinks of addressing it to Morfydd upon their projected reunion and the beginning of their life together as a couple. This embeds Porius's fealty to Myrddin in a domestic context—and implies that Porius's adventurous days might be over once he settles down to wedded happiness. It also suggests Porius's love for Morfydd—quite the obverse of Myrddin's epic contest with his female foil and rival, Nineue ferch Avallach—is the domestic manifestation of the same desires of which Porius's cavoseniargizing and the "awe-inspiring hideousness" (748) of Myrddin are the more uncanny avatars. It is a double ending, but a conjoint double. The familial and transcendental aspects cohabitate rather than contradict. It is, in other words, an ending fit for all sorts of readers.

Yet who will read *Porius* now? I know that Overlook, for its own understandable reasons, and many Powys fans want this book to sell to a broad, nonacademic public. Yet right now, the only interpretive community equipped to handle and negotiate with the complexities of a text like *Porius* is the academic community. It would be nice if there were a sophisticated coherent nonacademic community to analyze these texts, but there is not—there are only the lonely, perceptive general readers who, in their loneliness and perceptiveness, have always been the pith of Powys's audience. One understands the hopes of Powys's publishers (for commercial reasons) and Powys enthusiasts (because it would make their Joy in Powys more appreciated) for a kind of popular canonicity for the author, but this hope—and here I may well be too austere—seems to me an un-Powysian hope. The anti-academic tone in the introduction—amusingly figured in the parapraxis of academics having "poured" (14) over the work—is tolerable on one level. One should not expect Powys to write mechanically for an academic consistency—but one should not expect that of many academics also, and the entire tone bespeaks a continuing quest for a popular Powys, when for anyone—not just Powys but John Updike or Margaret Atwood—the serious readership will be an academic readership, remembering that academia includes students and former students as well as teachers. What is of value in the novel is that it provides an extremely outlandish yet historically faithful rendition of a confused and confusing time in history, which yields both demographic and ontological 'multiplicity.' The achievement of Powys's strange fifth-century tale, as presented in this splendid new edition, ensures that this readership will have new access to *Porius*, although one fears—or perhaps hopes—that it may yet remain inassimilable.



Franz Kafka: The Office Writings

Ed. by Stanley Corngold, Jack Greenberg, and Benno Wagner

Princeton University Press, 2009

reviewed by Walter H. Sokel

Following the publication of Klaus Hermsdorf and Benno Wagner's monumental collection of "Amtliche Schriften" (2004), the present volume consists of a selection of Kafka's office writings, ably translated into English, with illuminating commentaries by the editors following each document.

Each of the three editors contributes an essay to the volume. Stanley Corngold's poetological and socio-biographical essay, "The Ministry of Writing," which opens the volume, discusses the relationship between Kafka's idea of his creative writing and his bureaucrat's position. It is followed by Benno Wagner's richly informative history of the Prague Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute and Kafka's important role in it, shedding important new light on Kafka's many-sided personality. Jack Greenberg's essay on "Kafka and the Kafkaesque" concludes the volume.

Legal documents, petitions, commentaries, newspaper articles written by Kafka for the Prague Institute form the bulk of the volume. The editors' commentaries following each document shed valuable light on its background and fate. The commentaries frequently try to establish relationships between the documents and Kafka's creative texts, of which I shall have more to say below. The bulk of my remarks which follow here is based on my reading of Kafka's office documents and their historical and biographical context as gathered from Benno Wagner's introductory essay and the commentaries following each document.

Kafka was employed as a lawyer or legal clerk by the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute of the Kingdom of Bohemia, and later of its Czech successor, from 1908 until his early retirement, for reasons of ill health, in 1922. As the editors of the volume emphasize, Kafka played a very important role in the institute.

The Workmen's Accident Insurance Law of 1889 exemplified the Dual Monarchy's imitation of the social welfare legislation that Chancellor Bismarck had introduced in Germany. The Austro-Hungarian accident

insurance was organized according to regions with individual Institutes located in major cities of the Empire. Because of the highly advanced industrialization of Bohemia, the Prague Institute, where Kafka worked, enjoyed a particularly important role among the Insurance Institutes. Kafka's tasks at the Institute ranked high in importance. They consisted of two major responsibilities. He served as appeals officer for risk classification and was in charge of accident prevention.

According to the founding law of 1889, the insurance premiums employers were to pay depended on a firm's risk classification. The greater the risks of accidents the higher the premium to be paid by the employer, and the smaller the risks of accidents, the lower the premium to be paid. The chronic problem with this law was the lack of reliable statistics that would determine a given enterprise's degree of risk of accidents occurring. As Kafka saw very clearly and emphasized repeatedly, the result of inadequate statistics was arbitrariness and unfairness. Employers felt encouraged to aim for as low a risk classification as possible, which led to influence peddling, fraudulence, and overcharging of the few honest employers. Disastrous deficits arose for the Institute. That was the situation Kafka found when he began his work there. However, Kafka had entered the Institute at an opportune moment. Shortly after he joined, Robert Marschner, a renowned Goethe scholar and highly respected writer, took over as the Institute's managing director, with the firm intention of rescuing the Institute, by a radical reorganization, from its seemingly hopeless situation. Marschner liked and respected Kafka, even though that respect failed to result in satisfactory financial remuneration, and Kafka became the new Director's right-hand man in the reform of the Institute. He was involved in path-breaking decisions, and some important texts attributed to the Director, were actually written by Kafka. In April 1910, Kafka obtained the permanent rank of "Concipist," law clerk in charge of composing official declarations, commentaries, petitions, newspaper articles, and, was installed as head of the new appeals department. The fact that Kafka was chosen to accompany Marschner to the International Congress of Workmen's Insurance held in Vienna in 1913, highlighted his importance. The fact that the conference was held at the same place and time as the first world congress of Zionism was of great personal significance for Kafka. The new administration of the Institute, with Kafka's vitally important role in it, turned the course of the Institute around, rescuing it from threatening financial ruin. By establishing and rigorously enforcing equitable premiums, arrived at with the help of a decisively improved accident statistics, the chronic deficits were overcome and the Prague Institute became a shining example of success among the Insurance Institutes of the monarchy. Kafka indeed was

astonished at how easy that success had been and how smoothly the employers had followed the lead once the Institute provided it.

In Kafka's professional opinions, as expressed in his office writings, the ideal of consistency inspired and guided him. Consistency was for Kafka synonymous with justice. He sought to apply the existing laws as equitably as possible. Kafka's concern was to find the intention, i.e., the meaning of the law. In this pursuit of meaning, Kafka excelled in textual-linguistic analysis. His legal opinions are outstanding examples of applied hermeneutics, a close, most careful, and conscientious search for the meaning or intentionality of texts. His legal briefs are brilliant examples of the convergence of juridical and linguistic thinking.

It follows from Kafka's legalism that he was not a socialist. For he accepted and sought to follow the actually existing laws. He did not see the workers as being necessarily and automatically right in all respects and employers as necessarily and universally wrong. However, in accepting and applying the prevailing laws, Kafka sought to do so not only with fairness, but with compassion. He was profoundly moved, shaken, and appalled by the miseries he witnessed. However, they did not lead him to revolutionary conclusions. He kept away from ideology.

In the search for a label for Kafka's opinions in workmen's accident insurance, the term consensual humanitarianism presents itself. That is, although Kafka sought to decide cases in conformity with existing laws and their true intentions, he did so with the fundamental compassion, the humanitarian empathy with suffering that had brought into being the idea of employer-paid workers' accident insurance in the first place. In his opinions and decisions, he above all sought to consider the feelings, views, and preferences of the victims of a cruel fate. He sought to instill in the victimized workers a sense of being truly protected and able to expect fair and sympathetic treatment. He fervently promoted truly universal coverage, seeking to extend compulsory accident insurance to the entire personnel of enterprises and to make sure that equal treatment was extended to all members of the work force. Feelings and opinions of the afflicted were to be given significant weight.

Kafka's liberal humanitarianism manifested itself in the very nature of his professional duties which, as mentioned, included accident prevention. For even more humane than compensating victims of accidents would be to protect workers from suffering accidents to begin with. Kafka displayed most impressive ingenuity, technical skill, and graphic talent in explaining and propagating devices likely to prevent injuries from occurring. His sponsoring of cylindrical rather than flat shapes of wood-planing machines, with their much-enhanced protection

of the workmen's fingers, represents a masterpiece of technological reasoning, supported by skilful and persuasive draughtsmanship. Many accident prevention measures advocated by Kafka were dictated by common sense such as requiring quarry workers to wear eye-protecting goggles. The eagerness with which Kafka pursued the propagation of accident prevention can serve as an illustration of his non-socialist humanitarianism. For accident prevention served the common interests of workers and employers alike. With decreasing numbers of workplace accidents risk classifications would be lowered and employers would benefit by reduced premiums. Thus accident prevention highlighted the common interest of supposedly irreconcilable "class enemies."

The liberal-humanitarian roots of the ideal of accident prevention in Kafka's thinking appear with particular vividness in his conception of and fervent propaganda for a psychiatric hospital for psychically traumatized veterans of World War I. In this project, accident prevention, in a sense, transcended itself into accident cure. Through the most up-to-date psychiatric treatment, shell shocked and other victims of modern warfare could and would be restored to health, happiness, and renewed functioning in society.

Kafka's progressive humanitarianism was fully consistent with patriotism. For, as he expounds in a most significant passage, the state is the totality of its citizens. It is the well-being and happiness of all individuals in it that constitute the greatness and glory of the state. There is no state separate from the individual lives in it. There can be glory of a state other than the well-being of its citizens. The degree of happiness enjoyed by each defines the success of the whole. Thus for Kafka patriotism converges with humanitarianism.

It is the intention of the editors of this volume to demonstrate the relevance of Kafka's office work for his creative oeuvre. They point out and underline Kafka's immersion, due to his legal work, in so many economic, technological, social, and human problems of modernity as having had a most fructifying effect on his literary creation. They draw connecting lines between insurance cases dealt with by Kafka and numerous motifs and episodes of his fiction.

Several of these connections I have found quite illuminating. Kafka's technological expertise, displayed in his efforts at accident prevention, might explain the technical detail of the punishing machine of "In the Penal Colony." In the same text, the radical change of regime from the Old to the New Commander can be seen as reflecting the reforms in the Institute shortly after Kafka's joining it. In their commentaries, the editors set up an ingenious analogy between policies of the Insurance

Institute and the method of building "The Great Wall of China." Kafka's concern with accidents in quarries points to the ultimate section of The Trial that takes place in a quarry. The American novel The Man Who Disappeared as well as The Castle are, according to the editors, particularly rich in echoes of and allusions to his office work.

Going beyond the cross references of detail, Corngold in his introductory essay, "The Ministry of Writing," seeks to deduce a fundamental similarity between the realms of Kafka's office and his creative writing. Corngold seeks to establish an analogy between what Kafka calls his "writerly being" ("Schriftstellersein") and the way of being a bureaucrat. Corngold's essay is richly suggestive and interesting and carries plausibility. However, it ignores the vast generic difference between Kafka's dreamlike and surreal fiction and the mundane reality of his office writings, and it leaves unanswered the question why Kafka himself consistently saw the two realms irreconcilably opposed. Kafka's diaries and personal letters are full of lamentations over the wasted days at his office that should have been devoted to his literary creations. He never stopped looking upon his job as the bane of his life that deprived him of precious time and energy for what he saw as the real mission of his existence—his literary creations. This conflict in Kafka's life leads to a critical question to be addressed to the volume as a whole.

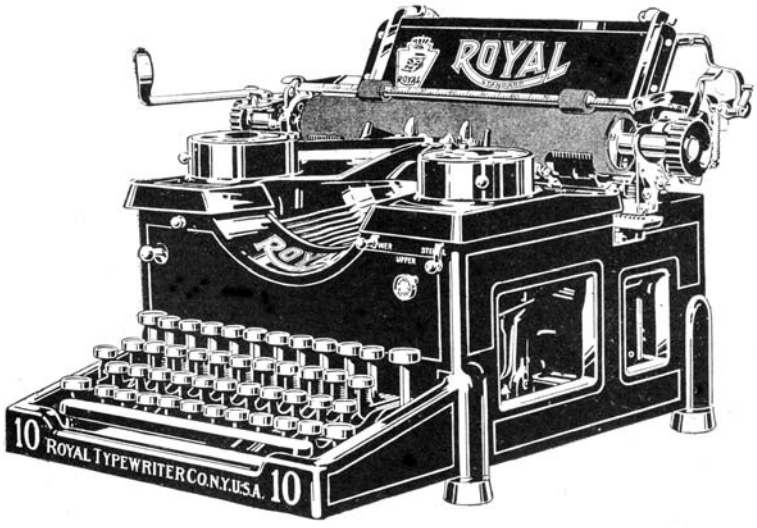
To be sure, this volume adds most significantly to our image of Kafka as a historical being, showing him as an extremely skilful lawyer, a man of high practical intelligence and technological understanding, an eloquent advocate of social justice and fairness, a liberal humanitarian. In many ways it corrects the image of Kafka gained from his literary creations, his diaries and personal correspondence. We also derive from this volume valuable historical information about the social welfare system of the Dual Monarchy.

Where the volume goes amiss, in my opinion, is in the editors' persistent attempts to show a close and direct, non-dialectical influence of Kafka's professional experience on his literary creation. Frequently these attempts fail to convince, and even at best they tend to remain conceptually superficial. Despite its ingenious and highly interesting sophistication even Corngold's essay suffers from the mistaken tendency to equate the two spheres.

What all three editors overlook is the vast generic discrepancy between the practical and societal realism of Kafka's legal writings and the profoundly alienating, dreamlike, and surreal nature of his fiction. A simple equation of these two worlds cannot do justice to the relationship of such vastly different realms. The neglect of that difference decisively

diminishes the value of the editors' interpretive efforts. By contrast Kafka himself never ceased to emphasize the irreconcilability of the two realms of his existence.

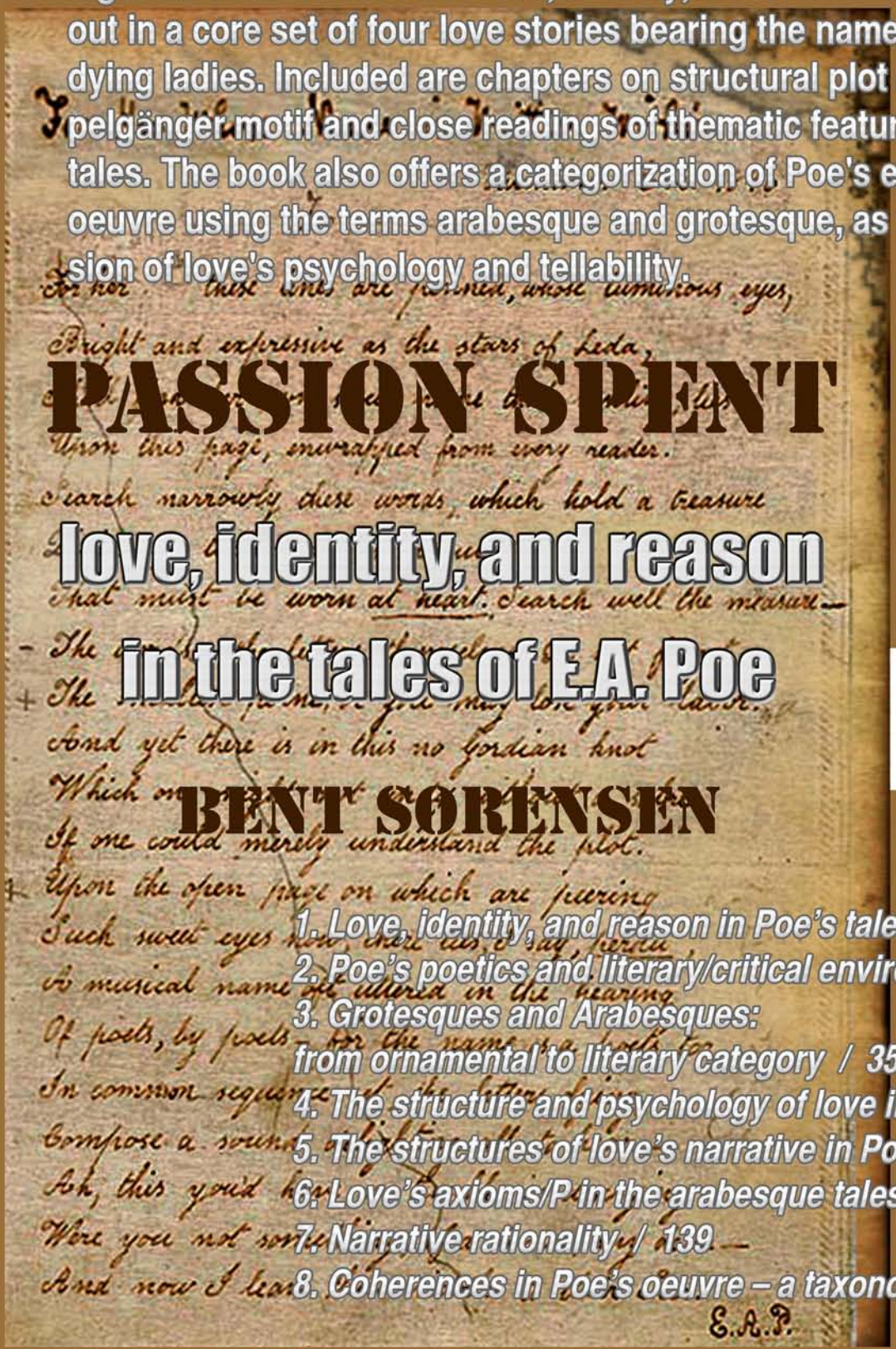
Jack Greenberg's concluding essay, "From Kafka to the Kafkaesque," inadvertently highlights the shortcomings of the volume as a whole. Despite its fetching title, arousing high expectations, the essay epitomizes the drawbacks of the volume as a whole. Greenberg sees the "kafkaesque" relating to Kafka's "frustration, anger, and resentment" in the face of the many instances of "evasion, concealment, and distortion" by employers trying to cheat on their primaries. Such reasoning can hardly do justice to the rich psychological, poetological, and philosophical implications of the term "kafkaesque." Greenberg's essay demonstrates with particular obviousness the general failure of the editors to shed light on the complexities of the relationship between the work of Kafka's livelihood and the work that enabled his life to add an important new word to the vocabulary of literary and existential sensibility.



NEW BOOK on POE

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE | POE AND HIS LADIES | WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO CRACK THAT ONE? | HERE IS A NEW TAKE ON IT.

This book is a reading of the arabesque tales of Edgar Allan Poe, focusing on the main themes of love, identity, and reason as they are played out in a core set of four love stories bearing the names of beautiful undying ladies. Included are chapters on structural plot analysis, the doppelgänger motif and close readings of thematic features in the four Poe tales. The book also offers a categorization of Poe's entire fictional oeuvre using the terms arabesque and grotesque, as well as a discussion of love's psychology and tellability.



PASSION SPENT

love, identity, and reason

in the tales of E.A. Poe

BENT SORENSEN

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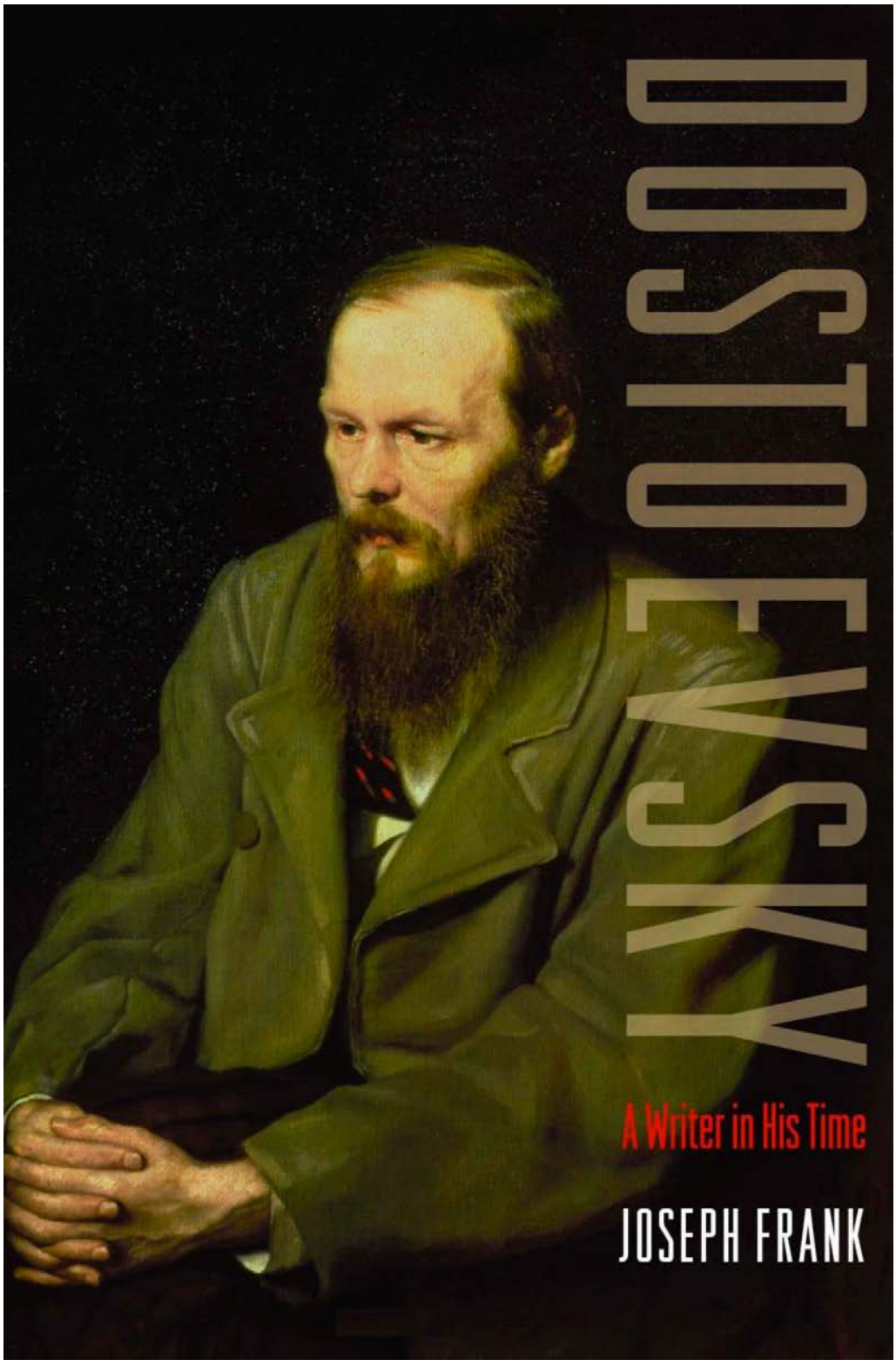
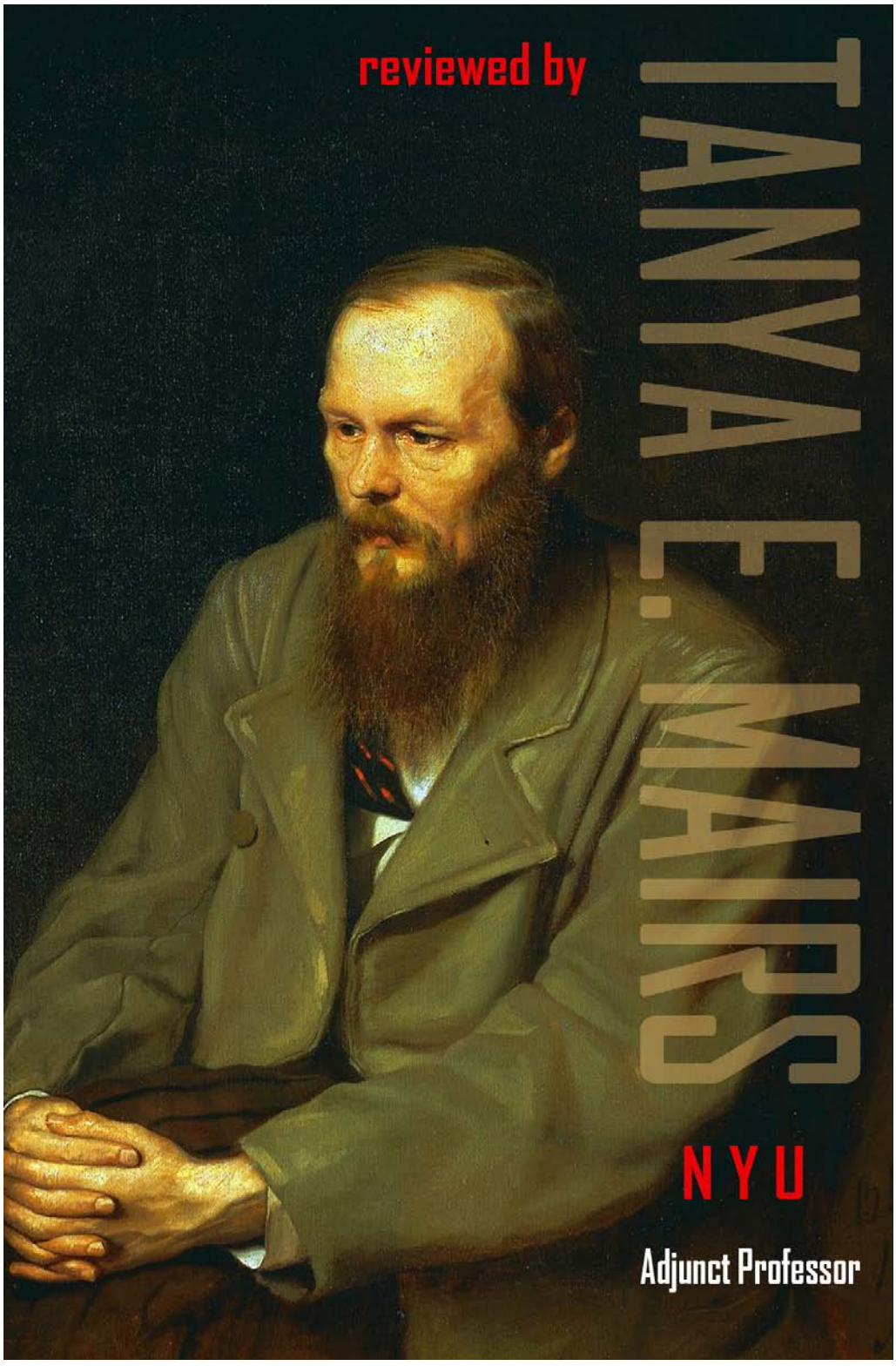

DOSTOEVSKY
A Writer in His Time
JOSEPH FRANK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TANYA E. MAIRS
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Adjunct Professor

Joseph Frank's five-volume study of Dostoevsky, the definitive study of Dostoevsky in the English language and one of the finest works of scholarship in any language, has been condensed into one volume, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*. Joseph Frank's Dostoevsky study presents us not only with an illuminating expose of Dostoevsky's life, times, and works, but a new critical approach in the field of Russian literary criticism. This is an "ideological" approach, Frank working on the assumption that Dostoevsky's works cannot be fully understood without considering the intellectual and political history of the time. Critics of Russian literature had hitherto been influenced by the New Critics here and the formalists in the Soviet Union and Russia. The New Critics emphasized form over content. They focused on the inner dynamics of a work of literature and considered exterior factors as peripheral in analyzing a work. Joseph Frank departed from the New Critics to claim that the historical and ideological realities in Dostoevsky's works were not only not peripheral but were essential to understanding Dostoevsky's *oeuvre*. Frank was himself associated with the New Critics at the time of the publication of his book *The Widening Gyre*, but his "ideological" approach emerged when he began working on Dostoevsky. He combines his recounting of the political and intellectual movements of Dostoevsky's time with his analyses of how these movements influenced and were reflected in Dostoevsky's literary works. And he does so brilliantly. It is the meticulousness and insightfulness that Frank demonstrates in analyzing how the ideologies of Dostoevsky's time affected his works that make Frank such a great writer and critic. As Allen Tate wrote, "Joseph Frank has the disquieting gift of going to the heart of whatever matter he undertakes to expound."

The idea of reducing Frank's five-volume study of Dostoevsky to one volume came from Princeton University Press, according to Joseph Frank himself, modeled on Leon Adel reduction of his five-volume study of Henry James to one volume. And Frank's one volume reads seamlessly. The cuts made were primarily chapters that detail Dostoevsky's personal life rather than historical material, so that the impact of Frank's ideological approach is never lessened.

But Dostoevsky's own life is the chronological backdrop against which all else is set in this book. And Dostoevsky's life was as dramatic as that of any of his characters. Born in Moscow in 1821, he was the son of a doctor. His family

was very religious but also held education in very high regard. Dostoevsky attended the prestigious Chermak School in Moscow, and then he was sent to the Academy of Military Engineers in St. Petersburg. Upon graduating in 1843, however, Dostoevsky decided to become a writer. And two early masterpieces were *Poor Folk* (1845) and *The Double* (1846).

Frank details how Dostoevsky became part of the St. Petersburg intelligentsia in the 1840s, which organized itself into "circles." The 1840s was a volatile time in Russia, with the repressive regime of Czar Nicholas 1 on the one hand, and the young writers and intellectuals who were influenced by Romantic Idealism and Socialist utopias on the other. Dostoevsky first frequented the Belinsky circle, Vissarion Belinsky being the major literary critic in Russia in the 1840s, as well as a Feuerbachian socialist. Dostoevsky then switched to the Petrashevsky circle, Petrashevsky being a Fourierist.

Frank chronicles Dostoevsky's involvement with the Petrashevsky circle, which would send Dostoevsky to prison, but also details Dostoevsky's involvement with Speshnev, whom Frank calls a revolutionary, and Dostoevsky a revolutionary by association as well. At a meeting of the Petrashevsky circle in April of 1849, Dostoevsky read aloud Belinsky's letter to Gogol in which Belinsky criticizes tsarism, serfdom, and the Russian Orthodox Church. He was arrested and sent to prison for four years. Frank gives a gripping account of Dostoevsky's years in prison. He calls prison Dostoevsky's "conversion experience," wherein Dostoevsky entered prison a radical, underwent a religious reawakening in prison, and then emerged with a rejection of his former radical beliefs and with a renewed faith in the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian people, as well as a devotion to the new Czar, Alexander II. To radicalize Dostoevsky in the 1840s and call him a radical or revolutionary is the tendency of Western critics. Russian and Soviet tend not to go that far. They take the position that Dostoevsky called for the end of serfdom and for judicial reform but never advocated the overthrow of the tsarist regime or social reorganization.

Frank discusses Dostoevsky's release from prison in 1853 and his years in exile before his return to St. Petersburg in 1859 (during his exile Dostoevsky married Marya Isaeva). He then gives an extensive account of the development of the radical movement in Russia in the 1860s and l870s and how it influenced Dostoevsky's writing. Dostoevsky's opposition to the beliefs and actions of the radical movements would become central to some of his greatest works—*Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Possessed*. Dostoevsky's focus in all three is his polemics challenging the ideas propagated by the radicals—Chernyshevsky in *Notes from Underground*, Pisarev in *Crime and Punishment*, and Nechaev in *The Possessed*, through the words and actions of his characters. All of the radicals of the l860s and l870s advocated the overthrow of the tsarist regime and

believed in socialism as the basis for the new reorganization. Dostoevsky dramatized in his works what he believed to be the evil implications inherent in socialist and radical thought.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky's last and, according to Frank, greatest novel, Dostoevsky presents most directly and articulately his alternative to the beliefs of the radicals of the l860s and l870s. Dostoevsky believed that faith in God and Christ, as practiced by the Russian Orthodox Church, would morally elevate and strengthen the individual and in turn society as a whole. He emphasized the necessity of faith, love, self-sacrifice, and suffering in opposition to the utilitarian and socialist bases of radical thought. For Dostoevsky, progress could be achieved only through the betterment of the individual by way of religion, not through reform or political and social reorganization.

Dostoevsky's greatness has been attributed to different things by different critics. Dostoevsky has often been called a "novelist of ideas," and Joseph Frank falls into that category of critics. For Frank, it was the way Dostoevsky dramatized the ideological debates of the time that made him such a great writer. To quote Frank, "[Dostoevsky's] unrivaled genius as an ideological writer was his capacity to invent actions and situations in which ideas dominate behavior without the latter becoming allegorical. He possessed what I call 'an eschatological imagination,' one that could envision putting ideas into action and then following them out to their ultimate consequences."

Frank details two of the most dramatic events of Dostoevsky's life—his epilepsy and his gambling. Dostoevsky experienced his first epileptic seizures while in prison. His seizures were severe and continued throughout his adult life. Two of his major characters are afflicted with epilepsy—Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* and Smerdyakov in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

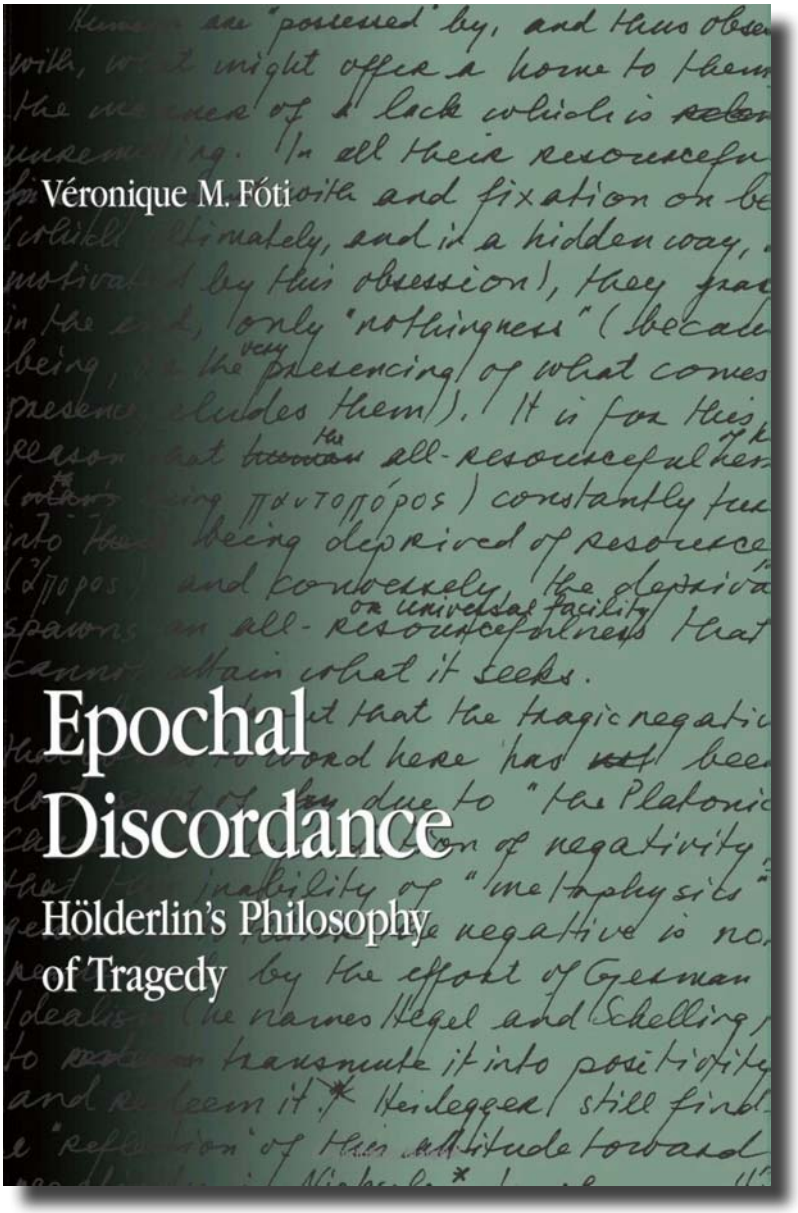
The other very dramatic episode in Dostoevsky's life was his gambling. He began gambling in l863 during his trips to Europe (gambling was illegal in Russia) in his pursuit of Appollonaria Suslova, with whom he was romantically involved. His gambling continued when he lived in Europe in 1867-1871 with his second wife (his first wife died in l864, and in l866 he married Anna Grigorieva Snitkina). Gambling is clearly the focus of Dostoevsky's novella, *The Gambler* (l865). Frank presents an excellent account of Dostoevsky's uncontrollable urge to gamble (he rarely left the roulette table until he lost everything he had). Frank describes this urge as "gambling mania," "uncontrollable excitement," "irresistible obsession," while Dostoevsky called himself "stupidly weak." Whatever the reason, Dostoevsky's gambling was one of the most dramatic episodes of his life.

There are two personal qualities to which Frank connects Dostoevsky's greatness. One was Dostoevsky's belief in his own excellence as a writer

and his unwillingness to compromise the quality of his writing for the sake of expediency. And the other was his resilience. Dostoevsky took four years of prison not as a debilitating experience but as a new beginning. And his claim to having "the vitality of a cat" describes his resilience after the deaths in one year (1864) of his first wife Marya and his beloved older brother Mikhail, one of the most difficult and traumatic periods of Dostoevsky's life.

Joseph Frank's limitless admiration for Dostoevsky the man and Dostoevsky the writer is evident throughout this volume. And Frank's putting Dostoevsky's works within the context of the writer's own life and the political and intellectual movements of that time makes reading *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* all the more compelling and reveals Frank's own genius.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics



Epochal Discordance: Hölderlin's Philosophy of Tragedy

Véronique M. Fóti

SUNY Press, 2006

reviewed by Rosa Slegers

In this short work on an often overlooked part of Hölderlin's *oeuvre*, Fóti provides an in-depth account of the poet's unfinished tragedy *The Death of Empedocles*, his translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone*, and his philosophical commentaries on these translations. Fóti convincingly argues that Hölderlin's work was essential to the "tragic turning" in German thought, which began at the end of the eighteenth century, continued well into the nineteenth century, and later resurfaced with Heidegger in the mid-twentieth century. With clarity and nuance, Fóti establishes Hölderlin as an original philosopher whose commitment to the theme of discordance both influenced the thought of his own time, and provides a welcome critical perspective on contemporary Continental Philosophy.

In disregarding Hölderlin's importance as a philosopher, current studies of the German Idealism have also glossed over the prominence of Sophoclean tragedy in the tragic turning. Sophocles' inheritance, however, is at the heart not only of Hölderlin's work but of the renewed interest in the tragic as it emerges in the late eighteenth century. Though *Epochal Discordance* is a work aimed at readers familiar with the concerns characteristic of Continental Philosophy, Fóti's careful engagement of classical themes in Sophoclean tragedy like katharsis, blindness, insight, hybris, and the struggle between the human and the divine allows her to open up what would otherwise have been an interesting but rather obscure argument to a wider readership of those interested in tragedy generally and Sophocles in particular. Furthermore, the questions she raises (but does not answer) along the way about the importance of Hölderlin's thought

structure today encourage one to engage anew the question of the tragic, not as a question belonging to a bygone epoch but as an issue that will remain relevant as long as the struggle between the desire for unity and the longing for separation and individuation continue to exist.

The "epochal transition" at the heart of Hölderlin's philosophy of the tragic centers around the tension between Nature and Art. Fóti takes us through the different versions of *The Death of Empedocles* to show that Hölderlin continuously subverts his own thought and emerges as a surprisingly honest thinker. As a poet, Hölderlin is interested in the singular, but this interest is contrasted with his tendency, as a philosopher, to "efface the singular in a union with Nature." (31) While, in the First Version, Empedocles' testament to humanity consists in the almost joyful advice to give oneself over to the elements, thereby reconciling "organic" human singularity with the excessive, "aorgic" nature of the divine, Hölderlin ultimately abandons his Third Version of his tragedy because he realizes that reconciliation is unattainable and that the tragic is an essentially separative force that defies all unification.

Fóti artfully transitions from the difficult discussion of the different versions of *The Death of Empedocles* in the first half of the book to an analysis of Hölderlin's treatment of *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone*. These later chapters help bring into focus Hölderlin's preoccupation with the primacy of separation over reconciliation. In Hölderlin's comments on *Antigone*, Nature has become a hostile force, destructive in its excess, rather than the beautiful and maternal power found in the First Version of *Empedocles*. Nature's

tendency to unify, to absorb the individual into a whole that obliterates all difference, is linked to what Hölderlin sees as the major shortcoming of philosophy. "For the late Hölderlin," Fóti writes, "philosophy itself is intrinsically limited, as compared to poetry, due to its predilection for reductive unification." (75) Here we find another locus for discordance, this time between philosophy and poetry. Fóti, understandably, does not pursue this parallel, but once again we find that her book invites further discussion, taking the theme of epochal discordance beyond its proper scope.

The epochal turning Hölderlin finds in the Sophoclean tragedies is the transition from the Greek to the Hesperian configuration, i.e., from classical antiquity to modernity. The Greek "natal gift" consists in the "power of the element" or Nature and "passionate intensity" marked by excess. To harness and counteract this dangerous (because potentially destructive) gift, the Greeks focus on clarity and lucidity of presentation. The modern (Hesperian) natal gift, on the other hand, is one of restraint and clarity and, taken to its extreme, extinguishes all passion and grandeur. The challenge in modernity therefore is to cultivate the "formative drive" toward passionate intensity. What is a natal gift in one epoch must be artificially cultivated in the other, a balancing act that can never result in reconciliation. It is at this point that Hölderlin's concerns about his own time resonate with the concerns of Fóti's readers. Fóti writes that "the epochal disjunction between Greece and Hesperia can, he thinks, point the way, for moderns attentive to its tragic dynamics, to a salutary transformation of ethical and political life." (83) The question we are invited to ask and try to answer is how, exactly, epochal discordance can inform

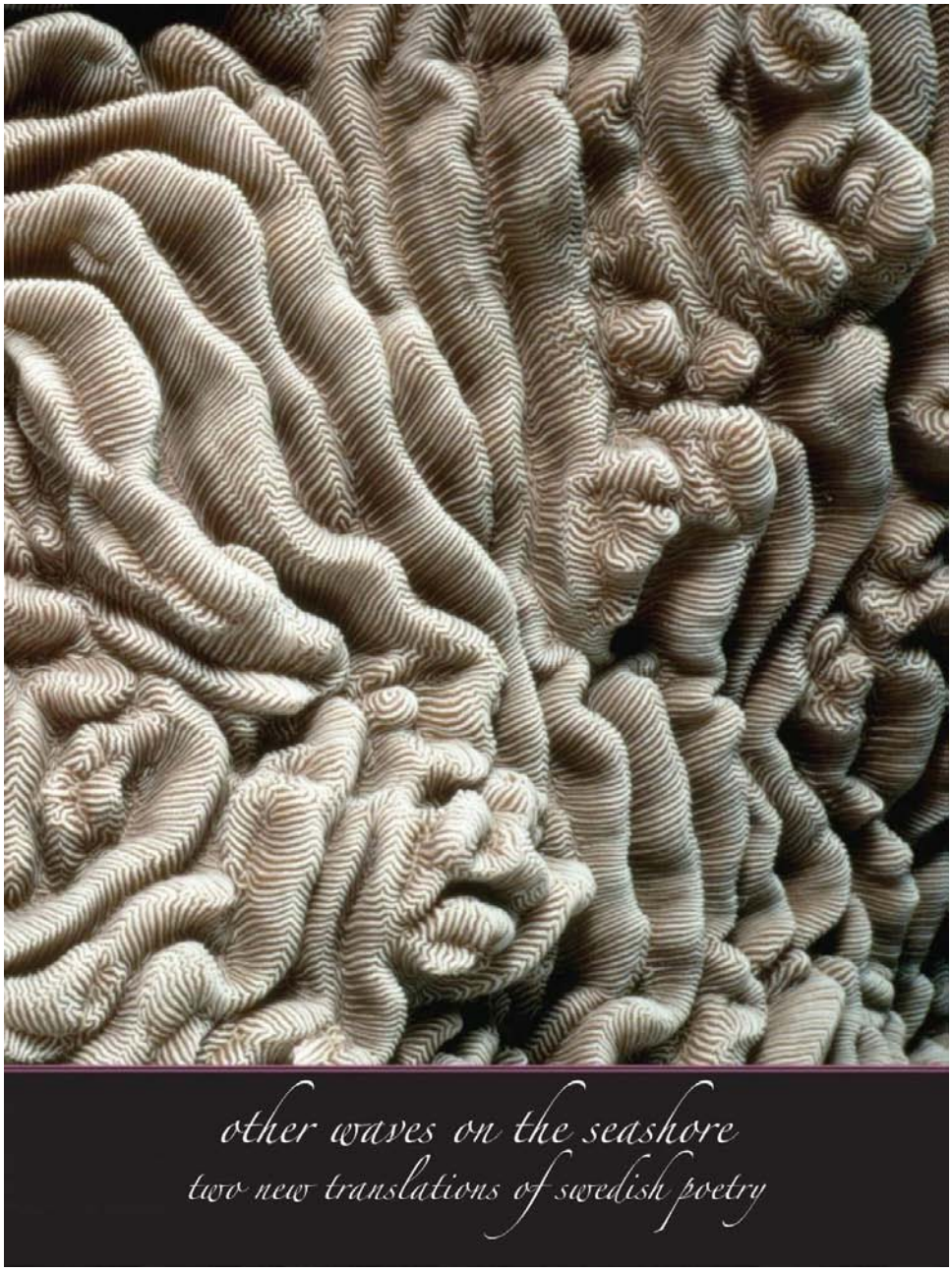
ethical and political life, whether for Hölderlin or for us.

In the last chapter, Fóti looks at Heidegger's discussions of Sophocles as they relate to the main themes in Hölderlin's thoughts on the tragic. Central to Heidegger's discussion is the theme of *Unheimlichkeit* or the "uncanny unhomelike": *Dasein*, for Heidegger, is not at home among beings and cannot come to rest. Similarly, Hölderlin's Greek-yet-modern Empedocles is torn between singularity and the desire for unity and cannot reconcile art with nature, the organic with the aorgic. But, Fóti notes, where Hölderlin warns against the potential destructiveness of an unchecked formative drive, Heidegger appears to embrace it, just like Antigone embraces passion at the expense of the Hesperian natal gift of order and clarity – an observation that of course raises many interesting questions about the sociopolitical implications of this difference between the two thinkers.

Fóti remarks that though the notion of the tragic in German Idealism has been the topic of extensive debate, Hölderlin's influence has been largely ignored because of a failure to regard his thought as philosophy. The question of the tragic, however, is at the very heart of Hölderlin's work, and the many "discordances" outlined in Fóti's book convince the reader of Hölderlin's role in bringing about the tragic turning. If Fóti's work leaves something to be desired, it is only because her decision to restrict her focus to Hölderlin's thought proper and the most immediate ways in which it influenced (and was influenced by) other thinkers leaves the reader wanting more. What are we to make of the disappearance of all female characters

in the third version of *The Death of Empedocles*? How does Hölderlin's aorgic principle relate to the Freudian death drive? What is the significance of the ever less Nietzschean character of the priest in the different versions of *Empedocles*? Do we find ourselves today in our own epochal discordance, and if so, what is the contemporary political and ethical relevance of Hölderlin's thought? In touching on these and many other questions, Fóti both underscores Hölderlin's importance as a philosophical thinker and invites further investigation into the issues that remain unexplored in *Epochal Discordance*.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics



reviewed by nicholas birns
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göran sonnevi, mozart's third brain. tr, rika lesser, 2009
petter lindgren, farawaystan. tr, lars ahlström, 2010

At the beginning of *Mozart's Third Brain*, Göran Sonnevi (born 1939) distinguishes himself from both extreme Heracliteanism—everything changes—and extreme Parmenideanism—everything is part of the One. In truth, not even Heraclitus or Parmenides in their waking lives could have held to their articulated extremes, and so stepping back from either verge is not only tenable but unavoidable. But what distinguishes Sonnevi is that he does not seek a sensible center, a comfortable immersion in the mid-range of experience: he insists on seeking out all possible points of connection even though both continual change and an underlying identity must be constant refrains.

Sonnevi is an unusual poet in that he is at once gnomic, introspective, and political. The beginning of section XXXIX of *Mozart's Third Brain* can serve as a suitable example:

> Snow fell upon the darkness Upon the two
> Who walked up Allhallows Hill in Lund
> In December, 1958 He didn't believe it was true
>
> Nor was it, except for
> A moment, outside of time The world
> closed its huge eye, whose inside was binding stars
> Then sleep came and pain The world is strange
> The world is strange, an alien placeSo-
> Cieties are warped, shot apart Nothing
> can be predicted. The future is the surging
> Of other waves on the seashore Winter (50)

Memory and detail are mingling with a kind of lyric breach. The moment out of time is suspended, promising a graspable transcendence but not one in any orderly continuity with the immanent. The monosyllabic authority of “And then sleep came and pain The world is strange” is offset and earned by the dizzying incorporation of data and experience in the rest of the passage. And not only the layering of present and past but the introduction of explicitly social speculation amid this moment of inward memory sets the tone for Sonnevi’s poetic method, in which public and private come to know each other intimately. The very hyphenation of “So-/cieties” in Lesser’s translation hints at the splayed nature of how the social manifests itself in Sonnevi’s poem. The social is not only ingrained within the poetic weave, but it is made clear there is no redemptive vision of society; indeed, the poem is very much about the tearings-apart of a social frame in which Sonnevi himself implicitly once trusted.

Sonnevi is like Ashbery in being at once diaristic, receptive, and capacious, but with Ashbery whatever diaristic referents exist are sealed off from our comprehension, while the pace of Ashbery’s recounting is quick, often jaunty; Sonnevi is at once more accessible and slower, though certainly not lugubrious. Nor is Ashbery remotely as political as Sonnevi is, although again in Ashbery the politics may be very covert. Yet the comparison with Ashbery comes to mind not just because Sonnevi similarly combines an difficult intimacy with an ambitious intellectual platform, but because this book’s translation into English by Rika Lesser, a distinguished American poet, makes it far more part of ‘American poetry’ than would occur if the translator was not somebody so present in and conscious of the American poetry scene. The lack of periods and the reliance this places on blank spaces and other forms of punctuation are also reminiscent of Ammons, although no form of punctuation assumes the signature role the colon does for Ammons. Not to say, though, that the translation assimilates the poem; quite the contrary, as not only Sonnevi’s sensibility but his primary references are intensely Swedish, and one of the poem’s major motifs is a complex, utterly non-reductive resistance to globalization.

It is often said that Sonnevi’s poetry is difficult, that he is learned in multiple disciplines, from many branches of science to music and politics, and that he shares both his knowledge and his investigations into that knowledge generously with the reader. This is all true, yet to go into reading *Mozart’s Third Brain* with this sort of caveat will mislead the reader, because what we are immediately confronted by—what stands to disconcert us most as readers of poetry—is an intense series of meditations on the crises and tragedies in the news in the mid-1990s, Rwanda, Bosnia, Somalia, episodes of “immeasurable” (78) pain for whom, the poem indicates, those who live should feel not just a vague collective guilt but a personal responsibility. Sonnevi has a been a political poet from the 1960s, but the aftermath of the Soviet collapse made the political aspect of his work more all-pervasive and accentuated

a mode of diaristic notation somewhere between passionate polemic and meditative grumbling.

But is this just editorializing on the issues of the day? Musings that might have been fructifying for the poet's creative process but should be purged from the final product? The New Critics of the 1950s would have certainly thought so, but even today's critic, used to all sorts of expository and political material, has to wonder whether not just the subjects talked about but the way in which they are talked about are journalistic, untrammeled. I would say the answer is ultimately no, that they are cognitive poetic art of what Coleridge termed the "finite-infinite" aspect of the historical. But undeniably the question above is one readers ask themselves before they can fully enter the poem.

This is made even more complex by Lesser's indication that *Mozart's Third Brain* is in a sense the anteportal to *Oceanen*, Sonnevi's 2005 work, which contains responses to 9/11 and its aftermath in much the same mode as the responses to Bosnia et al. in the earlier book. (Lesser, though, does translate a passage dealing immediately with 9/11 in the introduction.) This becomes intriguing because, as Lesser says she will not translate O*ceanen*, it most likely will not be translated in the foreseeable future, as who else but Lesser could translate Sonnevi? For the English-speaking reader, *Oceanen* is the unmanifested completion, the catastrophic sequel on which we are on the other side in the way that, as we shall see in a bit, we are on the other side of much of the meta-affective experience Sonnevi summons in the earlier poem. In a sense the ready adaptability of the discursive-speculative punditry of *Mozart's Third Brain* to *Oceanen* provides a far more clairvoyant and continuous view of the relation of the 1990s and 2000s than historical events, or how the conventional wisdom imagined them, ever could. Yet one desperately does not want to overemphasize the political references in Sonnevi's work, as they are felt to be—perhaps by both author and reader—embarrassing, as if they are there not out of rage, grudge, or bias but because art simply demanded them.

Given this awareness, why are the political referents there, what do they mean? A guess is that this is provided by the fact that, although Bosnia is labeled the "low-grade" (52) genocide by Sonnevi in relation to Rwanda, he concentrates on it more, and surely this interest in the European crisis has to do with the implications of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which albeit highly distantly (remembering that Yugoslavia was only briefly part of the Soviet bloc) precipitated the Bosnian crisis, Sonnevi was 50 in 1989, and it can be argued that Bosnia for his generation represented not just a crisis of the left—its very possibility dependent on a unipolar world where the United States predominated and the Soviet union had fissured—but a midlife crisis, particularly when the poem is studded with the deaths of slightly older contemporaries, and the purest lyric moments in the book are those occasioned by elegies to these figures. With each death, an optimistic view of

history as a quest towards social justice recedes further into the past—"Who speaks now for the lowest? And in which language?" (132) Death is an interruption of the natural order, and parallels the new world realities with their annunciation of strange new dispatches, as witness section XLV, the smallest unit of *Mozart's Third Brain*, here given in its entirety:

> Now Kore no longer wants
> To return to the earth
> In the cycle of vegetation, you say (57)

What this means is not that Kore (Persephone) refuses to go down to the underworld as her mandated cyclical sojourn, but that the entire order of surface and depth, light and dark, presence and absence is ruptured by a more radical catastrophe, as Kore no longer has the strength even to alternate between daylight and doom. The cycle was dolorous but also exuberant in its shuffling of light and dark; now the contrast no longer matters. (And the entire idea is attributed to a second-person other; it is not an experience asserted but an opinion overheard.) One assumes that, in Lesser's translation, the phrase "imagined community" (used with respect to Hades, 64) is intended to bear resonance of Benedict Anderson's phrase, whether or not it did in the original Swedish, ("imaginary community" is used on 96, so one does not know whether the 'imagined' is accidental or a reference to Anderson later varied by another usage). Anderson's book was also generated by the implosion of Communism into contending nationalisms, and this linkage to the unsustainability of Kore's cyclical journey point to what is, from the poems' point of view, some sort of unexpected annulling disaster. Other invocations of Greek myth and tragedy also point to some fundamental alteration of what had been assumed at the beginning of section XCVI. The famous First Stasimon of *Antigone* is not so much inverted by Sonnevi—the original Greek word Sophocles uses is *deinon,* which can mean terrible as much as it can noble to mighty—but has its valence switched to one side:

> Much is monstrous But nothing is
> More monstrous than man Laws being broken through, their sounds,
> Their rhythms toward eternity, their fractal interference forms,
> In the format of expanding fans, trees (116)

Importantly, as the syntax trails on, the tone becomes less pessimistic, as

proliferation at least airs out monstrosity. But this passage, with its revels of *Antigone*, tallies with a far more original statement, in fact a question: 'When did Antigone become genocidal; Creon always was" (69): if, as in Hegel's formulation, Antigone stood for individualism, Creon for the order of the state, it is assumed the latter will be self-interested and destructive, but now even the former is. Again a contrast has been disrupted, and instead of a conflict of light and dark there are only two alternate monstrosities. In the past, we relied on art, on eloquence, on personal distinction, to distinguish those worth supporting from those worth fearing. In Sonnevi's world, that sturdy ground of Romantic individualism is imperiled.

Part, though certainly not all, of this surprising Antigone-horror is generated by looking inward. In a recounted discussion with a friend Lesser identifies as the world-renowned poet Tomas Tranströmer, Sonnevi recounts the failures of the Communist regime in Vietnam, then admits the modern left in the West was partially to blame: "we, too, are the barbarians" (122-3). In a poem about the brain, so many complexities come in here, beyond the political. Tranströmer suffered a stroke in 1990 and is now aphasic, unable to speak, though retaining his mental faculties; Tranströmer nods when Sonnevi discusses composers or politics, but makes no audible reply, assents, but does not engage. Tranströmer's presence in the poem as a kind of silent, vibrant brain complicates the implied authorial posture of Sonnevi. It also somewhat makes Tranströmer an arrogate for the reader—as he listens to and responds to Sonnevi's political and artistic musings—and this gives the reader something to live up to, we have to rise not just to the level of listening to Sonnevi but that of emulating Tranströmer as auditor—which might account for how challenging, beyond the mere density of its referential material, the poem, in its enunciation, is.

These intricacies in Sonnevi's authorial posture mean that it is too easy to make the poem's 1990s political commentary into a plaint against 1990s-style globalization. Sonnevi somewhat shame-facedly takes an overtly "public stand" (97) in the battle over "the European brain." Sonnevi opposed Sweden's entering into the European Union (which Sweden eventually did). While even 'liberals' were advocating this as a means of greater interconnection and hybridism, Sonnevi not only took a public stand in itself but does so within his poem, forcing readers to confront the issue, whatever their feelings or whatever the relevance of the subject to them. And not only does Sonnevi aver that he is not anti-Europe as such, but he is clearly not anti-"universal empire" (142), or even "empire," a word that he uses several times, seeming to reference the Soviet Union, although the post-1989 United States was often said to be an empire. Yet empire in Sonnevi is not just global hegemony but also the cognitive connections between people, the continuum of sensoriness and consciousness, that through which "diffuse power" (51) can radiate. Are there good or bad collectivities in Sonnevi? And how does the individual, if

such a concept survives the corruption of Antigone and the wearying of Kore, deal with these connections?

His poem's deep engagement with music, and with the figure of Mozart, is key to how its mode of cognition advances beyond the categories it inherits. This is not a poem about the new cognitive science or about the connections between mathematics and music, or why Mozart's brain was so special and creative and how we can emulate it. As Rosanna Warren states in her foreword, the very idea "third brain" evokes the familiar left brain/right brain dichotomy of cognitive science, the rational and creative sides of an artistic psyche, but seeks neither to privilege one side nor, again, to posit a wanly synthetic thirdness. The idea of the third has been present in Sonnevi's poetry for a while; in the previous volume of Sonnevi poems translated by Lesser, *A Child Is Not A Knife*, Sonnevi, in "Dyrön 1981," muses, "A Third Term must epistle it cannot exist in language." Its very existence is contradictory. Similarly, the third brain is not the unification of opposites but "excluded" (128), symptomatized by "constant alternation." The third Brain is not so much a faculty that cannot be put into words—that would be the Second brain, 'resounding' (128; both resounding in the conventional sense and re-sounding) with 'music'—but a faculty we cannot imagine. Sonnevi loves Mozart as much as anyone—his reaction to the string quintet in G minor is so strong that, despite all the warnings we have received about 'imitative form,' I gained a lot by reading the poem in conjunction with various recordings of this piece. But his Mozart is not the consoling Mozart, the Mozart whose magic exempts him from the usual artistic stresses and shortcomings, the "collective Mozart" (54) that is "an absurdity, a falsification," but a combinatorial Mozart, one whose range of notes and permutations of sounds reveal "The greater memory…the interior,/ where all substances exist, actual or virtual./ in greater or Lesser degrees of perfection." (48). This plenum, though, is not an organic or expressive unity. Infinite combination does not assume a closed totality or even an asymptotic convergence on comprehensiveness. The "brain's plurality" (7) has its contacts "ever increasing, constantly growing" and this "irrevocably alters" the "simple structures of language." Sonnevi quotes Parmenides to the effect that unity cannot include both everything and the explicit articulation of the One; minus this explicit articulation, there is always one less ingredient there than there should be for the purposes of 'totality.' Plurality entails a constant shift that can be assumed to be the sum of all the world's parts yet never, determinately, adds up to anything. Furthermore, that "(n)othing is unaltered in a brain" (31) means that cognition can take into account life experience, whether the political headlines or the personal losses of departed friends that Sonnevi chronicles in the poem.

So "Mozart's Third Brain" as a concept is ultimately not predicable in the poem; it is not what the poem evokes, nor even what it desires, but what is on the other side of its desires. Nor is Mozart, much as Sonnevi appreciates his work,

a totemic hero, a "collective" figure that, whatever the best intentions of those who lionize him, can, at best, be "marginally evil" (54). Sonnevi shows he is less interested in Mozart's melodic aspects than his challenging techniques by dwelling on Bartók's ascent towards an "immense plateau" (6) residing in the underworld of paradoxes, and leading on to citing avant-garde twentieth-century composers such as Andrzej Panufnik and Girolamo Scelsi, though his mention of Billie Holiday, as well as more melodic modern composers such as Silvestre Revueltas, also shows he is not simply an Adorno-style cultural mandarin. Furthermore, the complex, meditative Mozart that Sonnevi summons is mirrored by a dark Mozart, a harlequin Mozart, a rogue Mozart, a Mozart who "Stalin, too, loved" (132), a Mozart that the literary reader does not want to digest and cannot digest. So Sonnevi does his best to foil the readers expectations of being about to say a highbrow version of "oh, how cute" with respect to the idea of Mozart's third brain; he prevents us from substituting a make-our-child-even-brighter cognitive-science paradigm that parades the appearance of complexity in order to evade its darker reality. Sonnevi is ruthless with himself in the poem, ruthless with the demands of his own production; he is similarly ruthless with the reader, he will not let us escape into an easier version of what we more lazily might like the poem to be.

Sonnevi challenges us because he thinks we are capable of being challenged. He prizes the democratic individual, able to love, to mourn, to make autonomous decisions, to have feelings not just constitute a nexus of appetitive wishes but be the bowstring to the cognitive instrument of life's perception. The world of the mid-1990s did not present only distressing data but also the inspirational changeover to a multiracial South Africa and the election of Nelson Mandela. Sonnevi does not just draw uplifting lessons, though, but stresses how these events underscored what is truly valuable about an autonomous, responsible individual:

> Democracy's secret in free, general elections with secret ballots
> There, too, is music's concealment, its inaccessibility, eye to eye (68)

So often it is said—by both democracy's opponents and supporters—that the public orientation of democracy precludes the secret, that concealment, and, most likely inwardness can only exist where there is suppression or something short of full discursive ventilation. By focusing on the secrecy of the ballot box and aligning it with music's sinuous avoidance of exposure to the discerning gaze, Sonnevi calls attention to a reserve that is not fetishistic, an obliquity that is the art of a complicated self-aware individuality not a by-product of a retreat

into ideology or fantasy. Even the patterning of the lines indicate this kind of secrecy; the space between 'secret' and 'in' is blank, open, but also unfilled; it is both apparent and mysterious: a secret but a blank, democratic one rather than a substantive, authoritarian version. For all the poem's somberness, its sense of being at an impossible end of time, there is some hope, "Not in vain do you give me your rose" (98), the narrator addresses an absent female, somewhat as in Eugenio Montale's Clizia poems, and, similarly, there is some ruptured, secreted, yet available hope visible to the reader of Sonnevi's agile, darkly virtuosic, infinitely concerned meditation.

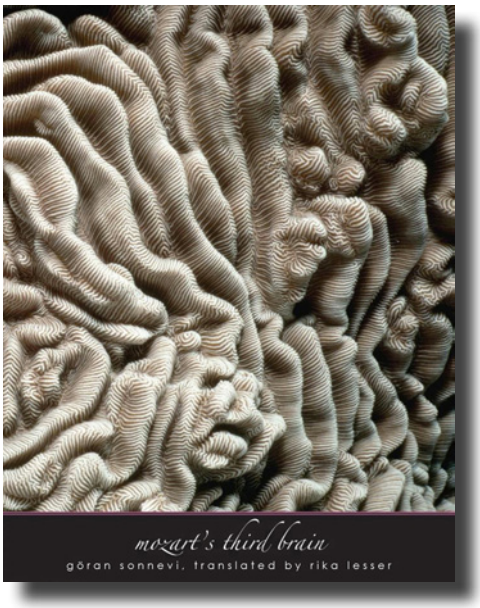
Petter Lindgren (born 1965) is a Swedish poet of a younger generation than Sonnevi's, but more fundamentally of a different disposition. Whereas Sonnevi works within an open, fragmentary structure above which hovers an unmistakable lyric purity, distended but with which the poet is in continuous contact, Lindgren starts with the short imagistic lyric and, retaining its lineaments, imbues it with detritus—"silver-coloured dragonflies" (15), "drinking glasses" (35). Lindgren writes as a journalist for *Aftonbladet*, one of the most popular of the Stockholm daily newspapers, and his poetry has the quality—not at all to be scanted—of an easy give-and-take with the world that comes from many sources but which can often particularly run in tandem with an ability to write good expository prose. But Lindgren is not a referential poet; if one had to place him in any genealogy, it would be a Surrealist one, as his poems continually assert the wacky underside of the ordinary seen even in realistic and elegiac details, such as in "Southward: A Railway Crossing" (part of the sequence "A Slower Kind of Ink,"):

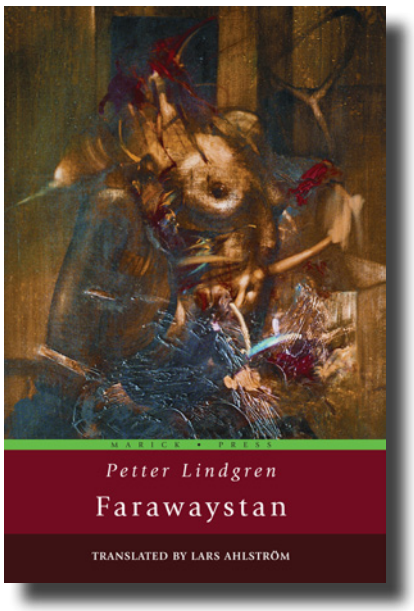
> The clouds that then passed over the landscape
> Are now peeling off in the city's art museum
> Around the old gateposts poppies grow (38)

The interchange between art and reality is seamless, but the import is at once to make reality less solid and more valuable than it might be without Lindgren's, again, basically though idiosyncratically Surrealist prism. With Lindgren, one can relax a bit and return to understanding the meaning of a specific poem, not the very kind of meaning to which the poem aspires as is at stake in Sonnevi. Translation issues also arise; whereas Lesser is an American who knows Swedish well, Lars Ahlström is a Swede best known for translating difficult Anglophone authors such as Gerald Murnane into Swedish. Rare is the translator who has excelled at working both into and out of a language. Ahlström's challenge is particularly great in that Lindgren's effect (unlike

Sonnevi's) depends very much on the individual word, and even more because so much of Lindgren's technique depends on upending our expected ideas of lyric diction. Despite these differences, there are commonalities between Sonnevi and Lindgren, though one has no idea whether these are due to coincidence, milieu, or influence, whether avowed or unavowed. "Persephone" (11) is mentioned as the proper name of an 81 year old, a symbolic inversion of a name that even in descent is associated with youth and elasticity. The very title *Farawaystan* also echoes Sonnevi's concern with the redefinition of the global in the wake of the Soviet collapse, as the prevalence of "–stan" as a suffix became much more ubiquitous after the independence of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, etc. Ahlström supplies this gloss: "Farawaystan refers to the Donald Duck by Carl Barks that we saw in Sweden during the 60s and 70s." So there is a sense of childhood whimsy converging with adult reality. One could argue that Sweden, as one of the few truly neutral nations in the Cold War, has its equilibrium upset by the end of this period more than the main combatants, whose identity depended less on their opponent roles than Sweden's did on its neutral one. This is what some of the rhetoric otherness in Sonnevi pertains to; in Lindgren, it is more of a purely mental state, at times one of memory and desire, at others a half-burlesque nightmare where dark if preposterous manipulators direct the fates of objects and people. At times these take on more specific contours, as in poems 11 and 12 of the sequence "Portrait of The Dead Owner of a Small Boat," where environmental extremity is used as a metaphor of a limit-situation, of somebody attempting, if not succeeding, to evade external control. The poetry here is not just in one mode; prose poem and lyric, self-reflexive conjuring—the name "Lindgren" is at one point explicitly evoked—mingled with the palpable if acrid detail: "here and there a taste of zinc, like old mailboxes" (39).

In one of the most personal, elegiac passages in *Mozart's Third Brain*, Sonnevi declares that "(t)he future is the surging/ of other waves on the seashore." We know that the future will come and how it will arrive, but we do not know what it will be: its shape, its force, its affect. Lindgren's collections ends with a prose poem on waves, with the conceit that all waves are sent by members of a bureaucracy, of increasingly diminishing rank as the waves proceed. Sonnevi's vision of flux and Lindgren's comic paranoia are drastically opposite in purport, but both are responses to unpredictability, searches for patterns that are not redemptive, consolatory or perhaps even positive. Sonnevi is a poet of more magnitude than Lindgren, but this willingness to ask the ontologically tough questions, to not settle for platitudes, to abide provocatively in the infinite space between Heraclitean change and Parmenidean unity, is a notable trait in these two outstanding translations from the Swedish.


mozart's third brain
göran sonnevi, translated by rika lesser


MARICK • PRESS
Petter Lindgren
Farawaystan
TRANSLATED BY LARS AHLSTRÖM

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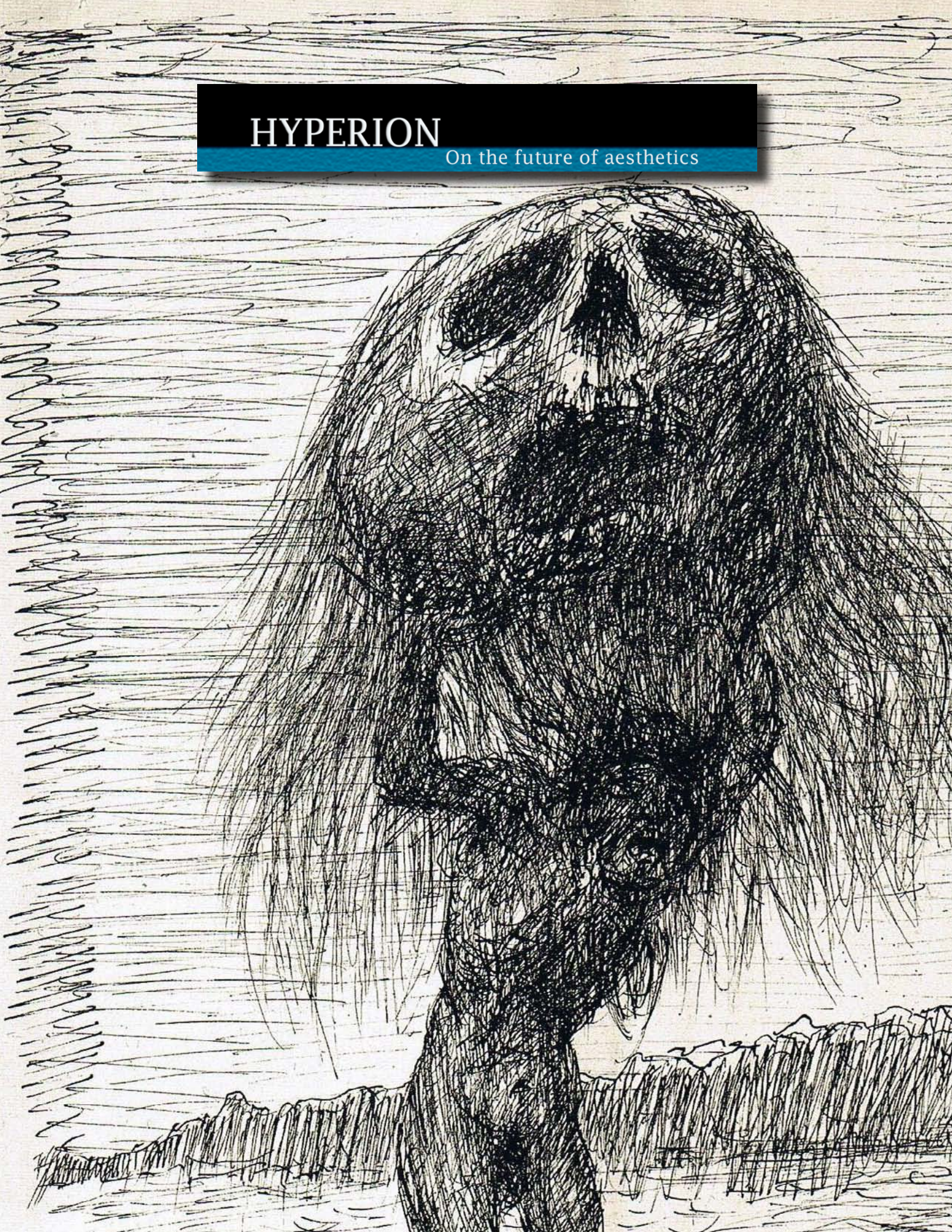
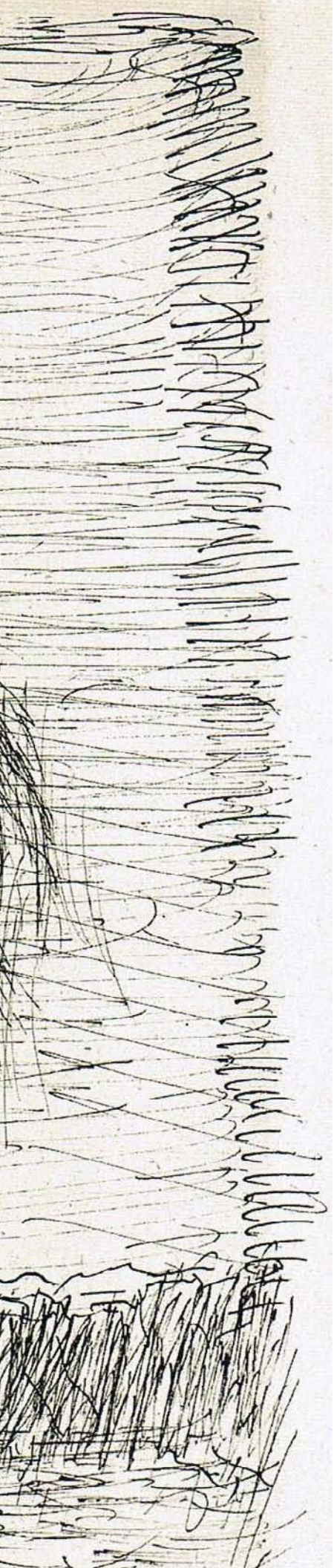
On the future of aesthetics





Theatre's Impossible Promise

The Void by Hybrid Stage Project

by David Kilpatrick

The Void. Written and conceived by Fulya Peker and Deborah Wallace. Incubator Arts Project (inside St. Mark's Church), 131 E. 10th St., NYC. October 2010.

With The Void, the Hybrid Stage Project bring the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy to the contemporary stage in a production that blends disparate trends from the theatrical avant-garde, resulting in a Modernist imagining (rekindling?) of lost ritual from forgotten mystery schools. A solitary figure works with chalk on the bare black stage, the white circle growing as he mentally slips into the absence opened by his marks on the floor. Two female figures provoke and perplex him throughout the rest of the play. No lover's triangle, it is unclear if they serve or imprison him, or perhaps they are simply complimentary states conjured from his unconscious. He asks them who they are, only to be told not yet, the promise of identity revealed never delivered.

This obscure scenario is not altogether unfamiliar to theatre-goers accustomed to the pilgrimage to St. Mark's Church to witness Richard Foreman's plays for his Ontological-Hysteric Theater. Though Foreman has decided to withdraw the Ontological from its permanent home, the Incubator Arts Project, a spin-off from the Ontological dedicated to developing new talent, carries the legacy in the same space. The writer-performer team of Fulya Peker and Deborah Wallace, having worked with Foreman's Ontological, extend the mission into arguably darker terrain.

Though less overtly erotic and violent than Foreman's signature style, the

performers in *The Void* employ mannered gestures and diction, refusing the transparent comfort of realism. The players spit verse at one another filled with ontological riddles like "why is there something rather than nothing?" The effect is disorienting, often hypnotic, as efforts to discern narrative prove futile. The minimalist set and lighting design by Nate Lemoine and Zach Murphy, respectively, serve the play's (in)action well, as Julian Mesri's sound design provides a mix of industrial scratches with Tibetan drones to further the otherworldly sensibility.

In describing Peker's directing style with her 2007 piece, *Requiem Aeternam Deo* (an adaptation of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), I used the term "ritual expressionism." Together with Wallace, this methodology continues. *The Void* is inspired by the work of Alfred Kubin, the Austrian Expressionist associated with the Blue Rider group, especially his drawings and novel, *The Other Side*. So this play is loyal to the Expressionist exploration of inner vision.

Mark Jaynes is a potent mix of daring and vulnerability as the artist, his anxiety and curiosity viral. Perhaps based upon Kubin, his character is of the lineage of Shakespeare's Hamlet and Mallarmé's Igitur, as one who explores the dark night of the soul, lost in the cruel abyss of non-knowledge. Peker and Wallace likewise radiate intensity, both enchanting and disturbing like a psychic dominatrix.

The Void is a fascinating forty-minute one-act that rejects the cynical post-postmodernism that dominates Off-Off-Broadway. Instead, the Hybrid Stage Project dare the audience to share in their exploration of theatre's impossible promise.

Alfred Kubin, *Der Tod kommt in die Welt*, 1947

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