

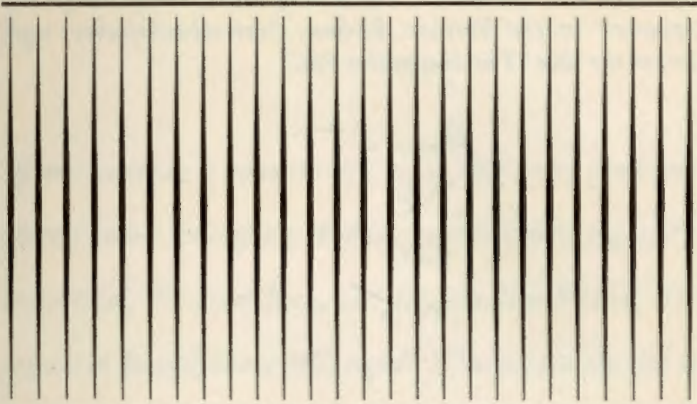
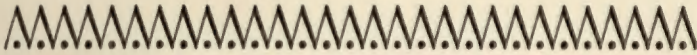
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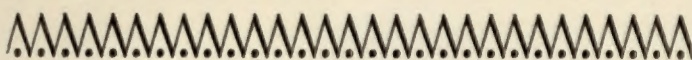
Knopf



THE CAPTIVE MIND
BY CZESLAW MILOSZ
24
TRANSLATED FROM THE POLISH BY
JANE ZIELONKO



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if they are, that means there must have been some reason for them in his day. Contemplative poems, such as his, could never appear in a people's democracy, not only because it would be difficult to publish them, but because the writer's impulse to write them would be destroyed at its very root. The objective conditions for such poetry have disappeared, and the intellectual of whom I speak is not one who believes in writing for the bureau drawer. He curses and despairs over the censorship and demands of the publishing trusts. Yet at the same time, he is profoundly suspicious of unlicensed literature. The publishing license he himself receives does not mean that the editor appreciates the artistic merits of his book, nor that he expects it to be popular with the public. That license is simply a sign that its author reflects the transformation of reality with scientific exactness. Dialectical materialism in the Stalinist version both reflects and directs this transformation. It creates social and political conditions in which a man ceases to think and write otherwise than as necessary. He accepts this "must" because nothing worth while can exist outside its limits. Herein lie the claws of dialectics. The writer does not surrender to this "must" merely because he fears for his own skin. He fears for something much more precious—the significance of his work. He believes that the by-ways of "philosophizing" lead to a greater or lesser degree of graphomania. Anyone gripped in the claws of dialectics is forced to admit that the thinking of private philosophers, unsupported by citations from authorities, is sheer nonsense. If this is so, then one's total effort must be directed toward following the line, and there is no point at which one can stop.

x The pressure of the state machine is nothing compared with the pressure of a convincing argument. I attended the artists' congresses in Poland in which the theories of

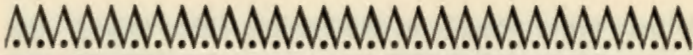
or Prague. The collective atmosphere, resulting from an exchange and a re-combination of individual fluids, is bad. It is an aura of strength and unhappiness, of internal paralysis and external mobility. Whatever we may call it, this much is certain: if Hell should guarantee its lodgers magnificent quarters, beautiful clothes, the tastiest food, and all possible amusements, but condemn them to breathe in this aura forever, that would be punishment enough.

No propaganda, either pro or con, can capture so elusive and little-known a phenomenon. It escapes all calculations. It cannot exist on paper. Admitting, in whispered conversation, that something of the sort does exist, one must seek a rational explanation for it. Undoubtedly the "old," fearful and oppressed, is taking its vengeance by spilling forth its inky fluid like a wounded octopus. But surely the socialist organism, in its growth toward a future of guaranteed prosperity, is already strong enough to counteract this poison; or perhaps it is too early for that. When the younger generation, free from the malevolent influence of the "old," arises, everything will change. Only, whoever has observed the younger generation in the Center is reluctant to cast such a horoscope. Then we must postpone our hopes to the remote future, to a time when the Center and every dependent state will supply its citizens with refrigerators and automobiles, with white bread and a handsome ration of butter. Maybe then, at last, they will be satisfied.

Why won't the equation work out as it should, when every step is logical? Do we have to use non-Euclidian geometry on material as classic, as adaptable, and as plastic as a human being? Won't the ordinary variety satisfy him? What the devil does a man need?

or the world of war? Both are natural, if both are within the realm of one's experience. All the concepts men live by are a product of the historic formation in which they find themselves. Fluidity and constant change are the characteristics of phenomena. And man is so plastic a being that one can even conceive of the day when a thoroughly self-respecting citizen will crawl about on all fours, sporting a tail of brightly colored feathers as a sign of conformity to the order he lives in.

The man of the East cannot take Americans seriously because they have never undergone the experiences that teach men how relative their judgments and thinking habits are. Their resultant lack of imagination is appalling. Because they were born and raised in a given social order and in a given system of values, they believe that any other order must be "unnatural," and that it cannot last because it is incompatible with human nature. But even they may one day know fire, hunger, and the sword. In all probability this is what will occur; for it is hard to believe that when one half of the world is living through terrible disasters, the other half can continue a nineteenth-century mode of life, learning about the distress of its distant fellowmen only from movies and newspapers. Recent examples teach us that this cannot be. An inhabitant of Warsaw or Budapest once looked at newsreels of bombed Spain or burning Shanghai, but in the end he learned how these and many other catastrophes appear in actuality. He read gloomy tales of the N.K.V.D., until one day he found he himself had to deal with it. *If something exists in one place, it will exist everywhere.* This is the conclusion he draws from his observations, and so he has no particular faith in the momentary prosperity of America. He suspects that the years 1933-45 in Europe pre-figure what will occur elsewhere. A hard school, where ignorance was punished



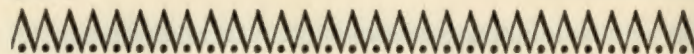
CHAPTER III

Ketman

OFFICIALLY, contradictions do not exist in the minds of the citizens in the people's democracies. Nobody dares to reveal them publicly. And yet the question of how to deal with them is posed in real life. More than others, the members of the intellectual elite are aware of this problem. They solve it by becoming actors.

It is hard to define the type of relationship that prevails between people in the East otherwise than as acting, with the exception that one does not perform on a theater stage but in the street, office, factory, meeting hall, or even the room one lives in. Such acting is a highly developed craft that places a premium upon mental alertness. Before it leaves the lips, every word must be evaluated as to its consequences. A smile that appears at the wrong moment, a glance that is not all it should be can occasion dangerous suspicions and accusations. Even one's gestures, tone of voice, or preference for certain kinds of neckties are interpreted as signs of one's political tendencies.

A visitor from the Imperium is shocked on coming to the West. In his contacts with others, beginning with porters or taxi drivers, he encounters no resistance. The people he meets are completely relaxed. They lack that internal concentration which betrays itself in a lowered head



CHAPTER IV

Alpha, the Moralist

THE HISTORY of the last decades in Central and Eastern Europe abounds in situations in regard to which all epithets and theoretical considerations lose meaning. A man's effort to match up to these situations decides his fate. The solution each accepts differs according to those impalpable factors which constitute his individuality.

Since the fate of millions is often most apparent in those who by profession note changes in themselves and in others, i.e. the writers, a few portraits of typical Eastern European writers may serve as concrete examples of what is happening within the Imperium.

The man I call Alpha is one of the best-known prose writers east of the Elbe. He was a close friend of mine, and memories of many difficult moments that we went through together tie us to each other. I find it hard to remain unmoved when I recall him. I even ask myself if I should subject him to this analysis. But I shall do so because friendship would not prevent me from writing an article on his books in which I would say more or less what I shall say here.

Before the War, he was a tall, thin youth with horn-rimmed glasses. He printed his stories in a certain right-wing weekly that was held in low esteem by the literary

circles of Warsaw, which were made up chiefly of Jews or of people who looked with distaste on the racist and totalitarian yearnings of this publication. The editor of the weekly had to some degree discovered him, and had reason to congratulate himself upon his choice, for Alpha's talent was developing rapidly. Very shortly, his first novel began to appear serially in the weekly. It was later published by one of the leading houses, and created a great stir.

His main interest was directed toward tragic moral conflicts. At the time many young writers were under the spell of Joseph Conrad's prose. Alpha was particularly susceptible to Conrad's style because he had a tendency to create solemn and hieratic characters. Night fascinated him. Small people with their powerful passions in a night whose silence and mystery embraced their fate in its gigantic folds—this was the usual formula of his novels and stories. His youthful works resembled Conrad's in their majesty and silence, and in a sense of the immensity of the inhuman, indifferent world. Alpha's position was metaphysical and tragic. He was tormented by the enigma of purity—moral purity and purity of tone in what he wrote. He distilled his sentences. He wanted each to be not merely a statement but, like a phrase in a musical composition, irreplaceable and effective in its very sound.

This need for purity, I would say for other-worldly purity, was basic to his character; yet in his relations with people he was haughty and imperious. His pursuit of purity in his work was closely linked to his personal arrogance; the former was his sublimation, his other ego, the repository of all his hopes. The more he worried about his disordered private life, the more highly he prized his redeeming activity, which is what his writing was for him, and the more he accorded to it the nature of a solemn rite. The

one rank that could have sated his ambition was that of a cardinal. Slow movements, the flow of scarlet silk, the proffering of a ring to kiss—this for him was purity of gesture, self-expression through the medium of a better self. There are certain comic actors who dream all their lives of playing a serious, dignified role; in him, much the same motives were at play. Alpha, who was gifted with an exceptional sense of humor in conversation, changed completely when he began to write; then he dwelt only in the highest registers of tragedy. His ambition reached further than fame as an author of well-written books. He wanted to be a moral authority.

The novel I mentioned, which was his first big success, was widely acclaimed as a Catholic novel, and he was hailed as the most gifted Catholic writer, which in a Catholic country like Poland was no small matter. It is hard to say whether or not he really was a Catholic writer. The number of twentieth-century Catholic authors is negligible. So-called conversions of intellectuals are usually of a dubious nature, not significantly different from transitory conversions to surrealism, expressionism, or existentialism.

Alpha was the kind of Catholic so many of us were. This was a period of interest in Thomism and of references to Jacques Maritain in literary discussion. It would be wrong to maintain that for all these "intellectual Catholics" literary fashion alone was at stake; one cannot reduce the clutching gestures of a drowning man to a question of fashion. But it would be equally incorrect to consider literary debates based on a skillful juggling of Thomist terminology as symptoms of Catholicism. Be that as it may, the "intellectual Catholics" colored certain literary circles. Theirs was a special political role; they were foes of racism and totalitarianism. In this they differed from

the Catholics proper, whose political mentality was not entirely free of worship of "healthy organisms" (i.e. Italy and Germany) and approval of anti-Semitic brawls. The Communists despised Jacques Maritain's influence as degenerate, but they tolerated the "intellectual Catholics" because they opposed the ideas of the extreme right. Soon after he published his novel, Alpha began to frequent the circles of the "intellectual Catholics" and the left. Sensitive to the opinion people held of him, and taking the writer's role as a moral authority very seriously, he broke with the rightist weekly and signed an open letter against anti-Semitism.

Everyone looked for something different in Catholicism. Alpha, with his tragic sense of the world, looked for forms: words and concepts, in short, textures. This tragic sense in him was not unlike Wells's Invisible Man, who when he wanted to appear among people had to paste on a false nose, bandage his face and pull gloves over his invisible hands. Catholicism supplied Alpha's language. With concepts like sin and saintliness, damnation and grace he could grasp the experiences of the characters he described; and, even more important, the language of Catholicism automatically introduced the elevated tone that was so necessary to him and lulled his longing for a cardinal's scarlet. The hero of his book was a priest, a sure sign of the influence of French Catholic novelists, and above all Bernanos, but also an expression of Alpha's urge to create pure and powerful characters. The action took place in a village, and here his weaknesses revealed themselves. He was so preoccupied with building up moral conflicts that he was blind to concrete details and incapable of observing living people. Having been raised in the city, he knew little of peasants and their life. The village he described was a universal one; it could just as easily have

A great doubt assailed him. If his colleagues doubted the worth of their work, suspended as it was in a void, then his perplexity took on larger proportions. He wanted to attain a purity of moral tone, but purity in order to be genuine must be earthy, deeply rooted in experience and observation of life. He perceived that he had blundered into falseness by living in the midst of ideas about people, instead of among people themselves. What he knew about man was based on his own subjective experiences within the four walls of his room. His Catholicism was no more than a cover; he toyed with it as did many twentieth-century Catholics, trying to clothe his nudity in an esteemed, Old World cloak. He was seeking some means of awakening in his reader the emotional response he wanted, and obviously the reader on finding words like grace or sin, known to him since childhood, reacted strongly. But there is an element of dishonesty in such a use of words and concepts.

Alpha no longer knew whether the conflicts he created were real. Hailed as a Catholic writer, he knew that he was not; and his reaction was like that of a painter who having painted cubistically for a while is astonished to find that he is still called a cubist after he has changed his style. Critics, deceived by appearances, reckoned his books among those that were healthy and noble as opposed to the decadent works of his fellow-writers. But he realized that he was no healthier than his colleagues who at least did not attempt to hide their sorry nakedness.

The War broke out, and our city and country became a part of Hitler's Imperium. For five and a half years we lived in a dimension completely different from that which any literature or experience could have led us to know. What we beheld surpassed the most daring and the most macabre imagination. Descriptions of horrors known to

us of old now made us smile at their naïveté. German rule in Europe was ruthless, but nowhere so ruthless as in the East, for the East was populated by races which, according to the doctrines of National Socialism, were either to be utterly eradicated or else used for heavy physical labor. The events we were forced to participate in resulted from the effort to put these doctrines into practice.

Still we lived; and since we were writers, we tried to write. True, from time to time one of us dropped out, shipped off to a concentration camp or shot. There was no help for this. We were like people marooned on a dissolving floe of ice; we dared not think of the moment when it would melt away. War communiqués supplied the latest data on our race with death. We had to write; it was our only defense against despair. Besides, the whole country was sown with the seeds of conspiracy and an "underground state" did exist in reality, so why shouldn't an underground literature exist as well. Except for two or three Nazi propaganda organs, no books or magazines were printed in the language of the defeated nation. Nonetheless, the cultural life of the country refused to be stifled. Underground publications were mimeographed on the run or illegally printed in a small format that was easy to circulate. Many underground lectures and authors' evenings were organized. There were even underground presentations of plays. All this raised the morale of the beaten but still fighting nation. National morale was good, too good, as events toward the end of the War proved.

In the course of these years, Alpha successfully realized his ambition to become a moral authority. His behavior was that of an exemplary writer-citizen. His judgments as to which actions were proper or improper passed in literary circles as those of an oracle, and he was often asked to decide whether someone had trespassed against the unwritten

patriotic code. By unspoken accord, he became something of a leader of all the writers in our city. Underground funds went into his hands and he divided them among his needy colleagues; he befriended beginning writers; he founded and co-edited an underground literary review, typed copies of which were transmitted in rotation to "clubs" where they were read aloud in clandestine meetings. He ranked rather high among those initiated into the secrets of the underground network. His actions were characterized by real humanitarianism. Even before the War he had parted with his rightist patron who had voiced the opinion that the country needed to institute its own totalitarianism. (The patron was shot by the Gestapo in the first year of the War.) When the German authorities set out to murder systematically the three million Jews of Poland, the anti-Semites did not feel compelled to worry overmuch; they condemned this bestiality aloud, but many of them secretly thought it was not entirely unwarranted. Alpha belonged to those inhabitants of our town who reacted violently against this mass slaughter. He fought with his pen against the indifference of others, and personally helped Jews in hiding even though such aid was punishable by death.

He was a resolute opponent of nationalism, so nightmarishly incarnated in the Germans. This does not mean, however, that he had Communist leanings. The number of Communists in Poland had always been insignificant; and the cooperation between the Russians and the Germans after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact created conditions particularly unfavorable to the activity of Moscow followers. The Communist Underground was weak. The hopes of the masses were turned toward the West, and the "underground state" was dependent on the Government-in-Exile in London. Alpha, with his barometer-like

sensitivity to the moral opinions of his environment, felt no sympathy for a country that awakened friendly feelings in almost no one. But like the majority of his friends, he was anxious for far-reaching social reforms and for a people's government.

He and I used to meet often. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that we spent the War years together. The sight of him was enough to raise one's spirits. He smiled in the face of all adversity; his manner was nonchalant; and to symbolize his contempt for hob-nailed boots, uniforms, and shouts of "Heil Hitler," he habitually carried a black umbrella. His tall, lean figure, the ironic flash of his eyes behind his glasses, and the anointed air with which he strode through the terror-plagued streets of the city added up to a silhouette that defied the laws of war.

Once, in the first year of the War, we were returning from a visit to a mutual friend who lived in the country. As I remember, we were arguing about the choice of a train. We decided against the advice of our host who had urged us to take a train leaving half an hour later. We arrived in Warsaw and walked along the streets feeling very satisfied with life. It was a beautiful summer morning. We did not know that this day was to be remembered as one of the blackest in the history of our city. Scarcely had I closed my door behind me when I heard shrieks in the street. Looking out the window, I saw that a general man-hunt was on. This was the first man-hunt for Auschwitz. Later millions of Europeans were to be killed there, but at the time this concentration camp was just starting to operate. From the first huge transport of people caught on the streets that day no one, it appears, escaped alive. Alpha and I had strolled those streets five minutes before the beginning of the hunt; perhaps his umbrella and his insouciance brought us luck.

These years were a test for every writer. The real tragedy of events pushed imaginary tragedies into the shade. Whichever of us failed to find an expression for collective despair or hope was ashamed. Only elementary feelings remained: fear, pain at the loss of dear ones, hatred of the oppressor, sympathy with the tormented. Alpha, whose talent was in search of real and not imaginary tragedy, sensed the material at hand and wrote a series of short stories which were published as a book after the War and widely translated. The theme of all these stories can be defined as loyalty. Not for nothing had Conrad been the favorite writer of his youth. This was a loyalty to something in man, something nameless, but strong and pure. Before the War, he tended to call this imperative sense of loyalty moral, in the Catholic sense. Now, fearing falseness, he affirmed merely that this imperative existed. When his dying heroes turned their eyes toward a mute heaven, they could find nothing there; they could only hope that their loyalty was not completely meaningless and that, in spite of everything, something in the universe responded to it.

The morality of his heroes was a lay morality, with a question mark, with a pause, a pause that was not quite faith. I think he was more honest in these stories than in his pre-war writings. At the same time, he expressed accurately and powerfully the state of mind of the countless underground fighters dying in the battle against Nazism. Why did they throw their lives into the scale? Why did they accept torture and death? They had no point of support like the Führer for the Germans or the New Faith for the Communists. It is doubtful whether most of them believed in Christ. It could only have been loyalty, loyalty to something called fatherland or honor, but something stronger than any name. In one of his stories, a young boy, tortured by the police and knowing

X // that he will be shot, gives the name of his friend because he is afraid to die alone. They meet before the firing squad, and the betrayed forgives his betrayer. This forgiveness cannot be justified by any utilitarian ethic; there is no reason to forgive traitors. Had this story been written by a Soviet author, the betrayed would have turned away with disdain from the man who had succumbed to base weakness. Forsaking Christianity, Alpha became a more religious writer than he had been before, if we grant that the ethic of loyalty is an extension of religious ethics and a contradiction of an ethic of collective goals.

In the second half of the War, a serious crisis in political consciousness took place in the "underground state." The underground struggle against the occupying power entailed great sacrifices; the number of persons executed or liquidated in concentration camps grew constantly. To explain the need of such sacrifice solely on the basis of loyalty left one a prey to doubt. Loyalty can be the basis of individual action, but when decisions affecting the fate of hundreds of thousands of people are to be made, loyalty is not enough. One seeks logical justification. But what kind of logical justification could there be? From the East, the victorious Red Army was drawing near. The Western armies were far away. In the name of what future, in the name of what order were young people dying every day? More than one man whose task it was to sustain the morale of others posed this question to himself. No one was able to formulate an answer. Irrational dreams that something would happen to stop the advance of the Red Army and at the same time overthrow Hitler were linked with an appeal to the honor of the "country without a Quisling"; but this was not a very substantial prop for those of a more sober turn of mind. At this moment, Communist underground organizations began to be active,

and were joined by some left-wing Socialists. The Communist program offered more realistic arguments than did the program of the London-directed "underground state": the country, it was fairly clear, was going to be liberated by the Red Army; with its aid one should start a people's revolution.

Gradually the intellectuals in the underground became impatient with the irrational attitudes that were spreading in the resistance movement. This irrationality began to reach the point of hysteria. Conspiracy became an end in itself; to die or to expose others to death, something of a sport. Alpha found himself surrounded by living caricatures of the ethic of loyalty he expounded in his stories. The patriotic code of his class prohibited him from approaching the small groups whose policy followed Moscow's dictates.

Like so many of his friends, Alpha felt himself in a trap. Then, for the first time in his writing he invoked his sense of humor, using it to point up the figures he knew so well, the figures of men mad for conspiracy. His satires bared the social background of underground hysteria. There is no doubt that the "underground state" was the handiwork of the intelligentsia above all, of a stratum never known in Western Europe, not to mention the Anglo-Saxon countries. Since the intelligentsia was, in its customs and ties, the legatee of the nobility (even if some members were of peasant origin), its characteristic traits were not especially attractive to the intellectuals. The intellectuals of Poland had made several attempts to revolt against the intelligentsia of which they themselves were a part, much as the intellectuals in America had rebelled against the middle class. When a member of the intelligentsia really began to think, he perceived that he was isolated from the broad masses of the popula-

tion. Finding the social order at fault, he tended to become a radical in an effort to establish a tie with the masses. Alpha's satires on the intelligentsia of the Underground convinced him that this stratum, with its many aberrations, boded ill for the future of the country if the post-war rulers were to be recruited from its ranks—which seemed inevitable in the event of the London Government-in-Exile's arrival in Poland.

Just when he was passing through this process of bitter and impotent mockery, the uprising broke out. For two months, a kilometer-high column of smoke and flames stood over Warsaw. Two hundred thousand people died in the street fighting. Those neighborhoods which were not leveled by bombs or by the fire of heavy artillery were burned down by SS squads. After the uprising, the city which once numbered over a million inhabitants was a wilderness of ruins, its population deported, and its demolished streets literally cemeteries. Alpha, living in a distant suburb that bordered on fields, succeeded in escaping unharmed through the dangerous zone where people in flight were caught and sent to concentration camps.

In April of 1945, after the Germans had been expelled by the Red Army (the battles were then raging at the gates of Berlin), Alpha and I returned to Warsaw and wandered together over the mounds of rubble that had once been streets. We spent several hours in a once familiar part of the city. Now we could not recognize it. We scaled a slope of red bricks and entered upon a fantastic moon-world. There was total silence. As we worked our way downward, balancing to keep from falling, ever new scenes of waste and destruction loomed before us. In one of the gorges we stumbled upon a little plank fastened to a metal bar. The inscription, written in red paint or in blood, read: "Lieutenant Zbyszczek's road of suffering." I

know what Alpha's thoughts were at that time, and they were mine: we were thinking of what traces remain after the life of a man. These words rang like a cry to heaven from a shattered earth. It was a cry for justice. Who was Lieutenant Zbyszczek? Who among the living would ever know what he had suffered? We imagined him crawling along this trail which some comrade, probably long-since killed, had marked with the inscription. We saw him as, with an effort of his will, he mustered his fleeting strength and, aware of being mortally wounded, thought only of carrying out his duty. Why? Who measured his wisdom or madness? Was this a monad of Leibnitz, fulfilling its destiny in the universe, or only the son of a postman, obeying a futile maxim of honor instilled in him by his father, who himself was living up to the virtues of a courtly tradition?

Further on, we came upon a worn footpath. It led into a deep mountain cleft. At the bottom stood a clumsy, huddled cross with a helmet on it. At the foot of the cross were freshly planted flowers. Somebody's son lay here. A mother had found her way to him and worn the path through her daily visits.

Theatrical thunder suddenly broke the silence. It was the wind rattling the metal sheets hanging from a cliff-like wall. We scrambled out of the heap of debris into a practically untouched courtyard. Rusting machines stood among the high weeds. And on the steps of the charred villa we found some account books listing profits and losses.

The Warsaw uprising begun at the order of the Government-in-Exile in London broke out, as we know, at the moment when the Red Army was approaching the capital and the retreating German armies were fighting in the outskirts of the city. Feeling in the Underground was

reaching a boiling point; the Underground Army wanted to fight. The uprising was intended to oust the Germans and to take possession of the city so that the Red Army would be greeted by an already-functioning Polish government. Once the battle in the city began, and once it became obvious that the Red Army, standing on the other side of the river, would not move to the aid of the insurgents, it was too late for prudence. The tragedy played itself out according to all the immutable rules. This was the revolt of a fly against two giants. One giant waited beyond the river for the other to kill the fly. As a matter of fact, the fly defended itself, but its soldiers were generally armed only with pistols, grenades, and benzine bottles. For two months the giant sent his bombers over the city to drop their loads from a height of a few hundred feet; he supported his troops with tanks and the heaviest artillery. In the end, he crushed the fly only to be crushed in his turn by the second, patient giant.

X X — There was no logical reason for Russia to have helped Warsaw. The Russians were bringing the West not only liberation from Hitler, but liberation from the existing order, which they wanted to replace with a good order, namely their own. The "underground state" and the London Government-in-Exile stood in the way of their overthrow of capitalism in Poland; whereas, behind the Red Army lines a different Polish government, appointed in Moscow, was already in office. The destruction of Warsaw represented certain indisputable advantages. The people dying in the street fights were precisely those who could create most trouble for the new rulers, the young intelligentsia, seasoned in its underground struggle with the Germans, and wholly fanatic in its patriotism. The city itself in the course of the years of occupation had been transformed into an underground fortress filled with hidden printing

ple who had died in the uprising: Lieutenant Zbyszek, Christopher, Barbara, Karol, Marek, and thousands like them. They had known there was no hope of victory and that their death was no more than a gesture in the face of an indifferent world. They had died without even asking whether there was some scale in which their deeds would be weighed. The young philosopher Milbrand, a disciple of Heidegger, assigned to press work by his superiors, demanded to be sent to the line of battle because he believed that the greatest gift a man can have is the moment of free choice; three hours later he was dead. There were no limits to these frenzies of voluntary self-sacrifice.

Alpha did not blame the Russians. What was the use? They were the force of History. Communism was fighting Fascism; and the Poles, with their ethical code based on nothing but loyalty, had managed to thrust themselves between these two forces. Joseph Conrad, that incorrigible Polish noble! Surely the example of Warsaw had demonstrated that there was no place in the twentieth century for imperatives of fatherland or honor unless they were supported by some definite end. A moralist of today, Alpha reasoned, should turn his attention to social goals and social results. The rebels were not even an enemy in the minds of the Germans; they were an inferior race that had to be destroyed. For the Russians, they were "Polish fascists." The Warsaw uprising was the swan-song of the intelligentsia and the order it defended; like the suicidal charges of the Confederates during the American Civil War, it could not stave off defeat. With its fall, the Revolution was, in effect, accomplished; in any case, the road was open. This was not, as the press of the new government proclaimed in its effort to lull the people, a "peaceful revolution." Its price was bloody, as the ruins of the largest city in the country testified.

But one had to live and be active instead of looking back at what had passed. The country was ravaged. The new government went energetically to work reconstructing, putting mines and factories into operation, and dividing estates among the peasants. New responsibilities faced the writer. His books were eagerly awaited by a human ant-hill, shaken out of its torpor and stirred up by the big stick of war and of social reforms. We should not wonder, then, that Alpha, like the majority of his colleagues, declared at once his desire to serve the new Poland that had risen out of the ashes of the old.

He was accepted with open arms by the handful of Polish Communists who had spent the war years in Russia and who had returned to organize the state according to the maxims of Leninism-Stalinism. Then, that is in 1945, everyone who could be useful was welcomed joyfully without any demand that he be a Red. Both the benevolent mask under which the Party appeared and the moderation of its slogans were due to the fact that there were so uncommonly few Stalinists in the country.

Unquestionably, it is only by patient and gradually increased doses of the doctrine that one can bring a pagan population to understand and accept the New Faith. Ever since his break with the rightist weekly, Alpha had enjoyed a good opinion in those circles which were now most influential. He was not reprimanded for having kept his distance from Marxist groups during the War; authors who had maintained such contacts could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Now the writers of Poland were a little like virgins—willing, but timid. Their first public statements were cautious and painstakingly measured. Still it was not what they said that mattered. Their names were needed as proof that the government was supported by the entire cultural elite. The program of behavior

toward various categories of people had been elaborated by the Polish Communists while they were still in Moscow; and it was a wise program, based on an intimate understanding of conditions in the country. The tasks that lay before them were unusually difficult. The country did not want their government. The Party, which had barely existed before the War, had to be reorganized and had to reconcile itself to the knowledge that most of its new members would be opportunists. Left-wing Socialists had to be admitted into the government. It was still necessary to carry on a complicated game with the Peasant Party, for after Yalta the Western allies demanded at least the semblance of a coalition. The most immediate job, therefore, was to bridge the gap between the small group of Communists and the country as a whole; those who could help most in building this bridge were famous writers who were known as liberals or even as conservatives. Alpha fulfilled every requirement. His article appeared on the first page of a government literary weekly; it was an article on humanism. As I recall it, he spoke in it of the ethic of respect for man that revolution brings.

It was May, 1945, in the medieval city of Cracow. Alpha and I, as well as many other writers and artists, had taken refuge there after the destruction of Warsaw. The night the news of the fall of Berlin came was lit with bursts of rockets and shells, and the streets echoed with the fire of small arms as the soldiers of the victorious Red Army celebrated the prospect of a speedy return home. The next morning, on a fine spring day, Alpha and I were sitting in the office of Polish Film, working on a scenario. Tying up the loose ends of a film is a burdensome business; we were putting our feet up on tables and armchairs, we were pacing the room, smoking too many cigarettes and constantly being lured to the window through which

came the warble of sparrows. Outside the window was a courtyard with young trees, and beyond the courtyard a huge building lately transformed into a prison and the headquarters of the Security Police. We saw scores of young men behind the barred windows on the ground floor. Some had thrust their faces into the sun in an effort to get a tan. Others were fishing with wire hooks for the bits of paper which had been tossed out on the sand from neighboring cells. Standing in the window, we observed them in silence.

It was easy to guess that these were soldiers of the Underground Army. Had the London Government-in-Exile returned to Poland, these soldiers of the "underground state" would have been honored and feted as heroes. Instead, they were incarcerated as a politically uncertain element—another of History's ironic jokes. These young boys who had grown used to living with a gun in their hands and surrounded by perpetual danger were now supposed to forget their taste for conspiracy as quickly as possible. Many succeeded so well in forgetting that they pretended they had never been active in the Underground. Others stayed in the woods, and any of them that were caught were thrown behind bars. Although their foe had been Hitler, they were now termed agents of the class enemy. These were the brothers of the young people who had fought and died in the Warsaw uprising, people whose blind self-sacrifice lay on Alpha's conscience. I do not know what he was thinking as he looked at the windows of those prison cells. Perhaps even then he was sketching the plan of his first post-war novel.

As his whole biography demonstrates, his ambition was always boundless. He was never content to be just one among many; he had to be a leader so that he could justify his personal haughtiness. The novel he was writing should,

start schools and universities, ships and railroads functioning. One did not have to be a Communist to reach this conclusion; it was obvious to everyone. To kill Party workers, to sabotage trains carrying food, to attack laborers who were trying to rebuild the factories was to prolong the period of chaos. Only madmen could commit such fruitless and illogical acts.

This was Alpha's picture of the country. One might have called it a piece of common-sense journalism had it not been for something that always distinguished him as a writer: pity, pity for the old Communist as well as for those who considered him their enemy. Because he felt compassion for both these forces, he succeeded in writing a tragic novel.

His shortcomings as a writer, so clearly evident in his pre-war works, now stood him in good stead. His talent was not realistic; his people moved in a world difficult to visualize. He built up moral conflicts by stressing contrasts in his characters; but his old Communist was as rare a specimen on the Polish scene as the priest he had made his hero before the war. Communists may, in general, be depicted as active, intelligent, fanatic, cunning but above all as men who take external acts as their domain. Alpha's hero was not a man of deeds; on the contrary, he was a silent, immovable rock whose stony exterior covered all that was most human—personal suffering and a longing for good. He was a monumental figure, an ascetic living for his ideas. He was ashamed of his personal cares, and his refusal to confess his private pain won the sympathy of the readers. In the concentration camp he had lost the wife he dearly loved; and now it was only by the greatest effort of his will that he could compel himself to live, for life had suddenly become devoid of meaning. He was a titan with a torn heart, full of love and forgiveness. In

subjectively since his pre-war days; he still could not limit himself to a purely utilitarian ethic expressed in rational acts. Faust and King Lear did penance within his hero. Both heaven and earth continued to exist. Still one could not ask too much. He did not belong to the Party, but he showed some understanding. His treatment of the terrorist youth even more than his portrayal of the old Communist demonstrated that he was learning. It was too early to impose "socialist realism"; the term was not even mentioned lest it alarm the writers and artists. For the same reason, the peasants were assured that there would be no collective farms in Poland.

The day of decision did not come for Alpha until a few years after he had published his novel. He was living in his beautiful villa, signing numerous political declarations, serving on committees and traveling throughout the country lecturing on literature in factory auditoriums, clubs and "houses of culture." For many, these authors' trips, organized on a large scale, were a painful duty; but for him they were a pleasure, for they enabled him to become acquainted with the life and problems of the working-class youth. For the first time, he was really stepping out of his intellectual clan; and better still, he was doing so as a respected author. As one of the top-ranking writers of the people's democracies he could feel himself, if not a cardinal, then at least an eminent canon.

In line with the Center's plan, the country was being progressively transformed. The time came to shorten the reins on the writers and to demand that they declare themselves clearly for the New Faith. At writers' congresses "socialist realism" was proclaimed the sole indicated creative method. It appears that he lived through this moment with particular pain. Showing incredible dexterity the Party had imperceptibly led the writers to the

point of conversion. Now they had to comply with the Party's ultimatum or else rebel abruptly and so fall to the foot of the social ladder. To split one's loyalties, to pay God in one currency and Caesar in another, was no longer possible. No one ordered the writers to enter the Party formally; yet there was no logical obstacle to joining once one accepted the New Faith. Such a step would signalize greater courage, for admission into the Party meant an increase in one's responsibilities.

As the novelist most highly regarded by Party circles, Alpha could make but one decision. As a moral authority he was expected to set an example for his colleagues. During the first years of the new order he had established strong bonds with the Revolution. He was, at last, a popular writer whose readers were recruited from the masses. His highly praised pre-war novel had sold scarcely a few thousand copies; now he and every author could count on reaching a tremendous public. He was no longer isolated; he told himself he was needed not by a few snobs in a coffee-house, but by this new workers' youth he spoke to in his travels over the country. This metamorphosis was entirely due to the victory of Russia and the Party, and logically one ought to accept not only practical results but also the philosophical principles that engendered them.

That was not easy for him. Ever more frequently he was attacked for his love of monumental tragedy. He tried to write differently, but whenever he denied something that lay in the very nature of his talent his prose became flat and colorless; he tore up his manuscripts. He asked himself whether he could renounce all effort to portray the tragic conflicts peculiar to life in a giant collective. The causes of the human distress he saw about him daily were no longer the same as in a capitalist system, but the sum total of suffering seemed to grow instead of diminish.

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Alpha knew too much about Russia and the merciless methods dialecticians employed on "human material" not to be assailed by waves of doubt. He was aware that in accepting the New Faith he would cease to be a moral authority and become a pedagogue, expressing only what was recognized as useful. Henceforth, ten or fifteen dialectical experts would weigh each of his sentences, considering whether he had committed the sin of pure tragedy. But there was no returning. Telling himself that he was already a Communist in his actions, he entered the Party and at once published a long article about himself as a writer. This was a self-criticism; in Christian terminology, a confession. Other writers read his article with envy and fear. That he was first everywhere and in everything aroused their jealousy, but that he showed himself so clever—so like a Stakhanovite miner who first announces that he will set an unusually high norm—filled them with apprehension. Miners do not like any of their comrades who are too inclined to accumulate honors for having driven others to a speed-up.

His self-criticism was so skillfully written that it stands as a classic declaration of a writer renouncing the past in the name of the New Faith. It was translated into many languages, and printed even by Stalinist publications in the West. In condemning his previous books he resorted to a special stratagem: he admitted openly what he had always secretly thought of the flaws in his work. He didn't need dialectics to show him these flaws; he knew them of old, long before he approached Marxism, but now he attributed his insight to the merits of the Method. Every good writer knows he should not let himself be seduced by high-sounding words or by emotionally effective but empty concepts. Alpha affirmed that he had stumbled into these pitfalls because he wasn't a Marxist. He also

let it be understood that he did not consider himself a Communist writer, but only one who was trying to master the Method, that highest of all sciences. What was remarkable about the article was the sainted, supercilious tone, always Alpha's own, in which it was written. That tone led one to suspect that in damning his faults he was compounding them and that he gloried in his new garb of humility.

The Party confided to him, as a former Catholic, the function of making speeches against the policy of the Vatican. Shortly thereafter, he was invited to Moscow, and on his return he published a book about the "Soviet man." By demonstrating dialectically that the only truly free man was the citizen of the Soviet Union, he was once again reaching for the laurels of supremacy. His colleagues had always been more or less ashamed to use this literary tactic even though they knew it was dialectically correct. As a result, he came to be actively disliked in the literary ghetto. I call this a ghetto because despite the fact that they were lecturing throughout the country and reaching an ever larger public the writers were now as securely locked up in their collective homes and clubs as they had been in their pre-war coffee-houses. Alpha's fellow-authors, jealous of the success his noble tone had brought him, called him the "respectable prostitute."

It is not my place to judge. I myself traveled the same road of seeming inevitability. In fleeing I trampled on many values that may determine the worth of a man. So I judge myself severely though my sins are not the same as his. Perhaps the difference in our destinies lay in a minute disparity in our reactions when we visited the ruins of Warsaw or gazed out the window at the prisoners. I felt that I could not write of these things unless I wrote the *whole* truth, not just a part. I had the same feeling

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about the events that took place in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, namely that every form of literature could be applied to them except fiction. We used to feel strangely ashamed, I remember, whenever Alpha read us his stories in that war-contaminated city. He exploited his subject matter too soon, his composition was too smooth. Thousands of people were dying in torture all about us; to transform their sufferings immediately into tragic theater seemed to us indecent. It is sometimes better to stammer from an excess of emotion than to speak in well-turned phrases. The inner voice that stops us when we might say too much is wise. It is not improbable that he did not know this voice.

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Only a passion for truth could have saved Alpha from developing into the person he became. Then, it is true, he would not have written his novel about the old Communist and demoralized Polish youth. He had allowed himself the luxury of pity, but only once he was within a framework safe from the censors' reproaches. In his desire to win approbation he had simplified his picture to conform to the wishes of the Party. One compromise leads to a second and a third until at last, though everything one says may be perfectly logical, it no longer has anything in common with the flesh and blood of living people. This is the reverse side of the medal of dialectics. This is the price one pays for the mental comfort dialectics affords. Around Alpha there lived and continue to live many workers and peasants whose words are ineffectual, but in the end, the inner voice they hear is not different from the subjective command that shuts writers' lips and demands all or nothing. Who knows, probably some unknown peasant or some minor postal employee should be placed higher in the hierarchy of those who serve humanity than Alpha the moralist.

during the War, in the language of slaves. He supported himself by various odd jobs. It is hard to define exactly how people earn a living in a city completely outside the law. Usually they took half-fictitious posts in an office or factory that supplied them with a work-card plus the opportunity to operate a black market or to steal, which was not regarded as immoral because it injured the Germans. At the same time, he studied in the underground university and shared the exuberant life of the resistance youth. He went to meetings where he and the other young people drank vodka, argued heatedly about literature and politics, and read illegal publications.

But he smiled scornfully at his comrades; he saw things more clearly than they. He found their patriotic zeal for battle against the Germans a purely irrational reflex. Battle—yes, but in the name of what? None of these young people believed any longer in democracy. Most of the countries of Eastern Europe had been semi-dictatorships before the War; and the parliamentary system seemed to belong to a dead era. There was no question as to how one came into power; whoever wanted to take over authority had only to seize it by force, or else create a "movement" to exert pressure on the government for admittance into a coalition. This was an age of nationalist "movements," and Warsaw youth was still very much under their influence even though, obviously, it had no sympathy for either Hitler or Mussolini. Its reasoning was confused. The Polish nation was oppressed by the Germans; so, one had to fight. When Beta declared that they were merely countering German nationalism with Polish nationalism, his comrades shrugged their shoulders. When he asked what values they wanted to defend or on what principles Europe was to be built in the future, he got no reply.

Here indeed was a well of darkness: no hope of libera-

tion, and no vision of tomorrow. A battle for battle's sake. A return to the pre-war status quo, bad though it had been, was to be the reward for those who might live to see the victory of the Anglo-Saxons. This lack of any sort of vision led him to see the world as a place in which nothing existed outside of naked force. It was a world of decline and fall. And the liberals of the older generation, mouthing nineteenth-century phrases about respect for man—while all about them hundreds of thousands of people were being massacred—were fossil remains.

Beta had no faith, religious or other, and he had the courage to admit it in his poems. He ran off his first volume of verse on a mimeograph machine. No sooner had I received his book and pried apart its sticky pages than I realized that here was a real poet. The reading of his hexameters was not, however, a joyous undertaking. The streets of occupied Warsaw were gloomy. Underground meetings in cold and smoky rooms, when one listened for the sound of Gestapo boots on the stairs, were like grim rituals conducted in catacombs. We were living at the bottom of a huge crater, and the sky far up above was the only element we shared with the other people on the face of the earth. All this was in his verse—grayness, fog, gloom, and death. Still his was not a poetry of grievance but of icy stoicism. The poems of this entire generation lacked faith. Their fundamental motif was a call to arms and a vision of death. Unlike young poets of other epochs, they did not see death as a romantic theme but as a real presence. Almost all these young writers of Warsaw died before the end of the War either at the hands of the Gestapo or in battle. None of them, however, questioned the meaning of sacrifice to the same degree as did he. "There will remain after us only scrap-iron and the hollow, jeering laughter of generations," he wrote in one of his verses.

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His poetry had in it none of that affirmation of the world that is present in the sympathy with which the artist portrays, for example, an apple or a tree. What his verse disclosed was a profoundly disturbed equilibrium. One can divine a great deal from a work of art, e.g. that the world of Bach or of Breughel was ordered, arranged hierarchically. Modern art reflects the disequilibrium of modern society in that it so often springs from a blind passion vainly seeking to sate itself in form, color, or sound. An artist can contemplate sensual beauty only when he loves all that surrounds him on earth. But if all he feels is loathing at the discrepancy between what he would wish the world to be and what it is in reality, then he is incapable of standing still and beholding. He is ashamed of reflexes of love; he is condemned to perpetual motion, to a restless sketching of discontinued, broken observations of nature. Like a sleep-walker, he loses his balance as soon as he stops moving. Beta's poems were whirlpools of fog, saved from complete chaos only by the dry rhythm of his hexameters. This character of his poetry must be attributed at least in part to the fact that he belonged to an ill-fated generation in an ill-fated nation, but he had thousands of brothers in all the countries of Europe, all of them passionate and deceived.

Unlike his comrades who acted out of loyalty to their fatherland, on Christian or vague metaphysical grounds, he needed a rational basis for action. When the Gestapo arrested him in 1943, it was rumored in our city that he was taken as the result of an "accident" to one of the left-wing groups. If life in Warsaw was little reminiscent of paradise, then Beta now found himself in the lower circle of hell: the "concentration universe." In what was then the normal order of events, he spent several months in jail before being shipped off to Auschwitz. Incredibly, he

managed to survive there for two years. When the Red Army drew near, he and the other prisoners were transported to Dachau, and there they were eventually set free by the Americans. We learned of all this only after the War, when he published a volume of stories recounting his experiences.

Immediately after his release he settled in Munich. It was there in 1946 that the book, *We Were in Auschwitz*, written by him and two of his fellow-prisoners, appeared. It was dedicated to "The American Seventh Army which brought us liberation from the Dachau-Allach concentration camp." On his return to Poland, he published his volume of short stories.

I have read many books about concentration camps, but not one of them is as terrifying as his stories because he never moralizes, he relates. A special social hierarchy comes into being in a "concentration universe." At the top stand the camp authorities; after them come prisoners trusted by the administration; next come the prisoners clever enough to find means of getting sufficient food to keep up their strength. At the bottom stand the weak and clumsy, who daily tumble lower as their undernourished organisms fail to bear up under the work. In the end they die, either in the gas chamber or from an injection of phenol. Obviously this hierarchy does not include the masses of people killed immediately upon their arrival, i.e. the Jews, except for those who were single and especially fit for work. In his stories, Beta clearly defines his social position. He belonged to the caste of clever and healthy prisoners, and he *brags* about his cunning and agility. Life in a concentration camp requires constant alertness; every moment can decide one's life or death. In order to react appropriately at all times, one must know where danger lies and how to escape it: sometimes by

blind obedience, sometimes by calculated negligence, sometimes by blackmail or bribery. One of his stories consists of an account of a series of dangers he dodges in the course of a single day:

1. A guard offers him some bread. To get it he has to jump a ditch that constitutes the line of watch. Guards, under orders to shoot prisoners who cross it, receive three days' leave plus five marks for everyone they kill beyond this limit. Beta, understanding the guard's intentions, refuses the bait.

2. A guard overhears him telling another prisoner the news of the fall of Kiev. Beta forestalls a report of the offense by giving the guard, through an intermediary, an old watch as a bribe.

3. He slips out of the hands of a dangerous camp overseer, or kapo, by a quick execution of an order. The fragment I quote below concerns some Greek prisoners who were too weak to march properly. As a punishment, sticks were tied to their legs. They are supervised by a Russian, Andrej.

I leap back, struck from behind by a bicycle. I whip off my cap. The Unterscharführer, a landlord from Harmenze, jumps off the bicycle red with irritation.

"What's happening in this crazy unit? Why are those people walking around with sticks tied to their legs? It's time for work!"

"They don't know how to walk!"

"If they don't know how to walk, kill them! And you, do you know another goose has disappeared?"

"Why are you standing there like a dumb dog?" the kapo screamed at me. "Tell Andrej to settle with them. Los!"

I ran down the path . . .

"Andrej, finish them off! Kapo's orders!"

Andrej seized a stick and struck with all his might. The

EPILOGUE (many trains came to Auschwitz that evening.
The transport totaled 15,000 people)

As we return to the camp, the stars begin to fade, the sky becomes ever more translucent and lifts above us, the night grows light. A clear, hot day announces itself.

From the crematoriums, broad columns of smoke rise steadily and merge above into a gigantic, black river that turns exceedingly slowly in the sky over Birkenau and disappears beyond the forests, in the direction of Trzebinia. The transport is already burning.

We pass an SS squad, moving with mechanized weapons to relieve the guard. They march evenly, shoulder to shoulder, one mass, one will.

"Und Morgen die ganze Welt . . ." they sing at the top of their lungs.

Beta is a nihilist in his stories, but by that I do not mean that he is amoral. On the contrary, his nihilism results from an ethical passion, from disappointed *love* of the world and of humanity. He wants to go the limit in describing what he saw; he wants to depict with complete accuracy a world in which there is no longer any place for indignation. The human species is naked in his stories, stripped of those tendencies toward good which last only so long as the habit of civilization lasts. But the habit of civilization is fragile; a sudden change in circumstances, and humanity reverts to its primeval savagery. How deluded are those respectable citizens who, striding along the streets of English or American cities, consider themselves men of virtue and goodness! Of course, it is easy to condemn a woman who would abandon her child in order to save her own life. This is a monstrous act. Yet a woman who, while reading on her comfortable sofa, judges her unfortunate sister should pause to consider whether fear

would not be stronger than love within her, if she too were faced with horror. Perhaps it would, perhaps not—who can foretell?

But the "concentration universe" also contained many human beings who spurred themselves to the noblest acts, who died to protect others. None of them figure in Beta's stories. His attention is fixed not on man—man is simply an animal that wants to live—but on "concentration society." Prisoners are ruled by a special ethic: it is permissible to harm others, provided they harm you first. Beyond this unwritten contract, every man saves himself as best he can. We would search in vain for pictures of human solidarity in Beta's book. The truth about his behavior in Auschwitz, according to his fellow-prisoners, is utterly different from what his stories would lead one to suppose; he acted heroically, and was a model of comradeship. But he wants to be *tough*; and he does not spare himself in his desire to observe soberly and impartially. He is afraid of lies; and it would be a lie to present himself as an observer who judged, when in reality he, though striving to preserve his integrity, felt subjected to all the laws of degradation. As narrator, he endows himself with the qualities which pass as assets in a concentration camp: cleverness and enterprise. Thanks to the element of "class" war between the weak and the strong, wherein he did not deviate from the truth, his stories are extraordinarily brutal.

Liberated from Dachau, he became acquainted with the life of refugees in Western Germany. It was like an extension of the life in the camp. Demoralization, thievery, drunkenness, corruption—all the evil forces set loose in man by the years of Hitlerism continued to triumph. The callous policy of the occupying powers toward the millions of recent slaves aroused his anger. Here, then, was

X X || the German bourgeoisie baffled by what had happened, American soldiers and officers, etc. Under his temperate words lurked an immensity of bitterness against a civilization whose fruit was Hitlerism. He set up equations: Christianity equals capitalism equals Hitlerism. The theme of the book was the *finale* of civilization. Its tone can be summed up in a single protest: "You told me about culture, about religion, about morality; and look what they led to!"

For Beta, as for many of his companions, the reign of Hitler was the culmination of the capitalist era in Europe. Its collapse announced the victory of the Revolution on a world scale. The future might mean further striving, but the turning point was passed. Almost all the books written in the early post-war years by young men like him developed the theme of man's impotence against the laws of History; even people with the best of intentions had fallen into the machine of Nazi terror and been converted into frightened cave men. The reading public was faced with a dilemma, a choice between the old civilization which had taken its evilness out on their hides, or the new civilization which could arise only through the victorious might of the East. So powerful is the hold success has over man's imagination that it seems not to result from human design plus favorable circumstances, but to reflect the highest law of the age. (Yet Russia and her seemingly invincible order had been merely a hair's-breadth away from defeat in the Second World War.)

The Stony World was the last book in which Beta tried to employ artistic tools, like restraint, hidden irony, masked anger, etc., recognized as effective in Western literature. He quickly realized that all his concern about "art" was superfluous. On the contrary, the harder he stepped down on the pedal, the more he was praised.

Loud, violent, clear, biased—this is what his writing was expected to be. As Party writers (he entered the Party) began to outbid each other in an effort to be accessible and simple, the boundary between literature and propaganda began to fade. He started to introduce more and more direct journalism into his writing. He discharged his venom in attacks on capitalism, i.e. on all that was happening outside the sphere of the Imperium. He would take an item from the news about warfare in Malaya or hunger in India, for example, and turn it into something halfway between an article and a snapshot.

I saw him for the last time in 1950. He had changed a great deal since the days before his arrest by the Gestapo. His former shyness and artificial humility were gone. Whereas once he had walked with a slight stoop and a lowered head, he was now a straight-backed man with an air of self-assurance. He was dry, concentrated on his work. The bashful poet had become a thorough homo politicus. At that time he was already a well-known propagandist. Every week one of his malignant articles appeared in a government weekly. He visited Eastern Germany frequently to gather news stories. No reporter can serve a cause as well as an author with a period of disinterested writing in his background; and Beta used all his knowledge of the writer's trade in his poisonous articles against America.

Looking at this esteemed nihilist, I would often think how like a smooth slope any form of art is, and of the amount of effort the artist must expend in order to keep from sliding back to where the footing is easier. The inner command that forces him to this effort is, at the core, irrational. By refusing to recognize disinterested art, the New Faith destroys this inner command. Beta was a real writer in his stories about the concentration camp;

though he questioned all man's inner imperatives, he counterfeited nothing, he did not try to please anybody. Then he introduced a single particle of politics and, like a supersaturated solution, his writing crystallized, became thereafter transparent and stereotyped. But one must not oversimplify. Many great authors, among them Swift, Stendhal, Tolstoi, wrote out of political passion. One might even say that political conviction, an important social message a writer wants to communicate to his readers, adds strength to his work. The essential difference between the great writers who criticized the political institutions of their day and people of Beta's type seems to lie in the total non-conformity of the former. They acted in opposition to their environment; he, writing, listened for the applause of his Party comrades.

For all their violence and precision of language, his articles were so dull and one-dimensional that this debasement of a gifted prose-writer stirred my curiosity. He was certainly intelligent enough to understand that he was wasting his talent. In conversation with several literary authorities whose word determines a writer's place in the official hierarchy, I asked why such measures were being applied to him. Surely the interests of the Party did not require it to reduce him to a rag. He was certainly more useful as a writer of stories and novels; to force him to write articles meant bad management of available artistic resources. "No one makes him write articles," came the reply, "that's the whole misfortune. The editor of the weekly can't drive him away. He himself insists on writing them. He thinks there is no time, today, for art, that you have to act on the masses more directly and elementally. He wants to be as useful as possible." This was a somewhat hypocritical answer. The Party constantly stresses its desire for good literature; at the same time, it

creates such a tense atmosphere of propaganda that writers feel compelled to resort to the most primitive and oversimplified literary techniques. Yet it was true that Beta *himself* wanted to devote all his time to journalism; although he was a highly qualified specialist, he seized upon work that was easy for the most ordinary drudge. His mind, like that of so many Eastern intellectuals, was impelled toward self-annihilation.

The psychological process that is set into motion as soon as such an intellectual takes up his pen is fairly complex. Let us imagine he is about to describe a certain event in international politics. He sees that phenomena are inter-related functionally rather than causally. Therefore, to present the event honestly, he would have to penetrate the motives of the opposing forces and the necessities which govern them—in short, to analyze it from every side. Then anger comes to his rescue, introducing order into the tangle of interdependencies and releasing him from the obligation to analyze. This anger against the *self-deception* that anything at all depends on man's will is, simultaneously, a fear of falling prey to one's own naiveness. Since the world is brutal, one must reduce everything to the simplest and most brutal factors. The author understands that what he is doing is far from accurate: people's stupidity or people's good intentions influence events no less than do the necessities of the economic struggle. But he takes his vengeance upon mankind (upon others and upon himself) by demonstrating that man is dominated by a few elementary laws; at the same time, he feeds his sense of superiority and proves himself acute and strong enough to dispense with "prejudices."

In his political articles, just as in his concentration camp stories, Beta's urge to simplify, to strip off all illusions, to present everyone and everything nakedly

was always predominant. But if one continues to follow this urge one reaches a point at which the intellect has nothing more to say. Words become a war-cry, an imperfect substitute for a clenched fist. Beta did arrive at the stage where words no longer satisfied him; he could not write novels or stories because they would last through time and so could not answer his need for a cry to battle. The movement to which he was subjected went on accelerating: faster and faster, greater and greater doses of hatred and of dizziness. The shapes of the world became simpler and simpler, until at last an individual tree, an individual man, lost all importance and he found himself not among palpable things, but among political concepts. His feverish addiction to journalism is not hard to explain. The writing of articles acted on him like a narcotic. When he put down his pen he felt he had accomplished something. It didn't matter that there wasn't a single thought of his own in these articles; it didn't matter that thousands of second-rate journalists from the Elbe to the Pacific were saying exactly the same thing. He was active in the sense that a soldier marching in formation is active.

"Und Morgen die ganze Welt" sang the SS guards moving against the background of the black smoke pouring out of the crematoriums of Auschwitz. Nazism was collective insanity; yet the German masses followed Hitler for profound psychological reasons. A great economic and social crisis gave birth to Nazism. The young German of that day saw all about him the decay and chaos of the Weimar Republic, the degradation of millions of unemployed, the disgusting aberrations of the cultured elite, the prostitution of his sisters, and the fight of man against man for money. When the hope of socialism vanished, he accepted the other philosophy of history that was offered him, a philosophy that was a parody of Leninist-Stalinist

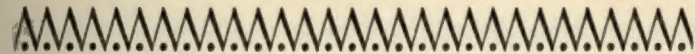
doctrine. It is possible that the German who locked Beta into the concentration camp was, like him, a disappointed lover of the world who longed for harmony and purity, discipline and faith. He despised those of his countrymen who refused to join in the joyous march. Pitiful remnants of humanitarianism, they mumbled that the new movement violated moral principles. Here, immediate and in sight, was the salvation of Germany and the reconstruction of the world. And in this unique moment—a moment that occurs once in a thousand years—these whining believers in that miserable Jesus dared to mention their trifling moral scruples! How hard it was to fight for a new and better order—if among one's own people one still encountered such infantile prejudice!

Beta also could see a new and better order within his grasp. He believed in, and demanded, earthly salvation. He hated the enemies of human happiness and insisted that they must be destroyed. Are they not evil-doers who, when the planet enters a new epoch, dare to maintain that to imprison people, or to terrify them into professions of political faith, is not quite nice? Whom do we imprison? Class enemies, traitors, rabble. And the faith we force on people, is it not true faith? History, History, is with us! We can see its living, explosive flame! Small and blind, indeed, are the people who, instead of comprehending the whole of the gigantic task, squander their time on worry about insignificant details!

Despite his talent and intelligence, Beta did not perceive the dangers inherent in an exciting march. On the contrary, his talent, intelligence, and ardor drove him to action while ordinary people temporized and rendered unto an unloved Caesar only so much as was absolutely necessary. He willingly shouldered responsibility. He did not pause to consider what a philosophy of historic change be-

comes once it sets out to conquer the world by the might of armies. "And tomorrow the world!"

A few months after I wrote this portrait, I learned of Beta's death. He was found one morning in his home in Warsaw. The gas jet was turned on. Those who observed him in the last months of his feverish activity were of the opinion that the discrepancy between what he said in his public statements and what his quick mind could perceive was increasing daily. He behaved too nervously for them not to suspect that he was acutely aware of this contrast. Moreover, he frequently spoke of the "Mayakovski case." Numerous articles appeared in the press written by his friends, writers of Poland and Eastern Germany. His coffin, draped with a red flag, was lowered into the grave to the sound of the "Internationale" as the Party bid farewell to its most promising young writer.



CHAPTER VI

Gamma, the Slave of History

IN speaking of Gamma, I must evoke a picture of the town in which I went to school and later to the University. There are certain places in Europe which are particularly troublesome to history and geography teachers: Trieste, the Saar Basin, Schleswig-Holstein. Just such a sore-spot is the city of Vilna. In the last half-century it belonged to various countries and saw various armies in its streets. With each change, painters were put to work repainting street and office signs into the new official language. With each change, the inhabitants were issued new passports and were obliged to conform to new laws and injunctions. The city was ruled in turn by the Russians, Germans, Lithuanians, Poles, again the Lithuanians, again the Germans, and again the Russians. Today it is the capital of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, a fancy title designed to conceal the blunt fact that Russia is effectively carrying out the precepts of the Tsars in regard to territorial expansion.

During my school and university years the city belonged to Poland. It lies in a land of forests, lakes, and streams, concealed in a woody dale. Travelers see it emerge unexpectedly from behind the trees. The steeples of its scores of Catholic churches, built by Italian architects in the

baroque style, contrast in their gold and white with the blackness of the surrounding pines. Legend tells us that a certain Lithuanian ruler, hunting in the wilds, fell asleep by a fire and had a prophetic dream. Under the spell of his dream, he constructed a city on the spot where he had slept. Throughout the many centuries of its existence, Vilna never ceased to be a city of the forests. All about it lay an abandoned province of Europe whose people spoke Polish, Lithuanian, and Byelorussian, or a mixture of the three, and retained many customs and habits long since forgotten elsewhere. I speak in the past tense because today this city of my childhood is as lava-inundated as was Pompeii. Most of its former inhabitants were either murdered by the Nazis, deported to Siberia, or re-settled by the Russians in the western territories from which the Germans were expelled. Other people, born thousands of miles away, now walk its streets; and for them, its churches, founded by Lithuanian princes and Polish kings, are useless.

Then, however, no one dreamt of mass murder and mass deportations. And the life of the town unfolded in a rhythm that was slower and less subject to change than are forms of government or borders of kingdoms. The University, the Bishops' Palace, and the Cathedral were the most esteemed edifices in the city. On Sundays, crowds filled the narrow street leading to the old city gate upon which, in a chapel, was housed the picture of the Virgin known for its miraculous powers. Vilna was a blend of Italian architecture and the Near East. In the little streets of the Jewish quarter on a Friday evening, through the windows one could see families seated in the gleam of candlelight. The words of the Hebrew prophets resounded in the ancient synagogues, for this was one of the most important centers of Jewish literature and learning in

Europe. Great fairs on Catholic holidays attracted peasants from neighboring villages to the city, where they would display their wooden wares and medicinal herbs on the ground. No fair was complete without obwarzanki (hard, round, little cakes threaded on a string); and no matter where they were baked, they always bore the name of the little town whose only claims to fame were its bakeries and its one-time "bear academy," an institution where bears were trained. In the winter, the steep streets were filled with boys and girls on skis, their red and green jerkins flashing against a snow that became rosy in the frosty sun.

The University building had thick walls and low, vaulted classrooms. The uninitiated were bound to get lost in the labyrinth of its shaded courtyards. Its arcades and halls might just as easily have been located in Padua or Bologna. Once Jesuits used to teach the sons of the nobility in this building; but at the time when I was studying there, lay professors were teaching young people whose parents were for the most part small landholders, tenant-farmers, or Jewish merchants.

It was in that building that I met Gamma. He was an ungainly, red-faced boy, coarse and boisterous. If Vilna itself was provincial, then those who left their backward villages to come there to study were doubly so. Muddy country roads made communication practically impossible in spring and autumn; peasants' horses were seized by fits of terror at the sight of an automobile; in many villages, homes were still lit by twig torches. Home handicrafts and lumbering were the only occupations, outside of farming, that the people knew. Gamma came from the country. His father, a retired officer of the Polish army, had a farm. The family had lived in those regions for generations, and its name can be found in the registers of the lower nobility of that land. Gamma's mother was Russian and he grew

up bi-lingual. Unlike the majority of his companions who were Catholic, he was Orthodox, a faith he inherited from his mother.

Our first conversations did not portend a close understanding between us. True, we were bound by a common interest in literature, but I was offended by his behavior, by his piercing voice—he just did not know how to speak in a normal tone—and by the opinions he uttered. He always carried a heavy cane of the type that was the favorite weapon of young people given to anti-Semitic extravagances. His violent anti-Semitism was, in fact, his political program. As for myself, I despised such nationalists; I thought them dangerous blockheads who, in order not to think, were raising a loud hue and cry, and stirring up mutual hatreds in various national groups. There are certain conversations that stick in one's memory; and sometimes what one remembers, even more than the actual words, is what one was looking at then. When I recall our talk about racism, I see his legs, the round paving stones of the street, and his cane leaning against the gutter. He spoke of blood and earth, and of how power should be vested not in the whole of the citizenry regardless of race or native tongue, but in the dominant national group, who should take measures to safeguard its blood against contamination. Perhaps his nationalist zeal was an effort to compensate for his own deficiencies; his mixed, half-Russian origin and his Orthodox faith must surely have caused him much unpleasantness at the hands of his provincial and primitive schoolmates. His voice rang out, belligerent and permeated by a sense of his own superiority. My arguments against racist theories awakened a profound disgust in him; he considered me a person whose thinking was an obstacle to action. As for him, he wanted action. This was the year 1931. We were both very young, very poor, and

unaware of the unusual events we were to be thrust into later.

I visited him in 1949 in one of the capitals of Western Europe where he was the ambassador of Red Poland, and a trusted member of the Party. His residence was guarded by a heavy wrought-iron gate. A few minutes after one rang, an eye would appear at the aperture, hinges would rattle, and one would see the big courtyard with a few shining cars in it.

To the left of the entrance stood the sentry-box of the chauffeur on duty, who was armed with a pistol against any eventuality. Standing in the middle of the courtyard, one perceived the proportions of the façade and the wings. This was one of the most beautiful palaces in that beautiful capital. A certain eighteenth-century aristocrat had built it for his mistress. The interior retained its former character; the big rooms, their walls covered with gilded wainscoting, contained furniture, rugs and Gobelin tapestries of that century. Gamma received me in the midst of gilt and marble; he was cordial; the years had worn the roughness off his gestures, and injected a slightly artificial sweetness into his manner. In this palace he had his apartment, reception salons, and offices. Many of the most eminent representatives of Western art and science visited him frequently. A well-known English scholar called him a charming man, liberal and free of fanaticism. This opinion was shared by many members of the intellectual elite, among them Catholics, liberals, and even conservatives. As for the luminaries of Western Communist literature, they admired him both because he was an emissary of the East they worshipped, and because he was extremely acute in his Marxist appraisal of literary problems. Obviously, they did not know his past nor the price one pays in order that an unseasoned youth, raised in one of the most for-

saken corners of Europe, may become the master of an eighteenth-century palace.

Gamma felt fine in this Western capital. He loved to visit night spots and cabarets and was so well-known in them that whenever he entered, the maître d'hôtel would lead him ceremoniously to the best table. Seeing that nonchalant man watching people through narrowed eyes from behind champagne bottles ranged in ice buckets, one could easily have mistaken him for an English squire who had managed to salvage something of his fortune. Tall, slightly stooped, he had the long, ruddy face of a man who has spent much time with guns and dogs. He looked very much like what he really was: a member of the lower Polish nobility, which once hunted passionately, drank passionately, fulfilled its political duties by delivering orations plentifully interspersed with Latin, and quelled opposition by a choral shout of protest or, when necessary, by fencing duels amid overturned benches and tables. The freedom of his gestures was the freedom of a man conscious of his privileges. Toward his subordinates who, as part of their job, often accompanied him on his nocturnal expeditions, he behaved with benevolent disdain. In the office he would at times, out of an excess of high spirits, pull the noses of the embassy secretaries or give them a resounding slap on the behind. But he was also prone to attacks of unbridled anger. Then his ruddy face would turn purple, his blue eyes would become bloodshot, and his voice recapture its former piercing, savage note. No wonder that Western diplomats, scholars, and artists considered him a none too psychologically-complicated *bon viveur*. Even his tactlessness seemed to stem from a broad, open nature that offended at times out of excessive sincerity but that was, in any case, free of guile. The lack of

embarrassment with which he spoke of matters considered touchy by other Communists won the confidence of his listeners. This was no Communist—they would agree after a visit to the embassy—or if he was, then how broad and civilized his outlook! What they thought was naturalness was for him sheer artifice. Conscious of his resemblance to a country squire, he used his simple, good-natured mannerisms with deliberate skill. Only those who knew him very intimately saw the cold calculation that lay beneath his feigned effusiveness. In his bosom he carried an invisible dagger with which he could strike unexpected and treacherous blows. But at the same time, this dagger, from which he was never parted either by day or by night, chilled his heart. He was not a happy man.

Wearing his most enchanting smile, he convinced diplomats suspected of not wanting to return behind the iron curtain of his personal benevolence toward them. He thundered against the idiots in Warsaw who did not understand how matters had to be handled in the West. After which he proposed a joint excursion to Warsaw by air, for a few days, to explain to those fools how to settle some question that had occasioned the exchange of numerous telegrams. The delinquent reflected: Gamma's good will was obvious; every trip to Warsaw was a proof of loyalty toward the government and so prolonged one's stay abroad; and, as far as he could see, no risk was involved. In a festive mood, exchanging little jokes with Gamma, the diplomat boarded the plane. No sooner had he reached the airfield in Warsaw than he realized that he had fallen into a trap. Having accomplished his mission, Gamma took the first plane going in the other direction. To supervise the consciences of his personnel was not the least of his duties; it was, in fact, an honor, a

sign of trust. His dagger always worked best whenever the talents of a psychologist were required, that is, in cases normally assigned to the political police.

But let me return to the past. Then, he did not know the taste of champagne. Faithful to ancient tradition, the University cafeteria in which we ate bore, as did many institutions of the University, a Latin name, *mensa*. The meals cost very little, but were as bad as they were cheap. Consequently they were the favorite subject of satiric verse which sang the unparalleled hardness of the meat balls and the wateriness of the soups. Amid the smoke of bad cigarettes, we used to sit there discussing poetry and reciprocally meting out laurels that interested no one but ourselves. Still, our group of beginning writers was to interest many people in the future and to play an important role in the history of our country. While our comrades were concerned with their studies or with winning good jobs in the future, we longed for fame and dreamt of reshaping the world. As so often happens, what intelligence and talent we had was paid for by a disturbance of our internal balance. In each of us were deep wounds dating from our childhood or adolescence, different in each of us but identical in one basic element, in something that made it impossible for us to live in harmony with others of our age, something that made us feel "different" and hence drove us to seek compensations. The subjective motives that breed immoderate ambition are not easy to track down. Gamma was, I believe, extremely sensitive about his family. Another factor that might have affected him deeply was something that occurred when he was a schoolboy: he accidentally killed a friend while hunting. The feeling of guilt that arose as a result of this accident probably helped to mold his future decisions.

Perhaps even more important was a disturbance of our

social equilibrium. We were all in revolt against our environment. None of us was of the proletariat. We derived from the intelligentsia, which in that part of Europe was a synonym for the impoverished nobility or the lower middle class. Gamma's father was, as I said, a retired officer; George, a poet, was the son of a provincial lawyer; Theodore, a poet (later shot by the Polish underground as a Party propagandist), bore an aristocratic name although his mother was an employee in a bank; Henryk, an orator, writer, and politician (later shot by the Germans), was the son of a railroad engineer who prided himself on bearing one of the most well-known names in Poland; Stefan, a poet who later became a prominent economist, came of an unsuccessful, half-German mercantile family; my family belonged to the Lithuanian nobility, but my father had migrated from the country to the city to become an engineer. The revolt against one's environment is usually *shame* of one's environment. The social status of all of us was undefined. Our problems were those of the twentieth century, but the traditions of our families bound us to concepts and customs we thought ridiculous and reactionary. We were suspended in a void, and in this we were no exceptions. The country had never experienced a real industrial revolution; the middle class was weak; the worker was for some people a brutal dirty-faced creature who worked hard or drank hard, and for others a myth, an object of worship. Our society was divided into an "intelligentsia" as opposed to the "people." To the latter belonged the workers and peasants. We were of the "intelligentsia," but we rebelled against it because it was oriented toward the past rather than the future. One could compare our situation, in some respects, to that of the sons of impoverished first families of the South in the United States. We were adrift, and we could find no place

to anchor. Some people called us the "intellectuals' club" in an effort to oppose the intellectuals to the "intelligentsia."

These were years of acute economic crisis. Unemployment spread throughout wide spheres of the population. The university youth, living without money and without hope of finding work after finishing his studies, was of a radical temper. This radicalism took two forms. Some, like Gamma, at the beginning of his stay at the University, became intensely nationalistic. They saw the answer to all difficulties in a vaguely defined "national revolution." In practice, this meant a hostile attitude toward their Jewish comrades, who as future lawyers and doctors would be their professional competitors. Against these nationalists emerged the "left" whose program, depending on the group, vacillated between socialism and a variation on the New Deal. During annual elections to "The Fraternal Aid," which was something in the nature of an autonomous student government that administered student houses, the *mensa*, etc., these two camps waged battles with words and sometimes with fists.

Both the Communists and the government tried to win over the "left," if I may use this term to describe a conglomeration of differing groups. Pilsudski's mild semi-dictatorship, lacking a clear-cut program, timidly courted the favor of the young people in an effort to recruit new leaders. Seeing the growing radicalism of the universities, it wooed the "left" by promising reforms. For a certain time, our group was the mainstay of the government's attempts to consolidate its position among the university youth. Our friends, Stefan and Henryk, were considered the most promising of the young "government" politicians in the country. But these attempts ended in failure. "The most promising young politicians" broke with the govern-

ment and went further to the left; whereas the mechanism of events pushed the government ever more to the right. Nationalism—if not downright totalitarianism in a local edition—began to gain ever greater victories. The government abandoned its support of the patchwork "government left" and started to flirt with the nationalists.

Let this suffice as a general picture of pre-war politics in the now lava-deluged city of Vilna. My account covers many years. During that time, every spring just when we had to study for exams the trees would turn green; and ever since, nowhere else has the green seemed so joyous to me. On the river, little boats appeared taking trippers out to nearby beaches, and long logs floated out of the forests down to the sawmills. Young couples, holding hands, strolled under the arcades of the University. To rise before daybreak, take a kayak at the landing stage and, in the light of the rising sun, paddle on the river whose swift waters pushed between sandy cliffs and clumps of pines—that was pure joy. We often made excursions to nearby lakes in whose midst whole archipelagos of islands thrust up like big bouquets. The grass on the islands was buoyant, untouched by human feet; nightingales shouted in the willows. We would swarm into the water and swim out, troubling the reflections of clouds and trees on its smooth surface; or we would float on our backs in the water, look up at the sky and sing happy, inarticulate songs. We lived through betrayals of love, sorrows over failed exams, mutual intrigues and envies. Our articles and poems appeared in print. Over the hard meat balls in the *mensa*, the topics of conversation changed. Disputes over the significance of metaphor in poetry yielded to discussions of the theories of Georges Sorel, and later Marx and Lenin.

Gamma parted with the nationalists rather quickly; still, he had little sympathy for the "government left" or for the Catholic left. He wrote poetry which was printed in magazines issued by our group; but his poems, unlike those written by Theodore, George, or myself, were the object of neither attack nor praise. The critics received them in silence. He had that mastery of technique that modern poetry requires, but what he wrote was lifeless. Those he envied wrote, I believe, stupidly; but their style was individual, their rhythmic incantations expressed the authors' feelings, their fury and sarcasm irritated the readers, but caught their attention. Gamma's poems were studied arrangements of carefully selected metaphors that said nothing.

Our group became more and more radical. After the collapse of the "government left," the question arose: what "left"? Social democracy in our country shared the faults of all the social democratic parties of the continent—it was weak and willing to compromise. Russia began to figure in our conversations ever more frequently. We lived less than a hundred miles from the borders of the Soviet Union, yet we had no more knowledge of it than did the inhabitants of Brazil. The border was hermetically sealed. We were situated on the peripheries of a world that differed from the East as much as if it were another planet. That Eastern world, which we knew only from books, seemed to us like a world of progress when we compared it with conditions we could observe at first hand. Weighing the matter rationally, we were convinced that the future lay with the East. Our country was in a state of paralysis. The masses had no say in the government. The social filter was so contrived that the peasants' and workers' youth had no access to secondary schools and universities because the expenses, though low, were never-

theless beyond their means. Infinitely complicated national minority problems (and our country had a high percentage of minorities) were resolved in the most chauvinistic spirit. The nationalist movement, supported by the petty bourgeoisie and the penniless intelligentsia, drove the government to ever sharper discrimination. The country was heading toward a variation on what was happening in neighboring Germany, the same Germany that threatened war and the destruction of Poland. Can one wonder that we looked to Russia as the country where a solution had been found to all the problems that beset us, as the country which alone could save us from the misfortunes which we could so easily visualize as we listened to Hitler's speeches over the radio?

Still, it was not easy to become a Communist, for Communism meant a complete revision of one's concepts of nationality. For centuries Poland had been in a state of permanent war with Russia. There was a time when Polish kings had led their troops to the very gates of the "Rome of the East." Then the scale tipped in favor of Moscow until at last, throughout the whole nineteenth century, the greater part of Poland was under Tsarist rule. In accepting Communism, one agreed to consider those old conflicts between the two nations to have been conflicts between their ruling classes only. It was necessary to forget the past. One conceded that Poland—after its short period of independence resulting from the Versailles peace—would, in the event of the victory of Communism, become once again a province of Russia. Poland's eastern territories, and the city in which we lived, were to be incorporated directly into the Soviet Union because Moscow regarded them as part of the Byelorussian and Ukrainian republics. As for the rest, that obviously would become one more republic in the Union. Polish

Communists made no attempt to conceal that such was the Party program.

To renounce loyalty towards one's country and to eradicate patriotic feelings inculcated in school and in the University—this was the price of entrance upon the road of progress. Not everyone was prepared to pay this price. Our group disintegrated. "The most promising young government politicians," Stefan and Henryk, became Stalinists; George and I withdrew. Those who crossed the line thought the rest of us weak poets, bookworms incapable of action. Perhaps their opinion was not far from the truth. I am not sure, however, that cast-iron consistency is the greatest of human virtues.

Gamma became a Stalinist. I think he felt uneasy writing his passionless poetry. He was not made for literature. Whenever he settled down before a sheet of paper he sensed a void in himself. He was incapable of experiencing the intense joys of a writer, either those of the creative process or those of work accomplished. The period between his nationalism and his Stalinism was for him a limbo, a period of senseless trials and disillusionment.

The Communist Party was illegal in our country. Membership in it was punishable under a paragraph of the law that defined any attempt to deprive Poland of any part of her territory as a criminal offense. Party leaders, realizing they had nothing to gain at the time from illegal activity, tried to reach and sway public opinion through sympathizers not directly involved in the Party. A number of publications appeared in Poland which followed the Party line, adapting it to the level of unwary readers. The group in which Gamma found himself started to edit one such periodical. Contacts with Party messengers took place in secret, often on trips to the neighboring forests. By now, most of the members of our original group had completed

their course of studies. This was the period of war in Spain and of the Communist front "in defense of culture," when the Party was trying to rally all the forces of liberalism under a popular slogan.

Gamma wrote articles, spoke at meetings, marched in May Day parades. He acted. When the authorities closed down the periodical, arrested the editors and put them on trial, he, together with the others, found himself in the dock. The trial created a great sensation in the city; it was a considerable blow to the government because it showed that this youth, on which it had counted most, had rapidly evolved toward Communism. Many liberals were incensed by the severity of the authorities toward these university graduates, these young doctors of law or philosophy. The best lawyers in the city defended them. The accused argued and lied convincingly and often; they were mentally better trained than the prosecutor, nor did they yield to him in knowledge of the law. They received mild sentences. Gamma was acquitted for lack of evidence.

During the years that immediately preceded the outbreak of the Second World War, Gamma worked at his profession, doing literary research. He wrote a book on the structure of the short story which in no way betrayed his political convictions. It would have been equally difficult to discover any particularly revolutionary notions in the two volumes of verse that he published. He married, and a daughter was born to him. His life was a constant struggle against financial troubles. Because he was known to be a Communist, he could not hope for a government position, so he supported himself by occasional literary jobs. From time to time, he published a temperate article about literature in leftist publications. He awaited his hour.

That hour came shortly. Hitler attacked Poland, and

his march was swift. The Red Army moved to meet him and occupied, in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, those territories which the Party program had always openly proclaimed should be joined to the Union. The effect of these attacks was like that of a fire in an ant-hill. Thousands of hungry and frightened people clogged the roads: soldiers of the beaten army trying to get home, policemen getting rid of their uniforms, women searching for their husbands, groups of men who had wanted to fight but who had not found arms. This was a time of universal migration. Throngs of people fled from the East to German occupation in the West; similar throngs fled from the Germans to the East and Soviet rule. The end of the State was marked by a chaos that could occur perhaps only in the twentieth century.

Gamma was mobilized but he spent only a few days in the army, so quickly did defeat come. The Soviet Union magnanimously offered the city of Vilna to Lithuania, which was to enjoy the friendship of its mighty neighbor for a year before it was finally swallowed up. Gamma, craving action, moved to Lvov, the largest city under Soviet occupation. There he met other pro-Stalinist writers, and they quickly organized. With the support of the new authorities, they acquired a house in which they set up a canteen and living quarters; and there they went to work on the new type of writing—which consisted mostly of translations from Russian, or else not overly fastidious propaganda.

In these new circumstances Gamma very quickly won the trust of the literary specialists who had been sent from Russia to supervise the "cultural clean-up" of the newly acquired territories. Many of his companions, although theoretically Communist, were torn by internal conflicts. The misfortunes of their fatherland were reduc-

ing them to a state of nervous breakdown. The savagery of the conquerors and their enmity toward all Poles filled them with fear. For the first time, they were in contact with the new and ominous world which, until now, they had known only from embellished accounts. But Gamma showed no doubt; his decision was made. I am tempted to explain this on the basis of his voice and his dry, unpleasant laugh, which could lead one to suspect that his emotional life was always rather primitive. He knew anger, hatred, fear, and enthusiasm; but reflective emotion was alien to him—in this lay the weakness of his talent.

Condemned to purely cerebral writing, Gamma clung to doctrine. All he had to say could have been shouted at a meeting or printed in a propaganda leaflet. He could move forward without being swayed by any affective complications; he was able to express himself in a single tone. His success (not as a writer but as a literary politician, which is the most important type of literary success in the Stalinist system) was also promoted by his fluent knowledge of Russian. He was, after all, half-Russian, and so he could arrive more easily than others at an understanding with the new rulers. He was regarded as one of the "surest."

But most people in the newly acquired areas were not so well off. They trembled with fright. The first arrests told them to expect the worst; and their fears were well-founded for the worst came quickly, in the form of mass deportations. At dawn, agents of the NKVD knocked at the doors of houses and huts; they allowed little time for the arrested families to gather together even the most essential articles; they advised them to dress warmly. Bolted cattle cars carried away the prisoners, men, women, and children. Thousands upon thousands ebbed away to the East. Soon the number was tens of thousands, and finally hundreds of thousands. After many weeks or months of travel,

the human transports arrived at their destinations: forced labor camps in the Polar regions, or collective farms in Asia. Among the deportees were Gamma's father, mother, and teen-aged sisters. The father—it is said—cursed his unnatural son who could write eulogies of the rulers who were the cause of his countrymen's sufferings. The father died somewhere in those vast expanses where a thousand miles seems a modest distance, but the mother and daughters lived on as slaves. At the time, Gamma was delivering inflammatory speeches about the great joy it was to live and work in this new and best of orders that was turning man's dreams into reality. Who can guess what he felt then? Even if he had tried to defend his family, he could not have saved them; and besides, although he was in the good books of the NKVD, he was afraid.

The Russians distrust Communists of other nationalities; and most of all, Polish Communists, as specific examples from the years 1917-39 demonstrate. Many active Polish Communists fleeing to the Soviet Union in fear of persecution were there accused of imaginary crimes and liquidated. That happened to three well-known Polish Communist poets: Wandurski, Standé, and Bruno Jasiński. Their names are never mentioned today; their works will never be re-edited. Yet once Jasiński's novel *I Burn Paris* appeared serially in France's *L'Humanité*, and he had the same international fame that Communist poets like Nazim Hikmet and Pablo Neruda enjoy today. He died in a slave labor camp near the Arctic Circle.

The wave of arrests did not by-pass the little group of "sure" individuals. Polish Communists were always suspected of nationalist tendencies. The discovery that they suffered over the plight of their nation was sufficient cause for repression. Suddenly one day, the NKVD started house-cleaning in the circle that Gamma belonged to. One

of the men arrested was the famous poet W. B. If Communist authorities in France were to arrest Aragon, or if American Communists were to imprison Howard Fast, the effect on the public would be more or less the same as that created by W. B.'s arrest. He was a revolutionary poet worshipped by the entire left and too respected by everyone, even his political adversaries, to be prevented from publishing his verse. Consequently, he held an exceptional position in our country. Fleeing from German-occupied Warsaw, he had taken refuge in the Soviet zone.

After the arrest of his colleagues, Gamma succumbed to a violent attack of fear. Never before in his life had he been so frightened. He assumed that this was just the beginning and that on the next round all the writers who were still at liberty would find themselves under lock and key. Feverish and wild-eyed, he ran to his fellow Communists with a proposal for immediate preventive measures. He wanted to issue a public manifesto condemning the arrested, among them W. B., as fascists. He argued that such a manifesto, signed by scores of names, would constitute a proof of orthodoxy. But his colleagues were reluctant to make a public statement denouncing their friends as fascists. This was, in their opinion, too drastic a step. They were experienced Communists and explained to him that such a move would be politically unwise. It could only prove harmful to those who signed because it was dictated so transparently by cowardice. Besides, it was hard to foresee the shape events would take in the future. Caution was indicated. The manifesto was not issued.

At that time Gamma was just beginning his career and had not yet mastered the canons of complicated political strategy. His reactions were uncontrolled. He had yet to learn how to act with true cunning.

. . .

Then Hitler attacked Russia, and in a few days his army reached Lvov. Gamma could not remain in the city; he was too well-known as a Communist writer and speaker. In the general panic that accompanied the hasty evacuation of offices, NKVD men, and the fleeing army, he succeeded in hopping a train bound for the East. He left his wife and daughter in the city. To tell the truth, the married life of this couple left much to be desired. The wife disliked the new order, as did nearly everyone who had occasion to watch it operate. She disapproved of her husband's new career. They parted, and their separation was to prove definitive.

Gamma found himself in Russia. His years there were years of education. Many Poles who had arrived in bolted cattle cars were scattered throughout Russia at that time. Their number, including the interned soldiers and officers of the Polish army, amounted to some one and a half millions. Moscow regarded them as a hostile element and treated them accordingly. The Kremlin never, even at the time of its military setbacks, abandoned its far-sighted plans for the new Poland that was to arise in the future. Poland was the most important country in the Kremlin's calculations because it was a gangplank to Europe. Since the "cadres" of the new Poland could not be recruited from among the deportees, the Party had to use the little group of "sure" Communist intellectuals. In Russia Gamma met the university colleagues with whom he had once stood trial; and it was they, together with a few others, who founded a society nobly christened the Union of Patriots. This society became the nucleus of the government that rules in Warsaw today.

Even before the war the members of the Union of Patriots had agreed to renounce independence for their country in the name of the logic of History. While in Rus-

sia, they began to pay this price in practice, for they were not free to show any solidarity with the masses of Polish prisoners and slave laborers. The deportees (among them were not only former landowners, manufacturers, and government functionaries, but mostly poor people—peasants, woodsmen, policemen, small Jewish merchants, etc.) were nothing but human pulp. Their thinking was branded with the stamp of noble and bourgeois Poland; they invoked pre-war days as a lost paradise. What else could one do with them except keep them in labor camps or on remote collective farms? The members of the Union of Patriots could sympathize with them as people, but their sympathy was not to be permitted to influence their political decisions. In any case, typhus, hunger, and scurvy were destroying this human material so effectively that in a few years it would cease to exist as a problem.

Gamma, whose family was among the deportees, understood why they thought of pre-war Poland as a lost paradise. Their lot, though not very different materially from that of millions of Soviet citizens, was particularly hard because they were unaccustomed to hunger and a severe climate. When the London government-in-exile concluded a pact with Moscow that called for the formation of a Polish army within the Soviet Union and an amnesty for Polish political prisoners, masses of people poured out of the northern slave labor camps and rushed to the south. The corpses of these ragged beggars littered the streets of the cities of southeastern Russia. Out of the totally exhausted, half-dead people who survived the trek, an army was formed that took its orders from the exile government in London. For Gamma, as for the Russian rulers, this was the army of the class enemy; like the English and Americans, it was only a temporary ally.

The Polish command was seeking officers. Several thou-

sand Polish officers had been interned in conformance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Now they could not be found. Gamma knew that the London Poles' search would not be crowned with success. This was a delicate matter. Civilized nations do not, in general, kill interned members of the military forces of countries they are not even at war with; still, the logic of History sometimes demands such measures. Polish officers were the "cadre" of the old order in Poland. Most of them were reserve officers; in civilian life they were teachers, lawyers, doctors, government officials, in short, the intelligentsia, whose ties to the past obstructed the way of the revolution that was to be imposed on Poland. Considering that the Germans, on their part, were doing an excellent job in that country of wiping out its intelligentsia, a cadre of over ten thousand constituted an impressive number, and one was not completely unjustified in using drastic methods to get rid of them. Whenever they heard of the London government's fruitless efforts to find some trace of the internees, Gamma and the other members of the Union of Patriots exchanged ironic glances.

One of the interned officers was a young professor from the University where Gamma and I had studied. The professor was a liberal who had commiserated with Gamma and his comrades over their arrest. He was, however, the author of several economic studies which presented the Soviet Union in a none too flattering light. Somewhere in the security files in Moscow his name had been written down. It took a number of months before NKVD authorities identified him in a camp. Their discovery came just in time: the telegram demanding his immediate transfer to a prison in Moscow arrived at the railroad station where the transports of internees were actually in the process of being unloaded, preparatory to their being taken into the

nearby forests and shot. The professor did not share this fate because, as bureaucracy would have it, complicated cases must be studied with special diligence. After the amnesty he got out of Russia.

Many Poles who observed life in the Soviet Union at first hand underwent a change of heart. After a sojourn in prisons or labor camps, former Communists entered the army of the London government. One of those released as a result of the amnesty was the poet W. B. When the Polish army was evacuated from Russia to the Near East (later to take part in the battles in Italy), W. B. was happy to leave the country of hopes unrealized after thirty years. Yet after the end of the War, he could not bear to remain an exile. He returned to a Poland ruled by Gamma and others like him. He forgave. Today every school child learns his *Ode to Stalin* by heart.

Despite any internal vacillations or moments of despair, Gamma and his comrades in the Union of Patriots persevered. They played for high stakes, and their expectations were fulfilled. The tide of victory swung in Russia's favor. A new Polish army started to form in the Soviet Union. It was to enter Poland with the Red Army and to serve as a mainstay of the new pro-Soviet Polish government. Gamma was among the first organizers of this army. Since there were no Polish officers, the higher ranks were filled by Russians. But one could not complain of a lack of soldiers. Only a small number of the deportees had managed to make their way to Persia together with the London army. For those who were left behind the only remaining chance of salvation, that is of escape outside the borders of the Soviet Union, was enlistment in the new army politically supervised by the NKVD and the Union of Patriots.

The summer of 1944 arrived. The Red Army, and with

it the new Polish army, set foot on Polish soil. How the years of suffering, humiliation, and clever maneuvering were repaid! This was what came of betting on a good horse! Gamma joyously greeted the little towns ravaged by artillery fire, and the narrow plots of land which were a relief for the eyes after the monotonous expanses of Russian collective farms. His jeep carried him over roads bordered by the twisted iron of burnt-out German tanks toward power and the practical embodiment of what had hitherto been theoretic discussions full of citations from Lenin and Stalin. This was the reward for those who knew how to think correctly, who understood the logic of History, who did not surrender to senseless sentimentality! It was they, and not those tearful fools from London, who were bringing Poland liberation from the Germans. The nation would, of course, have to undergo a major operation; Gamma felt the excitement of a good surgeon entering the operating room.

Gamma, now a political officer with the rank of major, brought with him from Russia a new wife, a Polish soldier-wife. In uniform, wearing heavy Russian boots, she looked as if she might be of any age. In reality she was very young, but she had lived through many hardships in Russia. She was barely in her teens when she, her sister, brother, and mother were arrested and deported from the center of Europe to the Asiatic steppes. Summers there are as hot as they are in tropical countries; winters so severe that the tears that flow from the cold are instantly transformed into icicles. A loaf of bread is a small fortune; hard work breaks the strength of undernourished bodies. Police supervision and the vastness of the Asiatic continent kill all hope of escape. The young girl, a daughter of a middle-class family, was not accustomed to hard, physical toil, but she had to support her family. She succeeded after a

while in entering a course on tractor driving, and after completing it she drove huge Russian tractors on the steppes of Kazakhstan. Her sympathy for the Stalinist system, after these experiences, was not great. In fact, like almost all the soldiers of the new Polish army, she had come to hate it. At last, however, she found herself in Poland, and the game for high stakes that Gamma was playing was also her game.

The Red Army reached the Vistula. The new government, which was as yet known only as the Liberation Committee, began to function in the city of Lublin. Great tasks and great difficulties faced the Union of Patriots. There was little fear that the Western allies would cause any trouble. The obstacles were of an internal nature; they sprang from the hostile attitude of the people. Once again the old conflict between two loyalties flared up. In the territories now held by the Russians large units of partisans, the so-called Home Army, affiliated with the London Government-in-Exile, had operated against the occupying Germans. Now these units were disarmed, their members drafted into the new Polish army or else arrested and deported to Russia. Gamma humorously recounted what happened in Vilna, the city of our youth. An uprising against the Germans broke out, and detachments of the Home Army entered the city simultaneously with the Russian troops. Then the Soviet command gave a magnificent banquet to which it invited the officers of the Home Army. This was, as Gamma said, a feast in the ancient Slavonic manner, a sumptuous repast during which, according to legend, midst friendly embraces, toasts, and song, invited kinsmen were quietly poisoned. In the course of the banquet, the officers of the Home Army were arrested.

From Lublin, Gamma observed that much the same

thing, but on an incomparably larger scale, was happening in Warsaw. At that time the Red Army stood on the line of the Vistula, with Warsaw on the opposite side of the river. The radio of the Liberation Committee urged the inhabitants of the capital to revolt against the Germans. Yet once the uprising broke out, the radio, receiving new instructions, began to heap abuse on the leaders. Of course: they were acting on orders from the Soviet Union's rival in the struggle for power. A feast in the Slavonic tradition was an inadequate measure in this instance; Warsaw itself, a center of opposition to the Russians just as much as to the Germans, had to be destroyed. The officers of the Red Army gazed through their binoculars at the street fighting on the other side of the river. Smoke obscured their field of vision more and more. Day after day, week after week, the battle went on, until at last the fires merged to form a wall of flame. Gamma and his friends listened to awkward accounts of what was happening in this hell, from the lips of insurgents who managed to swim across the river. Indeed, the price one had to pay to remain true to the logic of History was terrible. One had to behold passively the death of thousands, take on one's conscience the torture of women and children transformed into human torches. Who was guilty? The London Government-in-Exile because it wanted to use the uprising as a trump card in its play for power? The Kremlin because it refused to aid the stricken city out of its conviction that national independence is a bourgeois concept? Or no one?

Leaning over a table, Communist intellectuals dressed in heavy wool uniforms listened to the tale of a young girl, one of those who had succeeded in swimming the river. Her eyes were crazed, she was running a high fever as she spoke. "Our unit was smashed and pushed to the

river. A few succeeded in joining other units. All of those who remained on the bank were wounded. At dawn the SS would attack. That meant that all of us would be shot. What was I to do? Remain with my wounded comrades? But I couldn't help them. I decided to swim. My chances of getting across were small because the river is lit by floodlights. There are German machine-gun nests everywhere. On the shoals in the middle of the river I saw lots of corpses of people who had tried to swim across. The current carries them to the sandbanks. I was very weak. It was hard for us to find food, and I was sick. The current is very strong. They shot at me, so I tried to swim under water as much as possible."

After two months of battle, the Germans were masters of the ruins of the city. But Communist intellectuals had too much work before them to have time to brood over the misfortunes of Warsaw. First of all, they had to set the printing presses into motion. Because Communism recognizes that rule over men's minds is the key to rule over an entire country, the word is the cornerstone of this system. Gamma became one of the chief press organizers in the city of Lublin.

In the course of these years, he became a better writer than he had been before the war. He thrived on a strict diet of the doctrine, for "socialist realism" strengthens weak talents and undermines great ones. His primitivism, of which he had long since ceased to be ashamed, now lent the semblance of sincerity to his works. His true voice, which he had once tried to smother, now spoke in his verse, sharp and clamorous. He also wrote a number of orthodox stories about the War and Nazi atrocities, all of them modeled on the pattern that was to produce thousands of pages of Russian prose.

In January 1945, the Red Army began its offensive,

crossed the Vistula and swiftly neared Berlin. Gamma also moved to the west. The Party directed him to Cracow, the city in which the greatest number of writers, scholars and artists had sought refuge after the fall of Warsaw. There he tasted the delights of dictatorship. Strange creatures dressed in remnants of furs, belted peasant jerkins and clumsy rope-laced boots began to swarm out of holes in old houses, indeed from beneath their very floors. Among them were the intellectuals who had survived the years of German occupation. Many remembered Gamma as a young pre-war poet whose works they had ignored. Now they knew he was all-powerful. On his word depended the possibility of their obtaining a chance to publish, a house, an income, a job with a newspaper, magazine, or publishing firm. They approached him apprehensively. Neither before the war nor in their underground activity were they Communist. But the new government was a fact. Nothing could prevent events from evolving as Moscow, as well as Gamma and his friends, desired. With a broad smile of friendship, he pressed the extended hands of these people and amused himself. Some were recalcitrant; some tried not to show how much his favor meant to them; some were openly servile. In a short time, he was surrounded by a court of yes-men who frowned when he frowned or guffawed loudly whenever he deigned to tell a joke.

Possibly he would not have become such a popular figure so quickly had he behaved as impetuously and brutally as before. But years of schooling stood him in good stead. Observation of life in Russia and long hours spent discussing Stalinist strategy and tactics prepared him and his companions for the work that awaited them. The first and most important maxim was not to frighten people, to appear liberal, helpful, and to give men an opportunity to

earn a living while posing only minimal demands. Most people were not ready for diamat; their mentality still resembled that of the fools in the West. It would be a criminal mistake to create points of psychological resistance. The process of re-education had to be gradual and imperceptible. His second principle was to side immediately and indignantly with anyone who rebelled against the drastic methods of the government, the censors, or the political police. His third precept was to accept everyone who could be useful regardless of his political past, with the exception of confirmed fascists or Nazi collaborators.

By adhering faithfully to these principles, he brought many captives into the government camp. They became followers of the government not because they wanted to, nor even because of their public statements, but because of stern facts. The government took possession of all the printing shops and all the larger publishing firms in the country. Every writer or scholar had many manuscripts dating from the War when printing houses were inactive, and everyone was anxious to publish. From the moment his name appeared on the pages of a government-controlled periodical, from the moment his book was printed by a government-owned firm, the writer could not assert that he was hostile to the new authorities. In time, concessions were made to a few Catholic publications and to a certain number of small private publishers, but they were carefully kept as parochial as possible so as not to attract the best writers.

Not too much pressure was exerted; no great demands were made on anyone. National flags flew in the cities, and the arrests of members of the Home Army were carried out quietly. There was a determined effort to grant sufficient outlets for patriotic sentiment. The catchwords were freedom and democracy. Following Lenin's tactics,

the government proclaimed a division of the landed estates among the peasants. Whoever dared to speak of collectives at that time was punished as an enemy of the people for spreading alarm and slandering the government.

Obviously, the landowners whose property was confiscated were not content. Still, most of the estates, like the factories and mines, had been placed under compulsory German management during the Nazi occupation and their owners had been, in effect, dispossessed. The peasants' class hatred of the manor was not violent in our country so the expelled proprietors were not harmed. City-dwellers felt no particular sympathy for that feudal group of landholders; in fact, no one was upset by their loss of power. As for the intellectuals, they thought it just that factories and mines should become the property of the state. We must remember that five and a half years of Nazi rule had obliterated all respect for private property. A radical agricultural reform also seemed, in general, justified. The intellectuals were concerned about something else, about the boundaries of freedom of speech. At the time, they were rather broad. One thing was certain: one was not free to write anything that might cast aspersion on the institutions of the Soviet Union. The censors made sure that this rule was strictly enforced. However, praise of Russia was not, as later, obligatory; one could remain silent on the subject. Outside this sphere, writers were given considerable freedom.

In spite of everything, the entire country was gripped by a single emotion: hatred. Peasants, receiving land, hated; workers and office employees, joining the Party, hated; socialists, participating nominally in the government, hated; writers, endeavoring to get their manuscripts published, hated. This was not their own government; it owed its existence to an alien army. The nuptial bed prepared

for the wedding of the government with the nation was decked with national symbols and flags, but from beneath that bed protruded the boots of an NKVD agent.

The people who fawned on Gamma also hated. He knew it, and this was the source of not the least of his pleasures. He would hit sore-spots, and then observe the reactions of his listeners. The terror and fury that appeared on their faces would give way, in an instant, to an ingratiating smile. This was as it should be. He held these people in his hand. A stroke of his pencil could remove their articles or poems from the page proofs of a magazine; his word could cause their books to be rejected by a publishing house. They had to behave themselves. Yet even as he played with them, he was friendly and helpful; he allowed them to earn a living, he watched over their careers.

I met him in Cracow. Many years had elapsed since our discussions in the *mensa*—during one I had deliberately thrown a box of matches into his soup and since he was subject to attacks of rage, the incident had ended in fisticuffs. In the intervening years I had completed my studies in Paris, and later lived in Warsaw. I left our university city because I was thrown out of my job at the request of the city administration. I was suspected of Communist sympathies (it seems that differentiation between the Stalinist and anti-Stalinist left presents insurmountable difficulties to all the police in the world) and of being too well-disposed toward the Lithuanians and Byelorussians. The latter suspicion was completely justified. Now I was a refugee from Warsaw. My fortune consisted of the work-clothes I was wearing plus a hemp sack which contained my manuscripts, shaving kit and a two-penny edition of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. From the point of view of the Soviet Union's interests, I did not deserve anything for

what I had done during the War; on the contrary, I had committed certain sins. Nevertheless, now I was needed and useful; my record from the period of German occupation was not so bad; my pen could be of value to the new order.

My meeting with Gamma was almost friendly. Two dogs—rather stiff, yet courteous. We were on our guard lest we bare our teeth. He remembered the literary rivalry between us which had formerly caused him so much vexation; he also remembered my open letter against the Stalinists, which had placed me more or less in the position of present-day Western dissidents. Still he had a sentimental attachment—as did I—toward his former university comrades. This helped to break the ice. That meeting was the first move in a game between us that was to last a long time.

This game was not limited to the two of us. All the intellectuals who had remained in Poland during the Nazi occupation were teamed against the group that had returned from the East. The division was clear. Much more important matters than mere personal rivalry were at stake. After the experiences of the War, none of us, not even former nationalists, doubted the necessity of the reforms that were being instituted. Our nation was going to be transformed into a nation of workers and peasants and that was right. Yet the peasant was not content even though he was given land; he was afraid. The worker had not the slightest feeling that the factories belonged to him, even though he worked to mobilize them with much self-denial, and even though the propaganda assured him that they were his. Small contractors and merchants trembled at the knowledge that they were destined to be exterminated as a group.

This was, indeed, a peculiar Revolution; there was not

even a shadow of revolutionary dynamics in it; it was carried out entirely by official decree. The intellectuals who had spent the War in Poland were particularly sensitive to the temper of the country. Gamma and his friends glibly ascribed the mood of the people to a "survival of bourgeois consciousness," but this formula failed to encompass the truth. The masses felt that *nothing* depended on them, and that nothing ever would. Henceforth all discussion would serve merely to justify the Center's decisions. Should one resist? But in a system in which everything gradually becomes the property of the state, sabotage strikes at the interests of the entire population. Only mental opposition was possible; and the intellectuals, at least the majority of them, felt very deeply that this was their duty. By publishing articles and books they satisfied the fisherman. The fish swallowed the bait and, as we know, when that happens one should slacken the line. The line remained slack; and until the fisherman resolved to pull out the fish, certain valuable cultural activities went on that were impossible in such countries, for example, as the Baltic states which were directly incorporated into the Union. The question was how long this state of affairs could continue. It might easily last five, ten, or even fifteen years. This was the only game that was possible. The West did not count, and the political emigration mattered even less.

Certain personal factors, however, entered into the game between Gamma and me. His solicitude toward the members of our old group was not motivated entirely by fond memories of our university days. He could never free himself of a feeling of guilt that dated back to his childhood; and only by converting those of us who were not Stalinists could he feel that his past actions were at last justified. The trouble was that he was deeply pessimistic about the

future of mankind, whereas those whom he tried to convert were not. Loyal to the Center, he voiced official optimism, while in reality, after the years he had spent in Russia, he was convinced that History is the private preserve of the devil, and that whoever serves History signs a satanic pact. He knew too much to retain any illusions and despised those naïve enough to nourish them. To bring new damned into the fold was his one means of reducing the number of internally free people, who, by the mere fact of their existence, judged him.

Nor was our game played only within the confines of Poland. With Gamma's assistance, George, who became a Catholic poet, was sent to France as a cultural attaché; and I was appointed cultural attaché to the United States. A sojourn abroad presented important advantages. From that distance, I could publish impudent articles and poems whose every word was an insult to the Method. Whenever I felt that the line was too taut, I would write something that could be interpreted as a sign of approaching conversion. Gamma wrote me warm, lying letters. Both of us committed errors. He knew that the risk of my defecting was not great. Almost more than anyone else, I felt tied to my country. I was a poet; I could write only in my native tongue; and only in Poland was there a public—made up chiefly of young people—with which I could communicate. He knew that I was afraid to become an exile, afraid to condemn myself to the sterility and the vacuum that are proper to every emigration. But he overestimated my attachment to a literary career. On the other hand, I knew that his letters were false, but I could not renounce the idea that there was at least an iota of sincerity in his professions of friendship. I also believed that he was sufficiently intelligent not to expect me to sign the pact as he did. But I was wrong, for the day came when he

decided to convert me by both trickery and force. His dagger missed me, which is why I am free to write this portrait.

Gamma, too, went abroad. He left Poland after the initial post-war disorder had been mastered. A period of relative stability was in sight. The Peasant Party had to be eliminated and the Socialist Party absorbed, but these operations did not promise to be too troublesome. In general this was to be the era of the NEP. Liberalism was the word in cultural matters. Gamma, believing he needed a bit of peace after the nervous tension of the last years, took a post in the diplomatic service.

He sent his new wife to school in Switzerland to learn foreign languages and proper manners. In a very short time she was transformed from a soldier-bride wearing clumsy Russian boots into a doll with bleached hair and long, painted eyelashes. She became very chic, and dressed in the finest Paris fashions. He, meanwhile, devoted much of his time to writing. He wrote a novel about the trial of the group of young Stalinists in our university city, the trial in which he himself had been a defendant. It was published at once, and favorably reviewed. Still, it was not so warmly praised as one might have expected. "Socialist realism" had not yet made Polish prose sterile; whereas his book was one of those ideological exercises called novels in Russia.

When we were young, Vilna was an unusually picturesque city, not only because of its architecture or its setting amidst forests and hills, but also because of the number of languages and cultures that co-existed there. None of this found its way into his novel. Colorless, unable to evoke tangible things, his prose was merely a tool with which to etch in events and people. Events and people did not fare very well, however. Recognizing real persons in his

heroes, I could see how inaccurately he drew his characters. A novelist often modifies the people he has known; he concentrates his colors, selects and stresses those psychological traits which are most characteristic. When a writer strives to present reality most faithfully he becomes convinced that untruth is at times the greatest truth. The world is so rich and so complex that the more one tries not to omit any part of the truth, the more one uncovers wonders that elude the pen.

Gamma's inaccuracy was of a different order. In accordance with the Method, he created abstract political types. Into these prefabricated forms he tried to squeeze living people; if they did not fit, he unhesitatingly chopped off their legs or their heads. Stefan and Henryk, his heroes, were reduced to the sum total of their political activity. But knowing them well, I know how complicated their personalities were. Henryk, who died before a German firing squad, was an unhappy man, internally at war with himself; he was the most glaring and tragic example of a Polish Communist torn between two loyalties. Stefan, who after his return from Moscow became one of the dictators of Poland's economy, was always a riddle to me. Now a heavy-set, sullen man, a perfect prototype of the Soviet official, he had changed completely from the days when he had hesitated about embracing Stalinism. I knew him when he used to write poems and intelligent literary essays. Then, he was a young Faust—drunk with the beauty of the world, ironic, brilliant, and rapacious. Gamma's novel was entitled *Reality*, but there was little reality in it. It was a travesty on pre-war Poland that attempted, unsuccessfully, to present as demons the rather inefficient police and the sluggish judges of that time.

After completing his novel, Gamma began to feel somewhat bored. He started to travel. He visited many Euro-

pean countries, he went to Africa. Once, as we debated in the *mensa*, we used to dream of traveling. Our doubts as to whether we would ever realize our dreams turned out to have been unnecessary; we were to come to know this type of diversion all too well. The pleasures he got out of traveling were not, it seems, overly refined. He had little appreciation for architecture and art; he had no great curiosity about patterns of life in different civilizations. Had it been otherwise, he would have been a better writer. Travel for him was a pleasant way of killing time and of satisfying the youthful ambitions of a former provincial.

Outside of travel, his greatest pleasure was to play games with foreigners. Their conviction that he was basically "liberal" was not too far from the truth. The outrage with which he stormed against certain overly brutal methods of Stalinism cannot be described as completely false. He considered himself a servant of the devil that ruled History, but he did not love his master. By rebelling against him he not only eased his own internal tension, but won a good opinion for himself in the West. His demon-lord was lenient, granting him the delights of sporadic mutiny—just so long as it was useful. Gamma, observing the faces before him, smiled at people's credulity.

Whenever he was not busy with diplomatic duties, receptions, or the political training of his personnel, he gave bridge parties. He was an excellent, and a fanatic bridge player. He complained that he was too tired after work to do anything except play cards, that diplomacy kept him from writing. Actually, this was not quite true. At an early age he had already reached the summit of his career. Had he so wished he could have become a minister of state in a country where a minister is ruled by the decisions of the Central Committee of the Party. He was a member of the Central Committee. What next? During his stay

in the lovely Western capital, he took stock and discovered he had nothing. Well might he cry, "Qu'as-tu fait, toi que voilà, de ta jeunesse?" What, indeed, had he done with his youth? Where was there something he could call his own and not just the product of historic determinism? He was nearing forty, and he was clear-sighted. The old feeling of literary defeat was returning. He felt as empty as a sieve with a wind blowing through it. That wind of historic necessity swept all the meaning out of literature. One more astute ideological equation, several more pages of doctrinal prose! Why write when everyone knew in advance exactly what was to be said? He played bridge in his gilded and mirrored salon not because he was tired but because he was afraid to find himself alone before a sheet of blank paper.

Gradually he grew accustomed to this mode of life. But the Party does not like comfort to become a habit. Changes were occurring in Poland. At last strict orthodoxy was required of all writers. Gamma was needed on the spot. He left his eighteenth-century palace and the beautiful Western capital with sorrow. He knew that Eastern world to which he was returning much too well. Fierce battles and intrigues, constant dread of Moscow's frown awaited him. Sorrow was pointless; he had to go.

The position he received upon his return was higher than the rank of ambassador to a major Western country. He became, this time officially, the political overseer of all the writers, the keeper of their consciences. It was his duty to make certain that Polish literature developed in harmony with the Party line. The government had just offered the Writers' Union a newly constructed building in Warsaw that housed a huge modern amphitheatre, conference rooms, offices, a restaurant, and living quarters

for writers. That was where he officiated, attending numerous conferences with writers, publishers, security police, and representatives of kindred unions.

He was given an apartment in a government building reserved for higher dignitaries. Admission to this block of apartments is possible only after a previous arrangement by telephone. But these telephone numbers are not listed in the directory; they are issued only to trusted individuals. The member of the security police at the entrance telephones upstairs to verify whether the meeting was actually agreed upon; after which he takes the guest's personal papers and permits him to enter.

Gamma was right in foreseeing a period of intrigue. In general, he had little to fear from other writers because he was, hierarchically speaking, their superior; although even among them there were certain dangerous individuals who were stronger in dialectical materialism than he, and more rabbinical in their mentality. The real struggle for power was waged higher up, in the top brackets of the Party. There he had many enemies. Despite his long years of training, the fiery squire in him would still fall into a rage whenever someone crossed him. In such moments, he treated people as he would servants in his private manor. As ambassador, he could permit himself such brutality without fear of reprisal, but now it caused him trouble. Besides, the line had stiffened so much in Poland that a single sincere word, even if it was uttered only to win converts, could give rise to fatal consequences. Shortly after his return, he made one of the gravest blunders of his political career. This occurred at a meeting which took place directly after the outbreak of the war in Korea. Gamma, replying to "whispered propaganda," shouted heatedly, "Yes, we attacked first, because we are stronger."

It took a lot of work to patch up the damage caused by his unfortunate outburst. As we know, according to the official line, North Korea was attacked.

He also had to settle down seriously to his writing. Only an "active" writer can be a member of the Writers' Union. Every author is compelled to publish under threat of expulsion from the Union and consequent loss of all his privileges. The obligation to keep active is doubly binding on the bosses.

Someone in Warsaw said of Gamma, "He fights this war against imperialism and Western propaganda in the cause of peace, but he dreams of one thing: war. For if the war broke out, then there would be speeches, airplane flights, news reports from the front; and he wouldn't have to sit down every day behind his desk and torture himself over a novel. But just for spite, there will be peace; and he'll have five desks in that elegant apartment of his, and on each one, the beginning of a novel. And every day he'll howl with despair knowing that everything he writes is as dead as a stone."

One cannot envy this man his choice. Looking at his country, he knows that an ever greater dose of suffering awaits its people. Looking at himself, he knows that not one word he pronounces is his own. I am a liar, he thinks, and makes historical determinism responsible for his lies. But sometimes he is haunted by the thought that the devil to whom men sell their souls owes his might to men themselves, and that the determinism of History is a creation of human brains.

scrutiny. Neuroses as they are known in the West result, above all, from man's aloneness; so even if they were allowed to practice, psychoanalysts would not earn a penny in the people's democracies.

The torment of a man in the East is, as we have seen, of a new, hitherto unknown variety. Humanity devised effective measures against smallpox, typhus, syphilis; but life in big cities or giant collectives breeds new diseases. Russian revolutionists discovered what they claimed were effectual means of mastering the forces of History. They proclaimed they had found the panacea for the ills of society. But History itself repays them in jeers.

The supreme goal of doing away with the struggle for existence—which was the theoretician's dream—has not been and cannot be achieved while every man fears every other man. The state which, according to Lenin, was supposed to wither away gradually is now all-powerful. It holds a sword over the head of every citizen; it punishes him for every careless word. The promises made from time to time that the state will begin to wither away when the entire earth is conquered lack any foundation. Orthodoxy cannot release its pressure on men's minds; it would no longer be an orthodoxy. There is always some disparity between facts and theories. The world is full of contradictions. Their constant struggle is what Hegel called dialectic. That dialectic of reality turns against the dialectic fashioned by the Center; but then so much the worse for reality. It has been said that the twentieth century is notable for its synthetic products—synthetic rubber, synthetic gasoline, etc. Not to be outdone, the Party has processed an artificial dialectic whose only resemblance to Hegel's philosophy is purely superficial. The Method is effective just so long as it wages war against an enemy. A man exposed to its influence is helpless. How

can he fight a system of symbols? In the end he submits; and this is the secret of the Party's power, not some fantastic narcotic.

There is a species of insect which injects its venom into a caterpillar; thus inoculated, the caterpillar lives on though it is paralyzed. The poisonous insect then lays its eggs in it, and the body of the caterpillar serves as a living larder for the young brood. Just so (though Marx and Engels never foresaw this use for their doctrine), the anaesthetic of dialectical materialism is injected into the mind of a man in the people's democracies. When his brain is duly paralyzed, the eggs of Stalinism are laid in it. As soon as you are a Marxist, the Party says to the patient, you *must* be a Stalinist, for there is no Marxism outside of Stalinism.

Naïve enemies of the poison may think that they can rid themselves of the danger by locking up the works of Marx and Engels in burglar-proof safes and never allowing anyone to read them. They fail to consider that the very course of history leads people to think about the subject matter of these works. Those who have never personally experienced the magnetic attraction and force of the problems posed in these books can count themselves lucky. Though that does not necessarily mean that they should feel proud of themselves.

Only the blind can fail to see the irony of the situation the human species brought upon itself when it tried to master its own fate and to eliminate accident. It bent its knee to History; and History is a cruel god. Today, the commandments that fall from his lips are uttered by clever chaplains hiding in his empty interior. The eyes of the god are so constructed that they see wherever a man may go; there is no shelter from them. Lovers in bed perform their amorous rites under his mocking

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