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John Mosier

THE ARTIST UNDER SOCIALISM: INTRODUCTION

During the last one hundred years the relations between the arts and socialist ideologies of any stripe have been confusing, complex, and ultimately calamitous. As a result artists and intellectuals have developed a curious schizophrenia. In its earlier phases socialism, expropriated by Marx and Engels, commandeered by Lenin, and propelled to statehood by curious circumstances, attracted a host of artists and thinkers. Whatever the ultimate beliefs and intentions of men like Mayakovsky and Eisenstein, Shostakovich and Bulgakov, the excellence of their art legitimized the socialist ideal as surely as the more intellectualized contributions of Lukács, Gorky, and even John Reed.

In the West these ideas flourished, and they provided the nourishment for writers as diverse as Bertolt Brecht, Graciliano Ramos, and Jaroslav Hasek. These writers were not, of course, generic socialists. Technically they were communists, and their idea of socialism came not from Marx—many of whose works were not yet available—but through a systematic party pedagogy whose major texts were authored first by Lenin and then by Stalin. But their ideological beliefs were more or less obscured; first by their achievements as artists: the pragmatic societies of the West tended to accept talent regardless of the impulses behind it; and second by the persistent general fascination with the ideals of socialism, which, as this century wore on, seemed increasingly brighter from Paris and Mexico City than from Moscow or Leningrad.

Paradoxically, the more artists and intellectuals suffered under Stalinism, the greater the impact of Marxist thought in the West. By the time of Stalin's death socialist ideology, whether called Marxist, Marxist-Leninist, or communist, had become an important component of European intellectual life. In France and Latin America it may have been the most important component of that life. Although rigorously critical of capitalism, and capable of works that revealed a formidable intellectual prowess, Marxist

intellectuals were curiously naive about life in socialist countries. Whatever the country—Russia, Cuba, China, Vietnam—and whenever the time, their perceptions were remarkably ingenuous.

But after Stalin's death there followed a rapid sequence of revelations about socialist life, beginning with Krushchev's famous address to the party, and ending with the occupation of Prague in 1968. Some Europeans would transfer their devotions to the prospects for socialism in the emerging nations. But on the whole they reversed their course: the loss of the Communist Party's clout in French elections is a remarkably good indicator of the decline of the importance of Marxist thought in France. Although there have been isolated attempts to revivify socialist thought by purgation, revision, and complete transformation, those attempts have increasingly been on the margins of European intellectual life.

But in North America, where intellectuals traditionally have a perverse fascination with previously owned and discarded continental ideas, Marxist thought was only being discovered, and in a most peculiar way. It was truly Marxist, because it derived more from an inspection of Marx than of his great apostles, and it was more purely intellectual, because it was so little concerned with the artist himself, or with the actual achievements of those societies where Marx was plastered on every available wall.

The theoretical achievements of North American Marxists, although often brilliant, were usually, to paraphrase Milosz on Lacanian criticism, untenable. Given the cultural vacuum in which such criticism operates, the results are neither surprising nor unusual; rather it should be seen as testimony to the persistence of medieval scholastic traditions. The more serious criticism that one can level is that the energy consumed diverts attention away from the actual phenomenon to which this issue is devoted, and that is the emergence of an unusually gifted and powerful group of artists whose attitudes are the

result of their experiences inside socialism. Although the title of this supplement is deliberately neutral, it would not be far wrong to call it "a portrait of the new socialist artist," for the portraits revealed here are of a group of artists and intellectuals whose world views are dramatically the contrary of what has customarily been the case. What is revealed is a group of serious and penetrating thinkers who, although they have been formed by socialism, remain sceptical of its achievements and its promise.

This attitude has been caused not by anything the West has done, but by socialism itself, and in the opening essay (part of a forthcoming book on the cinema of Eastern Europe), Jacek Fuksiewicz shows how this all came to pass, and how it related to the artist. Although it is not his main purpose, his essay demolishes a few of the hoarier myths about socialist intellectual development along the way. Fuksiewicz' perspective is particularly important given his position as one of Poland's outstanding film critics: his book on Polish cinema is the basic reference work for foreigners, while his analyses of American television and the media are basic texts for his own countrymen.

The core of this issue, however, is a set of interviews. Krzysztof Zanussi is not only one of Poland's most important directors, but one of its foremost intellectuals, and he illuminates the critical differences between the two cultures of socialism and capitalism. At the same time, he makes very clear the deep interest in moral philosophy that characterizes his works. Zanussi's scepticism, his anti-dialectical moralism, and the sharpness of his vision, may reasonably be taken as the intellectual signature of the new socialist artist.

Andrew Horton, who helped to conduct two of these interviews, illustrates how closely the artistic and intellectual life can be linked: in addition to his extensive critical writing on the cinema of North America and Europe, he is an accomplished scriptwriter who worked with

Srjan Karanovic on the script for Karanovic's film *Something in Between*. This close linkage can also be seen in Slobodan Sijan and Zsolt Kézdi-Kovács. Both are accomplished directors whose interests extend considerably beyond the narrowly cinematic. Sijan makes us aware of just how wide the range of influences on an artist in a socialist country can be, while Kézdi-Kovács emphasizes the responsibilities he feels towards his audience. On a less happy note, Fox Butterfield, a keen observer of China, talks about the situation there. Despite its numerous unique qualities, there is much about the Chinese situation that was, and is, applicable to other socialist countries, and the same is true of Cuba, whose troubles are exemplified by the poet Armando Valladares.

Filmmakers increasingly bulk large in any discussion of the socialist artist. Their works are the least restricted by problems of language, and have brought their ideas to wide audiences both inside and outside of their native countries. This is not to imply, however, that the other arts are insignificant. Three works by the talented young Yugoslavian writer, Drago Jančar, serve as an impressive reminder of the sheer amount of talent which remains always beyond the grasp of those of us whose language facilities do not extend to Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, or Serbo-Croatian.

Rounding out a somewhat unusual issue is a portfolio of still photographs from Miklos Jancso's *Hungarian Rhapsody*. This handful of moments from Janos Kende's cinematography is a reminder of the achievements of these artists. The cover photograph, from Istvan Szabo's *Mephisto*, is a reminder of another sort: in this century, at least, it has been increasingly difficult for the artist or the intellectual to maintain any illusions about the purity of his undertaking. □

John Mosier is the film editor of the New Orleans Review.

THE ARTIST AND THE STATE: BARDS AND JESTERS, SOCIALISM AND REALISM

In the penultimate sequence of Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* the party goes celebrating the end of World War II greet the dawn by forcing the tired musicians to strike up the famous Polonaise that has traditionally been a national tune of patriotism for Poles. But the music is sadly and unexpectedly discordant: the weary musicians defile their national hymn while the troubled and despondent heroine is led through the steps of the dance. As the day breaks, the doorman hoists the flag; meanwhile Maciek is expiring on the ash heap. This disturbing sequence of images suggests that the new era that is dawning is scarcely heroic, but rather one in which, as the drunken journalist has prophesied earlier, the scum will rise to the top. *Ashes and Diamonds* is thus both a personal film about two young people whose chance at happiness is thwarted by the hero's misguided sense of duty and a powerful public statement about the predicament of Poland after 1945. Both Maciek's dilemma and the way he resolves it—choosing honor over love, patriotism over realism—have strong resonances with the tragic predicament of Poles.

Wajda's film is an important one because it was the first successful attempt by a director from Eastern Europe to make a strong political statement about his country's past and its present. Any thoughtful student of the cinema can appreciate the power and the poetry of films such as *Ashes and Diamonds*—and many have done so—but understanding the significance of his achievement and the courageousness of his artistry is a substantially more difficult task. The more closely one looks at the film, the more puzzles one finds.

Maciek, for example, far from being a communist himself, aims to assassinate a veteran party member who has returned with the victorious Red Army. Why would a director working in a communist country have as his protagonist a killer of communists? And this older man, Szczuka, is if anything as attractive in his

own way as Maciek is in his. Why, having made his hero an anti-communist assassin, does the director emphasize the positive side of his staunchly communist victim? Why is the ending of the film, with its series of dispirited images, the way it is?

Reading the novel on which the film is based only confuses the issues further, because Wajda's film is a drastic simplification and compression of the situations and characters of the novel: the point of view has been dramatically shifted. Only a handful of the many characters of the novel are left. There is nothing in the novel like the successive climaxes of the film, and the two dramatic death scenes have no precedent in the book at all. This last death scene, of Maciek on the ash heap, is exceedingly grotesque. Like the opening assassination scene in the chapel, it has a romantic sweep to it that has both bemused and disturbed critics from the very first.¹

Most viewers, when faced with such a predicament, adopt one of several strategies. They may dismiss the film as a seriously flawed work, arguing that whatever they do not understand is by definition bad. They may dismiss the intellectual thrust of the film entirely: the film is good, or important, because of the way its sounds and images are knitted together on the screen. If they are historically inclined, they might add that the film is important because it is one of the first examples in Eastern Europe of the successful integration of advanced Western cinematic techniques. Finally, there are those

¹One of the earliest and best expressions of this point of view is in Georges Sadoul's *Dictionary of Films*, trans. and ed. Peter Morris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) 288-289. For a fair assessment of the film's importance, see Antonin Liehm's "Polish Cinema Since the War," *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Richard Roud (New York: Viking Press, 1980) 2.788. In an earlier study Liehm refers to the film's "complicated symbolism" without elucidating it. He also implies that the film is a close adaptation of the novel. This is not true. See Mira and Antonin J. Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 180.

viewers who understand the political and historical subtext of the film as well as they wish. They feel that the cinema is primarily an entertainment medium; as such it must always tell an accessible story. This is not to say that they are opposed to ideas, or that they necessarily envision a cinematic world of kitsch, only that they are ill-at-ease with films whose purposes are so far outside their notions of art.

But the best films of Eastern Europe are works whose significance, thrust, and intentions fall far outside the traditional realm of pure cinema aesthetics. *Ashes and Diamonds*, whether a great work or a curiosity piece, is primarily a film of political ideas. Its aim was not to rouse the population, or to exhort them to sweeping political changes, but to make them consider their situation in the light of Polish history. For most of us, then, Wajda had made a film which relied on the audience having an understanding of certain key codes which were only readily apparent to Eastern Europeans.

The first code stems from the most striking contemporary feature of the three countries, the communist state itself of which the present governments are but variants. This state may be thought of in two ways. It is, of course, an actual set of governments which trace their legitimacy first to the October Revolution and later to the victorious struggle against the fascists terminated by the end of WWII. For the inhabitants of the three countries the communist state has historically been the Stalinist state. But Stalin and Stalinism is simply the practical or concrete side of an ideology, Marxism-Leninism, that provided an education for the film artists as well as giving them a theory of art and history. Under Stalin there was little choice but to accept the ideology. Even though it was a forced ideology, it was still one with great impact, and it must be understood. The communist state has two manifestations: its political existence as a state, or as a party trying to seize a state, and its intellectual existence as an ideology which, uniquely among modern ideologies, has its own theory of art.

The state's code embraces both a theory of art and a theory of artistic value. It specifies what can be discussed and what the effects on the audience should be. It is elaborate, complete, and has its own spokesmen. Little has been written linking the theory and practice of socialism under Stalin. Both an understanding of Marxist aesthetics and of the modern Marxist state remain surprising lacunae for most people, a lack of knowledge

made all the more surprising by the wealth of writings both on Stalinism as a personal political system and on Stalinist aesthetics, social realism. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult to evaluate the significance of earlier works such as *Ashes and Diamonds* and *Report on the Party of the Guests* as well as the more recent works—*Mr. and Mrs. Ma, of Marble*, *Diary for My Children*, *The Witness*, *Camouflage*, *The Stud Farm*, *Angi Vera*—which all attempt at explaining and evaluating that society and its beliefs.

After Stalin's death, the prospects for artists—as for everyone else—improved substantially. They improved in different ways in the three countries, as elsewhere in the region, and this combination of diversity and change has made it surprisingly difficult for Westerners to visualize contemporary life there. It is very far from the terror of the early 1950s, but equally far from being a monochromatic image of Sweden. When the drunken student in Zanussi's *Camouflage* publicly asks the rector, "Do you read Dostoevsky?" he exposes one of its more sensitive nerves. The exposure of such areas, largely uncharted territory for Western Europeans and North Americans, is one of the chief aims of a director like Zanussi, who has remarked that "*Camouflage* met with popular success not because people wanted to know what happens at the university, but because they recognized some diagnosis in the film that applied to the rest of society."² Directors like Zanussi, Meszaros, and Chytilova are perceptive social critics whose views of the possibilities of life under socialism should be weighed very carefully—after one has some idea as to what life under socialism is actually like.

On the one side there was the official reality of the state; on the other, the empirically verifiable and emotionally more satisfying world of the artist's experience. Some directors, like Zanussi, communicated this bipolarity directly in their films. Others, like Jan Nemec and Istvan Gaal, resorted to more elliptical means, making films which were like fables. Indeed this is the aspect of the artist's code which has impressed most Western viewers, for better or worse. But films which rely on what might be termed the

²Quote from "The Workings of the Pure Heart: An Interview with Krzysztof Zanussi." *Cineaste* 11.2 (1981): 27. The rector has not read Dostoevsky because he is an uneducated oaf, and also because Dostoevsky had become a relatively unacceptable writer after Gorky's 1934 speech inaugurated socialist realism. If he had read Dostoevsky, he wouldn't be so surprised when the student bites him on the ear.

Aesopian mode actually constitute only a small portion of the films made, and, once aware of the limits of life under contemporary socialism, the range of techniques used by the artists is impressive.

Finally, there is what might be called the historical code, which explains among other things why Wajda would make *Ashes and Diamonds*, and it does so in two ways. First, it is in the history of the artists in the region that one sees the ways that they have seen themselves and the functions of their art. On the one hand this is simply a formal way of explaining why the peculiar fusion of the grotesque and the romantic that is the stylistic hallmark of *Ashes and Diamonds* is quintessentially Polish: although we share with them the use of certain common terms like romanticism, the absurd, and the baroque, it is invariably the case that in reality we are talking about two quite different concepts. Romanticism to Wajda and to his audience is thus both an important and a dramatically different concept from what one might casually suppose it to be. But on the other it is a way of understanding how the artists have seen themselves and their mission: unlike their Western counterparts, they have been deeply and successfully involved in the struggles of their countrymen, and have consequently been seen by those same countrymen as esteemed spokesmen for the national cause.

At the same time, it is to history that one turns for an understanding of the origins of the three countries, and for their struggles. As the Hungarian director Andras Kovacs has observed, history is "so present in our films because it has had a much stronger influence on our life than on the life of peoples with a much happier history. Unresolved questions—in our conscience and in reality—are still to be found today."³ Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, and Slovaks are, in their own eyes, as richly differentiated from one another and from their neighbors as are the Irish and English, the Flemings and the Walloons, the Germans and the French. Although such differentiations are absolutely correct, cultural and historical accuracy has, in the case of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, frequently stood in the way of an appreciation of the most basic truths on the part of foreigners. In examining the arts, particularly the cinema, it is

important to realize the extent to which these countries have a surprising amount of common history. Some of this, like the adoption of a communist government after 1945, is obvious. But it is not well known that all three countries existed as powerful nation states in the late Middle Ages, and lost their nationhood in roughly similar ways, even though this observation is in fact a necessary departure point for any serious study.

The art of any country may finally always be seen as closely related to that country's national culture. But in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia this linkage has been both conscious and overt, for thoughtful people in all three countries have been more than usually preoccupied with a specific cultural problem, the question of a national identity. That question emerged in each country as a consequence of the loss of national sovereignty, which in the case of Hungary and Bohemia had been threatened at about the same time that the Americas were discovered, and, in the case of Poland, lost shortly after the North Americans won their independence from Great Britain.

How had it been lost? How could it be regained? These were two questions which obsessed generations of the best thinkers in all three countries. Their dramatically differing historical and cultural backgrounds led them to consider the question in different guises. For the Poles and the Hungarians national identity was often bound up with the question of territorial acquisition or simple national sovereignty, although even there the fact that the Hungarians by 1867 had become the *de jure* rulers of half of the Hapsburg Empire while the Poles were fragmented into three different sets of oppressed peoples produced greatly different ideas about the subject. For the Czechs, on the other hand, national identity became more a question of linguistic or racial purity, as over the course of Czech history since the collapse of the ancient dynasty of the Premysls in 1473 the population had been more or less equally divided between Czechs and Germans.

The growth of film as a new and explosive artform in this century and the triumph of Stalinism after 1945 in all three countries were powerful unifiers for artists. Film, as a new artform, was openly international, and from the very first the great achievers of the cinema had an influence that crossed all national and linguistic boundaries. Under Stalin the cinema had an even greater unity, because only certain

³From "Controversies Surrounding Hungarian Filmmaking," trans. Alain Piette, ed. Bert Cardullo, *New Orleans Review* 11.1 (Spring 1984): 93.

approaches to the artform, as well as certain subjects, were tolerated. While he lived, the artists of all three countries were able to say very little of lasting note.⁴ But after his death a great surge of creative energy was unleashed. In Poland it began with Wajda's films and survived the collapse of 1968 to become a part of the national conscience which culminated in the Solidarity movement, whose aims and complaints had been accurately foretold by Poland's filmmakers. In Hungary it appeared later, but its staying power has been remarkable. In Czechoslovakia the successes of the artists covered only a brief period during the 1960s, but their works form a brief but impressive testament to the potential of Czech and Slovak filmmakers.

So Wajda's film announced to the world that a new and talented group of film artists had arisen in Eastern Europe, artists whose work deserves to be understood and appreciated. These directors came from a tradition in which the artist's political involvement is an important part of his life. But their deep concerns with the body politic, far from making them less involved with the other arts, have made them the conscious shapers and adapters of their national literatures, since the artists who constitute that tradition were also deeply involved with the fates of their countries. As a result the best film artists exemplify a tradition in which the cinema is closely related both to the political and social issues of the nation and to the other more traditional art forms.

It is the history of the three countries that has given the artist his deep and often self-conscious involvement with the affairs of his nation which in other, happier, countries artists have been able to ignore. To what role does an artist like Jancso or Wajda aspire? Or, to put it another way: when they think of themselves as artists, what are the connotations? Wajda himself put it this way:

The whole of our culture has always been swayed by a "civic" tradition. Since this term

⁴Many critics do not correlate the fact of Stalinism with the artistic and intellectual careers they are discussing. For example, Roy Armes says, "Jancso's debut in the . . . 1950s was inauspicious . . . a prolific maker of short films who was unable to find his own style until he made *My Way Home* in 1964" (*The Ambiguous Image* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976] 141). Even a cursory examination of what was going on in Hungary in the 1950s reveals that the vast majority of significant Hungarian films date from 1964; there are few films of lasting significance before then. See Jancso's own statements on this in "I Have Played Christ Long Enough." *Film Quarterly* 28.1 (Fall 1974): 52.

sounds pretentious, it had best be clarified. For various reasons—historical, social, mythological,—culture in Poland has invariably stood for more, in degree and kind, than a heritage of works in which artists related "the adventures of their souls." It has always been a meeting place of social, historical, civic, and moral debate. . . . Since as a state Poland was missing from the map for the best part of 150 years, art and culture were the forum for the ventilation of fundamental issues to do with the model of social life, the role of the individual, the meaning of history, the basic hierarchies of collective existence.

Thus art and culture—and in due course the cinema itself—were *sui generis* usurpers, taking over themes and messages that in other societies were the proper domains of political institutions and public opinion. This has always imposed a certain commitment on the arts, which in turn prevented them from being purely a whirligig of esthetic forms, sensibilities, and mood: they could never be content to sparkle with paradox or dazzle with invention. This has always been their frailty; but it is also a symptom of their health.⁵

Wajda does not see himself simply as a cinema artist, but as an intellectual expounding a view of national issues to his countrymen in an attempt to remind them of who they are and what has formed their national consciousness.

Just why this came to pass is a complex and lengthy tale. Simplifying greatly, the situation was that their differing national devolutions forced the peoples of each nation in different directions, and by the last century the degree of freedom each group enjoyed was sometimes dramatically different. What each culture had in common was the major cultural issue discussed earlier—national identity. That subject has been something that Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, and Slovaks could best articulate through producing or consuming works of art. Consequently they have held their artists in high regard, while the artists themselves have been intimately involved with the political and social lives of their countries. A few brief examples illustrate the

⁵From the speech he intended to make in early 1982, which was cancelled after the imposition of martial law. The text was printed in *Variety* Jan. 1983, and reprinted in *Cineaste* 13.3 (1984): 12-13.

close and substantive relationship that has historically existed between the artist and his culture.

When in 1918 Poland regained her independence after suffering for more than a century under the rule of her neighbors, the pianist Ignacy Paderewski was named prime minister. A great pianist, Paderewski had no political experience. To outsiders the choice of Paderewski was an incomprehensible one, or perhaps yet another sign of Poland's "romantic" nature. In reality the choice was shrewd and practical. After being partitioned and incorporated by its three nearest neighbors Poland had been subjected to a discouraging variety of different political, economic, and cultural systems. If Poland was to become a country again, its peoples would have to unify in order to create a working state that would survive. Another reason had to do with international politics: Poland had to win the recognition of the Western powers as a viable political, ethnic, and cultural entity. The genial and world famous pianist's enormous artistic and moral authority epitomized the idea of a reborn and united Poland, both inside and outside the country.

But this choice was also the response to a deeply rooted Polish tradition that invested great charismatic artists with the power of spiritual leadership. Deprived of its independence, Poland could not have great political leaders. Given the iron control exercised over the territories, particularly by the Russians, such politicians who cooperated with the partitioning forces in often illusory attempts to secure a better situation for their country could never hope to become for their countrymen anything more than foreign appointed administrators. Those Poles who led the numerous consecutive and doomed uprisings were either executed, imprisoned, or forced to become exiles. So the only area in which Poland could express its national aspirations, defend its identity, and nurture hopes of future liberation was in its culture. The arts were of course the most concrete expression of that culture, and the leading artists, particularly the poets, assumed what was sometimes called the "rule of the souls." This expression, coined by popular consensus, explicitly gave to the nation's great artists the leadership of national consciousness.

At the same time that Paderewski was becoming prime minister, Stefan Zeromski was given a wing of the royal castle in Warsaw as his residence. One of the first acts of the new Polish

State was to open the official residence of the former Polish kings as the living quarters for the greatest living Polish novelist. The elevation of Paderewski and the treatment of the author of *Ashes* are perfect examples of the ways in which the state recognized the high moral and social patriotic commitments of its artists.

It is difficult to imagine Westerners thinking of their poets, much less their filmmakers, as having either the right to such leadership or the right to enjoy such privileges. Although the independent Polish state which conferred these distinctions perished in 1939, the way of regarding the artists did not. On 16 July 1975 the Main Office for the Control of the Press, Publications, and Public Performances in Warsaw circulated a confidential memorandum discussing Wajda's latest film, *The Promised Land*. The memorandum concluded on a sober note: "Wajda must not be turned into the bard. . . ." "The anonymous group of bureaucrats who wrote this report were thus the heirs to another and counter tradition in Eastern Europe which has always sought to muzzle the artist and to dampen any discussion of his works lest he achieve that position in his society. When Wajda sees himself as a potent force in his society, he sees himself clearly.

Although the traditions of the artist's involvement in public affairs is perhaps the strongest in Poland, it is easy to cite similar examples from both Hungary and Czechoslovakia. One of the leaders of Hungary's abortive 1848 revolt against the Hapsburgs was the great poet Sandor Petofi. His contemporary, the great poet and dramatist Imre Madach, was arrested for giving shelter to patriots in the aftermath of the 1848 uprising, and later became a member of the Hungarian parliament, while the important novelist Josef Eotvos served in two cabinets. In both Hungary and Czechoslovakia during this century artists and men of letters were frequently political leaders involved in their country's national struggle for independence. Frantisek Palacky was a historian, Thomas Masaryk a philosophy teacher, yet their names are inseparable from the concept of the state of Czechoslovakia. Palacky's contemporary, the Czech poet and journalist Josef Pecka, was one of the founders of the Czech Social Democratic Party. This political intimacy even extended to a science fiction writer like Karel Capek. A close friend of Masaryk's, he meticulously transcribed

⁶From Jane Leftwich Curry, trans. and ed., *The Black Book of Polish Censorship* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 234.

their conversations together. But he also founded the short-lived National Labor Party in 1925. All of these men—and one could name countless others less known in the West—were accomplished artists whose concerns with the identity of their nation led them to formal political involvements.⁷ In great measure, as with Paderewski, they were given this political leadership because of their achievements as artists.

While it is true that the bardic element predominated in the arts of all three countries, and it is there that one finds the greatest articulation of national values, this element should not be narrowly or rigidly defined. Frequently the bard excoriated national values, opening them up to a heated debate, as Wajda's usage of the term suggests. Over the last century some of Poland's greatest poets and greatest directors emerge as being remarkably similar in the unflattering ways that they treat their countrymen, and this phenomenon was by no means restricted to Poland. If an artist like More Jokai could exalt the national myths and create an exalted romantic image of Hungary, a writer like Geza Csath would deflate these images and hold them up to ridicule. If films such as *The Round-Up* and *Marketa Lazarova* articulated various stages of heroic nationalism in Hungary and in Czechoslovakia, they had as their opposites *The Witness* and *Long Live the Republic*, works which savagely deflated national pretensions and did so with an eye towards opening a debate about the basic identification marks of the national consciousness.

So to the concept of the artist as bard, that is as poet and teacher, should be opposed the concept of the artist as jester. We generally read such works, and see such films, simply as examples of comedy. Thus Jaroslav Hasek's *The Good Soldier Svejk* is considered a comic novel. But behind Hasek's wit lies a serious attack on the national self-image. He is not simply a satirist, but rather an artist who voices unpleasant truths, attacks false values, and breaks open the empty shells of

former values—no matter how highly they are regarded by the political and cultural hierarchy. In short, as Leszek Kolakowski has observed, the role of the jester is equally the role of the intellectual. The histories of the region afford numerous examples not only of the extent to which the jesters have performed this function—and only too successfully—but of the degree to which the same artist has frequently retreated from his bardic role into that of jester in order to recapture his central position as artist.

Of course the Stalinist dominated governments that came to power after 1945 had no intention of giving artists a seat in the government at all, whether they were bards or jesters. But in a curious way these governments ended up continuing the same tradition. Artists were important in the new states, even though the definition of art had been narrowly circumscribed. And to a surprising extent the old artists were taught: Hungarians still read Petofi and the Poles Mickiewicz. So on the one side the state boosted the role of the (subservient) artist, and on the other it kept alive the memories of most—although not all—of his predecessors.

These new states kept the traditions alive in another quite unintentional way. The issue of regaining independence ceased to be relevant: even though a great number of Poles, Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks were from the beginning opposed to communism and perceived themselves as conquered by yet another foreign power, the Soviet Union, this perception was by no means a universal or general one. Communist ideology did win over a large proportion of the population, and an even larger number accepted the system by giving it the benefit of the doubt. The pre-war governments of all three countries were in various ways compromised—in the case of Hungary, fatally so by its adherence to National Socialist Germany. The Democratic members of the Western alliance appeared willing to forfeit Eastern Europe to the communist sphere of influence. Finally, communism seemed here, as in France and Italy, to epitomize the abolition of oppression and injustice, and to represent the ideology of historical necessity. Even the most intransigent citizens of the three countries soon resigned themselves to the realities of the new Europe.

But this new political order quickly degenerated owing to a series of tensions and crises. First, Stalinism, however vigorously denounced (after Stalin's death) as an historic perversion of a healthy system, left deep wounds

⁷See the discussion in Dieter P. Lotze, *Imre Madach* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981) 15-20 (one of the few English language studies of a Hungarian artist). The fourth sentence of the study: "Hungarian men of letters were among their country's most outstanding political activists." See also Joseph Wechsberg, *Prague, the Mystical City* (New York: MacMillan, 1971) 2-4, Cecil Parrott, *Jaroslav Hasek* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1982) 76-77 (on the background of Hasek's political satires), and William E. Harkins, *Karel Capek* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962) 17-18.

in each society. The other, even darker, legacy of Stalinism was a deep suspicion that Stalinist methods were perceived by the ruling communist party as being perhaps the only way to manage societies in moments of deep crisis. Of course this was a vicious circle of self-fulfillment. The death of Stalin promptly plunged each country into a crisis which the party and the state attempted to handle by tightening up its control over the population. Although there were few relapses into the wholesale slaughters and incarcerations that were the order of the day while Stalin lived, there were equally few plunges into anything that might remotely resemble a genuinely democratic system. Democratization, whether it was called de-Stalinization or liberalization, was essentially nonexistent, no matter how frequently state and party officials claimed otherwise.

Second, the post-Stalinist consumer society inaugurated in Hungary and Poland turned out to be a double disappointment. In Poland and Czechoslovakia it was in the long run unable to sustain itself. Perhaps even worse was the fact that the periods of prosperity in each country, regardless of their duration, were correctly perceived by the population at large as also being times of untrammelled corruption. If the average person was becoming better off, a handful of opportunists had become very rich indeed. Those who became the richest were those whose cynicism about communism was only exceeded by their opportunism in profiting from it. Ironically, then, Stalinism came to stand for not only autocratic terror, but also for a certain curious kind of ideological purity.⁸

Third, the citizens of each country, particularly the artists and intellectuals, faced another and more potent attempt on their sense of cultural identity. While it was true that the traditional means of cultural expression such as language were never threatened as historically had been the case, there were concerted and effective attempts to reshape the national consciousness through distortions and omissions in the teaching of history, in books and newspapers, in efforts to

eliminate the influence of religion and the church, and through a series of challenges to the whole set of values which had traditionally been perceived as the cornerstones of national identity.

These communist states had no intention of allowing the creation of natural channels of public opinion, or of open political expression. Consequently the population had no way to express its true feelings. Once again the artists became public servants, articulating the real national values and ventilating important social and cultural issues. But this time the writers who traditionally constituted the leading edge of national consciousness were joined by artists from a new and still poorly understood medium—the cinema.

So for most Western audiences Jiri Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains* seems an honest and objective attempt to portray the resistance movement inside Czechoslovakia during WWII. But from the perspective of the communist government of Czechoslovakia the film, far from being exemplary of the anti-fascist resistance, is a devastating criticism of the official version of history. The departure point for any consideration of the cinema in Eastern Europe is a discussion of the impact of the state on intellectual life and the role that its official ideology plays in structuring works of art so that they conform to the state's code.

With Menzel's film the basic problem is simple: the people in the film behave all too much like people. Milos, the youthful hero, spends most of the film obsessed with the prospects of successful sex. When he is unable to make love to his sexually precocious girlfriend, Masha, he despairs and tries to kill himself. He becomes privy to the resistance among the railroad workers largely by accident. He unloads the bomb onto the munitions train because the man who was supposed to do it, Dispatcher Hubicka, is being summarily tried by a Railroad Court. His crime is stamping the cheerfully bared bottom of the telegraphist, Virginia Svata, whose coy sexuality is at least the equal of Masha's. Hubicka has become Milos' hero because of his sexual exploits on the stationmaster's couch. The stationmaster, far from being a moral fellow, is deeply jealous, particularly when Hubicka is successful with a woman that he himself has designs on. In the world of the train station, Hubicka is king because of his success with women, and Milos follows him because of this.

Although the major characters are preoccupied with sex, there are other drives as well: the

⁸Many observers have noted the persistence of the Stalin cult: for ordinary Russians his regime symbolized efficiency and freedom from corruption. The most hair-raising example is Molotov's wife, who as a Jew was herself arrested and tortured at Stalin's orders. Years after his death she told Stalin's daughter that "your father was a genius. . . . There's no revolutionary spirit around nowadays, just opportunism everywhere. Look at what the Italian communists are up to. It's shameful." Roy Medvedev quotes this scene, which he attributes to Svetlana Allilyueva, in *Only One Year* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) 408-409.

stationmaster dreams of becoming an inspector, Milos' relatives aspire to indolence, and many of the bystanders are cheerfully in it for whatever they can get. The war impinges on their lives by causing shortages, but it has little other effect. The Czechs at the station aren't even particularly anti-German, while the Germans themselves come in two varieties. The first group, one of the most bedraggled and woebegone groups of infantrymen imaginable, promptly heads into a hospital car on a railroad siding when they see a group of German nurses in it. The other group, three SS officers in the cab of a locomotive, has the opportunity to shoot Milos. But they don't; instead they quite literally kick him off the train. Although the sinister trio are implicitly dedicated nazis, they act pretty much as one would suspect—or hope—would be the case of soldiers anywhere. Ironically, then, the only overtly dedicated fascist in the film is the Czech railroad executive, and Menzel gives him three separate appearances in the film, and three good chances to mouth fascist propaganda.

Put baldly, this is not the way the government of Czechoslovakia wants the activities of its citizens portrayed. If we were to pick a film of any merit which advances the opposite hypothesis, and demonstrates what the state's expectations in this situation are, it would be Wajda's *Generation*. It is there that we see how a sensitive young man, who is drawn to the Resistance and to communist ideology, develops under the guidance of an experienced communist fighter. But ten years later in Czechoslovakia, instead of a dedicated communist who spends his time sabotaging trains and setting a proper moral example, we have Hubicka. Instead of an idealistic young intellectual who is discovering why fascists must be resisted—and imbibing communist ideology through Hubicka at the same time—we have Milos.

Menzel's sardonic portraits are what gives the film much of its force, and most Western audiences would probably agree that its power comes from the fact that Milos, an ordinary young man, suddenly is caught up in circumstances where he has to behave like a hero. He does so, but is tragically killed as a result.

No official detailed list of objections to Menzel's film has ever been made public.⁹ It is rarely the

case in a socialist state that the state censors ever reveal themselves, although everyone is aware of their existence. In *Man of Marble* the discussion in the screening room between the film editor and the young director reveals how this works. She shows the director footage from Jerzy Burski's *Birth of a City*. This is "footage that was cut but never used," she says, pausing, "on technical grounds of course." But the footage was obviously not used because of its contents: it shows bulldozers rampaging over trees, trucks axle deep in muck, as well as a food riot by the workers, who chase the local party functionary off across a field. In another clip that was cut, Birkut reveals that his parents were peasant farmers who owned some land, which means that they are not ideologically correct as model parents for the model worker that Burski is portraying.

Both Burski and his film were made up by Wajda. But the situation Wajda describes is typical: the editor never refers to the censorship by name, just as later, when we see the bricklaying event being set up, the secret police officer who inspects the building site is never referred to by name either. "Who is that?" the young Burski asks. "Oh, you know . . ." is the answer.

But from the censorship guidelines that have surfaced, it is easy to list the problems Menzel encountered. These are: the fact of collaboration itself, as symbolized by the railroad executive's perfervid national socialism; the passive acceptance of the occupation by the citizenry; Hubicka's lack of a proper communist orientation (it is very far from clear that he is a communist at all); the portrayal of Milos' family as generations of loafers and idlers; the open and aggressive sexuality of Masha and Virginia.

The state, then, had strict expectations about what it wanted in its war films. It had comparable expectations when it came to the nature of contemporary life. In the early sequences of Wajda's *Man of Marble* we are shown two films made by the mythical director Jerzy Burski. The second film that Agnieszka sees, *Architects of Our Happiness*, is a documentary-like glorification of an ordinary worker, Mateusz Birkut, who in 1950 allegedly sets a record for bricklaying. He lays 30,509 bricks on one shift, and his achievements become the way in which the film establishes the triumphs of socialist Poland in rebuilding after WWII. He and his wife Hanka are the exemplary proletarians which, as the narration of the film tells us, are the hope of Poland's future.

⁹The discussion that follows relies partially on the references in Curry regarding the treatment of WWII (338-345), and partially on remarks made by Josef Skvorecky in *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, trans. Michael Schonberg (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1971) 170.

But, as Agnieszka knows—and as the rest of the film shows us—all of this was deliberately fabricated by the filmmaker. Mateusz Birkut, whose glory was thrust upon him, turns out to be an exemplary proletarian of a far different sort who is finally killed in the 1970 workers riots at Gdansk which are the final phase of his personal protest against the fraud and hypocrisy of his government. Nor is his achievement real: when we see the actual sequence of the bricklaying, it is far from clear whether or not Birkut and his team have really set a record or whether the record is simply announced because the party bosses have arrived to congratulate him.

What Menzel and Wajda as artists illustrate is the two sorts of people who ran afoul of the state. Both men attempted to give an honest and objective view of their immediate national history. These two drastically different films suggest the two basic approaches of Eastern European film artists.

Menzel's characters are essentially unpolitical creatures. The only person in the film who has any political commitments at all, the fascist railroad executive, is mercilessly lampooned. No one else—and this is true of all of the characters in Menzel's films—has any political commitment at all. This type of characterization is typical of the best Czech filmmakers. It gives their films a Western ambience, and it accounts for their consistent success with Western audiences. However, it is a mistake to conclude that because they portray characters and situations where ideology has little or any influence that their works are not ideologically charged. As even this brief discussion of Menzel has indicated, his film is in actuality an attack on the official attitudes of his government, something that is made quite clear by a reading of the novel on which Menzel based his script. Like Wajda in *Ashes and Diamonds*, Menzel took a work that was, ideologically speaking, fairly correct, and gutted it, shifting the emphasis drastically to get the ends he desired.

Wajda's characters, on the other hand, are exactly the opposite. Birkut really is a dedicated communist. He goes over to the opposition not because he has become enamored of Western values, but because he finds that the communist state under whose rule he lives—and which has rewarded him lavishly—does not live up to those values. On the contrary, it only uses them for propaganda. *Man of Marble* is a chronicle of Birkut's disillusionment with the system and his fight against it (it is also, of course, about the

young filmmaker's attempt to recover the true history of Mateusz Birkut).

The implications of this brief discussion are that the best directors are politically heterodox. This is absolutely the case, and creates an interesting situation: those artists the state supports and rewards (like Birkut) are those who become its major critics. Why did this come about? Perhaps more importantly, what situation arose that enabled the artists to make such films? And finally, why does the state have such a patently artificial view of history?

Under Stalin artists did not make films like *Closely Watched Trains* or *Man of Marble*, and there were three reasons. The first, the censorship, was mentioned with respect to Menzel and in the brief discussions of *Man of Marble*. But in Birkut's time the censorship was less important, because the state handled its problems more directly, by locking up people who might be supposed to have disagreed with the government. Birkut himself is arrested and confesses to his "sabotage" of the Stakhanovite ideal.¹⁰ His actual crime is to have done nothing at all, and in this he is like millions of people during the reign of Stalin, except that he is more fortunate, since his life is spared. A recent quartet of Hungarian films illustrates the effectiveness of this approach. In *The Stud Farm* the veteran party member who heads the collective farm is awakened in the night by the secret police and taken away. Although one might suppose that as a loyal communist and efficient manager he would be the last person in the world to be frightened by such a thing, exactly the contrary is the case—both in the film and in life. He isn't sure where he is being hauled off to in the middle of the night—and neither is the audience. His position in the party, far from being a shield, actually places him in danger. It turns out in this case that he is simply being asked to select an agronomist from among the political prisoners, but no one is more relieved (or surprised) than he is that this is the case.

The reason for his surprise is beautifully illustrated in Meszaros' *Diary for My Children*. Juli's parents are dedicated Hungarian communists who flee to the Soviet Union because

¹⁰These numbers are not exaggerations. "In 1936-39, on the most cautious estimates, four to five million people. . . . At least four to five hundred thousand . . . were summarily shot, the rest were given long terms of confinement" (Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, trans. Colleen Taylor, ed. David Jorasky [New York: Alfred Knopf, 1971] 239). See the estimates as well in Alexei Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981) 15ff.

of the Horthy regime. As a child Juli sees first her father, an accomplished sculptor, being dragged off by the Russian secret police; after she becomes an adolescent and returns to Budapest she sees the Hungarian secret police dragging away the man who has become her surrogate father. Meszaros was very far from making up a fictitious story: her own father, Laszlo Meszaros, was a talented young sculptor who went to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, was arrested in 1938, and disappeared. It may be difficult to be sympathetic towards those party members who themselves were arrested, tortured, shot, or simply imprisoned. It was their own party which was doing this to them, and one tends to sympathize more with those people who were truly spectators. However, the fact of their condition suggests the extent to which the state enforced conformity, and the bizarre degree to which it did so.

It would be a gross error, however, to conclude that social conformity in the arts was achieved under Stalin solely as a result of terror and censorship (which is in itself a peculiar form of terror, that is to say, it is intellectual or aesthetic terror). On the contrary, the parties of all of these countries were full of men and women who were intelligent enough to realize the contradictions and the falsehoods. It was Miklos Jancso himself who said, "Stalinism is a religion, too. I know, I was a Stalinist myself."¹¹ Why these people held on to the faith as long as they did is in itself an intriguing question. But one clear reason is that the communist party was (and still is) deeply involved in the process of education, and this was so even before it came to power.

The educational system, organized first clandestinely by the party and then openly by the party through the states it controlled, presented party members with a comprehensive philosophy that did not simply explain away the apparent contradictions that have been noted, but gave a clear rationale for what was being done. Although it is always possible to discern behind the actions of the state censors a pedestrian conservatism that is international in scope, the party's ideology provided its members with highly defined and rigorous principles with which to see the world. These principles, when

applied to the arts, yielded the doctrine known as socialist realism.

Socialist realism differs from artistic schools or movements in the West in several key ways, the most important being that it was, during Stalin's life, the only permissible school. All serious students of art learn that artists in actual practice are hardly ever consistent in their allegiances, or in the extent to which they put their ideas into practice, while even within a cohesive group who have agreed to (or accepted) a certain label, there are likely to be vast differences. Although there have been consistent attempts by scholars to argue the complexities of this subject, the resulting impression is an erroneous one. Until Stalin's death socialist realism was a consistent and highly controlled aesthetics which demanded (and received) total adherence.¹²

Its consistency and control was because it was enthusiastically propagated and rigidly enforced by the governments of the region. This was particularly important for the filmmakers themselves. The new communist governments which emerged after the Second World War (like the Soviet Union in the 1920s) shared a common vision of the role of the arts and, within the arts, of the importance of film. These states therefore produced a curious paradox. On the one hand they placed much greater importance on the arts than was the case in the West. This was particularly the case with the cinema, which from Lenin's initial seizure of power had been seen as the artform of maximum importance.

The argument about the importance of the cinema is based on a simple analogy with one of the key premises of Marxism-Leninism, which is that all societies will pass through successive stages of development on the road to the truly communist society which is the highest stage of social and political development. Those theorists who envisioned literature and society moving down the yellow brick road towards film and

¹¹The juxtaposition of "faith" and "Stalin" is from Milovan Djilas: "... my approach to Stalin was something akin to a religious type of faith" (from the interview in G. R. Urban, ed., *Stalinism* [London: St. Martin's Press, 1982] 217). Jancso quote taken from "I Have Played Christ Long Enough." *Film Quarterly* 28.1 (Fall 1974): 52.

¹²Liehm (433-437) lists quotations in an attempt to explain "the different aspects of the problem" because the "question of Socialist Realism, and the proper definition of it, is a complex one." This is true only in the following sense: Western Marxist (and communist thinkers), and some post-Stalinist thinkers have written elaborate restatements or extensions or revisions of the basic ideas expounded by pre-revolutionary communist thinkers. Those statements are complex: as Marxist thinkers attempted to revise, purify, or rework the concept after Stalin's death, the resulting core became embedded in a mass of complicated and often contradictory writings. But there is nothing complicated about the doctrine that Stalin enunciated and had enforced during the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s.

socialism did not do so as a result of a happy coincidence, however. All states founded under the aegis of Marxism-Leninism began with an exclusive and rigid concept of what art was, what it did, and how artists should be regulated so as to do what they were supposed to be doing. So the central paradox which is vital to understanding what happened in the cinema in Eastern Europe is this. The various states encouraged the rapid growth and development of the artform. At the same time, they allowed no independent expression of any sort on the part of the artists. Paradoxically, even while the state initially exercised absolute control over artistic productions, the official doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, socialist realism, enhanced the artist's prestige.

The directors who came to prominence after Stalin's death rejected the doctrine. The term itself disappeared. But the fact that the term was no longer used did not mean that the concepts had ceased to exist. On the one hand, socialist realism is a useful term to indicate that to which the major directors were reacting. The uncompromising and aggressive stubbornness of Agnieszka in *Man of Marble*, her insistence on making a film about Birkut "because he fell," is a reaction to socialist realism. So is Wajda's tenacious desire to recreate for Polish audiences their real history. On the other hand, the fact that the term is no longer used scarcely means that the cultural bureaucracy of, say, Czechoslovakia, has rejected the ideas. Most Western critics, regardless of their political orientation, look favorably on the Czech artists of the 1960s. But in

1976 the state was still speaking of "anti-socialist tendencies" which tried to weaken the movement towards "socialist and realistic cinematography."¹³ In various ways socialist realist attitudes were still flourishing, even though the term was no longer used. In a curious way, then, socialist realism was the common thread linking together those artists who rejected the concepts with those bureaucrats and party members who remembered them. But whatever the label, and however it was repudiated, this common ground must be understood. Or, to put it another way, when Jancso says, "I was a Stalinist," what does he mean? What did a Stalinist artist believe? What were his films supposed to show?

Although often surrounded by a welter of confusions and contradictions, the doctrine is fairly easy to understand.¹⁴ Socialist realism is based on the premises of Marxist philosophy, particularly on the thesis that art, like all other realms of the human mind and spirit—philosophy, religion, ideology—form a superstructure which is completely determined by the base, that is to say, the economic relations of the means of the production of the given society. Being thus non-autonomous, the appearances of the superstructure reflect the realities of the base. Thus religion, far from being a purely spiritual matter towards which men are impelled in their desire for absolutes, has both been created by the repressive society and serves to perpetuate it. The religious impulse is a manifestation of a false consciousness. Art stands to society as the superstructure stands to the base. *Man of Marble* provides a perfect example of this. In *Architects of Our Happiness*, the official film about Birkut, we see Birkut posing for a marble statue exalting his heroic work efforts. Men like him, the film's voice-over narration says, are an inspiration to our artists. At the Second National Art Exhibition we see Birkut opening the exhibition, where his statue is the centerpiece. The camera passes down a line of other, similar works, and the narration describes Birkut as having contributed to a revolution in Polish art, concluding with a slogan: "The Polish Masses—

¹³From *The 20th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival*, ed. Jiri Purss (Prague: Orbis, 1976) 56. Other words frequently used as synonyms are "responsible" (12), "realistic" (14). The works of artists from countries outside the block are usually described as "progressive" (10). Western critics frequently have difficulty in realizing that these words really are code words. For example, here is the description of the attempts of the Czech film artists during the 1960s to raise the artistic and intellectual level of discussion and exhibition at Karlovy Vary: "They wanted to win the greatest foreign support for their revisionist theories, their anti-social and anti-socialist goals." This analysis is prefaced by the remark: "The 1968 Karlovy Vary Film Festival . . . will remain inglorious episodes" (73). The prize-winning films at this festival in themselves constitute proof that although the term socialist realism is no longer used, films continue to be made which conform to those principles. It is worth noting that the 3rd edition of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* states flatly that "socialist realism is the unifying principle of Soviet literature" (24.245). The article traces the term to Gorky's 1934 speech and defines it as literature with "a consciously socialist view of man in the world" (24.244).

¹⁴These contradictions are sometimes for the reasons cited in the note above. However, sometimes the complexity is the result of willful misrepresentation, as when David Craig writes: "For Western readers 'socialist realism' means little more than the novels and plays which Soviet writers produce to the orders of their government. . . . The hostility to this idea is part of that ignorance of socialist practice which our rulers and their media are so good at fostering" (*Marxists on Literature*, ed. David Craig [London: Pelican, 1975] 12).

A Fitting Theme for the Polish Artists."

Now comes the contrast. The camera passes by several surrealist paintings and lingers briefly on a trio of vaguely human abstract (or perhaps primitive) sculptures. Narrator: "Compare the degeneracy of Western art. Here the noble figure of man is distorted and debased." Western art is representationally debased because it comes from a culture that debases human beings. Socialist art is exaltedly representational because under socialism the human person at last achieves his proper place in the sun.

In the few writings of Marx and Engels about art, the idea is formulated that art has always reflected the economic and political realities of its time. There was an official art, which, as a part of the dominant ideology of the ruling class, supported the existing political and economic status quo, whereas a progressive art would represent the legitimate consciousness of the newer and aspiring classes, and therefore contribute to bringing about changes. It was Engels who summarized this the most succinctly in his 1888 letter to Margaret Harkness, singling out Balzac:

Balzac, whom I consider a far greater master of realism than all the Zolas *passes, presents et a venir*, in *La Comedie humaine* gives us a most wonderfully realistic history of French 'Society,' describing, chronicle-fashion, almost year by year from 1816 to 1848 the progressive inroads of the rising bourgeoisie on the society of nobles that reconstituted itself after 1815. . . . He describes how the last remnants of this, to him, model society gradually succumbed before the intrusion of the moneyed upstart, or were corrupted by him.¹⁵

Balzac was and remained a model for the proper techniques to be used by novelists of a Marxist denomination. Not only was he realistic in the conventionally understood sense, but he emphasized the complex interrelations between the economic and social tissues. He penetrated through the appearances of society and exposed those factors considered of primary importance by Marxist philosophy. Balzac's overriding virtue was his ability to penetrate beneath the surfaces of society.

As both the chief theoretician and leader of the

first communist party to seize power, Lenin translated the theoretical premises of Marxism into a set of guidelines for the party. Culture, especially literature and cinema, were for Lenin not merely theoretical problems, but practical ones as well: these forms had tremendous potential as propaganda vehicles. As a result, Lenin became the first—and the most successful—translator of Marxist ideology into a set of practical guidelines. In the arts, Lenin's concerns were strictly pragmatic: he openly called for a "party literature" serving the workers. He meant by that both a realistic, formally traditional, and unsophisticated form accessible to the working class, and a propagandistic commitment to the ideas voiced by the communist party.

In his epitaph-like announcement of Tolstoy's death, he stressed the former aspect: "Tolstoy not only wrote great works of fiction which will always be prized and read by the masses . . . but he was able with remarkable power to convey the sentiments of the broad masses who are oppressed. . . . Tolstoy expressed in his works the strength and weakness, the might and restrictedness of precisely the peasant mass movement."¹⁶ Lenin realized that Tolstoy was rather far from being sympathetic to Marxist attitudes, and that as an aristocrat with a bent in his later life towards utopian Christianity he could be seen as someone absolutely opposed to Lenin's own ideas. But Lenin shrewdly saw Tolstoy as a man of great contradictions, and these contradictions "are not only the contradictions in his own thinking; they are a reflection of those extremely complex, contradictory conditions, social influences and historic traditions which had moulded the mentality of the different classes . . . of Russian society" before the revolution.

Lenin and Engels both accepted—albeit with obvious reservations—the works of non-socialist writers like Tolstoy and Balzac as suitable models for socialist intellectuals. But neither thinker explained how the works of such writers could be formally related to the works of other more openly socialist artists. The 1934 All-Union Congress of Writers served notice on artists in the Soviet Union that there would have to be a close and formal relationship between the arts and communist theory. Although the pronouncements at the congress were made by Gorky, Bu-

¹⁵In *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*, ed. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1973) 115.

¹⁶From his article in *Sotsial-Demokrat* (Nov. 1910), as reprinted in Craig 351-353.

kharin, and Zhdanov, it was the Hungarian thinker George Lukács who systematized these and many other ideas into a powerful doctrine that served as the cornerstone of the state's policies towards arts, artists, and ideas.

Lukács began by rejecting all non-mimetic forms. This is why, in his famous essay, he argued that we must prefer Thomas Mann, whom he described as a critical realist, to Franz Kafka, labelled a modernist. Mann is the immediate inheritor of the Balzacian and Tolstoyan tradition.¹⁷ Neither Balzac nor Tolstoy could be called a socialist; at the Congress, Gorky had used the label critical realist, the term socialist realist being reserved for artists who had embraced socialism.¹⁸ Lukács developed Gorky's pronouncements still further, however; having rejected the non-mimetic (that is to say, modernist) arts, he further differentiated the pre-socialist realists, echoing Engels' rejection of the Naturalists. Writers like Zola, although extremely realistic in their depiction of the external and quantitative details of life, were argued to have missed the complexities of the essential interrelations in society and the "laws of motion."¹⁹ They were pessimistic about man's abilities to escape from his social conditions; they

questioned his ability to survive at all, much less to change society. Thus the Naturalists denied the fundamental principle of Marxist thought, which was the reality of the class struggle, and its optimism about man's ability to change his society. For Lukács, Kafka and the modern non-mimetic literature (for example, the literature and theater of the absurd) were the continuation of the naturalist tradition in the conditions of the twentieth century: they expressed the angst of being instead of rejecting it and showing the right historical perspective of the class struggle (*Realism in Our Time* 26).²⁰

Although Balzac had little to say about the class struggle, his understanding of the complexities of the society, and the accent that he put on economic factors, made his works an informed criticism of capitalist society from which the reader could learn how developing capitalism works, and thus confirmed Marxist principles that societies developed along predictable lines, with the economy being the dominating factor.

These distinctions were crystallized in the concept of typicality, typical being not that which is usually found, or even dominant, but something that epitomizes or illustrates the principle of contradictory and conflicting historical forces at work, and thus indicates the path of future development. Engels had observed that realism "implies, besides truth of detail, the truth of reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances."²¹ Sixty-four years later, at the Nineteenth Party Congress, Malenkov would define it thus: "Typicalness corresponds to the essence of a given social-historical phenomenon and is not that which is merely the most widespread, frequently repeated, or everyday."²²

Both Pudovkin's filmed version of *Mother* and

¹⁷In the opening essay of *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper, 1971) 23. The alleged complexity of Lukács' thought is one of the reasons why terms such as socialist realism are thought to be complex ones. But, to paraphrase Brecht, all Lukács was really saying was "be like Tolstoy—but without his weaknesses! Be like Balzac—only up to date!" Quoted by Dave Laing, *The Marxist Theory of Art* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978) 56, who also observes the extent to which Lukács' theories were parallel to the Moscow "realists" who wanted to make artists conform (48). What none of these writers discusses, however, is the extent to which such conformity was the price for survival—the literal price. In this connection it is important to note that both Lukács and Balazs were working in Moscow from the early 1930s through 1945. A less than conformist Lukács would have ended up like Babel, Mandelshtam, or Marta Meszaros' father, all of whom were sent to prison and died there.

¹⁸The term appears in his 17 August 1934 address to the Party Congress, reprinted in Maxim Gorky, *On Literature* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, n.d.) 264. But Gorky spent more time attacking Dostoevsky, thus developing a position that stands behind the confrontation between the student and the rector in *Camouflage* mentioned earlier (246-248).

¹⁹The term comes from Engels: "Motion is the mode of existence of matter" (*Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, ed. Clemens Dutt [Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1963] 31).

²⁰There is a close correlation between what Lukács says here both with party orthodoxy (Dutt 48-49) and with what happened to Kafka, a citizen of Prague, in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Kafka was ignored until the 1960s: "Franz Kafka . . . a victim of what is known as the consequences of the personality cult," is how the Czech scholar Eduard Goldstucker phrased it in 1963 (quoted in Wechsberg 80). Goldstucker, president of the Writers' Union, was expelled from the party in 1969 and emigrated to England. Any openly expressed serious interest in Kafka went with him.

²¹From the Harkness letter, *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art* 114. Malenkov quote from *All Stalin's Men* 154.

²²Medvedev observes that Malenkov's definition was lifted "almost word for word" from the *Literary Encyclopedia*. The 3rd edition of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* cites the Harkness letter in its discussion of typicality (25.690).

Gorky's original text of the same name are perfect examples of typicality. The heroine is initially a supporter of the tsarist state: she reveals to the authorities where Pavel Vlasov (her son) has concealed arms. But when she sees the "justice" meted out by the court she is radicalized. In a climactic final sequence, she has joined the revolutionaries: when the mounted police charge the hapless marchers, she seizes the red flag and lets herself be trampled by the horses. She does not represent a general phenomenon in pre-revolutionary Russia, but her movement from active support of the state to radicalization and support for the revolution make her a typical figure, that is, the sort of person whose existence validates the progress of the revolution. Works such as *Mother* became the early ideal of the party, and were seen as perfect forerunners of socialist realist art. But when the time came to describe the world after the revolution, there were no easily adaptable models, and the situation was problematic. The confusion was exacerbated by the curiously unsystematic way in which the three theoreticians had discussed art.

Marx and Engels were both interested enough in the arts to leave numerous examples of what they thought appropriate content for artists. Engels' discussion of Balzac, which was easily expanded by Lenin in his discussions of Tolstoy, made for a reasonably clear set of guidelines about the appropriate concerns of the artist. When it came to the most appropriate form art could take, however, the situation became much less clear, even though Lukács attempted to dodge the issue by insisting that content determines form. But in reality the problem of socialist realist form was full of contradictions. On the one hand, there were the predilections of Marx and Engels for the mimetic arts. Marx thought that Greek sculpture and poetry in "certain respects prevails as the standard and a model beyond attainment."²³ What this meant was that Marx and Engels implicitly established a curious canon: Balzac and the Greeks, as it were. Lukács' literary tastes allowed him to make what was implicit explicit, and to provide a series of theoretical arguments asserting the superiority of those traditions and their importance as the required pattern for socialist art. This may have been feasible as a theoretical position, but in

actual practice the bureaucrats presiding over the arts cheapened it into something reminiscent of bourgeois academism, particularly in the plastic arts. The vulgarizations which we glimpse in the Stalinist art exposition in *Architects of Our Happiness* were labelled "socialist and workers art," while any departure was castigated as modernist and bourgeois.²⁴

Now comes the contradiction. That same academism was the type of art against which the twentieth-century avant-garde poets and painters had revolted, justly considering it to be the art of the bourgeoisie which they despised. Very often the anti-academic and anti-mimetic artists were leftists, while some of them, like Bertolt Brecht, were deeply committed to the communist cause. But all of these artists believed, as Brecht said in his famous polemic with Lukács, that the reality of this century cannot be conveyed by the means of expression of past centuries. Those contradictions manifested themselves sharply in post-revolutionary Russia. The younger generations of Russian artists, especially those sympathizing with the Revolution, were close to avant-garde art—modernism, constructivism, and futurism.²⁵ As they considered their art as a rejection of the bourgeoisie, and since they personally identified with the October Revolution, they naturally assumed that theirs was the new revolutionary communist workers art.

Since the traditional academic artists were mostly reluctant, and the avant-gardists were the sympathizers, the newly established Soviet government had little choice but to accept them for the time being. The 1920s are therefore a period of dynamic development for the creative arts inside the Soviet Union, full of imagination and highly unconventional: Mayakovsky, Bulgakov, Meyerhold, Kandinsky (to quote only a few examples), and finally the great filmmakers, Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, and Pudovkin, contributed to making it one of the most fascinating periods of European culture. The commitment of this art to the ideals of revolution was visible in the posters, in the verses of Mayakovsky, whose cadences were specially constructed so that they could be read at the great

²³Quote from the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, reprinted in *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art* 135. The Marxism of Marx's comments on Greek art is not intuitively obvious. See the summary by Laing 10-12.

²⁴Compare: "... in practice, socialist realism came to mean the adoption of the techniques of nineteenth century realist fiction and painting with a new socialist content ..." (Laing 42).

²⁵See the analysis in Marc Slonim, *Soviet Russian Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), especially 6-8.

political rallies, in the theater of Meyerhold, and finally by the revolutionary frescos of Eisenstein and Pudovkin.

The great masters of the Russian silent cinema—Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Pudovkin—were not socialist realists, since their best films were produced before the term was coined. However, insofar as they were early and enthusiastic supporters of the October Revolution, they were socialist artists whose works were examples of the kind of realism that early communists wanted to will into being. *Battleship Potemkin* certainly fulfills the recipes of socialist realism. Eisenstein shows the chief conflicting forces of the time (1905), depicts how a mutiny or insurrection through national solidarity transforms itself into a national revolution, and points unequivocally to the forces to which the future belongs. His first film, *Strike*, is an equally apt illustration of the failures of such movements—in this case a strike by industrial workers. The strikers are ultimately crushed because, unlike the mutineers, they are unable to maintain their initial solidarity and transform their strike action into a national revolutionary movement.

In both films, however, Eisenstein stuck with incidents which both Communist Party theoreticians and bourgeois reporters could agree were true. The sailors of the battleship *Potemkin* really did mutiny, they were supported by the inhabitants of Odessa, and the revolution of 1905 was an actual fact. There were just strikes which were crushed by the factory owners in ways quite similar to the ones Eisenstein depicted in his film. Both Eisenstein and Pudovkin, when they portrayed the October Revolution in their later films (*October* and *The End of Saint Petersburg*) also produced accounts of a real historical sequence of events which, while narrated from a highly partisan point of view, were scarcely manufactured out of whole cloth.

This situation began to change in the early 1930s, as the Soviet authorities began to curtail artistic freedom, impose a tight bureaucratic control over artistic production, and to enforce the doctrine of socialist realism. As our earlier discussion made clear, the doctrine was formally announced (by Zhdanov, secretary of the Central Committee) at the First Union of Soviet Writers Congress in 1934, and endorsed by Gorky, who enjoyed a notable amount of authority among writers. Once the theory had been promulgated, the consequences became obvious. The best theaters were closed down and their directors

dismissed. The case of Meyerhold is typical: he had been a party member since 1918. By 1936 his persecution "was in full swing," as Roy Medvedev puts it.²⁶ When Meyerhold tried to speak out for artistic freedom he was attacked. Then he was arrested, tortured, and killed. Babel and Mandelshtam were sent to jail and died there. Mayakovsky committed suicide. Some of the artists, like Kandinsky, emigrated. Others, like Bulgakov, were spared—but they no longer wrote. Beyond the rhetoric composed of theoretical premises which were translated into harsh and simplistic slogans, there was a set of obligations for the artists, and these obligations were unequivocally formulated for the survivors.

For the next two decades the task of the artist in the socialist state was not to present reality according to his own experiences and the experiences of his audience. Such experiences were considered a superficial catalogue of irrelevant details. His task was to shape the total vision of the world according to ideological principles. In works depicting the past, for instance, the image of history, together with the forces involved and the attitudes of the protagonists, were seen as Marxist historians (themselves closely supervised by the state) argued them to be.

Under socialist realism the artist had to see the unfolding of history as a progression of evolving economic organizations which both foreshadowed and culminated in the crises of late industrial societies. The historical reality revealed was inevitably that of the struggle between the dispossessed and their oppressors. National, religious, and linguistic differences were simply shadows obscuring this reality which it was the artist's task to rip away. Thus for example in *Alexander Nevsky* Nevsky must not only defeat the Teutonic Knights, he must do so after building a coalition force of Russians that includes the peasants. Such activities did not necessarily happen in the sense that the Western historian would say that they happened. But for the historians of Stalinist Eastern Europe they happened. The degree of freedom in interpreting or even creating historical facts can best be illustrated by Soviet films portraying such important figures from Russian history as Peter the Great and Marshal Suvorov. In Vladimir Petrov's *Peter I* and in Pudovkin's *Suvorov*, the Tsar who with violent methods built the strong

²⁶Quote (and discussion of those who perished) in *Let History Judge* 233.

bureaucratic machine of the state and put it to the service of despotism and the military leader who ruthlessly executed the expansionist policies of Catherine the Great, are presented not only as national heroes, which could be understandable, but as "progressive" figures. In the official Marxist vocabulary this term is the highest praise and means that they epitomize historical justice.

The literary or cinematographic description of contemporary life unfolded along similar patterns. All conflicts and crises were explained as conflicts of "the old and the new," that is the traditional and conservative, or even reactionary attitudes that were a legacy of the past or an influence of the West—and the pro-communist and progressive ones. A very good example is provided by the films depicting the attempts to collectivize agriculture. For Stalinist Russia, like Maoist China, the success of agrarian reform was inextricably linked with the success of the revolution. Success in the agriculture based on the application of collectivist principles meant that the lot of the rural poor had improved. If the standard of living of the peasantry had indeed improved under socialism, this in itself validated its legitimacy and justified its excesses in the eyes of those people whose lot the revolution had changed. This linkage is why the collectivization of agriculture was important even in states like Russia (and, even more obviously, Czechoslovakia), where an increasing share of the national wealth was generated through industry.

Collectivization—and the attempts to demonstrate its success—assumed a disproportionate importance in official socialist life, and the filmmakers had to respond accordingly. Consequently Dovzhenko's *Earth*, like Eisenstein's *The Old and the New*, both criticized by the Party and both subjected to cuts reshaping them in order to make them compatible with the new doctrines, are largely fantastic visions of a world that in fact did not exist.²⁷ On the one side we have a large mass of pro-collectivist progressives who attempt to persuade the peasants and small landowners that their vision is correct, while on the other hand we have a small band of reactionary farmers (kulaks) who quickly resort to terror.

²⁷Dovzhenko's film was criticized, but he remained a dedicated communist: he was defended by Khrushchev in 1943, who also rehabilitated him after Stalin's death, saying he was a "loyal, upright citizen." See *Khrushchev Remembers*, ed. Edward Crankshaw, trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970) 172, 341.

These films are historically accurate only in that they are faithful reflections of the official party line. For example, many of the hated kulaks had in reality only recently become landowners: in its early phases the revolution had distributed land to them. Far from sympathizing with the idea of collectivism, the masses of rural proletariat were actively against the idea. Finally, the real application of terror was by the state itself against the peasants. In the Eisenstein film, which the director had titled *The General Line*, and which the authorities ordered reshaped and then retitled precisely as *The Old and the New*, the dramatic climax is the milk-skimming machine sequence: the demonstration of the machine is to convince the traditionally minded peasants that collectivization will bring with it labor saving machinery. In reality, however, different means of persuasion were used. There was no place, however, to describe what was a largescale tragedy: the historical laws of motion (dialectics) were absolute, and one could be only on the right or on the wrong side. Those on the wrong side had to be treated as criminals and portrayed in the cinema as villains. The Manichaeon visions of Stalin (those who are not with us are against us) demanded an equally Manichaeon division into black and white characters—positive (flawless), or negative heroes.

Stalin's thesis about the intensification of the class struggle in the process of building socialism demanded that all divergencies between the officially pronounced vision of socialism and the drab reality be attributed to that struggle. Ironically, this thesis was formulated at a time when the former exploiting classes had almost literally ceased to exist: their property had been appropriated, some of them had emigrated to the West, and the vast majority of the remainder had been physically liquidated. Imaginary conflicts were depicted in order to satisfy that directive, while any discussion of the real conflicts that Russians faced was forbidden.

The real conflict was caused by Stalin's embarking on a course of speedy collectivization and industrialization as the price of an enormous exploitation of the Soviet people; however, any opposition or even discontent on the part of the proletariat was viewed as the result of the class struggle still being waged by survivors of the exploiting class or by agents of imperialist powers. Even underproductivity, absenteeism, alcoholism, and theft were thought of in this way. Such problems are obviously the kinds of problems one might think are universally present

in modern society, although in Soviet Russia they were also the result of the latent opposition of the workers to their exploitation by the state. But the state invariably presented them as the heritage of pre-revolutionary times or as the result of decadent Western influences. The official party interpretations of what was happening in all spheres of life became a blueprint or formula that had to be applied in works of art. And, as there were the same blueprints, not even slightly modified, an all too visible pattern was emerging from books and films.

Consequently, Stalin would define this pattern even more explicitly. His famous directive which technically initiated the era of socialist realism described it as an art "national in form and socialist in content." But the Russian word used for "national," *narodni*, also means "of the people," and it was in this sense that Stalin's directive is to be interpreted; or, to paraphrase into American English: "An art populist in form and socialist in content." National form was to be simple, unsophisticated, and mimetic, so that it could be easily understood by popular audiences. As such it would promote positive patterns of behaviour, educate the masses, and raise their consciousness. These were the important tasks entrusted to artists, whom Stalin obligingly referred to as the "engineers of human souls."

Implicit in this definition was the idea that the arts should advance the state's views about the individual behaviour that it desired. In *Architects of Our Happiness* the primary activity of the citizens portrayed is work. In this, as in many other senses, Wajda's creation is typical, as the following passage from the standard Hungarian film history points out:

The screen was to represent what life *ought* to be. Pirjev, the director of the Soviet film *Siberian Rhapsody*, prided himself with great satisfaction on having presented parking lots for motor-cars, the likes of which had never existed in Siberia before this film, but came to be established in considerable numbers after the release of this film. It was the future that was to be shown. . . . However, without knowing the present, one can have no idea of the future.²⁸

The predominant accent on work and on the productive part of people's lives became a major

preoccupation of socialist realist films. But even here the later, more formulaic films differed from the comparatively freewheeling works of Dovzhenko and Eisenstein, who at least had made films which presented dramatic conflict. But the Poland of Jerzy Burski is completely free of any tension at all. Image after image extols the joys of living under socialism: the camera moves from the happy workers at the New Year's celebration to room after room of domestic bliss. Burski's film, like many real literary and cinematic productions, aimed to show the happiness and high state of consciousness achieved by the people living already under socialism. Such films were later derisively referred to as the "girl meets tractor" movies.

How all of these directives, particularly the concept of typicality, worked in the actual practice of the East European states is illustrated by the treatment of the state of affairs in the rural areas of all three countries immediately after 1945. The films that were made echoed or repeated those that had been made in the Soviet Union. In this second repetition, however, the original purpose had become completely lost. The making of films about the agricultural situation had become an end in itself. The three countries had never had the inequities of agricultural production that Russia had endured, and all three produced plenty of food.

The real problems that developed in agriculture were a function of the state's determination to collectivize; in short order the rural countryside in all three countries was a seething battleground of violent conflicts resulting from the collectivization of agriculture.²⁹ Large landholds were expropriated, and the paid experts whose knowledge made such farms profitable were imprisoned. The smaller landowners were classed as kulaks, and the same Stalinist pejorative used to describe a sort of mythical scroogelike farmer was imported into the three countries (in Hungary and in Poland the Russian word itself was used, since there wasn't a comparable word in either language). The proverbial deceitfulness and stinginess of the

²⁹As Ivan Volgyes puts it: "Rich peasants, and even those barely well-to-do, and all others opposed to collectivization were branded *kulaks*, a term borrowed from Russian and used to designate rural opponents of the regime. Terror, coercion and murder were the weapons the regime used against the reluctant peasants. The peasants, of course, responded in kind, and soon the cities were starving. This reign of economic terror . . ." (*Hungary, A Nation of Contradictions* [Boulder: Westview Press, 1982] 52).

²⁸Istvan Nemeskurty, *Word and Image: History of the Hungarian Cinema* (Budapest: Corvina, 1968) 162.

kulaks, when coupled with the oppression of the great landowners, was held responsible for rural poverty.

Ironically, the peasants had typically welcomed the early stages of communism, which delivered to them individual parcels of land. But in short order the new regimes resorted to the classical Stalinist methods of collectivization. Those peasants who opposed the return of the land, or restrictions on the amount of land they could own, were promptly branded as kulaks, and dealt with accordingly. In this respect communist ideology became a self fulfilling prophecy. Those peasants who were deprived of ownership and forced into a collective farm rapidly lost their incentives to produce. In the farms yet to be collectivized, compulsory quotas were set, and the farmers, scared of what would happen in the future, and not being provided with the means to produce (hand tools, machines, fertilizers and pesticides), could not fulfill the quotas, thus again creating a vicious circle. Since any decrease in productivity could not be publicly acknowledged—on the contrary, dramatic increases were regularly being bruited about—the only explanation was that the kulaks were hoarding the crops, a crime punished with the whole severity of socialist law.

In cases where the state confiscated large landholdings and started operating state-owned farms in their place, the communist governments of the three countries simply did not have agricultural specialists with the expertise to run agricultural operations. In this instance, of course, what was true of agriculture was true in other areas as well: any sort of genuine specialist who had been educated in capitalist times was mistrusted. The people the state substituted in their stead generally had a combination of professional ineptitude and party loyalty that made them completely inadequate for the task at hand. In every case, there were other, technical problems as well, such as the inefficiency of the concept of bureaucratically run collective farms, and the lack of modern technology and machinery, but the result was that the communist states virtually destroyed agricultural productivity in Eastern Europe in the decade immediately after the war. Even without the use of terror, the problems of collectivization pushed the new socialist states to the "brink of self destruction and national disaster," to use Milovan Djilas' expression about the similar agricultural crisis in Yugoslavia. But even though Stalin's writ no longer extended there, the

Yugoslavian communist leaders rejected the idea that the collectives be disbanded. "We have just begun—we cannot give up socialism in the villages," was Tito's response.³⁰

Nevertheless, filmmakers in all three countries reinvented and embellished the conflict along predictable lines: Jerzy Kawalerowicz' *Gromada* and Stanislaw Rozewicz' *Difficult Love* were two early examples. The latter film is a perfect example of the alienation of such films from any existing reality: on the political blueprint of the division of the countryside between the kulaks, middle-sized farmers, and the poor, a Romeo and Juliet story was superimposed, with, of course, a happy ending. The kulak is punished, the middle-sized farmer converted to socialism, and the young lovers finally reunited. Since the kulak's daughter is one of the pair, we have every reason to suppose that all problems have been solved. Films such as these were still being made in Czechoslovakia as late as 1978, despite the painfully obvious fact that agricultural collectivization struggles had long since vanished into the country's past as having any relevance at all to its problems. But the glorification of the struggle was still necessary: if while before the revolution the peasants were told how much better off they would be afterwards, afterwards they were told how much worse off they had been before.³¹ In either case the emphasis was on getting them to believe what they had been told. This was far more important than the actual improvements, which in most cases were probably quite modest or wholly illusory.

The agricultural situation, then, became a kind of gigantic metaphor for the problems of socialist society. The vast disparity between the dreams and promises of the states and their economic realities, which became painfully evident in the early 1950s as the result of over-investment in heavy and military industries, inefficiency and mismanagement, and the neglect of consumer needs, was explained by sabotage, most of which was supposedly done by North American and Western European secret agents who infiltrated into the socialist countries. The shortage of

³⁰Quotes from Milovan Djilas' *Tito, the Story from the Inside*, trans. Vasilije Kojic and Richard Hayes (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980) 54-55.

³¹The next sentence is a paraphrase of one by Steven Mosher in *Broken Earth* (New York: Free Press, 1983) 300. Mosher's analysis of the myth that things in China improved for the peasants after the revolution is relevant to Eastern Europe as well (285-305).

insecticides meant that insects such as the Colorado beetle were ruining the potato crop. But the official version had it that the beetles were being dropped by American planes. The fact that no one ever saw an American plane—and that the airspace of the socialist countries was on all other occasions described as impenetrable by enemy planes—was never clearly explained.

Bizarre as it may seem to an outsider, during this period (and of course for a much longer period in Russia), there were virtually no industrial accidents. If a train crashed, it was sabotage. If there was a mine disaster, it was sabotage—so much so that in the early 1950s a filmmaker like Fabri in Hungary was making a fairly drastic departure from orthodoxy when he created situations in which sabotage was not the cause of accidents. This explains why the leading film of the anti-socialist realistic period was Munk's *Man on the Rails*. As this film sums up the approaches used both in real life and in the cinema, it is worth a closer look.

The film opens with the death of Orzechowski, a retired railroad engineer, who is run down by a train. A committee is set up to investigate the case. The members include the local party secretary, the manager of the regional railroad authority, a communist youth organizer, and a member of the secret police. This committee manages to establish three different versions of what happened.

If we recapitulate the order, we can place the three versions in a hierarchy of political values. The first version is the purely Stalinist one illustrative of the general points established thus far in our discussion. In this version Orzechowski, a specialist whose work predates the war, is seen to belong to what Marx called the "workers aristocracy," and accordingly he hated the new communist order. He opposed the party policies and sabotaged the efforts of his co-workers to save coal and raise production quotas. When he was unmasked and forcibly retired, he decided to take revenge by derailing a train. In this version his death came by accident: the train ran over him when he was tampering with the semaphore.

The second version reveals the reality of the thaw and its attendant liberalizations. Orzechowski was a good specialist, but a man of somewhat difficult character. He did not understand the new socialist order, and was jealous of his younger colleagues, all good communists, who were rising fast in the hierarchy. His accidental death was the result of

drunkenness. Such behavior is a legacy of the capitalist past, and more attention should have been given to his re-education.

As in *Rashomon*, as we get closer to the end we begin to see that the final version comes closest to the truth. Orzechowski was sympathetic to socialism, but he fought to maintain the older professional standards. His greater experience led him frequently to oppose the projects of his zealous and politically-minded subordinates. He perceived that their inexperience led them to suggest things that would ultimately bring about great damages to the railroad.

When Orzechowski discovered the broken semaphore, he realized that the only way to stop the train was to stand on the tracks: the train would run over him, but the engineer would stop the train and thus prevent a still greater catastrophe. A deeply moving and symbolic scene shows him taking off his precious railwayman's chronometer and placing it between the rails where it will be preserved.

Munk's film is a powerful statement about the essentially positive attitude of the nation towards socialism which accuses the authorities of creating false conflicts such as those epitomized by the first and second versions of the accident. These conflicts, Munk argues, are essentially specious, whether Stalinist hard-line accounts or their more liberal replacements. Both versions are unwilling to admit what the real underlying problem is: the complete ignorance as to how to solve problems on the part of the party members who have been catapulted into professional jobs coupled with the state's unwillingness to admit that their inexperience would result in costly errors.

The desire to explain all failures as the result of Western inspired sabotage was of course not confined to the world of cinema. During the late 1940s, particularly after Tito's break with Stalin, high officials in all three countries were purged: Marian Spychalski and Wladyslaw Gomulka in Poland, Laszlo Rajk and Janos Kadar in Hungary, and Josef Slanski in Czechoslovakia. Spychalski, who was Gomulka's closest confidant, subsequently caused the Polish film industry a good deal of trouble. In 1953 the film industry had made an epic depicting the life of General Karol Swierczewski-Walter, a communist who was a commander of one of the International brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Wanda Jakubowska's *Soldier of Victory* obediently portrayed the removal of Spychalski, unmasking him as a traitor collaborating with Western

embassies to murder Swierczewski-Walter. But in 1956, when Gomulka came to power, Spychalski was rehabilitated and made minister of defense. Then he became president. Both posts made the existence of a film which portrayed him as a traitor to the state an embarrassment. Jakubowska's film was consequently shelved.

It is important to realize that socialist realism can effectively be seen as a metaphor for acceptable intellectual behavior under Stalin, determining not only what films were made and what books were written, but how historical events were interpreted. Artists and railroad engineers (and politicians and communist functionaries) were thus not the only ones affected.³² Critics and academicians were expected to explain, justify, and support the state's cultural policies as well as its view of history. The views of reality that the filmmakers were obliged to show were not their inventions alone, but were the result of the cooperative enterprise of the intellectuals in relevant disciplines. Soviet historians obediently portrayed the German attack on Russia in 1941 in ways that conveniently removed the blame from Stalin's shoulders for not anticipating the attack.

But the state's demands involved scholars in other areas as well. Bela Balazs is justly regarded

as one of the great film theorists.³³ In addition to his film scripts, he worked with Bartok on the libretti to his operas, thus incidentally illustrating the close connection between film and the traditional art forms that is so characteristic of Eastern Europe. But as a member of the Hungarian Communist State Balazs' theories were trimmed to fit the needs of that state. In the 1930s Balazs had been one of the leaders for the autonomy of the film as an artform by arguing that the film itself was the work of art. The literary portion, the script, was simply a component of technique. Not only did Balazs' theory elevate the cinema, but it made the director the real film artist; and, by establishing him as the real creator, and his film as the real artwork, it laid down the foundations towards seeing the cinema as a major artform parallel to the others. But in the dark years of the late 1940s in Hungary, it was important for the state to be able to control this new artform thoroughly, and the most effective way of doing this was to exercise absolute control over the scripts, which, as written documents, could be corrected and adhered to. The practical result was that Hungarian directors became slaves to their scripts. The theoretical result was that Balazs revised his theory to assert the primacy of the script, just as Lukács had obediently followed the developing party line and rejected Kafka.

Although one could find scores of similar examples where the artists obediently bobbed and ducked as state policy followed its inexplicable and sometimes mystic course, it must be pointed out that socialist realism was not sheer conformism, but also something to which a generation of the best artists in all three countries dedicated themselves. There were different reasons why in each country. One key reason was, as we have seen, the traditional role of the artist positing a future society in the midst of a deeply unsatisfactory present. Idealistically speaking, the polarization of European intellectual society during the century meant that most men who cared about their fellow man would end up being Marxists rather than fascists. The struggle against fascism being over, there was hope for the future in building a socialist state.

A more pragmatic but equally universal reason was that the state's commitment to art, and the importance that socialist realism gave to the artist as a type of social engineer who would transform the consciousness of new generations, simply continued and enhanced the traditional sense of

³²The issues raised by A. M. Nekrich about the responsibilities for the disasters of the opening months of WWII are summarized by Vladimir Petrov, *June 22, 1941: Soviet Historians and the German Invasion* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1968) 13. Nekrich's historical study generated serious controversy, which was solved in 1967 when he was expelled from the party (22-23). See also the comments in *All Stalin's Men* 57, 75.

³³Nemeskurty points out how Balazs "found himself compelled to comply with the sectarian trend which had been gathering strength from 1947" (165). For most Western film critics, Balazs' discussion of the script in *Theory of the Film*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover Books, 1970) 246-249 is simply a theoretical exercise. Dudley Andrew, in his *The Major Film Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), discusses Balazs in the same way that he discusses other theorists: his Marxism is only a factor in his theory to the extent that he sees "the economic infrastructure of film" (85). But in reality Balazs' views in *Theory of the Film* are deeply responsive to Stalinist strictures. This is why he was, to use Andrew's phrase, "outraged by avant-gardism," and why he "came out so openly for a mechanistic theory of montage" (90). And his politics led him to rewrite film history as well. Balazs characterizes Griffith as making films which were "not only new in their form but radically democratic and progressive in their content" (51). This is certainly a surprising endorsement of *Birth of a Nation*, since it is difficult to see the Klan as a force either democratic or progressive—regardless of how one defines the terms.

mission and value which the region's artists had. The state pumped large amounts of money into the film industry and gave large subsidies to the theaters. It printed large numbers of books, and supplied artists with a variety of technical aids. The lavishness of state support, coupled with the complete freedom from commercial considerations, in and of itself convinced many artists. In Czechoslovakia and in Hungary there were other reasons as well. The Czechoslovak communist party government came to power in a homogenous and relatively prosperous country where a sizeable portion of its dirty work was already done. In addition, since there hadn't been any real resistance to the fascists in Czechoslovakia, there had been few reprisals, nor any of the aspects of civil war as was the case in many other countries.

In Hungary, as in Poland, the absolute destruction of the countryside itself was probably a factor, since the communists did organize each country and attempt to rebuild it. In Hungary in particular the regime and its ideology had additional legitimacy if for no other reason than the old order had led the country into two wars in a row on the wrong side, and, what was worse, had been unable to disengage from the loser, as had the Italians, the Rumanians, and even the Bulgarians.

For these and other, more compelling but probably less rational reasons, most artists, including the filmmakers, began as sincere communists who believed in socialist realism. However, after the death of Stalin and the beginnings of the thaw, they became the most perfervid critics of the excesses of Stalinism. Artists such as Konwicki, Andrzejewski, and Brandys in Poland initially believed in the possibilities usually expressed by the term "socialism with a human face," but they soon became disillusioned with the socialism in any of its actual forms.

After Stalin's death there was a rise in the hopes of the populations, and a widespread belief that after all of the many Stalinist mistakes were rectified socialism would live up to its promise. These attitudes were accompanied by a liberalization which was grasped quickly in Poland, where films such as *Man on the Rails*, *Eroica*, *Kanal*, and *Ashes and Diamonds* inaugurated a new era. In Hungary this process was substantially delayed by the 1956 Revolt and the subsequent repressions; consequently the first significant Hungarian films are made only after 1963. In Czechoslovakia the Communist Party

had been the strongest of the three national parties; under the democratic Republic of the inter-war period the Party had flourished, and it was substantially more able to resist the impetus for reform which shook the parties in Hungary and in Poland. Consequently, the first stirrings of the thaw were delayed until 1963, and even then, the artists whose works signal these new directions are a much younger group than was the case in the other two countries. Ironically, the thaw in Czechoslovakia was also the shortest.

Just as Stalinism, and the Stalinist version of socialist realism, had been the same in all three countries, so did the process of destalinization and liberalization follow a similar pattern, although in different periods and with a different pace. In Poland after 1956, and in Hungary and Czechoslovakia after 1963, distinctive national signatures began to emerge.

Cinema became the key area where an open discussion of important social and political issues was possible. Sometimes these issues were brought out in an oblique or elliptical fashion, but in societies where there was no discussion of important social or political issues permitted in the state controlled press, radio, and television, any opportunity to discuss substantive issues, regardless of how allegorically they were constructed, was an important event. Thus in Poland, where the process began first, a great national debate followed Wajda's *Kanal*, *Ashes and Diamonds*, and *Lotna*. The same was true with Munk's *Eroica* and *Cross Eyed Luck*. All five of these films (and many others as well) generated a debate about the basic issue of the traditional Romantic and heroic behavior of Poles faced with historical adversities. Is such an heroic resistance at the price of the decimation of consecutive generations of young patriots wise, or should the nation calculate its chances, prevent such bloodshed, and put up with foreign occupation? Munk's films in particular seemed to cast a doubt about the wisdom of such a Romanticism, showing in an absurd and apparently mocking light the tragedy of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, in which the poorly armed Polish resistance fought alone against the well-equipped German forces, amidst the hostile neutrality of the Soviet Union and the purely verbal support of the Western allies. Though never openly formulated, this debate about history had contemporary political implications: should the Poles continue to revolt against the historical, political, and geographical realities, or should they accommodate themselves to the situation? In 1956, for example,

the Poles, unlike the Hungarians, stopped short of an open uprising, which exemplified the changes in the Polish national self perceptions. Later a similar debate was generated in Poland by Wajda's adaptation of the epic novel dealing with the Napoleonic era, *Ashes*.

Films like Munk's *Man on the Rails* and Kadar and Klos' Czech film *The Accused* openly presented issues of concern to the Polish and Czechoslovak societies. Munk dealt with the issue of Stalinist mistrust as a reigning principle in social organization, while *The Accused* dealt with the issue of the responsibility of an individual in a highly bureaucratized society. Other films presented allegories that were clear to all interested parties: a mythical bureaucratic and police run state in Tadeusz Chmielewski's *Eve Wants to Sleep*, a totalitarian picnic in Nemec's *Report on the Party and the Guests*, a boat cruise organized and over-regulated along easily recognizable bureaucratic principles in Marek Piwowski's *The Cruise*.

Although the word conventionally used to describe what was happening in society is liberalization, the term is misleading, because it implies that the various states undertook a systematic policy that stood in strong contrast to their past policies. This was not the case. It is more accurate to see what happened as a sort of breakdown of the mechanisms of repression which kept both artists and their public conforming to the state's needs. Vladimir Bukovsky put it this way: "The 1960s saw not so much a thaw as a cooling down, an ossification."³⁴ Enough windows were punched in the existing walls to allow works of some stature to pass. But the state was generally critical of these works in the media, and it spared no effort to ensure a steady flow of ideologically correct works which would reinforce the most primitive notions of Socialist Realism. □

³⁴Quoted in *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter*, trans. Michael Scammell (New York: Viking Press, 1977) 136.

ILLUMINATIONS: AN INTERVIEW WITH KRZYSZTOF ZANUSSI

Conducted by Andrew Horton and Jacek Fuksiewicz

What particular question have you not been asked that you would like to be asked in an interview?

There is no particular question I'd like to be asked. Most questions have a hidden meaning or an evaluation behind them. Sometimes someone asks you, "How do you manage to do your films so well?" which is a terrible trap of a question. But there may be an opposite "why," as in "why are your films so boring, and why didn't you have much success until just now?" This is the sort of question I wouldn't like to answer.

You have had many opportunities to make contact with Western audiences. What are their misperceptions about you and your work?

They are endless, and it is fascinating to watch what happens to your film when it is seen in different contexts. Of course the sample of the public I'm meeting is a small minority considering there are many spectators who buy a ticket and go—there aren't that many, unfortunately, but still far more numerous than I will ever meet. So I can't really build any solid knowledge of misperception until you make a survey, which I have never done. So I have only a few intuitions about misconceptions, and they change with time.

First of all, I have to face a stereotype, which is usually fixed in the heads of the public before I appear. This stereotype evolves. For a long time I was a young, so-called Eastern European director, so I was judged, my work was judged, as what was expected of the Eastern European director. Now it happens that I appear as somebody who is rather cosmopolitan, and as some of my films were made in the West, people hardly associate me with my own country. My travels across Italy are very misleading, because people ask me why I have an accent—just because I have an Italian name. And when travelling with the film about the Pope, which for the Italians is an Italian film, that was a totally different outlook on me. Once I was even confused with someone else.

There were a lot of political misconceptions, which were probably the most painful in the 70s. It was the shadow of the 60s, when the whole of Western rhetoric was extremely difficult for us to accept. It sounded extremely hostile. I don't want to use the word, but it sounded very reactionary and had very strong fascist overtones: the whole European left was speaking a language which invoked to us—to me—memories of Stalinism. It was very strongly totalitarian. And there was enormous difficulty in understanding the communication, and all of us had to develop very elaborated patterns of speech to avoid expressions and terms and ideas which had totally opposite colors, which to us are highly repugnant, and which are very exciting and alluring for most young Westerners. And this was one of platforms where we were deeply confused.

I remember that in 1972 at Cannes when you showed Family Life you were attacked by the press, by the critics, as to why your film was not revolutionary, why you didn't deal with social and political problems.

Right. They wanted something totally different. I was very proud that I was able to break with the stereotype of revolution, which although deeply abused was still very present in our society. This is always the same relationship—that you meet some expectation. The best is when someone has no expectation. But that happens very seldom, usually only when you are confused with somebody else. Then there are no expectations. Otherwise, it is always a confrontation with what people expect from you, you as an author, or you as a representative of one or another ideologies.

Other foreign directors want to go to Hollywood, even though that entails making a drastically different sort of film—as has been the case with Forman. Since you've made films here, is that something you see yourself as doing?

To function, that is the possible role of the filmmaker outside of reality, the only reality he

has grown up in. It is not easy. There are many examples. The point is what is for me. I wouldn't classify Milos Forman so radically, because he remained to a certain extent faithful to himself. He still has the touch. He doesn't return, but he does return to Czechoslovakia to shoot *Amadeus*, and so there is something, and he reminds us of the great Austrian Empire which Bohemia was part of. And so there is something I can recognize. He didn't really melt into the American way of thinking, but he made very big compromises, made concessions, as did Polanski.

And Makavejev, who continues to say he can't make films in Yugoslavia. . . .

Well, I wonder if he would be really permitted to do what he wants to do. He is so excessive. But in fact Makavejev functions on the international level very successfully—not in terms of business, but in terms of temperament. He finds his role, which is interesting.

But my aim is to keep making my own films—which is like writing my own novels—wherever I am. The longer I am in the West the more I have to say it will be my vision of life. But I insist that even if I make a film in France it is not a French film, but it has to be my film, and in Germany it has to be my film and not a German film. And I try to find the line of to what extent what I'm telling is understandable and acceptable in a different cultural context. But basically it is continuation. It is not imitation. I don't want to camouflage myself. I would blame Zulawski for doing it. He is more Catholic than the Pope. He makes films that are so French that they cannot be more French. He is playing a role of an Eastern European working in France as expected. He is telling them exactly what they want to hear. He is, in fact, very successful, and that is why I dare to criticize him, because it is not an attitude that I particularly like. It happened to a couple of our directors who left. They just tried to imitate, and they were good imitations. Sometimes you make good imitations. Quite a few Hollywood directors came from Europe and made imitations. So it is possible as an attitude.

But who said it? I think it was William Wyler, but Milos Forman quoted it to me: "In order to make a successful film in America you must love hamburgers and coke." I hate both. So, I have little chance.

Could you say a little bit about your American film, The Catamount Killing?

Oh, yes, my first and only—as to now. Well it's definitely not my favorite, but it's still something I recognize, and I don't want to withdraw my name from it. It was sort of a lesson I had: when I made this film I realized what I like and what I really don't like, what makes me happy and what makes me unhappy. I made a film which was offered—it was not my script. Funnily enough, the author, James Hadley Chase, had written his novel without ever being in America, so the realism of his book was rather deceiving. We realized when shooting that there were things that were not credible, which you realize especially when you try to visualize them. But I thought I would find something which was mine, and I added to it; I rewrote the script, and I added a second half to it. So as the film was about a crime, I tried to add some punishment to it. I made a film which naturally wasn't very successful, because it was in the wrong slot, and telling the wrong people the wrong things. But it is still something in which I tried to articulate my vision of moral values as applied to this society. The line which I was very proud of is said by the protagonist at the end, after having committed a crime. He wants to be arrested, saying, "I want to be free, so I want to go to prison." This is, of course, deeply understandable to anyone who has read Dostoevsky but wouldn't be very understandable to people who go to see double features in the drive-in—which is where this film is playing.

Did it receive a commercial release?

Oh yes. It was actually playing in drive-ins. It broke even, although it didn't make any money, but it wasn't expensive. On the other hand, I was offered a similar kind of project immediately afterward, which proved that this was not considered a failure. Except that I never wanted to make another film like that. One was enough. And I realized that it doesn't make me enough fun and that it was too far away from my own experience and from my own knowledge. To make something that is obviously halfway is disappointing. So I was happy to come back to Poland to make another film, and then I made something in Germany, which was much closer to my personality. But I'm still looking for a project for America. . . .

What different approach might you take today in a film about America?

Well today I would be very careful to choose the

subject matter, using something I feel competent about and have personal experiences in, or something where I feel as competent as any American should. In fact, I'm planning—and I am under contract—to make a film, a sort of remake of *Queen Cristina*, the classic with Greta Garbo, about the same historical character. The script has been completed just recently.

There is an Italian production involved, and there will probably be a British part in it, and probably an American part, too. It is scheduled for 86-87. The script has been completed just recently, and I was working on it. It is a very interesting work, again, because my writer is a British-American writer, Chris Bryant, who works for Paramount, and he was all the time censoring, monitoring my ideas, pointing out that whatever I say would never be understood by the boy from Iowa—which I remember was the argument that Milos Forman heard when he was working on *Amadeus*. And this I understand, I admit it, I understand it's a relevant argument: to make *Amadeus* successful he had to make the film for somebody who's never heard the name Mozart, and that's how it works.

That's true, but I think America is now much more receptive to a foreign vision, or to an American vision of foreigners. Are there two or three films made by foreigners about America that you admire?

Taking Off, Paris, Texas; maybe Louis Malle's Atlantic City. They are all extremely different. And I would say Konchalovsky's Maria's Lovers. For you it would be a fantasy. There is a totally and absolutely Russian emotionality, disguised and dubbed into spoken English. Amazingly, when you watch the scenes, and you try to read the dialogue in Russian, you realize how authentic and natural it is, while in English, I'm afraid, it functions not that well.

In speaking about Catamount Killing you spoke about applying your moral point of view. This brings us to the problems of your moral concerns, which are not only your concerns, but became the concerns of the Polish cinema of the 1970s. Why this particular concern for ethical problems in Polish cinema? In talking to North American students about Camouflage I was told that the sort of corruption that you portray could happen here, that your portrait of the university could be a university here. Is there more corruption in Poland?

Well, no. I would say that the real corruption is

bigger in many other countries I know of, but the discrepancy between the ideology which speaks about values and the application of the values becomes very painful. Whenever it happens in America you agonize about it as well. For example, the film about the honest cop in New York, *Serpico*, is exactly the kind of moralism which I recognize in our cinema. But, the whole issue is not as dramatic as it is for us, because probably the reality here as it is perceived by the public is not such a dramatic contrast, which is why you have so little cynicism in America, just as you have so much cynicism in Poland, and all over the continent. People believe that their institutions function, and that their politicians are more honest, that things are basically okay. We have the belief that everything is the opposite of how it is described, that the institutions act totally to the contrary. This is the whole Orwellian concept—that you can have a ministry of justice which sets injustice, and you have a ministry of wealth which distributes poverty; and there is a ministry of truth which spreads lies. If you have it as a part of a big system, and you totally disapprove, the whole structure of your public life, all institutions, you consider ill-conceived. Then it becomes a major issue, not a marginal issue.

So it is not a question of just a comparison, I think. Most Americans trust most of the American institutions. So the criticism is in a way marginal. When something goes wrong, you think, well, that's a good subject for somebody to make a film about. But we have a feeling that all is wrong, from the bottom to the top, deeply exaggerating, which is my political objection—that we exaggerate. Talking to our friends in opposition, I try to convince them that paying for public transportation is totally justified, even if Jaruzelski made many unacceptable movements. And they say no, negation should be total, including not paying for public transportation. So the difference is in scale, it is bigger, the discrepancy is bigger, in our case.

Your films being very strong criticism of the Polish system, why does the Polish government support them?

A very good question. That's one question which I have to answer in all meetings with the public. How often I am asked that. Well, the question is in a way irrelevant because it refers to a totally wrong image of a centralized totalitarian system. However centralized they are, they are not all that centralized. And there is always an inner power

struggle. In fact, I believe that in my country, as much as in the Soviet Union, the difference of opinions between different trends in the same communist party is much bigger than the differences between the parties in most Western countries, and especially bigger than in America, where the difference between the Republicans and the Democrats is far smaller than the difference between the different trends under the surface of the Soviet Union or Poland, where the concepts of the future and the concepts of life are very very different. It never goes to the surface, but it is there underneath, and the fact that sometimes one film is allowed to function comes from the fact that one group, one fraction is in favor of it in order to embarrass another fraction. It is very seldom direct, and usually indirect, but also a very simple mechanism, that whoever is responsible for the production of the film, for the permission, would be fighting to defend his decision. And he will always be inclined to believe that the film is innocent, while the others accuse him of being not alerted enough. So there are many elements, and many aspects, to the complication which allows some films to function without being censored.

You said that the criticism stems from the discrepancy between communist ideals and their application. Do the authorities recognize in themselves those high values?

To a certain extent. I think it is in decline now. They care less now about beautiful ideas. The utopian vision of communism is not taught anymore, as it used to be in the 1950s, when the utopian vision of the classless society, and the idyllic future, was still very present. Nowadays there is a far more pragmatic approach. I think the deepest believers among communists would just argue that their system has more future and is a little bit better than capitalism, but I don't think they would go so far as to say that in three generations you would really see a paradise on this earth. So this is already gone. But still there are some who believe that communism should have a moral superiority to capitalism. And this may work sometimes as an argument when you criticize the application, and the ideologist will say alright, maybe the application doesn't work, and this film, this criticism, confirms the importance of the ideas, and the ideas are there. There should be justice; there should be better ideas.

Konwicki, in The Polish Complex, stands as the sort

of cynic you have just described, but he also says that he is waiting for miracles. Are you waiting for miracles, too?

Oh yes, very much so. Of course I do wait for miracles, but I'm very patient, so I don't insist that they must happen. But I have seen several miracles happen in history—the recreation of Poland after the First World War. In 1917 there was no chance whatsoever to believe that there would ever be an independent Polish state, and in 1920 there was.

So a miracle is a combination of opportunity, chance, and a few right people at the right time?

Well, you asked three questions in one, and therefore it would be a philosophical credo if I agreed with you. But you are right. All those elements must be there. But there may be also a massive switch of opinion, which sometimes provokes miracles. Some revolutions are like miracles, because they happen and nobody expected them; a couple of years earlier nobody dared dream about them. So, such miracles sometimes happen in history—speaking about political miracles and not individual miracles. So I'm waiting for one. But I won't insist. If it doesn't happen I won't be very disappointed, because there is no regularity about the occurrence of miracles.

Who is your audience in Poland? Do you feel you have a particular audience you are aiming at? Are you reaching the "farmer in Iowa" in Poland?

I don't really aim, but due to my under evaluation of the farmer from Iowa, who sometimes may be responsive to something that I would arbitrarily say that he's excluded from, sometimes I do—by surprise. It happened to one of my films, *Behind the Wall*, which deals with academic reality, and it is far too complicated to be understood, and it was understood, astonishingly, by people who had no idea what the difference was between an associate professor and an assistant, and had no idea what are the details of research. But they knew that the lady wants to be loved and the love was refused, and on this level it functioned. It was one of my films which reached a large audience. It just happened. Probably when you are honest and clear, you may reach people far beyond the point you expect. But this is a miracle. *Camouflage* was a film which I thought would just be set for three or four hundred thousand people

in my country. That would have been a decent audience, and I had five times more—just because people identified with these academic figures, without knowing anything very much about academic life. But they knew the factory, and they knew it was the same kind of structural corruption, and structural pressure is so similar that they recognized themselves in something they thought would be exclusively understandable to people who had experience of academic life.

So your films do play in small theatres and in small towns?

Some of them play in small theatres, but some of them play in very big theatres, too. Most of them do play in small towns, and I am very aware and conscious of economic pressures. Also, I think there is a moral aspect. I don't want to be a debtor of the government, and I want to make films which will break even. Otherwise the sponsorship of the government will be morally binding. I don't want to feel like that. There is a very strong movement among our colleagues, and I subscribe to it, to make ourselves self-sufficient in terms of an audience, to look for popular support instead of looking for government support. And we did succeed. You know Wajda is quite popular and moneymaking as a director, and I would consider myself as a solid investment. There is no loss with my films in the last couple of years. None of my films were a loss.

A good deal of recent literary criticism argues that at the heart of all narrative is mystery. The ending of Ways in the Night seems ambiguous. You could say, pessimistically, that the love affair never worked out; or you could say that she hasn't been touched by history, wants to lead her own life, and rips up the letter. What was your feeling about the ending?

I think the girl is rather unhappy—or she will be unhappy—because she refuses to deal with history, to recognize her roots, to recognize her limitations. But I will say that the fact that the letter remains unopened has a certain notion of mystery in it, and maybe the mystery should remain mysterious. So you would like another person to do the same with her. But the notion of mystery is something which I insist on very strongly, and I think that is what is very badly missing in the French and Anglo-Saxon concepts of life and culture. The concept of mystery is

missing. It is missing in all the rationalistic cultures of the West, particularly in France with its Cartesian vision. Those films which deal with mystery occur so seldom; like, for instance, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which tries to bring us a touch of a real mystery which will never be revealed, and that makes it highly irritating and most unsatisfactory. But that's the real mystery. The rest is just misunderstanding, taking something for mysterious when it turns out at the end to be explicable. This would apply even to *The Exorcist*, because it seems to give a very clear answer. At the end we know how to defend ourselves. That's all very wrong.

A few years ago I made a film which few people cared for very much. It didn't have much of a run in America, although I believe it was shown at a few universities. It was called *Imperative*, and it was all about mystery and the notion of mystery. The subject of it is the notion of mystery and the difference between Eastern religiosity and the Western rationalist approach.

Do you think that Polish culture is more receptive to mystery, something often suggested by the idea of Catholicism and the notion of the "slavic soul"?

Being Westerners we do not belong in the mainstream of Slavic tradition, since we're Catholics. But our Catholicism is far more open to mystery than French Catholicism, which is perfectly washed-out of any touch of mystery whatsoever. So it is probably a combination of all of that. Our culture, the place where we grew up in Europe, makes us open to some influences of the East, and of Eastern European criticism.

It's ironic that both you and Wajda have made films about World War II, and about a love affair between a German and a Pole. What do you see as the difference between you?

There is a difference between Wajda and I. He is fifteen years older, and he speaks about his direct memories and I don't. My memories are the memories of childhood, so that places me differently. Besides, I'm talking in my own name, from a Polish point of view to a German audience. Whereas Wajda in *Love in Germany* speaks from the German point of view. Although he is a Pole, and although he uses a Polish text, the reality with which he identifies the characters is all German. The Pole is a marginal figure in his film. But apart from that, I think there are similarities, no doubt, and our Polish-German complex is

always to be explored. The more I work in Germany the more I feel how little in common we have being neighbors.

Michalek said that the Germans were absolutely hostile to that film. What did they feel about yours?

I think I managed to play a certain kind of moral blackmail so that the film got very good reviews and a very large audience. But it was a television audience. I don't think I met one single person who was satisfied or pleased with the film. I think they just used it as one of their masochistic instruments which they use to flagellate themselves before they go for a meal. I had this feeling there were objections; I felt that people were objecting and that single people were objecting more, that I put the blame on the good German instead of putting blame on the bad German. It is always very unpleasant, because everybody always identifies with the good Germans, however few of them there were. And now, if you say that the good German was also guilty, it is a rather unpleasant statement. But on the other hand, I noticed that—and it was very scary—I was praised, even by the crew, who said they liked the way of showing the uniforms, and of showing that the Germans know how to make order, know how to handle the problems. It was rather scary. It was a German crew, and they were very happy with me as a director. I showed that they were tough.

Has it been shown in Poland?

In Poland it has never had a release, although maybe it will be released now. It qualified for release two years ago, but still there is no motion about it. The previous government, the government of Mr. Gierke, told me that it shows Germany in a good light by the simple fact that they allowed me to make this film. So that's the reason.

Is the same thing true of Wajda's film?

I wonder. Probably not, but again, films dealing with the resistance are now rather unpopular with the authorities. Resistance is something very universal; any kind of subversive activity seems to evoke some illusions.

Are there other of your films which have not yet been shown in Poland?

Imperative hasn't been shown yet. And obviously, my film on the Pope has never been considered for release in Poland, and I must admit I understand why. It is politically not on the line, on the official historiography, but is opposing it.

As a filmmaker and scriptwriter do you feel some obligation to teach, to help younger filmmakers?

I feel this obligation. I teach a lot, but simply because I find it a challenge. First of all, I articulate things that otherwise I wouldn't bother to articulate. As you know, film is a very deeply brainwashing profession, so once you are forced to speak to students, you have to name things which normally you don't name anymore. Besides, it is a challenge when you meet people who question all you have done and all you have learned. I don't know whether they will be right and I will be wrong, so I am very curious to see the process. In the end there is a certain satisfaction when you find people who are responsive to the same values and the same intuitions that you have, and they will continue. I was teaching in Lodz, in our film academy for years, and I was fired, gloriously fired, due to the film I made in America and due to the fact that I spent too much time in America.

I don't understand the concept of being fired in a socialist country like Poland. How can you lose your job unless it is a political action?

It was a political action, and I got dismissed that way. I was dismissed in one day; it was a rapid dismissal. Then for a long time I was teaching in another film school which was created later in Katowice at the Catholic university. Now the students of our school are starting their work, and I'm very curious if our school is any better, being a newly created school in opposition to the other one. Recently I've been fired from the new one, from Katowice. But very gently, it was no big break. There was a big fight about whether the school would survive, and I was very involved. We won; the school will survive. But there was a small additional remark—but without you. Kieslowski has been fired, too. Maybe we'll manage to come back to it. In fact, we do something that is particularly subversive. We teach without being paid. So all semester I commuted to Katowice and taught there without being paid. Doing it without pay was legal. The pretext of being cut was an article.

How does the present political situation in Poland change the situation in film there?

It needs a critic, and it needs a very fresh eye, to make a diagnosis of what has happened. There are several facts that are feasible. All pro-governmental films are absolutely rejected. It doesn't matter how much sex and frontal nudity you put to them. No one wants to see them. This is something which didn't happen before. The public was more lenient, and it is not very lenient anymore. There is a certain interest in evasion, and there are quite a few evasive films, which are doing well. But people are again very sensitive to all allusions. Also, you have this new science fiction trend of political criticism, which is very strong, and very well received, disguised in the future, a gloomy future. Sometimes it is funny, sometimes it is gloomy, but it is always meant to be a vision of an Orwellian world. What else can I say? These are the things which are easy traits; these are the films which have an impact. But I think that people got immune to culture in general, to a certain extent.

Has your last film been released in Poland?

Not yet. And it has been very badly received in Poland. The official—the ultimate—judgment of our film is negative. The film is defamatory and is a slander. That is what was pronounced by the secretary of the central committee. So, they are responsible for culture. What is new is that there are some people who dare to oppose this opinion, even within the administration. There is a vice prime minister who expressed a different opinion. But still this is the official opinion with all consequences. On the basis of this opinion the film was withdrawn for the Oscar, and so now there is no Polish film for the Oscar. They will never allow slander to be shown.

This was the official notice?

Oh yes. It was publicly said, and the obedient journalists were instructed that they had to attack the film on this line, and they did so immediately. The film hadn't even opened, and there were

quite a few devastating reviews, saying that I'm showing a vision of the country which is unfair.

What do you think about the role of films in society, given television?

I make no distinction. Whatever way there will be distribution of my work, I am happy that there is distribution. It may be television; it may be the cinema. If I had an option I would prefer the cinema, as it is a more social kind of reception. It is a group experience, and people unite watching a film. In our fragmented society I think that is a particular value when we feel united for a moment, for one moment of laughter or for one moment of fear. And we leave the cinema watching one another, which I think is very healthy. However, it is declining, but not entirely, I think. There is the panic of the concert audiences decreasing when records first appeared, or when radio started to transmit music. There was a saturation, with a minority frequenting musical institutions. I think it will remain this way; there will always be a small minority. Always the thing which will be the most avant-garde, the most important, will be connected with the experience of cinema. But probably more and more of my films will be shown under different circumstances. I don't mind. I am so happy that somebody will see what I've done. Even if it is on the plane, the worst kind of reception you can imagine, I would still say it's better than nothing. I don't have high expectations, which is part of my whole philosophy, which is probably different from that of the incoming generation who are expecting a lot, and are misled by some sort of intuition, or a conviction, that something has been promised to humanity, to us, some sort of justice, some kind of fairness. I wonder by whom, and to whom? I managed, being four years old, to escape from the transport to the concentration camp, and I think that is a good preparation for life.□

Edited by Sarah E. Spain.

Armando Valladares

TO THE PREACHERS OF HATE

Translated by William Marling

Y ou were the ones
built the walls of lies,
telling everyone
that I had bloody claws
and savage fangs
with jaws vomiting
the brimstone of heresies.
You told them
that I couldn't smile,
that my lips could not
kiss children,
that my eyes could not see tenderly,
nor my hands cradle a wild flower.
You preached hate and the big lie.
I was far away,
there in the forced labor camp
under whip and bayonet blows,
learning the terror
of the butt-end of Marxism,
or in the sealed cells of Boniato prison,
or on hunger strike.
And they saw me arrive in my wheelchair,
frightened, they watched
"Why do they bring this monster here?" they thought.
.....
First, some noticed
the lack of claws,
those who waited saw in my mouth
the savage fangs
showing in my smile
calm and without hate. . . .
Days passed and I talked with everyone
and my words took root and flowered.
Months passed, and I showed them my heart
and twenty years of lies

could not resist the destructive force
of my tenderness
and the walls of rancor fell
—erected by you—
and my love opened eyes
to a different reality,
the sun of my soul
celebrated a warmth of life
that you denied I had.
And they loved me,
they admired me,
the women and children kissed me.
Marxism couldn't stop them,
nor class struggle,
nor membership in the Young Communists
nor the terror of your Political Police.

Meetings were called
to demand that they hate me
to prohibit them from kissing me
or greeting me.
Those who wanted to be close to me
had to be threatened and terrorized.
You had to put me in isolation again.
But it was already too late.
Over the shards of hate that my love swept aside,
from there below—hidden—
they lifted hands to greet me
and blew kisses to my window
and at times
secretly,
the way this poem leaves,
there came into my cell a rose:
the admiration of a people enslaved.

July 28, 1979

Drago Jančar

REALITY AS LITERATURE—
OR A NOTE FROM PRAGUE, SPRING 1983

INTRODUCTION

Drago Jančar, thirty-seven, belongs to Yugoslavia's younger generation of writers. He has written three novels, four plays, two books of short stories, and a volume of essays. His novel, *The Rogue*, has been translated into seven languages, while his play, *The Great Brilliant Waltz*, was judged the best play of the year in Slovenia in 1985. Jančar feels that his writings derive some of their impulses from existentialism. In his view "man is a being of free and independent historical initiative, and circumscribed only by his will-power. He is an entity of free and open possibilities, concepts, and actions, responsible only to his own freedom and power. But at the same time he is a creature of generic memory and a creation of social patterns." These words suggest a sort of tension in his works, which the author has described as balanced "on the thin edge between madness and hope."

This morning I visited Kafka's grave at Strašnice—a Jewish cemetery in the suburbs, close to the last stop of the underground: beautiful tombstones, made of black marble, beautifully arranged one beside the other, in straight lines, along wide walking paths—quite different from the old Jewish cemetery in the Old Town, where one has the feeling of walking over a pit, filled with earth, but underneath full of dead bodies. Here, at Strašnice, all the tombstones are black, except the one erected for Kafka, which is white. Every one of them is overgrown with green, except Kafka's, on which there is sand and a heap of little stones, brought here instead of flowers by his admirers. Opposite Kafka's grave there is built in the wall a memorial plate for Max Brod. Under Brod's plate are again plenty of little stones. Here Senoa should have written: a stone from the poet's grave. I am trying to get the graveyard caretaker—who fills his little stove even if outside is warm and damp April weather—into a conversation. The Jew is diffident, but then there is that woman who corresponds exactly to the description of a woman from Phillip Roth's "Professor of Desire"—an unusual feeling, to meet a person

you know from some literature, really far away. I feel tempted to ask the literary heroine about the grave of Kafka's barber, which she had wanted to show to the literary hero of Roth's novel. At the last minute I change my mind; my assumption might turn out to be true, and then reality and literature might become one and the same thing. Following this, I arrive straight to Josef K. But his world is so close to reality that I dare not risk this identification. The fall yesterday was big enough, so that now for the time being I am going to stand on solid ground, even if on the thin edge between reality and literature.

Have I still not overcome the reality of yesterday, or the literature about the decomposition of the organism, about the resistance of all organic matter? Disintegrating, ill, neurotic I had to overcome the customs formalities at the Zagreb airport—horrible drinking the night before, that evil which comes close to the border of abyss, the one that wants to touch a certain dark bottom, the one which has in itself a self-murdering instinct. And then I am pulling around, from one point to another, with the airplane being understandably late. A sudden meeting with P. He, as well, is

travelling to Prague, on business in his line as a publisher. I envy him his self-composure no less than his fine state of health.

Such should a man be when starting on a journey, unlike me, brittle, with pains in my temples, and confused, utterly confused. I have a feeling he knows what is going on inside me, but he is considerate and does not at all show what he might be thinking. I am drinking coffee, the third one on that day already, and I know that things are going to get worse. Indeed they are. A cool fever and waves of sickness come over my body. I know: it is coming. Quite peacefully I go to the lavatory, cover the seat, and sit myself on it. Sweat is coming over me, like the sweat before death. It seems to me I am falling and that I am lying helpless in an empty space. I am floating. It's terrific and beautiful—beyond description. I know this is what it will be like when I die; but not yet, not here in the lavatory at the Zagreb airport. When once I am dead and white, then it will be like this. Gradually I am awakening from the semi-conscious state, recovering my strength, becoming confident that I am going to see Prague. Also, the plane is not going to collapse, but if it should it will be precisely into the abyss I am in now. Nothing new will happen. I am washing myself with a cold squirt of water. Our plane is still nowhere in sight. P. gives me a few coins, and I make a call to inquire what horrible thing has happened last night. Nobody answers. That is better. I borrow from P. some money and buy myself a watch. I make a present of it to myself for my horrible birthday yesterday. In the duty free shop I also buy a few presents. I hate shopping, but today it is necessary, very necessary indeed. My nerves are becoming all right again. I know the worst is now behind me. Anybody who knows the agony of death and has been through it knows also when he has suffered it through and that the worst is over.

Fifteen years ago reality and literature were clearly distinguished. Kafka's world was interesting; it constituted a distant, unknown land. Man's physical fall was never brought into relation with his spiritual existence, with the feeling that the bottom of the dismal abyss was moving away all the time, even if it is so close. Now, however, the two feelings are already much closer to each other; now the dangerous edges where reality and literature seem to border on each other have become much closer: Kafka and his barber, the airplane and my fall, the world where I walk.

The hotel reminds me of something like a boarding school: a small room, radio, a view of some kind of a courtyard and big, box-like council houses like in the suburbs; the bathroom for men down along the corridor, just like in army barracks. Downstairs at the entrance, I put a few coins into the telephone, trying to ring up T. At the other end is a woman's voice, but it seems as though she cannot hear my voice. I try again, and yet again. The voice at the other end is increasingly less patient. Possibly the telephone has broken down somewhere. I try to ring up from the post-office nearby—same thing. Either they do not want to hear me or some other technical forces are already in operation. To the town close by I send a telegram to V., a friend of mine. *I am in Prague. Let's go for a beer.* Afterwards I go to my room and try to fall sleep. I cannot: the nerves, a strange room, a big town with black facades all over, deadly sins, twitching eyes, wandering. I cannot. I call a taxi, go into the town, and walk along Vaclavske namesty. From the sky a slight rain is beginning. It is nine o'clock, and the streets are empty except for a few foreigners, like me, at first sight. At Flek's I have a dark beer, with a taste of caramel, and little pieces of bread toasted in fat and spread-over with garlic. I am watching two large tables with people singing and competing one against the other. At one table there are Czechs, from the provincial parts, and at the other tourists from East Germany, who obviously are enjoying their stay here in this tavern. The Czechs are slowly singing a certain pulled-out melody; the East Germans, beating their Prussian refrain with "eins, zwei, drei," are expectedly the louder group. A drunken man is staring at me. Today I could not care for a drunkard. I'm smoking; I pay the bill to the drunken waiter, and then along the black, empty streets—what with the rain continually drizzling—try to find a taxi.

A heavy dream—but in the morning I feel rested. I again call T., this time through telephone exchange. Now he answers, and this time we seem to hear each other distinctly. It seems that last night I did not sufficiently understand the telephoning technique here. Phone boxes here work differently. I receive a cordial reception, and we have a long talk about literature, above all about Slovene literature. Then I browse through the review *Plamen*, which was published until 1969. T. was on the editorial board—a very fine review indeed: literature written at home and foreign literature, a critical scrutiny of history,

historical parallels, problems of a "small" nation, political articles written from a critic's distance and with a respectful attitude, full reviews of what is new on the book market, polemics, glosses, and all of it in a beautiful design. In the most recent number I come across poems by G. Strniša, and right at the beginning Dedijer's account of Kidrič's meeting with Stalin (unitaristically J. Visarionovich provokes him: I am a full-blooded Serb—but Kidrič does not give in to this and says, I am a full-blooded Slovene). 25,000 copies of *Plamen* were issued. It was quieter and more searching than the well-known clashing *Literarny noviny*. In 1969 in the last number, we read on the first page, Duben (April): *Nothing lasts for ever*, words (if I am not mistaken) which by the editors are attributed to Ovid—informing the readers that it is banned. And this is the end. But to T. it seems that this will go on forever. He believes he will certainly not see such a magazine again. Possibly . . . but after a prolonged consideration . . . possibly such a magazine will be seen by the present generation which enjoys more trust and whose members have found themselves also inside the institutional organizations; possibly this generation will gradually start to open the overall platform—a series of capable people. But the whole thing would have a perspective if the institution wanted capable persons. The problem is in the fact that they want *fools*, those who had in the early seventies everywhere come to the cultural sphere. But the fools will cut off the heads of those who are capable, even if the latter are ideologically one hundred percent pure. Therefore T. does not expect certain young men to be able to embark on a more remarkable career. But then there is something. He hopefully voices his hope against hope: there is some prose, some criticism, here and there an editor protected by his party services in the past.

The famous seventies, also in my country: a funeral of the students' movement, an end to the liberalization in the society, economy, and a decline of creative work in culture and science; a rise of dogmatics and bootlicks; the time of my hardest trials, study, writing; and at the turn of the decade, in my country, a change—new liberalization in culture. For how long will this last?

And then I read a series of stories and anecdotes about *former* writers, editors, critics, producers, dramaturgists . . . how somebody is somewhere in the province, another one a cloakroom

attendant, the first one a bookkeeper, the other one an entertainer in pubs, a Švejk—who else. T. dislikes this comparison, and later on I notice that nobody likes it either. Švejk is a simulation of one's folly, but what is going on here is much too serious for the Švejkian simulation to still have any significance at all. Now the world has come much closer to that which sees and desperately tries to understand Josef K. Nobody is any longer eager to simulate a fool, when now the differences between what is rational and what is stupid are so radically obliterated. But still: Švejk and Josef K. are much closer to each other than it appears at first sight. Even if they cannot see each other, as stated by Kosik, each of them has brought his respective world to that point of absurdity where the meeting point comes up.

The lesson I draw from all this is the insight that fifteen years ago I would not have been going to Kafka's grave in a frame of mind like today. Possibly the world has been like this from time immemorial—only that in my consciousness at the end of the sixties I came to see it suddenly in a clear light, in the middle of dilluvial human darkness. However, at that time activism and the endless talking about freedom appeared to be a very sensible form of existence. But is it still, despite what all happened here?

In this town something happened that we are all very much determined by. It seems we all do not want to admit this. Here, possibly, the most violent breakdown of the writer's, of the intellectual's commitment in the newer European history took place. Each of us living in the East has gone through something similar, but it appears to me that in other places we have everywhere preserved some essential chance for the continuation of autonomous literature, for a language that is essentially different from the redemptive or pragmatically political one. Here brute force was the first to strike, and it was then replaced by mediocrity, every kind of brutality and foolishness that then entered all aspects of and started changing everything in existence according to its own image. This phenomenon, of course, does not belong to this one town, to Prague, but here its most characteristic signs are to be found. The intellectual flight of a spring was here at its highest, and so the fall is so much the deeper. Perhaps it is inadequate to call all of this Stalinism. Something more is at stake, something which is inside man himself. Otherwise we need not think for a minute that the rest of us are

immune from Stalinism.

I believe it is not necessary at all to insist that Stalinism is not a historical phenomenon overcome by now, but that it is something that is latent and according to some indicators also constantly present. Stalinism, called as such after J.V. Stalin, could, as a human and social phenomenon, have also a different name. We witnessed, by force, its outburst; its continuity can be encountered now and will be also experienced in the future, for the force which is ready to resort to oppression in order to introduce into society equality and order, which is ready to do evil for man's good, is more than a social phenomenon, an historical law, or the fiction of a few people. Stalinism is a latent constituent part of any society and is organically built into man as a human being.

At times such things appear to be all well known. Yet it is clear that they have always had to be reiterated. My generation has not been much interested in restrictions and ghosts which were there in the blood and veins of those before us, all who had difficulty coping with them. We entered an open place. In the years when man reached an intellectually and morally definitive picture, we spoke and wrote free words as a matter of course. It is now a decade and a half since those years. During that period many a thing has happened or has changed, so much so that it is again necessary to speak in very clear words about things already known. It is indeed surprising to observe how a short span of fifteen years, not in itself in historical perspective of any particular importance, blurs the historical memory of and brings the next generation face to face with exactly the same questions that at one time in the past used to appear, at least for a straightforward individual, solved.

I must say, however, that I am losing my will to argue such things with other people—and other things, as well. Thousands of typewritten pages had been swallowed up when I worked as a journalist, and many of these texts were printed on the pages of reviews, of students' presses: how many discussions, sleepless nights, how many heated debates, how many words uttered from Metković to Krakow—and all this activism eventually just in order to strike with full force, back on you with precisely that force about which you have been telling other people that it must never happen again. And then you can realize

that this is unidentified evil, not to be named by using simple labels, because it goes deeper than you can imagine. Finally you know that it is perhaps just literature that might help you towards an understanding of it, but never will you be able to do something opposing its mere existence. Cruelty and stupidity are two permanent characteristics (virtues?) of mankind, indestructible and eternal.

The fundamental statements about violence and stupidity were made by Kafka and Hašek here on this historical soil. Their statements were made for us all. But by sheer accident—or is this possibly just an underlying law—it was here where their literary output started turning into reality. Or, shall we make the point more explicit: reality started to turn into literature.

I'm looking for a pub to have lunch—near the synagogue, a place where from behind the windows I can hear the noise of boisterous voices. Entering the place, going along a dark corridor, suddenly I am in a big hall full of elderly men, everyone of them attending to his plate, with an aluminium spoon eating a kind of broth or hot pot. Close to the door on the wall, there is a large map of Europe with a great many little red circles, circles with inscriptions: Buchenwald, Treblinka, Oswieczim, Mathausen, Dachau, and a great many others, written in smaller characters. The doorman, here in charge of supplying food to old Jews, comes up to me and quickly says something to me, first in Czech, next in German. I have no idea what this babbling is all about. But I perceive the suspicion in his eyes and sense that he wants me to go out. The old men are watching; they have looked up and they see me pushing at the door. The part of the hall closer to me is now quieter. I am trying to ask something, to explain it, but nothing doing—a misunderstanding—and I leave.

The town is almost dug up; everywhere there are some tubes. Along the labyrinth of such tubes—conducting hot water or something like that—I creep my way to a well-known publishing house. The person who has received me has a good knowledge of Yugoslav literature. Together we have a long and interesting chat; we praise Pekić and Kocbek, all the time speaking merely about literature.

I take my lunch in the vicinity of the old Jewish synagogue. After lunch I light myself a cigarette.

A waiter quickly steps up to me and warns me not to smoke during lunch. I don't understand. I am alone at the table, and I've finished my lunch. In the literary weekly, I am browsing through the titles of new books, authors, looking for familiar names: how can one read a literary weekly after lunch without a cigarette. I must not do this, the waiter tells me, in any restaurant during lunch-time or dinner-time. Obediently I put out the cigarette on the saucer under the coffee-cup. Discipline, I say, but he only shrugs his shoulders. What can he do? What can they do? What can we all together do? We may read books; in the centre of Prague I may look for a thread leading to thoughts about Kafka and Czechs; I may think in my literary vein: that I can do. In spite of it all, I go to the nearby beerhouse and have a good beer and two cigarettes one after another. I write a few postcards, one of them to Sarajevo. When posting it I remember what I should have written to my Sarajevo friend: this is how you maltreated Ferdinand!

I have been trying to avoid the hotel recently, to avoid it as much as possible. There you find just a tumult of East Germans, and in the evening there are in the night-club, leaning over the bar, tourists from West Germany and Sweden drinking expensive drinks. They are behaving. . . oh, we know how they behave. By mistake, one evening, I started to talk there to one of them. They do not understand; they do not understand a single thing. Each boasting gesture of theirs shows that they do not understand anything. I shall be avoiding package tours and socialist hotels; on my door I shall put down an inscription, the one which the persecuted Slovene philosopher Kurelt wrote: "Odi profanum vulgus et arceo."

I am walking the streets with no particular goal in mind. From one tramway I change to another. When I see I've come to somewhere in the suburbs I go back straight to Prekope. I have a very slight persecution mania, especially later on when I am sitting in a pub and those at the neighbouring table are taking pictures while a lad sitting at my table keeps looking at my notes. This has no connection with Prague whatsoever; this is that axis which goes through the middle, the human diagonal for which one need not travel anywhere at all, in order to experience—for the axis remains in him, the diagonal goes through the middle. This is a slight sickness of mine, and in the evening, after a full day of aimless strolling,

I suddenly realize that all the time I was thinking of Erdman, the hero of my novel, all the time of him alone—not only of the irrational and pointless violence he is going to be entangled with, but also that this slight sickness will contribute to what is to happen to him. Literature.

T. asks me very kindly not to smoke, for smoke gets into every kind of fabric and that is something that cannot be aired. I understand his point. He says that Slovene literature has an interesting characteristic trait. Almost all of it is written without the author's distance; the writer is almost wholly inside his work. He can hardly think of a text in which the author clearly keeps a humorous or intellectual distance from his hero.

In the evening I go to the theatre and run out; then I go to a kind of a theatre of poetry, Viola, which is at the same time a fine saloon. Everybody there is beautifully dressed up. It seems to me that everywhere are men and women of literature, that everywhere is literature, that everybody is looking at me, probably because I am walking among the tables with my coat on. I leave this place as well. I go on foot to Kalich—a very long way—but there they are closing up so again I am walking along empty streets. My friend V. told me that fifteen years ago Václavské náměstí sparkled with life until three o'clock in the morning. And now, at nine in the evening, everything is empty.

I came to Prague as a sick man; the body has recovered but the soul has remained ailing. So there is little wonder that here everything is black—black with the reiterating, thin April drizzle, with everything dug up along the Vltava, with people discontented, with waiters and shop assistants impolite. That oppressive axis, which I sense running through the middle of my mind and body, exactly across my chest, is still inside me and I cannot evade it. I am in Prague, and I feel that the axis is still inside me, mercilessly revolving around me. Should I resort to the town of Prague for an excuse, to Kafka or to Hašek, who is clearly nothing but Kafka from the other direction? Kosík writes about this thing. And must I look at whatever there is through the medium of literature?

The whole day I am strolling around the town. I happen to enter the Museum of Czech Literature, where children are shrieking and setting my hair

on end. They are screaming, even if above the door from where they are coming there is a big plastic bust: a head, with finger on the lips. In the next hall there is a spotlight; TV teams are filming fragments of the big exhibition of Jaroslav Hašek which is to be opened on the following day in commemoration of the writer's centenary. Newspapers, radio, monographs, photographs: Prague is filled with the centenary celebrations of Hašek, an apotheosis of Švejk's attitude. Wherever I turn is literature and literature only.

Fifteen years ago it was different. *Plamen* was not merely literature. Prague was not literature only; the tanks in front of the building of "Československi spisatovel" knew that in it there was not only literature. On that morning, fifteen years ago, I woke up in my room at six and heard the news about the occupation. I hurried off to the city centre; we met together at the Katedra, prepared posters and banners, organized a demonstration. The world was real.

All night I am travelling by train through unknown regions, and in the morning I find myself in a little district town, on all sides surrounded by mountains. The grand institution for the study of literary history, like a circle, like a mountain, dominates the roofs of the city: bright corridors, modernly equipped offices. I am introduced to the Director of the Institution and offered coffee. We get photographic treatment for the use of the local newspaper. My guide passes a remark that this is already his third coffee today, whereas in different conditions he drinks four. This is obviously a well-known way out, for his director tells me that he drinks at least fourteen. "That many?" I wonder sincerely. "But that is nothing," they both smile amused; their Minister of Culture drinks thirty of them at least—but is as sound as anybody. Next, I come to the High Institute of Literary Studies; I am being introduced to various professors who inform me about the work of their respective centres. Everything here is registered, examined, evaluated, catalogued, conserved—everything created in the literature from the past centuries up to the present days. With respect and with somewhat trembling hand, the professors pick up old manuscripts and point to famous notes made by poets either by the side of or below the text, significant lines and changes. They are also telling me about the great men who had visited the High Institution, for instance, about a grandson of Heidegger's who is currently the Director of the

Danish Royal Library and a very old gentleman. When fishing, others have fixed a fish on his hook and bait—and he was truly self-confident about his instinct. The computer centre, reading rooms, soft synthetic carpets, soft music in some offices: "A quiet study of the literature from the past?" is my exclamation into this quiet investigation of Mančka, I believe. "He," they reply, "has cut himself off from our literature." "From literature?" I ask. "Literature must live in its natural environment," is their answer.

Along the corridors there is an abundance of various slogans and pictures of Lenin, and in the town below patriotic marches, resounding from every candelabra. Apparently, a certain festivity is near—but this testing of technical facilities goes well into the afternoon. Whatever I am looking at, testing with my dizzy hand, is—literature. And I see they are right. The natural environment is the literature itself, or what else?

In Prague at the hotel, V. is expecting me. I am very glad to see him. During our walk across the Karlov bridge I am telling him how Kosík envisages the meeting between Hašek and Kafka, or rather their heroes, Švejk and Josef K. Two sentries take the delinquent Švejk from the hospital at Hradčani, while two men, wearing cylinders, are taking Josef K. in the opposite direction, towards a desperate stonepit, where one of them will kill him and at the same time make him turn round. Švejk is engaged in a friendly exchange of words between the two sentries; and Josef K. is immersed in watching the behaviour of his mysterious escorts. Therefore, they cannot notice one another.

My friend V. is tired from the night behind him. In a certain flat they had been drinking until the morning, awakening all the members of the family. He is ill-humoured; everything seems to be going topsy-turvy. For two years now, they have been sending two of his manuscripts from one publishing house to another; it is the third year already. He is trying to explain it, inasmuch as it is possible to explain a novel while walking along the Nerudova Street. We sit down in his pub, called Bonaparte. Has everybody here a pub of his own? Hašek U Kalich, Hrabal at the Golden Tiger, V. has a beer-parlour—Bonaparte. V. was finally told the truth by one of the editors; this was at the moment at the last stop of his manuscripts: if you want to be a national hero, then publish it by yourself. V. does not want to

be a national hero. He does not want to emigrate. He does not want to have his books printed when he is sixty, for at that time everything might well be different. He wants to have his books printed here and now. Next he says he would live in Ljubljana if he had to live somewhere abroad. I feel slightly embarrassed. Have I been overstating our circumstances? True, he has been to our country, but when one sees matters from inside out. . . . I don't know what to say; I am telling him about what Kundera wrote in his introduction to the Slovene edition of *Ridiculous Loves*. I am referring to the book *Šivoljenje je drugje* (*Life Is Elsewhere*). Then we keep silent. Suddenly, then, we do not have anything else to say to each other. Some other kind of literature has now entered our conversation, notably of a life carried on somewhere else. I understand him. Next, he tells me some currently interesting political jokes. Sad laughing, then suddenly he is in a hurry; his wife is ill at home. At Karlov most we part. This is how it is—in him are Hašek and Kafka together, but not recognizing each other. Therefore they will continue to live together.

With a freedom like mine, V. would be more than satisfied. Are my books coming out? They do, and the publishers have already agreed to issue texts I have hardly begun to write, as well—and, mind you, texts quite different from those which he, for some moral reasons, cannot publish. May I smoke after lunch? I may, not only after lunch but also in the middle of it. If I want, I can put a piece of meat into my mouth and then have a smoke. If I want to, I can *both* smoke and eat at the same time. But with this freedom of mine I am not satisfied, not in the least.

All day I am alone and I sense a certain neurosis coming over me. I would go home and start with some work; what I can start here at best is some excessive eating. I go to a place along the street and start filling myself with some rich food.

Gluttony I always find in my body when I feel my stomach is well, and then I have one idea after another how magnificent it is to eat, one food after another. This gluttony I feel with all the satisfaction in front of butcher's shops. When I see a fine sausage, according to the label attached to it—homemade, dried salami—I start eating it in my imagination, rapidly, regularly, recklessly, like a machine. This kind of hurry increases my despondency, which even on an imaginary plane appears to be a consequence of such an action.

The skin of the ribs I force, unchewed, down my body—to pull it out again, no matter how stomach and intestines suffer. I eat up what I can in the little places along streets; I eat everything still left there. . . . In this way I am enjoying only my health, but also a certain suffering without pangs and quickly to be over. This is not written by me: this was written by Fr. Kafka in his diary. And the entire Mitteleuropa as I know it from the 1968, all left-wing and critical intellectuals, students and writers, journalists and activists, all of them are standing in front of a shop-window of a bar in Prague, where I am devouring a piece of fat pork; all of them are looking at me—chewing, swallowing, devouring, and with pure mouth expressing the most popular phrase of the *eighties*: Pure Kafka. Everything is Kafka!

Or all of this may have no relation to what is going on fifteen years ago.

Or I have definitely mixed up the whole thing. Possibly in the middle of Mitteleuropa you cannot—when thirty-five years old—just cannot say anything but: pure Kafka.

In the evening I am yet again strolling along the empty Prague streets, watching the windows of the pubs. When Prague was teeming with the Slavonic patriotism, Kafka was walking the dark streets and looking at those bright windows. But inside, Hašek was cracking his jokes, founding his funny parties, and destroying Austria. True, they could not meet. But both of them were anticipating a world sure to come.

And with growing lucidity I know that the world of '68 was still real, while the present one is becoming increasingly a literary one. On the other hand, where with the true avowal of my own eyes literature is turning into reality, I distinctly feel also that my world has changed. The world in which I am is a fiction made by them both, Kafka and Hašek. While my world has changed through my own physical and spiritual experience, and if in 1968—because of the belief it contained—it was still real, then this should be added: I am afraid life is not only somewhere else but also at some other time in the past. But it is the persistence of Josef K. and the knowledge of what is to come that we must carry on. No other choice.

Before I leave Prague, I go for a final stroll in Sta-

Město. On the wall of an old house there is an inscription intended to convey something. It wants to convey that by virtue of its presence and significance this is the only stand valid in this world: no more life but only literature. I am reminded of Mediterranean towns, where the walls are full of countless slogans, ideas—but not by a long shot having that literary power of a graffito in Prague, written on an old house at

Karlowo:

Je zlé!*

And I sense this refers not only to Prague; it tolls for me, for me personally.□

*Evil exists

HISTORY AND RESPONSIBILITY: AN INTERVIEW WITH ZSOLT KÉZDI-KOVÁCS

Conducted by John Mosier



Zsolt Kézdi-Kovács

INTRODUCTION

Zsolt Kézdi-Kovács was born in 1936. As he relates below, he was accepted into the Academy for Theatre and Film Art in 1956, where he became part of the film class that included Istvan Szabo, Janos Rosza, and Pal Gabor. He then went on to the newly founded Bela Balazs studio for experimental film, where he made three short films. He was Jancso's first assistant on *The Round-Up*, which, when released in 1965, rapidly established that director as a major talent in European film. Kézdi-Kovács then made his first feature film in 1970. Called *Temperate Zone*, it won him a special prize at the Locarno Film Festival. Since then he has made six films: *Romanticism* (1972), *The Orange Watering Truck* (1973), *When Joseph Returns* (1975), *The Nice Neighbor* (1979), and *The Right to Hope* (1981). *Forbidden Relations* was the Hungarian entry at the 1983 Cannes Film Festival. It is a compelling and somewhat upsetting story about a working-class hero and heroine who fall in love and who must defy society in order to stay together. The catch is that they are brother and sister. What they are doing is not only "immoral," but it is against the law, and much of the film—which perplexed Western critics—centers around these abstractions.

The eminent Polish poet, Czelaw Milosz, has observed, in speaking of Gombrowicz, that his difficulty with an international audience was not that he was below international standards, but above them. This is a fair statement about Kézdi-Kovács, as well. He is a sophisticated and subtly ironic moralist whose films reveal, as he explains below, a deep sense of responsibility towards his audience and towards his art. In this sense he is like Zanussi,

but Kézdi-Kovács seems to feel a particular affinity for the plight of ordinary people, as well as an unwillingness to judge them.

Although Hungarian films are highly valued in the West, there is a surprising and often comic level of ignorance about them. This stems not so much from problems with the language or the customs shown in the film but rather from an ignorance of the artist's aims and the audience's expectations. In this English language interview, conducted in New Orleans in March of 1985, Kézdi-Kovács gives a good accounting of just what those aims are and how he sees himself as an artist.

How did you become a filmmaker?

It's not easy to tell because it's not easy to tell what your life is. To be a filmmaker is for me my life. That's my hobby, my profession; my life is based completely on that. Of course, I never knew that I would be a filmmaker before I entered the Academy because it was such a dream that I couldn't believe it. But later I realized that in my early childhood there were many small signs of the destiny which was pushing me in this direction. For example, I got a very primitive screening machine for my fifth birthday with little filmstrips—this was before the war. Later on I started going to the cinema; I started writing. I was always preparing myself, but I never knew exactly what was going to happen. I was very disturbed about what would happen to me. Of course, that was the Stalinist period, which in every sense was very difficult. So, in 1956 I entered into the Academy, and I'm sure it was by chance because there were almost one thousand applicants, and only ten of us were accepted. That was the only university that gave you a chance if you finished with a not very good degree.

Then, just as today, film in Hungary was much more important than it is here in the United States, because here it is thought of mostly as entertainment; even though there are other filmmakers here who are making other kinds of films, they are not that popular and they are not seen by the mass of the public. But in Hungary at the end of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, film was a very important social factor. By the mid-1960s, film was more advanced in its thinking than the other arts and literature, and even more advanced than the politics.

Why was this so?

In those times film could explain ideas, not

straightforwardly, but with symbols. For example, there is a film of Jancso which for me even now is his best film, *The Round-Up*, which was a very clear opening. He not only showed ideas but in a very complex fashion made Stalinist oppression be seen at the same time as an historical story. So film became for the government, too, a very important factor, because it showed abroad that we were opening, that Hungary has become more liberal, more relaxed. As you know, film is a very important means of transporting ideas over the borders. And, of course, for Hungary this is more important than for other people in Europe because the Hungarian language is a very difficult one. Even though our literature is very strong, you cannot really translate it, and so very little of it has been translated.

The big problem is that there is not enough Hungarian literature that has been translated into English. The only modern writer with a decent translation is Geza Csath.

... who interestingly enough is not very well known in Hungary. He's a very good writer, one of my favorites, but he's not very well known. He had a cousin who's a better writer—a poet who made translations of English poetry that are excellent. The idea of a good translation is something which is important. Csath is not the best, but with a good translation he's very impressive. Other Hungarian writers who are better, but whose works are shown through an inferior translation, are not very well known.

Despite our ignorance of it, we always feel that there is this tremendous literary tradition in Hungary which the filmmakers think of themselves as continuing.

Yes. We are attached to it; we are referring to it. Those artists are our points of reference. Even if

you don't use literature, you are always thinking about it. It is part of your thinking, and it is not available to foreigners.

The problem is that the best Hungarian poets have been engaged in translating world literature into Hungarian, not the other way around. That's why films are so important to us, which is natural. When people see a Hungarian film, they see something about us.

The only thing which may be competitive is music, but music is not specific. You can say very easily Dvorak is a Czech, but who cares, really. I mean, I like him, but not because he's a Czech. That's the way music works; it's very general. You don't need to know Czechoslovakia to enjoy Dvorak. Bartok is Hungarian, but he is a very important musician for the whole of humanity, and probably most of his listeners never realize that those melodies—the greater part of those melodies—are Hungarian folksongs. I can't say that everything goes through, but when audiences see one of my films that is subtitled, a big portion of my thinking does go through. There are not the barriers that there are for the literature, and that's why I'm happy to be a filmmaker.

So one of the most important ways to show how we live, how Hungary thinks and lives, is film. Even today that's one of the most important elements, and that's why we introduce our films abroad. I think the government is clever enough to see that even though the films are not always representing the official ideas, they show an image of Hungary which is not a bad image. You see that there are problems, but, of course, there are problems everywhere.

But, getting back to the question, for me to be a filmmaker is mostly a responsibility towards the audience, towards the people. These are big words, but I think somehow they are true. To be a filmmaker in Hungary means that you cannot do anything. There are only twenty films a year. So if you get a film, you have to speak about something.

So you feel a special responsibility as a filmmaker to Hungarians. You feel a special responsibility to help people, to see the terms of their lives better.

Yes. That's a very good question because that's our basic approach to the films. I'm always asked why I show a story and at the end of the film I am not giving clear answers to all those problems I am showing. I say always that I think honestly that I cannot answer all the problems, that I'm not

God. The filmmaker is not God; he cannot solve all the problems that society is having. My honest approach is to show the problems as I see them with all the complexity and all the difficulties that surround those people. I think it's the only way if you are not just entertaining people—which I am just not able to do. I can't make entertainment films. As we say, I am just not conditioned to that function. Sometimes in difficult days I think about it, and I say to myself that one time I have to try it. But then when I sit down and I'm beginning to try to write something, in the end it comes out as difficult as my other films. So that's my way of thinking, and that's the responsibility of a filmmaker in today's Hungary. We cannot construct new ideals, and we cannot improve upon those ideals which still exist.

We cannot resolve problems which are not resolved by the whole society—politicians, scientists, economists. But to show all the people who go to the cinema that these problems are still existing or that they are existing and nobody cares is something that's very important. And, of course, none of this is on a general social level. You take individuals; you tell a story; you analyze a situation. You analyze society, and you try to find out which are the trends. Also, there is a level of discussion; there are things which are not taken by the sciences or sociology or anything else, and that's the moral level. It is a very important thing for me, this moral void. It is a vacuum which I feel very strongly in contemporary Hungary because the traditional moral structure was broken. Now there is no strong traditional moral structure at all.

Is this what led you to Forbidden Relations?

Yes, exactly. I wanted to show in a very strong example how in a society in transition those people—the two lovers—are left alone and society cannot deal with them. They just cannot handle them; they put them in prison, but it doesn't do any good. The village cannot do anything about them. They are not friends; they are not enemies.

For an ordinary man it is impossible to face all of the troubles of this life without a guiding light. It's too heavy a burden for him to make decisions on his own each minute, and that's why the two lovers are lost. That's why almost all of my heroes are lost.

So when people who are lost see your films, are they getting a very good sense of the moral nature of life?

Yes. They become conscious of their situation; that's my role—to make them conscious that there is something wrong. I cannot say let's compose a new society. That's not my role. But I think those people who are intelligent enough to see this analysis of my films can realize that the situation they are living in is just bad. They have to realize that this is not the best of worlds. There is a wonderful sentence of Luis Bunuel where he says I make films to show that this is not the best of existing worlds. I feel the same thing. I just want to show that the world I am living in is not the best world.

population—or historical characters. In your films the people seem much more typical of the working class. Is this your interest?

That's one of my troubles with the Hungarian public, because these are films that are being shown to ordinary people, and they say, we are not interested in our own life. But of course that's a reaction which I understand but I can't accept, because in a film you analyze something. You don't say it openly; you don't show your opinion openly, but there must always be a very strict opinion. For example, in *Right to Hope* there is a



Forbidden Relations

You seem to see film in Hungary as reaching a broader audience than literature does.

Yes, although my films are not big hits. But even so, I have one hundred and fifty thousand viewers for each film, not counting any television viewers. If I wrote a book in this manner or at this level—certainly not a very popular book—I could never reach this size audience.

In many socialist countries, the films are either about intellectuals—who constitute a small percentage of the

main character who is a woman judge, and she's very strict. I try to depict her in a very objective manner. I don't say that she is wrong, but I hope that by the end of the film the audience will say, well, she's wrong. And in the other films, too, I have a sympathy, but I don't want to show it too openly. That's the spectator's role—to decide whether he likes the character or not. I only make a very mild guide towards my characters in this film, and in my other films. I think this is something that is quite specific in my films, especially those made in the last ten years. They are all made the same way in this respect.



The Right to Hope

Earlier you were talking about your work in The Round-Up. Could you explain its impact on Hungarians?

Jancso and I began to work together in the early 1960s, when he was not famous, when he was considered as a fool. Nobody wanted to work with him. He behaved very differently from other people. He had a haircut that was very different. He never wore a necktie. His friends were really outside of the line. When he began, his style was not developed. So as his first assistant I participated in the creation of this style. I mean, I knew exactly how it developed, and sometimes it was my work, and I was part of the film, much more than with other directors. I had been first assistant with some other directors, and in those films I was treated like everybody else. But with Jancso we worked together very closely in a small group of people—not only me, but the scriptwriter, the editor, and the cameraman. And I may say that we invented together a style.

I was never tempted to imitate it. I knew the tricks, and I could always do it. Even now, I could do a Jancso sequence without any difficulty. I know exactly how it works—how these small camera movements, or the movements of the actors, make it very special. But, of course, as I knew it was completely different, and I knew that it was his style, his thinking, and his sense of rhythm, I knew that I was different.

Even so, in my first films I used the same techniques of the camera—the long sequences, the travelling—and there was a moment after my third film when I sat down with my cameraman, I talked with him, and I said, we can't follow in



The Right to Hope

this way. The story is so different, and the characters are completely different, that we can't make it in that way, Jancso's way. So we decided not to use travelling, not to use zoom, and to try to cut the sequences into pieces. I didn't know how to do that kind of editing because I had never done it before. So I had to sit down and see as many of Bresson's films as I could to learn how to cut a scene. So Bresson became one of my favorite directors—not just because of his editing, either. There are many things of his that I like.

So you see that was the moment that I consciously changed the way I make my films. And still I am very strict about that.

What was the fascination with that particular style of filmmaking? Was it just a kind of experiment?

Yes. It was a kind of experiment. I must say that making a Jancso film is much more exciting than seeing it. There is such an incredible tension, and it is a work full of improvisation and responsibility for the whole crew. That work is much more important than the result, particularly for the later films—not *The Round-Up* and the films he made shortly afterwards, which are ideologically very strong, but the later films. These early films are very important for the whole of Eastern European thinking because of their relation to the idea of power and how it works: how power manipulates us in the modern world, how it oppresses, and how the Stalinist terror worked. That's why these films were much more important socially, and as a message, than as pure form. In his later films, Jancso went more for form, but by that time I was not working with



The Right to Hope

him. But these early films were revolutionary and new for the audience, very new, very different. It was important that the Party and the audience should tolerate the difference, and should understand it. So Jancso became a symbol in the 1960s for another way of thinking.

It's almost as though when you talk about these films and say Jancso, you are talking about a collective moment in Hungarian filmmaking.

Yes, but not just filmmaking—thinking. It changed a way of thinking. Even people who had never seen his films in Hungary were for or against him. It was a phenomenon in our society to make fun of him, to be a fanatic, even to mock his films. Even those who hadn't seen his film were taking sides. But I must say that *The Round-Up* was seen in Hungary by one million spectators out of a total population of ten million.

Why was the film set in 1868? That strikes me as a curious year. The Dual Monarchy had already been established.

That's a very exact moment in Hungarian history. You know we had this great revolution in 1848-49, and then a very strong oppression by the Austrians. Later the Austrians, because of some defeats, some internal problems, became more tolerant. They wanted to change this strict oppression and re-establish an association with the Hungarians, to have a consolidation of power, to change the rules, and to change the methods of the oppression. They had to finish with the old guard, and I think that's something



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which is more or less common. This is the moment when the power decided to make a truce with the Hungarian people and with their leaders. The Austrians wanted to open up towards a new form of society, not to use the same methods of oppression. They were trying to get an understanding.

But somehow, in a very complicated way, that situation in 1868 reflected the society of the 1960s, which after 1956 had a period of very strict government rule. It was a compromise after 1959, and a compromise was set up between the power and the Hungarian people which was based on the idea of let's forget the 1950s on both sides. On the one side—the government—it was let's forget the methods, and on the other side, let's forget the memories. And the film tries to catch that moment.

So what you are saying is that you see two realities, the present reality and the memory of the historical situation, and that you see them almost simultaneously.

Almost simultaneously, and that's a very important thing. It's a special part of Eastern European thinking because we have had so much trouble. And so all of our lives, we have always balanced things, steering between the rock and the hard place. We have to know how it worked once. And it is true for the other nations, too. You can't imagine that someone who is Polish does not think about all of these historical experiences during the centuries with the Russians. That's where they have a point of reference.

Not knowing history is not the best part for a



Nice Neighbor

cultivated man. You know, that's a funny thing, when you ask me about history. In our country, history has a much bigger role than here. We are constantly living with our history, comparing, maybe sometimes too much, but we are always comparing the situations—the historical events and the contemporary ones. And all of these things are always in your mind. Here, you just forget them. You don't go back into your past, for example. You just don't do that. We are always going back: now we have such a situation as in 1829, and in another moment. . . . Maybe it's wrong, but sometimes it helps.

That's why for us historical film is not only telling about a part of history. Historical films always make a parallel with the present. Not only that, but they confront the public with a story which has many references to the present situation. For example, now in Hungary there are six or seven films made about the short period we were talking about, the 1860s and 1870s. This was a period where there was a big boom in the economy. At the same time something intellectually and socially controversial was happening. It was a silent transformation, not a revolutionary period, and it was an opening towards capitalism. At the same time, they were trying to forget about the big revolution of 1848. It's not just by chance that these films are made now.

Did it say something about Hungary in the nineteenth century that was also controversial?

Yes, because at the same time, during this century, the situation in this picture was depicted



Nice Neighbor

in a very romantic way, which means that there were only heroes of the big revolution, and the evils of the Austrians. It was a very clear and a very simplified picture of this century. We have a great writer, and a very Romantic one, Mor Jokai, who wrote about a hundred volumes of novels romanticizing this period. And that's why Jancso's film is important, because it shows, for example, that the Hungarians were not only angels, because all of the people in the film are Hungarians. In the 1950s the Hungarian revolutions of the seventeenth century, together with the one in 1848, were always portrayed in a very simplistic and vulgarized Stalinist way, and this film was against that sort of way. It was also a clearly non-Hollywood movie, and you must understand what this meant for the Hungarian audience. Our films in the 1950s were very deeply Hollywood, although, of course, they never said this.

Even though they were Socialist-Realist?

Oh yes. The pattern was the same. The structure of the film was the same, and even the style. The ideas were the so-called socialist ideas, although, of course, they weren't really socialist but rather Stalinist ideas. But if you look at our films in the 1950s they were the same as the worst of Hollywood. I'm not talking about the best, because there are great Hollywood films, but the worst Hollywood films are the same as these Hungarian films.

I raise these questions because there is so much confusion among Western critics about the basis of



Nice Neighbor

Hungarian film. Western critics have placed the time of The Round-Up as far as twenty years from its actual date. Recently Jozef Veress from the Hungarian Film Institute told me that he had met North Americans who thought that Angi Vera was a film about contemporary Hungary.

Not just in North America, but in other countries as well. There are some countries where people thought *Angi Vera* was a contemporary film. That's a problem of a small country which is so far from the mainstream.

But these things about Jancso are important for me, too, because this period was important. But they were important on another level as well. That was the first time I had met somebody who as a filmmaker had clear ideas, but, once on a set, when he encountered new elements, new faces, he never tried to force his original ideas. He tried to use everything that was present, all of the elements. I don't know if I am being clear here, but that's something very important. If you divide filmmakers into groups, there are two ways to make films. One is the guy who writes everything on paper, who has the storyboard. He goes to the set and says that's the angle, that's the frame, that's the camera movement, that's what the actor must do and say. And that's it. He never realizes that the image which is in his head is different from the film, because film has to deal with a reality which is always completely different from what you have in your head. The other kind of filmmaker always has his own ideas, but he has to face this reality, seeing if his ideas are good or not, and he tries to confront the reality with his ideas. It's a very complicated



Nice Neighbor

game, reacting to the reality. And that's what I really learned from Jancso—to be open.

Is that why the performances in Forbidden Relations are so powerful? Did the actors bring anything to the film that made you change your mind?

Well I must tell you that's a very personal thing with them. I like Lili Monori a lot, and I work with her a good deal, but she's very difficult to work with. I had decided who would play the roles very early in writing the scenario, and I talked with her a lot. She would be Juli, the heroine, and Miklos Szekely would be Gyorgy. She accepted the role of Juli, and when she accepts a role, she's very good to work with. If not, she's bad. So I introduced Lili to Miklos Szekely, to each other just before we began to shoot, as they didn't know each other. They fell in love with each other immediately, so there was a big love story going on during the shooting. You could never produce love scenes like theirs: not only making love, but just touching, one to another, so close, so intense, because that was their own. The end of this story is that after the shooting was over a child was born as a result of this relationship.

Maybe that was the difference you felt. But in these cases you have to leave some things open. You can't say exactly what to do to the actors, because they are much more intense. For example, in the scene when she comes back from the doctor after she's pregnant, and she says, well, I've decided to have an abortion, he just beats her, and then beats her again, and then they are on the bed together. The whole scene was so intense I couldn't predict things. We made it

without any rehearsal. We did three takes of this scene, and in the first and the second take he didn't want to beat her, so he faked it, and after those two takes she said, no, beat me, very hard. And he did, very hard, with all the force he had, so much that she started to cry. Although there was artificial bleeding too, her nose was actually bleeding from the blows. Of course when she cried, he was very upset, and so things were really working—because he cared for her. That's

the way it worked between them. There was an incredible build up to the scene, and such a climax, and then a very nice ending. They were so warm to each other. You can never simply tell an actor how to do that.□

Edited by Sarah E. Spain.

Armando Valladares

QUESTION

Translated by William Marling

for Fernando Arrabal, my friend.

Tell me, Arrabal,
you who are out there
on the horizon of complete freedom,
what do the famous communist poets say
about the sick old people and women,
about the Vietnamese refugee children?
About those who flee by the thousands,
not a smile in their baggage,
over a sea without shores,
on voyages without compass or blessing
sad voyages into the night
that sometimes end in the deep.
What do the intellectually respectable
politically Marxist writers say,
those who fatten their butts
secure in capitalist comfort?
Those who raise from time to time
—and only at times—
their voices for “justice,”
those who call themselves “humanists.”
The more I prick up my ears, the less I hear them.
Perhaps fleeing from communism
makes the Vietnamese poor less human.

July, 1979

Drago Jančar

TWO PICTURES

Translated by Anne Ceh

*Fate is partial to reiterations, variations, symmetries . . .
They kill him but he is not aware he is dying in order that
some scene may repeat itself. . . .*

J. L. Borges

*He who is wise knows that the eyes may fail twice, and for
two reasons: firstly, if we step into darkness from the light,
and secondly, if we tread from the darkness into light. When
he later convinces himself that something similar occurs to
the soul, never does he start to laugh irrationally if he sees
that the soul is confused. . . .*

Plato, The Republic VII

The old woman

The square is almost empty on this side. A roar, a shrieking and the wailing of a siren are coming from afar, from behind the monument, from the upper area of the gigantic square. Some people are standing here, in front of the shops and between the trees, conversing amongst themselves, and all of them are gazing over there beyond the monument. An old woman garbed in black is approaching over the white pavement, going slowly across the great empty space. Both her hands are lifted breast high, as if she were wading through water, a clumsy handbag over her elbow; in her other hand she is clutching something light, as if afraid that what she holds in her palm will be carried away. She looks fatigued, treading the pavement as if she were mounting steps. For a moment she still gazes before her, at the ground, then, lifting her glance, she slowly makes her way towards the nearest trees. For a moment, it seems to the man standing somewhat removed into the interior that the old woman is going towards him. He observes her from the corner of his eye, again looking agitatedly in the direction of the monument, from whence some figures are racing across the square. The old woman leans with both arms upon a tree, head again bent towards the floor. Her handbag swings in empty space like a weight. The hand gripping that light paper is raised aloft on the

trunk, as if she wishes to safeguard it against an inundation or from the muddy pavement beneath her. The man is watching the figures as they rush across the square and is listening to the ever louder and ever more confused shouting on the other side. Suddenly he raises a hand and waves. Then he calls out something. One of the figures stops, stares about. The man calls out again. The other now gazes lost about himself for a moment, then catches sight, aims for the trees. He has a camera in his hands. A large leather bag hanging from his shoulders must be extremely heavy for it greatly hinders his walking.

Then the cameraman is standing by the man, animatedly explaining something to him. Both gaze towards the monument; again the man has the old woman in the corner of his eye. She seems to him to be somewhat smaller than she'd been before. The old woman is slipping down the tree towards the floor. She is gripping the rough trunk with her hands, pressing the paper to her palm with her thumb, her knuckles grazing steadily down the bark. The pavement is damp and cool. Then she is lying down, for there is not enough strength in her knees either. Then she is looking at the crowns of the trees high aloft and the tall houses behind as if she were lying at the bottom of a deep pit rimmed by trees and the tall, light facades behind them. The man is watching the

figures rushing across the square; they are increasing in numbers, the one at his side is preparing his camera. But simultaneously he knows that something on the sky-line is missing; the old woman has disappeared.

—The old woman, says the man, that old woman has fallen down.

The Mothers from the Mayo Plaza

The cameraman, who runs across the square coming to a halt by the man on the pavement, is as used to all kinds of demonstrations as he is to his own breakfast. He carries out his job in one of the most politicised nations of the world, particularly in the last few years after the fall of the most recent group of rebel officers that ruled, like numerous ones before it, for but a short while. Not a week passes without the Plaza de la Mayo reverberating with the chanting of demonstrators. Consequently the men with cameras lurk in front of the Casa Rosada every day, modern communication techniques bearing their reports in an instant to all the corners of the world. Amidst the monotonous repetition of left and right and the intermediate assemblies and demonstrations, amidst the summarising of their radical and moderate and intermediate demands and reports, unusual shots of cheering and at moments inarticulately weeping, at other times again dignifiedly silent women have recently appeared. In an instant these shots unexpectedly achieved a high price on the world communication market. The information mediators and the shapers of public opinion also rapidly found a striking title for this extraordinary group of demonstrators: "The Mothers from the Mayo Plaza." It is difficult to explain why shots of these women have become so sought after in the world information jungle. The fact that they are linked to the "dirty war" in which 30,000 opponents of the military regime have disappeared, tells too little. In the long run, these years have only been an episode, only a chapter in some long war, only a scene from the political madhouse that has already been in existence more than thirty years. Many of the missing ended up in the enormous pits, in the mass graves that have begun to be discovered and excavated throughout the whole country, the majority of their bodies impossible to identify. Some are of the opinion that ten thousand were murdered; others are convinced that all the thirty thousand desaparecidos are dead. But the public is already accustomed to the corpses they have

dug out and, of course, exhibited in photographs and on television screens. The public, which must be imagined seated in a comfortable armchair, beer and salted crackers in hand, can gaze at corpses from every part of the world every evening, so to speak, corpses in differing uniforms and clothes, of different races, sizes, age and sex, which is why the armchair public was roused when it saw the Mothers of the Mayo Plaza, photos of missing sons in their hands or pinned onto blouses, their tear-swept or shrieking faces. Only hope has remained to these mothers, demanding back their sons. Their sons are on the list of desaparecidos. Nevertheless, no one can reliably tell them of their fate—are they in the pits or are they by some miraculous chance still amidst the living, jailed in prison or some secret place. The movement of these weeping women, their wailing and wringing of hands would be impossible to define politically either on the streets or in a television commentary. Apparently nothing interests these women other than their sons. The truly affected and desperate, yet hopeful faces appeared on the screen. Perhaps it is this very fact but not its terrible background that compelled the public to shift in its armchair or fetch another beer from the fridge. And perhaps this is the reason that shots of these women from the Mayo Plaza were so in demand for a short while.

Nervously, the cameraman rummages through his bag, eagerly saying something to the man on the pavement and changing the objective on his camera. He then steps a few paces forward, leaning on a tree taking shots of those fleeing from the back rows, who had joined the demonstration and whom the police were dispersing. The man standing in the background calls something out to him.

—The old woman, he calls, that old woman has fallen.

Photographs of two desaparecidos

The man rushes up to the old woman lying on the ground, trying to lift her. He sees she is conscious for she is gazing at him with her restless eyes and her hand; that hand in which she is clutching two photographs is stretched out before her.

—She's unwell, he calls out to the young man with the camera.

—Lady, say, lady are you ill?

He takes hold of her beneath the armpits, lifting her sufficiently for the old woman to sit on the pavement, handbag in hand. She is pale and it

looks as if she really will pass out.

—Bring some water, he calls there between the trees, where the one behind is leaning on a trunk, camera drawn up to his eyes, a finger directing the objective towards the last rows of the demonstrators. These are rushing towards the Bishop's Palace, trying to find an empty exit. The cameraman looks round uncertainly, then shoots on.

—A glass of water, Alberto, shrieks the man, who is now holding the woman in his hands like a bag. Her legs are stretched helplessly along the pavement—she is completely helpless, with the handbag in her lap and with the photographs in her hand. Alberto waves a hand, then moves it up to the objective again. The square is full of fleeing figures. The police are chasing them with outstretched hands like in some childish game. Near the Black Maria, they are beating a small black-haired one with staves. From the other end, the wailing of the women can still be heard. No one is touching them. Nevertheless, the iron police wall is keeping them away from the governmental palace like a waveguard. They are rounding up the youths from the back rows, dragging them into the vans. A larger group is squashed and surrounded by the monument. Alberto is filming. The man behind succeeds in lifting the woman, throwing her handbag over his shoulder, gripping her under the armpits and leading her slowly towards a bench. The old woman totters. The square is emptying rapidly. Alberto puts his camera away, setting the heavy leather bag down on the bench beside the old woman. He rushes off somewhere, quickly returning with a glass of water.

The man presses the rim of the glass to her mouth. The old woman drinks in tiny sips. The man dampens her brow and the back of her neck.

—You ruined a shot, says Alberto, sighing.

—It's always the same anyway, says the man.

—It's livelier today, says Alberto.

—You would have left her on the pavement, says the man.

—My dear fellow, what I've already seen, says Alberto as he is getting up, still gazing round as to whether it will break out again, or whether a fresh knot will gather anywhere. But there is nothing: the square is emptier and emptier, the crying subdued also. The wailing of the police cars can be heard from the neighbouring avenue as they draw off.

—All the same, says the man, you cannot leave her on the pavement. Alberto sits down again, only now looking fully at the old woman seated

between them.

—Ah, he says, but I know this one. She's here every day. I know you, lady, he says.

The old woman looks at him and nods.

—This one has lost two, he says. Two have disappeared.

He indicates her hand with his chin.

—See, she's got pictures.

—May I look, Ma'am? the man says amicably, reaching for the photographs. Slowly the woman unclasps her palm. The man takes both pictures, looking at the portrait of a young man sitting, legs crossed, in a wicker armchair, dressed in a white open-necked shirt. He is laughing as if the one who was taking his picture had just told him something funny.

—Your son? asks the man.

The old woman nods.

He then inspects the picture of the second youth. He is like him. He is dressed in a military uniform.

The old woman shakes her head.

—Leave her alone, says Alberto, she doesn't know Castilian. And she is not quite sound in the head, he says. She walks the Mayo Plaza showing these pictures to everyone. She speaks some Slavic language, Russian, I don't know what. Then some old priest comes and takes her away but the woman returns the next day.

—What kind of a uniform is that to you? asks the man.

Alberto takes the picture, inspecting it.

—I don't know, he says, it might be German. It's an old picture. Perhaps it's Polish?

—It's not Polish, says the man.

—Alright, German then, says Alberto, it's all the same. The old woman gazes at the picture they are passing from hand to hand in front of her, attentively following their movements, her own hand accompanying the picture to some extent.

—Well, then what does that soldier have to do with all this. What has he got to do with the desaparecidos?

—How do I know, says Alberto. The woman's a bit mixed up. I tell you, she's not quite right in the head. Just look how she's staring.

Alberto gets up, slinging the heavy bag with his camera onto his back.

—That old man's coming, there, he says. He'll take her away. We can go.

—Goodbye, Ma'am, says the man. Everything will be alright now, won't it? He smiles cordially. The old woman begins to nod. Coming towards them across the square is a grey-haired man in black clothes, clerical collar round his neck, heavy

shoes with thick soles. They wave to him.

—Where did you park? asks Alberto.

—It's not German either, says the man, for I know the badges.

—It's all the same, says Alberto. Where did you park?

The priest sits down next to the woman, taking hold of her hand, persuading her. The old woman nods. Then she puts both the pictures away in the handbag she's holding on her knees. They rise and go slowly across the Mayo Plaza, upon which the evening strollers are already beginning to gather.

The first—the picture of the young man in a light shirt

Until the moment when pressure on the release and the click of the photographic camera brings his smile to standstill and preserves him, motionless, seated legs crossed in some garden in the wicker armchair, in a light shirt—until this moment it is impossible to relate anything about Gojimir Blagaj that would assist us in understanding the later development of his life, the extraordinary and forceful events that followed, events that the old priest, with all his country simplicity and earnestness will call "devil's grease." And with this simple finding, he will reflect upon a great deal more than he will express. He will reflect upon the infernal cabal that the Prince of Darkness had already prepared long ago, in some other and ancient country, to be repeated here and with different people. Until that moment, he too, a country priest from some Dolenjska village, knowing the boy, watching over his development, caring for him, discussing the most confidential matters with him, could not have related anything particular, apart from the fact that from the age of seventeen onwards the lad had often said he could not see any vital sense in any of the things he was doing, at school and in his studies and in the trips to the hills at the other end of the country. But the old man had taken no notice of this; all young people are like that. They want something more, something else, perhaps even greater, stirring and bold. They calm down later. Here he was mistaken. The young man now sitting in the basketchair near him and smiling at some girl with a camera in her hands will not calm down, because the unrest in him is deeper than the old man is capable of judging. The young man is twenty-five years old; the years of his life with his mother, study and the army, the monotonous hours and days of work in the bank where he's employed in the

loans department as an adviser, are behind him. That is behind him; before him are people, events.

In the photograph that some reporter will glance at with professional routineness a decade later in the Plaza de la Mayo, he is laughing, in a light, open shirt, seated in a wicker armchair—in a garden where it is humid and hot, where a thin transparent mist of dampness trails above their heads making it difficult to breathe, although the garden is in the proximity of the town they once upon a time, long ago named Nuestra Señora Maria de Buenos Aires.

Ada

Some months after this garden pastoral, Gojimir makes the acquaintance of Ada. The meeting is unusual and surprising but certainly quite by chance. For afterwards, when she had thrust through the throng of people at the entrance, she could have set off in any other direction. Later, she never knew how to explain why she had approached exactly him.

The morning's work is drawing to a close. The woman sitting opposite Gojimir, turning on the revolving chair, gets up and with a pleasant smile leaves across the great space of the bank. The marble hall is full of people loitering here and there, the greatest number at the entrance. The cries and chants of the students have already been echoing from the nearby university building for two hours. Here they are to be heard like some far-off booming that escalates then is silent for some time. The shrieking is cleaved by the wailing of a police siren. The customers are waiting for the street to empty; the employees are nervously looking at the clock, for the time for the midday break is drawing near. Gojimir Blagaj is writing down details and filling in the empty spaces in the papers the woman left upon his table. When, for a moment, he lifts his gaze, he notices that the girl who has thrust through the crowd by the entrance is staring round the hall and, a moment afterwards, is walking towards him—a girl in jeans, with a bundle of books clutched to her chest with crossed arms. Calmly she sits down on the just vacated revolving chair, as if she has sat here many a time before.

—I would like some information, please, she says. She is sitting motionlessly on the chair but Gojimir notices that she cannot control her gaze. She has her head turned slightly to one side and is looking towards the door from the corner of her eye. She starts visibly when a man in a thin, light

jacket, sweat stains under the armpits and loosened tie, thrusts through the throng at the door.

—If I'm not mistaken, says Gojimir, smiling, then that one is looking for you.

The girl looks amazedly at him, trying to smile. Her mouth trembles slightly at the corners. Gojimir bends towards her, putting some papers into her hand. The man walks up and down the hall, staring attentively at the lines to the counter windows. Gojimir smiles and talks of interest rates. Wondering at his own calm smile it seems to him that he is seeing his own smiling face in a mirror; he wonders at this calm image for he can sense exactly how wildly his heart is thudding. A female colleague at a neighbouring table observes them closely. The man in the light jacket bangs into someone and politely apologises. The chanting on the streets is scattered into individual cries and the people by the door are craning their necks.

—On no account look round, says Gojimir, your acquaintance is already leaving.

The girl stares at some spot on the papers, not moving at all for some time.

—So, says Gojimir, he's left.

—Thank you, says the girl and the features of her face relax.

—I'd like to sit here a little while, she says, my name is Ada. Adelina actually, my brother is Anselmo. It's funny isn't it? she says.

—Why should it be funny? asks Gojimir.

—Everyone says it's funny, it's so alphabetical. Gojimir looks at the hour hand and the hall, which is beginning to empty.

—Is your brother roistering out there too? he asks.

—Also, says Ada, he the most of all.

—They haven't taken him away? asks Gojimir worriedly.

—Him? Ada smiles. Not he, smiles Ada. Ada knows how to smile very beautifully; she's got lovely, long black hair. She is very beautiful is Ada, Anselmo's sister.

The second—the picture of the man in the uniform of an unknown army

The photograph in which the cameraman, who brought the old woman the water and on whose account he lost a good shot at the fleeing demonstrators, attempts to recognize the uniform of the second of these two desaparecidos—this photograph was taken at the other side of the world, some nine thousand

kilometers from the Plaza de la Mayo. It was taken with a clumsy military camera such as were used by German soldiers. It was taken in May '45 in Carinthia in Austria. The coarse, grainy surface clearly indicates that the picture has been enlarged. Part of a face at its edge is also proof that it was cut from a group photo. Held in the hands of an officer, the camera, with its mute eye, denotes the faces of the soldiers at that moment with an unusual severity. The group is sitting along the side of a lorry so that the young men on it are looking into the eye of the camera over their shoulders. Some are standing in the background, hands in pockets. With their thin, youthful faces, these too appear to have been rendered serious; their glances are all fixed upon its eye but as if they themselves are absent, or perhaps turned inward. In the instant the officer presses the release, the lorry roars and shakes itself. The crowd of women and children and the remaining soldiers move restlessly. People disperse. Those standing on it with their hands in their pockets grip the seated ones by the shoulders. The cameraman from the Mayo Square really could not have recognized the badges on the uniform of one of the two desaparecidos in the photographs carried around by that extraordinary old woman. That army does not exist. That army is a vanished one.

Anselmo

—Their names are from some Spanish drama, relates Ada smilingly, whilst she is shifting piles of posters and newspapers here and there across the floor. Their father had admired Spanish drama enormously. He had been particularly fond of some romantic writer, Jose Echegaray, had liked him so much that he had named them after two of the characters from this drama. This does not seem particularly funny to Gojimir who is sitting on the edge of her bed, lighting a cigarette.

—Nevertheless, it is funny, Ada confirms. Don Anselmo, after whom Anselmo was named, was an old landowner of great means. Along with all his wealth he was of exceptionally magnanimous heart. Father enjoyed this combination so much that Anselmo was given his name.

Gojimir still does not understand.

—It is amusing, says Ada, that Anselmo is fighting against a magnanimous landowner. It is exactly Anselmo who is so important in this fight that he must work under cover. It is precisely Anselmo who is fighting against his own name,

if we take it symbolically.

—And Ada? Gojimir wants to know.

—In that story, Adelina is a lovesick, unhappy and slandered maiden. Of course, she too has a good heart and is high-born.

Gojimir sits on the edge of the bed and watches Ada who is squatting on the floor amidst the papers, relating such amusing tales.

—That Anselmo, says Gojimir, I'd really like to make his acquaintance.

He'll make his acquaintance. And when, after a few years, we shall see Gojimir sitting in the same situation, on the edge of the bed with a lighted cigarette, however, completely altered, it will perhaps be possible to ascribe this complete change directly to this knowledge.

Casulla

In September '67 Gojimir unexpectedly finds himself in Casulla, a poor suburb of B.A. Anselmo, Ada's brother, is with him, here amazingly known to many as Jordan. The street is muddy, the huts low and crooked; here and there one can see into the interior of a house, where a fat woman reclines on a broken couch, staring fixedly into the television set. In the intervals between downpours of rain, the sun shines on Casulla. The men sit in front of the houses, sipping the hot Paraguayan tea, maté, from dried gourds or tin cups. The dogs and cats amble through the mud of the street; curious and shrieking children cluster around Gojimir and Anselmo in groups. They turn off the wide street into a narrower one where there is less mud but also less light. Then they cross a yard full of old car tyres, coming to stop before a low house. A pregnant woman passes them, greeting Jordan loudly. When they enter the low room, within are some young men enveloped in clouds of cigarette smoke. The discussion continues with unabated force even after both are seated in their midst. It continues for the whole of the afternoon and late into the night between the frequent showers of rain scrabbling over the rooftops and softening the muddy yard. In the smoke-filled room, full of unknown, heated faces, the new comrade listens to political analyses and pathetic arguments, listens to them interrupting each other, to how the specially emphasised abbreviation for the radical organisation cuts the space like a sword. He hears about the methods and manner of illegal activity, listens astonished to a long speech by his friend Anselmo who explains his theory about the Argentine triangle,

which, with its geographic and demographic geometry is deciding the direction of revolutionary action. That afternoon and in the earlier part of the night, Gojimir Blagaj becomes a member of some radical political group for which it is in actual fact irrelevant as to whether it is named *Ejercito revolucionario popular* or something else.

A pava, a jug of hot water, passes amongst them. They pour it onto the dry tea. Gojimir can remember only one name, only one face—Witold Ozynsky, with his Slavic name and motionless, thin face, taciturn, however, sharp and precise whenever he does speak. Whenever he speaks he demands action, less discussing, more clear and the sharpest of action. Every time he draws upon his cigarette, he squeezes it so firmly between his lips that only a thin straight line is visible there.

During the night, as he and Anselmo leave together through muddy Casulla and as they try to light their last cigarettes under some overhang, before each will go to his own car, and as the gusts of rain extinguish the match's flame every time, it is clear to Gojimir that his life has changed. It has taken such a fundamental fresh turn in one afternoon alone, that it is no longer possible to go back. And yet, as Anselmo remembers, he appears to be pleasantly excited, positively agitated as Jordan calls it professionally. He was enthusiastic, ready for anything and it looked as if he had finally found some sense in his life.

El Mariscal

On the 17th November 1972, a good humoured company is gathered in a small capotin al paso: Ada, Gojimir, Anselmo and Witold. The capotin is crammed full from wall to door so that in the prevailing noise individual words can barely be made out. The street is also full, a throng of people in holiday spirits pouring through the wide avenues. The Mayo Plaza is full, the San Martin and Santa Fe Avenues, a river of cars is flowing down the Rivadavia, hooting for all they are worth, people are waving through windows, larger groups chanting on the pavements. Flags. The whole of Buenos Aires is booming in great expectation. He is coming—Perón. The saviour is returning from a twenty year exile. The amicable left-wing company in the premises called El Mariscal toasts his return, the hope that is here again. Some paces away on the street, that illusion that has already become a legend and which older comrades in the rooms of the Casulla

and rented flats in the centre of town have revived with enthusiasm, is happening: the Creoles, the poor and humiliated descamisados on lorries, with their drums and songs amidst the glittering and extravagant capital. In broad daylight, eyes wide open, some ancient myth again becomes reality. No one can hear each other amidst the noise in El Mariscal, though they are talking very loudly and all at once. Anselmo is singing. Gojimir is regarding Ada's smile and raising his glass of wine. Amongst the noise he catches individual syllables of Anselmo's song. This is not the song being sung in the streets today and which everyone knows, for many of them heard it through the loudspeakers of their childhood years, the song about Perón. Anselmo is singing about Che Guevara and winking amiably all around. One amongst them is silently following the gigantic noise, the pouring crowds, the drumming, singing and shrieking. Witold smiles calmly to himself. But this does not seem anything out of the ordinary to anyone. They are used to him as such.

The letters

But, as is known, that historical illusion lasted but a short while. A myth cannot become reality. It evaporates even before the aged president, his health affected by long years of exile, dies, leaving numerous parties, currents, factions and organisations all bearing his name and which, in an instant, again whirl the country into a horrendous and complex political vortex. To the company in El Mariscal by the roaring avenue, that 17 November is sooner or later a moment of conception, that forthcoming events, full of realities, rapidly turn into a hallucination. El Mariscal is only an interval, a short truce in the Third World war between left and right. Behind the scenes and in the underground of the sparkling capital the conflict breaks out again with all its might. The Alianza, with its confederates in the army and the police, strikes again, a new season of hunt and escape begins, counter blows, hiding, emigrating, underground activity. During the following years we see Gojimir Blagaj in that low-ceilinged room in Casulla, staying there overnight more and more frequently; we see him in the Mar del Plata in a conversation with some Portuguese trader, in the region of Formosa amongst the cotton plantation workers, in long nocturnal debates with students in Cordoba in some bourgeois flat, beneath the chandelier and in a leather armchair. His mother

gets letters from him, full of affection and concern about her health, also affirming that everything is alright with him and she need not worry in the slightest on his account. Often with her is the old priest in his black robe and awkward, thick-soled shoes, more suited to some other climate, to some ancient dusty village paths no longer in existence. Silently he observes these unknown ones who bring the post and her attempts full of friendly imploring, to know something more about her son from the newcomer—about his life and the strange work he is doing, about the bed he sleeps in, about his health, about the beating of his heart. There are no answers. The sole reply and the sole comfort are the letters which she puts away carefully, as if in frequently re-reading them she would reveal something in them amidst the general affection and dear mother greetings that would disperse her terrible suspicions. That there are ever more of these terrible suspicions is read from her face with unerring faculty by the old priest, sir, as she calls him, sir with mountaineering boots, awkward gestures and the appearance of a farmer.

The priest

The old gentleman is telling the mother about some green clearing on a forest hillside. In actual fact the glade reaches into the interior of the forest like a grassy inlet. All of it together lies somewhat higher up and whenever he stands there the whole valley lies beneath his feet, with its fields, meadows, with the sparsely scattered houses and the white church in the background. In the moment when he looks towards the church, he sees, from close up, the bell strike. The bell swings, the clapper striking its rim with all its strength. Then he waits for the echo to reach him, to reach the clearing on the forest slope where he is standing. But this never happens. The waiting becomes tortuous; the sky above the landscape darkens and lowers as if before a storm. These weird dreams repeat themselves to him almost every night. He always wakes before the far-off sound wafts towards him. He relates this to her, despite knowing she is not listening to him. Each has his own dreams and his own life. Her dreams were tortuously disconnected in that moment the lorry drove away to the railway station that young man now looking into this room from the enlarged photograph upon the shelf. The priest, who has his own dreams, also stood on that plain and worriedly watched the embarkation of the vanished army; to him it seems as if he saw his

serious face, the hand that waved. But this is as far off and as long ago as the dreams waking him each night. He knows, however, that these are not dreams to her. She has still not lit a candle in front of that picture. He also knows there is reality and there is life whilst there is hope. He does not want to and cannot take this hope away from her. But within him an anguish of fear is mounting as he watches how, day by day, ever more agitatedly, she shifts around throughout all the rooms the letters brought by the unknown ones, how she is ever more taciturn, how she gyrates without ceasing between that picture and those letters, how an immovable foreboding is etching itself into her face. And the more he talks of the trials we have to accept, of the pity in cares and suffering, the more he himself senses that what is happening in this room extends beyond his powers. Her ever more frantic face and his strange dreams, this photograph and that forest glade, all this is only a remote reflection of some other events, the margin of some fearful games he can no longer comprehend.

Black hair

One late, sunny afternoon in February '74, as Ada is returning from school along the suburban street, with the children's yells still in her ears and nervous system, she notices from the corner of her eye that a large car is driving alongside the pavement behind her, slowing up. Automatically Ada moves inwards on the pavement. The car hoots loudly and when Ada stares round, she sees a black-haired man with a moustache, sitting in the front seat, whose facial features seem familiar to her. After a few steps she starts, staring anew. Now she sees the driver also. Seated behind the wheel is her brother Anselmo, laughing unrestrainedly. The black-haired man is also laughing and in an instant it flashes through Ada's whole body. That's Gojimir, her beloved, with dyed hair and a long moustache. The moustache is dyed too otherwise it would be red which would never go together with black hair he tells her about an hour later. And yet she had been afraid of him, says Ada, literally terrified, for at such a moment, everything in a person becomes mixed up in an infinitesimally small part of time—memory and recognition, strangeness and misunderstanding; such a moment confuses a person, confuses her to such an extent that an unknown and shuddering feeling shakes her under the skull and throughout her whole body. And also later, when Anselmo leaves upon some

imaginary excuse, when they are alone in the car, in the isolated street, when Gojimir is kissing her hair and neck and mouth she cannot rid herself of this extraordinary feeling. In the evening, during that oppressed time between day and night, as they lie on the ramshackle couch in the small house in the narrow Casulla street, as they listen to the increasing evening noise of people and animals all around, it is suddenly clear to Ada where this feeling that is not and does not want to leave her is coming from: Gojimir has in truth changed. It is not only his appearance that is altered. Ada distinctly senses that he is weary, that he has somehow aged in the year they have not been together; with his work, with the endless nocturnal discussions, with overnight stays in slipshod accommodation, during the long journeys, the hiding and the agitating, he has indeed become a different man, has become a professional who no longer wishes to talk about his work, about the dangers he must go through, about the aim, which is infinitely far off and perhaps unattainable. Whilst she is smiling, as only she knows how to smile with those white teeth of hers, whilst she is gazing into his face above her as he bends over her, eyes closed, seeking her lips, Ada knows in all certainty that it will no longer be possible to resume anything of what used to be in him and what was between them. She smiles, however. The more anxious she is in her breast, the more she smiles.

During the following days, Anselmo confirms to her that something has been happening to Gojimir recently. His organisational talents are waning, his oratorical capabilities, always distinguished by a calm voice and lucid arguments, are changing into an unconvincing and hesitant stammering. In the field, amongst the cold storage workers, he has already mostly quit. At some night meeting he caused a fearful uneasiness amongst the radical students with his sudden silence; afterwards, when attempting to take the matter in hand, he spoke so confusedly that he provoked salvos of laughter. The organisation is convinced that he must be put in reserve for a while, during these momentarily increasingly complicated circumstances. This is even more necessary on account of the police breakthrough and the Alianza which has evidently succeeded in pushing some well hidden agents amongst their ranks. A whole succession of members and adherents of V.B.A. have disappeared, not only illegal colleagues but well-known public personalities. In such a situation every demoralised link can provoke a

catastrophe.

The trap

During the next days, Anselmo rents a small, comfortable flat for Gojimir, in the proximity of the Av. Triumvirata. Ada visits him regularly. She spends all the spare time she has from school with him. Surprised, she notices that Gojimir really is behaving like a sick man. He morbidly desires her closeness, her physical closeness, her touches and embraces, which is already becoming tiring. With circumspect questions, Ada attempts to find out whether anything particular has happened to him, whether any incident has suddenly sent him off the rails as the unexpected event has brought him amongst them. It is soon clear to her, however, that nothing extraordinary has occurred. The illness is worse: Gojimir has lost faith in the sense of what he's doing. She tries to hide this knowledge from her brother, sometimes bringing some life to this sick room, with his uproarious laugh and his jokes. Gojimir speaks of his mother more and more frequently; he wants to see her. On one of Anselmo's visits he demands this directly. Anselmo smoothly repudiates his plea. When he explains to him that the ring around them is closing in, that the pressure is growing worse and worse and that they are probably waiting right there for him, Gojimir calms down and again writes a long letter. One evening when Ada is setting off for her parents, he forcefully retains her. He cannot stand this any more, he says to her. What can't he stand, the solitude probably? Not the solitude, says Gojimir, not only the solitude. Not just this prison in which he unexpectedly finds himself; he cannot bear the whole thing together any more. He is a foreigner amongst them. Ada does not understand. A foreigner, shrieks Gojimir. He's thirty years old, a foreigner amidst them and the whole thing is senseless. Ada remains with him that night too, postponing the visit to her parents as she has already postponed it ever since they shut themselves away in this flat. She then listens to him patiently, how he talks at length, calmly, about his Slavicism in his Slovene language. They are awake almost the whole night and in the morning, when she finally tears herself away from him, his words go with her. He feels as if he's in a trap here, says Gojimir. Everytime she leaves him he has the feeling he's in a snare he's not going to get out of. Ada understands this, understands it so well that it is now irrevocably

clear to her: he is afraid. She does not understand about the foreignness for he's been amongst them for years already, for he has abandoned his former friends and the immigrants long ago, for she is with him and he's close to her brother and they are within the invisible but safely closed circle of his friends. But she understands about the fear. For the truth about the ever more frequent disappearances from their ranks is a secret no longer. The organisation is breaking up. Anselmo's visits are also rarer. Ada attempts to resist the compassion welling within her, mingling with a feeling of aversion when she looks at this old, young man with his altered appearance and black hair—black, dyed hair again becoming light at the roots, where they are growing, so that he has a light area around his forehead. And at times, she conceals with difficulty her own anxiety, transferred from him to her, so that in the deaf night they both have the feeling that something is going to happen at any minute.

Witold

When during the following months Anselmo tirelessly searched his calm, pale face, he ascertained that there were two versions of the reasons that had led Witold Ozynsky amongst the merciless composers of black lists and assistants in the kidnappings. His biography in the organisation is clear and linear. Around the year fifty-three he joins the student group FUBA, assisting in meetings and demonstrations. After the prohibition of FUBA, he is barred from university, the following year is active in a narrower group connected with the workers. Finishing his military service, he enrolls in the business faculty, working publicly as a local functionary during the year of civil government. After the coup d'état of sixty-seven, he is again underground. The first version, culled by Anselmo after long conversations with Witold's underground colleagues and with the aid of analogy, is already set during the following few months or even a year. According to the first version, Witold is a victim of the classic method of the famous police officer known as "the man with peanuts." One evening a police patrol accosts Witold. In a routine examination of the car they discover a chest of weapons in it. This would have been sufficient for Witold never to have seen his father again, never again to have heard the Polish singing he so loved. The man with the peanuts now enters. He does not permit Witold

to be taken away to the cellar to have his head smashed in. He does not even allow anyone in the office to break in his teeth. No one must touch him at all. His remarkable sense for people tells him that this time perhaps the matter should be tried differently. They put the box back in the car boot. Witold drives all night over the town, completely confused, heart beating and the blood racing in his temples. After two hours of incessant driving, he ascertains that no one is following him. He decides to keep quiet about his visit to the police. How can he prove that they let him go just like that—apart from which Witold knows very well what happens to those in their ranks who they release just like that? He delivers the box to the agreed place. During the days following he does not budge from his father's shop. At every customer entering through the door amidst the jangling of the bell, he senses a painful emptiness at the top of his stomach, like on a roundabout. After some ten days of fear, restless days and anxious nights without dreams, he receives the small man almost like a saviour. In his father's office behind, the newcomer then asks for a bowl or a pot where he might shell his peanuts. The visits and the long nocturnal discussions are repeated a few times. Then Witold returns amongst them.

Anselmo accepts this version, put together by comrades with a persistent piecing together of details. But to him there is something missing in it. It is a too simple, classical method for a waverer. It does not, to him, correspond to Witold's pale face and compressed lips, the calm and decisive face that Anselmo conjures up before his eyes as he is waiting in isolated streets or watching them in dark halls. There is no time to concern ourselves with Anselmo's reconstruction of the second version, for Gojimir is sitting on the bed, completely altered, waiting for someone to step in his path. To be imagined is how Anselmo walks the streets of the capital for hours with Witold's former fiancée who understands nothing, as he asks her about all the details in connection with this strange, passionate and pale man, how he talks to his father in the small office behind the shop, before he, too, moves away to some unknown destination. It must be known that Anselmo's way to the second version was a long and difficult one for it is beyond his experience. To Anselmo, the second version is a feeling of obscurity. The second version iterates that Witold has been on the other side right from the start.

At the beginning is a moment in Witold's

youth, some afternoon in the year forty-four when, in the Ozynsky's flat, they are staring shocked and amazed at a newspaper where the name of a strange place, *The Katinsky Forest*, is printed in greasy letters. The newspaper, filled with German propaganda, contains a large photograph—an excavated grave, a pit full of bodies. It fills Witold's young soul with a horror that walks the Ozynsky flat that night—a fearful abyss. He cannot sleep the whole night long and can hear someone sobbing. Cries fill the rift he senses in his breast, the abyss in the oppressed space about his heart.

According to the second version, which complements his face more than the details of his activity, his behaviour at meetings in Casulla, his extraordinary absence in the capotin el paso, his compressed lips—according to this version, Witold is on the other bank and has been in the secret alliance right from the start.

Anselmo will never know which of these two versions is the correct one. But is it all that important? Although from Anselmo's point of view the first one is classical and the second one obscure, although everything altogether appears to be a complicated tangle of chances, the only clear thing is that fate has guided Witold into Gojimir Blagaj's path. It could have been another, cutting into the night with the sharp ring of the electrical bell. But the one who came during the night, ringing at the door of Gojimir's hidden flat was precisely Witold. Maybe he had been decided upon for this right from the start, according to the first or second version or bypassing them both.

The bell in the night

When the sound of the electric bell hisses out between their four walls, Gojimir starts and pales. As if sensing something, he gets out of bed and sits upon it as if there had been something in his behaviour oppressing him all day with a secret strength, Ada relates. Perhaps it seems like that to her today, perhaps it all happened quite differently, for she cannot rely utterly on her memory. She cannot, let us say, remember which film she was watching when it rang. For a while she was convinced the film was an Italian one and that Marcello Mastroiani was quietly saying something to some famous actress. Now it seems to her it wasn't so. Now she's sure that there was a lot of shouting and shooting for she knows exactly that she turned the television down before she went to the door.

When the bell cuts unexpectedly into their four walls, Gojimir is sitting upon the bed. Ada, her feet tucked beneath her, is seated in the armchair in front of the television; she gets up, pulling at the thin fabric of her nightgown that has rucked right up, sticking to her thigh, pulls on a cardigan and goes to the door.

—Wait, says Gojimir. You don't know who it is.

—Anselmo, who else, Ada says.

Then it is not Anselmo standing in the doorway; in the doorway stands Witold Ozymsky.

—It's Witold, says Ada, he wants you.

—Why doesn't he come in? Gojimir says.

—He'll wait in the car, Ada says, and you are going with them, she says, standing in the middle of the room gazing fixedly at him. And today she is convinced that in that moment she knew something was going to happen. But Witold, Witold, Witold, there simply could not be anything wrong here. And that was exactly what was in Gojimir's look as he was searching for something in her eyes, precisely that Witold was in his gaze also. She stands watching him get dressed. He does the light shirt up extremely slowly and then takes such a time pulling his arms through his jacket that a nervous horn blowing is to be heard from the street below.

—The devil, says Gojimir, I'm coming.

But this was said with such a voice, tells Ada, as if wishing to conceal an enormous inner tension. He uttered such a sentence on purpose, to detract her attention from his own straying eyes, searching round the room, wanting to cling to something between these four walls. Then he reached into his pocket and fastened on his watch just above the palm, as he always wore it. Ada now knows that his hands were shaking and that twice during the clasping the watch slipped from his fingers. But Ada sees such things much later, as she relates them to Anselmo and his comrades or as she is trying to explain the event, with indulgent words, to the silent old woman with the two pictures. The old woman is not listening to her. In actual fact she does not like listening to anyone. She is looking elsewhere and deeper, there where Ada's perceptions do not extend, even though Ada remembers every detail.

Gojimir stands in the middle of the room, patting his pockets. Below, the nervous tooting is heard again. Gojimir goes up to Ada, stroking her elbow with the back of his hand.

—I'll be back soon, he says.

He never returns.

Transport

When the lorry of May '45 drives up to the small railway station, a throng of soldiers is already ascending into the open cattle wagons. The **youth from the photograph** jumps over the side of the lorry. English soldiers are standing around the station and by the trucks. An officer is talking to some railwayman by a jeep, nervously tapping his trousers with a baton. The embarkation unwinds without a stop, also, however, without the noise, calls and exhortations usual for military transport. The **youth from the photograph** thrusts through the crowd of grey-uniformed bodies, to the passenger coach connected just behind the engine. Standing by it is a semicircular group of officers from his army, mutely attending to the tramp of army boots in the trucks. The **youth from the photograph** gesticulates nervously with his hands, telling something to one of the officers in the semicircle. He indicates with his hand and turns away. The youth draws off, looking for a coach. Someone proffers him a hand through the **open gullet** of a nearby car. The youth clasps the proffered hand with both of his, clambering up. A moment after the slamming of doors is heard, as the English soldiers quickly push them along the narrow rails. The **youth from the photograph** leans on the thick wooden wall of the door, gazing about him. All are quiet and pale. All are silent. The iron rattle of bolts can be heard on the outside of the wagons as they are slid into their rings. Then the train pulls away. Some moments after footsteps begin to tramp over the roof. Someone up top laughs loudly.

—Jesus, says the lad standing by the door next to the **youth from the photograph**, the one who had proffered a hand so he'd climbed into the truck.

And then he adds quietly:

—Blagaj, where are they taking us?

The Journey

Sitting in front is a thickset driver whom Gojimir does not know. Witold is seated on the rear seat, hands on his knees, gazing at the street before him, a street where there are ever fewer lights. Witold's immovability suddenly becomes unbearable.

—Witold, says Gojimir, where are we going?

Witold is silent.

—Witold, says Gojimir loudly and decisively, this isn't the way to Casulla.

Witold does not reply; the driver moves his head and looks into the mirror above the front window. The enormous old Buick fumes through

the empty and dark suburban streets. The houses are getting smaller and scarcer. The headlights then illuminate a low building and whilst he is turning in, the driver sounds the horn loudly twice. In the instant it stops, an unknown man appears in the light of the headlamps; another is already opening the door on the side where Gojimir is sitting. Wordlessly he pushes onto the seat next to him; the one in front vanishes from the circle of light, and a moment afterwards is seated in the front seat. The Buick jounces off, as the one in the front seat hunts the door, finally slamming it with a bang. The silent company rushes along the long country roads into the night.

The man on his left smells of spirits. To the right, Gojimir feels the heat of Witold's body. The man on the left has pushed him right up against him. Gojimir leans forward and stares Witold in the face. His eyes are still following the road, touched by the headlamps of the car, with total attention. Gojimir feels over Witold's motionless face with his eyes.

—Witold, says Gojimir in a parched voice, quietly, what does this mean?

His words hang in the air, shiver in the air and then beat about the dark men's heads in the car like frightened birds. Then they vanish, engulfed by the even noise of the car engine. It is quiet and dark in the car.

The station

The moment the train stops, blows from staves and rifle butts begin to drum upon the wagons. A crowd of hostile people roar around the trucks. Men's and women's voices demand the death of the traitors. The soldiers in the wagons withdraw on all sides from the drumming, like a terrified flock. Someone tries to pray. Someone says:

—This is the end.

But this is not the end yet. This is only the beginning of the end.

Blagaj feels the lad next to him searching for his hand. He presses it weakly; his palms are damp and cold.

The brickworks

The car bounces over a potholed macadamized road. It is dark. The lights of the capital are far behind them. The headlamps then touch upon a long, low building, heaps of broken bricks everywhere around, crunching also beneath the wheels of the car. The three get out, pulling

Gojimir from the car. The driver turns off the engine, leaning on the wheel. There is not a sound and there is no wind. The air is as still as some immovable mass as the group sets off towards the great clay pit near the brickworks.

Some other pits

At the other end of the world, some nine thousand kilometers away from the deserted brickworks and the clay pit, towards which three men are leading Gojimir Blagaj with his dyed hair and altered appearance, in that far off year of 1945, on a warm spring afternoon by a forest road near a town called Kočevje, a column of men in ragged and crumpled uniforms, surrounded by armed guards, comes to a halt. Three men unwind a coil of telephone wire from a wide drum, clipping it with pliers. The guards take the pieces of wire, tying the prisoners' hands with it by the wrists. Individual shots can be heard close by, between them bursts of machine-gun fire. A captive in the column, whom we shall recognize in the coarse-grained, enlarged, cut out from the group picture on the Mayo Plaza, follows the guards' hands with paled eyes, as they tighten his wrists with the wire. Then he lifts his look to the man's eyes that are red from lack of sleep.

—Please, the captive suddenly whispers, undo it a little.

The guard looks at him astonishedly.

—I've got a son, he says, please.

—I can't say the guard, gazing about him. I cannot.

—His name is Gojimir, says the bound one loudly so that the quiet and pale ones about him are as restless as a terrified flock.

—What have you got there? a voice calls from the clearing. The guard takes a step back, pushing the bound one in the shoulder with his rifle butt.

The column moves. The shots are closer.

There are deep pits there.

The abyss

At the start of the eighties the whole world came to know of the mass graves that are found close to the Campo da Mayo in the cemetery in La Plata and in numerous other places. Newspapers began to publish the details and television networks showed shots of the despairing mothers from the Mayo Plaza, demanding their sons, or at least their bodies. Excavated from the pits were ever more victims of the senseless underground ideological war that had brought

victory to none. What had remained of it were the human lives buried in the pits and the long lists of desaparecidos of whom it will never be known where they vanished. Some usurping caudilla who apparently killed the kidnapped with his own hands was even set before a court but the man was persistently silent at the judging. What else could he do. He could not return a son to even one mother. They also found people who had fled from the shots in the dark night. One had escaped from a pit full of corpses and then, for a glass of spirits, had drunkenly related what he had seen there. He said they had led him, hands tied, to the edge of the abyss. His attendant had shot him with a revolver in the back of the neck, from behind, but the bullet had only grazed his ear and he had fallen into the pit alive. He had fallen onto a corpse and there was a terrible sighing, weeping and sobbing in the pit, for some were still alive. During the night he had dragged himself from the poorly covered aperture out into the open and had fled. But this is only a story circulating amongst the people. No one can verify it, for the drunken Creole soon disappeared into the interior of the country and was lost in the extensive pampas. As we have said—those desaparecidos who reappeared amongst the people again remained serious and silent.

Trophonius' cave

The ancient Greeks said of a gloomy and sad person that he'd visited Trophonius' cave. Whoever had seen the horrors in it, the subterranean corridors and snakes and whoever succeeded in returning from it had a dark shadow lying across his face for the whole of his life.

Apparently it was precisely Trophonius, together with his brother, who built the famous Apollo overnight dwelling in Delphi. Because the brothers were renowned as excellent builders, the mighty King Hirieus asked them to erect a special, well-protected building in which he would safely house his hoards. The brothers soon finished the edifice, simultaneously building a secret way to it, intending to steal his wealth from him. Hirieus saw this and set a trap for them. He caught only Agamedus. Trophonius tried to rescue his brother from gaol many times. Because he soon realised he was not going to be able to free him, and he himself was unable to hide because he would be recognised by his features similar to his brother's, he decapitated him, taking his head away with him. In that moment, the interior of the earth swallowed him up.

He dwelt in a cave in a clearing in some forest. Whoever was daring enough could go to him for a secret or a prophecy. However, only after he had undergone some terrible trials could he then ask for advice. Not all of them performed them; not all of them returned. It was possible to arrive at the entrance to the hollow, yawning like a black gullet, along a series of subterranean corridors and halls. It was then necessary to descend some ladders which reached to the next hole. The opening here was very narrow, so that the legs could be thrust into it and the body could only be pulled through it with great difficulty. A rapid, precipitous fall to the floor of the cave followed. He who wished to hear either a prophecy or advice had to hold honey cakes in his hands. These were for calming down the snakes that crept and crawled everywhere in the pit. Thus, at the same time, he could not touch the invisible apparatus which then lifted him from the cave. The sojourn on the terrible floor might last a whole day and a whole night. Some never ever returned again. Sometimes some succeeded in hearing the prophecy; with the aid of the already mentioned invisible apparatus they then returned to the surface, nevertheless so that their feet were in the air, head hanging down. Outside they then sat upon the chair known as Mnemosyne, who is the goddess of memory, and remembered all those terrible impressions and the cave which was cleaved into their consciousness for the rest of their lives.

Epilogue

We must, however, tell the tale to the end. The three men are leading Gojimir towards the deserted brickworks. He is no longer asking anything, nor is he thinking of escape. He is searching for a trace of some strange misunderstanding on Witold's face, to be explained any minute now. But the presence of both the types who are walking close by him and the third who remained in the car, head resting on the wheel, tells him that this will not occur. This will also not occur because Witold is walking behind him, lips compressed, the revenger of some other far-off pit. Nor does the thought help us that Gojimir certainly has no connections with that pit. He is entangled in a terrible and senseless game, stepping, with his dyed hair and subsiding hope, towards a long, dark building at the end of the way.

Let us leave them this way—not because we wish to avoid the details, about which the

newspapers and the Books of Survivors write. Let us leave them this way on Ada's account, because of her hope. During the following days an agitation will take hold of her, then a terrible presentiment will completely prevail. Suddenly she will be sorry for every cross word she had spoken, every evil thought. Perhaps she will also be sorry because, that far-off afternoon with the books in her lap, she rushed off the street into the bank, there meeting the lad who is now no longer anywhere. She will search for him in Casulla and around the suburban cold storage chambers, to find him amongst the workers with the piles of newspapers under their arms, with his fair or dark hair. Later on, she will visit his mother and sit silently in front of her two likenesses. Let us leave them on Anselmo's account also, who, under the name of Jordan, will open the doors of offices and press the bells of bourgeois flats, pistol in pocket, to catch sight of Witold's calm face and his compressed lips. Once we will receive a report that he has been seen in Rosario, 25th May on the Jacaronda festival, in the militia parade. He will

search for him there with a group of comrades but will not find him. And it will be better thus, for in the most senseless of all wars in mankind's history, in the Third World ideological war, a fresh victim would have fallen. And let us leave them this way chiefly on account of that old woman who walks the Mayo Plaza with the pictures of two desaparecidos, in the crazy and enormous hope that she will never need to light candles in front of their likenesses. Some of the regular visitors to the Mayo Plaza already know her. The cameraman, who is always there with his camera strained to catch some exceptionally great event, smiles affably at her. It never even occurs to him to film her, she who is, with her unwavering hope and faith, the greatest miraculous event. Some of the strollers also know the old country priest who, hobbling across the smooth pavement in his awkward shoes, takes hold of the old woman under her elbow, the two together leaving past the monument to Pedro de Mendoza.□

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARMANDO VALLADARES

William Marling

INTRODUCTION

Poet Armando Valladares spent twenty-two years in Cuban prisons. His crime: criticizing Fidel Castro in a student newspaper in 1960. Although he fought to overthrow the Batista regime, and became an official in Castro's Ministry of Communication, Valladares disliked Cuba's status as a Russian satellite.

Valladares was convicted of "undermining state security" after a two-hour trial before a military tribunal. "I can still recall," says Valladares, "how the President of the tribunal spent the whole trial with his military boots on the table, reading comics." The sentence was thirty years in jail.

Confined first at the Isle of Pines and later at the notorious Boniato prison, Valladares and other political prisoners were beaten, showered with human excrement, and denied medical treatment. In 1974 they were kept in isolation without food for forty-six days in an attempt to make them join a political re-education program. Valladares could not walk when he emerged, and prison officials refused to let him use a wheelchair sent by Amnesty International.

His first book was written on cigarette papers with Mercurochrome and smuggled out of Boniato in a toothpaste tube by his future wife, whose father was a prisoner there. She published *Desde mi Silla de Ruedas* in Paris in 1976. Mounting international pressure forced the Cubans to release 3,000 political prisoners in 1977, and to send Valladares to a military hospital. There he was asked to recant the charges in his book: he refused, medical treatment stopped and he was held in solitary confinement in a Havana jail until 1981.

Deliverance came as a result of a campaign by Spanish writer Fernando Arrabal. He persuaded French President François Mitterand to intervene with Castro on Valladares' behalf. After his release in October of 1982, Valladares was flown to Paris and rushed directly to the hospital.

Today Valladares and his wife live in a small *piso*, or apartment, in a nondescript building typical of the sprawling new suburbs of Madrid. He is a small man, and seated among the stacks of books, magazines and papers that he collects to document human rights abuses in Cuba, he looks even smaller, a tiny, inoffensive ex-bureaucrat. When he speaks, however, a secret switch seems to have been thrown. He gestures rapidly, nervously, continuously. A range of emotions—from compassion to disdain—passes across his face.

What do you think of when you recall your twenty-two years in prison?

I consider it a stage in my life that I must not forget so that I can tell what it was like. Fortunately, I have no bitterness, not even against those who tortured me—remembering it does not upset me.

How long were you held incommunicado?

I was held that way many times, but the longest time was nine years, during which I neither saw anyone from outside, nor received letters nor telephone calls. When I left solitary I almost couldn't walk.

Is it true that you finally wrote poems with your own blood?

Yes. Being in a punishment cell, I didn't have anything to write with, so I cut my finger and with a splinter I wrote that poem.

How did you keep your spirits up?

By my religious convictions and my love for my wife. I was absolutely convinced that I had acted correctly, that I was right. The important thing in any circumstance is to live according to your own conscience. When you make yourself whole this way, you give yourself a force that is indestructible.

During that period, what did you do; what did you think about?

I took refuge in a fantasy world, I wrote . . . other times I analyzed the situation, I thought. Luckily, I had years and years to think about everything: man, life, my situation, Cuba. . . .

And to dream about freedom, I suppose. What is freedom for you?

The possibility of thinking, expressing yourself and acting according to a set of convictions. Above all it is an internal attitude: there are a lot of people walking the streets, going from one place to another and, nevertheless, they're not free. I never felt myself a slave: inside I was free and that is the only real way to feel free. I was also afraid; there were times when I was terrified, but they never succeeded in breaking me.

In addition to your activity as a writer, you're a human rights activist. How would one describe your activity?

As helping the foundation of committees throughout Europe. In October I founded one in Spain that people as ideologically opposed as Alvarez de Miranda, Javier Tusell, Sanchez Drago and Xavier Domingo belong to. I offer all the material on the violation of human rights that I receive from Cuba to organizations like Amnesty International. It's a job that has to be done in a coordinated way among all those who advocate it, and not just denounced when it's a dictatorship.

Nevertheless, it seems that violations and torture are denounced with more frequency in Chile or Uruguay than in Cuba. Why is that?

Because there has always existed the idea that Castro is the just guerrillero who saved the Cubans from dictatorship, and gave them back their freedom. But one has to have the honor to recognize that the revolution that so many helped and admired was betrayed. It is immoral to criticize Pinochet and justify Castro, or vice versa.

What is the situation of political prisoners in Cuba?

There are in Cuba really about 150,000 prisoners, of whom some fifteen thousand are political, out of a population of nine million inhabitants. Havana, with two million people, has a penal population that varies between forty-five and fifty

thousand prisoners, distributed in forty jails and concentration camps.

How many remain from the era of the revolution?

Some two hundred, who have always rejected plans for rehabilitating them and have been there now between ten and twenty-four years. The majority of these "historic prisoners" were collaborators close to Castro, commanders who made the war and fought with him in the mountains, like the Spaniard Gutierrez Menoyo.

Can you tell us anything new of his whereabouts?

For two years I haven't heard anything of him. We can only trust what [Spanish cabinet member Fernando] Moran said when he came back from Cuba—that they told him he was alive. When I left jail, he was isolated in a tiny cell without sunlight, without clothes, without adequate medical assistance, and without either visits or mail: absolutely incommunicado and under a regimen of torture. I was with him many years and I was witness to the brutal beating that they gave him and without doubt it caused his detached retina. It seems inconceivable that the Spanish government has not secured his release. How is it possible that France gained mine, when I'm Cuban, and the Spanish government is not capable of freeing one of its citizens? At the least someone ought to demand that some Spanish authority visit him and that he be treated like a political prisoner.

It is said that Castro has this personal charisma. Is it true?

It is true. He has a personality that attracts people, especially European politicians. It's something similar to what happened to Roosevelt with Stalin, when he called him "Papa Stalin." Castro is also this manly, virile type, very much the protector . . . Surely if he were short and slender he would not be so attractive.

Attractiveness gains him the masses?

No, you can't "gain" the masses. What happens is that it is mandatory to attend the rallies of Fidel; the chief of personnel of every business has his employees sign up to assure their attendance, and the same occurs with the so-called voluntary labor of "Red Sunday," and those who don't go can lose their jobs.

Did you participate actively in the revolution?

Yes. I even finally held a high post in the Ministry of Communication. I will say that ninety percent of Cubans supported the revolution. During the dictatorship of Batista there was tremendous corruption in the administration and this was one of the reasons, among others, why Castro received so much sympathy. I believed that it really would be the solution of Cuba, that he was a type of Messiah.

Do you believe that Castro was sincere in his initial plans, that he was pursuing a policy of freedom?

Castro was always a charlatan. He called himself a democrat because he knew that with the title of communist there was nothing he could do: back then communism was like "the bogeyman." Nevertheless, a few months ago he declared for TVE [Spanish National Television] that he was always a communist.

Tourists are coming back from Cuba with the impression that now, at least, the people eat.

Sure, people eat starch and eggs until they're stuffed, but many important foods are rationed, like meat, to which each person has the right to one kilo per month. Other foods, like seafood, are only offered in stores for tourists or for directors of the Party. A few months ago the *Washington Post* reported that seventy percent of the wages

of Cubans go to the black market. The scarcity of goods, not only foodstuffs but clothing, is impressive.

Is there any self-criticism, or any organized political response?

There is some self-criticism; for some months now the government has opened up the possibility of "constructive criticism." On the other hand, they are talking about organizing independent unions, but listen to the attitude of the government, in this respect, in the declarations of the vice-president of the republic to *Diario 16* this past October: "Perhaps there exist in Cuba peoples with fanciful ideas of union liberties, but I foresee for them ridicule." A few months before this eleven farmworkers who had organized a free union were executed. Exile is the major reply in Cuba, and, at this moment, there are a million Cubans with their passages paid to leave the island as soon as they can get the "papers."

Is there a chance things will change?

Of course. I hope to return to my country free of communism, to a free Cuba, a place like Spain is today. □

William Marling is Associate Professor of English at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

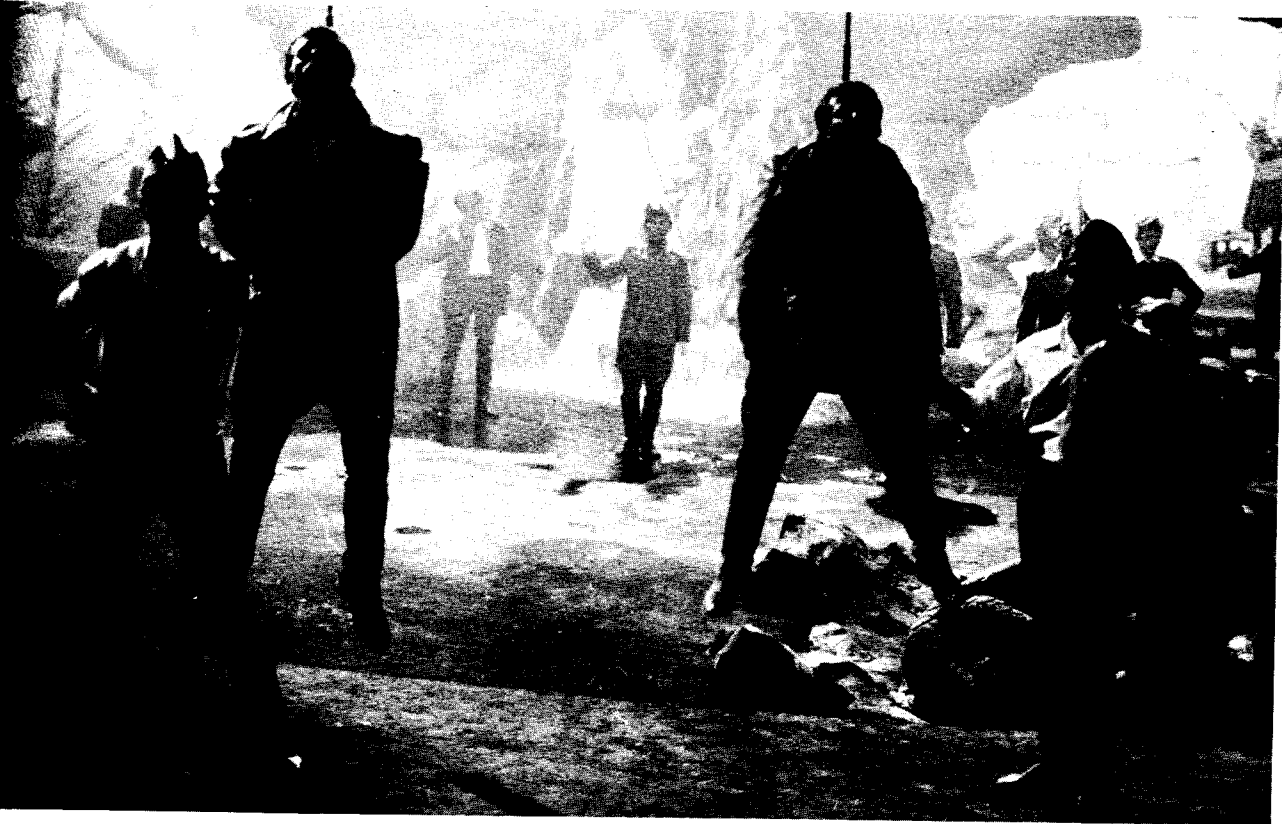
HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY

Directed by Miklos Jancso

Cinematography by Janos Kende









BUSES, UNDERTAKERS, AND THE BELGRADE STRANGLER: SLOBODAN SIJAN ON COMEDY

Conducted by John Mosier and Andrew Horton

INTRODUCTION

Slobodan Sijan began his career as a painter and then switched to making films, partially as a result of his fascination with old movies, particularly the comedies of Laurel and Hardy. His first feature film, *Who's Singing Over There?*, was shown at Cannes in the *Un Certain Regard* section in 1980. It went on to be an enormous popular and critical success. His third film, *How I Was Systematically Destroyed by Idiots*, was the first Yugoslavian film to deal with the traumatic events centering around 1968. His most recent film is called *The Marathon Family Runs Its Last Lap of Honor*, and deals with a family of Serbian undertakers. The time is 1934, and all five generations live in the same house. *Marathon Family* is a remarkably keen evocation of the world of silent film. It begins with a newsreel showing the events at the funeral of King Alexander, and it ends with a prolonged freeze frame of the youngest member's face as he runs over a policeman. Then we see a frame burnout, and the burned celluloid gradually replaces the face. In between these images the film is blackly humorous: the protagonist strangles the heroine; his best friend is accidentally incinerated in the family crematorium; and there is a pitched battle between the Marathon family and the heroine's, during which the houses of both are destroyed and the bride's family is blown up.

Why the documentary footage at the beginning of The Marathon Family?

There were several reasons. I wanted to frame the film in a way that looks like a theater screening in Yugoslavia in the 1930s. It would start with a newsreel of well-known events, then you would have film that's shot in the manner of a film of the 1930s, and then you would have a frame burnout, which happens in those kinds of theaters several times. That's one reason. Another reason is that the whole story is a strong stylization in a way, the kind of story that's not realistic. So I wanted to give the audience the opportunity to connect the kind of documentary events which are as silly, as crazy in their way, as the events that you see later in the film, that when you show them, people say, "Oh, how crazy." So you show how the real thing looks, and you connect them. That assassination is material that always fascinated me, and I wanted to use it in a film for some time. Nobody had used it in Yugoslavia; it's great material. You have morticians there, you have Goering, so you have a kind of feeling for an era, and what was going

on. So I felt it would be a good introduction for a film. A lot of people have thought that it doesn't fit in the film so good, but I like it. The documentary footage is really beautiful, and it gives a good introduction to the time, and that's the importance of it.

But the documentary footage, and what happens to your hero, makes the film a rather neat metaphor about the rise of fascism.

I as a filmmaker don't like to think in metaphors, as much as people usually appreciate them, because I believe that you can find a metaphor in almost everything if you are looking for it. I feel it is not so much a good thing if a film has a general metaphor, because it reduces the meaning of the film to one thing, while I think a film should offer thousands of metaphors from scene to scene. You have to recognize thousands of things and to relate them to your own experience if you have a good experience with a film. So you think of metaphors as one of the tools you use, not as the main purpose. It's a story about certain times, and about certain kinds of

intolerance which can be recognized by today's audience. It's in a way universal—the fight of a young guy who fights the older generation to try to do something. At the end he just becomes as the rest of them. I think that's a common story of today's life. Almost everywhere you have these stories all around. Generally, I think it's a film about evil forces, or about making jokes with evil. When something fills you with fear, you make jokes about it, and that makes it much easier to take. Of course, fascism is one of the things, and you always deal with what you have. It is a metaphor, in a way, of the growing of fascism.

Out of what set of experiences do you get these pistol packing Serbian villagers?

Well, you see it is totally unrealistic. This film is totally a stylization that relates to the contemporary audience's experiences with the movies. You didn't have gunfights of that kind in old Serbia. You had criminals, you had gunfights, but they didn't have such a gangster-like shape. That's what I did, because I like that kind of movie, and I just wanted, when I had the opportunity to make a film, to make something that looks like the movies that I like. So that's the result. The story was so full of things that aren't realistic, it allowed me to do that. I didn't have to follow a realistic pattern, and I could build a world of its own. I really did that film having in mind some good comedies by Billy Wilder, some people who worked in that kind of comedy, you know, comedy set in a certain period. It relates a lot of my experiences of American movies that I like, because I am great buff. I was raised on it, and I enjoyed it a lot. I knew that I could not make those kinds of films in Yugoslavia, because you have to relate to the conditions in which you work and to some of the realities that you have. You can't make real genre films. You can't make gangster films in Yugoslavia because you don't have gangsters. But this film is something that gave me an opportunity to make a small gang war between two families. You have that kind of family war there, so I just gave them family heads, and some cars, and it started to look like something we knew. It's a little touch that makes it look like a gangster movie, but not so much as to spoil the Yugoslavian audiences' feeling for the movie's reality. They accepted it pretty well.

So when they saw it, they realized how it related to their experiences.

When they saw it they were not thinking in terms of "is it real or not?" They just accepted it. It was totally okay for them. This film was the most popular film of that year.

Did you run into any people in Serbia who saw it and were insulted?

Oh yes. That's the permanent problem in comedy. With every film that I made I had some groups, some people, insulted—because it's a comedy. And when you make people ridiculous, they say, "Why do you show a priest like that?" And in the next film, "Why do you show a policeman like that?" I said, "Listen. This is a comedy. You have two main elements." As Mack Sennett said, "You have two mechanisms that work in comedy. One is the attack on authority, and the second is mistaken identity." Those two mechanisms are the basic ones. And in this film you have a lot of basic attacks on authority—not just authority, but dignity. Morticians are very dignified, so this is an attack on dignity, as well. That's how it's funny. In such a context, you put in an assassination of a king so the old generation can feel insulted, and others don't like the idea of making fun of funerals, and so they're insulted. But that's a question with black humor. But what's important to me is that the younger generation—young audiences—really accepted that film; they had a feeling for that kind of humor. They really liked the film.

What else of Mack Sennett's were you fascinated by?

Mack Sennett is fascinating for me because of one reason: he created the whole reality in front of the camera. You don't have anything else in the background. The extras that are moving around are already controlled because he picked them out—short, or tall, or fat, or with big mustaches. He controlled everything that moves in front of the cameras, and it becomes one whole grotesque world of his. That's one lesson I learned from Mack Sennett: more than slapstick. What fascinated me in films that he produced, and it was generally in the silent comedies, was that he organized the whole world, the whole gallery of faces and creatures that appeared in front of the camera, and that's what I'm trying to do in my films: to control every face that appears on the screen and not just to say, give me some people. But I try to choose people whose sheer appearance brings some comedy or some specific look or meaning to the scene.

That's one thing that I really liked in Mack Sennett, and then I liked a lot of American comedies, especially Laurel and Hardy and the Marx brothers; they're really the greatest absurd comedians. But I liked Laurel and Hardy and their kind of truth that existed in their characters, the kind of truth about characters that everybody could relate to. I think that's the key for good comedy: to create characters that are so convincing that everyone can recognize and relate to them. It doesn't even matter what kind

operate, and I prefer to call it a tragi-comedy, let's say, more than a comedy: films that start as pure comedy, or with a comic flair, and then through the development of characters and the story you are starting to get more serious and even very dark. I don't know why, but that's the kind of action I like. Maybe because when you offer just a kind of dark material to people they are very thick, and they reject it very easily, but when you make them laugh and you just hit them with some hard stuff, they remember it even harder.



of story, just as long as the audience can identify with the characters and have fun with them. Then when the film is over they have the experience of some new characters that they recognize. I think that's the main thing you can do in a comedy.

Yes, but what's interesting here is not just that you've studied the silent film comedians and have an eye for their interests, but how far you've pushed the form itself. For example, the scene where the youngest Marathon family member strangles his girlfriend is very funny, but it's also quite unlike anything we would have been likely to see in silent comedy.

Yes. That's generally a form in which I like to

So it's a kind of way to make films that I find very appealing. It's a way of making films that I like. There is one writer in Yugoslavia who calls his plays grotesque tragedies, and I like that expression. I think that term—grotesque tragedies—can fit very well as a description of my films, and that's what I'm trying to do.

If it's a tragedy, who's the tragic hero?

In my third film, I had one hero. You have him as a tragi-comic persona, and here you have a whole group of people. Also in my first film you had a group of people. So it varies from film to film. What is important is that somehow in those

films—maybe I won't continue in that direction—I enjoyed ending them quite darkly. I didn't feel good about letting the film develop just as comedy and ending like that; I had to direct it in this black direction.

Had Marathon Family been written as a play before Who's Singing Over There? was written?

Yes. *Marathon Family* existed as a play in 1973, if I am correct, and it was a very successful play. It played almost ten years.

Did the play contain the Hollywood material?

No. The play didn't have at all that kind of stuff. It's what I liked to have in the film. I mean, when you start talking in detail, everything is different. But the spirit of the play is there, and that's why I wanted to do it. What attracted me to the play—besides having fun working with Dusan Kovacevic on my first film and really finding out that we can make good things together—was a kind of dark aggression that I felt in that play, a kind of hate that develops in young people, a very destructive energy that existed in that play. It was fascinating for me. It really attracted me, and I wanted to have that feeling on the screen; I think we succeeded in getting that in the film.

But to succeed we had to change everything. What happened was that we never looked at the play when we were writing the script. I hadn't looked at it again; he hadn't read it again. We just knew all the characters, and we started from scratch. We talked a lot while he was writing the script. One part of the play in my memory was weak, and that was the part of Djenka. Also, it was a contemporary play, and I put it in the 1930s, which was what happened with *Who's Singing Over There?*, also. It was a contemporary story which didn't have any connection with the war, but I felt that this humor is more convincing when you can remove the contemporary experience of life from that humor, so nobody can ask questions, you know, like "why are those guys doing that; why don't the police come?" People just say, "Okay. In those times it was crazy," so they can accept all the crazy stuff. So we started from the feeling of the play and developed a totally new story, with Djenka as a cinematographer, with the war between the two families, which was not in the play, and with the crematorium, which was not in the play. When you start counting what was not in the play, when people start asking what was not in the

play, the answer is that a five generation family was in the play, and that's the main thing—crazy family, and their pressure on the youngest one who wants to get out. At the end he cracks. He becomes as bad as they are, and even worse. He starts as a romantic hero who wants to get out, but at the end the situation is that he is the leader and worse than they are. That's the story.

But I want to underline that Dusan Kovacevic was the scriptwriter, and mine was a kind of directorial collaboration. I think that the director has to direct everything—the actors, the art direction, the costumes, the scriptwriting. You have to be in all phases of the work if you want the film to reflect what you want it to reflect. If you want the film to look the way you want it, you have to be in all phases of work, but the writer can think of writing some scenes, and there are certain things that I don't know how to do. I don't have the experience for that, so I tell him, listen, that's maybe great, but I cannot deal with that kind of material. You have to direct the scriptwriter like you work with the cinematographer. I think it was Otto Preminger who said, and I agree completely with him, that the director's job is everything—script, actors, sets, costumes. You have to control all that and give it direction. Otherwise, you are simply a guy on the set telling people what to do. The director is the one with the concept, and he starts trying to realize that concept, and that's it.

When I started talking to Dusan about making this film, I had that idea; I had the feeling that this material would allow me to incorporate into that story all the stuff that I liked in the movies. I could play the game of making a kind of American movie which is really not an American movie at all, but I could put that kind of stuff in it. It gave me the opportunity to use that design, and all of those genre elements, and to play with it in a way that is, of course, totally the opposite of the real genre movies.

And yet those films end on a note of triumph. Do you think there's something specifically Serbian that makes you end the film that way?

I don't know. We have a lot of films about triumphs. I can't generalize so much as to say that it's a Serbian thing; I don't think so. I think it's a question of the sensibility of people who make a certain kind of work. This story—Dusan's play—was a pessimistic thing—for me full of despair—and that's what I tried to do in the film. We didn't have a precise end. We just said—it was in the

script—"They start to fight." There was no real culmination, but I knew that I would have it and what I wanted was the feeling of white heat at the end, of an ending without gradation. The day before we were shooting that scene, for the first time I looked at the play again—Dusan wasn't there—and I looked through the last scene, and I found this sentence, which wasn't really the last sentence, but towards the end: "We will spill your guts." And I wanted that to be the last sentence in the film, and so I added it, because I thought that it gave the feeling of the whole thing.

You're in an unusual category, being a serious filmmaker and yet dealing in comedies, especially in Eastern Europe. Do you find this a problem? In your own country with the critics, for instance, do they have trouble understanding what you do?

It depends from critic to critic, but generally comedy is harder material to swallow, especially my approach. What I feel is a strength of my working in Yugoslavia in comedy is trying to listen to our audience, which is not so sophisticated as the audience in the West. So people here ask me why do you use those jokes, for instance. Why does the girl grab Djenka's crotch when they're on the motorcycle, and I see those things as the vitality that this audience that we have gives me. I'm not afraid to be populist with humor. I want to keep in touch with that, because it's a tradition of cinema, and I feel it's a good thing that you have the opportunity to be in touch with those people who understand that part of humor, and I'm not ashamed of that. I like to use the vulgar side of humor sometimes, because it's humor. But with the critics, because they have seen that stuff so many times, they say, that's not art. But that's comedy, you know. They were saying that for Laurel and Hardy. I remember when I was a kid everyone was saying, they are not great art. Buster Keaton is great art. Laurel and Hardy are for me the biggest that can be. There is no bigger; that is the top.

It depends on the kind of critic, also. There are people who like comedy, and if they are film critics they will appreciate comedy. But you have people who don't find things funny, and with comedy it's like that. I send someone to see a film where I almost died laughing, and he comes back and says, "Why did you send me to see this film? It's not funny." So it's very strange. Also, with comedy you are at the mercy of the audience. If they don't laugh you know immediately that the

film doesn't work. There is no other genre that has such strong criteria. You make a drama, people look, people go, they say they like it or they didn't. But there is no real measure. But with comedy you have it; it's laughter. It's a hard genre to work in.

But one important thing is also that we have good actors for comedy in Yugoslavia. I didn't have that orientation when I started making films, but then you discover that you have to find the best things to work with to make movies that work. When you start looking around you find that you don't have such good actors for strong dramatic things. Actors in the Yugoslav cinema don't have the kind of conditions to work. You cannot concentrate on a role too long. They call you, give you a script, you have to do it. But when you are a comedian and work in a comedy, actors really know how to do it if they are good. They have a lot of experience in things. So they can be good in those bad working conditions. They enjoy doing it. And you have some good writers for comedy. So I found out that I could organize a small universe that could work.

What about How I Was Systematically Destroyed by Idiots, your first film that wasn't set in the past? Was it a black comedy as well?

No. It's a political satire. Of course *Who's Singing Over There?* isn't a black comedy either, just *Marathon Family*. I call them really tragi-comedies; maybe that's the best title. *How I Was Systematically Destroyed by Idiots* is a film that I wanted to make for a long time. It was based on a novel, and I knew it from the manuscript for a long time before it was in print. I had started working on it in 1981, but it was just impossible to push it through because this is the first film made in Yugoslavia about the events of 1968—the first feature film. This film broke the barrier; afterwards I think two films appeared. This film showed that you can talk about those events, that it's not so taboo as some people thought. But it was hard to push the project through because everyone said that you could not make a film about it. But I said let's try. Also, it wasn't a film that looked like a commercial project. It was a hard project to do, but I wanted to do it, and I was happy to make that film.

I did it the way I wanted to. I had the actor in mind, and I don't think I would ever have started the project without knowing him. He was the exact persona—I'm not talking about the acting but about what was happening in his head.



Having all those elements at a certain point, I used the power that I had as a director who had made two big hits to push this smaller project through, to make a film that probably nobody would have given me before. The only trouble was of when it was released; the way they damaged it was that they changed the date of release. It was supposed to be released in October, which is the best season in Yugoslavia for films, but they released it at the end of May, when nobody goes to the cinema. It played for about twenty days, but it had a poor attendance. It's a film that I like a lot. The reason that I'm satisfied with that film is that I wanted to use the whole technology that you have for a normal Yugoslavian film—the budget, the 35 mm camera—and then make a movie about a marginal persona, an unimportant man, and make it almost like an underground film, with a little shaggy technique, long takes, hand-held camera, without trying to make it a big film.

And what about your latest film?

Strangler Versus Strangler, like *Kramer Vs. Kramer*, is about a Belgrade strangler, but there are two of them. I always liked this sub-genre—films about stranglers. I wanted to do a film about a strangler, but as I've said, it's hard to make a genre film in Yugoslavia. But one day I came to the idea that maybe it would be funny to make a film about how a provincial capital like Belgrade—you know, the capital of a small state—becomes a metropolis. In the film we say that you can follow how it becomes a metropolis if you follow its chronicle of crime. The top of that chronicle is the strangler, who's the king of crime; so if a city gets a strangler, it's a metropolis. And that's the basis for the construction of the film. But then I said, the good thing would be to have in such a small city not one but two stranglers, and then there would be chaos. So there is a rock singer who's imagining that he is a strangler because he has a telepathic connection with the real strangler, and that's how the story develops. He's not a real strangler, but finally he strangles the strangler. I don't want to tell the story, but that's the basic idea: small city, a small capital that wants to be a metropolis, and the proof that it is going to be a metropolis is the appearance of the strangler. But there is another strangler, and the police can't find out. That's how the comedy develops. It's a kind of spoof of horror films.

After *Who's Singing Over There?* I could really go on making that sort of film again, but I wanted

to make a different sort of film. I was always trying to change the type of film I was making, and that's one of the reasons I have had problems. The problem in Yugoslavia was that my first film was my biggest success, and the reaction to the next film was "well, it's not like the first one," and the reaction to the next one was "well, it's not like the last one." However, outside of Yugoslavia it is the usual thing that you come out with a movie every second year, and so those films were recognized as every film for itself, separate works that I did, and people understood the continuity. I had some kind of recognition which told me that I was right in what I was trying to do. So what my film did outside of Yugoslavia encouraged me to persist in what I'm doing, because in Yugoslavia I think I would be struck with that critical approach. They would just say it is nothing. After four films you just cannot listen to that.

Why was the first film such a big success in Yugoslavia?

I don't know. I cannot explain it. It was a big success not only in Yugoslavia but everywhere. That film, I guess, has some charm which makes it work everywhere. I cannot explain it. I really didn't expect it to be a hit. I thought it would be a nice funny film, but it became a tremendous success, and it started something. But you never know how it happens. The script went through so many changes; it was really a script that had a great development. I think it had eight drafts. We were changing things seven days before the shooting, very important things. It started as a forty page script—a contemporary story—about an old man going to Belgrade by bus to buy a winter coat. He comes to Belgrade, and he discovers that it is a Sunday and the shops aren't open. So he sits on the bus and goes back home. That was the story.

When I read the script, I really liked the characters in the bus. This old man comes into the bus, and he meets all these crazy people, obsessed with themselves and their problems, quarreling with themselves. There was really something strange in that kind of comedy. That's what Dusan did. I talked to him, and he had some good ideas about expanding it. We started talking about developing it into a screenplay for a feature film because it was a good chance to make a first film and because it was only a bus and the people. So it was a good, low-budget project for a young director, which gives you a chance to do something.



So we started working on the script. He wrote the script, but we had story conferences almost every day. We discussed it a lot, and I changed a lot with scissors and glue, putting words to somebody else, and changing the scenes. We really worked close on it. It was a creative experience. That's how we got to the idea of having the film end on the day the war started. It was not for message reasons, and reasons of making an important film, but for formal reasons. I felt that the whole construction of the film was a kind of gradation of small crazy events—one crazy event, next crazy event, next crazy event, and so on. At the end, nothing happens, so you have a kind of gradation of crazy events and then nothing.

So I kept telling Dusan, listen, we have to have some big boom at the end; you have to have something happen at the end which will make all the things that were happening unimportant. So we got to the point that if we put the film on the first day of the war, and a bomb hits the bus, then you have the war as the craziest thing and you relate to that. That was a big decision because it involved changing costumes, and some financial changes. We convinced the producers that it would be okay—they were afraid; they wanted to see a draft. So we started changing things, and new developments appeared. With a pro-nazi guy, we came to the issue of racial hate with the gypsies. So this script had a strong development. In the beginning, in the contemporary version, the gypsies really were thieves. Then we decided they won't be thieves but that they will be accused of being thieves because they are gypsies. So you have all those meanings getting in, and it started as a formal question of how one structure develops. If it grows it has to blow—or something.

To what extent were you influenced by the sort of folk surrealism that one sees in Serbia?

Well, you see, I was a painter, and my taste was influenced by surrealism, by what is usually considered surrealism, because as you know the specific movement is quite different from what people usually think. What surrealism was really about was trying to uncover the unconscious stream of thought, and that sort of thing. What I was trying to do with *Who's Singing* was . . . I have to go back to when I started, to when I started working on TV. I did everything they gave me. They gave me a script; I did it. I worked like

the B directors. Get the assignment and do the job the best you can. That's the real thing. But then in doing it I discovered that there were some things I enjoyed more. So it was a great period in my life. I made five one-hour films for TV. That's where I found my direction. The two best were both films that dealt with the kind of surrealistic feeling that comes out of realism.

That was what I saw as a possibility in the first script of *Who's Singing* that I got, which was a TV script of forty pages: a forty minute movie, contemporary, without the war, and totally different circumstances, but there were those characters in the bus. And in the bus I saw the chance to develop some strange situation. What I was trying to do was to make something that isn't illogical, but can happen—something that can happen, but looks strange, because when you look at it from a different angle you discover this surrealistic quality in a realistic event. That's what you see everywhere. In Yugoslavia you see those funny people fighting about some stupid things, those crazy faces in the market. If you have an eye for that, it can really look unreal. That's what I wanted to have on the screen, and that's how it came out. But I don't feel it is surrealism, because what is usually surrealism is something that usually goes over the border of what's possible. What I like is something that does not cross those borders: a more or less realistic event, but it looks very strange. It discovers for you unrealistic qualities, the surrealistic qualities of reality, let's say. The best way to do that is through humor.

It's like good caricature. You have a face which has some funny elements in it, but caricaturists see what is really funny in that face, or evil, or good. You push those possibilities that exist in a real world. So it's different than a usually realistic approach, but it is less than a real caricature. Because you have the camera, you have film, which adds this convincing note. Film is a realistic medium. It reflects what is in front of the camera, and it convinces the viewer that this is the real world. So if you can find real people who look grotesque, but they are real people, you are not making masks. So that's it. Film is a realistic convincing medium. And while you are finding things that are real, you are not making them up and you are convincing the audience. But as you accumulate more of these unusual things in front of the camera, then you start getting that unusual feeling.

How has your painting background influenced you in

your filmmaking?

I think having a clear idea about what painting can do and what it cannot do has helped me a lot: where should a film use some of the experiences of painting, and where it is a totally different thing. I found out that a lot of directors like to use very arty compositions which are basically something that comes out from painting, which is a very static thing. Film is alive, and it can hardly stand these things, although you can use them from time to time. Where painting really helped me was that I was a painter and I didn't have a need to do that in films, because I liked that field, and I wanted to make films. I wasn't somebody who wanted to be a painter and who started using a camera instead of a canvas. I knew what painting is, and I didn't have these false ideas about what film images should be. My experience of painting helped me to avoid using painting in films. That's how it helped me.

How do you feel these painterly problems relate to North American films?

In American cinema people are using these arty compositions in a way that can fit the movie without damaging it because it's the general attitude of the American cinema that they are just taking care of the basics, that the film moves fast, and they don't spend time on arty stuff. They don't generally like to spend time on that, so it can be more dangerous in European films. But it depends on who's making it. Because you have to stage the whole scene, and if you stage it in a static way, then the cameraman can make an arty composition, but if you make things move, or do it in a more dynamic way, then you can't make nice compositions, because the camera has to follow the action. I think the real job of the cameraman is lighting and trick photography. Composition is okay, it can be important, but it shouldn't be exaggerated, because cinema composition is totally different.

So you don't think there are any parallels between painting and cinema?

Some people think there are, but I don't think that it is possible. Even in a static shot, if you have somebody moving, it is a composition that's changing every second. Only in a totally static shot, without anything moving, can you have the experience of a kind of painting composition.

Otherwise you have the experience of twenty-four compositions a second.

Do you think that the early filmmakers were more aware of these kinds of differences?

It depends on the filmmaker, on the region of the world. I think Scandinavian directors show a big influence of composition in that sense—using a film frame like a painting and trying to recreate something of that. I think of American cinema as always being very practical and following with camera and all cinematic means what is going on, and adapting to that. I consider that the great virtue of American cinema, because that kept films alive, and it didn't violate the experience of the viewer. While some great movies—German Expressionist movies—did some experimentation with composition, and sometimes it worked. But it really depends on how strong the director is and what is his approach.

What kinds of differences are you aware of?

Being a filmmaker from a smaller country, a smaller cinematography, is not a great thing, especially when dealing with comedy, because comedy does not rate with the festivals. You cannot become a great name making comedies as a filmmaker from a small cinematography. It's not a very grateful job in that sense, but where it pays off is in everyday life. You have that experience with the audience; you have people who saw the films, and they like comedy, so the big reward is there. It is hard to change things in comedy because a lot of it has been done. Very few people specialize only in comedy. But when you analyze it, comedies really deal with important issues in life, and very often they are mean, mean to people, and disgraceful. They let us reveal our evil side through laughing at other people. They are great things.

For instance, I really appreciate the work of Blake Edwards—Billy Wilder and, after him, Blake Edwards. So that's a stream of comedy that I like a lot. It goes back to Ernst Lubitsch. I like that much more than Woody Allen. I like parts of his films, but I don't like them after a while. I think that their construction in a way falls apart. I remember the films as good, and then when I watch them after ten years I am surprised how they are fragmentary, bits and pieces. Some bits are great, but as a whole, why? Why is he doing this? Because he was reflecting the beliefs of a

sophisticated contemporary audience that comedy shouldn't be just a comedy but should be kind of clever. At a certain point people start being ashamed of laughing in a theater. But basically he's a great comedian, and he does great things.

I think some of my films gained some international recognition only because my comedies had some tragic stuff in them. So they

were not only comedies. That's why they get some attention. If they were just comedies, like Laurel and Hardy, and coming from Yugoslavia, nobody will give a damn.□

Edited by Sarah E. Spain.

Drago Jančar

THE GALLEY-SLAVE

Translated by Franci Slivnik

The air overfilled with damp, pestilent air. Everything there is creeping, pushing its way from the seashore into the interior. Is now the beginning of the end? Cordons. The position in embryo. In the bowels a feeling burning and snapping.

The air was so heavily filled with damp that it was stifling the crunching of the fire by the road and that its reflection was winding, breaking into the night. Dark figures would sit down from time to time or with tedious steps move through the palish light. A few fathoms upwards to the heavens reached the dim light to be pressed down by the low skies. Both of them were close enough to hear the occasional words exchanged by the night guards and the clattering of their arms, to see a figure dressed in a long black gown and walking between the men. And then there came into their den by the road, all around hidden by thicket, an aggressive sound. Up there were indistinct clattering sounds; somebody was saying something to spur on the monotonous sound of the hoofs along the road and of all the wooden staff on the cart dragged along. The sound was getting bigger and when it hit them quite near they could see on the cart three men sitting. One of them was pulling up the horses; the other two were armed with some kind of rifles, gnarled and cudgel-like, leaned against their shoulders.

When the noise came closer to the fire, some twenty steps' distance, the figures jumped to their feet. A sharp cry suddenly stopped the indistinct sounds. Still on the cart, the figures were moving erratically, putting something from one side to another, and then all three of them jumped down. The carter was coming nearer, talking in loud words to the soldiers. Then they stuck out to him a long, strong pole. He put one end of it on his shoulder and dragged it off to the cart. With the help of the two armed men he fastened now a kind of parcel onto it. Then all three of them gripped the pole at the lower end, so that the parcel at the other end was swinging

in the air like a big, thick fish. With loud shouts they were carrying the pole in front of them to the fire. At quite some distance before the fire they stopped. The figure in the long gown disentangled itself out of the dim light and stretched its arms into the air. The load was carefully lowered and that figure, with hands clad in gloves made of cloth, seized the parcel. It carried it away somewhere in the background where another, smaller fire was sending out smoke into the damp air. A big cloud rose from that part and both of them felt in their nostrils the smell of juniper-shrub and sour vapour. And so it went on, with the second parcel and with the third one, right until the whole of the load had been carried over to the other side. The men were all the time talking in loud voices across the fire. But then it came to a halt. On the cart there was a sadly wailing little pup. It all seemed that one of the men was determined to get it over to the other side, but he got a shrill, sharp answer back, several soldiers in the same breath retorted that was not possible. The arguing was coming nowhere near an end. He persisted with his puppy, and they persisted in their way. Finally the three from the cart stood aside and had a brief talk. There was no choice. Now both of them could see in the light of the fire how in the background a sword was raised and how it cut down with a sharp stroke, how a final wail came forth—and the negotiations about the pup were over. Now one after another fastened onto the pole a few other articles, pieces of clothes, and then by a big winding went over to the small fire in the background. From the stifling air there appeared the figure in the black gown. With half-burning twigs in the one hand, giving out black smoke, and with an earthen vessel in the other, he went to the cart and the horses. He was determined to make a good job of it. He enwrapped everything into a huge cloud of smoke and now the sharp smell of juniper-shrub and sour vapour assaulted their den so strongly that both of them could endure it no longer.

Cautiously they crept out of it and then through the thick shrubbery descended down the slope. The voices were remaining behind them, and when already far down in the glen they could see behind them a narrow cone of dim light rising against the low skies.

Groping through the dark, at the verge of despair, the youth was trying to go on. How many hours, how many days, how many weeks had they been on this journey? How many times had they tried? How many times had they in every way possible tried to break through the barrier which was from all sides closing off the country by fires, military cordons, armed peasants, bumbailiffs opening fire before asking a question, officers combating plague, the detestable smell of juniper-shrub and sour vapour? Travelling merchants, beggars, bad fellows of every kind, fugitive galley-slaves, seamen from ports where plague was raging—everybody forcing his way into the interior of the well-guarded, closed-in country, all of them carrying the germs of the horrible disease that might break out any minute. Time and again it had happened that one single traveller had destroyed a settlement or a city. He spent the night at an inn and when he was found the following morning, lying like a pig, all black, this meant an end to everything. Therefore countless strict and cruel safety regulations had been introduced to protect the country. But both of them, the youth and Johan Ot, had in the meantime been running secretly from one fire to another, escaping from soldiers and guards, trying to get across the entanglements placed on mountain routes.

Where was the day and where was the night when they in some far-away seaport gazed at some other fire, at some other, bluer sky? They were roaming around a town gone mad; everybody was running out, after the quarantine regulations had been no longer observed. The inhabitants and the casual visitors were running to all parts of the world outside, taking there the germs of the contagious disease which had chosen not to show itself for the time being. The disease was there, in the blood, in the veins, out and starting its killing. On that night, when everything fell to pieces, when the state of emergency in the town was called off, they broke into an empty house and had a proper booze. Later in the night the youth disappeared and when he returned he was quite exhausted but in high spirits. Such a beauty, he cried out, such a black pearl, such a blistered Moor, I had her. But

there was no time for laughing—when they set out to leave the house, they stopped at the first corner. On a spacious square armed seamen were getting together galley-slaves who had like birds flown away in a sudden confusion. From every side they were forcing them back and then on to the ships. Both of them ran and hid themselves in an empty house. The whole morning they were petrified with fear. There was a hard blow against the door downstairs and they could notice through the window that it was Simon the Sea Gull who was down there with a group of armed men. Like hunting dogs they were rushing from door to door. Simon the Sea Gull was trying to scent the fugitive galley-slaves. There were further knockings on the door, but the youth and Johan Ot, too frightened to be able to move, were standing by the window, hoping the door would not give in. The door did not give in. The big wooden cross-bar was saving them. Simon the Sea Gull and his gang gave up. They went on, down along the street—and now here, in this den, the youth and Johan Ot could not help but see in their minds the crook-backed figure and its stump pointing to the hunting dogs the door. They were waiting and waiting in that house for Simon the Sea Gull to come again and start beating upon the door. He would smell the stink of galley-slaves; he would trace them and get hold of them. But down there it was more and more quiet. After a few days only occasional sounds could still be heard from the square at the top of the street, and afterwards even these died away. The city was empty. The last inhabitants had run away. But down below, in the port, there were still a few vessels.

Amidst the mass of fugitives both of them managed to get on a kind of wooden structure, where nobody was in command, where everything seemed to be still, and it seemed that the ship would never sail off. Among the horrified mass of human bodies there were some seamen, some fugitive galley-slaves. They were together and it seemed that the ship would eventually leave the unfortunate port. But the ship would have to sail in all directions. Everybody wanted to get to his own shore.

Finally it did sail off but the sailing was a short one—only as far as the neighbouring town. Here once again people had run away in all directions, again soldiers searching for fugitive galley-slaves. In the port the youth and Johan Ot were desperately looking for some sort of transport to their home place. On one occasion it seemed that they had found something. They would row,

work, and in return they would get off where they wanted. But nothing came of it, because the captain had pulled up his linen shirt. Around the waste there were long scars left by the chains. It all seemed that in this foreign land they would perish. But at last they made it. Some Venetian merchants of dubious looks, dubious language, dubious cargo were taking on scum willing to work.

They have made it. They have come back.

They were now stuck in this den, powerlessly looking at the dim light of the fire cone up there by the road.

Johan Ot sensed how the youth's eyes were frightfully searching his face. At no point can we get through, he thought. After all that we had been suffering, we were now stuck in this den. But he swore to himself: I'll get this young lad home. A miracle had raised his face from the bottom of the sea; from that crawling, quiet world of beasts it put that face in front of him. He had got him on the ship and across the sea. He had got him into this den and he would get him out of it.

From the other side upwards they groped their way to the top of the hill. They felt they were at the top but they could see nothing below. The mass of damp air was pressing down. No stars in the sky, and also the fire on the other side could not be seen.

Blindly, they were pushing their way along the ridge.

Tired out, losing their breath, they stopped and now they sensed that something of the morning light was penetrating the thick air. On the left, down on the slope they seemed to see shadows of flat surfaces. It was walls—houses.

They sat down in the grass and waited.

No cock-crowing, no barking of dogs, no voices, no signs of life.

The day has started, but down there no move, no sound.

—Wait, he said and went down towards the houses. The youth remained behind and when he cast a glance back he could see his desperate look. He is going to leave me alone, it seemed to be saying. I will not leave him, he thought to himself. I shall save him—for that stroke, for that cry, which had sent the young lad's soul across the sea.

In the little settlement there was in fact no life. In the courtyard of the first house there lay a huge heap of half-burnt rags and other things. Pieces of clothes were thrown all around. Something must have been happening here. They must have

been burning pestilent rags here. The door whimpered when he knocked it open. Emptiness stared at him. From here people had fled. On the ground pots and broken pieces as if somebody had left the place in a great hurry, taking with them only the barest of necessities. In a small black recess he found a piece of smoked meat. For quite some time he gazed at that reddish, smoked matter; then he suddenly made up his mind, snatched the meat and pushed it under his shirt. In the second house he found a wineskin and a bunch of garlic—a warm peasant's coat, a knife, a leather belt. He wrapped up all this in a thick blanket and put it over his shoulder. The youth was shivering with the morning damp as he returned.

Johan Ot put the blanket round his shoulders and offered him wine. He drank in big gulps. Before they started with the meat, each of them chewed a big clove of garlic; a part of it they ate, the rest they smeared over their face and hands.

—We'll have to find lots of herbs and lots of wine, said Ot, but first we'll have to get past the cordons. In no time it will be worse here.

All the morning they rested above the derelict settlement. Ot went down for a second time, collecting whatever was useful and whatever could be put into mouth. Of the latter there was very little, but warm clothing for both of them was still there. They made a huge fire and again and again passed through the smoke the clothing they had found there, slightly hard with the sweat and smelling of the stable. Once more they smeared themselves with garlic, which they had soaked in wine. When setting on their way in the evening, there was still in the air that damp, stifling warmth, and swarms of flies and of unknown insects were all around their heads.

—Be careful of these, said Johan Ot. Of flies, rats, grasshoppers, fleas, any kind of insect. They creep on pestilent excrement, carry with them pestilent vapour.

Without stopping they were swinging the branches around them, trying to keep off the molesting flies, of which there was no end. Slowly, it was growing dark. By a narrow, steep path they were going up to a rocky spear, hanging over their heads like a kind of a heavy wardrobe which would any moment thunder down the hill, pulling along with it anything dead or alive. The forest was becoming less thick, but then there was the low, thick, hardly passable shrubbery—from every side the shrubs, with their snake-like creepers and climbers, blocking the path. They had almost got as far as under the

wardrobe, when the groping foot sensed there was no solid ground—a big hole in front of them. They just saw the edge and down there the darkness. Somewhere under the wardrobe they continued their way.

Exhausted with anger, Johan Ot raised his hands above the head. The youth was groping his way somewhere on the right. Suddenly the rock under the feet started to break, and, swearing, he slid over the edge. With utmost effort, he was holding on, trying to support himself on the elbows, while the feet found no support in the gravel slipping down into the darkness. The youth sprang close, seized him as firm as he could and pulled him up. They staggered dangerously.

At the same time they snatched at each other and together, embraced, they rolled down into the bush at the edge.

—Rotten sods, swore Johan Ot, again they've blocked everything. Nowhere a single damned passage.

There was nothing doing. Back.

With no will left to them, they descended down the path. This night again there was no moon and no stars in the sky. It was cold and they plucked up some courage when they came to the first trees. Now they were going on through the forest, from one trunk to another. The youth had less and less of any will left.

—I cannot, he said, I cannot make it any longer. There's no point; what they call buboes are still all there on my skin. What's the use—I snuff it here or there, what does it matter.

Ot stopped. First he seized him firmly and then gently pushed him into the darkness. Now he pressed the wineskin against his lips, so that the warm, stale wine could be gurgled down the youth's throat. He himself took a gulp or two, put the wineskin across the shoulder and again seized the youth by his hand.

—Walk, he snapped.

Obediently the youth followed.

—By night only can we fight our way through, he said after some time. By night they will sleep around some fire or other.

The land with no paths suddenly finished and they came to a soft, soaked road. It was a few steps broad and led along the ridge of the hill. At some distance in front of them they noticed a fire and, at a stone's throw away, another one. Here, right through the middle, somewhere here they must find a passage.

Now for some time they walked along the road; before long, however, they let themselves down below it, into the shrubbery, as already so many

times before. The fire was again close enough for them to hear men's voices. Behind the scarce bushes along the road there was a big meadow. On the lower side there was a forest—and if they manage to get across, they will be on the other side.

—Now we are going to run, said Ot. Did you understand? You are going to run if it breaks your chest. You are not going to stop before.

The other fire was not to be seen. A slight elevation on the right was hiding it away from sight.

They hid themselves and listened all ears. Only sundry voices were coming through the night. Over there, but the fire, nothing was going on to call the attention of the guards.

—Now, said Ot, and they rushed across the meadow. In long strides he was jumping across the empty area, disappearing below; he fell, suppressed the pain, got up and kept running. He felt he would get across; nothing in the world could stop him now. A few more jumps, and he fell down in the bushes on the edge of the forest. The youth coming after him was not to be heard. He waited for a moment and then he decided to step among the trees.

At that moment, in the darkness behind his back a horrible bang was heard. As a matter of fact, first somebody cried out and first somebody groaned, but then came the bang and a flash of light splitting the darkness and the silence into a thousand particles. It seemed to him the whole meadow was lit up, that from every side they were running towards the middle. For a moment only, he hesitated. Then he turned and rushed back.

He got somewhere to the middle when he could hear before him panting, and then somebody gave out a cry. With hands groping in front of him in that direction he suddenly noticed, quite close to him, two dark figures rolling and fighting, one against the other, on the ground. He grabbed the one who was beating the one under him, grabbed him by the collar with a force that made that collar cut into the throat. With both his hands he pushed the figure overcoming the youth down the hill, where it disappeared.

With darkness in his eye sockets, the young lad stared at the sky and at what was going on around him, with hands resting by his body, and it all seemed he would never again make a move anywhere—as if lying on the deck of the galley, in the hot afternoon sun, with scorching sunshine over his head and in it. Johan Ot snatched this rag-like body and put it on its feet. After me, he

said, after me. The other one never made a move. He grabbed him along his waist and dragged him off to the hill. The guard below, having recovered from the fright, started to shout as much as he could and more of the voices down there could be heard. Down below they are going to search for us, said Johan Ot, we must get higher up.

Once they started to drag along the mucky road, it seemed to him that the voices from below were disappearing in the darkness. But from the right, from the side where the fire was, there was a neighing of horses to be heard. The horses even started running along the street. But that exhausted, frightened body, almost dead with fear, Johan was dragging after him into the forest. He decided to go right upwards, through the thorny bushes. Here the youth started to somehow follow him, his legs started to move, as if he had awakened from a kind of lethargy. High up already, under the wardrobe, they stopped.

There was no one chasing them.

By the following morning they had no wine left. Only a little meat and garlic. Much worse, however, was the question gnawing at them: where now?

At every point here they had been trying to find an opening through which to escape the guards, get over blocked paths, by-pass the fires, and escape through the dark forests. The youth was silent. He had sunk on his knees and would not look up. This night they would have saved themselves. Ot had been practically on the other side. But the youth had obviously been exhausted to the last drop. He did not run across that meadow, he remorsefully admitted during the night. His legs were suddenly petrified and he sank to the ground. He could hardly move on any more.

He had been crawling on the ground when suddenly a figure stood up in front of him. That figure got terribly frightened by the snakelike movements. He was just buttoning up his trousers, and very close there was a stinking, a pestilent smell. He had almost killed him without a second thought. When he saw that the creature in the grass was helpless, he leant forward and seized him. He called for help, made a shot—and the breakthrough, the escape was over for that night.

—Listen, said Johan Ot. He who is afraid and just waits, he won't escape the disease.

Again, he helped him to his feet.

—You must, he said, you must start on your way.

He pushed a little piece of garlic into his mouth and the youth was grinding it among his jaws indifferently.

Again he raised him to his feet, gave him a push, and again they were going the same way downwards.

As they were coming out from among the trees towards the road, they could hear from the place where there was yesterday a blockage, a fire, they could hear numerous voices. Something was happening there. Johan Ot ran down a little, as far as the bushes. After a few moments he returned, almost out of breath.

He pulled the young lad and said.

—Come now, this is a chance.

They went straight down to the road where it was blocked. The closer they were, the louder was the noise.

Down there stood a dark crowd of poorly dressed people, with bundles and parcels under their arms; among them were cows and a few horses loaded with sacks. A few hundred sturdy peasant men, women, some children, some dogs running here and there—the excitement was glowing and stirring the crowd, occasional outcries were reaching the empty space in the front, menacing gestures with fists, women begging, children crying. They got somehow into the crowd, in front of rifles. Across the road, some twenty steps away, was a quiet troop of soldiers. Out of that unmoving iron wall there stared the big openings of the rifle-barrels, and the swords, loosely hanging from the soldiers' belts, were ready. Some fifteen of them were in the first row, but behind it was clinking with arms. In the group behind the iron wall something was astir. They were pulling together carts, making barricades.

The people wanted to get through. The people wanted to get through at any cost. What is this band standing here, setting up a barricade. Why should not they rather use their rifles in Bosnia against the Turks! Will they leave them here to perish amidst bandits, seamen, galley-slaves and other mobs forcing its way from the ports into the interior?

The youth felt icy drops of sweat on his forehead. Johan Ot as well was fidgeting. If they detect them, if under the peasant clothes they detect a fugitive galley-slave, no god can ever help them. The crowd is dangerous. A furious crowd is more dangerous. But the worst happens when the crowd is frightened. Johan Ot had experience with crowds. This crowd was furious and frightened. But it was necessary to hold out.

These people will break through the barricade.

Some peasants, carrying swords in their hands, pushed into the front. Sacrificing their blood they will open the way. Rather they will kick the bucket here than remain at the mercy of pestilent filth, black tumours, horrible and solitary wretched death when everybody has fled from you.

From the back they made a push forward and the front row felt behind them the hot bodies of the mass behind. The crowd was agitated, moving forward. Ot was staring at the eyes of a young soldier from the iron wall. The pupils of his eyes were restlessly fixed on the peasants' legs and his jaw was slightly trembling. The soldiers were also afraid. Also in the iron wall the hearts were beating wildly.

—Stop, somebody cried out from the back. A young officer, with dark face, with moustache hanging down, put up his hands and stepped forward. Stop.

The crowd made an agitated movement; the cry went through it like a blade through a group of packed bodies. Another movement and the crowd stopped.

—Just one more step, he shouted, and there will be bloodshed.

He came quite forward, right up to the first row, before the blades of the armed peasants. There was now a silence and so it was possible to hear distinctly his quiet, low voice.

—We are here to stop you, he said. And we have stopped others with arms better than yours.

—This thing of a rifle, and he pointed with his thumb back, this rifle can make in your body a hole just as big as your nob, he said, and pointed with his forefinger to the forehead of the peasant standing in front of him.

—Listen, he said. We have an order. Archduke Leopold signed it. We have precise instructions. First, we pass through post by a special procedure. Second, we pass through those who have 'fédé'—that is to say a medical certificate that during the last six months nobody pegged out at his place. Third, we pass through those who will go of their own will for six weeks into the quarantine. We have a barrack for twenty people and that barrack is full. Fourth, in the village below, I know exactly, for a week now legions and legions of rats have been dying. And so, for the time being you cannot pass through.

Behind there was a stir, a cry. The agitation moved the first row forward. It all seemed that the brave young officer would not much longer stand before them and instruct them what to do,

that before long there would be a splash of blood from his beautiful skull.

For the time being, he shouted, and again it was quiet. For the time being, I say. We'll prepare a new quarantine. The wood is now being hewn, and the Capuchins, who will look after it, are already on the way. In the meantime set up a camp. Do not allow anybody else to join you. We'll give you careful medical instructions. And then one after another will be admitted into the quarantine.

—Will be no need for it, somebody shouted from behind. By that time we'll be all stretched out, black.

This insight went through the crowd like lightning. In the heart, somewhere in the middle, things were getting mad. The fury and the fear, both had turned into madness. In the heart of the dark throng it was getting wild, roaring. As if somebody made a command, all of them cried out so wildly that the officer went back a step—and this started the whole thing. From the background some kind of things, sticks, stones started to shower on the first row of the soldiers. A few soldiers rushed out to help the officer but by that time it was too late. In a moment he had been knocked down and now blood was the only thing to be seen. The peasants' arms were striking, thundering like small guns. The first row moved forward and backwards. Big red flowers came into blossom. And now there was such a confusion, such a mad dance. Those in the front were pushing back, the heart was gone wild, pushing it way out. Those behind were flying in all directions, like frightened animals. The women were screaming, dogs gone wild were running back to the woods, but the iron wall, with bare swords in hands, moved a few steps forwards. The peasants from the first row, or rather those that still remained, were frightened by the iron wall, the bloody wounds, the growl from every side and started to turn their arms against their own folk, against those who were madly pushing them forward.

Johan Ot was dragging the youth from this hellish scene of man's end. Through bodies, through hands, which were beating all around, through peasants' hands no longer under any control over what they were doing, through wailing and whimpering of cows and horses all trying to escape, through the lifeless jaws and eyes shining in stupor, through the narrow passages of this wild dancing mob he sought to drag him out. Cold ran down his spine when he looked at the youth's face. The youth had also a

lifeless, glassy look. He was also beating all around; his eyes clearly did not recognize him. His jaws were restless; white foam was coming through the corners of his mouth up on the chin. Behind them there was a thundering sound—but they were already outside, among those who had sensed the saving expanse and rushed across the meadow or into the forest. Anybody who tried to catch the moment and get along the barricade made a fatal mistake. New soldiers had come from the next guardhouse and dispersed along the edge of the forest which they had both

wanted to cross the night before.

They pulled themselves back to their former place, again under the wardrobe overhanging them. When they had got to the woods, they could still hear down below the unbearable shouting, cursing, shooting, bloody fighting. No, this was not an ordinary fight; this was a desperate struggle. For behind them there was pressing the plague with its legions of rats gone wild and in front of them there were the staring black gun-barrels and the white-cold blades of the swords.□

AN INTERVIEW WITH FOX BUTTERFIELD

Conducted by David C. Estes

INTRODUCTION

When Fox Butterfield opened the *New York Times*' Peking bureau in 1979 shortly after the United States and China normalized relations, he became one of the first American correspondents to live in that country since the Communist victory in 1949. He was particularly well-qualified for the post, having done graduate work in Chinese at Harvard and having reported from Taiwan and Hong Kong during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). After completing his assignment in 1981, he published *China: Alive in the Bitter Sea*. This book is distinguished from the many others on contemporary China by its accurate explanation of the intricacies of the Communist system and also by Butterfield's familiarity with the continuing presence of traditional Chinese cultural patterns in the people's daily lives. While in Peking, he reported on the flowering of unofficial literature and free speech during the Democracy Wall movement (November 1978 to December 1979). But before his departure he saw the government's initial steps to re-establish control over artistic and political expression, following the pattern of alternating relaxation and restraint typical of China's policies. Butterfield currently works in Boston as chief of the *Times*' New England News Bureau.

What has been the impact of events during the Cultural Revolution on contemporary Chinese arts?

It took up until 1978 and 1979 for the material to begin showing up in poetry, short stories, novels, the theater, and movies. The first thing that people wanted to say after the Cultural Revolution was exactly what had happened. You got, in many cases, first-person accounts, not just semi-autobiographical but quite autobiographical, thinly disguised as fiction. These stories suddenly burst out. I was there in 1979 and began seeing them everywhere. People would tell me, "There's this terrific new play. You have to come down and see it." Or, "There's this great new movie." It would be about a village during the Cultural Revolution, or a high school teacher—what he went through—or about a student's experience. They wanted to recall all of the horrors that had happened to them. After a few months they moved on from that. They were able to look at whether the system as a whole had a problem, whether the Communist Party as a whole had problems, and they began then trying to discuss the period after the Cultural Revolution.

So the themes were initially developed by relying on personal experience.

A lot of it was autobiographical. People had just incredible experiences. They had gone through something in a Chinese way like the Holocaust. Obviously, it was not the same, but many people had been killed or tortured or had their lives destroyed, their families disrupted, their houses taken away. They felt a need to describe these things.

Why, then, was there a two-year delay in the emergence of these stories in the arts?

I think the answer is political. People didn't know which way the political winds were blowing. Not until Deng Xiaoping was in the ascendancy sometime in 1978 did they begin to feel safe when talking about these things. Immediately after Mao's death it was not at all clear who was going to win. There was still fighting between the left and the right. At that time the national leaders who were the so-called liberals were actually, by today's standards in China, quite conservative, and they had not lifted the controls over art and literature. Furthermore, in late 1978 Deng quite deliberately encouraged this outpouring of literature. The signals went out through the classified bulletins that circulated to people and by word-of-mouth. Democracy Wall was a tip-off

that some people in the government were prepared to allow more freedom of expression. I was in China in December 1978, and Democracy Wall had just gotten going. It wasn't just in Peking as some people think. It was also in Shanghai and in cities throughout China for a number of months at that time. Even people down in Yunnan Province were putting up wall posters and were starting to run off underground journals on their rather primitive printing machines.

What characterized the underground journals printed at that time?

There was a little bit of everything in them because people had not been able to write for ten years, and for longer than that they had not been able to write as they wanted to. A lot of the people who were publishing things were relatively unsophisticated. They had not had much schooling. On the whole these people were in their twenties. Many of them were working in factories. Some younger people in the Party and even in the army were producing this literature. Others were university students or graduate students, but they were not high-level intellectuals. Nothing came out from the older established writers, the well-known writers, the people who had made their names before the Revolution in 1949.

Why didn't the intellectuals participate in the Democracy Wall movement?

The first to begin writing were the younger people whose memories were not so long, who didn't have as much to lose. The more senior intellectuals had gone through the terrible period of the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1957, when Mao had said to the intellectuals that it was okay for them to write what they wanted: "We want criticism of the Party because it will help us reform ourselves." That movement came just after the troubles in Hungary, and Mao thought that the Communist Party had achieved enough success in China that loosening the reins a little bit and letting people say what was on their minds might in fact help reform the Party. But he very quickly discovered that people were much more critical of the Party than he expected. The floodgates were opened, and all this criticism came out. So then they cracked down in the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Hundreds of thousands, if not several millions, of intellectuals were badly

hurt. Some were sent off to prison camps; others were heavily criticized and lost their positions. People became very scared. The Cultural Revolution in the late 60s and early 70s went even farther than the Anti-Rightist Campaign. There was a long period in which people did very little writing because it was too dangerous.

Here we should talk about how the official system works in China. If you want to be a writer or you want to be an artist, unlike in this country, you cannot simply submit a manuscript or a painting and hope that a publishing house will print it or a gallery show it. You have to be accepted by the official establishment and put on the government payroll. You become a state-employed writer or artist through a writers' or artists' association. The process for becoming a member of these associations may vary from one region to another. But in general an artist, for example, will go through a state school and then join a state artistic association. He may work there a long time taking training courses, producing canvases which are acceptable to the teachers according to the strict canons governing what he may and may not do.

How does the underground or dissident literature in China compare to that which is written in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe?

The basic point is that there are no senior Chinese dissidents like Solzhenitsyn or Sakharov. There are no similar cases where intellectuals well-respected nationally or internationally have emerged in opposition to the government. I should say that they were scared off by the terrible period of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 and by the Cultural Revolution. But the cause also goes back to the Chinese tradition of patriotism and conformity to the system. While there is a tradition that a good minister should not be afraid to criticize the emperor, it was never as deep and as strong as the tradition of the loyal opposition here in the West. So people tend to be less outspoken and to operate within the system. Relatively senior Chinese intellectuals have told me that even when they were most opposed to Mao they did not want to say so publicly because they felt that wasn't the right way to do it. They should do it within the system.

The intellectuals must feel they have the power to be influential within the system despite the oppression.

Yes, they feel that they have some power. And

they feel they have more power to influence policies from within the system than outside where they won't be respected. Hierarchy is terribly important in China. Since most of the dissident writers and artists are young people without any prestige or position, it is easy for other Chinese to dismiss them. I think many people did. I went to houses of senior intellectuals during the Democracy Wall period and asked them if they had been down to see what was there. They said, "Heavens no! Their calligraphy's bad, their poetry is second-rate, and their ideas are infantile." When I asked about their basic ideas, the intellectuals replied that they themselves should be the ones to express those ideas in a more sophisticated and subtle way. There remains a gap between those younger dissidents and older people who still may be trying to work within the system.

In Roses and Thorns, an anthology of recent Chinese short fiction, the editor, Perry Link, comments that the unofficial literature journals around the time of Democracy Wall "were often seen by their youthful contributors as stepping stones to the regular official press." Do you think it was possible for these dissidents to become state-employed writers eventually?

Maybe they believed they could. Certainly when they started out there was a tremendous surge of enthusiasm, a feeling of liberation. They did have the sense that they were sanctioned by Deng and the leadership, at least for the period of about a year in 1978 and early 1979. Deng may have been doing that for his own political purposes because the criticism these people were putting out was directed at his opponents. But once the criticism began to swing towards Deng himself and the young people began to say they did not have enough artistic freedom, then he shut it off. In October 1979 the leader of the Democracy Wall movement, Wei Jingsheng, was sentenced to fifteen years in jail. This was a clear signal that this movement was no longer going to be given a free rein.

Wang Keping, the Peking dissident artist, is a good example of many of these young people. His father and mother were both Communist Party members and were officially sanctioned writers and theatrical people. He had grown up believing in the Party. When the Cultural Revolution started he was a Red Guard and took part enthusiastically in looting people's houses. When Mao sensed the Cultural Revolution had

gone too far, Wang, like many other young Chinese, was shipped off to the countryside. Having become disillusioned while working on a farm in northeast China, he sneaked back into Peking illegally and lived, essentially, the life of an outlaw. Through his parents' connections, he became a writer for Radio Peking. Although officially a scriptwriter, he found that the state did not want any of the scripts he submitted because they were on the wrong themes. He found that what he most liked was to sculpt, which was very difficult because of the unavailability of material. In order to buy wood, which is in short supply in north China, he had to barter illegally with people who had access to it. He had very few models to copy and did not have books about modern Western art or about Chinese art. He was not accepted by the official artists' association and did not have a place to exhibit. He was able to find a few other people like himself who were unofficial artists. Eventually, they put together a show. The first time, their paintings were confiscated by the police. This was at the time of Democracy Wall. But on their second attempt, they were able to have a small show in a somewhat out-of-the-way place in Peking. It was widely attended by people who had not seen such paintings before. There were abstract canvases, nudes, and many attempts to emulate Western art. Wang Keping's sculptures were primitive. While not truly abstract because they were recognizable forms, they were more abstract than Chinese had ever seen. His works were clearly political, very sarcastic about the Party. They made deliberate attacks against fat party bureaucrats. Interestingly, Wang has since married a French woman and now lives in Paris.

What are the possibilities for those writers and artists not in official associations to publish or exhibit their work?

Certainly before 1978 or 1979, there was almost no possibility for people who had not been accepted into the official associations to publish or show their works. But at that time many of the journals did open up to outsiders and more material was published than had been before. There has also been a great increase in the number of such publications. Many of these are local, sort of home-town journals. Each province now has its own literary magazines. So there's much more opportunity, but there is still a certain measure of control over them.

It is also important to note that during 1978 and

1979 when the government was more tolerant than it had ever been before and perhaps since, some of the artists were brought into the Party—some of them were co-opted. One of the current leaders of the Writers' Association, Wang Meng, was in 1978 among the dissident writers. He was one of the most interesting in terms of literary quality, but he hasn't published anything since then. He was lionized by both the dissidents and some officials who saw in his writing attempts to be more honest about what had happened, all within the acceptable limits of not criticizing the Party too far. Wang joined the Party and is now a member of the Central Committee, but he has also stopped writing. There's a price.

It sounds like he's not a writer at all any more.

I don't think he is. Now he's a political operative. There are a couple of cases of writers who have continued to write since 1978-79. The most famous and most extraordinary is a man named Liu Binyan. In Western terms you would say he is really a journalist. He has become a kind of investigative reporter, although he started out as a short story writer and novelist in the late 1950s. His writings were modelled on Soviet literature with heroes who went out and discovered problems in the society, wrote about them, and helped reform them. These pieces were always morally uplifting. He attacked individual cases of corruption and malfeasance, and the young hero was always able to right the wrong. After the Cultural Revolution, when he resumed writing, he really let go full blast. He wrote a book called *People Are Monsters* about a series of very corrupt people in which he was really attacking the system. He focused on Party bureaucrats who had taken power for themselves and would not allow the people power. The book described real cases of corruption, and in the end some of these people were punished. One famous sentence in it says, "The Communist Party controls everything, but the Communist Party does not control itself." That sentence shows he was going beyond the acceptable limits of simply criticizing individuals who might be bad. The book caused him serious trouble, and there were attempts to put him back in prison. He'd been in prison during the Cultural Revolution, but he has somehow managed to tread the line and not suffer too severely. Even now today he is going around the country and publishing reports in some of the newspapers—real cases. In essence, he is a sort of Woodward and Bernstein official

investigative reporter. To the surprise of many, at the recent national Writers' Congress held this January, he was elected to the post of vice chairman of the Writers' Association. He was not on the official slate, but was elected from the floor. It was an overwhelming development—unprecedented—and is an example of how the writers feel they have some obligation to be as democratic as possible and to push the Party.

In a speech to that conference, Hu Qili of the Secretariat of the Communist Party Central Committee told delegates that "literary freedom is a vital part of our social literature." Does the election of Liu indicate that the Writers' Association might become more aggressive in claiming such artistic freedom?

Very similar speeches were made at the preceding Writers' Congress in 1979. This is not a new theme. The question is how far will the government go in allowing such freedom. The election of Liu certainly indicates a surprising amount of freedom, more than one might have guessed. There is real ferment there, and people are pushing for it. Another example is the election of Bai Hua, a writer in the People's Liberation Army, to the standing council. The association had put forward 290 names from which 230 were to be picked. Yet he was not among the 290. His name was put forward from the floor. He had been criticized in 1981 for his filmscript "Unrequited Love" in which the hero eventually dies stranded in the snow in Mongolia where he had been sent to protect China. As he dies, his body forms a question mark in the bloody snow. The question that's left is: will the Party ever really reform itself? Bai was criticizing not just individual corrupt officials, but the whole system—a very, very important difference. To call into question the legitimacy of the Party system as a whole is what is dangerous.

Here I might add that several unofficial or dissident artists have been living in the United States recently and have been putting on shows in New York and Boston. One of them told me, "Real liberation is in America. We haven't had real liberation in China yet."

What is the purpose of calling a national Writers' Congress?

There have been only four since 1949. The last two, in 1979 and this year, have been called quite deliberately to stir up ferment and put pressure on the political conservatives. I would not be at

all surprised to see another period of a year or two in which there is an outpouring of literature which the government will then call a halt to.

In 1985 we are in a period when Deng, for political reasons of his own, is trying to get rid of the remaining opposition from the left. It's very hard to describe who these people are because there's no single term in English which covers them. You could talk about people who are still Maoists and could call them conservatives, which sounds like a contradiction in terms because you wouldn't usually call Mao a conservative. They are conservative in the sense that they don't want to change the way things have been done in China for so long. You could also call them leftists, which sounds like another contradiction because leftist and conservative would seem to be at opposite poles. These are Party bureaucrats and senior people in the army who don't want to give up their positions, who don't want to see change, who don't want to see an opening to the outside world. Many such people remain in power. Right now Deng feels the need to push against them, and one of the ways to do this is through the artists and the writers. Recall that in 1978 and 1979 to help get rid of some of his enemies within the Party, he encouraged Democracy Wall and an outpouring of literature. I think we are seeing some of that same thing again today. While Deng tries to push forward on the economic front and make reforms in industry, to lessen the resistance he has to encourage and mobilize all the support he can. Some of that support comes from the artists and writers.

Could we assume that as Deng's economic advances become solidified conditions for artists will also improve? Are the two tied together?

I don't think they're necessarily tied together. Deng and his close associates such as the Party's General Secretary Hu Yaobang and Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang, who will supposedly be his successors, are in agreement that they want better living standards and rapid economic growth. Although they want to see some greater political freedom, they are not liberals in our sense of the term and still believe in fairly strict Party control. What distinguishes them from the conservatives or Maoists is that they are willing to change the economic system. In order to do that they may well make use of writers and artists by giving them some freedom to attack and put on the defensive the conservatives. But I'm not yet convinced that Deng will allow artists the kind

of meaningful long-term freedom that they would like. You'll see it in waves. In 1978-79 there was a great outpouring of artistic expression, and then the government clamped down. In 1983 there was a campaign against so-called Spiritual Pollution when people not only stopped writing but in many cases went to the printers and asked for their manuscripts back because they were afraid of what might happen. Now the government is once again encouraging them, and they have opened up.

Given the re-evaluation during the last several years of Mao's position, what are current attitudes toward the principles of socialist art which he enunciated in 1942 in his "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art"?

I don't think the government has ever discredited those talks. By and large, they remain the touchstone for attitudes toward the Party, literature, and art. Despite the talk about guaranteeing freedom of artistic creativity, the Writers' Congress reaffirmed that writers and artists will follow the leadership of the Communist Party and of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought. Artistic freedom and the leadership of the Communist Party are not the same thing. There is inevitably a tension there. I don't think they have ever gotten away from Mao's call to make art and literature serve the Party.

Mao's talks indicate that literature is supposed to serve the masses, as opposed to the intellectuals. Do you think that along with the greater freedoms following the Cultural Revolution has come a re-definition of the audience artists are allowed to address?

Well, he did talk about serving the masses, but what lies at the heart of that is serving the Party because it is the vanguard of the masses and determines who the masses are. Without question, there has been an opening up since Mao's death. But what the Writers' Congress is affirming shows they have not totally broken away from Mao's ideas in their official policy. There is obviously a tension here because many writers and artists want to break away from these principles.

How has the diversity of regional folk arts, which some might consider the true arts of the masses, been affected by national policies governing the arts?

As I traveled around China, the government would always take me to see the local artistic troupe. After seeing seven or eight of these in different provinces, I was struck by the fact that they all seemed to have been cut from the same piece of cloth. I couldn't see a difference from one province to another. Finally, when I was in Tibet with the first group of Western journalists in 1979, our hosts told us they were going to take us to see the Tibetan art troupe which was to be a great experience because Tibetan music and dances are quite different from those in the rest of China. It turned out they were putting on the same dances, singing the same songs, and wearing the same costumes we could see in Peking. The next day we happened to be out walking in a park and my guide spotted a young man and woman who were famous performers in that art troupe. So we stopped to talk, and I asked where they had learned those wonderful Tibetan songs and dances. They replied that each of them had spent six years in the Peking conservatory. In fact, one was Tibetan and the other was Chinese. They had simply been trained to do what performers throughout China were doing. Their performance was posing under the guise of being Tibetan, which it wasn't at all.

When you were in China, did you attend the movies?

Yes.

What did you notice about the importance of film in the society?

In China film is terribly important because it is one of the few forms of entertainment that exists. People go several times a week, just as Americans used to go in the thirties in the pre-television age. People will go to see any movie. There is a funny story about the Winter Olympics at Lake Placid in 1980 when the first Chinese team came to participate. Someone had set up a movie theater for the athletes that ran twenty-four hours a day. It turned out that the only people who went in there were the Chinese who were there almost continuously. They were starved since they had seen only the handful of movies released during the Cultural Revolution. Chinese movie theaters open at 6:00 A.M., and even then there are lines of people waiting. This is partly because of the lack of other forms of entertainment, and partly because of the novelty of movies.

Is it possible for Chinese scriptwriters, actors, and

directors to view foreign films which are not released to the general public?

During the Cultural Revolution certain people had access to Western films that the masses did not. Now that some foreign films are open to the masses, people in the film world can still see more than the ordinary people can see. That practice of classified access still continues. It's a benefit that they get which is based on the theory that information is power. If you can control the flow of information, you can control the way people think and what they do. There's still not unlimited access for the public to Western films and books. Many are still available only to people with a certain level of clearance or rank in the Party.

Deng has urged that older leaders be replaced with younger ones, and the American press has reported some of the shifts in leadership in the army and in the Party bureaucracy. Are such changes in appointments also taking place in the official associations of writers and artists?

This is going to occur biologically now, no matter what anybody wants, because the well-known writers are now quite old. The senior people in the associations are at least in their sixties if not in their seventies and eighties. Their health is failing, and they are dying. Rather soon we will reach the point where there are no more living great Chinese writers, and that's going to create an interesting vacuum. For example, in the Writers' Association the chairman is Ba Jin whose famous novel, *Family*, dates back fifty years. He is in very poor health. I cannot imagine that the Party is going to accept the newly elected vice chairman, the dissident investigative reporter Liu Binyan, as the eventual chairman. It will be an interesting problem what the Party is going to do when there are no more people around who have prominent reputations, who published before 1949 when it was safe to publish.

Similarly, Ding Ling, one of China's greatest female authors, has written nothing since 1949 that compares to what she wrote before then. She has had a rough time but has remained, at least outwardly, amazingly loyal to the Party. I met her during her visit to the United States a year ago, and she would not say anything critical of the Party even though she had spent years on a farm and then in a prison camp. She didn't want to talk about that. She wanted to talk about how much better things are now and about what she plans

to write. But the fact remains that she has not written anything since 1949 that measures up to what she did before then—before the Party clamped down on writers and artists. If you were to ask a Chinese writer what great book has been published since 1949, he would have a very hard time answering the question, whereas in the Soviet Union major works have been published.

What accounts for the great difference in literary achievement between China and the Soviet Union since both governments use extensive control and censorship?

The controls in China have been much tighter because they get down to a lower level. They are much more personal. When campaigns like the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Cultural Revolution, and the recent Spiritual Pollution Campaign begin, people are forced to gather in their small groups with friends and colleagues from work to criticize each other. So they are with others who know them very well and will know if someone is busy with a major work. In Russia the secret police are the major mechanism for control. Russians have made much less use of the constant, on-going group control. One could talk for a long time about the work unit and its effect on the Chinese. Most Westerners had never even heard of the "danwei" until the late 1970s. People are grouped together largely for purposes of control, but in some cases for efficiency and convenience. Every Chinese belongs to a unit. It's the place where one works or goes to school and is often subdivided into groups of five to ten people who will meet regularly each week to read editorials in the *People's Daily*. When a campaign starts they may meet not just once a week but once a day or even several times a day. There is very little you can do that's private. Very little remains secret. There's almost no way to hide things in China.

Your remarks imply that Chinese writers and artists operate with a great deal of suspicion and distrust.

They are getting over some of that now. People have loosened up considerably compared to the way they were up to 1976 at the end of the Cultural Revolution, and things are not as oppressive as they were. But it is still very far from our situation in the West, or even what it is like in Taiwan where people are able to be more

outspoken.

In what ways does China's rich artistic heritage influence today's artists and writers who are working with avowed socialist purposes?

That's the hardest problem: how to combine Chinese tradition with something that is modern. And they had been wrestling with that for a hundred years before the Communists gained power. There have been very few Chinese cultural figures in the twentieth century—whether writers, dramatists, musicians, or artists—who have enjoyed any real success—very little compared to the Japanese. It is difficult to understand why they have been unable to meld the two traditions more successfully. Maybe something in the Chinese culture itself has prevented them from looking outside because they have always felt so deeply rooted in their own. Or maybe the Chinese culture had withered to such a degree that they lacked the strengths to draw on which the Japanese had since their culture remained more vital and alive into this century.

A very specific problem is the loss of cultural heritage because the people can no longer read classical Chinese, or at least not very well. In the 1950s the Communists simplified the written language, changed the characters, and reduced the number of them in common usage, so many people can no longer read classical Chinese and can not read the great novels unless they have been modernized. And then it's like reading Shakespeare in the *Reader's Digest*.

What is the attitude of intellectuals toward simplifying the characters? Do they see a loss of heritage?

You hear people on both sides. But certainly many young people today are no longer in touch with their own literary heritage. This is the language in which things were written until quite recently—up until the beginning of the twentieth century. It would be like our not being able to read Dickens or Melville or Twain. There's a richness and nuance in the play of language that has been lost with these changes. The Chinese literary tradition was very particular to itself and was extremely complex in its literary allusions, metaphors, and forms—all of which are so different from our own. It's not just that the government has simplified the characters, but

that it has reduced the number of characters in common usage. Thus a literate Chinese today is not the same as a literate Chinese fifty years ago who would have had a much wider grasp of the language.

So even though writers have a greater audience because of increased literacy, what they are able to do with the

language—

—may also have been cheapened. I have the sense that they've lost something.□

David Estes, a member of Loyola's English department, has taught in China at the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute.

Armando Valladares

NIGHT UNENDING

Translated by William Marling

The cell was dark
like all the prison
the punishment broke
mind and body.
His final strength was unbent.
Afternoon by afternoon,
sessions of blows.
All of his body
an incredible map
of bruised coasts.
And the days passed
between torture and screams.
Outside there was a sky
and it was light.
Inside, the night unending.
They took him out to beat him.
On the wall a sickle and hammer
over a background of blood.
An instrument of torture
drilled through his ribs . . .
On the wall
a sickle and a hammer,
in the hallway
a body
over a puddle of blood.
"Tell them he's dead,"
said the guard coolly.
"Let's wait till he loses
enough blood," answered the rifleman.
Three hours passed
thickening . . . fluttering hours.

Into the garbage truck
they threw him with disgust
—after which they arranged
with care the barrels.
Outside there was a sky
but no light.
Inside, the night unending.

(Dedicated to the memory of Francisco Morales
Menendez, killed in the punishment cells of the
Prison of the Isle of Pines, 28 February 1967.)