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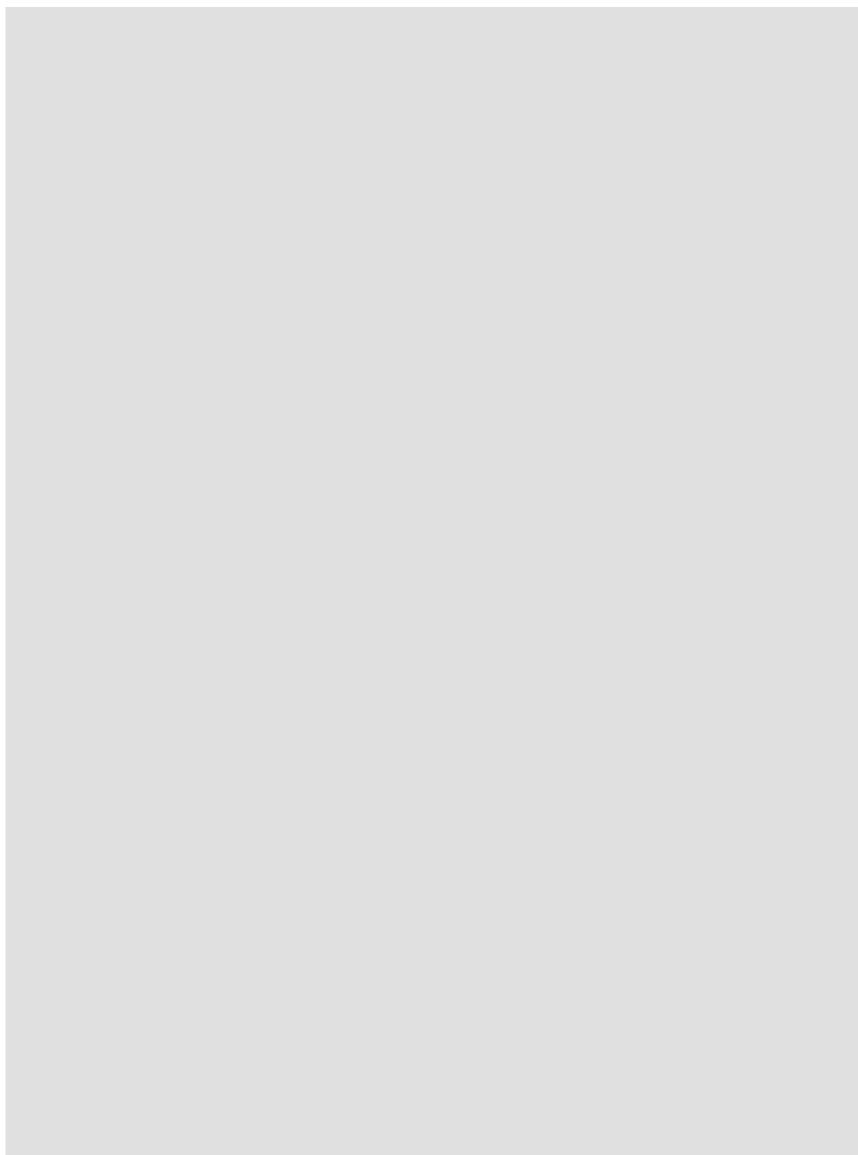

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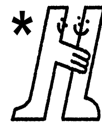

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Front page / Naslovnica: Classicists from Ljubljana in front of the Temple of Octavia, sister of Emperor Augustus; Corinth, May 1958.
Photo essay / Foto esej: Classicists from Ljubljana in Greece, 1958 (cf. page 323).

A Proletarian Classics: The Relationship between Ancient Greek and Roman Culture and World Communism from 1917

Edited by David Movrin, Elżbieta Olechowska, and Henry Stead

Ljubljana 2022

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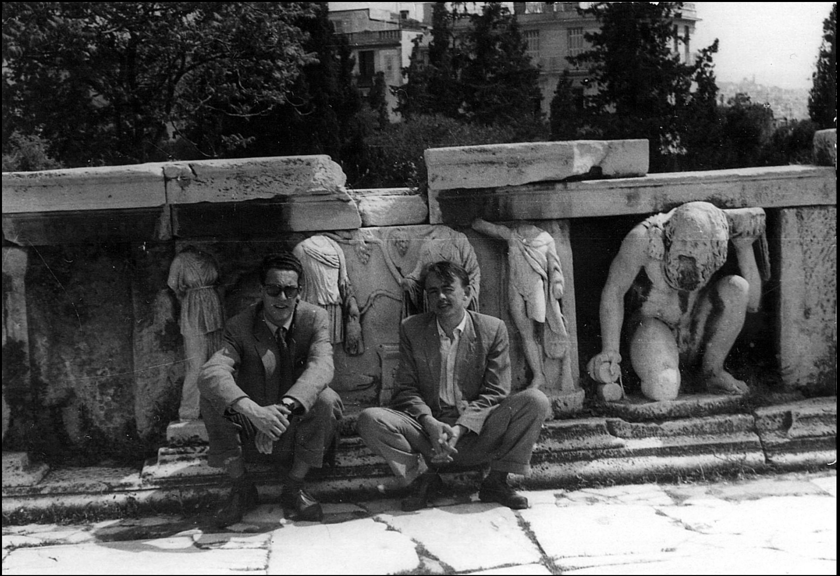

Athens, Theatre of Dionysus –
Primož Simoniti, Matija Pogorelec.

Athens – Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Primož Simoniti, Nataša Stanič, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc, Mirko Juteršek, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Milan Grošelj.

INTRODUCTION

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A Proletarian Classics?

Henry Stead*

THE BACKSTORY

The relationship between the study of Greek and Roman classics and European communism, particularly in the USSR and the Soviet bloc, has attracted increasing critical attention over the past decade. There have been several international conferences organized by scholars, including my coeditors David Movrin and Elżbieta Olechowska, which have resulted in the volumes *Classics and Communism* (2013) and *Classics and Class* (2016).[1] More recently, ancient theater and (mainly) Soviet communism in Central and Eastern Europe has been the subject of an international conference, resulting in a third volume, *Classics and Communism in Theatre* (2019).[2] The subject is gaining momentum. A new network established by The Centre for Classical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, and collaborating with Oxford's Archive of the Performance of Greek

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1 Karsai, Klaniczay, Movrin, and Olechowska, *Classics and Communism;* Movrin and Olechowska, *Classics and Class*. This publication came from the original meeting of the network, organized by György Karsai, Gábor Klaniczay, and Jerzy Axer. The project was funded by Thyssen Foundation and was conducted by Collegium Budapest and the University of Warsaw. It was initially called "Gnôthi Seauton! – Classics and Communism: The History of Studies on Antiquity in the Context of the Local Classical Tradition."

2 Movrin and Olechowska, *Classics and Communism in Theatre*. See also Olechowska, *Classical Antiquity on Communist Stage in Poland*. Exceptions included the Western panel, resulting in Hall, "American Communist Idealism in George Cram Cook's The Athenian Women (1918)," 1–22 and Stead, "British Communist Theatre and Aristophanes: The Case of Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood," 23–43. On the panel also were Justine McConnell, presenting on CLR James' *Toussaint Louverture* (1934), and Rosa Andujar, on Greek fidelity in Fidel's Cuba.

and Roman Drama and the University of St. Andrews' Centre for the Receptions of Antiquity is embarking on an exploration of "Classics and Cold War Theatre 1956–1989." In the British context, *A People's History of Classics* (2020) has shown glimpses of the creative influence of Soviet communism on several scholars, writers, and artists who worked with classical antiquity in Britain.[3] There have been plenty of discrete studies conducted over the years, many of which have been collated on the "Brave New Classics" website's research page.[4] But there is an extraordinary amount of work yet to be done on classics and communism as both a dominant and countercultural ideological force worldwide.

Whilst the discipline of Classics (especially the study of ancient Greek and Latin) suffered under the Soviet regimes, in other and sometimes surprising ways, "classics" – as cultural activity surrounding the ideas, images, texts, and other remains of ancient Greece and Rome – can be seen to have flourished both within and beyond the academy. For example, even within the Soviet bloc, classical translation and Marxist-Leninist ancient history and archaeology thrived in certain areas, as the closing segment of this issue illustrates with examples from Poland and Slovenia. The confluence of technological advances and increased leisure time in the twentieth century (not to mention the concentration of effort within the USSR on creating "proletarian culture") also meant that cultural participation burgeoned, and this included engagements with ancient Greek and Roman antiquity. The classics (broadly defined) were therefore accessible for the first time to mass audiences and mass readerships, where before they were largely limited, by education and means of access, to wealthy elites, who had nurtured them in the imperial European tradition of the *ancien régime*. The classics may not have entirely lost their former class connotations, even if the franchise was dramatically expanded.

The international workshop in which the following articles were initially presented as papers was held online in October 2021. Hosted by the School of Classics, University of St. Andrews, and sponsored by the Classical Reception Studies Network, it aimed to explore further the conflicted and complex relationship between classics and communism, using the prism of the ambiguous or polysemic concept of proletarianism. What, after all, is "a proletarian classics"? We

3 Hall and Stead, *A People's History*, esp. 476–495. See also Stead and Hall, "Between the Party and the Ivory Tower," 3–31.

4 Brave New Classics, www.bravenewclassics.info.

invited colleagues to discuss how classical antiquity was received by inhabitants of communist states. We asked how Soviet ideology and cultural policy could change the experience of "classics" both inside and beyond the Soviet Union and its satellites. Although in our call for papers we explicitly invited colleagues with a view on classics and communism outside of Europe, e.g., in Africa, Asia, Australasia, South and Central America, and the US, where we know there are interesting tales yet to be told, we did not manage on this occasion to attract papers. We did, however, receive a range of abstracts from people examining classical engagements in Belarus, Bulgaria, East Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Slovenia, and Ukraine.

PROLETARIAN LITERATURE

In 1925 Leon Trotsky argued that there was "no such thing as proletarian culture and [. . .] there never will be." His thinking was that before the revolution, the workers would remain too oppressed to create, and then after it, there would no longer be any proletarians because it would be a classless world. The concept did, however, catch on. In 1935 William Empson wrote:

> One might define proletarian art as the propaganda of a factory-working class which feels its interests opposed to the factory owners; this narrow sense is perhaps what is usually meant but not very interesting.[5]

He even agrees with Trotsky that "You couldn't have proletarian literature in this sense in a successful socialist state." But then he moves onto an altogether more expansive sense of the term, including "such folk-literature as is by the people, for the people, and about the people." Empson is non-committal on whether it has to be all three at once. For him, the concept of proletarian literature is at once "vague" and "somehow obvious."[6] He explains that even the Bolshevik Russians did not seem to have a single accepted definition.

Vague the term may be, but bland and unimaginative proletarian art need not be. In the 1934 All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, Maxim Gorky described how socialist realism sought to have a real transformative effect on the world, but it aimed to do this by myth-making:

5 Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 6.

6 Ibid., 17.

> Myth is invention. To invent means to extract from the sum of a given reality its cardinal idea and embody it in imagery – that is how we got realism. But if to the idea extracted from the given reality we add – completing the idea, by the logic of hypothesis – the desired, the possible, and thus supplement the image, we obtain that romanticism which is at the basis of myth and is highly beneficial in that it tends to provoke a revolutionary attitude to reality, an attitude that changes the world in a practical way.[7]

Immediately preceding this passage, Gorky shows the real-world power and application of myth in classical terms:

> This same folklore in our days has raised Vladimir Lenin to the level of a mythical hero of ancient times, equal to Prometheus.

Gorky's speech was delivered at a pivotal moment in Soviet cultural history, the adoption of "socialist realism" in the place of the more radical and sectarian concept of proletkult. This coincided with the anti-fascist "Popular Front" period (1934–1939), which precipitated a shift away from the more militant "*for* the worker, *by* the worker" model, toward more inclusive models, including, e.g., "*about* the worker" and simply "*in service to* the class struggle." Proletarian literature – in the sense of what an anti-fascist writer *should* produce according to the Communist International – became capacious enough to envelop the works of Western, middle- and (more rarely) upper-class "fellow travelers." Their attitude toward Soviet communism or the brand of communism espoused by their national Communist Party (not always the same) was sometimes less than enthusiastic. This said, the canon of Soviet-endorsed Western "progressive writers" might surprise most students of English and Modern Language Studies today. Some of the most celebrated and popular foreign authors, while published widely throughout the Soviet Union and its satellites, are scarcely read today (e.g., Jack Lindsay and James Aldridge).

DISCIPLINARY MATTERS

Our two-day workshop ended with a round table in which respondents Edith Hall (Durham University), Neville Morely (University of Exeter), and the Chinese Studies specialist Gregory Lee (University

7 Gorky, "Soviet Literature," 25.

of St. Andrews) reflected on the workshop papers and discussed broader matters. Given that there has been considerable scrutiny of the discipline in recent years in terms of its associations with imperialism, racism, misogyny, ableism, classism, it is unsurprising that talk turned toward the state of the discipline. Far from being a summary of that day's discussion, the following is a reflection inspired by our conversation. Given its formerly privileged status in modern society, the story of classics has long been told by people for whom the elitist narrative benefits. The study of ancient Greek and Roman classics – so the story goes – is uniquely valuable and rigorous: the literary classics have, after all, "stood the test of time," and the kind of education (largely linguistic) required to read them and the cultural activities that surround it are therefore considered to be delivered, conducted and consumed by an intellectual elite. This narrative has lost considerable currency over the past century, but it is stubborn. Since our disciplinary histories have long tended to focus on the receptions of an elite, both within and beyond the ivory tower of academia, the discipline and classical culture, especially literature, have strong associations of elitism.

However, this is just one side of the story. The extent and importance of the other side are still largely unknown. The projects of recovering both working-class engagements with classics, against the wider (and also true) narrative of exclusion, and the recovery of leftist classics, against the received narrative (also true) of its disciplinary and aesthetic conservatism are aligned. This was one of the aims of Edith Hall's and my *A People's History of Classics* (2020), which told the story of Classics "from below," but also included many radical classicists, who in various ways were engaged in the workers' struggle. Recovery is a necessary step toward exposing the underlying corruption of the existing narrative and challenging its hegemony. As Neville Morley warned, however, in the round table, it is also the case that the working-class and radical classicists we recover may have inadvertently contributed to the maintenance of the cultural hegemony enjoyed by the classics. I have considerable sympathy with this view, but I also feel a responsibility to counter the dominant narrative, skewed as it is by selection bias, rather than either cede the discipline and culture upon which it is founded to the reactionary right or consign it to the flames.

Those who lived in the Soviet Union and its satellites faced a similar dilemma in the wake of the October Revolution. Radical factions demanded the eradication of what they saw as the bourgeois or counterrevolutionary classical education, but pockets of resistance held, and the discipline was protected through the actions of seve-

ral brave figures. This is the conventional story, but it applies more comfortably to the fate of classical philology than a Classics more broadly conceived.

It is important to remember that the histories of both classical culture and communism in every region are different, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically. When we study Western communist classics, we tend to find excitingly countercultural radicals, using Marxist ideas and pioneering Soviet aesthetics to challenge local convention.[8] They were very often also passionate advocates for civil rights and the kinds of freedom of expression that were denied their "Second World" counterparts. In the USSR and the nation states forming the Soviet bloc, for many, Marxism-Leninism was the oppressive convention against which the spirited rebels yearned to defy. That said, as we shall see, space is now emerging for more nuanced evaluations of the debt of Marxism to the discipline. Elżbieta Olechowska put it well when she said at the beginning of the workshop:

> To date, we have focused on persecution and difficulties. The time has come now to recognize that half a century of communism did not result only in a spectacular economic and ideological collapse of the practical application of communist principles, but also accelerated a much-needed transformation of methodology and focus, resulting in a better understanding of the ancient world.[9]

This step from a narrative of disciplinary decline via persecution toward a more balanced assessment of classical culture in the age of Marxism and Leninism opens up exciting new ground both in parts of the world where communism was a dominant and often oppressive ideology and where it was a countercultural and liberating force attractive to internationally minded and anti-capitalist artists and writers.

PEACE AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

That we can now access more fully proletarian classics is surely, in part, a result of the changing political climate. Between November 1989 and February 2022, we have enjoyed more or less free collaboration across Europe and high levels of access to formerly restricted archives. We have managed to tell our shared histories in ways that the

8 Bertolt Brecht, Isadora Duncan, Joan Littlewood, for example, were all considered parents of their art form.

9 Spoken in the opening session of the workshop, October 23, 2021.

polarizing Cold War environment precluded. The present invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces has reminded us once more how fragile and precious peace is. Quite apart from the tragic loss of life and terrible living conditions of the victims of the invasion, the war has also reconstructed all too familiar barriers which serve to separate us. The present situation reminds us how we must fight to keep avenues of cultural and intellectual exchange open, even when freedom of movement is restricted. The pandemic catalyzed and quickly normalized affordable and accessible international collaboration. Our online 2021 workshop was an example of this. We benefited hugely from participation from scholars across the world, including both Ukraine and Russia. These scholars now write from very different worlds to those in which they prepared their papers for the workshop, as do we all.

LEFT BEHIND

Another renewed urgency for the project has perhaps been provided by the high-profile appropriation of classical culture by bigots and fascists (including the so-called Alt-right) in the service of overtly harmful ideas (misogyny, racism, xenophobia, classism). Nevertheless, away from the extremes (and as briefly discussed above), the business-as-usual model of "Classics," complete with its associations with reactionary politics and elitism, continues quietly to shore up social division and intensify the privilege of the powerful and wealthy, in the UK and the US at least.[10] This background fuels several of the following explorations of classics and communism. When the discipline seems poisonous enough to elicit calls from within to be "burned down," we might profitably look to ways in which the same cultural entities (ancient Greece and Rome) have been dealt with and harnessed in other times and cultural contexts by "progressives" (both radical and less so). It is worth noting that these "progressive" appropriations may, at times, be just as harmful, repulsive, mind-numbing, or misinformed as their reactionary counterparts. The difference is that we have simply not focused on this side of our intellectual and cultural history while we have happily plumbed the depths of our rightist history. A rigorous "both/and" approach is required. The history of fascist Italy and Germany, for example, has been recently

10 For contemporary rightist and racist abuses of classical antiquity see, e.g. Dozier, PHAROS. See also Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men,* for misogynist abuses of classics by the contemporary US right.

well addressed by scholars,[11] but explicitly anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, or "red" classics are comparatively underexplored.

One of the aims of the workshop was then to help recover the contribution of leftist thought (especially Marxism-Leninism) to our conception of the classical. The international, if not quite global, focus of our discussion, as well as the provocation and flexibility of the term "proletarian," has enabled us to access this "other side" of classics. We are very much at the beginning of this project, but the present issue of *Clotho* constitutes a significant step forward in our assembly of case studies illuminating twentieth-century non-elite and anti-capitalist classics.

THE ESSAYS

The articles that follow are unified by their rich interdisciplinarity and showcase a broad range of methods and approaches to the subject of "proletarian classics." Ancient historians rub shoulders with literary and reception scholars. The receptions engaged with here range across the intersecting fields of the history of scholarship, the history of the book, theater studies, comic book studies, political theory, cultural studies, and, of course, classical studies. The issue also presents two summarized and translated interviews with scholars whose careers were to different degrees and in different ways framed by the communist era in which they studied and their careers were, for the most part, conducted. The issue is illustrated by a photo essay depicting a visit to Greece by Slovenian students in 1958, which has been preserved and presented by one of the photographers herself, Ksenija Rozman.

The first essay introduces readers to the presentation of the classical world within a Workers' Encyclopedia, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, produced between 1931 and 1936 by intellectuals aligned to the Communist Party of Norway (NKP). Eivind Seland analyses the revolutionary classical education condensed into the entries of this encyclopedia, with a particular focus on historical narrative. Unlike contemporary reference works, this Marxist encyclopedia provided an ancient history based on the concept of class struggle. It presents proletarian heroes, such as the Gracchi and Spartacus, in largely positive terms, while ancient "class consciousness" is shown to have been suppressed by the delivery of

11 See, for example, Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joosse, *Fascist Latin Texts*, available online; and for twentieth-century fascism and classics, see Roche and Demetriou, *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.*

entertainments, economic sops, and a cross-class dependence on slave labor. Working-class solidarity is emphasized and promoted throughout. Every opportunity to prove the validity of Marxist analysis is taken. Seland shows how the emphases placed on social injustice, poverty, gender, ethnicity, slavery, and imperialism in the 1930s encyclopedia foreshadow scholarly preoccupations, which would only be taken up in earnest by Western historiography in the 1970s.

In the second article, Vittorio Saldutti focuses on the reception of Athenian democracy in the Soviet Union. His main subject is the German Professor of Ancient History and communist political leader Arthur Rosenberg (1889–1943), who was the first publicly to compare ancient Athenian democracy to contemporary German and Russian councils. In his hands and later those of the Dutch revolutionary Anton Pannekoek, Athenian democracy becomes a benchmark of true, uncorrupted democracy, as opposed to bourgeois democracy and later the "democracy" experienced in the Soviet system.

Our third article heralds a section of three essays on the reception of Spartacus. This cluster of independent studies on the communistic image of the Thracian slave leader across different times and places is helpful in that it effectively explodes the myth of Comintern monoculture, based on the idea that communist-controlled constituencies followed a dogmatic cultural policy formulated in Moscow. While the dogmatism and presence of centralist cultural policy are undeniable, their eventual manifestation was almost as kaleidoscopic and various as the people involved in its creation and the social contexts in which they created them. As we shall see, several strong common aesthetic, thematic and ideological features unify them, but there is also space for significant divergence and individuality concerning creative approach, medium, and even content. The representation of Spartacus in the public sphere is a vast subject, and the three essays here illustrate well the diversity of communistic receptions across time.

While actively engaged in military service in defense of Ukraine, Oleksii Rudenko heroically managed to complete his research on early Soviet performance receptions of Spartacus in Kyiv in the latter part of 2022. As his essay explains, Tiberius Gracchus, Marcus Junius Brutus, and Spartacus were the only ancient historical figures to be included in a list compiled by Lenin in 1918 of subjects of "monumental propaganda." In practice, Spartacus was the only figure of the three to be welcomed wholeheartedly into the Bolshevik parade of heroes. The Italian writer Raffaelo Giovagnoli's 1874 novel *Spartaco* was translated into Russian in 1881. It became a key source for Soviet receptions of

Spartacus. Rudenko traces the extent of the influence of this Italian mediation as he analyzes the theatrical receptions of Spartacus written by Vladimir Mazurkevich (1920) and Vladimir Volkenstein (1921). He also investigates the presentation of Spartacus in early Soviet mass performances. These were colossal audience participatory events, with vast casts and often performed out of doors and comprising pageant-like processions of revolutionary heroes. Such processions would frequently be peopled by Spartacus and his slave army. Rudenko tracks these early Soviet representations onto contemporary Soviet historiography and, where possible, government policy. Contemporary reviews of performances in a thriving genre of Soviet theatrical criticism are addressed to reveal a fast-changing and energetic engagement with what became, in this revolutionary moment, an extremely familiar and popular feature of Roman antiquity.

Miryana Dimitrova's essay on the reception of Spartacus by Bulgarian comic creators from 1979–1983 further explores the extraordinary popularity of the tale of Spartacus. She highlights the (perhaps surprising) diversity of the slave hero's representation within the Soviet bloc through an in-depth discussion of his unique Bulgarian reception, which includes an enthusiastic adoption of a conjecture by a German philologist in 1955, which transformed Spartacus' origin story. Instead of hailing from an indistinctly "nomadic" Thracian tribe, Spartacus becomes a member of the "Maidi" tribe and, therefore, from a region in southern Bulgaria. Dimitrova thus shows a Bulgarian nationalistic reception of the Soviet hero. Her analysis brings Spartacus' reception up to the post-Soviet present day, which enables her to demonstrate the ideological malleability of the slave leader, stemming – as she persuasively argues – directly from the lack of concrete evidence about Spartacus' life before Batiatus' gladiator camp.

We complete our Spartacist hat-trick by turning back in time and to *Ultima Thule* (specifically Caledonia), with an article by Scott Lyall, a Scottish literature specialist, who explores how Spartacus' slave army was envisaged by James Leslie Mitchell (*alias* Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 1901–1935), a radical Scottish leftist and working-class author. Mitchell's pen gave Scotland one of its most celebrated modern classics, the trilogy *A Scots Quair* (1932–1934), the opening book of which, *Sunset Song* (1932), is the most well-known. It would be televised in 1971 and adapted into a film in 2015. In 1933, at the height of his creative powers, Mitchell wrote *Spartacus*, a novel based on the Third Servile War, 73–71 BC. As well as presenting the first in-depth analysis of this novel's relationship with its classical sources, Lyall's essay presents Mitchell's distinctive blend of utopian pessimism and

atavistic progressivism with admirable clarity and nuance. *Spartacus* radically focuses the narrative exclusively on the enslaved, leaving "the masters" (the Romans) all but uncharacterized. *They* become the faceless mass. Mitchell's creative process of self-professedly propagandistic myth-making from historical sources feeds into his broader reflection on what a revolutionary anti-capitalist writer in the 1930s should do. It is interesting to note that Mitchell seems to have come to a similar conclusion to his contemporary communist historical novelist, Jack Lindsay (1900–1990), who in 1937 advocated for a similarly propagandistic historical mode in an American communist monthly, *New Masses*.[12]

In a letter to the Scottish author Naomi Mitchison, now held in the National Library Scotland, Mitchell wrote:

> For years I've wanted to write the story of Spartacus and the Gladiator chaps. This year I did it. And all the while I wrote – and even while I corrected the proofs – I was scared that the next issue of [Jonathan] Cape's *Now and Then* would tell me that Naomi Mitchison had done the same. It seemed impossible she could keep off the subject for long – it was so essentially hers.[13]

Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999) never did write a *Spartacus*, but – as the following essay by Barbara Goff shows – the Scottish writer and activist did on several occasions contemplate revolution in antiquity in her historical fiction. Mitchison's classical writings stretch the bounds of "proletarian classics" in exciting ways. She came from a prominent aristocratic Scottish family but worked tirelessly on the left of the parliamentary Labour Party UK, then committed to gradualist reform rather than revolution. As Goff demonstrates, Mitchison used antiquity as a site of experimentation with forms of political and social radicalism. While the novels discussed in the essay tended to sell well and – as evidenced by Mitchell's fan mail, cited above – enjoyed an enthusiastic following among readers on the left, Goff asserts that "in terms of long-term popular or critical success they have not been favored," but they do, she continues "fail in interesting ways."

12 For a discussion of Lindsay's historical fiction based on his *Brief Light* (1939) see Stead, "Class Struggle in Catullan Rome."

13 Letter from James Leslie Mitchell to Naomi Mitchison, dated "Tuesday" [August? 1933]. National Library Scotland: Papers of Naomi Mitchison and her family. Acc. 5885.3.

Failure is a concept infrequently discussed in Classical Reception Studies.[14] It is, however, something with which those of us who study the work of radical leftist writers, artists, and scholars on the western side of the Iron Curtain – i.e., in the uniquely polarizing context of the Cold War and its anti-communist aftermath – are all too familiar. History is often kinder to authors and artists than the days in which they lived. Mitchison is currently enjoying something of a renaissance, with the reprinting of her novels and the imminent release of Edinburgh University Press's *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*, the first scholarly volume on her as a writer.[15]

Goff's discussion of Mitchison's ancient revolutions exposes the author's fascination not only with female emancipation but also myth and ritual, influenced by the kinds of anthropology in vogue at the time performed by James George Frazer and those scholars associated with the "Cambridge Ritualists" label. Both cultural anthropology and "failure" feature prominently in Claudio Sansone's essay on Pier Paolo Pasolini, Aeschylus' *Oresteia,* and the "irrational." He traces the Italian writer and filmmaker's relationship with Aeschylus' tragedies, exploring Pasolini's attempt "to excavate patterns of ideological resistance" in them. It was not so much in critical accolades that Sansone deems Pasolini to have failed, but in his ultimate disappointment with his own notion that the irrational in Greek tragedy had revolutionary potential. Pasolini's attempt to turn the classical to political ends is shown to have been frustrated. The study ranges across different kinds of evidence: archival, play scripts, translator's notes, published essays, a posthumously published novel, and an unfinished study for a film. From this collage of sources, we witness the struggle of the Italian artist to make engaged versions of the classical. His classicism and radical politics appear held in an antithetical conflict from which no synthesis would ultimately be found. The Cambridge Ritualists, E. R. Dodds (esp. *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 1951), Antonio Gramsci, and the communist professor of Greek at Birmingham, George Thomson (esp. *Aeschylus and Athens*, 1941), are identified as key sources for Pasolini's shifting conception of the revolutionary irrational. Ultimately, Sansone offers the study of Pasolini's frustration as a cautionary tale, advising against reading revolutionary content into "elite products of

14 In 2019 Rosa Andujar and Daniel Orrells (Kings College, London) called for papers on negatively received theatrical receptions of antiquity for a Society for Classical Studies conference entitled "Problems in Performance: Failure and Classical Reception Studies."

15 Purdon, *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time.*

past literary history," which might themselves be antithetical to such readings.

Also focused on the reception of Greek tragedy is Natasha Remoundou's article, which primarily takes on Sophocles' *Antigone* in the hands of the Irish poet, writer, and playwright Aidan Carl Mathews (b. 1956), staged at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin in 1984 – a busy year for *Antigone* in Irish theaters.[16] She opens, however, with a discussion of an earlier Irish reception of Antigone in the anonymous poem "The Prison Graves." The poem, which appears to date to March 1918, takes a recent production of *Antigone* at the Abbey Theatre as a contemporary hook on which to hang a politically motivated elegy to the executed Irish diplomatist turned anti-colonial rebel, Roger Casement (1864–1916), whose remains, first buried in Pentonville Prison, were reinterred in a Dublin cemetery as late as 1965. The anonymous poet uses the grief of Antigone to express their own at the death and lack of proper burial of Casement, but also (and quite strangely) uses a topical allusion to the recent interment of an executed murderer in the grounds of the prison to demonstrate the relevance of both the ancient play and the poem's subject. An elaborate publicity stunt? But Mathews' *The Antigone* (1984) is the main subject of Remoundou's posthuman lens. It may be conceived as a proletarian classic as it offers a radically class-conscious interpretation of the tragedy. Set in a dystopian, post-nuclear, militarized, surveillance state where atrocities and violence have become normalized. The Polynices character (Poly) has been spirited away and suffers a Stalinesque *damnatio memoriae*. Antigone's bleak struggle is never ending and apparently hopeless: tragedy and history repeat themselves indefinitely. The essay introduces readers to two underexplored and hard-to-access receptions of Sophocles' tragedy.

The final two essays move us away from tragedy and Western leftist receptions of classical antiquity and into the realm of the disciplinary history. On the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain, we observe the impact of Marxism-Leninism on the activity of classicists in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and the Polish People's Republic. David Movrin presents an exciting archival find in the recently rediscovered personal papers of the doyen of Slovenian classicists in the postwar period, Anton Sovre (1885–1963). Unlike several other Slovenian classicists, Sovre was not considered a threat by the com-

16 See, e.g., Macintosh, "Irish Antigone and burying the dead"; Torrance, "Post--Ceasefire Antigones and Northern Ireland." Full bibliography in Remoundou's article.

munist authorities. It was to him that the job of preparing a document on the future of classical philology for the Third Yugoslav Five-Year Plan fell. Movrin shows how Sovre attempted to use the document to counter the suspicions Party officials had about the discipline, which had a bourgeois reputation and was thus frequently scapegoated. Movrin's analysis of this fascinating document reveals not only what Sovre wrote but also uses his knowledge of the unique social context to read between its lines since Sovre was not untouched by the brutality of Tito's regime. Movrin also presents part of an interview he conducted in early 2022 with the scholar, Kajetan Gantar (1930–2022), who was named prominently in the 1959 document. Gantar revealed that the document was essentially a hasty collaboration between the two men. Movrin sets their plan for classical philology in its wider context of seemingly pointless bureaucracy and abortive planning cycles. The plans, however fanciful they may have been for the historical moment in which they were produced, were – Movrin explains – slowly and successfully put into practice over the succeeding generations.

Elżbieta Olechowska rounds off the essays, and she comes out swinging: "For Poles, Communism has become synonymous with Soviet domination at the end of World War II, an ideological smoke-screen hiding imperial aspirations inherited from czarist Russia." In addition to revealing and embodying a trend in the former Soviet bloc of deeply felt anti-communism, her article reminds us that there were few Marxists among Polish classicists following World War II. Those few, however, who survived the decimation of the War played an instrumental role in maintaining the discipline and providing an institutional space within which students and colleagues of all ideological inclinations could learn and then ply their trade. One such was Kazimierz Majewski (1903–1981). In spite of his communistic worldview, explains Olechowska, he was not only tolerated by the academic community but widely respected for his scholarship and the vital role he played in organizing and contributing to the intersecting fields of philology, ancient history, and archaeology, first in Wrocław and later in Warsaw.

That concludes the essays of this issue of *Clotho*, but not the issue itself. There are two interviews, summarized and translated by Olechowska, conducted by Adrian Szopa and Andrzej Gillmeister on April 22, 2016. The first is with the Polish historian and papyrologist Professor Ewa Wipszycka (b. 1933), whose work, especially in the history of the Christian Church in Egypt during late antiquity, has been widely lauded. The second is with Professor Benedetto Bravo (b. 1931), Ewa's husband, a historian of ancient Greece. Their interviews complement

Olechowska's article on Majewski well since Wipszycka and Bravo were in the same Warsaw University as Majewski in the early stages of their academic careers. Another interview, with Professor Ferenc Hörcher from Budapest, provides another and different window into the region during the decades that followed.

The essays collected here represent a continuation of the Classics and Communism project, but also the early stages of a new strand of the project seeking to uncover, or recover, the leftist tradition of engagements with classical antiquity both inside and outwith the academy. Many such engagements have been suppressed or obscured by Cold War attitudes. For the many and now well-documented limitations and shortcomings of Soviet classical studies, applying a Marxist lens had a dramatic impact on academia on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Studies conducted under, or influenced by the strictures of Marxism-Leninism were sometimes decades ahead of Western scholarship (e.g., imperialism, slavery). It would be a mistake to suggest that these approaches and analyses were not already developing in Western Europe and the States, but they were undoubtedly energized by the electricity of the revolutionary period and sustained by the (for a time) utopian symbol of the Soviet alternative.

Beyond the academy, class-conscious and politically motivated creative practitioners learned from public-facing studies written by scholars with communist sympathies. The broad-rimmed and perhaps slightly quizzical lens of "proletarian classics" will, we hope, continue to provoke, to generate new "ways in," and encourage new ground to be broken by students and scholars across the globe.

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ARTICLES

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The Classical World in a Norwegian Workers' Encyclopedia: *Arbeidernes Leksikon* (1931–1936)

Eivind Heldaas Seland*

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA FOR THE WORKING CLASS

In 1927 the first issue of the weekly illustrated *Arbeider-magasinet* was launched. Published, edited, and written by people sympathetic to the Communist Party of Norway (NKP), the magazine was editorially independent and aimed at the education and entertainment of the working class.[1] *Arbeider-magasinet* became an instant commercial success. The magazine statutes required that parts of the profits should be set aside for cultural purposes, and it was decided that some of the proceeds would be used for the long-desired publication of an encyclopedia for the working class.[2] The project was assigned to the experienced historian, journalist, and socialist activist Jakob Friis (1883–1956), who was soon joined by historian Trond Hegna (1898–1992). The resulting *Arbeidernes leksikon* – "Workers' Encyclopedia" – appeared in six volumes and with c. 10,000 keywords in 1931–1936.[3]

Few encyclopedias are written from scratch. Most projects borrow and copy material from earlier works, with or without permission or due credit.[4] *Arbeidernes leksikon* was explicitly inspired by "The Great Soviet Encyclopedia" (*Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, first

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1 Berggrav, *Magasinet*, 33–40; Pedersen, *Det var der vi ble til*, 9–18.

2 Berggrav, *Magasinet*, 43–46; Paulsen, "Arbeidernes Leksikon."

3 Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*.

4 Prodöhl, *Politik Des Wissens*, 55–63.

edition in 65 volumes, 1926–1947) and “The Small Soviet Encyclopedia” (*Malaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, ten volumes, 1928–1931).[5] The preserved editorial correspondence reveals that traditional bourgeois Norwegian, Swedish, and German encyclopedias were, in fact, also extensively used.[6] Nevertheless, it soon became clear that the project was overwhelming. All articles had to be edited, and many of them had to be written anew to reflect Norwegian conditions. Editorial efforts to recruit qualified contributors from the labor movement were complicated by the opposition from the Labor Party (DNA), which at that time still identified as Marxist, but which propagated a line of democratic reformism, opposed to the revolutionary line of the encyclopedia editors and NKP.[7] The leading DNA newspaper, *Arbeiderbladet,* called for all party members to withhold support for the project,[8] which resulted in the editorial ignorance of the publication of the work and critical review in the party press. The solution found by the editors was to draw on Hegna’s network within the independent but communist-leaning and revolutionary Marxist organization and journal *Mot Dag* (“Towards dawn”), run by students and young academics, mostly affiliated with the University of Oslo.[9] In 1933 the project was formally subcontracted to the organization, Friis remaining editor only by name.[10] Most articles are unsigned, but the major entries on ancient Greece and the Roman empire were authored by the historian and classical philologist Jørgen Fredrik Ording (1902–1987). He was a part of the inner circle of *Mot Dag*, and was also responsible for many other articles on classical history as author or editor. The question of authorship, however, is not essential in this case, as the encyclopedia was conceived as a collective endeavor.

In the end, all six volumes were successfully published only one year after the original schedule, and the planned print run of 10,000 copies was sold out. The encyclopedia was generally well received in the communist and independent labor press but reviewed briefly

5 Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol 1., preface.

6 Correspondence to [Ole Christian] Gundersen, March 3, 1933, ARK1719 *Mot Dag*, box D-0002, folder “diverse,” Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek, Oslo; Report from meeting on how to speed up the publication process of *Arbeidernes leksikon*, January 7, 1933. ARK1536 Trond Hegna, box D-L0024, folder “diverse korrespondanse, *Arbeidernes leksikon*,” Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek, Oslo.

7 Bull, *Mot Dag og Erling Falk*, 219.

8 Arbeiderbladet, “Et arbeidernes leksikon.”

9 Bull, *Mot Dag og Erling Falk*, 219.

10 Ibid.; Friis, *Bevegelsen Og Målet*, 165–66.

and negatively in DNA-affiliated newspapers and in Christian, central and right-affiliated publications. Both chief editors and several key contributors joined or re-joined DNA when *Mot Dag* was reconciled with the party in 1936 and later became prominent members of the democratic labor movement in Norway, which abandoned its Marxist orientation after World War II. The Communist Party became gradually marginalized in the labor movement and lost popular support after 1948. Thus, there was little demand for new editions of the revolutionary encyclopedia. It was only in the connection with the publication of a new, although not explicitly political, encyclopedia published by the labor movement publishing house Tiden in 1975, that the project was rehabilitated, and its pioneering effort in advancing working-class identity was recognized.[11] The only reprint is a much-abridged version published by the (then) socialist publishing house Pax in 1978.

RESEARCH HISTORY, SOURCES, NARRATIVE THEORY

Some correspondence and other records from the project are preserved in the archives of Friis, Hegna, and *Mot Dag* in the Labor Movement Archives and Library (Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek) in Oslo.[12] The Norwegian National Library has digitized most of the newspapers from the period. These contain advertisements, opinion pieces, and reviews about the project. *Arbeidernes leksikon* is barely mentioned in the relevant volumes of the official history of the Norwegian labor movement[13] and figures only in short passages in the memoirs and biographies of the key figures involved in the project.[14] Only limited academic scholarship has been undertaken about it. Kjell-Olav Hovde's MA thesis on the representation of the history of literature in the work highlights the inbuilt tension of the encyclopedia between establishing a working-class counterculture while at the same time educating its readership in theoretical Marxism.[15] As we shall see, this duality is also present in the representation of classical antiquity, although arguably to a lesser degree. In the illustrated volume accompanying a 2012 exhibition on the history of encyclopedias in the Norwegian National Library,

11 Gerhardsen, Højdahl and Sannes, *Tidens Leksikon*, vol. 1, preface.

12 ARK 1065, ARK 1140, ARK 1536, ARK 1719.

13 Pryser, *Klassen og nasjonen;* Maurseth, *Gjennom kriser til makt*.

14 Bull, *Mot Dag og Erling Falk;* Friis, *Bevegelsen Og Målet*.

15 Hovde, "Arbeidernes Leksikons litteraturhistorie for fremtiden."

Arbeidernes leksikon figures as a prominent example in the chapter devoted to "Knowledge and ideology."[16]

This article will focus on the reception and representation of the classical past in the encyclopedia. In Norway, as elsewhere, classical education long remained the preserve of male members of the upper classes. Mandatory Latin was removed from the curriculum in Norway with the introduction of three-year gymnasia in 1869. Nevertheless, it remained popular, with ca. one-third of the students still majoring in the language in the period when *Arbeidernes leksikon* appeared.[17] History, however, was an essential subject in primary and secondary schools, and despite the emphasis on Norwegian and Bible history, children with the working-class background would have had some exposure to classical history after graduating from the mandatory seven-year public school system. This was even more the case for academically successful students who progressed through the selective two-plus-three years of middle school and gymnasium education. The explicit aim of *Arbeidernes leksikon,* stated in the preface to the first volume, was to prepare the working class for their historical mission: to assume power.[18] What need would future rulers have for ancient history? Quite a bit, as it turns out.

Since the so-called linguistic turn of the 1970s, historians have been increasingly conscious that their activity intrinsically entails the construction of narratives.[19] On a general level, Philippe Carrard, in his study of the French *nouvelle historie* movement of the twentieth century, demonstrated that this applies to all historical texts, even those that explicitly reject a narrative approach.[20] New History, with an emphasis on description and structure, emerged partly in reaction to Marxist historiography,[21] which does have an explicit narrative of historical development at its core. Nevertheless, New History's insistence on structure over narrative is an interesting parallel to encyclopedias, with their alphabetical organization and claim to comprehensiveness and factuality. For Carrard, the hidden narratives of historical texts may be investigated through what he calls "the poetics of history:" the

16 Berg et al., *All verdens kunnskap.*

17 Statistics Norway, Graduates of general secondary schools, upper stage, available online.

18 Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 1, preface.

19 See Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire;* White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe;* Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country.*

20 See Carrard, *Poetics of the New History.*

21 Carrard, *Poetics,* 43.

rules and conventions that historians adhere to in their writing. What poetics of history may be found in a Marxist encyclopedia? Paul Veyne has operationalized the study of historical narratives by pointing out how they consist of events organized into a plot.[22] There is clearly a plot of history in *Arbeidernes leksikon*, but how is it constituted? Jörn Rüsen throws out a more fine-meshed net by distinguishing four types of historical narratives: the traditional, the exemplary, the critical, and the genetical.[23] For Rüsen, these regulate our sense of time along three axes: memory, continuity, and identity. Below, these three approaches are rolled out on selected articles about classical history from *Arbeidernes leksikon*. This will demonstrate the ways different kinds of historical narratives defined by Rüsen are used by the authors and editors of that work to organize events in a series of historical plots according to Veyne. These are then combined into a coherent overarching metahistory as established by Carrard.

THE GLORY THAT WAS GREECE

Rüsen's "traditional narrative" constitutes historical memory by describing the "origins constituting present forms of life." It highlights continuity by arguing that these have permanence and establishes identity by "affirming pre-given patterns of self-understanding."[24] Such narratives, frequently idealizing, have been influential in classical studies and remain common, particularly within popular culture. Examples would include descriptions of ancient Greece as the starting point of traditions of philosophy, political thought, art, and literature that continue through history and still serve to identify some people and specific cultural traits as "Western" even today. As expected from an explicitly revolutionary work, the traditional narrative is not dominant in *Arbeidernes leksikon*. Nevertheless, examples may be found, for instance, in the sizable parts of the article on Greek history describing literature, language, art, and architecture[25] and in the many short, unsigned articles on ancient biography, mythology, monuments, and geography. These accounts are brief but generally positive, highlighting Greek culture's innovative, unique, and lasting qualities. That ancient Greek temples, sculptures, and works of literature are considered relevant and vital to a Norwegian working-

22 See Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*.

23 Rüsen, *History*, 11–19.

24 Rüsen, *History*, 12.

25 J.F. Ording, "Hellas," in Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 3, 835–841.

-class audience of the twentieth century shows that the editors of *Arbeidernes leksikon* considered knowledge, education, and culture valuable, independently of the revolutionary cause. The Marxist perspective is still visible, for instance, in emphasis on artisans and skill over artists and individual genius and Greek culture as a collective enterprise.[26] Thus the twentieth-century working class is included in the traditional narrative of ancient Greece; it also becomes part of *their* heritage and identity.

ELITE OPPORTUNISTS AND A PROLETARIAN HERO

More critical and generally less positive in their evaluation of the classical world are the many "exemplary narratives." For Rüsen, exemplary narrative gives cases that exemplify the application of general rules of conduct. They demonstrate the validity of such rules across time and serve the purpose of identity building by generalizing historical experience to such rules of conduct.[27] Such narratives are found in biographical articles on Greek and Roman rebel leaders and rulers. A point in the case is the articles on the Gracchi brothers,[28] who spearheaded attempts at agricultural and political reform in the Roman Republic of the second century BC. The grievances addressed by the two reformers are seen as caused by social injustice grounded in the relations of production. The focus is on the existence of a large group of propertyless and destitute citizens living in dependence on smaller aristocracy with large, slave-run landholdings. While the social problems were real, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus are not seen as true champions of the people in *Arbeidernes leksikon*, but as members of a new and ascending elite using the ordinary people to promote their individual and group interests. This contrasts with the gladiator Spartacus, who led an influential slave uprising in southern Italy from 73–71 BC. Spartacus is perceived as a true revolutionary whose project failed due to the lack of class consciousness among the rebelling slaves, who were more interested in looting or running away than in effecting revolutionary change.[29] Biographical articles on ancient rulers are brief but also exemplify Marxist historical theory. Caesar and Augustus

26 E.g., Ording, "Hellas," 826.

27 Rüsen, *History,* 12.

28 Ording, "Graccherne," in Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 3, 513–515; Ording, "Romerriket," ibid., vol. 3, 123–124.

29 Ording, "Romerriket," 125–126; Friis and Hegna, "Spartacus," ibid., vol. 3, 478.

are, for instance, seen as driven by personal ambition but acting as the champions of a business- and slaveowner aristocracy locked in a power struggle with the traditional senatorial elite. The Roman people were diverted from their genuine class interest through entertainment, economic support, and access to slave labor.[30]

The exemplary narrative in these articles is that class struggle is a constant in history. The ancient protagonists might be driven by personal ambition and patriarchal concern for the welfare of the people. However, the conflicts that bring them to the head of history for a brief time are brought about by structural tensions between new and old elites and between these elites, the free poor, and the large slave population. The constancy of class struggle throughout history demonstrated in these accounts confirms the validity of Marxist doctrine, and the failure of ancient revolts to turn into real revolutions due to a lack of class consciousness is a reminder of the importance of class solidarity to present-day workers.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE ACROPOLIS

Critical narratives, also called "anti-stories" by Rüsen, challenge the origin stories and notions of continuity voiced in traditional narratives and create an identity through the rejection of tradition.[31] These are common in *Arbeidernes leksikon*, as the premise of Marxist theory is that past (ancient and medieval) and current (capitalist) modes of production were based on exploitation. Following that view, a radical break from the past was imminent and inevitable. Again they may be exemplified through the extensive article on ancient Greece, which contains detailed discussions of Athens and Sparta.[32] While the radical nature of Athenian democracy in the context of the ancient world is underlined, it also stresses how the system excluded women, discriminated against foreigners and descendants of mixed marriages, and rested on the exploitation of slave labor. This caused widespread unemployment among the free poor, who became dependent on state handouts, paid military service, and imperial expansionism. It is also emphasized how a small elite dominated the formally quite open system due to the wealth, education, and rhetorical training required to take an active part

30 Friis and Hegna, "Augustus," ibid., vol. 1, 428; "Cæsar," vol 2, 122–123; Ording, "Romerriket," 127–129.

31 Rüsen, *History,* 12, 14.

32 Ording, "Hellas," 818–828.

in democratic processes. Sparta is described as a "democracy for the ruling classes" with strong egalitarianism within the tiny elite of male citizens. At the same time, it rested on the exploitation of the helots, described as serfs and state slaves, and discrimination toward the Perioeci.

Readers familiar with classical history will recognize the various elements of these descriptions from any textbook and classical sources. They are presented in matter-of-fact language, and the narrative is driven by events and facts. Although laudable aspects of Greek culture are highlighted (see "traditional narrative" above), it is nevertheless clear to the reader that Greek freedom and democracy were not for all but rested on privilege, colonialism, and the exploitation of enslaved people.

UNDER THE YOKE OF ROME

The most crucial type of narrative of ancient history in *Arbeidernes leksikon* is, however, Rüsen's "genetical narrative," which relates the memory of the "transformation of alien forms of life into proper ones." The most explicit example of this is probably the article on the Roman empire, which fills no less than 21 columns or 11 pages.[33] As in traditional accounts, Rome is highlighted as a point of departure for later political, military, juridical, and religious development. But the plot of the article (in Veyne's sense), which serves to organize the events and facts that are presented, is not the importance of Rome for later history but the rise and fall of the slave mode of production seen as characteristic of the ancient world in Marxist historiography. It explains how agricultural land and political rights were concentrated in aristocratic hands during the royal period and the early republic, leading to reliance on slave labor and the formation of a propertyless urban proletariat. The resulting tension was relieved by imperialism and government handouts. Imperialism led to the formation of new commercial elites, bringing about the end of the republic and the establishment of the principate. The concentration of capital in elite hands and the lack of new areas to colonize led to the civil wars of the third century. They were described as a revolutionary movement spearheaded by the soldiers, which failed to lead to social reform. They ended in a military and religious dictatorship, reinforcing economic stagnancy and decline, ultimately leading to the downfall of the Western empire.

33 Ording, "Romerriket," in Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 6, 115–136.

This narrative is established by casting critical events as the result of class struggle. The republican system was founded when the aristocracy successfully ousted the king but remained locked in a struggle between traditional and new elites who owed their wealth to slavery and used poor citizens as assets in their quest for power. The struggle of the orders, slave rebellions, social and civil wars, imperialism, *populares*, the collapse of republican institutions, and the establishment of hereditary rule all fit in. Important actors, whether the Gracchi, Catiline, Cicero, or Caesar, become figureheads of class interest, frequently motivated by personal ambition. On the one hand, the argument is circular; on the other, theory and history mutually reinforce the plot. In this manner, 1200 years of history and one of the largest empires of the premodern world become proof of concept for Marxist historical doctrine.

EVENTS, PLOT, POETICS

Zooming out from the specific narratives in the articles discussed above, the genetic narrative of the Roman Empire also exemplifies the grander historical narrative of *Arbeidernes leksikon*, constituted by hundreds of short and a handful of longer articles relating various aspects of history. History becomes a stream of repression, exploitation, and imperialism, provoking rebellions and revolutions that are often either unsuccessful or otherwise co-opted by elite agents and interests. This allows us to read the alphabetically organized, factual, and mostly jargon-free encyclopedic accounts as parts of a larger plot.

While the articles on ancient Greece and the Roman empire contain historical narratives aligned with Marxist historical theory, the many shorter articles need to be read in context to grasp the overarching narrative. Carrard's concept of "poetics of history," the rules and conventions that historians adhere to in their texts, might help exemplify how this was done in *Arbeidernes leksikon*. On a basic level, this is visible in the (actually quite limited) use of Marxist terminology, such as proletariat, class, exploitation, revolution, or mode of production, and the conscious selection of topics and assignment of space. Thus Aristonicos, the leader of a rebellion mobilizing slaves and the poor against Roman rule in Pergamon 133–129 BC, gets a full page that includes bibliographic

references. In contrast, Aristides, the great Athenian statesman, gets a mere ten lines.[34]

On a more sophisticated level, Carrard divides historical texts that have no overt narrative structure into the categories of "descriptions" and "metahistories."[35] Descriptions are texts that ask not "what happened" but rather "what were things like."[36] Thus, they lack the events that propel the plot in Veyne's approach to narrative history. This seems to be an apt parallel for an encyclopedic approach to history, which, although it contains many events, fails to organize these into a plot explicitly. Carrard finds two narrative structures even in descriptive texts, the "tour" and "the map."[37] Arguably *Arbeidernes leksikon* makes use of both. The map consists of many small descriptions of historical conditions and processes, all playing out according to the same set of rules (e.g., slave mode of production, class struggle), and thus all situated within the same historical landscape. The tours are constituted by cross-references between articles that connect short factual articles with each other and the longer narrative accounts of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. The article on Aristonicos, for instance, refers to the Gracchi. That article, in turn, references the article on the Roman empire. Carrard's "metahistories" are texts that engage with prior works and discuss already existing information in light of these.[38] *Arbeidernes leksikon* contains only a few explicit references to other texts. However, given that the whole project depends on bringing history in line with Marxist historical thought, there is a specific metahistorical dimension. At times this becomes overt, for instance, in the article on ancient Greece, which enters the modernist-primitivist debate on the nature of the ancient economy on the modernist side.[39] The article on the Roman empire polemicizes against explanations for the decline of Rome that were popular at the time: racial degeneration and excessive luxury, and argues that declining economic productivity and the inability to reform caused the downfall of the Western empire.[40] The descriptions and the metahistorical aspects of *Arbeidernes leksikon* contribute to the more common and familiar narrative of historical stages.[41] Here

34 Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 1, 366–368.
35 Carrard, *Poetics*, 37–47.
36 Carrard, *Poetics*, 38.
37 Carrard, *Poetics*, 38.
38 Carrard, *Poetics*, 41.
39 Ording, "Hellas."
40 Ording, "Romerriket."
41 Carrard, *Poetics*, 47–54.

classical antiquity is just the first main stage in a development that has led to the capitalist world of the twentieth century, to a communist revolution in the Soviet Union, and that will also necessarily lead to a revolution in Norway and other industrial countries shortly.

THE CLASSICAL WORLD IN ARBEIDERNES LEKSIKON

There is no doubt that history is vital in *Arbeidernes leksikon.* While the emphasis is on contemporary and recent history, as well as the history of the socialist movement, premodern history, including the classical world, received broad coverage. The encyclopedia was explicitly Marxist and revolutionary, and history constituted evidence that Marxist analysis was valid. On a general level, Carrard's and Veyne's approaches to historical narration shed light on how this story was told consistently within the restraint imposed by the encyclopedic genre's requirement of brevity, factuality, alphabetization, and the multitude of non-historical content. On a more specific level, however, Rüsen's typology of historical narratives shows that this was not the only story told of the classical past.

On the one hand, ancient history and classical heritage are represented as subjects of independent, even eternal significance, as typical in traditional historical works and encyclopedias of the period. This may be ascribed to ambitions to educate the working-class audience that the encyclopedia was written for, as well as to create a work that was an alternative to mainstream encyclopedias in terms of comprehensiveness. On the other hand, social injustice, poverty, discrimination toward women and foreigners, imperialism, and reliance on slave labor are characteristic of the ancient world. In this, the encyclopedia foretells topics that, although well-attested and known, only entered mainstream Western historiography in earnest in the 1970s. A third program, even if less overt, may also be discerned: The emphasis on revolutionary leaders, popular rebellions, and the hard work, skill, and industriousness of ancient slaves, artisans, and workers not only serves to establish historical consciousness but also indirectly credits the working class with the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, thus appropriating the traditionally bourgeois domain of classical history for the people.

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Fig 1: The six leather-bound volumes of *Arbeidernes leksikon* (1931–1936) instill the liberating value of education and knowledge. The illustration on the back of the volumes depicts a human climbing toward the sunlight on a staircase built by a set of *Arbeidernes leksikon*.

HVOR FINNER VI SVAR?

på alle de spørsmål som dukker op i dagens løp — under samtalen med kameratene, på møtene om kvelden eller under lesningen av dagens aviser? Alle disse spørsmålene roper på *kjensgjerninger* for å kunne besvares. Gi oss *facts, facts, nothing but facts,* som engelskmennene sier — kjensgjerninger, kjensgjerninger, *bare* kjensgjerninger! Hvor finner vi dem? Hvor finner vi kjensgjerningene om den internasjonale *agrarkrisen,* om utviklingen i *Amerika* efter krigen, om den amerikanske fagbevegelsen, om imperialistenes kamp i *Abessinia, Afganistan, Afrika, Albania?* Hvor finner vi svar på hvad *akkumulasjon* er for noe, hvad *anarkismen* vil, hvem *Aristoteles* var? Hvor finner vi oplysninger om arbeiderbevegelsens ledende menn i inn- og utland, om *Alvestad,* handelsministeren i den første norske arbeiderregjeringen, om *Andreev,* den nye viseformannen i sovjetregjeringen, o. s. v., o. s. v. = = = = =
Når arbeiderne skal søke svar på disse spørsmål, må de gå til sitt eget spesialleksikon som gir en greiere, mer utførlig og pålitelig beskjed enn binnsterke og kostbare borgerlige verker. = = = = = = =

Ingen aktiv deltager i arbeiderbevegelsen kan undvære dette praktiske opslagsverk.

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magasinets kommisjonæ

ARBEIDERNES LEKSIKON

svarer allerede i de første to heftene på foregående spørsmål. I de følgende heftene vil man finne svar på en lang, lang rekke av de spørsmål som vi alle daglig støter på i det politiske liv hjemme og i utlandet. Vi nevner i fleng: *Dawes- og Youngplanene*, femårsplanen i *Russland*, forholdene i *Kina, India* og *Syd-Amerika*, o. s. v. Til alle disse spørsmålene vil man i Arbeidernes leksikon finne et rikt *kartmateriale*, som ikke hefter sig ved detaljer, men illustrerer de økonomiske og materielle forholdene i vedkommende land og derfor blir til direkte støtte for studiet av de spørsmål som interesserer arbeiderklassen: Kampen om verdensmarkedene, om råstoffkildene, om sjø- og transportveiene etc. etc.

Kjensgjerningene om disse spørsmål er det som avgjør svaret på dagens diskusjonsemner: er det fare for en ny verdenskrig, vil femårsplanen bli gjennemført, vil det britiske verdensimperium opløses, kommer Norge med i neste krig og på hvilken side o. s. v. o. s. v. Men selvfølgelig vil Arbeidernes leksikon først og fremst gi svar på spørsmålene om arbeiderbevegelsen her hjemme, om dens historie, om *Thranitterbevegelsen*, om de *faglige* og *politiske* organisasjoners historie og menn og om alle de begivenheter som alle arbeidere bør kjenne, og som det særlig er nødvendig for dem som deltar i arbeidernes organisasjoner å være inne i.

«Arbeidernes leksikon» utkommer i **94** hefter à **60** øre, med **2** hefter hver måned. For ca. **3 øre pr. dag** blir du altså i stand til å erhverve dig dette fond av kunnskaper om alle de spørsmål du støter på og som interesserer arbeiderklassen i dens kamp

Fig 2: Advertisement printed in labor-movement newspapers in 1931 to attract subscribers to *Arbeidernes leksikon*. The total price of the leather-bound set, NOK 71.40, amounted to c. one week's wage for a skilled worker. National Library of Norway. CC-BY-NC-ND.

ABSTRACT

The Norwegian *Arbeidernes leksikon,* "Workers' Encyclopedia," was published in six volumes from 1931–1936. It was inspired by *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, explicitly aimed at working-class readers, and establishing an alternative to the hegemonic bourgeoise discourse. The editors and many of the contributors belonged to the Communist Party of Norway (NKP) and the independent communist intellectual organization Mot Dag ("Towards Dawn"). This article investigates the reception and representation of the ancient world in *Arbeidernes leksikon* based on selected articles through the lens of narrative theory. Classical education was traditionally the domain of the upper classes. It is argued that the *Workers' Encyclopedia* demonstrates that reorienting the reception of ancient history was considered essential both to rewrite history according to Marxist doctrine and to establish workers' culture as a full-fledged alternative to its bourgeoise counterpart. In the *Workers' Encyclopedia,* the classical past is celebrated not for its empires and rulers but for the effort of the masses and their struggle for freedom.

KEYWORDS: book history, classical reception, encyclopedias, counterculture, historical narratives

Klasična antika v norveški *Delavski enciklopediji* (1931–1936)

IZVLEČEK

Norveška *Delavska enciklopedija*, *Arbeidernes leksikon,* je med letoma 1931–1936 izšla v šestih zvezkih. Zgledovala se je po Veliki sovjetski enciklopediji, ki je bila izrecno namenjena bralcem iz delavskega razreda in je predstavljala alternativo prevladujočemu meščanskemu diskurzu. Njeni uredniki in številni sodelavci so pripadali Komunistični partiji Norveške (NKP) in neodvisni komunistični intelektualni organizaciji Mot Dag (»Proti zori«). Članek skozi prizmo teorije pripovedi na podlagi izbranih člankov raziskuje recepcijo in reprezentacijo antičnega sveta, kot ga slika *Arbeidernes leksikon*. Klasična izobrazba je bila tradicionalno domena višjih slojev. Članek *Delavsko enciklopedijo* predstavi kot dokaz, da je bila preusmeritev recepcije pri antični zgodovini bistvena tako za reinterpretacijo zgodovine v skladu z marksistično doktrino kot za vzpostavitev delavske kulture kot polnopravne alternative svoji meščanski vzporednici. *Delavska enciklopedija* klasične preteklosti ni vrednotila zaradi imperijev in vladarjev, temveč zaradi prizadevanja množic in njihovega boja za svobodo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: zgodovina knjige, klasična recepcija, enciklopedije, protikultura, zgodovinske pripovedi

Athens, view of the Propylaea.

Athens, view of the Propylaea –
Nataša Stanič, Zorka Šubic Ciani.

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Ancient Athenian Democracy, Workers' Councils, and Leftist Criticism of Stalinist Russia

Vittorio Saldutti*

INTRODUCTION: MARXISM AND ANCIENT DEMOCRACY

"The political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor." With these words, Karl Marx, addressing the General Council of the International precisely 150 years ago, described the revolutionary experiment of the Paris Commune.[1] The German philosopher had always been very cautious in defining the political form of the new society that would come into being following the seizure of power by the working class.[2] Even though in the years following the establishment of Bonaparte's government he continued to have hopes about the political potential of universal suffrage for the proletariat, in general, he had been silent about the future political organization of a socialist society and increasingly suspicious of any

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1 Marx, "Civil War in France," 142. This phrase was added in the third draft of the text, with many other observations on the political nature of the Commune lacking in the first two drafts.

2 His main task after his break with the Hegelian tradition had been the analysis of how to obtain the "economic emancipation of labor," but "the features of this future order were […] never outlined," as Nippel says in *Ancient and Modern Democracy*, 288. Hudis, in "Marx's Concept of Socialism," describes the general solely economic predictions as "intimations of the future" and sketches a brief history of their evolution through Marx's works.

election as a potentially revolutionary tool.[3] The French proletarian revolt filled that gap. In Marx's eyes, there was a novelty in the organization of the Paris Commune of 1871 and how the communards took decisions amid their resistance against the German army. Marx underlined that the revolutionary government "was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short term [...] a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time." He then went on to say that the Paris Commune "supplied the republic with the basis of *really* democratic institutions."[4] The revolution of 1871 thus demonstrated that representative democracy was not a real democracy.

The impression left by the French events was so deep that it led Marx and Engels to make their only revision to the *Communist Manifesto*. In the preface to the German edition published in 1872, they wrote, "One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.'"[5] This belief – which, as we shall see, was fundamental in the later struggle between Bolsheviks and social democrats – was, moreover, the starting point for further studies on the meaning and nature of democracy, ancient and modern, which engaged Marx and Engels in their late years.

A much-debated question is whether Marx's reflections regarding the meaning of democracy influenced his opinion about ancient democratic Athens. Indeed, he did not share a classicist notion that saw ancient Greece and Rome as a golden age and model for a future society, and that is also true for Athens. Even if he recognized the outstanding achievements of Hellenic culture and civilization, a social order economically based on slavery was hardly suitable as a model for an exemplary society.[6] However, it

3 Doveton, in "Marx and Engels," 555–591, analyses the development of Marx's ideas regarding democracy from the warm support of his early works to a more skeptical later vision of any kind of electoral and representative governing system.

4 Marx, "Civil War in France," 139–142 (my emphasis).

5 Marx and Engels, "Preface to the German Edition," 175. The German original runs as follows: "Namentlich hat die Kommune den Beweis geliefert, daß, die Arbeiterklasse nicht die fertige Staatsmaschine einfach in Besitz nehmen und sie für ihre eigenen Zwecke in Bewegung setzen kann."

6 According to Marx, in "Economic Manuscripts," 47–48, Greek art shows that ancient times were "the childhood of humanity" in "the most beautiful form." Nevertheless, he recognized the "immature social conditions" and the "imma-

is also evident that his judgment was not limited to this general statement. In his last years, Marx deepened his analysis of ancient societies. After reading the works of Lewis Henry Morgan, he was confirmed in his idea that ancient societies were initially egalitarian and that the State was coincident with society.[7] In this framework, Athenian democracy was a peculiar form of communitarian resistance, implemented by the demos, against the development of social classes. This interpretation of ancient societies emerges clearly from a reading of Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*, written in 1880–81. Here the philosopher traces the evolution of Greece, and Athens in particular, from its primitive gentile institutions to the political State. The economic evolution of Athenian society enabled the transition from a pristine society, organized according to the gentile origin of everyone, to a political society, where "all registered citizens [were] free and equal."[8] Cleisthenes' reforms were a crucial moment in that progress, marking the point at which "the relations to gens or phratry ceased to govern the duties of an Athenian as a citizen. The coalescence of the people into bodies politic in territorial areas [was] now complete."[9] Only after the Roman period did "the element of property, which [had] controlled society to a great extent during the comparatively short period of civilization, give mankind despotism, imperialism, monarchy, privileged classes, and finally *representative democracy*."[10]

In Marx's line of reasoning, slavery was in the background. Engels brought it to the fore in the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, a work inspired by the same readings as his friend. Concluding a chapter on "The Emergence of the Athenian State," he writes, "the class antagonism on which the social and political institutions rested was no longer between the nobles and the common people, but between slaves and freemen, wards and citizens."[11] Engels exonerates the Athenian democratic system from the allegation that it had caused

ture stage of the society in which it originated." The concept was brilliantly summarized by Engels in "Anti-Dühring," 168: "Without slavery, no Greek state, no Greek art, and science; without slavery, no Roman Empire."

7 This idea was first developed by Marx in *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, 31, where he writes, "in the states of antiquity, the political state makes up the content of the state to the exclusion of the other spheres."

8 Krader, *Ethnological Notebooks*, 214.

9 Ibid., 215.

10 Ibid., 233 (my emphasis).

11 Engels, "Origin of the Family," 222.

the fall of the polis,[12] distinguishing economic and political structures; however, the emphasis on the first element made it prevalent among the first generation of Marxist scholars, who were unable to read Marx's *Notebooks*, since these were only published almost a century later.[13] In any case, neither Marx nor Engels explicitly stated that ancient Athenian democracy could be a model for the future proletarian real democracy.[14]

During World War I, the split inside the social democratic parties was fought in the field of theory and politics. The red line dividing the two political factions was the democracy they were fighting for. Right-wing and centrist social democratic theorists such as Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky thought that the only possible democracy was the parliamentary and representative form that existed at that time. The main task, in their view, was to acquire universal suffrage and win general elections to lead the society from capitalism into socialism. On the other hand, Leftist leaders defended Marx's ideas about breaking up the old state machinery and establishing a new democratic order.[15] In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin, defending the Dutch revolutionary Anton Pannekoek against the criticism of Kautsky, returned to the problem of the early examples of an actual democratic regime. Writing on the eve of the October Revolution, he prophesized: "Under socialism much of 'primitive' democracy will inevitably be revived, since, for the first time in the history of civilized society the mass of population will rise to taking an indepen-

12 Engels, "Origin of the Family," 222: "It was not democracy that caused the downfall of Athens, as the European schoolmasters who fawn upon royalty would have us believe, but slavery, which brought the labour of free citizens into contempt."

13 The impact exerted by Engels' "Origin" on early Marxist studies of the ancient world is well testified by its reception among scholars such as Franz Mehring and Karl Kautsky. Mehring cited Engels as an undisputed authority in his pamphlet "Über den historischen Materialismus," 289–343, and Kautsky used the study in his description of class struggle in antiquity in many of his historical works. Cf. Kloft, "Karl Kautsky," 311–331.

14 I must emphasize the adverb "explicitly," since many scholars have argued that ancient Athens was an implicit model for Marx and Engels' idea of democracy. Among classicists, Marcaccini, in *Atene Sovietica*, 49, and briefly in "What Has Marxism," 353, has elaborated on this conclusion; while among experts on Marxist thought, Hunt, in *Political Ideas*, 82 (taken up by Femia, *Marxism and Democracy*, 75–76), and McCarthy, in "Praise of Classical Democracy," the latter in the context of Marx's so-called "humanism," suggest this possible source of inspiration.

15 Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, 207–211, briefly summarizes the controversy.

dent part, not only in voting and elections, but also in the everyday administration of the State. Under socialism all will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing."[16] "Primitive democracy" is a suggestive expression, which was, in all likelihood, not about ancient democratic Athens.[17] Lenin, in the same book, wrote: "Freedom in capitalist society always remains about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners,"[18] demonstrating a vision of ancient democracy that is anything but positive. When talking about a "primitive democracy," Lenin was perhaps thinking of the Russian village communities called *obshchinas*.[19] More probably, he was evoking the rudimentary and naive trade union democracy criticized by Bernstein and Kautsky, but defended by Lenin as a valuable tool for the governance of a socialist society.[20]

To recapitulate, Marx and Engels stated that direct democracy without a division of powers was the only proper form of democracy. However, until the Russian Revolution, no one explicitly referred to the Athenian democratic regime – since it was based on the slave mode of production – as a possible model for the socialist revolution.

ARTHUR ROSENBERG'S ATHENS AS A PROLETARIAN REPUBLIC

A few years later, Arthur Rosenberg (1889–1943) was the first to do so. A promising alumnus of Eduard Meyer, who later became his *Doktorvater* and principal supporter,[21] Rosenberg studied at Berlin

16 Lenin, "State and Revolution," 492–493.

17 Marcaccini, in *Atene Sovietica*, 109–111, seems to be leaning toward that hypothesis.

18 Lenin, "State and Revolution," 465.

19 Even if he could not have been aware of the then-unpublished correspondence between Marx and Vera Zasulich on the potential revolutionary role of peasant village communities, he would certainly have known of Marx and Engels' "Preface to the Russian Edition," 426, where, in a summary of that debate, they wrote, "the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development."

20 This possibility is suggested by the context. The expression "primitive democracy" was coined by Beatrice and Sidney Webb in "Primitive Democracy," 397–432, in reference to the internal organization of trade unions, and was utilized by Bernstein and Kautsky with a derogatory tone. Lenin, in "What has to be done?" 481–482, agreed with them at first.

21 Rosenberg's problematic relationship with Meyer, who would also become his principal opponent within German academia, has been studied by Wirsching

University.[22] At first, his research was devoted to Italic and Roman political institutions. Due to his expertise in Roman constitutional history, he edited several substantial entries in the Pauly-Wissowa.[23] Writing the entry *Res publica*, Rosenberg began to investigate ancient democracy as a self-government of the people, and this would go on to be the main topic of his later research. During the war, he decided, like many others in his position, to adhere to the German Fatherland Party, a conservative political organization founded by Ludendorff. As the war was ending, his thoughts on ancient history intersected with the events of contemporary history, and his life was redirected as a result. The sudden collapse of the Wilhelmine regime fostered the setting up and spread of workers' and soldiers' councils all over the country, particularly in Berlin, where he lived. Rosenberg was so impressed by the newly established governing bodies, which he thought were similar to the organs of self-governing ancient democracies, that he made a political U-turn. He decided to side with revolution, joining the rank and file of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), the party most sympathetic to the idea of a workers' state based upon the power of councils.

In 1919 Rosenberg went a step further than Marx and Lenin concerning Athens and workers' democracy when he wrote the article "The most ancient proletarian republic in the world."[24] The article was published in the *Freie Welt*, an illustrated weekly magazine attached to social democratic newspapers. Its editorial location, layout, phraseology, and appealing title were all directed at educating working-class readers to perceive Athenian democracy as a helpful lesson from the past. He argued that "Athens in [the] period of the dictatorship of the proletariat had a constitution which conforms in its fundamental lines to the elements characterizing the system of councils. […] Thus, the Athenian republic was characterized by the direct self-government of the proletarian masses." To demonstrate the existence of a proletarian republic, the historian described the Athenian social and economic organization in highly original terms compared to the well-established Marxist reading. Its main target was the importance and role of slaves

in "Politik und Zeitgeschichte."

22 Recent detailed biographies of Arthur Rosenberg are Riberi, *Arthur Rosenberg*, and Keßler, *Arthur Rosenberg*. Less exhaustive is Senatore, "La vita e le opere di Arthur Rosenberg," 177–232. Canfora's *Comunista senza partito* remains useful.

23 *Imperator* (9.1, 1139–1154); *Imperium* (9.2, 1201–1211); *Ramnes, Ravenna, Regia, Regifugium, Res publica, Rex, Rex sacrorum, Romulia, Romulus* (1 A, 1137–1139; 300–305; 465–469; 469–472; 633–674; 702–721; 721–726; 1074; 1074–1104).

24 Rosenberg, "Älteste proletarier-Republik."

in Athenian production, which, in Rosenberg's opinion, constituted only "a small minority of the population, perhaps one-fourth of the total population." Consequently, "the vast majority of productive work was already done by free workers." This was the premise of Rosenberg's peculiar history of Athenian democracy, which he argued had been led by a bourgeois government until Ephialtes put it in the hands of the working class. This innovative reconstruction of Athenian democratic history caused a lively debate on the pages of the cultural insert of the authoritative social democratic newspaper *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.[25] The reply to Rosenberg was first entrusted to Otto Jenssen, then to the Italian socialist historian Ettore Ciccotti. The response was consistent with the Second International orthodox reading of Marxism, and the controversy, therefore, took on the character of a struggle between the old and new approaches to Marx's texts.[26]

At the end of 1920, Rosenberg joined the Communist Party (KPD). The following year, he learned from the lessons of the previous debate and further explored his ideas about the development of Athenian democracy in a textbook of ancient history for the workers' university entitled *Democracy and Class Struggle in the Ancient World*.[27] Here he made explicit the comparison between ancient democracy and contemporary councils:

> It is possible to discover close similarities between the Athenian constitution of the period of proletarian democracy and the political organization developed by the Paris Commune in 1871: in both, there were small districts from which poor people sent their delegates; both paid civil servants a worker's salary; both had a central authority, wielding at the same time advisory and executive power, formed by delegates from small districts. In addition to this, regarding the effects that the ideas developed by the Paris Commune had on the present Councils' Republic in Russia, it is easy to find many analogies between that political system and the Athenian constitution.[28]

Rosenberg was reading about Athenian democracy with Marx's *Civil War in France* and Lenin's *State and Revolution* lying open before

25 Jenssen, "Die 'Proletarierrepublik' Athen"; Rosenberg, "Nochmals die Proletarier-Republik"; Ciccotti, "Athen eine 'Proletarierrepublik'?"

26 The debate has been analyzed in detail by Saldutti, "Origini di *Demokratie*."

27 Rosenberg, *Demokratie und Klassenkampf*. Saldutti, in "Arthur Rosenberg," has underlined the educational framework and aims of the book.

28 Rosenberg, *Demokratie und Klassenkampf*, 37–38 (my translation).

him.[29] He was thus led to the conclusion that "the three constitutions [i.e., of ancient Athens, of the Paris Commune, and the Soviet Union] rested on the same fundamental principle: the aim that the poorest working population could self-govern as far as possible," to such an extent that "in Athenian society class distinctions withered away."[30] In this manner, the classicist brought his interest in ancient societies into convergence with the goal of socialist revolution, even at the cost of straying from the conventional social democratic reading of ancient societies.[31]

DEMOCRATIC ATHENS AND THE SOVIET REGIME IN ROSENBERG'S CRITIQUE

Rosenberg's career progression within the Communist Party was swift. Elected city council member in 1921, he took part in the Congress of Jena, where he sided with the Party's left wing, led by Ruth Fischer. In 1924 his faction obtained the majority in the Party, and he became a member of the central committee and then MP. His commitment took two directions. First, he was involved in the parliamentary committee of inquiry into the German defeat in World War I. This assignment significantly impacted his decision to abandon ancient history in favor of contemporary history. Even more important was his role as a German member of the executive committee of the Communist International. From this vantage point, he could see first-hand the decline of the International under Stalin. In subsequent years he maintained his critical stance until he left the Communist Party in 1927. Like many other left-wing communist leaders, he saw what was happening in Russia as a decisive deviation

29 Riberi, *Arthur Rosenberg*, 57–58, has emphasized Rosenberg's debt to Lenin's *State and Revolution*.

30 Rosenberg, *Demokratie und Klassenkampf*, 41 (my translation). Worthy of note is that Rosenberg here uses the verb "verschwinden," the same peculiar verb used in the German translation of Lenin's *State and Revolution* to describe the slow disappearance of the state after the conquest of power by the revolutionary movement.

31 The analogy between ancient Athens and contemporary politics was pursued in other aspects as well. In Rosenberg's description of the split within the Athenian proletarian party after Pericles' death and the consequent struggle between Cleon and Nicias (*Demokratie und Klassenkampf*, 52–53), it is possible to read between the lines an analogy of the clash between social democrats and communists.

from Marxism: degeneration from proletarian democracy to the dictatorship of a bureaucratic clique.[32]

When his appointment as MP was over, Rosenberg decided to write books on contemporary history.[33] In 1932 Rosenberg published a *History of Bolshevism*.[34] Here he tried to sketch the evolution of Bolshevism as a peculiar kind of Marxism characterized by two distinctive elements. The first was the prominent role of a centralized Party in the revolutionary struggle. The second was Lenin's refusal to limit the Party's task to the emancipation of industrial workers alone. According to Rosenberg, "Lenin regarded social democracy as the great leader of the Russian nation in its struggle for freedom,"[35] and "the difference between Lenin and all other social democrats consist[ed] in his including in his plans, in addition to the proletariat and the middle class, the immensely powerful class lying between them."[36]

This description of Bolshevik political theory owed much to the renewed interest of Rosenberg in Marx and Aristotle, simultaneously, in the early thirties. Several publications on the father of scientific socialism, as well as Rosenberg's final article in classical studies on the meaning of democracy and dictatorship in the *Politics* of Aristotle, date to those years.[37] This last article reacted to Werner Jaeger's salient study on the evolution of Aristotle's thought,[38] which served as a pretext for him to return to his previous interest in ancient

32 In his resignation letter, "Rosenberg begründet seine Austritt," he said that "the sharp turn made at the 14th Congress of the Bolshevik party in domestic policy must have as a logical consequence the dissolution of the Third International." The reference was to both the implementation of the "Socialism in one country" theory and the emergence of Stalin as the one and only leader of the party, ratified at the Russian party congress of 1925.

33 He began with a monograph on the birth of the German Republic: Rosenberg, *Entstehung der deutschen Republik*.

34 Rosenberg, *Geschichte des Bolschewismus*, cited in its English translation, *History of Bolshevism*.

35 Ibid., 29.

36 Ibid., 41.

37 On Marx, see Rosenberg, "Marx und Engels"; Rosenberg, "Karl Marx." Rosenberg was the editor of Marx, *Das Kapital*. On Aristotle, see Rosenberg, "Aristoteles über Diktatur."

38 Jaeger, *Aristoteles: Grundlegung*. The main difference between Rosenberg and Jaeger lay in their stances on Aristotle's judgment about democracy in books 3 and 4 of his *Politics*. While Jaeger thought that the Stagirite resumed Plato's harsh criticism of democratic regimes, Rosenberg believed that he had already broken with the political ideas of his master and was thus less critical of those regimes.

political philosophy.[39] Rosenberg once again stated explicitly that most of his theoretical ideas on contemporary politics derived from ancient history and political philosophy. Since his first attempt to understand Athenian democracy in the light of Marx's thought, he had difficulty comparing the modern proletariat with ancient social classes, which differed from industrial workers.[40] Thus, even though the political form of ancient and contemporary democracies could be compared, their social bases were, at first glance, very different. Reading Aristotle's principal political work and Marx's most influential essays, Rosenberg found a solution to this dilemma. He underlined that the philosopher from Stagira had defined the constitutions based on their class composition. Democracy was the regime of the poor, and oligarchy was the regime of the wealthy, irrespective of how numerous they were.[41] Aristotle's analysis refers to a conservative and even oligarchic definition of democracy as the regime of the poor and the worst. This contrasted with democratic ideology, portraying democracy as the government of the majority and thus of the entire civic body.[42] The Stagirite observed that the reason why democracy could appear to be the constitution of the majority was that in every city, the poor outnumbered the wealthy. He ended his reasoning with the paradox that if by coincidence, the poor people were a minority in a polis, and they led it, it must be described as a democracy. Aristotle concluded that a constitution's social and economic bases determined its political definition. According to Rosenberg, this was also true of modern, industrialized societies.[43]

39 Canfora, *Comunista senza partito*, 66.

40 Rosenberg's terminological inaccuracy was one of Ciccotti's main criticisms. Rosenberg attempted to reply in *Demokratie und Klassenkampf*, 3, saying that "in ancient times, the proletarian was the product of poverty alone."

41 Arist., *Pol.* 3.1279b16–1280a6, 4.1290a30–b3.

42 The democratic ideology was exposed by Hdt. 3.80.6, who defines democracy as πλῆθος [...] ἄρχον, hinting at the sovereignty of the majority; and by Thuc. 2.37.1, who makes explicit the idea of a regime based on majority rule, saying that: ὄνομα μὲν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐς ὀλίγους ἀλλ᾽ ἐς πλείονας οἰκεῖν δημοκρατία κέκληται. In sharp contrast to this image, Ps.-Xen., *Ath. pol.* 1.2–9, describes Athenian democracy as follows: οἱ μὲν γὰρ πένητες καὶ οἱ δημόται καὶ οἱ χείρους εὖ πράττοντες καὶ πολλοὶ οἱ τοιοῦτοι γιγνόμενοι τὴν δημοκρατίαν αὔξουσιν· ἐὰν δὲ εὖ πράττωσιν οἱ πλούσιοι καὶ οἱ χρηστοί, ἰσχυρὸν τὸ ἐναντίον σφίσιν αὐτοῖς καθιστᾶσιν οἱ δημοτικοί. Plato, *Resp.* 8.557a, agrees with this image of democratic government by saying that it is the regime of the poor, while oligarchy is the regime of the wealthy.

43 Rosenberg, "Aristoteles über Diktatur," 352.

Once again studying the history of Bolshevism, Rosenberg concluded that Marx had the same idea as Aristotle: "In Marx's view, true democracy in a modern industrialized state can only mean the government of the proletariat *in the sense that the working class assumes the leadership of the middle class and the peasantry.*"[44] The proletariat and oppressed groups did not completely overlap, and since contemporary society is divided into two layers, the working class must be the leading group of a broader social coalition. This meant that poverty was the link between ancient and contemporary oppressed classes and the social basis for any democracy. Lenin, inheriting this conception from Marx, favored the formation of the typical democratic coalition of all the poor.

At the start of the revolution, Lenin tried to organize this heterogeneous social bloc into the political system proper to the Russian uprising, that is, the soviets. "[In] the Soviet Lenin recognized the existence in a weak and elementary form of an entirely new type of working-class government which could only be compared historically with the Paris Commune of 1871."[45] Soviets were created by the popular masses themselves, and for this reason "the Bolshevik Revolution was able to base itself upon the sole democratic and national representative body, i.e., the Soviet Congress."[46] Given its social basis and constitutional organization, Soviet Russia was initially a true democracy in the definitions of both Marx and Aristotle. However, wartime communism, the NEP, and the subsequent rise of Stalin ratified the Party's victory over the councils and resulted in the defeat of democracy. Rosenberg clarified: "As will presently be demonstrated in detail, the educated (so-called) Soviet government that has been in power from 1918 to the present day has nothing in common with this type of government."[47] He confirmed this statement in his work on Aristotle as well, where he wrote: "[Assuming Aristotle's point of view] Soviet Russia of 1917 and 1918 *would have been* a democracy, while [our] contemporary French republic would be an oligarchy."[48] Compared with ancient Athens, the democratic experience of Soviet Russia was over definitively. Drawing his conclusions on the Soviet Union of his days, Rosenberg said:

44 Rosenberg, *History of Bolshevism*, 12 (my emphasis).

45 Rosenberg, *History of Bolshevism*, 97.

46 Ibid., 119.

47 Ibid., 99.

48 Rosenberg, "Aristoteles über Diktatur," 355.

> Socialism is inconceivable unless accompanied by the exercise of self-determination on the part of the people. For socialism is the rule of freedom under which the State disappears. An over-bureaucratized administration based on the employment of force, and which the masses must obey, is irreconcilable with the socialist organization of society and can only be regarded as a middle-class institution.[49]

Rosenberg's judgment of the evolution of Russia from Lenin to Stalin was driven by the idea – developed through his research on ancient Athens – that democracy is, in the end, the people's self-government, presupposing the sovereignty of the poor. The Athenian model is, in some way, the benchmark for every attempt to establish a democratic regime, something that happened at the beginning of the Soviet regime but did not last long. Contemporary Russia was thus no longer a democracy, as the Athenian comparison showed.

PANNEKOEK ON COUNCIL DEMOCRACY AND STALINIST RUSSIA

The use of Athenian democracy as a touchstone for the degeneration of the Soviet Union under Stalin was even more explicit in Anton Pannekoek's final works. As we have seen, Anton Pannekoek (1873–1960) was already a recognized leader of the leftist and revolutionary tendencies of European social democracy before the Great War.[50] Since the foundation of the Dutch Social Democratic Party, he had been a fierce opponent of reformist and revisionist attempts. He came into contact with German social democracy in 1906 when he was chosen to be a teacher at the central Party school in Berlin.

In 1912 he defended, against his former friend Kautsky, the need for a violent revolution to overthrow capitalism. His controversy with Kautsky became a fundamental point in the ensuing struggle between the left and center of the Party, even if he had no well-defined idea regarding the new political system to be established after capitalist power had been broken. The Russian and German revolutions suggested to him the missing piece of his reasoning. Like Rosenberg, Pannekoek was impressed by the spread of soviet councils in Russia

49 Rosenberg, *History of Bolshevism*, 262.

50 The most exhaustive biographies of Pannekoek are Malandrino, *Scienza e Socialismo*, and Gerber, *Anton Pannekoek*. The works contained in *Anton Pannekoek* are devoted to investigating his background in academic astronomy and the impact this had on his political theories.

and their work as revolution engines. This impression was confirmed by the November Revolution in Germany and led him to become a passionate advocate of council democracy as the only way to win the revolution and establish a workers' regime.

Later on, he became increasingly critical of the Soviet regime in Russia and the strategy of the Communist International, to the point that Lenin's criticism of left-wing communism was directed mainly at him. Pannekoek's organization, the Rätekommunisten (Communist Councils), disapproved of the international tactics and the Party's dominant role in the Russian Revolution in the establishment of the socialist State. Pannekoek became a point of reference for all communist critics of the Bolshevik hegemony in the international workers' movement. It is unknown whether Pannekoek ever met Rosenberg, but he certainly knew his works and his ideas since they both spent much of their life in Germany in the same political field.[51]

During World War II, he took stock of his political experience and, in 1946, published his definitive work, *Workers' Councils*.[52] The task of the book was to fight back against both bourgeois democracy and Soviet communism and to defend the meaning of council socialism. Against parliamentary and representative democracy, he stated:

> Council organization, in this respect, is quite the opposite of parliamentarism. Here the natural groups, the collaborating workers, and the personnel of the factories act as unities and designate their delegates. Because they have common interests and belong together in the praxis of daily life, they can send some of them as real representatives and spokesmen. Complete democracy is realized here by

51 Riberi, in *Arthur Rosenberg*, 92, postulates the existence of political connections between the left wing of the KPD, Rosenberg in particular, and the Dutch ultra-left, led by Pannekoek. During the twenties and thirties, both shared an interest in the work of the Marxist philosopher Karl Korsch (a close friend of Rosenberg until his death), who inspired many observations in Rosenberg's *History of Bolshevism* and Pannekoek's *Workers' Council*, as noted by Riberi in *Arthur Rosenberg*, 381–402, Keßler, in *Arthur Rosenberg*, 122–125, 232–233, and Gerber, in *Anton Pannekoek*, 192.

52 The first Dutch edition, *De arbeidersraden*, was published under the false name Aartz. The English translation was published, with a new chapter and major revisions, in 1950 as Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*. The complex history of this book's publication has been summarized with archive references in Gerber, *Anton Pannekoek*, 195, with notes. I cite from the first Dutch edition with my own translation.

> the equal rights of everyone who takes part in the work […] This labor democracy is entirely different from the political democracy of the former social system.[53]

Council organization is a real democracy, as Marx stated about the Paris Commune and Rosenberg wrote during the German Revolution. Pannekoek also shared with both of them the idea that the distinction between legislative and executive power would disappear in a council society.

Many chapters of his book analyze what happened in Russia during and after the revolution. He defined the economic system of the Soviet Union as state capitalism and criticized the political decline of the Bolshevik Party after 1919, saying that:

> The soviets were gradually eliminated as organs of self-rule, and reduced to subordinate organs of the government apparatus. […] The Russian Revolution initially gave a mighty impulse to the fight of the working class. For the first time in history, the working class could overthrow a corrupt government, which was shaken by huge strikes. On the basis of strike committees, which already existed, the Russian Revolution built up the councils, that is, self-governing political bodies […]. But Russia was an underdeveloped country, and its working class was too weak and small to realize true workers' control over production […]. The councils were soon left powerless, subjugated to the already dominant bureaucracy.[54]

According to Pannekoek, however, beyond capitalism and state capitalism, there remained the possibility of establishing a society of councils and a genuinely democratic one.

Casting his net further back, Pannekoek found that this future society had models beyond the Paris Commune and the first two years of Soviet Russia. In a chapter devoted to analyzing the evolution of the idea of democracy in history, Pannekoek uses ancient Athens as his central positive paradigm: "Like in ancient Greek towns […] democracy was the usual organizational form of the community […]. Democracy was the form of collaboration and self-rule of free

53 Pannekoek, *De arbeidersraden*, 39–40. In the English translation, the phrase continues: "The so-called political democracy under capitalism was a mock democracy, an artful system conceived to mask the real domination of the people by a ruling minority."

54 Ibid., 74–76.

and equal producers, each master of his own means of production, his soil or his shop and his tools. *In ancient Athens, which produced this kind of democracy in its most perfect form*, it was the regular citizens, gathering every month and every week, that decided on public affairs."[55] He goes on to address the problem of the modern distinction between legislative and executive power, saying that: "The administrative functions, which were already developed, were not performed by professional, governmental employees, but by the citizens themselves, who held those functions for short periods only, which were circulated by lot."[56] Of course, in this kind of primitive democracy, there were various problems, particularly slavery, along with the imperialist attitude of Athens, but this was not the point. Much more interesting, in Pannekoek's view, was the role of ancient democracy as a trailblazer for every subsequent democratic form of government in history, in particular that of the workers' councils. This becomes even more evident some pages later. Defending the word 'democracy' from both bourgeois and Stalinist appropriation, he continues:

> Workers must be strongly persuaded that council organization is the most perfect and superior form of juridical equality. Adhering, then, to the emotional value attached since ancient times to the word "democracy," we may say that council organization represents the higher form of democracy, the true democracy of labor. Someone may ask whether the word "democracy" really meant this, since the word *-kratia* means supremacy, government, power. In the word itself there is the idea of control from above, from the side of the government, which is above the people themselves, even if it has been elected by the people. In a council organization, this problem will not exist […] since the government will be the people itself, *comparable to some extent with the ancient democracy of Athens*.[57]

Thus, ancient Athens was, in Pannekoek's eyes, a forerunner of council democracy, and council democracy was the only way for the workers to escape the double trap of capitalism on one side and Stalinism on the other.

55 Pannekoek, *De arbeidersraden*, 133 (my emphasis).

56 Ibid., 133.

57 Ibid., 140–141 (my emphasis).

CONCLUSION

Stigmatized as a slave society in the theoretical elaboration of the Second International, Athens became a political model in the years that followed the Russian and German revolutions. Thanks to Rosenberg, the organization of Athenian democracy was seen among the ultra-left of the Communist International as the forerunner of contemporary council democracy, a true democracy compared with the bourgeois false one. This idea was used once again in subsequent years when the dream of a socialist republic in Russia faded away. The NEP and the adoption of the "socialism in one country" theory were perceived by the leftist and council communists as a betrayal. The Athenian model was thus used to stress the distance between genuine democracy and the bureaucratic regime established in the Soviet Union, which was seen as a parody of the previous council system.

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ABSTRACT

"The political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor." With these words, Marx described the Paris Commune of 1871. It "was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short term [...] a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time." The political tradition of the Commune was inherited by the Russian soviets and inspired Lenin, who explained the role of those governing bodies as a "reversion to primitive democracy." Arthur Rosenberg, professor of Ancient History at Berlin University, tried in his book *Democracy and Class Struggle in the Ancient World* to offer historical ground for the ideas developed by Lenin in *State and Revolution* and compared ancient Athenian democracy to the contemporary German and Russian councils. During the 1920s, as a communist leader and MP, Rosenberg, recalling his ideas on Athenian democracy, criticized the political degeneration of the Russian workers' State. He stressed how Soviet Russia, in limiting the power of the councils, had suppressed the governing body of socialist direct democracy. In his work *Workers' Councils*, Dutch revolutionary Anton Pannekoek renewed Rosenberg's criticism at the end of World War II, returning to the image of ancient democratic Athens as a forerunner of the socialist councils.

KEYWORDS: Arthur Rosenberg, Anton Pannekoek, democracy, Athens, workers councils

Antična atenska demokracija, delavski sveti in levičarska kritika stalinistične Rusije

IZVLEČEK

»Naposled odkrita politična oblika, pod katero je mogoče uresničiti ekonomsko emancipacijo dela.« S temi besedami je Marx leta 1871 opisal Pariško komuno. Sestavljali so jo »občinski svetniki, izvoljeni s splošnimi volitvami v različnih mestnih okrožjih, odgovorni, ki jih je mogoče hitro odpoklicati [...] delovno in ne parlamentarno telo, izvršilno in zakonodajno hkrati«. Politično tradicijo komune so podedovali ruski sovjeti in navdihnila je Lenina, ki je vlogo teh upravnih organov pojasnil kot »vrnitev k prvotni demokraciji«. Arthur Rosenberg, profesor antične zgodovine na berlinski univerzi, je v svoji knjigi *Demokracija in razredni boj v antičnem svetu* poskušal ponuditi zgodovinsko podlago za ideje, ki jih je Lenin razvil v knjigi *Država in revolucija*, in primerjal antično atensko demokracijo s sočasnimi nemškimi in ruskimi sveti. V dvajsetih letih 20. stoletja je Rosenberg kot komunistični voditelj in poslanec s sklicevanjem na svoje ideje o atenski demokraciji kritiziral politično degeneracijo ruske delavske države. Poudarjal je, da je sovjetska Rusija z omejevanjem moči svetov zatrla vodilni organ socialistične neposredne demokracije. Nizozemski revolucionar Anton Pannekoek je ob koncu druge svetovne vojne v svojem delu *Delavski sveti* obnovil Rosenbergovo kritiko in se vrnil k podobi antičnih demokratičnih Aten kot predhodnice socialističnih svetov.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Rosenberg, Anton Pannekoek, demokracija, Atene, delavski sveti

Athens, Propylaea – Franc Žužek, Nataša Stanič, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Milan Grošelj, Primož Simoniti, Mirko Juteršek, Ksenija Rozman, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Jožica Škof, Zorka Šubic Ciani.

Athens, Erechtheion.

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Spartacus and His Early Soviet Theatrical Representation

Oleksii Rudenko*

> Everyone who is fighting for freedom, for a better future for humanity, will put on their placard just one word – and this word will be Spartacus.
>
> Vladimir Mazurkevich, 1920.[1]

INTRODUCTION

In some respects, the year 1918 predetermined the future of the Classics in the early Bolshevik republics. It was in that year that Lenin's plan of "Monumental Propaganda" emerged, which provided the first official list of Bolshevik heroes of the past and indicated to whom new monuments should be erected. This plan originally comprised two documents: an April statement that demanded the destruction and removal of monuments to the czars and their servants, and a July decree that enlarged the list and ordered the design of new monuments to the socialist revolution.[2] This task was pri-

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1 Finishing this article would have been far easier in times of peace. Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. I dedicate this article to my colleague, the historian Dmytro Yevdokymov (b. 1998), who gave his life defending the Ukrainian people in late March 2022, and to everyone defending and supporting Ukraine today. I am grateful to Henry Stead for inviting me to the workshop in October 2021 and for his attentive remarks and kind suggestions when editing this article. My anonymous reviewer/s significantly contributed to the final shape and methodology of this essay.

2 Stead and Paulouskaya, "Classics, Crisis and the Soviet Experiment to 1939," 128–36; "Decree on Monuments of the Republic," 95–7; "Decree on the Approval of the List of Monuments to the Great People," 118–9.

marily entrusted to a special committee comprising the Commissar of Enlightenment (Education), the Commissar of the Property of the Republic (Finances), and the chair of the art department at the Commissariat of Enlightenment.

One of the Soviet leaders responsible for the politics of remembrance, Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933), soon announced: "We begin to erect in the public gardens and other districts of the capital monuments which will rather pursue the purpose of wide propaganda than immortalization."[3] Early in August of 1918, a list of monuments that were supposed to be erected in Moscow and across socialist Russia was published.[4] The list included six categories. The first, entitled "Revolutionaries and Public Leaders," began with Spartacus, followed by Tiberius Gracchus and Marcus Junius Brutus. No monuments, however, to Gracchus or Brutus appeared within the next two decades, and even Spartacus remained a rare subject of Soviet sculpture, appearing only in the later periods of the Soviet era.[5] Although it was easy enough for the classically-educated Marx and Engels to establish continuity between these ancient figures and the proletarian revolution, it was clearly more problematic for their Soviet descendants to harness any such continuity to propagandistic ends.[6] This difficulty ensured that Spartacus, Brutus, and Gracchus were kept on the margins of communist monumental politics. The politics of monumental commemoration was rather biased toward the heroes of the modern world. Especially common were statues commemorating Karl Marx (1818–1883); communist and military leaders, such as Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) and Joseph Stalin (1878–1953); poets like Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) or Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841); French revolutionaries, including Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794), Georges Danton (1759–1794) and Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793); Red Army soldiers; and abstract "Heroes of the Revolution."

3 Lunacharsky, *Ob Izobrazitel'nom Iskusstve*, 51–2; translation mine.

4 "The List of Figures to Whom Monuments Should Be Erected in Moscow and Other Cities of RSFSR." See also *Dekrety Sovetskoy Vlasti*, T. III, 118–9; Michalski, *Public Monuments*, 109; Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 89. There were no other Greco-Roman heroes than Spartacus, Gracchus, and Brutus on the list.

5 For instance, one of the very few monuments to Spartacus in Ukraine was erected in Odesa as late as 1988.

6 See selected mentions about Marx and Engels reading the Classics: Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 41, XXIII, 265; Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 42, 17, 31, 52. For a recent overview of Marx's knowledge of ancient history, see Nippel, "Marx and Antiquity," 185–208.

Nevertheless, unlike Gracchus or Brutus – who never quite captured the Soviet imagination as they might have – Spartacus remained firmly on the Bolshevik agenda, entering public discourse by other means than visual monuments. His prominent representation in history-writing and textbooks, toponymy, onomastics, and sport[7] all contributed to Spartacus' unrivaled reputation in the early Soviet era as a precursor to the Bolshevik hero.

Theater and mass performances beginning in the 1920s also helped shape the proto-Soviet image of Spartacus. Such spectacles were especially effective in conveying simple messages to large audiences. They proliferated in the revolutionary era primarily due to the "vacuum of authority and control" that followed the October Revolution.[8] Censorship principles and practices were rapidly changed. Together with the ostentatious willingness of the Bolsheviks to create a new proletarian culture, such changes sparked many artistic and theatrical experiments, including those engaging with the image of Spartacus. It is important to remember that until the late 1920s, Soviet culture was open to new, experimental tendencies in art, literature, cinema, and theater. In the 1930s, however, this all stopped. The repression of Ukrainian non-conformist authors, poets, and intellectuals, for example, was in line with the wider curtailment of artistic freedoms throughout the Soviet Union and Soviet-inspired states.

Theater and cinema had long been considered entertainments for the bourgeoisie. After the revolution, these media forms were opened up to the proletariat. Tickets became affordable and new cinemas opened across the cities of the Soviet Union.[9] While their programming was not yet extensive, the sheer number of films, frequently experimental, produced by such artists as Dziga Vertov (1896–1954, ca. 26 films), Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948, 14 films), and Oleksandr Dovzhenko (1894–1956, c. 15 films), who began their careers in the 1920s and 1930s, indicates the high status that cinematography acquired in the newly founded Bolshevik state. Film and performance art more broadly became key mechanisms for promoting Bolshevik ideas.[10] This essay

7 In Soviet sport, Spartacus gave his name to the famous Spartakiads (Spartacus competitions) and to "the people's team" Spartak, e.g., the famous FC Spartak Moscow (est. 1922).

8 For the concept of the "vacuum of authority and control," see John Von Szeliski, "Lunacharsky and the Rescue of Soviet Theatre," 416.

9 Maksakov, "Teadelo na Ukraine," 20. In 1928, the price for a theatre ticket in Ukraine was 73 kopecks compared to 1 ruble 43 kopecks before 1914.

10 Maksakov, "Teadelo na Ukraine," 20.

will concentrate mainly on theater, with some attention paid to mass performances, where the material remains are comparatively scarce.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Mass propaganda, or controlling the minds of the crowd, has been crucial for achieving specific political goals since antiquity.[11] In the aftermath of the Bolshevik coup in 1917, the role of mass performances and theater was reconsidered as they achieved new significance in their capacity for influencing the citizens of the newly established Soviet republics.[12] Although these republics were officially independent states under separate Bolshevik governments, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Caucasian republics were under the implicit control of the central government in Soviet Russia. A decision made in Moscow on a particular matter promptly became a guiding light for other republics.[13] The Greco-Roman classics and the educational discipline founded upon them, which in the czarist era (as in contemporary Western Europe) was considered a marker of high cultural achievement and intellectual esteem, also experienced a new fate.[14] As Stead and Paulouskaya have shown, before the Stalinist suppression of a cultural practice widely associated with the *ancien régime*, revolutionary Russia experienced a flood of classical culture, as the wave of the so-called Slavic renaissance broke on the seemingly impervious shores of the emerging Soviet republics.[15] This article explores how and why the image of Spartacus was employed in early Bolshevik propaganda.

Since the role of toponymy, sport, and history-writing in shaping the image of Spartacus is relatively well explored, other key issues shall be the focus here.[16] First, the utility of the ancient hero in Bolshevik propaganda will be investigated. Second, the way Soviet theater and mass performance became an important site for experimentation

11 See several classical works on the topic, beginning with Republican Rome: Mouritsen, *Plebs and Politics in the Late Roman Republic;* Morstein-Marx, *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic;* Yakobson, *Elections and Electioneering in Rome;* Edwards Jr., *Luther's Last Battles.*

12 Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams,* 93–7.

13 Heller and Nekrich, *Utopia in Power,* 70–7.

14 Stead and Paulouskaya, "Classics, Crisis and the Soviet Experiment to 1939," 142; Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front,* 37–64.

15 Stead and Paulouskaya, "Classics, Crisis and the Soviet Experiment to 1939," 128–47.

16 Phillis, "Spartacus and Sports in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe"; Rudenko, "The Making of a Soviet Hero."

with the classical will be demonstrated. Third, the representation of Spartacus and his uprising in the most important Soviet plays and performances created in the first few years after the October revolution will be analyzed. The greatest attention will be paid to the two most popular dramas about Spartacus' uprising, which were written by Vladimir Mazurkevich (1920) and Vladimir Volkenstein (1921).[17] Where available, contemporary critical reviews will be used in determining how the plays were received. Finally, the narratives of Spartacus' uprising will be compared in order to show how each writer reflects upon the events surrounding the 1917 Revolution through the lens of the ancient world.

Given the centrality of classical education among the intelligentsia and Czarist cultural practice more broadly, it is perhaps unsurprising that classical antiquity should have played a crucial role in Bolshevik propaganda after 1917. Classical culture's associations with Czarism and aristocratic power made it an attractive area to turn upside down. Revolutionary examples from antiquity would help the Bolsheviks implement their proletarian narratives into the public sphere. These narratives emphasized several key features: class struggle, modest descent as a defining factor of a human's worth, the destruction of the state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the fight against the bourgeoisie (broadly defined).[18] It was, however, not easy to find a proletarian or socialist hero in the distant past. The democratic system of Athens or the military devotion of Sparta did not align with Bolshevik political concepts, which primarily praised the dictatorship of the proletariat.[19]

Where then to look for heroes of antiquity, suitable for symbolizing seemingly eternal proletarian ideals? The solution was clear to the Bolshevik leaders: in figures *opposing* those regimes. Hence the appearance of the three ancient heroes in Lenin's above-mentioned plan: Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, Spartacus, and Marcus Junius Brutus.[20] Both Gracchus and Brutus originated from aristocratic families, and despite the simplified historical narrative about their resistance toward the *optimates* and Caesar, neither of them could serve as a convincing example in a discourse of class struggle. A slave,

17 When referring to the plays about Spartacus, I use "drama" and "play" interchangeably, bearing in mind that the plays about Spartacus' uprising were only dramas.

18 Heller and Nekrich, *Utopia in Power,* 50–77. Lenin formulated these key postulates in his *State and Revolution,* written in August–September of 1917.

19 Chiesa, "Lenin and the State of the Revolution," 106–31.

20 A hero, in this case, does not imply any axiological value.

however, a gladiator with humble Thracian origins, thus descending from the "periphery" of the ancient world, without any preserved images or detailed biography, absolutely could. As Frederick Ahl bluntly put it, "Spartacus was the historical proof that these people could rise and menace any society which had wealthy employers and mistreated employees, even though his rebellion was ultimately crushed."[21] The Bolsheviks henceforth considered themselves as the revolutionaries who successfully managed to convert the actions of their revolutionary predecessors, including the Spartacists, into a new society. The image of Spartacus therefore became that of a heroic proto-Bolshevik revolutionary in the Soviet republics in the first two decades of their existence.

SPARTACUS AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

In the unofficial competition between the "big three" ancient revolutionaries, Spartacus acquired several other advantages over Gracchus and Brutus. In a frequently cited letter to Engels, Marx called Spartacus "the most capital fellow in the whole history of antiquity" and a "real representative of the proletariat of ancient times."[22] Consequently, according to the quasi-religious adherence of Soviet society to the writings of Marx, Spartacus' uprising became a seminal and exemplary revolutionary event in world history. Furthermore, in a speech at the Polytechnic Museum in Moscow in 1918, none other than Lenin referred to Spartacus as an initiator of the war, "fighting against the yoke of capitalism."[23] With the advocacy of both eponymous fathers of Marxism-Leninism, who both readily projected the language of capitalism and class struggle back into antiquity, it is no wonder Spartacus was so widely celebrated in the Soviet republics. Lenin's speech and the general attitude of the Bolshevik leaders toward Spartacus defined the future image of Spartacus in the Soviet era both inside and beyond the academy.

21 Ahl, "Spartacus, Exodus, and Dalton Trumbo," 77.

22 "Spartacus emerges as the most capital fellow in the whole history of antiquity. Great general, of noble character, a real representative of the proletariat of ancient times." See Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 41, 265.

23 All translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise stated. Lenin, "The State: A Lecture Delivered at the Sverdlov University," 470–88. George Hanna's translation seems to be slightly incorrect as in its original version Lenin claimed that Spartacus began the war "in the defence of the suppressed class." For Russian original see Lenin, "Rech na mitinge v Politekhnicheskom muzee," т. 37, 65–70.

Yet, the transition of historiographical discourse toward a uniform class-struggle narrative was not entirely smooth. It began to be implemented in the 1920s, when it was adopted in the first Soviet textbooks, but it became predominant only in the 1930s.[24] This period of transitioning from Russian imperial scholarship to the newly established Soviet historiography was not merely academic but heralded serious real-world implications. This era, for example, brought with it significant changes in the composition of ancient history departments at institutes and universities.[25] It also led to the substitution of leading historians from the Czarist era with the newly-emerging 'stars' of Greco-Roman studies in the USSR, such as Alexandr Mishulin (1901–1948) – who named his nephew Spartak – and Sergei Utchenko (1908–1976).[26]

Finally, by naming their revolutionary movement after Spartacus, the German communist movement *Spartakusbund* (the Spartacus League), created in 1916, attempted to establish historical continuity in the Bolshevik struggle for power.[27] In a powerful act of invoking ancient exemplarity, Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) even conflated the name of Spartacus with German communism in her 1918 speech: "We of the Spartacus Group, we of the Communist Party of Germany, are the only ones in all Germany who are on the side of the striking and fighting workers."[28] Hence, the broad lacunae in Spartacus' own biography, his ostensibly modest (or at least unknown) descent – which fitted within the narrative of the centuries-long struggle in defense of the "oppressed class," his recognition in the Marxist-Leninist scriptures as one of the key symbols of the ancient proletariat, and his invoca-

24 Rubinsohn, *Der Spartakus-Aufstand*, 14–5, 48.

25 Mishulin, "Drevniaia istoriia v srednei i vysshei shkole," 9–15; Braginskaya, "Studying the History," 35–50. On the fate of classical pedagogy in the early Soviet Union, see, e.g., the contributions of Braginskaya, Budaragina, Fayer and Yasinovskyi in Movrin and Olechowska, *Classics and Class;* Takho-Godi and Rosenberg, "Classical Studies in the Soviet Union," 123–27. For Soviet classics, see Baryshnikov, "New Threats, Old Challenges," 3–6, with a full bibliography of Russian language sources. See also Karpyuk and Malyugin, "Soviet antiquity, view from the 21st century," 459–64; Krikh, *Obraz drevnosti v sovetskoy istoriografii: konstruirovanie i transformatsiya*, 118–41.

26 See more in Rubinsohn, *Der Spartakus-Aufstand;* Rudenko, "The Making of a Soviet Hero," 342–46. See also Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars,* 17. Spartak Mishulin (1926–2005) became a celebrated Soviet actor.

27 Rubinsohn, *Der Spartakus-Aufstand,* 9.

28 Luxemburg, "On the Spartacus Programme (December 1918)," 87–90; Rubinsohn, *Der Spartakus-Aufstand,* 9.

tion by the German radical left, all reserved for the humble Thracian gladiator a central place in the front rank of early Soviet pageantry.[29]

Raffaello Giovagnoli's novel *Spartaco* (1874) was translated into Russian in 1881. It has been cited by Richard Stites as one of the key "radical propaganda stories" to which "conscious workers" in the Soviet Union were regularly exposed. As we shall see, this novel contributed significantly to the subsequent shaping of Spartacus' image, since it became an important source and model for the Soviet Spartacus plays and films in the 1920s.[30] A few decades after its composition, Giovagnoli's tale was to become in the Soviet Union an exemplary historical novel narrating an ancient uprising.

However, the plot of Giovagnoli's novel was more complex than any of the early Soviet plays. The plot begins during Sulla's dictatorship (82–79 BC) and features both Catiline and Julius Caesar as glorious heroes of the ancient struggle against the aristocrats. Giovagnoli introduced dozens of characters, both Roman and gladiator rebels. Thus, *Spartaco* may be seen as providing the sequence of events or the blueprint for the early Soviet dramas. Furthermore, we ought to remember that Giovagnoli presented Spartacus as a "parallel character to Garibaldi." His focus, therefore, was more on unification in the face of a common danger rather than exclusively on the social demands of freedom.[31] For Giovagnoli, *unity* was the keyword of his novel, but for the Soviet authors, the key idea was the confrontation between slavery and freedom. Each playwright had to decide how closely his script would resemble the well-known Italian novel. There was considerable room for experimentation.

EDUCATING THE MASSES

Theater, mass performance, and cinema became essential channels of Bolshevik propaganda and communication for enlightening the masses.[32] Immediately after the revolution, the very idea of the theater was reconsidered. The theater was now required primarily to convey

29 Michalski, *Public Monuments,* 108–12.

30 Siegelbaum and Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents,* 83; Gross, *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia,* 244–5; Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams,* 31. Further work on Giovagnoli's novel would be welcome given its importance in Soviet receptions. Short discussions appear, e.g., in Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars,* 20–22, and Rudenko, "The Making of a Soviet Hero," 340–2.

31 Lapeña Marchena, "The Stolen Seduction," 175; Hardwick, *Reception Studies,* 41.

32 For a discussion on mass performances, see Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre,* 39–46.

Bolshevik narratives to the masses in a clear and simple manner. Anatoly Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar of Enlightenment for the Russian Federation (1917–1921), recognized the theater's utility in shaping the minds of the people.[33] He implemented the idea of "new content in old forms" and promoted ways of rethinking the classics of world culture in diverse formats: dance, theater, poetry, art, and translation.[34] Going to the theater became cheaper (sometimes free) in the 1920s, and the theater section of the Commissariat of Enlightenment was established as early as 1918.[35]

Participation and accessibility were key factors in the prominence of theater in the broader cultural landscape. With levels of illiteracy remaining relatively high in some regions, the audiences for performed spectacles were significantly larger than the readerships of printed works. The key differences between theater and mass performance were: 1) the venue where the play was staged (i.e., in a theater building or in open spaces, such as public squares) and 2) the topic. Mass performance had the potential for large-scale and creative audience participation, which could produce an immersive effect.[36] As Natalia Murray has underlined, mass performances promised to bring art to common people, giving them a chance to participate in their very creation. Mass performances – even more than theater and cinema – brought a sense of belonging and immersion in the events the actors were reenacting.[37] Such grand spectacles were deemed revolutionary since they eliminated the border between the spectator and the participants, creating a mysterious, quasi-spiritual entity by the end of the performance. Mass spectacles in the early Bolshevik era fostered a specific sense of belonging and collective identity, similar to the role of mass celebrations or carnivals in the Middle Ages.[38]

Soviet mass performances, however, never focused exclusively on the figure of Spartacus: he was merely one figure among many other revolutionaries. But due to his centrality in revolutionary history, he was one that could not easily be overlooked. These performances often had a peculiar, pageant-like format and their content was

33 Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, 20–2. For more on Lunacharsky, see Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, 90–5.

34 Von Szeliski, "Lunacharsky," 419; Stead and Paulouskaya, "Classics, Crisis and the Soviet Experiment to 1939," 129.

35 Von Szeliski, "Lunacharsky," 416; Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre,* 24.

36 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance,* 37–39, 138.

37 See also Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre,* 23.

38 Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre,* 39–40; Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams,* 97–100. See also Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance,* 32.

propagandistic, yet the role of contingency, or unpredictability, was significantly higher than in any theatrical play. For example, Spartacus frequently appeared alongside revolutionaries of different eras – French or early modern Muscovite rebels, and the viewers in the streets or city squares gladly joined in singing or marching during the performances. Such performances strove for grandeur and impact rather than historical accuracy, which resulted in historical events being presented in a simplified and unidimensional manner, easily digested by the new mass audience.

New theater journals and magazines were published, highlighting the elevated role the Bolshevik leaders assigned to drama. These included: *Zrelishcha* [Spectacles] (1922–1924), *Vestnik teatra* [Bulletin of Theater] (1919–1921), *Vestnik teatra i iskusstva* [Bulletin of Theater and Art] (1921–1922), *Kultura teatra* [Culture of Theater] (1921–1922), *Zhizn iskusstva* [Art Life] (1923–1929), *Sovremennyi teatr* [Contemporary Theater] (1927–1929), *Novyj zritel* [The New Spectator] (1924–1929), and *Vestnik rabotnikov iskusstva* [Bulletin of Cultural Workers] (1920–1926), to name a few. *Zrelishcha* announced: "We are expecting from the theater something saturated with ideas and meaningful in a dramatical way. We are expecting a theater of a new organizational thought. A play should be a trumpet of new thoughts and feelings, a herald of the new universe."[39] Theater critic Aleksandr Kugel (1864–1928) – who sometimes used the pen name *Homo novus* – claimed that the aims of a theatrical director and performance were "to amaze the audience with something previously unseen and with the originality, or the beauty and amusement of the show."[40] These principles were implemented in Soviet plays based on the story of Spartacus.

Theater directors were, of course, crucial intermediaries between the script and the staging of the play. Their roles in early Soviet theater deserve critical attention.[41] Due in part to the difficulty – caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the continuing silence from many Russian scholars – in accessing sources, the following analysis limits its focus to the available published materials. The first Soviet-era Spartacus play appeared before the institutionalization of the image of Spartacus in the Soviet republics. Its author, Yurii Sandomyrskyi (c. 1870–1927), published his play *Spartacus* in five acts in Odesa in 1917. It is said to have been closely based on Giovagnoli's

39 Mass, "Nakaz Zimnemu Sezonu," 4; translation mine.

40 Kugel, "Teatralnyie zametki," 4; translation mine.

41 For performance reception studies see, e.g., Hall and Harrop, *Theorising Performance*.

Spartaco. Sandomyrskyi's play became the first Spartacus play to be staged in Soviet theaters.[42] In his play, Sandomyrskyi appears to have employed the same characters, tropes, and narrative lines as Giovagnoli. Giovagnoli's text also stood as a key source for several subsequent dramatic portrayals of the Soviet Spartacus. The 1917 Spartacus play did not gain nearly as much popularity as the following one, written by Vladimir Mazurkevich (1871–1942) and published in Petrograd in 1920.

MAZURKEVICH'S *SPARTAK*

Giovagnoli's *Spartaco* was at the beginning of Bolshevik representations of Spartacus, yet his word was not the last to be said on the matter. Mazurkevich's *Spartacus: The Slave Uprising* was a short one-act drama (20 pages) about Spartacus and his revolt that craftily depicted the ancient gladiator as the main leader of a great slave revolt. While it was based on the famous novel, its truncated form granted it significant freedom from its source.

The first edition of the published play contains a four-page introduction of unknown authorship, which provided a brief overview of the historical circumstances of the Late Republic. It served as a justification for referring to the figure of Spartacus and established the link between the ancient gladiator uprising and the Bolshevik revolution. The author of the introduction focused on the social division between the patricians and the plebeians and emphasized the emergence of a separate "class of people who had nothing"[43] – i.e., a proletarian class (free but impoverished).

After an explanation of the division between patricians and plebeians, the author stated: "in fact, the entire population of Rome was divided into freemen and slaves," underlining once more the Bolsheviks' image of a bipolar world (divided into owners and slaves).[44] Beyond the inaccurate dating of the beginning of Spartacus' uprising (73–71 BC) as 72 BC, the introduction also provided a simplistic interpretation of Roman history. For example, the author claimed that together with seventy other gladiators, Spartacus headed to Southern Italy and destroyed the cells and prisons on their way, liberating the slaves. Soon after, Spartacus had command over an army of 50,000 soldiers, including

42 Unfortunately, the only readily available edition of Yurii Sandomyrskyi's play can be accessed at the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg, so at the time of writing, an analysis of the play is impossible.

43 Mazurkevich, *Spartak*, 3; all English translations of the text are mine.

44 Ibid., 4.

shepherds and peasants who were "languishing under the oppression of the landowner-patricians" and "joining Spartacus who saved them from slavery and dependence."[45] Unlike Giovagnoli's novel, credited as its source, the active phase of Spartacus' uprising was, according to this introduction, limited to 72–71 BC; the introduction also does not go into details of battles, successes, and the various factions within Spartacus' army.

The final battle, the reader is told, happened during "the siege of Rome" [*sic*], after the rebels persuaded Spartacus to attack the city, yet as it was unsuccessful, Spartacus died and six thousand of the slaves were crucified along the road leading to Rome.[46] The conclusion of the introduction states:

> Spartacus fell, but the enterprise he began is alive and throughout the thousands of years it is resurrected every time in the fire of people's uprisings. Today, Spartacus' name is written on the banner of German communists who are leading their proletariat to a social revolution.[47]

The brief historical introduction provided not only general contextualizing information but also offered a vision of continuity between the ancient ideas and the revolutionary reality. This imagined continuity argued for the play's contemporary relevance, explaining why the figure of Spartacus should matter to the people supporting the Bolsheviks. There is no clear indication of who penned the introduction, since its title is simply "Introduction to Vladimir Mazurkevich's play." Given the numerous mistakes in dating and a schematic explanation of Spartacus' uprising, it seems that the introduction was crafted by someone with limited knowledge of ancient Roman history – or with a desire to simplify the course of events for the audience.

Inconsistencies between the stated source text (*Spartaco*), the introduction, and the text of the play itself occur several times, making it highly unlikely that the introduction was written by Mazurkevich. For instance, in a discussion about the next steps of the gladiator army, Oenomaus (mistakenly called Oknoman) persuades Spartacus that in the beginning of the uprising there were 150 gladiators who escaped from Capua, but their army now consists of 73,000 soldiers.

45 Mazurkevich, *Spartak*, 5.

46 Ibid., 5–6. Mazurkevich preferred historical accuracy – for instance, his version of the final battle happens in Southern Italy instead of Rome – to the impression the play might have on the viewer.

47 Ibid., 6.

The introduction, however, had counted 70 gladiators in the beginning, and their band had grown to an army of 50,000 soldiers; Giovangnoli, on the other hand, amasses an army of 60,000 from 600 gladiators.[48] Nevertheless, such inconsistencies need not have been conveyed to the viewer, due to the script's intensive focus on the last days of the uprising.

The play offered only a few protagonists: Spartacus, his sister Mirza (a fictional character adopted from Giovagnoli's novel), three gladiators of Gallic, German, and Greek origins, the Roman consul Lucullus, and two unnamed gladiators in the guard.

Mazurkevich continuously emphasized Spartacus' noble goal of world liberation, resembling Giovagnoli in the description of Spartacus' aims ("to install justice and equality in the entire world") and the illustration of treachery and infighting among the gladiators, which led to his ultimate downfall in the battle against the Romans.[49] Mazurkevich completely ignored the romantic relationship between Spartacus and Valeria Sulla that shines through Giovagnoli's text.[50] During negotiations with a Roman legate (who turned out to be consul Lucullus – another plot twist adopted from Giovagnoli's novel), Spartacus explicitly argues against the institution of slavery, harking back to times when "everyone worked their own land" in a world with "no proprietors, no slaves, no owners, and no servants."[51]

Mazurkevich presented Spartacus' agenda in clearly Bolshevik terms: it was a fight against slavery and landlords, and a struggle for equality among the people. Mirza expresses her opinion of her brother thus: "You, Spartacus, devoted your whole life to the noble aim of liberating the suppressed."[52] The anthem that the gladiators sing when they are heading to their final battle transmits similar ideas, asking (rhetorically) whether the gladiators would prefer to die in the arena "for the entertainment of the flatulent rich" or during the fight for their freedom.[53] This anthem was Mazurkevich's invention. It does not appear in Giovagnoli's novel.

For reader and viewer of the play alike, the comparison between the Roman patricians and Russian imperial landlords must have been obvious. In the introduction, however, the author preferred to make the connection explicit using the technical terms *patritsii* [patricians]

48 Mazurkevich, *Spartak*, 5, 10; Giovagnoli, *Spartaco*, 196.

49 Ibid., 270.

50 Ibid., 129–32.

51 Mazurkevich, *Spartak*, 15; Giovagnoli, *Spartaco*, 264–70.

52 Mazurkevich, *Spartak*, 13.

53 Ibid., 20.

and *pomeshchiki* [landlords], a word used to define the landlords of the Russian Empire, thus a clear symbol of the fallen regime. Surrounding the 1917 Revolution, the theme of land ownership was crucial for the Bolsheviks.[54] This is perhaps why the vocabulary of landlordism features prominently in the introduction, while in the play the topics of freedom and slavery have center stage.

Later, quarrels in the camp between the gladiators and mistrust and accusations of treachery lead to an unsuccessful battle and the death of Spartacus.[55] Spartacus, wounded in the battlefield, delivers a speech more consistent with a Bolshevik politician bent on the emancipation of the international proletariat than with a leader of a slave uprising in ancient Rome:

> A day will come when in the whole world the suppressed will rise against their oppressors … They will destroy the old world … And on the ruins of the past they will build a new world, bright and pleasant, where everyone will be equal, where liberty and equality will reign. Everyone fighting for freedom, for the better future of humanity, need put only one word on their placard – and this word is Spartacus.[56]

This final speech appears to engage with Spartacus' speech from Giovagnoli's novel. Ahead of the final battle, Spartacus claims that "when we die, we will leave as revenge to our successors the flag of freedom and equality, stained with our blood as our legacy."[57]

Mazurkevich's play bears several traces of traditional plays of the Russian Empire. As a transitional play, it is not yet fully fluent in communist parlance. Sometimes the author employs old spelling conventions, and his execution of these conventions is not always free from error. For example, years are counted as the Russian equivalent of BC "before [the birth of] Christ" [*do Rozhdestva Khristova*], instead of BCE "before the Common Era" [*do nashei ery*]; similarly, the interpretation of the goals and motives of the rebellion is simplified. Nevertheless, Mazurkevich was successful in conveying the main action of the Spartacus uprising to a large audience in a short one-act play.[58]

54 Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, 17–9.

55 In Giovagnoli's novel, quarrels occur between a Greek woman, Eutibida, and German and Gallic gladiators. In Mazurkevich's play, the German gladiators are at the origin of the quarrelling.

56 Mazurkevich, *Spartak*, 22.

57 Giovagnoli, *Spartaco*, 399; Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 20.

58 The publication of Mazurkevich's play went almost unnoticed until the first plays were staged. It was published "on spec," or as literature, i.e., ahead of any

VOLKENSTEIN'S *SPARTAK*

The same year as Mazurkevich's play was published, *Vestnik Teatra* announced a competition for authors to write a play about a revolutionary character, and Giovagnoli's *Spartaco* was again mentioned as the primary example.[59] We should not, however, jump to the conclusion that the winner fully adopted *Spartaco* as a template without making his own unique contribution. The prize money was significant: 30,000 rubles for the runner-up and 40,000 rubles for the best revolutionary play. Next year, *Kultura Teatra* notified that the state printing agency accepted Vladimir Volkenstein's (1883–1974) tragedy *Spartacus* (5 acts in ca. 70 pages) for print and for staging in the First Theater of the Russian Socialist Republic.[60] Reinhold Gliere (1875–1956), one of the most famous composers of the era, was commissioned to arrange a musical accompaniment for the play's production in Moscow's Bolshoi Theater.[61]

Volkenstein based his *Spartacus* on Plutarch's biography of Crassus, but he also refers to information sourced from other ancient texts.[62] Volkenstein's sources might have been especially diverse because he was a graduate of Saint Petersburg University and spent a year at Heidelberg University in Germany, famous for its classical scholarship.[63] He mentions, for example, the wars with Mithridates and the figures of Lucullus and Gaius Marius, whose description is found in the works of Plutarch, Appian, Sallust, and Livy.[64] But he also worked from his imagination, creating several of his own characters, including two female advisers to Spartacus, Melissa and Julia, who do not feature in Giovagnoli's novel.[65]

theatrical production. No significant reviews appeared following its publication. Although the play was later staged in some local theatres, it was not reprinted, and thus only a few copies of the 1920 edition have been preserved.

59 "Konkurs Proletkulta," 19.

60 "Tragedii V. M. Volkensteina," 52.

61 "Bolshoi Teatr," 53.

62 Plutarch, *Life of Crassus*, 8–11.

63 Henry, "Les Errants de Vladimir Volkenstein au premier Studio du Théâtre d'Art," 80.

64 Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 21.1–4; Plutarch, *Life of Crassus* 8–11; Appian, *Roman History: The Civil Wars* 1.14.116–21; Sallust, *Histories* 3, fr. 90–94, 96–102, 106; 4, fr. 22–23, 25, 30–33, 37, 40–41; Livy, *Summaries* 95–97; Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars*, 130–51.

65 Volkenstein, *Spartak*, 8–107. This edition was based on the original play staged in the Theatre of the Revolution in 1923 with only minor details changed since 1920 version.

The play takes place between 73–71 BC and unlike Mazurkevich's play or Giovagnoli's novel, they begin in the gladiator school in Capua. Here, Spartacus is ordered to kill his best friend Berisad in the gladiators' playfield – another departure from Giovagnoli's plot.[66] Berisad, however, persuaded Spartacus before the battle to make an oath that in case the bloodthirsty crowd of Romans should demand him to kill Berisad, Spartacus will organize a revolt and force the gladiators to escape their slavery.[67] In response Spartacus claims that "freedom must return to us; the sky and earth will be ours," defending personal [*sic*] freedom as the highest value.[68]

Counterposing Spartacus to the "old regime," Volkenstein depicts the Romans as crude, petty and greedy people. Giovagnoli, by comparison, shows a fascination with the Roman army in his novel. In Volkenstein's *Spartak*, for example, the main concern of the praetor Toranius upon hearing of Spartacus' revolt is that it will result in the cancelation of the gladiatorial games that he was traveling to Capua to see.[69] Additionally, the least frivolous news discussed among the aristocratic characters is that Crassus has bought himself a new mansion.[70]

The Romans are also characterized as cowards. Several candidates for consulships withdraw themselves for fear of Spartacus' army.[71] The only Roman who dared undertake the military campaign against the slaves was Crassus, but even he was motivated more by envy of Pompey, who had been called back to Italy by the Senate, than by patriotism.[72] The Romans exhibit no sense of patriotism or honor throughout: Crassus even claims that if Spartacus were to capture Rome, he would simply escape to his new estate on Crete.[73] Such a disparaging characterization of the Romans was a significant departure from Giovagnoli's novel.[74] In the latter, the Romans are

66 Volkenstein, *Spartak*, 24–26.

67 Ibid., 20–21.

68 Ibid., 28–29.

69 Although Toranius was a quaestor at the time, Volkenstein mistakenly calls him a praetor. See Sallust's account in Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars*, 145.

70 Volkenstein, *Spartak*, 32, 38, 73.

71 Ibid., 39–41.

72 Ibid., 75–77.

73 Ibid., 76.

74 Discrepancy between Volkenstein's and Giovangioli's representation of the Roman commanders became a reason for Stepun's critique of Volkenstein's

described as worthy opponents of the gladiators, putting the two armies on par. Spartacus invests much effort, for example, to model his army on the Roman legions. Moreover, he considered Crassus to be one of the most notable Roman commanders.[75]

Meanwhile, Volkenstein describes Spartacus' intentions with a great deal of pathos, following the tradition established by Giovagnoli.[76] In Volkenstein's narrative, Spartacus' main desire was not merely to free the slaves who had joined his army, but rather to trigger the overthrow of slavery and tyranny worldwide and put power in the hands of the slaves. This would be a slave revolution to match the Bolshevik drive toward a worldwide proletarian revolution. Beyond simple freedom, Spartacus believed that "the world ought to belong to the slaves. The ground is fortified with their work, they created the roads, buildings, and temples." "Let the decrepit structure of Rome fail," implores Spartacus, "It was cruel. On its wicked ruins, I will erect a glorious state."[77] The desire to build a new state is shown more explicitly here than in Mazurkevich's short play. Spartacus, however, remains the key political agent compared to the depersonalized historiographic concept of a slave revolution (or mass agency) that would become more common in the 1930s. Spartacus, in the more pageant-like mass performances, for example, would feature as merely one of the many historical figures involved in an ancient fight for the "new order," which closely resembled Bolshevik aspirations.

The play presents the slave camp as internally divided on the question of Spartacus' motivation: Is he motivated by revenge or the desire to construct a new world? Predictably, as a heroic leader of the revolution and as a tragic hero, Spartacus is shown to follow the second, idealistic path, driven as he is to "create a new law" and urging his comrades that even if their uprising fails, "another army will gloriously finish our affair," again hinting at the Bolshevik present.[78] Similarly to Mazurkevich's play, Volkenstein's drama depicts the camp of the slaves as being ravaged by mistrust and treason, resembling the earlier description in Giovagnoli.[79] The Gauls and the Germans are strongly

drama, reviewed below. See Stepun, "O Suschnosti Tragedii," 37–43.

75 Lapeña Marchena, "The Stolen Seduction," 175; Giovagnoli, *Spartaco*, 265, 386.

76 "Is it the freedom we are bringing to all the slaves?" wondered Spartacus in Giovagnoli's *Spartaco*, 210.

77 Volkenstein, *Spartak*, 43–44, 52, 103.

78 Ibid., 72, 98–99.

79 Giovagnoli, *Spartaco*, 314–27.

implicated, although Volkenstein also describes drunkenness and the abuse of wine as the key factors which led to the slaves' defeat.

Unlike Mazurkevich, Volkenstein did include a romantic line in his plot. He introduced Julia, the daughter of an unnamed Greek freeman, who rebels against the Romans and is killed by the gladiators because of her tremendous impact on Spartacus' decision-making.[80] By inventing Julia, Volkenstein moved closer to representing Spartacus as a tragic hero, driven both by his high ideals of liberating the oppressed and his more mundane romantic feelings for his lover. Julia's role mirrors Giovagnoli's Valeria, who presents Spartacus with a letter containing an appeal to abandon the uprising in favor of their love.[81] Spartacus, however, driven by idealistic beliefs and the pursuit of a noble aim, declines Valeria's offer.

Volkenstein's play was performed regularly in the largest theaters of the Soviet republics, such as Moscow's Theater of the Revolution (whose director at the time was Vsevolod Meyerhold), where it was staged on September 6, 1923, directed by Valery Bebutov.[82] Volkenstein's *Spartacus* was well received as a literary text and was reprinted in the USSR in 1921, 1927, 1962, and 1971.[83] However, the critical reception of the play on stage (and through it Volkenstein's text itself) was mixed. One of the first reviews, published in October 1923 about the production in the Theater of Revolution, claimed that the play was "boring and does not possess any specific merits … It is staged in such a way that not only is the modest artistic dignity of the play not sustained, but its revolutionary sense is also darkened. The hero of Rome, Publius Crassus, is depicted as a foolish *Polizeimeister* or a petty tyrant."[84] This perception of 1923 play was backed up by 1922 review of the text itself, written by the philosopher and sociologist Fyodor Stepun (1884–1965), who began his attack on Volkenstein with a remark on the presentation of Roman backwardness: if the Romans were so backward, why had Spartacus lost and what was the value of his entire uprising?[85]

80 Volkenstein, *Spartak*, 52–53.

81 Giovagnoli, *Spartaco*, 392–93.

82 Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 153.

83 Vladimir Volkenstein, *Spartak: Tragediia* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo, 1921); Vladimir Volkenstein, *Spartak; Novyi Prometej; P'esy* (Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel, 1962); Vladimir Volkenstein, *Spartak – Papessa Ioanna – Smert Linkolna: Tragedii* (Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel, 1971).

84 Kugel, "Teatralnyie Zametki," 3–4.

85 Stepun, "O Suschnosti Tragedii," 40–41. The discrepancy in the representation of the Romans as backwards in Volkenstein compared to Giovagnoli's *Spartaco*

It is not clear whether Volkenstein's play was billed as a tragedy per se. Even so, drawing loosely on Aristotle's *Poetics* and the European philosophical tradition engaging with it,[86] Stepun argued that Volkenstein's play was not a tragedy "from the point of view of theatrical tradition," since the tragic hero is always "guilty without guilt," unlike Spartacus, who had no sin.[87] Stepun followed the Aristotelian tradition, where "authentically tragic guilt is ambiguously 'guiltless,'" and therefore could not comprehend Volkenstein's ignorance of this factor.[88]

Moreover, Spartacus in Volkenstein's play did not have a strong opponent (such as Crassus in Giovagnoli) and important causes for which he was fighting, hence Stepun concluded that "no unsolvable problem is solved with Spartacus' death" and the drama "turns out to be an artistically defective thing, not a bronze but a plaster cast painted like bronze."[89] This criticism, combined with Stepun's general opposition toward Bolshevik policy, led to his forced exile in 1922 together with other representatives of the early Soviet intelligentsia.[90] The negative review, however, did not diminish the popularity of Volkenstein's play, which was henceforth called "a heroic drama" rather than a tragedy. Twenty-five years later (1947), under the oppressive cultural doctrine of Zhdanovism, the play would be criticized for its simplistic ideas of drama and incorrect "social characteristics."[91]

Other magazines and reviewers were more generous. For instance, the review in the September 1923 issue of *Zhizn iskusstva* praised the experimental character of the drama, asserting that: "Spartacus staged in the Theater of Revolution is the first cornerstone in the construction of a new theater. The staging, play, and acting are marked on a completely

might possibly fuel Stepun's dismay. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing if Stepun was acquainted with Giovagnoli's novel.

86 The leading figures on the side of that tradition, on whom Stepun also appears to be leaning, are Hegel and Kierkegaard – *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and *Either/Or* (1843), respectively. For discussion on both philosophers and their engagement with tragedy, see Billings, *Genealogy of the Tragic*, esp. 143–45 and 161–88, and Greenspan, *The Passion of Infinity*, 140–57, with full bibliography.

87 Stepun, "O Suschnosti Tragedii," 40. Daniel Greenspan aptly formulated this concept for ancient Greek tragedy as follows: "Tragic guilt must be of a specific kind and its parameters are a matter of character and action." See Greenspan, *Passion of Infinity*, 92.

88 Ibid., 144–5.

89 Stepun, "O Suschnosti Tragedii," 40–41.

90 See his memoirs, Stepun, *Byvshee i nesbyvsheesja*, 617–28.

91 Osnos, *Sovetskaja istoricheskaja dramaturgija*, 46; Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, 177–81.

different scale."[92] In October 1923, the Theater of Enlightenment in Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg) also staged "the revolutionary play *Spartacus* [by Volkenstein], written in sincere, lively, colorful tones, rich with beautiful and courageous claims, saturated with activity." The reviewer suggested that it might be difficult to stage, "yet it has brilliantly organized mass scenes," an important demand for plays, which became even more prominent in the 1930s when the concept of the slave revolution rather than the heroic uprising of Spartacus became the preferred narrative.[93]

The play, therefore, corresponded to the growing requirement for the presentation of mass agency, in contrast to a revolution led by a single intellectual. This was the revolution of the proletarian/enslaved masses. While scholars argue that early Soviet plays tended to emphasize the success of any enterprise coming from the efforts of a collective of people rather than a single individual,[94] Spartacus was a figure who attempted to lead a proletarian uprising alone and thus always deserved a separate, idealized, and somewhat awkward place in Soviet theater. This feature marked both Mazurkevich's and Volkenstein's dramas. Spartacus is alone in his struggle, especially after the treason. In Giovagnoli's novel, Spartacus is surrounded by advisers and friends in the gladiator camp. In the 1930s, a solitary hero like Spartacus did not fully represent the participation of the people to the level the Bolsheviks aspired to achieve.

SPARTACUS IN THE EARLY SOVIET REPERTOIRE AND MASS PERFORMANCE

Plays about Spartacus were popular in early Soviet theaters. Soon theatrical seasons, especially the autumn season, were being opened by one of the three Spartacus plays (i.e., Sandomyrskyi, 1917, Mazurkevich, 1920, and Volkenstein, 1921) in many theaters across the Soviet republics. The famous Bolshevik theatremaker Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) invited Valery Bebutov (1885–1961) to produce Volkenstein's play in Moscow on September 6, 1923, at the Theater of the Revolution.[95] When the new Khamovnicheskii district theater was opened in Moscow in 1923, Yurii Sandomyrskyi's *Spartacus* was selected for production as the key

92 IA. A., "Moskva: Teatr Revolyutsii 'Spartak,'" *Zhizn Iskusstva*, September 18, 1923, no. 37: 21.

93 S. M., "Teatr Prosvescheniya," *Zhizn Iskusstva*, October 16, 1923, no. 41: 16.

94 Michalski, *Public Monuments*, 114; Von Szeliski, "Lunacharsky," 417.

95 Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 153.

dramatic play.[96] The selection of which version of Spartacus to produce is likely to have been dictated by practical issues. Mazurkevich's play would have been considerably easier to stage than Volkenstein's. Smaller theaters tended to prefer shorter plays, involving fewer characters and requiring less elaborate set design.

The First State Moscow Circus in 1924 announced the staging of a "propagandistic-educational" pantomime called *Spartacus*.[97] Smaller theaters followed suit. In 1924, the Proletarian studio at the Theatrical College performed a preview of Spartacus in Odesa, and in Ivanovo-Voznesensk one of the few plays staged in the local theater was *Spartacus* (although the play's author is not mentioned).[98] A new small district theater in Petrograd in 1923 also staged *Spartacus*.[99] In 1928, a letter to the editor of *Novyi Zritel* [The New Spectator] from Kharkiv, which was the capital of Ukraine at the time, announced that *Spartacus* would soon take place in the Odesa Opera House.[100] Such dispersed archival findings are not the result of an exhaustive survey, but they do suggest that Spartacus enjoyed a central position in the early Soviet repertoire.

The figure of Spartacus appeared not only in the theater but also in the streets and other urban spaces as a part of broader mass performances. He might not have received as much attention as in the dramas dedicated solely to him, but his appearances still form an important aspect of his reception.[101] In the main square of Astrakhan, on May 1, 1921, the Second City Theater initiated a performance entitled *A Revolutionary Mystery*.[102] Around 500 workers and Red Army soldiers were dressed as rebels from the times of Spartacus and the insurrections led by Stenka Razin (1630–1671) and Yemelyan Pugachev (1742–1775). As the local journalist described:

> At 9 p.m., the signal came. The director and writer comrade Dolev made an introduction and the 10,000- to 15,000-person crowd began to contemplate [the spectacle]. The mystery, of course, was not a literary work, but it recounted, in an epic manner and using a very primitive

96 "Khronika: Moskva," *Zhizn Isskustva*, 1923, no. 31: 28.

97 "Khronika," *Rabochii i Teatr*, 1924, no. 4: 20.

98 M. Shumskij, "Po Federatsii: Odessa," *Zhizn Isskustva*, 1924, no. 4: 24; "Ivanovo-Voznesensk," *Zhizn Isskustva*, 1924, no. 3: 27.

99 "Kto-Gde," *Zrelishcha*, 1923, no. 60: 25;

100 Maksakov, "Teadelo na Ukraine," 20.

101 Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 23.

102 "R.S.F.S.R. Pervoe Maya v Provintsiyah," *Vestnik Teatra*, June 15, 1921, no. 91–92: 5.

> and non-developed dialogue, the events of separate moments in the Russian, French, English, and other revolutions. But the impression was great. Every tirade against the yoke of the capitalists caused a storm of applause. In the final moment, when the slaves rush on the czar, his family, and the ministers, the crowd of workers and children, inspired by the revolutionary spirit, joined the choir in singing the proletarian anthem *The International*.[103]

A similar performance, involving around one thousand participants, took place in Moscow in 1928, when the Bolshoi Theater organized a pantomime about Spartacus during the Spartakiad competition.[104] However, the grandest and the most famous mass performance was *The Mystery of Liberated Labor*, staged in Petrograd on May 1, 1920.[105] The aim, as Natalia Murray points out, was to "legitimise the revolution, implying that it was inclusive and mass in nature."[106] *The Mystery* employed strong symbolism and an emphasis was placed on the quintessentially Marxist division between the "oppressors" and "oppressed." A number of figures from unrelated historical eras ("Roman slaves led by Spartacus ran toward the red banners, followed by peasants with Stenka Razin ahead of them …") were united under an imagined umbrella of fighting for proletarian ideals.[107] This eclectic symbolism was underlined when "in the grand finale, the Kingdom of Socialism was revealed in the form of a rising sun, a red star, a tree of liberty around which the victors reveled, red banners and a figure of Liberated Labor in front of which the soldiers exchanged their weapons for the implements of peace."[108] Reports claim that thirty-five thousand people watched the mystery, and this was exactly the kind of impact the Bolsheviks envisioned for outdoor mass performances.[109] While Spartacus did not hold a leading role in such cases, the mere presence of his figure in mass performances and mysteries strengthened that image of his which the theater was promoting in the 1920s.

103 "R.S.F.S.R. Pervoe Maya v Provintsiyah," *Vestnik Teatra*, June 15, 1921, no. 91–92: 5.

104 "Teatralnaya Zhizn v Moskve," *Sovremennyi Teatr*, July 29, 1928, no. 30–31: 519.

105 Also translated as *The Mystery of Freed Labour*. See its description in Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 40–1, and Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 94–5.

106 Murray, "Street Theatre," 230.

107 Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 40; Murray, "Street Theatre," 236.

108 Murray, "Street Theatre," 236.

109 Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 40; Murray, "Street Theatre," 236.

CONCLUSION

Spartacus served as a symbol of the revolutionary proletarian myth throughout the Soviet era. His name became so widely disseminated throughout early Soviet popular culture that newborn babies were often named Spartak. In the utopian sci-fi novel *The Coming World* (1923) by Yakov Okunev (1882–1932), for example, Spartacus is used as a revolutionary name.[110] Spartacus' name even became celebrated in lullabies. The following was sung to a child in a 1928 play:

> Sleep Spartacus, my dear boy, hush-hush,
> From the wall Bukharin looks into your cradle.[111]

Theatrical plays, mass performances, and numerous reprintings of Giovagnoli's novel promoted a specific image of Spartacus: a brave leader of the slaves, a hero acting in the name of the ancient proletariat, and the only ancient precursor to the Bolsheviks.

To define the early Soviet dramas about Spartacus as mere adaptations of Giovagnoli's *Spartaco* would risk underestimating the creativity of the 1920s playwrights, especially Volkenstein. The setting and political coloring of Giovagnoli's novel (a tale intended for its own historical moment) did not align with the propaganda needs of early Bolshevism, therefore significant levels of originality were required by both Soviet writers.[112] Mazurkevich's *Spartacus* turned to his Italian source for several plot points and inspiration for his eponymous hero's programmatic speeches. Volkenstein's text followed Giovagnoli's novel more closely, yet he still diverged significantly from it, engaging also with other sources, including ancient historical ones. He excluded certain elements that would have been impractical for staging and completely omitted Giovagnoli's final battle scene.

Neither of the Soviet writers drew upon Giovagnoli's description of Spartacus' learning from the example of the Roman army: the old world could not offer anything beneficial for the new order under con-

110 Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 174–5; Heller and Nekrich, *Utopia in Power*, 217.

111 Arkhangelskii, Pustynin, Alekseev, "Konkurs na Luchshuyu Semyu," 25. Bukharin was a member of Politburo and one of the Soviet leaders of the era.

112 "This explains why, even in today's globalized world, major shifts in a story's context – that is, for example, in a national setting or time period – can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally." See Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 28.

struction by Spartacus, and thus the Bolsheviks.[113] Both Mazurkevich and Volkenstein changed the primary focus: the concept of unity, while remaining essential, became secondary to the theme of fighting for the liberation of the oppressed masses. The Soviet authors also tended to divert attention away from Spartacus' idealistic image toward the ideals for which he was fighting.[114]

While theater, toponymy, and sport were important in shaping the image of Spartacus in the Soviet epoch, there were also attempts to introduce Spartacus to ballet and cinema,[115] both of which would deserve critical attention. The libretto for *Spartacus* the ballet was completed as early as 1933, but it was not be performed until the celebrated Leonid Yakobson's premiere in 1956.[116] In the 1920s, it was generally believed that ballet could not fulfill the aims of Bolshevik propaganda in terms of accessibility and appeal for the masses.[117] As the practice and performance of dance was state-sponsored in the early Soviet Union, the importance and utility of ballet was reconsidered in the decades following World War II.[118]

The first Soviet films telling the story of Spartacus were also produced during the 1920s. In 1926, the All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration (1922–1930) filmed its own version of *Spartacus*, based on Giovagnoli's novel. Sadly, the film is now lost.[119] The premiere took place in December 1926 in Kyiv and more than a year later (January 1928) in Moscow. After several favorable reviews, Soviet theatrical reviewer Khrisanf Khersonskii (1897–1968) criticized the film for being "an opera, high-style product." He denounced its superficial handling of the subject and its "oversimplification of the gladiators, their causes and aims."[120] His review was part of a general shift of attitude, coinciding with Stalin's

113 Lapeña Marchena, "The Stolen Seduction," 175.

114 Hardwick, *Reception Studies*, 41.

115 One of the first mentions of the ballet on the theme of Spartacus and his uprising is in *Sovremmenyi Teatr* 1928, no. 36. See also Searce, "The Recomposition of Aram Khachaturian's Spartacus at the Bolshoi Theater, 1958–1968," esp. 362, 368.

116 Fernández, "Choreographies of Violence," 111; Janice Gross, *Like a Bomb Going Off*, 48. For more on Yakobson's ballet *Spartacus*, see ibid., 241–300.

117 Murray, "Street Theatre," 239. Ballet dancers were involved in several mass performances, such as *The Storming of the Winter Palace* in 1920.

118 Stead and Paulouskaya, "Classics, Crisis and the Soviet Experiment to 1939," 136–37.

119 "Spartacus," VUFKU (All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration), available online. See also the brief analysis in Rudenko, "The Making of a Soviet Hero," 340–2.

120 Khrisanf Khersonskii, "Cinema: VUFKU at the Break," (1928), VUFKU, available online. See also an overview of the reaction to the movie in Rudenko, "The

accession to power during the 1920s and 1930s, when several earlier artistic innovations were abandoned.[121] What had been a prerequisite for the early-1920s "proletarian" theatrical depiction of Spartacus, i.e., the simple clarity of ideological messaging, was therefore condemned less than a decade later in the new medium of film.

The October revolution had provided both the stimulus and opportunity to radically rethink society's relationship with antiquity. More work is required, but the general pattern may already be perceived. From the mid-1930s "Spartacus' uprising" gave way to the idea of a slave revolution, i.e., it went from the narrative of an individual hero to one of mass agency and the overthrow of a whole economic system. Government policy, scholarly practice, and public perception rarely work in unison, but this general pattern tracks suggestively if not definitively with contemporary discussions among Soviet historiographers.[122] It was no accident that this shift occurred in the early 1930s when the idea of building socialism in one country replaced the idea of the worldwide proletarian revolution.[123]

Early propagandists (and utopian revolutionaries alike) wanted to open up the previously restricted cultural realm of classical antiquity and make it accessible to the people. All three plays appearing in the first few years after the 1917 coup – written by Sandomyrskyi, Mazurkevich, and Volkenstein, respectively – remained popular for the next few decades of Soviet theater. Theater and mass performances (and later cinema and ballet) continued to shape and transform the image of Spartacus after cementing his popularity in the 1920s. Early Soviet theater showed Spartacus striking the flint for a worldwide proletarian revolution in the modern era. Gracchus and Brutus, Spartacus' parallel figures on Lenin's list of heroes, could not establish the continuity that the Bolsheviks sought to create between the "ancient proletariat" and the oppressed workers of the modern world. On the other hand, Spartacus (or at least his theatrical image in the early 1920s) could. His heroic example would shape the perception of Greek and Roman antiquity in the popular imagination for several decades to follow.

Making of a Soviet Hero," 340–2. [In this article, the transcription of Khersonskii's surname is corrected.]

121 Platt and Brandenberger, *Epic Revisionism*, 8–9.

122 Rudenko, "The Making of a Soviet Hero," 337, 344–6.

123 Ibid., 343–6.

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ABSTRACT

Spartacus became one of the key figures of Soviet dramaturgy in the 1920s. He was presented as the only ancient predecessor of the Bolsheviks and his theatrical image significantly shaped the later icon of the gladiator as a brave leader of the oppressed masses and a hero acting in the name of the proletariat. This article explores the image of Spartacus in early Soviet theater and mass performance and outlines the correlation between the template of Spartacus' portrayal, Raffaello Giovagnoli's novel *Spartaco* (1874), and the first dramatic adaptations by Vladimir Mazurkevich (1920) and Vladimir Volkenstein (1921). The article examines the use of the ancient hero in Bolshevik propaganda and traces the ways in which Spartacus' image morphs and maps onto wider shifts of Soviet political and cultural policy in the early decades of the USSR.

KEYWORDS: Spartacus, Soviet Union, Raffaello Giovagnoli, Vladimir Mazurkevich, Vladimir Volkenstein

Spartak in njegova zgodnjesovjetska gledališka reprezentacija

IZVLEČEK

Spartak je v dvajsetih letih prejšnjega stoletja postal ena ključnih osebnosti sovjetske dramatike. Predstavljal je edinega antičnega predhodnika boljševikov in njegova gledališka podoba je pomembno oblikovala poznejšo ikono gladiatorja kot pogumnega voditelja zatiranih množic in junaka, ki deluje v imenu proletariata. Članek raziskuje podobo Spartaka v zgodnjem sovjetskem gledališču in množičnih predstavah ter sledi povezavam med predlogo za upodobitev Spartaka, romanom Raffaella Giovagnolija *Spartaco* (1874), ter prvima dramskima priredbama Vladimirja Mazurkeviča (1920) in Vladimirja Volkensteina (1921). Članek tudi prikazuje, kako so antičnega junaka uporabljali v boljševiški propagandi, in preučuje, kako se je Spartakova podoba spreminjala in prilagajala širšim premikom sovjetske politične in kulturne politike v prvih desetletjih ZSSR.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Spartak, Sovjetska zveza, Raffaello Giovagnoli, Vladimir Mazurkevič, Vladimir Volkenstein

Athens, Erechtheion, Caryatid porch.

Athens, Temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis.

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Crushing the Imperial(ist) Eagles: Nationalism, Ideological Instruction, and Adventure in the Bulgarian Comics about Spartacus – the 1980s and Beyond

Miryana Dimitrova*

With his muscular body and determination to fight the Roman imperial oppressor, Spartacus became the standard bearer of the ideology of class struggle rooted in the nineteenth-century socio--political currents in Europe and the US and flourishing in Marxist communist thought. Impressed by Appian's depiction of Spartacus, Karl Marx famously praised him as a noble, great general, a true hero of the ancient proletariat.[1] The Spartacus League, formed and led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg during World War I, fought against the involvement of Germany in the conflict and saw revolution as the only way to destroy the capitalist class and empower the proletariat. It was precisely the Spartacus League, which after the war renamed itself the Communist Party of Germany, that brought to post-revolution Soviet Russia the idea of Spartacus as the epitome of class struggle. The gladiator was "elected" as a leading ideological personality to be praised and employed as a role model for the masses.

As in many other European countries, in Bulgaria too, the figure of Spartacus was appropriated and reimagined to reflect and embody early twentieth-century socio-political struggles. Communist

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1 Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 265.

movements were suppressed in the kingdom of Bulgaria until the end of World War II, and all manifestations of Marxist ideas in culture and art were curbed, including Raffaello Giovagnioli's book *Spartacus*. Published in 1874 and praised by Garibaldi himself, it enjoyed great popularity at the time but was officially condemned as subversive reading.[2] Nevertheless, the freedom fighter acquired prominence in Bulgarian society in the 1920s and 1930s, inspiring many artists and intellectuals whose minds and hearts were open to communist ideals. Two examples that stand out are the poems "Severniat Spartak" [The Northern Spartacus] and "Gladiator" written by the celebrated Bulgarian poet Hristo Smirnenski in 1921 and 1922, respectively. In "Severniat Spartak," a profound and emotional call to arms, expressed in the first person singular, the author likens himself to Spartacus, whose righteous revolt against the injustices inflicted by the ruling classes on the poor cannot be stopped by the Roman legions:

In vain, the legions raise their banners!
In vain, you seek to bar my way!
I throw against your gold cuirasses
My million-strong iron masses,
With burning breast, I join the fray.[3]

September 1944 saw a sea change – as the Red army made an unopposed entry into the country, it overturned the monarchy, paved the way for the foundation of the People's Republic, and brought a new cultural and ideological reality in its wake. Bulgaria became one of the most devoted Soviet satellites and sustained its close relationship with the big Russian brother for decades. Soviet-flavored Spartacus flourished in all spheres of public life.

Among the best-known appropriations of the name and the ideal it came to represent were the mass sports competitions, the so-called republican Spartakiads. Based on the Soviet original, which rose as the alternative to the Olympics, condemned as a manifestation of the exploiting capitalist forces, these games became an essential

2 The book is a perennial classic – the first edition currently available at the National Library in Sofia was published in 1896; the most recent one is from 2004.

3 Hristo Smirnenski, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, translated from Bulgarian by Peter Tempest, 59. The poem "Gladiator" can be found in the same volume, 55–56.

part of Bulgaria's sports scene for decades.[4] The fact that the official newspaper of the Bulgarian army reported that a naval Spartakiad for cadets took place as recently as August 2021 points to the stability of tradition.[5] The particularly felicitous amalgam of Spartacus' good physique and gladiatorial and military prowess, on the one hand, and his idealistic and humane character, on the other, created an image of perfection resonating well with the idea of athletic achievement: football clubs (following the Soviet model), gyms, a public swimming pool in Sofia, and a security company still proudly bear the name Spartak.[6] As an echo from the communist days, Spartacus remains ingrained in Bulgarian culture.

In his insightful article on the Soviet reception of Spartacus, Oleksii Rudenko suggests that the Soviet influence on the countries in the Eastern bloc was uniform: "given the same influences of the USSR on the Central and Eastern European region, the image of Spartacus had become artificially imposed on them. Therefore, the true reception in the context of these countries is hardly worth considering: it was a constructed image that has quickly disseminated in historiography and cultural life."[7] However, taking issue with the suggested uniformity of appropriation, I argue for the uniqueness of the Bulgarian adoption of Spartacus based on his undisputed place of origin – ancient Thrace – a territory occupied mainly by modern-day Bulgaria and thus determining a complex relationship between past and present that reaches far beyond Soviet influence.

Bulgarian historical fiction writers reveled in the suggestion made by Konrad Ziegler in 1955 that due to the corruption of the text, Plutarch's description of Spartacus as belonging to a nomadic tribe ("nomadikou") should be read as belonging to the Maedi tribe ("maidikou"), known to have occupied the lands along the river Strimon (nowadays Struma in southwestern Bulgaria).[8] This intrinsic geographic connection, accepted

4 On the historical and ideological foundations of the Spartakiads, see Gounot, "Between revolutionary demands and diplomatic necessity," 197–8; on Bulgarian Spartakiads, see Girginov, "Bulgarian sport policy 1945–1989," 515–538; also Information Bulgaria, 572; 589; for examples from across the Eastern Bloc, see Strożek, Picturing the Workers' Olympics and the Spartakiads.

5 "Spartakiada po morski sportive," available online.

6 Also noteworthy is the name of a notorious gay club – *Spartakus* – that existed in Sofia in the early 2000s.

7 Rudenko, "The Making of a Soviet Hero," 355–6.

8 Ziegler, "Die Herkunft des Spartacus," 248–50; for an overview of Ziegler's hypothesis, see Fields, *Spartacus and the Slave War 73–72 BC*, 28. Ziegler's theory is not accepted unanimously – for example, Keith Bradley prefers the reading

by Bulgarian thracologists in the second half of the twentieth century, legitimized an elevation of Spartacus into a national icon, an image not necessarily replacing that of the Comintern hero but nevertheless infusing it with a sense of superiority and pride.

This paper considers a specific strand of the myriad Bulgarian literary depictions of Spartacus (there are at least a dozen historical novels dating from the 1970s to the present day, many specifically focused on the hero's life in Thrace),[9] namely the comic series "Spartak" published in the *Daga* magazine (1979–1983).[10] The plotline and characterization of the comics illustrate an appropriation to specific cultural ends – to establish the eponymous hero as a role model for young Bulgarian readers and a national hero both by embodying the proletarian anti-imperialist struggle but also by creating visual and textual links between his place of birth in ancient Thrace and modern-day Bulgaria. My analysis sets the story within the context of a significant cultural event in the country, the celebration of the thirteen centuries anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian state in 1981, and sees it as a critical element of national propaganda, skilfully combining the didactic and the visually spectacular to reach out to young audiences. In the second part of the paper, I compare the narrative in *Daga* with two contemporary Bulgarian comic versions of the story of Spartacus, published in 2017 and 2020 (the latter is a new graphic novel based on *Daga*'s story). Examining the main points of similarity (Spartacus as a nationalist icon) and difference (Spartacus' portrayal as an aristocrat rather than a proletarian hero), I sketch the current creative tendencies of interpreting the subject but also underscore the enduring potential of the personality of Spartacus to serve as a well-crafted vessel of ideological instruction and entertainment.

DAGA AND "SPARTAK"

Daga (the Bulgarian word for rainbow) was launched in 1979 and was regularly published until 1992. Its remarkably westernized aesthetic greatly impacted an entire generation and still sends ripples of

"nomadic" when quoting the passage by Plutarch; see Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World*, 92.

9 For example, Stajnov and Jankova, *Legenda za mladia Spartak*.

10 All issues of *Daga* are available online, "Spartak" can be found in issues 2–11. References in this paper follow the original page numbers, corresponding to the page numbers of the uploaded scanned magazines. See the bibliography for more details.

nostalgia among those who read it as teenagers.[11] Even though comic strips and cartoons in magazines and newspapers had been much loved in Bulgaria for decades, *Daga* took the Bulgarian comic book to a new level of variety and visual sophistication.[12] Moreover, it was among the first officially endorsed full-scale comic publications after decades of rejection of the "Western" genre as incompatible with the progressive artistic values of communist society.[13] According to Anton Staykov, the initial intention of the publishers to find a new propaganda instrument, unexpectedly, even to them, led to the generation of huge profit; so, after the first few issues, they simply closed their eyes to what the creative teams in *Daga* were doing. This resulted in a more liberal stylistic and linguistic expression, the broadening of the genre range, and, finally, almost total freedom of scriptwriters and artists, as well as a great joy to the readers.[14]

Published by the state-owned publishing house Septemvri, the magazine boasted impressive circulation. It occupied the shelves of the newspaper kiosks and bookshops next to the hit comic magazine *Pif Gadget* (one of the few Western magazines to reach Bulgaria, mainly thanks to its ties with the French Communist Party) and several children's magazines imported from the USSR. The sixty-four action-packed pages offered the young reader a remarkable selection of stories ranging from adaptations of Bulgarian and world classics (e.g., Robert Luis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *Hobbit*) to specially commissioned sci-fi stories, historical fiction (e.g., series about the great geographical discoveries), adaptations of folk and fairy tales complete with puzzles, crosswords, origami tutorials and letters from devout readers addressed to the editors. Special attention was paid to Bulgarian history – stories about medieval khans, czars, and nobles featured prominently and often included additional educational sections on the pages following the given episode – for example, illustrations of the elements constituting the typical dress

11 Its popularity can be attested by a recent documentary featuring interviews with writers and artists who have worked for the magazine, and the two collector's edition books (2012 and 2016), featuring specially commissioned stories by the authors of *Daga*.

12 For an excellent introduction to comics in Bulgaria, see Staykov, *Kratka Istoria na Bulgarskia komiks*, 8–17; "Bulgarian comics in the second decade of the new century"; and Stefanov, "'The infantile genre,'" 41–52.

13 Stefanov, "'The infantile genre,'" 42–3.

14 Staykov, "*Daga* – detsko-yunosheskiat komiks kult." Note that unless otherwise stated, all translations from Bulgarian and Russian into English are by the author.

and weaponry in different periods of Bulgarian history.[15] This comic cornucopia was well-measured in terms of form and content to attract different age groups.

"Spartak" was published as a ten-episode series in issues 2–11 of *Daga* (1980–1983). The series was written by Lyubomir Manolov and illustrated by Georgi Shumenov, except for the first episode, illustrated by Vladimir Konovalov. The introduction of a new illustrator changed the visual style of the comic as the finer, more elegant drawings of Konovalov were replaced by the more realistic and chiseled bodies of Shumenov, allegedly because Shumenov was more skilled in drawing horses.[16] The first thing that attracts attention when looking at the series against the rest of the magazine contents is that "Spartak" is distinguished by its monochrome style, while all other stories are drawn in full color. As noted by Teodor Manolov, the son of the writer Lyubomir Manolov and himself the author of a new comic version of the same story to be discussed below, Konovalov was not given enough time to color the panels before the publication of the first episode.[17] Instead of becoming a disadvantage, the black and white layout became a trademark as this seemingly more mature look could be seen to match the gravity of the subject matter.

The key to understanding the significance of the comic is the political and cultural context of the late 1970s. *Daga* began its life in 1979 during a time of significant cultural activity related to the celebrations dedicated to the thirteenth centenary of the founding of the Bulgarian state in 1981 (counted from the arrival of the proto-Bulgarians on the Balkan Peninsula in AD 681). A major cultural nationalist project presented the Bulgarian nation as an amalgam (very peacefully formed) of three ethnic components – Thracians, Slavs, and proto-Bulgarians. As early as 1976, a decree issued by the central committee of the Communist Party initiated and funded a remarkable array of wide-scale academic, cultural, and media projects to celebrate the modern Bulgarian nation.[18] Various historical studies were commissioned to popularize and commemorate the anniversary

15 In fact, an earlier 1970s illustrated book series entitled *Bulgaria Drevna I Mlada* [Bulgaria ancient and young] is described by Petar Stefanov as "historical stories in pictures" and seen by him as a precursor of the history-themed comics to flourish later in *Daga;* Stefanov, "'The infantile genre,'" 43.

16 Staykov, *Kratka istoria na bulgarskia komiks,* 93.

17 Manolov, *Spartak,* 7.

18 The special committee was headed by no other than Lyudmila Zhivkova, the daughter of the dictator Todor Zhivkov. For an analysis of the political dimensions of the celebrations, the use of historicity and the glorification of the past to

and demonstrate the critical position of the Bulgarian state on the map of Europe despite the Iron Curtain and, importantly, to exemplify an ancient nation confidently marching toward the bright future of communism. The writer of "Spartak," Lyubomir Manolov, had even worked on a script for a feature film about the gladiator. However, his project was sidelined, and priority was given to motion pictures dedicated to the proto-Bulgarian arrival in the Balkans and their importance in forming the Bulgarian nation.[19] Manolov redirected his creative energy toward the comic genre, and his project found a place in *Daga.* Since its first issues were strictly programmed to include ideologically grounded material before the magazine gained relative creative liberty in the late 1980s, Spartacus emerged as a crucial nationalist symbol of the same rank as iconic personalities whose exploits were celebrated in the pilot issue of *Daga.* These were Czar Simeon (and his victory against the Byzantines at Aheloi in AD 917) and Vasil Levski, the freedom fighter against Ottoman rule in the late nineteenth century.

SPARTACUS THE THRACIAN, SPARTACUS THE BULGARIAN

The Thracian provenance is crucial for the depiction of Spartacus. Four out of ten episodes of "Spartak" take place in ancient Thrace, with the narrative centering on the formative years of the hero and the nurturing of his physical prowess and inherent opposition to social injustices. The writer of the comic takes the liberty to create an original and detailed picture of Spartacus' early life and to situate it within the divided and profoundly corrupt society of the Maedi tribe. The story opens with young Spartacus, portrayed as the son of the hunter Zoltes, carrying wood. Rhodopis, the daughter of lord Remetalk, intrigued by the handsome boy (around the same age as the reader of *Daga*), inquires whether he is a slave. Spartacus proudly responds that the blacksmith to whom he is an apprentice is a slave; he is an orphan.[20]

validate the communist doctrine, see Elenkov, "Humanno-klasoviat vtori Zlaten vek," 33–62; Kovachev, "1981."

19 Manolov, *Spartak,* 7. The epic film Khan Asparuh, glorifying the proto-Bulgarian people as founders of the Bulgarian state and allegedly featuring 60.000 extras, was released in 1981.

20 Manolov and Konovalov, "Spartak," 3.4. References to all comic books include page and panel numbers.

Plutarch's claim that Spartacus' wife lived with him in Capua and they escaped together (*Crass.* 8.3) inspired fully-fledged modern fictional depictions of the gladiator's female companions, most notably by Howard Fast and Raffaello Giovagnoli. Both were popular in Bulgaria at the time. Giovagnoli's novel had been rehabilitated by the communist authorities. Fast's *Spartacus*, written by a pro-communist and blacklisted American author, was endorsed and published in Bulgarian translation as early as 1954, just three years after its publication in the US.[21] In light of these popular literary sources, the limited female presence in the comic is striking. However, although the young Thracian lady Rhodopis makes a much shorter appearance than her non-comic counterparts, her role deserves attention as she is designed to provide contrasting (more pragmatic) views to Spartacus' working-class hero's maturing mindset.

The boy is punished for daring to converse with Rhodopis and is warned by the blacksmith (his mentor who trains him to fight and shoot) that she belongs to the ruling class, the lords. Nevertheless, Spartacus, driven by his emotion but also by his still immature understanding of the world, insists that she is a good person. He also asks himself: "Why does her father have the right to beat people?" Moreover: "Why does slavery exist?"[22] This demonstrates his acute sensitivity to social inequality from an early age.

Later in the same episode, Spartacus shows disobedience while serving at the lords' banquet and is banished. He takes to the mountains, where, as the caption on the final panel reads, "people are free."[23]

21 In Fast's *Spartacus*, the Thracian meets the German slave girl Varinia at the gladiatorial school; the romantic story is made even more central in Kubrick's film as their offspring becomes a symbol of the vitality of Spartacus' cause overcoming death. In Giovagnoli's novel, the strong female presence falls into three stereotypes: the filial devotion of Spartacus' sister, Mirza; the scheming and vindictive courtesan who joins Spartacus' ranks to betray him because he rejects her love; the virtuous and passionate Valeria Mesala – trapped in a loveless marriage to Sulla – who becomes the mother of Spartacus' daughter. In Hristo Danov's and Maria Daskalova's novel, Spartacus' wife, Fia, after leaving their son in Thrace, joins him to fight for their people, is enslaved with Spartacus, and stays with him until her death, shortly before the final battle. The other leading female character is Sempronia, who is in love with Spartacus but realizes that even after his wife's death, he would never betray his cause and escape with her. She begins to hate the regime that destroys Spartacus and the reader learns that it is that hatred that would lead her to join Catiline's conspiracy.

22 Manolov and Konovalov, "Spartak," 5.2.

23 Ibid., 8.4.

This is a crucial allusion many Bulgarians would have recognized. The communist partisans during World War II were persecuted by the monarchy, then allied with Nazi Germany, and took refuge in the mountains, conducting guerrilla raids from there.

The idea of class struggle within the Thracian society is made prominent by the portrayal of the ruling Thracian aristocracy as cruelly indulging in the mistreatment of the poor peasants and imposing restrictions on individual freedom. After eight years of banishment, Spartacus happens to save Rhodopis' life in a dramatic episode in which he confronts and slays a bison; this valiant act wins him the favor of her father and the nobles. However, soon after that, in episode four, Spartacus learns that the fate of Rhodopis is to become a priestess of Bendis. Although the girl is unwilling to dedicate her life to the Thracian goddess, she must obey the rule. This feels like a pivotal moment in the story and has several implications. In a communist society, women work shoulder-to-shoulder with men. However, ancient Thrace is exposed as a community where women's rights are suppressed, and discrimination transcends class segregation. The fact that the girl belongs to the aristocracy does not grant her the luxury of choice. Furthermore, the fact that it is the cult of Bendis she must serve stands out as an implicit condemnation of religion as interfering with personal development and freedom. However, the inescapable duty is not the only reason for her failed romance with Spartacus – the story indicates that Spartacus and Rhodopis belong to two conflicting worlds. Their worldviews clash during a romantic hunting scene, aptly chosen as Bendis was known as a goddess of the hunt. He claims that the world is not set right and is not fair. She responds that this is how the world works, and nothing can be done about it. Spartacus exclaims: "This is what torments me."[24] Soon, Rhodopis disappears from the story, confirming the rigidity of social roles in her world and Spartacus' firm resolve to fight against injustices.

In the following episodes, Spartacus participates in various missions, including the Mithridatic war – he fights among the ranks of the Thracian horsemen opposing Sulla at Chaeronea. Although the Pontians are defeated and the Thracians are forced to retreat, he fights valiantly and spares the life of the centurion Flaccus, who acknowledges Spartacus' noble nature, even if barbarian. This fictitious inclusion is among the many that create the trope of Spartacus' compassionate nature and readiness to help. We see him saving a Thracian shepherd boy, saving Rhodopis from the bison (the episode noted above), and

24 Manolov and Shumenov, "Spartak," #4, 4.5–6; 5.1.

refusing to kill his opponent later in the arena or during the various battles against the Romans after the outbreak of the rebellion. This combination of strength, resilience, and ruthlessness toward the oppressor, yet benevolence and rejection of pointless violence, contribute to Spartacus' appeal.

Back in Thrace, Spartacus again runs into trouble while defending a group of innocent peasants from the Thracian lord Amadok's cruelty. He is accused of insurrection, sent to prison, and sentenced to death; however, as the Thracians begin to befriend the Romans, as their natural allies in corruption, the king orders Spartacus to fight Amadok in the arena to entertain the Roman envoy. The young man wins but, in line with his ethos, spares Amadok's life; the Roman visitor is impressed and asks for Spartacus to be given to him to be trained as a gladiator, a request the king is more than happy to grant.

It is worth mentioning that Manolov's depiction of the events leading up to Spartacus becoming a gladiator ignores the hypothesis of the involvement of Spartacus as a mercenary serving in the Roman ranks – an event likely related to his arrival at the school of Lentulus Batiatus. Ancient sources, notably Appian, Plutarch, and Florus, acknowledge that Spartacus came from the Thracian lands but offer relatively brief and inconclusive accounts of how he ended up at the gladiatorial school in Capua. Appian describes him as a Thracian who served with the Romans and became a prisoner and, subsequently, a gladiator (*B. Civ.* 1.116). According to Florus' implicitly hostile depiction, he was a Thracian mercenary who first served as a soldier in the (Roman) army, then deserted, and finally became a gladiator (*Flor.* 2.8).[25]

Bulgarian historians, both during the communist era and in contemporary studies, base their accounts of Spartacus' life on ancient sources. For example, in a historical survey published in 1964, Stoil Stoilov states that Spartacus' brilliance as a soldier won him a place in Sulla's army after the Thracians fighting on the side of Mithridates were captured; later, he joined Lucullus' legions and deserted when forced to fight against his Thracian people. He was captured and sent to the gladiatorial school.[26] Such an interpretation of the events does not contradict the state-controlled image. However, the comic story offers a particular and propagandistic take on this murky period of

25 For modern discussions of the conjecture of Spartacus' service in the Roman army, see Schiavone, *Spartacus*, translated by Jeremy Carden, 20–25; Fields, *Spartacus and the Slave War*, 27–30.

26 Stoilov, *Spartak*, 55–59.

Spartacus' life – instead of being a prisoner of war, Spartacus, betrayed by his tribe, becomes a victim of the oppressive regime of the corrupted Thracian lords. This could hark back to the denigrated image of the Bulgarian monarchy before the communist coup in 1944 and the subsequent conflict between the publicly condemned remnants of the degraded bourgeoisie and the virtuous workers and freedom fighters.

Episodes 6–10 depict the better-documented part of Spartacus' life and follow a less idiosyncratic and more mainstream interpretation of events. Spartacus becomes a star of the arena of Lentulus Batiatus. Unable to endure the prospect of yet another massacre to please the Roman perverse addiction to violent spectacles, he decides that the time for rebellion is ripe. Even though it is the spur of the moment, Spartacus, with the clear vision of a leader, captures the armories and, in the later scenes, demonstrates his talent in training and commanding the slave army (no doubt innate and not acquired during his service in the Roman army). He escapes the blockade at Vesuvius with the help of rope ladders made of vines. Manolov's Spartacus expresses his firm conviction that it is his destiny to succeed: "We, the free people, will pass."[27] Throughout the various battle scenes, the gladiator remains true to his character and lets several captured Romans go free.

Another milestone event that defines Spartacus as a proletarian hero is precipitated by strife within his ranks. Spartacus urges his men to head north and live free out of reach of the Roman power, while his comrade Crixus and others want to march against Rome and plunder it – thus enriching themselves and exacting revenge. Spartacus agrees against his better judgment.[28] Here, the main themes – Spartacus' democratic and compassionate nature and his innate qualities as a leader – are underscored and interpreted in the light of the ideal figure of class struggle and proletarian virtues. In the introduction to the 1983 Bulgarian edition of Giovagnoli's novel, the historian Hristo Danov summarizes what the communist regime hailed as characteristic of historical Spartacus, namely his "complete disinterest in private property and material riches altogether."[29] Thus, when his comrades insist on attacking Rome, Spartacus consents

27 Manolov and Shumenov, "Spartak," #9, 6.4.

28 Georgi Markov suggests that the popular perception that Spartacus initially opposed the idea to march against Rome but agreed to do it in spite of himself might have been influenced by Plutarch's more sympathetic depiction of the gladiator. However, Markov contends, Florus' view that it was Spartacus' plan to lead his men to Rome, could be equally plausible; Markov, *Buntat na Spartak*, 133.

29 Giovangnoli, *Spartak*, translated by Petar Dragoev, 463.

because of his democratic nature – and not because of being tempted by the prospect of rich plunder or revenge. The internal strife between Spartacus and Crixus highlights the qualities Danov finds in this hero of the "ancient proletariat." Unlike other revolt leaders who "consciously fell back on the forms, insignia, and titles typical of the ancient eastern and Hellenistic monarchies, Spartacus created and applied [...] a definitely democratic leadership, clad in the republican form."[30]

Following a fierce battle in which Spartacus and his men crush the Roman eagles and send Lentulus into flight, the Gauls remain resolved to march against Rome. All his attempts to stop them are in vain. However, the armies of Crassus and Lucullus block the way to Rome while Pompey advances from Spain. Betrayed by the Sicilian pirates, Spartacus faces the fateful battle against Crassus' legions. Although he seeks Crassus to fight him in a duel, he is slain before he can face the Roman general. Stoil Stoilov aptly describes a metaphorical confrontation of Crassus and Spartacus as a conflict of two human types, or reality versus dream. "No other social order apart from slavery-based society could exist at this stage of the historical development of humanity."[31] In an implicit critique of a world in need of reform, he concludes that "people like Spartacus are born once in a thousand years, while every century has its Crassus."[32]

Without dwelling on Spartacus' psychological state, the comic, following the general trend of the period, conveys a sense of ideological isolation of the protagonist and his beliefs. Although gathering thousands of followers, he struggles to withstand the greed, savagery, and desire for revenge that surrounds him both in Rome and within his ranks. Nevertheless, his death is not in vain – it sparks what would become the blaze of war against slavery and would blend with the proletarian class struggle for a new social order. The sense that Spartacus transcends his late-republican world to reach out to posterity and instruct modern generations in virtue is powerful and visually striking in *Daga*. It reflects the official appropriation of the gladiator as a symbol of proletarian struggle, but also establishes explicit connections with contemporary Bulgaria both at the story's beginning and end. The page following the end of the first episode transports the reader to contemporary Bulgaria and shows a photo

30 Giovangnoli, *Spartak*, translated by Petar Dragoev, 463.

31 Stoilov, *Spartak*, 77. The trope of the meeting between Crassus and Spartacus in a failed attempt to negotiate is widely used (e.g., Giovagnoli, Danov, and Daskalova) and has its basis in Appian's account (*B. Civ.* 1.14).

32 Ibid.

of Spartacus' statue in the city of Sandanski, its chiseled monumental features reflected in the heroic look of the *Daga* protagonist.[33] The story comes full circle with the final image in episode ten. Reassuring the reader that the hero's achievement would be remembered for the years to come, the final caption, wrapped around an image of the head of Spartacus towering over the mountains, reads:

> Thus, in the spring of 71 BC, died Spartacus – the leader of the greatest slave rebellion in antiquity. The rebellion failed but shook the very foundations of the vast empire spreading its dominion over three continents. The leader of the first slave revolt in the history of the Roman Empire was Thracian. Today, in the city of Sandanski, the statue of Spartacus stands as an expression of our gratitude for the immortal achievement of the hero born in these lands, according to historians.[34]

So, back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, *Daga* offered a remarkably colorful mix of Western pop culture visual style and communist, as well as nationalist propaganda. Henry Jenkins recalls the notion of reading comics (in the West) as the opposite of reading serious, meaningful, as it were, literature: "we read in secret – under the covers by flash-light, hidden in a textbook in class – with the knowledge that there was something vaguely oppositional about our practices."[35] *Daga* was different – if your teacher caught you reading these seemingly light, superficial stories in pictures, you could point out that it was the story of Bulgarian heroes that you were reading.[36]

Before discussing two contemporary Bulgarian renditions of Spartacus' exploits to underscore the complexity of *Daga's* story, I will briefly consider a Soviet comic that exemplifies a distinct ideological take on the subject matter that remains completely alien to Bulgarian writers of the period. "Spartak" appeared around the same time as the series in *Daga*, in the April 1980 issue of the children's magazine *Vesyolie Kartinki* (still in print, unlike *Daga,* which did not survive the post-communism economic crisis in the 1990s).

33 Manolov and Konovalov, "Spartak," 9. The statue, erected in 1978, is the work of the sculptor Velichko Minekov, author of numerous state-commissioned monuments glorifying the Bulgarian past.

34 Manolov and Shumenov,"Spartak," #11, 9.10.

35 Jenkins, "Introduction," 1.

36 In fact, scholars recognize that comics, by mixing images and text, can facilitate understanding and memorizing of given study material and can thus be used as an effective learning tool. Cf. Duncan and Smith, *Power of Comics*, 278.

The entire issue is dedicated to celebrating Lenin's birthday and is replete with snippets of information about his childhood; on page two, there is a poem dedicated to Lenin. The story lends itself well to the glorification of the communist luminary. Based on Raffaello Giovagnoli's *Spartacus*, whose popularity in Bulgaria has already been mentioned, the entire story, beginning with a quote by Lenin stating that "Spartacus was among the most prominent heroes of one of the biggest slave revolts around two thousand years ago,"[37] fills only three pages. The warrior is taken captive by the Romans and then made a gladiator. He cannot endure the humiliation and decides to rebel. The highlight of the story is the Vesuvius sequence – after descending the mountain slope by makeshift ladders made of vines, Spartacus and his men surprise and defeat the Romans, bringing the story to an end with a caption reading that "the news of Spartacus' victory roused thousands of slaves to a battle for freedom."[38] Even though, admittedly, the format of the magazine entails shorter stories oriented toward younger children, it is somewhat surprising how schematic and superficial the story appears even when abridged. The ending is indicative not only of the children-sensitive editing of the contents but also of the selective propagandistic approach; by omitting Spartacus' death, the story negates it, and the hero takes one step further toward immortality.

Daga's comic is not only aimed at older teenage readers. It offers more realistic (and therefore credible) character development. In addition to the general outline of the events during the slave war, it features details drawn from ancient historiography that contribute to a more nuanced depiction.[39] Moreover, unlike the "Spartak" in *Vesyolie Kartinki*, unabashedly striving to provide historical justification for Lenin's wisdom and guidance – the story seems to have been included because of Lenin's personal admiration for Spartacus – "Spartak" in *Daga* flaunts a very Bulgarian, idiosyncratic and nationalist agenda.

37 "Spartak," 14.1. The author of the text is unknown, but the first panel announces that the story is based on Giovagnoli's novel. The story is illustrated by E. Gorohovskii.

38 Ibid., 16.1.

39 For example, Spartacus killing his horse in anticipation of the final battle, to demonstrate that there is no way back, can be traced directly to Plutarch, *Crass*. 11.6. An exciting explanation is offered by Dimitar Popov, who claims that horse sacrifice was common in Thracian ritualistic practice; Popov, *Spartak Trakietsat*, 144–5.

POST-COMMUNIST SPARTACUS

His enduring fame attests to the fact that Spartacus was – and remains – a perfect nationalistic role model. His afterlife in democratic Bulgaria is rich and replete with his reincarnations in historical fiction and comics, bearing the stamp of nationalistic, conservative features which replaced the outdated proletarian struggle. The remainder of this paper looks at examples of contemporary comics to map out the transmutations of the hero to suit the post-communist (and anti--communist) ideological agenda and to nurture and empower a new generation of Bulgarian teenagers. By tracing the characteristics of this departure from the proletarian image, the comparison aims to help single out the typical propagandistic traits of the original *Daga* series and elucidate the points of nationalistic propaganda where old and new comics overlap.

An important interpretative strand emerges, namely a firm denunciation of Spartacus as a proletarian hero, related to a negation of his humble origins lauded by earlier communist-era scholarship and promptly reflected in *Daga*. In his introduction to a study of the life of Spartacus, the thracologist Dimitar Popov states the necessity of redressing the ideological agenda, especially the view that Spartacus created a plan for a full-scale proletarian revolution – not least because no proletariat in the modern sense of the term existed in antiquity.[40] Perhaps surprisingly, such critical opinion was expressed (and left uncensored) as early as 1977 by a British scholar, J. G. Griffith, who participated in a symposium dedicated to Spartacus in Bulgaria. He wrote: "I cannot persuade myself that he was a prophet with a social message, dying for a cause for which the time was not ripe."[41] Even Stoilov, in his markedly propagandistic survey, admits that Spartacus' cause was doomed, but at least the Thracian, "with his iron fist, opened the first crack in the granite wall of the Roman supremacy."[42]

The notion of the low birth of the hero is also out of vogue. Popov's etymological analysis of the name Spartacus leads him to conclude that there is a direct link with the royal line of the Odrysian kingdom, thus rejecting the earlier reading that related Spartacus to the Maedi

40 Popov, *Spartak Trakietsat*, 8. A similar stance is taken by Bradley: it is "impossible to view the Spartacan movement as being in any way dominated by abstract or ideological imperatives: freedom from slavery was the intent of the fugitives; the slavery system itself remained unaffected"; *Slavery and Rebellion*, 101.

41 Griffith, "Spartacus and the Growth of Historical and Political Legends," 69.

42 Stoilov, *Spartak*, 110.

tribe.[43] This view harks back to the hypothesis put forward by Theodor Mommsen that Spartacus was of noble, even royal lineage.[44] However, as Popov himself and recently Georgi Markov argued, there are no indications that Spartacus belonged to the aristocracy. If that had been the case, his noble parentage would not have escaped ancient historiographers' attention.[45]

Such cautious treatment of the idea of aristocratic Spartacus is not endorsed by contemporary comic renditions of the subject, which make the hero's princely pedigree the central theme of the story. *Spartak: Zashtitnikat na Trakia* [Spartacus: The Defender of Thrace] and *Spartak: Buntat na robite* [Spartacus: The Revolt of the Slaves] are parts one and two of the story of the Thracian gladiator included in a series of comic books on famous Bulgarian historical personalities such as proto-Bulgarian khans and medieval rulers. Written by Miroslav Petrov and drawn in monochrome realist aesthetic by Veselin Chakarov, the two short, pocket-size comic books were published in 2017 by the Vazdigane foundation, an organization that promotes patriotic causes. In the book reviewing blog *Knizhni Krile*, Nenko Genov welcomes these comics as more realistic treatments of the story of Spartacus and distinguishes them from the propagandistic image of the slave leader, an emblem of proletarian struggles in the past.[46] Although tempting to take this laudation with a pinch of salt, such opinions indicate the urge to liberate Spartacus from his communist past, rediscovering him as a symbol of nationalistic pride. Part Two follows the commonly accepted plotline depicting the events from the onset of the revolt to Spartacus' death and does not offer any unusual interpretation. However, Part One starkly contrasts the depiction in the *Daga* series and reveals much about Bulgarian society's reimagining of the proletarian hero. Spartacus is now a proud member of the aristocracy – the prince of the Maedi people – who fights to protect his lands from the Romans. Among his feats is the mission to liberate Macedonia from the Roman invasion. Although this episode might be seen as a chronologically plausible fictitious interpretation of historical events in the Roman province of Macedonia, the twenty-first-century Bulgarian reader can easily relate this to a political sore spot, the ongoing dispute

43 Popov, *Spartak Trakietsat*, 79–80; see also Velkova, "Der Name Spartacus," 195–99.

44 Mommsen, *History of the Roman Republic*, 350.

45 Markov, *Buntat na Spartak*, 64–65; Popov, *Spartak Trakietsat*, 80–81.

46 Genov, "'Spartak – Zashtitnikat na Trakia' I 'Spartak – Buntat na robite' ot Veselin Chakarov I Miroslav Petrov."

with North Macedonia regarding its language and ethnic and cultural profile. By tentatively equating Bulgarian with Thracian, the episode could be seen as furthering the nationalist agenda of those political and social circles in the country refusing to acknowledge the Macedonian language as distinct from Bulgarian and insisting on the common Bulgarian origins of people living in the former Yugoslav republic.

In *Spartak: Legendata* [Spartacus: The Legend], the son of the writer of the original series Lyubomir Manolov, Teodor Manolov, an art director and artist, (re)created together with his father the script of the series in *Daga* in a project advertised as consisting of ten graphic novels. The first one was published in 2020. Featuring many guest artists and colorists, this eye-catching volume preserves the main plotline of the *Daga* series but elaborates on story details and characterization – for example, Rhodopis is now a prophetess, thus evoking the character of Spartacus' wife in Plutarch, described as a bacchante (*Crass*. 8.3)[47] and, it seems, is promised a more substantial role in the series. More importantly, the story aims to reconcile the different hypotheses about Spartacus' provenance depicting him in contradictory terms, namely that he is a highly educated man and an experienced soldier but is also very close to the lower social class. *Spartak: Legendata* discards the proletarian origins of Spartacus, but unlike the comic discussed above, it finds the golden mean by presenting him as the son of an impoverished landowner. Becoming an orphan at an early age, he is sent to a distant relative, the local ruler (paradynast) Remetalk, who, in turn, arranges for his armorer to look after the boy and forgets about his existence, hence Spartacus being raised as a commoner. The language of the comic abounds in deliberate archaisms, which evoke folk tales or narratives from the Bulgarian Revival period.[48] Subjecting the narrative about ancient Thrace to the linguistic expression associated with national folklore tradition gives an impetus to the identification process of Spartacus as a Bulgarian hero. The fact that the book's full title includes the description "a graphic novel and an encyclopedia of our lands in antiquity" speaks volumes

47 In Danov's and Daskalova's 1977 novel, Spartacus' wife is also portrayed as someone who has the gift of clairvoyance.

48 The Bulgarian national revival period is traditionally framed between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, according to Roumen Daskalov, is characterized by three major processes: the struggle for the establishment of an independent Bulgarian church, education, and literature. The revolutionary movement was thus aiming to liberate the country from Ottoman power; Daskalov, *Making of a Nation in the Balkans;* see also Genchev, *Bulgarian National Revival Period*, translated by M. Shipkov.

about the insistence on historicity despite the seeming admission of the creative license taken by the authors.

What unites all three comic stories considered in this paper is the derision of anything foreign – be it the Roman invader or the Greek influence, it is seen as potentially damaging and corrupting, and the mission of Spartacus is to spearhead the Thracian opposition to it.

The most striking omission is the suggestion of Spartacus' mercenary service in the Roman army. In both *Daga* and *Zashtitnikat na Trakia*, and very likely in the forthcoming books of *Spartak: Legendata*, as an heir to the original story in *Daga*, Spartacus evolves as a commander of the slave revolt not because of his previous military experience in the Roman army but thanks to his innate talent and charisma which enable him to channel his proletarian and nationalistic ideals.[49]

The notion developed in *Daga,* of degraded Thracian society that sends Spartacus to his fate as a gladiator to please the Roman envoy, was already mentioned. The episode of the banquet during which Spartacus refuses to obey the Thracian nobles is elaborated in Manolov Jr.'s version. Spartacus arrives at the mansion and, dazzled by Hellenistic luxury and beautiful decorations, observes: "We used to be great, independent people, but today we are conquered by the Greeks through their settlement in our lands."[50] This may or may not be an implicit critique of Plutarch's depiction of Spartacus as bold, courageous, and clever, qualities that align him more with the Greeks than with the Thracians (Plut. *Crass*. 8.2). Inspired by Plutarch's account Aldo Schiavone describes his vision of Spartacus: "In a wholly unexpected manner, a more faceted personality takes shape, happily positioned between two cultures, if not between two anthropologies – Thracian strength and Greek gentleness: a difficult synthesis of unsuspected richness."[51] Such an amiable and not entirely implausible picture of a multicultural Spartacus is not welcome in Bulgarian popular culture. The Thracian warrior's allegiance to the national cause is clear-cut and implicitly xenophobic, although keeping the limits set by political correctness in sight.

An exhaustive comparison between the literary depictions of Spartacus adherent to the communist ideals and the contemporary post-communist, right-wing-leaning views is beyond the scope of this

49 Thus, Florus' suggestion that he emulated the Roman custom of giving funeral gladiatorial games – in his case, with Roman captives fighting each other (Flor. 2.9) – finds no place in the comics.

50 Manolov, *Spartak*, 38.5.

51 Schiavone, *Spartacus*, 20.

paper. It would necessarily include the numerous works of historical fiction that have enjoyed popularity for the past fifty years. Nevertheless, the comics, presenting intriguing blends of ancient and contemporary theories about Spartacus and by their genre ethos reaching a wide readership, especially younger audiences, emerge as the touchstone of the cultural currents and didactic agendas. The bottom line of the present analysis is that the lack of concrete evidence about Spartacus' life before his arrival at the gladiatorial school ensures a convenient malleability of the image of the Thracian hero, shaped to suit desired ideological goals. The legendary aura surrounding Spartacus' provenance is purposefully embellished in Bulgarian popular culture by comic authors to create a shimmering image of the Thracian warrior who, although at times defending proletarian ideals, remains first and foremost a proud Bulgarian.

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ABSTRACT

Daga (the Bulgarian word for "rainbow") was a Bulgarian comic magazine launched in 1979 and regularly published until 1992. Its remarkably westernized aesthetic greatly impacted an entire generation of readers. Included in its variety of stories (history, sci-fi, literary classics) is an action-packed account of Spartacus' exploits. For ten consecutive issues (1979–1983), the story spanned the hero's life from a more fanciful narrative of his early years in Thrace to the better-documented events in Italy and his death. The paper explores the plotline, characterization, and visual aspects of "Spartak" to reveal the eponymous hero's significance for young Bulgarian readers in the 1980s. Drawing on the cultural and historical context, I argue that Spartacus was well suited to serve as a role model and a national hero by embodying the proletarian anti-imperialist struggle and also, notably, because of his supposed place of birth near the river Strimon in modern-day Bulgaria. I also look at examples of contemporary comics, including a new graphic novel based on *Daga*'s story published in 2020, and consider the transmutations of the hero to suit the post-communist (and anti-communist) ideological agenda, characterized by a departure from the proletarian image of Spartacus in favor of more conservative, aristocratic features.

KEYWORDS: *Daga*, Bulgarian comic magazines, Spartakiad, Strimon, Thrace

Razbijanje imperial(istič)nih orlov: Nacionalizem, ideološki poduk in pustolovščina v bolgarskih stripih o Spartaku v osemdesetih letih in kasneje

IZVLEČEK

Daga (bolgarsko "Mavrica") je bila bolgarska stripovska revija, ki je izhajala med letoma 1979 in 1992. Njena izrazito zahodnjaška estetika je močno vplivala na celo generacijo bralcev. Med raznolikimi objavami (zgodovina, znanstvena fantastika, literarna klasika) je bil tudi akcijski opis Spartakovih podvigov. V desetih zaporednih številkah (1979–1983) je zgodba sledila junakovemu življenju od pretežno domišljijske pripovedi o njegovih zgodnjih letih v Trakiji do bolje dokumentiranih dogodkov v Italiji in njegove smrti. Članek raziskuje zaplete, karakterizacijo in vizualne vidike stripa "Spartak" ter prikazuje pomen naslovnega junaka za mlade bolgarske bralce v osemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja. Na podlagi kulturnega in zgodovinskega konteksta ugotavlja, da je bil Spartak primeren lik vzornika in nacionalnega junaka zato, ker je utelešal proletarski protiimperialistični boj, pomembna pa je bila tudi domneva o njegovem rojstnem kraju v bližini reke Strimon v današnji Bolgariji. Članek raziskuje tudi primere sodobnih stripov, vključno z novim grafičnim romanom, ki temelji na zgodbi revije *Daga* in je izšel leta 2020, ter obravnava transmutacije junaka, ki so skušale ustreči postkomunistični (in protikomunistični) ideološki agendi, za katero je značilen odmik od proletarske podobe Spartaka v prid konservativnejših, aristokratskih značilnosti.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: *Daga*, bolgarski strip, Spartakiada, Strimon, Trakija

Athens, Parthenon.

Athens, Parthenon – Jožica Škof, Meta Masič Prelesnik,
Mirko Juteršek, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc.

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"And so with the moderns": The Role of the Revolutionary Writer and the Mythicization of History in J. Leslie Mitchell's *Spartacus*

Scott Lyall*

INTRODUCTION

"[T]he most splendid fellow in all ancient history."[1] Karl Marx's description of Spartacus, the gladiator who led a slave revolt against the Roman Republic from 73–71 BC, demonstrates the Thracian's eminence in the revolutionary political tradition. The German Spartacists took their name from him as they led an uprising against the Weimar government in the wake of Germany's defeat in World War I and this inspired Bertolt Brecht's play *Drums in the Night*, originally named *Spartakus*.[2] The most famous twentieth-century fictional representation of Spartacus is Stanley Kubrick's film of 1960, in which Kirk Douglas played the slave leader. The movie is based on the American writer Howard Fast's bestselling novel, first published in 1951. Fast began writing *Spartacus* on his release from prison, where he was incarcerated for his refusal "to turn over to the House Committee on Un-American Activities a list of supporters of the Joint Anti-fascist Refugee Com-

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1 Marx, "Letter of 27 February 1861 to Engels," 141.

2 See Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, 24.

mittee."[3] Fast's novel emerged in part therefore from the conditions of American political life in the mid-twentieth century, in particular the blacklisting of artists alleged to have communist sympathies;[4] as Fast comments, "it was not the worst time to write a book like *Spartacus*."[5]

Writers of different eras and contexts have retold the story of Spartacus to galvanize revolutionary protest in their own times, and while Fast's *Spartacus* is modern fiction's best-known representation of the gladiator, J. Leslie Mitchell's *Spartacus* was published almost twenty years prior to Fast's book, in 1933. Mitchell had long been fascinated by the ancient figure of Spartacus and the modern Spartacists who bore his name. This article will explore these influences and their references throughout his work, taking in consideration Mitchell's significant source material for his novel. Like Fast, Mitchell, better known for the work published under his pseudonym, Lewis Grassic Gibbon,[6] was moved to write his *Spartacus* not only in condemnation of the violence of ancient history but in opposition to the continuing histories of violence during his own period in the 1930s, such as class oppression and the rise of fascism. Mitchell's position on the role of the revolutionary writer is examined through analysis of the *Left Review* debates of the mid-1930s. His radical perspective as a writer is also made clear in *Spartacus*: to advocate for the common folk of the world without resorting to political dogma or compromising his critical standards. As the article will argue, alert to the entanglements of historical reality and myth, Mitchell's novel is myth-history more than political or historical realism, and draws upon the legend of the Golden Age to conceive a better modern world.

THE ROLE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITER AND THE *LEFT REVIEW* DEBATE

Mitchell (writing as Gibbon) declared his political position when writing to *Left Review* in 1935: "I am a revolutionary writer. [...] I hate capitalism; all my books are explicit or implicit propaganda."[7] His contribution was part of a debate in *Left Review* in the mid-1930s that

3 Fast, *Spartacus*, vii; see also Fast, *The Naked God*, 90.

4 See Douglas, *I Am Spartacus!*

5 Fast, *Spartacus*, viii. In his memoir, *The Naked God*, Fast notes that *Spartacus* was also attacked by members of the Communist Party; *The Naked God*, 120.

6 I refer to the author by the name under which the relevant work was written and call him Mitchell; on the complexities of the Mitchell/Gibbon identities, see Sassi, "The Shifting Identities of Mitchell and Gibbon," 33–46.

7 Gibbon, "From Lewis Grassic Gibbon," 738, 739.

focused on the objectives of the recently-formed British section of the Writers' International, which according to Henry Pelling was a "front organization" for the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).[8] Founded in October 1934 and issued monthly, *Left Review* was launched by the Writers' International with "an explicitly anti-fascist agenda."[9] Members were asked to "use their pens and their influence against imperialist war and in defence of the Soviet Union," and Mitchell completed an application form to join the organization.[10] However, despite Gibbon's contention that his work was a form of propaganda, his item in *Left Review* robustly countered the suggestion from other contributors that the Writers' International should pursue the proletarianization of literary culture through the elimination of so-called bourgeois influences from revolutionary writing. Far from being "decadent" and "narrowing in 'content'" as argued by previous correspondents in the debate, "the period from 1913 to 1934" – broadly, the modernist period – had seen a "continuous display of fit and excellent technique" according to Gibbon. While "capitalist economics have reached the verge of collapse," literature has achieved its "greatest efflorescence" – as the arts do, so he argues – when civilization is decaying.[11] Modernism is a late literary bloom *reflecting* societal decline. However, it is not itself a literature *in* decline as his antagonists contend, whom Gibbon characterizes cuttingly as possessing merely "a little bad Marxian patter and the single adjective 'bourgeois' in their vocabularies."[12] The formal techniques of his later novels, such as the rhythmical run-on sentences and multiple narrative perspectives of *Spartacus* and *A Scots Quair*, mark Mitchell/Gibbon as an experimental writer whose work anticipated his own wish to see "a Scots Joyce, a Scots Proust" in Scottish literature.[13] It is little surprise then that while stating his position in *Left Review* as that of "a revolutionist," he maintains this is "no reason for gainsaying my own critical judgement," and although "in favour of a union of revolutionary writers," he thinks only those who are good writers – "those

8 Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 80.

9 Malcolm, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 27. According to Malcolm, *Left Review* was "run variously by eminent figures of the left such as Montagu Slater, Edgell Rickward, Randall Swingler, Amabel Williams-Ellis and Tom Wintrigham," with the latter as "Mitchell's main contact within Writers' International." Ibid.

10 "Writers' International, Statement of Aims," quoted in McGrath, "James Leslie Mitchell," 247.

11 Gibbon, "From Lewis Grassic Gibbon," 737–38.

12 Ibid., 738.

13 Gibbon, "Literary Lights," 164; for comparison of Gibbon and Joyce, see Lyall, "On Cosmopolitanism and Late Style."

who have done work of definite and recognized literary value (from the revolutionary viewpoint)" – should be admitted.[14]

Taking a broader view of the *Left Review* debate, Nick Hubble draws a distinction between Proletcult (or Proletkult, i.e., "proletarian culture") and "proletarian literature."[15] Emerging from the 1917 Russian Revolution, the initial experimentalism of Proletcult would give way to the cultural depiction of the assumed realities of working-class life, especially in industrial environments, combined with a distaste for avant-gardism. Leon Trotsky objected in *Literature and Revolution* (1925) to the notion that there could ever be a "proletarian culture,"[16] but Joseph Stalin's increasing grip on power led to the proscription of non-revolutionary literature and art and the revision of historical narratives.[17] According to Michael James McGrath, the Proletcult position from around 1928 was summed up in the motto "Burn Raphael," signifying antagonism to Western traditions of artistic beauty.[18] Propagandistic Soviet writing focusing on content and rejecting formal experimentation is contrasted by Hubble with "proletarian literature," which they define as "books written *about* workers" but "not necessarily always written *by* them or even (given the price of many books) published *for* them."[19] Mitchell, who was raised on a croft in what is now rural Aberdeenshire, was not of the urban working class, insisting, when writing as Gibbon in his essay "The Land," that he

14 Gibbon, "From Lewis Grassic Gibbon," 739.

15 See Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question*, 1–9.

16 "[T]here is no proletarian culture and there never will be any and in fact there is no reason to regret this. The proletarian acquires power for the purpose of doing away with class culture and to make way for human culture," Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, 185–86.

17 Soviet historians contrived theories to ensure that events in the ancient world prefigured the culmination of Russian history in 1917. Wolfgang Zeev Rubinsohn explains that Stalin's theory "of the division of human history into five successive periods, defined on the basis of their social structure," was based "on a defective knowledge of history, and was quite simply wrong," placing, for instance, the end of Spartacus' revolt in 63 BC rather than 71 BC. According to Rubinsohn, "the theory of the two-phase or three-phase revolution was developed" to account for the historical gaps created by Stalin's thesis. This new theory placed the Spartacus War at the end of the first phase of history, making it "roughly the counterpoint in ancient history" to the revolution of 1905, which preceded the revolutions of 1917. Spartacus, on these terms, was a historical harbinger of the October Revolution; Rubinsohn, *Spartacus' Uprising and Soviet Historical Writing*, 6, 7.

18 McGrath, "James Leslie Mitchell," 245.

19 Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question*, 2.

was "of peasant rearing and peasant stock" and describing farmers as "the world's great Green International awaiting the coming of its Spartacus"; his interest in Spartacus may have been stimulated by the knowledge that, according to Barry Strauss, the slave uprising was "overwhelmingly a revolt of the countryside."[20]

Mitchell was plain about his revolutionary sympathies, but the precise nature of his political beliefs is less clear-cut. As a young journalist stirred by the Bolshevik Revolution, he was on the Aberdeen Trades Council committee of the "Industrial Council or Soviet" in 1918.[21] He claimed to be thrown out of the CPGB during his time in the army (1919–23) for Trotskyism and was subsequently refused membership when reapplying on two separate occasions in 1931.[22] William K. Malcolm calls Mitchell a "hidden member" of the CPGB, someone known to be sympathetic to communism but "for whom open declaration of official membership could have proved professionally harmful,"[23] while Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill suggest that "Gibbon was a Marxist who was never a Communist."[24] However, Mitchell also professed support for anarchism,[25] and Elinor Taylor is closest to the mark when describing his politics as "more eclectic and continually shifting" than the communist orthodoxy of the likes of the novelist James Barke.[26] The *Left Review* debate indicates Mitchell's aversion to what he regarded as the dogmatism and philistinism of Proletcult ideas and aesthetics. Yet, while there is an implied reflection of the present in the past in *Spartacus*, as a historical novel with a primary focus on Roman slaves rather than modern-day workers, it sits somewhat awkwardly in relation to the definition of proletarian literature offered by Hubble. Gibbon may have described himself as "a revolutionary writer" in *Left Review* while at the same time defending aesthetic and critical values, but *Spartacus* illustrates the limits of the writer's role in revolutionary action.

Mitchell's skepticism toward the literary class can be gauged through an examination of the character of Kleon in *Spartacus*. Malcolm describes Kleon as "the classic Aristotelian deuteragonist,

20 Gibbon, "The Land," 244, 247; Strauss, *The Spartacus War*, 41.

21 Malcolm, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 19.

22 Ibid., 23–24.

23 Ibid., 24.

24 Ferrall and McNeill, *Writing the 1926 General Strike*, 141.

25 Mitchell described himself as "naturally an anarchist," "Letter of 10 November 1934 to Linklater," quoted in Malcolm, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon,* 24.

26 Taylor, *The Popular Front Novel in Britain,* 152.

second in the pecking order to the protagonist alone."[27] Yet, in some ways he is the most important character in the novel, and certainly the one most fully drawn by his author. Described as "a literatus," and so an "unchained" slave, the Greek Kleon reads to his master – the Romans are often called "the Masters" in order to demonstrate the continuing transhistorical significance of the particular social relations described in the novel – in Greek, Latin, and Syriac.[28] He is sexually abused by his owner, who has Kleon castrated; on his escape, Kleon emasculates his sleeping master in violent revenge and flees carrying a copy of Plato's *Republic*, a text often assumed to propose a communist society that would influence Thomas More's *Utopia* and other fictional utopias.[29] Kleon is the novel's skeptic and intellectual. An atheist, believing in "no Gods […] but Time and Fate," his vision in the face of life's meaninglessness is an "order on a planless earth, of endurance where all things meet and melt."[30] Kleon seeks initially to cynically craft Spartacus into his strongman leader who will deliver political transformation, but he, in turn, is transformed by Spartacus' qualities, in particular the Thracian's compassionate nature and his identification with the oppressed. Kleon the thinker and lawmaker, who teaches the slaves how to vote and who formulates the laws of the "New Republic,"[31] is one half of Plato's philosopher king from *The Republic*, with Spartacus, the man of action who becomes "the King of the Slaves" (later echoed in Christ as "King of the Jews"), forming the other half.[32] As Douglas Gifford comments, "Kleon is the head to Spartacus' heart."[33]

However, while Gifford's contention that "Kleon's maimed body causes him to retreat into cold aridity of intellectual theory and his playing with Platonic theory of a Republic is Gibbon's [*sic*] way of being ironic about political theorising" seems plausible on the surface, it misses the possibility that Mitchell emasculates the literatus as a self-reflexive comment on the position of the writer in relation to re-

27 Malcolm, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 66.

28 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 3.

29 For example, "our purpose in founding our state was not to promote the particular happiness of a single class, but, so far as possible, of the whole community," Plato, *The Republic*, 120. For a refutation of Plato's communism, see Garnsey, "Plato's 'Communism,' Aristotle's Critique and Proclus' Response," 6–30, which points out that only the Guardians live communistically.

30 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 16, 80.

31 Ibid., 87.

32 Ibid., 47.

33 Gifford, *Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 69.

volutionary political action.[34] Kleon's "great Law, the *Lex Servorum*, to use in the time when the leaders of the slave-legion sat in the Senate" in Rome, counsels that "[o]nly by Law may the perfect State and citizen be created," but this is scoffed at by the Jew Gershom ben Sanballat, who places "Jehovah" above human law, and undermined by Hiketas, who believes in a "Golden Age" of "perfect freedom" where there are no laws.[35] Later, before the final battle against Crassus' Roman legions at which the slaves will be defeated, Kleon looks again "with unseeing eyes" at the *Lex Servorum* and *The Republic*, and after a brief wish to re-read them, "his eyes glazed […] with weariness, and he put them away."[36] Kleon, representative of the writer type – a figure in many of the author's novels[37] – appears initially to have a central role in the formulation of a new state, but he is neutered not only in the act of castration perpetrated by his master and by the immense forces ranged against him and the slaves in battle, but by the very nature of his role as an intellectual in violent conflict.

FROM SPARTACUS TO THE SPARTACISTS: REFERENCES AND INFLUENCES

Malcolm's claim that for Mitchell the primary function of writing is as a "doctrinaire instrument" for revolutionary purposes does not wholly align with the argument made by Gibbon in *Left Review* for the importance of good revolutionary writing as opposed to a prescriptive dogmatism.[38] Mitchell's aims become clearer in the references to Spartacus and the Spartacists punctuating his work. His poem "Spartacus," in which "The creaking crosses fringed the Appian Way –," recalls a scene replayed at the end of the novel *Spartacus* and referred to in Gibbon's *Grey Granite* (1934).[39] Ryan D. Shirey calls "Spartacus" a "self-consciously Romantic poem," as Mitchell's verse tended to be.[40] Formally conventional and mannered in its vocabulary, it is unclear when the poem was written, although it seems likely to have been prior

34 Gifford, *Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 69.

35 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 134, 135.

36 Ibid., 200, 201.

37 For example, John Garland and Andreas van Koupa in Mitchell's *Stained Radiance*, 142. While Koupa says of his retreat from idealism, "I will put by the dreams of Spartacus and Christ," Garland moves from a position of ironic freedom to communism.

38 Malcolm, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 29.

39 Mitchell, "Spartacus," 186.

40 Shirey, "Gibbon, Shelley and Romantic Revolutionary Renewal," 99.

to the publication of the novel of the same name.[41] However, in spite of its aesthetical limitations, the poem indicates Mitchell's perspective not only on the figure of Spartacus but on how he perceives his own role as a revolutionary writer. Spartacus "lived for Freedom when the Night / Had hardly yet begun" suggests Spartacus' revolutionary goals derive from an early period in the history of oppression.[42] Although over time, "the blind drift of days and ways forgot" Spartacus, "Thy name, thy purpose: these have faded not!"[43] Spartacus' name not only lives on but shines out "from the darkling heavens of misty Time."[44] The first stanza, therefore, establishes Spartacus as a revolutionary hero in historical time who has become a legendary figure, with the grandiloquence of the language intended to communicate what Shirey terms Spartacus' "mythic status."[45] The second shorter stanza focuses on the use of Spartacus' name as an enduring call to revolutionary arms: "down the aeons roars the helots song / Calling to battle."[46] The slave rebellion led by Spartacus may have been defeated, but he has given to "the world the lordship of the slave!" and this remains vital to the continuing activism of the revolutionary tradition.[47] Shirey argues that "Spartacus triumphs in creating an idea, transmitted through word and song, that lives on and inspires."[48] However, it is not strictly Spartacus who creates the idea, but those writers who work in "word and song" and who, like Mitchell in poetry and prose, seek to apotheosize the man as a myth so as to animate the revolutionary spirits of future generations. As M. J. Trow points out, "Spartacus was not merely a symbol of the heroism of slaves; he became an icon of freedom against tyranny of any kind."[49] Nevertheless, Trow's *Spartacus: The Myth and the Man* locates Spartacus solely in his own historical era and resists the idea that Spartacus is relevant to the struggles of other periods, which Trow regards as anachronistic: "In reality, he was Spartacus, not for all time, but for his own time."[50] In this, Trow willfully misapprehends the manner in which history and myth are reagents catalyzing each other through the work of the creative imagination. History and myth

41 On Mitchell's poetry, see Bold, "From Exile," 115–23.
42 Mitchell, "Spartacus," 185.
43 Ibid., 186.
44 Ibid., 186.
45 Shirey, "Gibbon, Shelley and Romantic Revolutionary Renewal," 99.
46 Mitchell, "Spartacus," 186.
47 Ibid., 186.
48 Shirey, "Gibbon, Shelley and Romantic Revolutionary Renewal," 99.
49 Trow, *Spartacus*, 221.
50 Ibid., 16.

cannot be uncoupled, as Mitchell demonstrates in his poem and, as we shall see, in his novel on Spartacus. The role of the revolutionary writer is the recreation of myth-history in the cause of insurgency.

Mitchell's interest in the Spartacists, especially the figures of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, emerges not only from political conviction but from his approval of the way in which they carry on Spartacus' revolutionary legacy in Mitchell's own period. The semi-autobiographical Malcom Maudslay of Mitchell's *The Thirteenth Disciple* (1931) calls Liebknecht "still one of my heroes: one of the world's great heroes,"[51] while Gay in *Gay Hunter* (1934) thinks that Liebknecht "had been right" about militarism: "it was merely a half-witted ape dressed in an old newspaper and leaf-hat, posturing, red-posterior'd, before admiring females…."[52] The German Spartacists declared their opposition to war in their *Official Declaration of the Spartacus Union*, from 1919:

> The class rule of the capitalists – that was the real cause of the world war in Germany and France, in Russia and England, in Europe and America. The capitalists of all countries – these are the real initiators of the slaughter of the peoples. International capitalism is the insatiate Moloch into whose bloody jaws are thrown millions upon millions of fresh human sacrifices.[53]

The Spartacists considered military war to be another aspect of class war, with the World War I opening up the stark choice between continued destruction or the overturning of capitalism; they argued that "[o]nly socialism can save the people from this bloody chaos, this gaping abyss."[54] Mitchell's poem "On the Murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg" mentions neither figure directly but instead represents the Spartacists as god-like figures sent to Earth to improve the human lot: "Go down to the struggling Sons of Men, / And teach Them all Ye know."[55] The final lines of the poem – "And the longed-for Dawn shall glint our Spears / And the Splendid Two return!" – suggests not only the return to life of the murdered Liebknecht and Luxemburg to lead the revolutionary battle, but a return to the historical era of Spartacus himself.[56] Mitchell's various representations of Spartacus

51 Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple*, 44.
52 Mitchell, *Gay Hunter*, 126.
53 *The German Spartacists*, 3.
54 *The German Spartacists*, 4.
55 Mitchell, "On the Murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg," 200.
56 Ibid.

mythicize history in order to inspire a revolutionary future, while at the same time exploiting classical sources to condemn his own era and the civilization that produced them.

SOURCES AND PARALLELS

Ian S. Munro advises us that Mitchell's "chief authority" for source material on Spartacus and the Third Servile War was "the Greek historian Appian,"[57] presumably his *Civil Wars*, while according to Malcolm, Mitchell's wife Ray "helped her husband piece the Spartacus legend together in preparation for his novel by sifting through the main classical sources of the writings of Appian, Plutarch and Sallust."[58] Mitchell also consulted C. Osborne Ward's *The Ancient Lowly: A History of the Ancient Working People from the Earliest Known Period to the Adoption of Christianity by Constantine*; McGrath claims that Mitchell owned a copy of *The Ancient Lowly* and that Ray Mitchell "recalled using Ward's book while helping check the draft of *Spartacus*."[59]

Originally published in two volumes in 1888, Ward's book offers a Marxian perspective on the working lives of ancient peoples. Ward's account mythicizes Spartacus, who is described as "one of the great generals of history; fully equal to Hannibal and Napoleon, while his cause was much more just and infinitely nobler, his life a model of the beautiful and virtuous, his death an episode of surpassing grandeur," and who "committed no acts of brutality" in his campaigns against the Roman administration.[60] Ward also draws historical equivalences between the United States of his own time, "when working people [...] are again on the rally and are forming the most compact and extensive organizations that have yet existed," and "the deeds of Eunus and Cleon or of Spartacus and Crixius [normally Crixus]" during the ancient slave rebellion.[61] Ward maintains that Spartacus' rise to a position of leadership among his fellow slaves from around 74 BC

57 Munro, *Leslie Mitchell*, 126.

58 Malcolm, *A Blasphemer and Reformer*, 116.

59 McGrath, "James Leslie Mitchell," 330. Ward's book was a source, too, for Fast's *Spartacus*: see Fast, "Letter of 8 June 1979 to McGrath": "Your letter is the first time I have seen the name of Lewis Grassic Gibbon, and I have absolutely no knowledge of his writings or his beliefs. [...] If you are curious about some of the information I had in SPARTACUS, you might look at a very long, Marxist historical work called THE ANCIENT LOWLY," NLS, Acc. 1318.

60 Ward, *The Ancient Lowly*, vi, 264.

61 Ibid., 24.

corresponded "with the movement of the Roman senate to suppress the right of organization," which was "followed by a great struggle."[62] This suggests parallels with union-breaking practices in the United States from the later nineteenth century onwards and corresponding acts of worker resistance. Remarking on what he calls the "wholesale suppression" of unionization in the Roman Republic, Ward's claim that Spartacus' "remarkable conquest [...] in the industrial centers of Italy actually revived the organizations or turned their membership to his use" appears to situate the famous gladiator in late-nineteenth century America and Roman Italy simultaneously.[63] Ward's descriptions are informed by historical source material – an impressive list prefaces the contents – while also recruiting Spartacus for socialist political purposes in his own place and time, a technique consonant with Mitchell's creative methods as a revolutionary writer.

Influenced by Ward's book, Mitchell used the phrase "the ancient lowly" in *Gay Hunter* and *Grey Granite* to describe the oppressed.[64] There are further parallels with Ward's work in *Spartacus*, which begins and ends with the following words: "*It was Springtime in Italy, a hundred years before the crucifixion of Christ.*"[65] Ward proposes that Spartacus was "the last emancipator" until Jesus, thus representing the slave leader as Christ's forerunner.[66] *Spartacus* ends with the crucified Kleon's vision or hallucination of Spartacus and Christ as one:

> And he saw before him, gigantic, filling the sky, a great Cross with a figure that was crowned with thorns; and behind it, sky-towering as well, gladius in hand, his hand on the edge of the morning behind that Cross, the figure of a Gladiator. And he saw that these Two were One, and the world yet theirs; and he went into unending night and left them that shining earth.[67]

Spartacus and Christ are united in mystical revolutionary brotherhood in Kleon's mind and although in historical time Spartacus is dead and Jesus not yet born, the future of humankind belongs to their ideals, represented here as identical. Association with Christ further mythologizes Spartacus, who is described as "a God" and who him-

62 Ward, *The Ancient Lowly*, 243.

63 Ibid., 262.

64 See McGrath, "James Leslie Mitchell," 226, 304.

65 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 3, 210 (italics in the original).

66 Ward, *The Ancient Lowly*, 291.

67 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 210.

self believes "[t]here's a God in men," although an "Unknown God" rather than the god of a particular religion.[68] Malcolm interprets the concluding scene as meaning that "[t]he legacy of Spartacus' revolt for posterity [...] is that it paved the way for the even more enduring radicalism of Christ and of Christian teachings."[69] But the real meaning of the image of Christ here is not simply the idea of Spartacus as His radical precursor, but that a revolutionary politics to end the recurrent history of the suffering of the common people must be suffused with mythic power in order to transcend the violent material circumstances creating that very suffering. This marks the limits of Mitchell's Marxism and indicates that his real aim as a revolutionary writer is the mythicization of history in the propagation of a powerful creative myth to inspire a radical transformation of the future.

MYTHICIZATION OF HISTORY, CIVILIZATION, AND THE GOLDEN AGE

To better understand Mitchell's approach to the mythicization of history in *Spartacus*, an outline of his attitude to history is required. Mitchell was an adherent of the anthropological theory of diffusionism. The diffusionists believed that civilization started in one place – Egypt – and was diffused to the rest of the world, as opposed to the evolutionist theory, which proposed that civilization developed in various locations simultaneously. Mitchell's novels often contain an intellectual propagandist for the theory, which he saw as the key to understanding history and civilization. For Mitchell, prior to the development of civilization – which, according to the diffusionists, had arisen accidentally due to the growth of crops on the flooding of the Nile Basin – humans had lived as free hunter-gatherers. Civilization, growing from human rootedness to agricultural communities, meant the development of repressions and taboos, religion, social class, war, and gender oppression. Many of his novels suggest glimpses of a pre-civilization Golden Age, with similarities to the thinking of the Romantics and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which informs Mitchell's political hopes for the future.[70]

Mitchell was especially interested in the death of civilizations. His non-fiction book *The Conquest of the Maya* (1934) focuses on the decline of the Mayan civilization and its ultimate defeat by the Spanish in the

68 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 203, 195.

69 Malcolm, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 68.

70 For Mitchell's diffusionism, see Young, *Beyond the Sunset*, 9–22.

sixteenth century – Mitchell calls the Spaniards "scum from the sea" – and is written from a diffusionist perspective: Mitchell's diffusionist guru, Grafton Elliot Smith, provided a foreword.[71] Mitchell rejects Oswald Spengler's "theories of cyclic catastrophe," then popular among modernists, to explain the fall of Mayan culture.[72] Instead, he sees the Mayans as a people conquered by imperialists who viewed them as barbarians, when actually, for Mitchell, the simpler Mayan way of life was superior to the modern civilization of the Spaniards and showed glimpses of a lost Golden Age. This is captured in Mitchell's comment "that the motherland of the great civilization which built Chichen Itza was Mu, another name for Atlantis," an observation relevant to our examination of *Spartacus* to which we will return.[73] Mitchell ends *The Conquest of the Maya* by speculating whether the death of Mayan culture serves as an "indictment for the codes and crimes of our own civilization" and "prophecy for it of a fate as fantastic and terrible," a reminder that his accounts of historical violence are at the same time denunciations of his own period.[74] He comments that although the Maya doubtless "had their moments of hatred of these rulers, and possibly their moments of revolt," "no tale comes to us of the rise of a Maya Spartacus."[75] According to this, the Maya did not mount an organized resistance to protect their way of life from their invaders and so their civilization was overthrown, to be buried in the mists – and myths – of history. The story of the Maya is an implied warning to the common people of Mitchell's own time that their peace and welfare must be defended from the depredations of the powerful.

Spartacus can be classed as a historical novel since it is set in the past and is based upon an identifiable historical episode. However, as Douglas Young comments, it is not a historical novel "in the sense of trying to re-create in detail the events and ethos of a period in the past."[76] Indeed Mitchell makes some historical blunders: for one, a character reads Ovid, who was not contemporary with the action – although it is relevant to the themes of *Spartacus* that Ovid writes about the Golden Age in *Metamorphosis*.[77] Naomi Mitchison, who wrote many historical novels set in the ancient world, such as *The*

71 Mitchell, *The Conquest of the Maya*, 266.
72 Ibid., 126.
73 Ibid., 29.
74 Ibid., 269.
75 Ibid., 191.
76 Young, *Beyond the Sunset*, 64.
77 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 58; Munro, *Leslie Mitchell*, 127.

Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931), thought Mitchell failed to understand the historical contexts of *Spartacus*: "He had put it into modern terms without understanding what the ancient terms were."[78] But as Malcolm points out, *Spartacus* is "a work that is less historical simulation than political abstract."[79] *Spartacus* is, on one level, a historical novel, but, contra Mitchison, it is less concerned with historical verisimilitude – to represent the past through the knowledge we have gained of it in the present – than to judge the present in light of the past. What T. S. Eliot termed "the mythic method" of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, its "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity," is reversed by Mitchell in *Spartacus*, which asks its readers to infer from the example of antiquity lessons for their own time.[80] *Spartacus* is revolutionary myth-history, and the novel enables Mitchell to point to historical degeneration and attack the moral and political sicknesses of civilization, past and present.

While Rome might be regarded as one of the pinnacles of ancient civilization, Mitchell characterizes the Romans as decadent and sexually diseased, and slaves are often used cruelly as their sexual playthings and "infected with the venereal diseases" of a degenerate civilization.[81] Cossinus and Kharmides discuss the rumor that Spartacus was "no Thracian, but a tribesman of remoter people [...] captured from the Golden Age" and Cossinus dreams of owning Spartacus as a "body-slave" to "debate the life of the Golden Age while he rubs me in my bath."[82] Cossinus is one of the kinder, more cultivated Roman leaders, captivated by the Golden Age through his reading of Hesiod, but even he fails to see the irony of debating the Golden Age – an allegory of ultimate freedom – with a slave. Cossinus' interest in the Golden Age is merely historical, the whim of an educated patrician, and a self-interested fantasy of living in even greater personal comfort than at present. Mitchell's Spartacus, on the other hand, is depicted as a man-myth, a living reminder of the Golden Age, whose campaigns against Roman power seek not only freedom from slavery for himself and his followers in their own historical time but everlasting liberty for the commons of the world.

78 Mitchison, "Letter of 21 September 1983 to Malcolm," quoted in Malcolm, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 64.

79 Malcolm, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 65.

80 Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," 178, 177.

81 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 125; see Young, *Beyond the Sunset*, 65–66.

82 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 59.

Spartacus is a historical figure whom Mitchell characterizes in archetypal terms as the Great Leader on whom history turns. Becoming more authoritative as the novel progresses, he is described as a "giant" of a man, possessed of immense strength and iron will, yet also compassionate.[83] He is "the Voice of the voiceless," a figure who represents all of the oppressed, not only among the slaves but of all time, as well as a romantic hero with whom women experience "wild ecstasy" in bed.[84] As Strauss points out, Spartacus "was a failure against Rome" but "a success as a myth-maker" who was "whatever people made of him."[85] Mitchell is aware that inspirational myths can turn to politically-motivated misconstructions, and the Spartacus "legend" is not simply exaggerated in the Thracian's favor but also consists of scurrilous falsehoods: it is rumored he "tortured his captives and had virgins brought to his tent in order that he might violate them publicly. Also, he ate horses."[86] Kleon fears that "the story of the slaves' insurrection" will become "dim and confused, in the ages to be," and that while "[p]oets and writers of tales will yet tell of it," they will use the uprising to emphasize their "own loves and hates, with us only their shadowy cup-bearers."[87] An advocate of Plato's *Republic*, where poetry is distrusted,[88] Kleon believes it inevitable that history will be distorted by fiction. Recounting the rebellion almost entirely from the slaves' perspective indicates its author's resolve to fictionally retell history from the side of the subjugated as opposed to the winners, so countering some of Kleon's apprehensions, which are a skeptical antidote to the dangers of history turning into myth. Nonetheless, *Spartacus* tells the story of a historical event "destined to become legend and myth,"[89] as Gifford puts it. Mitchell's linking of the slave rebellion to the Golden Age indicates his calculated complicity in the mythicization of history of which Kleon warns.

Allusions to the Golden Age abound in *Spartacus*. Hiketas believes there existed a Golden Age "when there were neither Laws nor swords, Masters nor slaves –."[90] Titul alludes to "the vanished Western Isle," and Kleon speaks of "the Islands of the Blest" which are "[b]eyond

83 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 73.
84 Ibid., 194, 196.
85 Strauss, *The Spartacus War*, 166, 185.
86 Ibid., 57.
87 Ibid., 194.
88 See Plato, *The Republic*, 67–93.
89 Gifford, *Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 67–68.
90 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 135.

drowned Atlantis."[91] Titul believes himself a descendant of the people of the Western Isle, which, according to Kleon, "was the island of Atlantis, for so Plato tells."[92] Plato's account of the rise and fall of Atlantis in *Timaeus and Critias* sparked continuing debates as to whether Atlantis was mythical or an actual place lost to history. Atlantis became a metaphor for the myth of the Golden Age and an allegory through which to criticize current societies; as Northrop Frye explains, "utopia is a *speculative* myth; it is designed to contain or provide a vision for one's social ideas."[93] In Mitchell's work, the Western Isle, Islands of the Blest, and Atlantis are different names for a Golden Age which he professes to believe once existed and which he uses as an ideal against which to measure the degeneration of the present. In his science-fiction novel *Three Go Back* (1932), the passengers of a crashed airship are sent back in time to Atlantis and vow on returning home to "preach Atlantis": to evangelize for humanity's utopian potential and a radically better world.[94] Titul's Western Isle is a mythical utopia, which as Kleon understands, is "[n]owhere, in fact" and does not actually exist.[95] Malcolm regards Kleon the atheist as illustrating a rational progression from the beliefs of Titul, whose faith rests in the god Kokolkh and who is often described as insane; yet, as referred to previously, Spartacus himself is represented by Mitchell as an aspect of the Golden Age in which Titul believes.[96] Titul believes in the reality of the myth, what we might term the Real, a feature of human history that yet sits outside time of which the transient world is merely a likeness, and in this, he might be a better Platonist than Kleon. Kleon may be right to say that the Western Isle is "[n]owhere, in fact" and so it cannot be discovered through exploration, but it is found in the human imagination and various fictional worlds. As Elpinice, Spartacus' lover, says: "I think it's neither in Thrace nor your Islands, this land you mock. It lives in our dreams and our hopes, and maybe we'll never attain it. But – we broke out of Batiates' ludus to *try*."[97] The Western Isle, Atlantis, the Islands of the Blest: these are the mythic standard of perfection against which Mitchell's capitalist society, with its histories of violent oppression, is judged wanting. Far

91 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 13, 46.
92 Ibid., 7.
93 Frye, "Varieties of Literary Utopias," 205.
94 Mitchell, *Three Go Back*, 194.
95 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 46.
96 Malcolm, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, 69.
97 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 46.

from discarding the notion of a mythic otherworld in the name of political materialism or intellectual progress, Mitchell builds his case for revolution around the idea of the Golden Age.

HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE

Elpinice's observation that the Golden Age remains to be established on Earth through revolutionary action indicates the importance of her character. She has Spartacus' ear and an equal place with the men on the insurrectionists' "council of war."[98] Through her, Mitchell endorses equality for women in the slaves' prospective New Republic as well as in his contemporary society. That a pregnant Elpinice is raped and killed by the Romans illustrates in the most brutal terms how far off the attainment of such hopes are, her unborn child with Spartacus symbolizing a lost radical future. Elpinice's murder happens off page, but other violent scenes are depicted with visceral detail, such as the capture of Roman legionaries by the slaves, described as "an orgy of hate":

> Pallid and filthy, denied the sun, denied the remembrance of wine or warmth, the slaves of the mines went mad in a lust of revenge, delighting in torments, bathing their arms to the shoulders in blood, tearing the entrails from still-living bodies.[99]

The violence of the slaves is revenge for the violent oppressions they have suffered at the hands of the Romans, but its gruesomeness suggests that morally, the slaves may be no better than their masters. Further, it raises a troubling question: to what extent does the originary moment of violence in overcoming their oppressors undermine the ideals of equality, peace, and freedom imagined by the slaves for their New Republic – in short, is the violence justified? Gershom ben Sanballat asks this very question of Kleon, who replies: "We must destroy before we build."[100] Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators* (1939), a novel about the Spartacus revolt that, according to its author, likewise infers "parallels between the first pre-Christian century and the present," suggests that the violence of the slaves toward the achievement of their goals destabilizes the "Sun State" of communistic liberty before it is ever attained; Koestler's disillusionment with Stalinist tyranny and the Marxian

98 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 26.
99 Ibid., 40.
100 Ibid., 87.

theory of history would be precipitated by researching and writing *The Gladiators* and would see him quit the Communist Party in 1938.[101] Malcolm claims that in Mitchell's novel, "the ideal of a free society" can only be won "through violent revolutionary action."[102] Although Spartacus is far from the most bloodthirsty of the slave leaders and is generally depicted as noble in purpose and action, Malcolm's argument is supported by Spartacus' transformation "from a wayward slave to an archon-tyrant."[103] But Mitchell's real point in refusing to censor his portrayal of violence is that civilization itself is built on the violence – often invisible in modern societies – of hierarchical social relations. The horrors of actual violence in *Spartacus* condemn the cruelties of the ancient world in which it is set. However, it is also emblematic of the slow violence enacted through oppression and inequality during the period in which the novel was published.

Mostly reviewed positively on publication, *Spartacus* was criticized for its graphic depictions of violence. While Compton Mackenzie commented that "Mitchell has always had a pretty taste in horrors, and in 'Spartacus' he has been able to indulge it legitimately," Herbert Read thought the novel "full of violence which is pathological and not imaginative in origin," and Ivor Brown complained that the blood and gore undermined our sympathies for the slave cause.[104] The advertising card sent out by Jarrolds Publishers (*Figure 1*), which claimed *Spartacus* was "comparable to the best in Flaubert or [Lion] Feuchtwanger," prompted dissent from some critics who objected to the implied comparison to Gustave Flaubert's historical novel *Salammbô* (1862).[105] The card even cites American writer Christopher Morley, dedicatee of *Gay Hunter*, comparing *Spartacus* to Homer, perhaps in reference to the violence of *The Iliad*. The ancient setting of *Spartacus* allowed Mitchell to be especially extreme in his depiction of violence, but the point applies to the modern age as well. This is made clear in

101 Koestler, *The Gladiators*, 316, 129; see also Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, 319–27.

102 Malcolm, *A Blasphemer and Reformer*, 120.

103 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 81.

104 Mackenzie, *Daily Mail*, October 26, 1933, NLS MS. 26071/5; Read, *The Spectator*, October 13, 1933, NLS MS. 26071/6; Brown, *The Observer*, November 12, 1933, NLS MS. 26071/4.

105 For example, Howard Spring in *The Evening Standard* (September 29, 1933): "Mr Mitchell is hardly of Flaubert's rank, but one accepts with equanimity his publisher's assurance that he is." NLS MS. 26071/2. *Salammbô* was a favourite novel of Mitchell's, according to Munro, and "influenced his choice of theme" in *Spartacus*, *Leslie Mitchell*, 125.

J. Leslie Mitchell

("LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON")

is 32 years of age;
has been a journalist, a soldier, an airman, an excavator;
is one of the leading authorities on American archæology;
has written a standard history of the Maya civilization;
is the author, under his "second name", of a trilogy hailed as the greatest achievement in Scots literature for the last hundred years;
has written several novels and fantasies which have won high praise from the discerning public and discerning critics (Christopher Morley has compared him to Homer!);
and has now written a work, comparable to the best in Flaubert or Feuchtwanger —his first historical novel—entitled

A Story of the Great **SPARTACUS** *Roman Slave Revolt*

7/6 net At all good Booksellers and Libraries

JARROLDS Publishers (LONDON) Limited, Paternoster House, Paternoster Row, E.C.4

Fig. 1: "Publisher's advertising card for *Spartacus*." Source: National Library of Scotland, Special Collections, MS. 26071/1.

his letter to the poet Helen Cruickshank, who had been troubled by the novel's extreme descriptions of violence:

> Yes, horrors do haunt me. That's because I'm in love with humanity. Ancient Greece is never the Parthenon to me; it's a slave being tortured in a dungeon of the Athenian law-courts; ancient Egypt is never the pyramids; it's the blood and tears of Goshen; ancient Scotland is never Queen Mary; it's those serfs they kept chained in the Fifeshire mines a hundred years ago. And so with the moderns. I am so horrified by all the dirty little cruelties and bestialities that I would feel the lowest type of skunk if I didn't shout the horror of them from the housetops. Of course I shout too loudly. But the filthy conspiracy of silence there was in the past is coming again in Scotland in a new guise called Renaissance and objectivity, and National art and what not. Blithering about Henryson and the Makars, and forgetting the Glasgow slums.[106]

For Mitchell, civilization is not cultural glories such as the Parthenon, but the slaves and workers who built it. Civilization is not its classics; it is the social cost of creating those classics. As Walter Benjamin puts it, "[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," a point made in *Spartacus* through the Roman Cassius' fear that the progress of the slaves "meant the end of all beauty and culture."[107]

Mitchell's final comment to Cruickshank concerns his objections to the nationalistic Scottish literary renaissance of the 1920s and '30s. Powered by the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, this movement promoted the renewal of Scots cultural forms and language, with MacDiarmid basing his efforts in part on the example of early renaissance poets ("Makars") such as Robert Henryson (*c.* 1420–*c.* 1490) and William Dunbar (*c.* 1460–*c.* 1520) – namely, the early twentieth-century Scottish renaissance sought national revival through the cultural retrieval of Scotland's first renaissance.[108] For Mitchell, however, the culturalism of the modern Scottish renaissance ignored the

106 Mitchell, "Letter of 18 November 1933 to Cruickshank," NLS Acc. 5512; see also Cruickshank, *Octobiography*, 89.

107 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 248; Mitchell, *Spartacus*, 132.

108 For an overview of the Scottish literary renaissance, see Lyall, "Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance Movement"; for the Scottish literary renaissance in relation to Scots poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, see Dunnigan, "The Return of the Repressed."

appalling social conditions of an industrial city like Glasgow in the 1930s, as well as understating what he saw as the dangerous links between nationalism and fascism.[109] Similarly to Fast's *Spartacus*, then, Mitchell's novel was written in the context of the Scot's disquiet at political and cultural developments in his own country, as well as his disgust at continuing poverty and class oppression worldwide. While fighting the violence of ancient Roman civilization, Mitchell's Spartacus symbolizes enduring revolutionary hopes for a just society now and in time to come.

109 See Gibbon, "Glasgow," 114–25, especially 121. In *Fascist Scotland*, Bowd claims that the "noisy and fractious fringe of Scottish Nationalism [...] had an at least ambivalent relationship with Fascism" in the interwar period, 138.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this article is J. Leslie Mitchell's *Spartacus* (1933), his fictional representation of the slave rebellion in ancient Rome led by the eponymous gladiator. The article begins by examining Mitchell's contribution to debates over the role of the revolutionary writer in *Left Review* in the mid-1930s and his place in the British Left in this era, before going on to survey the ways in which the figure of Spartacus and the German Spartacists are represented across Mitchell's oeuvre. It then explores key source material utilized in the writing of the novel, as well as outlining comparisons between Mitchell's representation of Spartacus and those of his fellow novelists Howard Fast and Arthur Koestler. Including close readings of *Spartacus* and informed by archival research and previously unpublished manuscript items, the article argues that at the same time as denouncing the cruelties of Roman rule, *Spartacus* also signals Mitchell's passionate opposition to what he considered the violent histories of oppression suffered by the commons of the earth of all times, culminating in the capitalist crisis of Mitchell's own period in the 1930s. Mitchell creates this effect of historical simultaneity by writing a work of myth-history – as opposed to historical realism or political propaganda – that employs the utopian legend of the Golden Age to inspire radical dissent against modern deprivation.

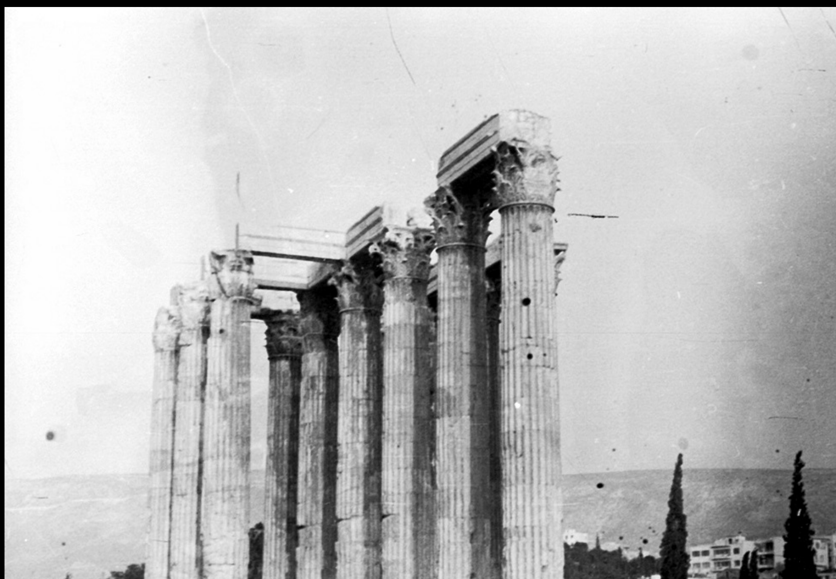
KEYWORDS: Spartacus, J. Leslie Mitchell (1901–35), Lewis Grassic Gibbon, communism, myth-history

»In tako je tudi s sodobniki«: Vloga revolucionarnega pisatelja in mitizacija zgodovine v *Spartaku* J. Leslieja Mitchella

IZVLEČEK

Članek se osredotoča na roman *Spartak* (1933) avtorja J. Leslieja Mitchella in njegov fiktivni prikaz suženjskega upora v antičnem Rimu pod vodstvom istoimenskega gladiatorja. Avtor najprej obravnava Mitchellov prispevek k razpravam o vlogi revolucionarnega pisatelja v reviji *Left Review* sredi tridesetih let 20. stoletja in njegovo mesto znotraj britanske levice v tem obdobju. Zatem članek raziskuje, kako so znotraj Mitchellovega opusa predstavljeni lik Spartaka in nemški spartakisti. Sledi obravnava ključnih virov, ki jih je Mitchell uporabil pri pisanju romana, in primerjava njegove upodobitve Spartaka z upodobitvami pri pisateljih Howardu Fastu in Arthurju Koestlerju. Na podlagi podrobnega branja in raziskave arhivskega ter prej neobjavljenega rokopisnega gradiva članek dokazuje, da roman Spartak obsoja krutost rimske vladavine, obenem pa kaže tudi na Mitchellovo strastno nasprotovanje temu, kar je po njegovem mnenju predstavljalo nasilno zgodovino zatiranj, ki so jih doživljale različne zemeljske skupnosti poljubnih časov in so vrhunec dosegla znotraj kapitalistične krize Mitchellove lastne dobe, tridesetih let 20. stoletja. Učinek zgodovinske sočasnosti Mitchell doseže tako, da – v nasprotju z zgodovinskim realizmom ali politično propagando – napiše mitsko-zgodovinsko delo, ki z namenom spodbuditi radikalno nasprotovanje zoper sodobno izpraznjenost navdihuje z utopično legendo o zlatem veku.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Spartak, J. Leslie Mitchell (1901–35), Lewis Grassic Gibbon, komunizem, mito-zgodovina



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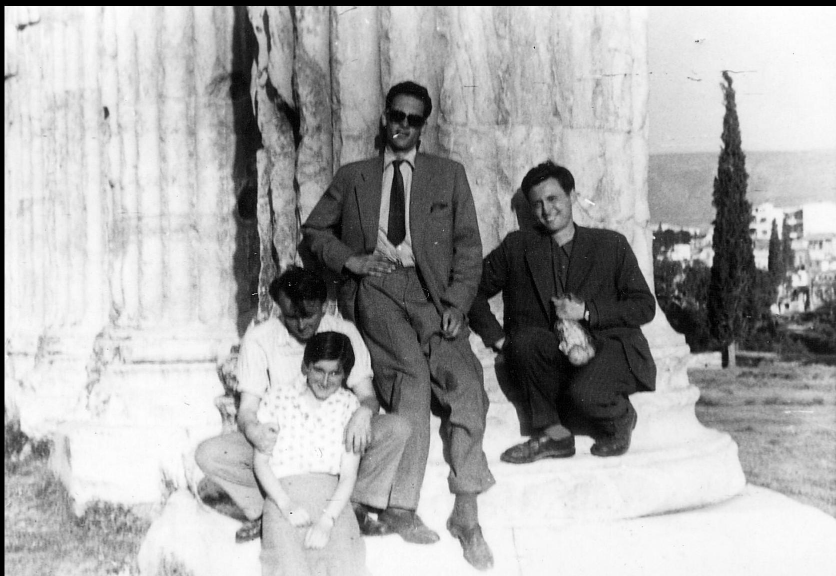

Athens, Olympieion – Matija Pogorelec, Ksenija Rozman, Primož Simoniti, Franc Žužek.

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Revolution in Antiquity: The Classicizing Fiction of Naomi Mitchison

Barbara Goff*

INTRODUCTION

One of the intersections between "ancient Greek and Roman culture and world communism from 1917" can be traced in the early works of Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999). She became famous with a series of novels and short stories set in the ancient world, some of which will be the subject of this paper. In particular, the representations of radical political change, of revolution, will be explored in a corpus of selected novels and short stories.

Married to a Labour MP, Mitchison was never a card-carrying Communist, but she espoused a range of left-wing causes, from birth control to Scottish nationalism. Her diverse oeuvre offers a series of variations on the quest for social and sexual justice and freedom, delivered through an ambitious range of genres. Because of this diversity, her work traces many of the preoccupations of the twentieth century, from socialism, feminism, democracy, and colonialism, to technocracy, ecology, migration, and multilingualism. Indeed several such themes can be read in her versions of antiquity, which were produced mainly in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these bear the imprint of the Russian Revolution, as well as of other preoccupations characteristic of the progressive wing of early twentieth-century British culture.[1] At the same time, they suggest new roles for Classics as a dis-

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1 For a general introduction to Mitchison's work, see Joannou, "Naomi Mitchison at One Hundred," 292–304.

cipline. In terms of long-term popular or critical success, they have not all been favored, but they fail in interesting ways. A much later novel will also be discussed, which reworks the earlier texts' preoccupations with greater success.

The discipline of Classics was entering modernity in the 1920s; compulsory Greek was abolished at the universities[2] and the Crewe Report (1921), commissioned by Prime Minister Lloyd George, consequently examined "The position of the Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom." This report sought "the re-adjustment of [the discipline's] claims to modern conditions" and is engaged in developing a sense of the discipline's role in "the life of the nation as a whole."[3] Dethroned from its traditional place as gatekeeper to higher education, the discipline needed to espouse new stories about itself. Mitchison's works of historical fiction approach antiquity from the point of view of subalterns – women, slaves, barbarians – producing new versions even of well-worn narratives. Her role in helping to produce an enlarged role for Classics can be seen in the enthusiastic reviews of her books and recommendations of them for schools.[4]

Although she was born into the Haldane family, which had supplied Britain with political and academic notables for generations, Mitchison was not formed by a traditional classical education. Her family connections meant that she could attend the Dragon School in Oxford, as the single girl among a class of boys, but at the onset of menstruation she was whisked away and delivered to governesses.[5] The tension between being classical and being female is legible throughout her writings, including in the representations of revolution investigated here. Her autobiographies describe various unstructured encounters with antiquity, such as the much-quoted discovery of Plato's Guardians:

> I picked up and began to read *The Republic* and was much taken with the idea of being a Guardian … It is odd that I was not put off by the undoubted fact that all Plato's Guardians were male and that he said many unpleasant things about the inferiority of women.[6]

2 Raphaely, "Nothing but Gibberish and Shibboleths?" 71–94.

3 "The Crewe Report," 3 and 29.

4 See, e.g., Wilson, "Historical Fiction for the High-School Latin Class," 107–115, and Beall, "Historical Fiction on Classical Themes," 8–12.

5 Mitchison, *All Change Here*, 11–13.

6 Ibid., 40. See Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, 1–2 on the necessity for ambitious women of the period to identify at least partly as male. Mitchison some-

The informal encounter does not preclude a critical perspective. In Mitchison's fictional writings on antiquity, the classicists whose guidance she acknowledges include her husband Dick Mitchison (1894–1970) and Theodore Wade-Gery (1888–1972), an established Oxford scholar and her lover.[7] She thus came to antiquity obliquely, and this may be what helped to produce the radical vision that Peter Green celebrates in *The Conquered* (1923), Mitchison's first novel, set among the Gallic victims of Rome:[8]

> This book was not only excellently documented and a fine creative achievement in its own right: it forced readers to perform a radical revaluation of the ethics drummed into them during their schooldays. It came, indeed, like a slap in the face to complacent Caesar-nurtured imperialists by treating the Gallic Wars from the viewpoint of the Gauls.

All her subsequent classicizing works of fiction adopted a similar perspective.

With this thoroughly "democratic turn" to her writing on the ancient world, it may seem strange that Mitchison's writing does not generate more critical interest from present-day classicists.[9] This may be due partly to the range of genres in which she worked: her historical fiction is sometimes overshadowed by her science fiction and Scots novels. But she has been a "neglected" and then a "rediscovered" author ever since 1953, when Henry Treece wrote of *The Conquered* as "my favourite forgotten book."[10] We can also suggest that despite the work's investment in antiquity, Mitchison is not a "classic"; from the perspective of early twenty-first century readers, much of the work has dated, and the style in particular can be gratingly sentimental.[11]

times seems to have characterised herself as a "boy," though not as a man. See, e.g., Calder, *Nine Lives of Naomi Mitchison*, 47.

7 See the dedication to *Black Sparta* and *All Change Here*, 164.

8 Green, "Aspects of the Historical Novel," 53–60.

9 A notable exception is Sheila Murnaghan, "The Memorable Past," 125–139.

10 Calder, *Nine Lives*, 63. On neglect and rediscovery, see most recently the essays collected in the "Naomi Mitchison Special Issue," *The Bottle Imp* 19 (2016).

11 For critiques of her style see, e.g., Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, 178, and Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel*, 114, 136. Q. D. Leavis famously dismissed Mitchison's style as an "average magazine story" with "a nauseating brand of sentimentality" ("Lady Novelists and the Lower Orders," *Scrutiny* [September 1935]: 112–132, 114, 128) and Calder notes the *Cape Times* excoriating the "maddening infantile lisp of a style" (*Nine Lives*, 88).

However, it should be noted that in writing revolutionary versions of antiquity which foregrounded the experiences of those usually silenced in the ancient sources, the texts were undertaking a genuine struggle, which marks them with tensions. Some of the narratives discussed here, especially those collected in *The Delicate Fire* (1933), are messy and unfocused, and the summaries provided do not capture the fairly abrasive reading experience; few modern critics pay any attention to the short story collections. Most of Mitchison's work is out of print, although critics interested in the early twentieth century have started to re-examine the texts.[12]

In the critical terms of the early twentieth century, Mitchison's work was defiantly "middlebrow," i.e., not striving for a role as a classic in "high culture," and currently critics are inclined to site her within the movement to take the characteristics of Modernism and adapt them in order to communicate more effectively with a wider general audience.[13] Mitchison's own writing addresses the question of how to reach different groups; the difficulty as to how to reconcile audiences and ambitions is visible in her diary entry for August 24, 1941:[14]

> I feel I don't care about being in the same tradition as Shakespeare and Beethoven if only I can do something for my own people in Scotland. I would like of course, just for once, to be a best seller [...] But it doesn't matter. I want what Yeats wanted. I want the small group. I want to write history for two or three dozen people who may or mayn't read what I write, for the small, tiny group who said I knew more about Pindar than anyone but Wilamowitz,[15] I want to write like a bit of history in *The Blood of the Martyrs* [1939], which probably nobody has noticed, but it is first class stuff. And then I want to write for people here, for Denny M and Duncan and Angus and Lilla and Jemima and Lachie, for Alec and Anna, for Willie and

12 See, e.g., Purdon, *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*.

13 See, e.g., Joannou, "Introduction," 1–20, and in the same volume, Bluemel "Exemplary Intermodernists," 40–57, and Humble "Feminine Middlebrow Novel," 97–111.

14 Mitchison, *Among You Taking Notes*, 159.

15 Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff was "possibly the greatest Hellenist of his age" (Magnelli), the author of numerous important books and articles on a range of ancient authors, including canonical scholarly commentaries.

> Johnnie – to make them confident and happy. But I don't want to write for the New Statesman boys, for the international culture of cities […][16]

It is particularly interesting that classical antiquity makes it into this dissection of her literary ambitions, sitting somewhat awkwardly alongside not only her Scottish neighbors but also the left-wing journal *New Statesman*. It should also be noted that this generic and political tension is legible in Mitchison's cultural background; as a scion of the Haldane family, her origin and upbringing are in some contrast with her later progressive allegiances and experimentations. The early classicizing novels and short stories, with the representations of revolution that I discuss, can be read as repeated attempts to square the recalcitrant circle.[17] Mitchison's gender and class identity and the frictions between them meet the progressive forces at work in her historical period and the available versions of classical antiquity to produce a specific oeuvre of historical fiction. The versions of antiquity purveyed in these works of fiction are all "revolutionary" in that they are characterized by transgressive desire, violence of various kinds, and sometimes radical ambivalence, but accounts of actual political change are infrequent and sometimes awkward.

REVOLUTION NARRATIVES OF THE 1920S AND 1930S

The stories collected as *Black Sparta* (1928) include "The Head and the Heart," in which women are caught up in a full-scale revolution. This story, the earliest of the "revolution" narratives, is focalized through the figure of the aging Pindar, who is visited by his Milesian friend Pausilla. Pausilla recounts her history of sexual as well as political dissidence. Unmarried, and a foreigner, she has been living with an aristocratic political leader in the Greek colony of North Africa, Kyrene, and has become involved in the democratic revolution there. She lived with Damophilos outside marriage because she "wanted to be free and not belong to anyone, not even him."[18] Damophilos and his friends were

16 The people named towards the end of this quotation are her neighbours in the Scottish village where she moved in later life.

17 We perhaps do not need to note that the "classical" and the "revolutionary" have not always been easy bedfellows; see on the overall relationship not only the present volume, but also Goff and Simpson, "Introduction" in *Classicising Crisis*, 1–10.

18 Mitchison, *Black Sparta*, 93.

reluctantly drawn into revolutionary activity and ended up helping to lead the movement, but he has been executed by fellow revolutionaries, suggesting the contours of the French as well as the Russian Revolution, as successive cohorts of insurgents turn on one another.

Damophilos features as a character in Pindar's *Pythian* 4, where the poem's speaker entreats the ruler Arcesilaus to allow Damophilos to return from exile to Kyrene. In the story, it appears that this has happened, but to no positive effect, and Pindar laments, "What is the good of all this writing when people die … [Poetry] can't do any of the things I said it could do."[19] The political and poetic failure is accompanied by sexual renunciation and compromise. When Damophilos was in political danger, Pausilla concluded that the gods required from her a supreme sacrifice, and she made a vow of chastity. This, as she points out, meant giving up any future life with her lover, any child, and indeed any sustenance, since she has no way of supporting herself other than by dependence on men.[20] She later loses her faith in the gods and breaks her vow, quite cynically, with the captain of the ship on which she and her sister escape from Kyrene.[21]

Most of her friends, who were also Pindar's friends, have been killed, so her representation of the revolution is ambivalent at best. Much of her narration, which dominates the story, is taken up with loving and sensuous descriptions of aristocratic life at Kyrene before the revolution, and subsequently, she condemns the revolution in strong terms. The demos, referred to as such, are not a very attractive proposition; Pausilla represents them in a patronizing way as "little shopkeepers or businesspeople who'd done badly,"[22] and later she lists "labourers, shop people, sailors, street women."[23] Although she has a sense of their grievances against the king, once they no longer trust the aristocratic leaders, she condemns them:

> I suppose we expected too much of the demos; after they'd seen how easy it was to smash things and how easy it was to kill they wouldn't take orders or advice from anyone … they started killing people, not in hot blood but saying it was justice … And nobody did any work except the women.[24]

19 Mitchison, *Black Sparta*, 117.
20 Ibid., 110.
21 Ibid., 114.
22 Ibid., 97.
23 Ibid., 100.
24 Ibid., 108–109.

Finally, she sums up: "that, you see, was the democracy of Kyrene. I suppose all democracies are the same more or less. I think there must be something inherently cruel and stupid in them, the reduction of everyone in a crowd to the lowest."[25] This recognizable anti-democratic discourse, and the later reference to the "ten days" of revolutionary upheaval,[26] indicate that although the historical Kyrene did depose a king and move to democracy in the fifth century BC, it is the Russian Revolution which provides the foremost template for the imagined events in Kyrene. Mitchison visited the USSR in the 1930s and records an ambivalence about it, which she shared with many other British leftists.[27]

But Pausilla does not have it all her own way, since we are also offered another very different view of the revolution. Her sister, who accompanies her, has a different and more optimistic view, claiming that

> before the end of the ten days, things were much better, they really were! They'd got some sort of order into the State, they'd stopped robbing foreigners and started working again, they were making a constitution! … I'm sure a democracy might be beautiful.[28]

She is determined to get to Athens, where a different democratic revolution is firmly established and where Aeschylus is developing into a poet of Pindar's stature.[29] Like Pausilla, she is determined to live independently, and she is willing to live with an Athenian acquaintance, out of wedlock, in order to establish herself there. She is Aspasia, the future consort of Pericles. So although the story canvasses various forms of failure – political, sexual, and artistic – it also commits to the success of a new kind of poetry, a working democracy, and an independent female who does manage to put her mark on history.

This first "revolution" story involves tropes which will recur. Women's sexuality is closely bound up with liberatory political developments and can cross class boundaries, while masculine politics display the figure of the sacrificial Frazerian king, here the

25 Mitchison, *Black Sparta*, 112.

26 Ibid.

27 Mitchison, *You May Well Ask*, 187–91. See also Stead, "From Argyll with Love." For more detailed accounts of British reaction to the Revolution, see Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution*.

28 Mitchison, *Black Sparta*, 112.

29 Ibid., 115.

aristocratic political leader who suffers undeservedly for others.[30] While the leader whose followers turn on him is recognizable from the history of various revolutions, especially perhaps the French, this figure acquires further resonance from Frazer's study of myths and rituals in which a king dies to preserve his society. A further element of this story which becomes characteristic of later ones is that the representation of revolution is complex enough that judgment must be reserved. Although all the characters here agree that the king of Kyrene was long overdue for his end, the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, with civil war and political repression, had shown that radical political change could immiserate as well as liberate. In subsequent narratives, we read variations on revolutionary female sexuality, the Frazerian figure, and the multiplicity, or indeterminacy, of judgments on revolution.

In later works, women are more integrated into revolutionary activity but often figure in the revolutionary brotherhood, rather than being part of the actual organization of political action.[31] Although we can trace a move across the works to more optimistic representations, there is an undercurrent of failure, regret, and disappointment. In *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931), Mitchison's best-known novel, the central revolution is that of Kleomenes III, the historical late-third-century king of Sparta. He is represented as attempting to restore Sparta's historical supremacy by bringing back Lycurgan institutions of common ownership and commensality, canceling debt, enfranchising helots, and redistributing the land. The revolution is represented not only through Kleomenes and his male supporters but emphatically also through women.[32]

30 On the influence of Scottish folklorist and anthropologist James George Frazer (1854–1941) in Mitchison's work, and that of other women writers of the period, see Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, 17–19, 33–40. Frazer's enormous compilation of myths and rituals from around the world discerned a pattern underlying them of a king who periodically dies and is reborn as a guarantee of harvest and thus of social survival. Frazer's work was highly influential, not least because it brought together study of classical antiquity and what were then perceived as "primitive" cultures.

31 See, e.g., Sponenberg "'The Pendulum is Swinging Backwards,'" especially chapter 4.

32 Mitchison's sources here most likely included Plutarch, *Agis and Cleomenes*; the novel's episodes of the deaths of Kleomenes and of his women family members follow Plutarch's narration closely.

Philylla, the maid of honor of the Queen, is first seen as a young girl practicing archery, determined to grow up into a "real" Spartan, a "soldier" rather than a "girl."[33] We understand that her investment in the revolution is partly because it gives her opportunities beyond the constrictions of the female role, and she pursues this double path of "soldier" and "girl" for the rest of the novel, identifying with the archaic ideal of Sparta which Kleomenes is endeavoring to revive. But she is also represented insistently as female, subject to sexual awakening and sexual threat. When she visits the family of her helot wet nurse on her fourteenth birthday, the nurse recognizes that she is making the transition to womanhood: "Her foster-mother was feeling at her with big wise hands […], touching at all the soft, very sensitive growing points of her body. Waves of feeling poured over her as she waited, shut-eyed, centering, centering […]"[34] Philylla notices that she is taller than some of the helots, and feels that "there was nothing she was afraid of."[35] But the helots refuse to be properly respectful, saying, "There won't be any of that soon! – not when we're all masters, me and him and him."[36] She is shocked, and she senses a threat from the men, whose number she cannot quite see: "dark and laughing, they waited for her."[37] At first, as an elite Spartan, she recalls "all the powers of life and death, of prison and torture and abuse when the abused has to stand silent with his hands folded and neck meek." But as a fellow supporter of the "King's New Times," she also recognizes that with his vigorous words, "the man had brought some sort of community between them."[38] She acknowledges and accepts the community of interest brought about by the imminent revolution, so that the sexual tension, generated by the figure of a young girl facing a group of men, is redirected to enable the crossing of class boundaries.

Kleomenes' royal revolution, like that of Damophilos, is doomed, and he and his supporters flee to Alexandria in Egypt. In Alexandria, they are imprisoned by Ptolemy but plan to break out and try to rouse the Alexandrians with the cry for freedom. On the eve of their fatal attempt, they share a feast, and during this meal, they talk intimately of their love for each other, with Kleomenes and his lover reliving

33 Mitchison, *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*, 126.
34 Ibid., 155.
35 Ibid., 157.
36 Ibid., 157.
37 Ibid., 157.
38 Ibid., 158.

the scene of their first declarations.[39] This feast clearly recalls the Last Supper of Jesus but is also a Mystery as at Eleusis and a version of the rites of Osiris, another dying king, alongside a celebration of homoerotic desire.[40] Kleomenes is positioned as a similar kind of leader, celebrated in rites which ensure that although he dies, he persists, as the figure of the sacrificial king.[41] Despite this figuration, his fall sweeps up all his followers. His male companions are killed in the streets of Alexandria, and the women of his family, his mother and his children, and the families of his followers, who have all been separately imprisoned as hostages, are executed by the Egyptian authorities. Philylla, the wife of his closest friend Panteus, achieves the kind of heroic identity she longs for only via these terrible events; she supports all the other women through the mass executions that follow, lays out the bodies, and finally ensures that her dress falls around her neatly when she is killed.[42]

A second female character is also caught up in Kleomenes' movement and comes out of it more successfully. Erif Der is a Scythian princess and priestess who kills her father during a ritual and leaves Scythia for Greece in search of healing. At first, she uses her fertility magic for Scythians, Spartans and Egyptians alike, but once Kleomenes' revolution is under threat, she deploys greater powers to stunning effect. When Kleomenes is killed in Alexandria, she goes into a trance; her spirit or Egyptian "khu" leaves her physical body and travels to guard the corpse in the form of an enormous snake.[43] Since his corpse is thus preserved, there emerges a cult in his honor, which permits his revolution to enjoy a kind of afterlife. The novel closes with later generations of Scythians and Spartans alike tending his memory.[44]

A very different coordination of female sexuality and revolution unfolds in the collection *The Delicate Fire* (1933), specifically in the five narratives gathered under the title "Lovely Mantinea." These deal with the aftermath of the destruction of Mantinea by the Macedonians under Antigonus in 222 BC.[45] The destruction of Mantinea was itself fallout from Kleomenes' failed revolution, so the Spartan events are

39 Mitchison, *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*, 646–648.

40 Ibid., 641–642. For the feast and the love of Kleomenes and Panteus, see Plutarch, *Agis and Cleomenes*, 37. The ritual overtones of the feast are not found in Plutarch. For the wife of Panteus, see Plutarch, *Agis and Cleomenes*, 38.

41 Mitchison, *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*, 643.

42 Ibid., 672.

43 Ibid., 685–687.

44 Ibid., 713–719.

45 See Polybius 2.56–58.

in the background; Kleomenes' revolution supplies a paradigm to which some characters aspire. Each of the first four stories is focalized through a different character, while the last takes a more distant third-person perspective. Together they imagine how the aftermath of violent upheaval may lead to a utopian community. Over-full of contradictory events and emotions, plot developments that strain credibility, and a frequently ponderous and didactic tone, the stories have not made much of a mark in criticism; the contemporary review in the *Times Literary Supplement* passes no judgment except to say that the characters end up in a "happy communism," which perhaps was condemnation enough.[46] It might be suggested that Mitchison has exhausted the possibilities of the classical world, especially in relation to revolution. Murray's introduction to the 2012 edition of *The Delicate Fire* concludes that the collection

> illustrates a fundamental change in Naomi Mitchison's work. The early stories are set in ancient Greece, like many before them. But here Mitchison effectively says farewell to that setting with accounts of the worlds of Sappho and "Lovely Mantinea." … She turns away from Greece for good. She turns to the present, and will spend the thirties warning against fascism.[47]

It will be suggested here that *The Blood of the Martyrs* (1939) resists the fascism of the 1930s with a different kind of revolution and that *Cleopatra's People* (1972) embeds the earlier tropes in a different culture and in a story even more dominated by women.

The only first-person story in the "Lovely Mantinea" group, "The Wife of Aglaos," is ironically titled; although the narrator Kleta certainly begins the story as the wife of Aglaos, she takes on several other identities before regaining that status. Kleta is enslaved, along with her baby son and everybody else in Mantinea, when the city falls to Antigonus. In her new master's house she tries to make friends with the other slaves, but without success because they are hostile to her former citizen status. She succeeds in forming a friendship only when she gives birth to her new master's son, and is helped by a slave herdsman Damis. Once she recovers from the birth, they determine to run away and she abandons the baby. In hiding, when Damis helps her express her painful breasts, she goes on to feed him, and they subsequently become lovers.

46 Smyth, "The Delicate Fire," 444.

47 Mitchison, *The Delicate Fire*, v.

When the couple meet up with other escaped slaves who have set up a home in the hills, the outlaws assume that Kleta belongs to Damis. Damis quickly rebukes them: "She's not my woman. She isn't anybody's. She is a free woman … She's not a lady. She is a good woman."[48] Liberated from the notion of possession, Kleta sleeps with each of the outlaws in turn, and over the years she has two children whom the outlaws all acknowledge together. Her shared body thus works politically to unite the group: "I became one of them. I got their point of view."[49] Kleta's first-person narrative tries on occasion to reclaim something of a higher status, in that she can teach the outlaws about poetry and philosophy. But she then comes to recognize that Homer and the philosophers do not speak to those who are enslaved or otherwise oppressed; she perceives her culture anew as well as her politics.[50] She reflects on the Spartan revolution under Kleomenes and concludes that it failed because it came from the top down, because Kleomenes "could not get out of the possessors' habit of wanting more power for himself" instead of making "a stable state where there would be no one under and no one over, but all equal."[51] So the physical sharing is furthered by a cultural and political sharing that works both ways. However, the idyll of egalitarian politics and sexual emancipation ends with the arrival of Kleta's husband, himself having escaped from slavery, and her return to a more regular union with him.

Other stories concentrate on male survivors of the sack, Kleta's husband Aglaos and her brother Arkas. The final Mantinea story brings all these people together once more and stages a real revolution, a slave revolt in which Kleta plays a prominent part. Her husband Aglaos has, like her, learned humility and brotherhood through having been a slave, but Arkas has not; although he suffered as a slave, he has clawed back power and has now become a brutal owner himself. Kleta and Aglaos move to Arkas' farm, but are horrified by his cruelty toward his slaves. They befriend the slaves, and when the slaves in the whole neighborhood rise up against the owners, Kleta and Aglaos are spared. Indeed the rebel slaves allow them to help direct the course of the revolt, so that they end by saving the lives of most of the owners. Kleta occupies a prominent role in ensuring that the revolution is largely bloodless. The harmonious conclusion of the revolutionary

48 Mitchison, *The Delicate Fire*, 166.

49 Ibid., 168.

50 Ibid., 170–171.

51 Ibid., 169.

action may invite skeptical scrutiny; for instance, Arkas repents of his misdeeds with unconvincing alacrity, so that the narrative escapes the necessity to have Kleta, Aglaos, or the other ex-slaves kill him.

The perspective of this final and apparently optimistic story differs considerably from Kleta's first-person narrative in her own tale. There, she questions at the outset whether "I can say what happened with any measure of truth,"[52] and she often struggles to find exactly the right words to express her understanding of past events. The impersonal narrative of the final story, despite its multiplicity of exciting incidents, has no such difficulty and keeps all the characters at arm's length. The story ends when the ex-slaves have killed the people they needed to, spared the others, and are planning a new settlement run along egalitarian lines. The upheaval and suffering, sexual and social, are positioned to bear positive fruit in a future characterized by freedom and equality. The ending, however, is not simply triumphant. Aglaos, who had been a philosophy student, reflects:

> The old Stoic equality idea looked like coming real now that it had solid facts to work on! It would be very exciting to see whether it would be possible to run a community without slave-owning at all; it had never been done in the past, but – after all, why not?[53]

There is some irony here in that twentieth-century Western society has, in its own representation, managed without slavery for decades, whereas the notion of equality is still utterly radical. So the community of ex-slaves challenges its 1933 audience to make the kind of imaginative leap into an identification that Kleta had made earlier, and, despite the disillusionment with revolution legible in other parts of Mitchison's work, the absence of slavery in the twentieth century could yield optimism about the possibilities for equality.[54] Yet the final sentences are open to a different, ironic reading. "That winter they would be working together, but there would be no need for words, no need to talk about

52 Mitchison, *The Delicate Fire*, 141.

53 Ibid., 274. "The old Stoic equality idea" is not fleshed out in the story, but Aglaos' idea may relate to the strand of Stoic thought characterised by cosmopolitanism and human community. The lost Republic of Zeno apparently recommended that "we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity, and that we should have a common life and an order common to us all"; Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander*, 329.

54 The absence of legal slavery is meant here, but we are also increasingly forced to be aware of enslaved people all around us. See, e.g., the Anti-Slavery International website's details on modern slavery.

all that, ever any more. No need between equals."[55] On the one hand, this can be read as an idealizing declaration of faith that the past can be managed toward a positive reconciliation among people who were earlier on opposite sides, and it might strike us as valuable, if naive; and it brings its own truth in that it is the final sentence of the story, so there is indeed no more talk. But that very silence may be thought ominous. It potentially closes down debate and leaves a difficult history unspoken. The fact that the characters will never discuss their previous lives again might imply, in quite a sinister fashion, that the life of "equality" is maintained only at a great price.

The Blood of the Martyrs (1939) is set among the early Christians in Rome and examines the difficulties attending the construction of a political movement in the face of persecution. This novel is perhaps more revolutionary even than "Lovely Mantinea" in that the institution it tries to build, the Christian church, does survive and still functions, although few would readily say that we now inhabit "the kingdom" of peace, justice, and freedom which the early Christians work for. The plot convenes a huge cast of characters from different parts of the Roman world who are drawn together by the magnetism of the imperial city as well as by their shared investment in the new religion. The early Christians, of mostly servile status, assume that the rich and the masters will not be part of their revolution,[56] but meanwhile, the aristocrats of Rome are discussing their own brand of political change: how to depose Nero and develop a constitution without emperors but with proper senatorial power for themselves. They conclude that an actual revolution, "with equality and all that," is impossible,[57] but in their very houses, the slaves are working toward that end. The novel invites us to think of early Christianity as a version of socialism, and in the third part, the chapter titles include explicitly political terms such as "Difficulties of a United Front."[58] The identification is sealed by the "Dedication," which thanks as contributors to the book "Austrian socialists in the counterrevolution of 1924, share-croppers in Arkansas in 1935 … and the named and unnamed host of the witnesses against

55 Mitchison, *The Delicate Fire*, 275.

56 Mitchison, *Blood of the Martyrs*, 25–26.

57 Ibid., 288.

58 "United front" was the name given to various moves in the early 1930s towards cooperation between the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Labour Party. After 1935, the related term "popular front" denoted cooperation among all those opposed to fascism. See, e.g., Thorpe, *History*, 96–99; Worley, *Labour*, 207–8; Morgan, *Against Fascism*, chapter 2.

tyranny and superstition."[59] Conversely, Rome suggests the Fascism of both Mussolini and Hitler, complete with the dictator appearing in uniform on a balcony and crowds shouting Hail.[60]

The version of socialism purveyed here, however, is one fully invested in the sacrificial Frazerian king, and the slaves explicitly link Jesus to Spartacus and Kleomenes of Sparta among others. These did not only die for their fellow-humans, but were also "all of them for the oppressed ones, the common people."[61] Conversely, the agency of women, especially their sexual agency, is harnessed to the revolutionary ends, as when Lalage the dancer shares her body to promote community among her fellows.[62] Equally interesting from the point of view of female agency is the fact that some of the women worship Isis as well as Jesus,[63] so that even this transcendentally influential "Frazerian king" does not have everything his own way.

CLEOPATRA'S PEOPLE

Mitchison moves into very different territory after the 1930s, writing stories set in Scotland, Africa, and outer space. But 1972 saw a return to antiquity with *Cleopatra's People*, in which some of the earlier themes appear in a new guise. Women's agency in social change and in resistance to oppression is again important, and female sexuality is explored as a part of that agency. The revolution is again led from the top, by a sacrificial ruler figure, and although it fails, its sacrificial gestures secure certain kinds of success as well, so that there are still multiple stories that may be told about it. In fact, there are two revolutions in the novel, one inspired by the other, the sequence possibly pointing forward to further attempts at justice, peace, and brotherhood. The ambiguous ending leaves room for some characters at least to find political security and harmony.

The two revolutions are responsible for the novel's complex structure, which moves back and forth between three time periods: 45–37 BC, when Cleopatra is planning how to escape Roman domi-

59 Mitchison, *Blood of the Martyrs*, "Dedication," n. p. Mitchison had worked with both groups first identified.

60 Mitchison, *Blood of the Martyrs*, 175.

61 Ibid., 132.

62 See Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, 133. Benton, *Naomi Mitchison*, 114 notes the poor reviews of this novel when it first appeared. Recent important treatments include those by Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, and Sponenberg, "The Pendulum."

63 Mitchison, *Blood of the Martyrs*, 74–77.

nation; 31–30 BC, at the end of independent Egypt with the death of Cleopatra and her women companions Charmian and Iras; and 26–25 BC, which marks the subsequent attempt to bring the surviving children of Cleopatra to Egypt and inspire an Egyptian uprising. The novel is thus divided between accounts of the Queen and her resistance to Rome and Octavian and accounts of the later attempt to arouse the subject Egyptians to revolt against the Romans. In the earlier period, the Queen is devising means to exploit Rome's strength against itself, by helping Antony against Octavian but also by planning to increase her own independent strength through trade and alliances in other parts of Africa and India. In the later period, the initiative passes to a family of upper-class Alexandrians, the surviving relatives of Charmian. Hipparchia, Charmian's sister, devises the plot and prevails upon her niece Aristonoë to help. The scheme is to contact the children of Cleopatra, Selene and Philadelphos, who are living in Rome in quasi-captivity, and bring them to Alexandria. Once the Egyptians see the children, Hipparchia believes, they will instantly rise up against the Romans. The holes in this plan are, of course, enormous, but it does almost work; the children are recognized, and the people of Alexandria do attempt a revolt in their name, which is immediately crushed by Rome. Hipparchia dies, although the other members of her family are spared, and the children of Cleopatra make various arrangements to escape. The Queen of Punt, an African kingdom south of Egypt, is instrumental in the rescue of Cleopatra's son Philadelphos from the Romans. The rumor is put about that he has been kidnapped and eaten by savage cannibals, a tale which the Romans are only too ready to believe.[64]

As will be clear from the foregoing, the novel is spectacularly female-dominated, although a number of men play supporting roles, and the figure of Octavian, subsequently Augustus, looms threateningly off-stage. Cleopatra is represented as a powerful queen with wide-ranging political ambitions furthered by acute intelligence; once dead, she inspires other women's initiative as they preserve her memory and try to fulfill her plans. In the parts of the novel set during Cleopatra's lifetime, she travels for trade and exploration, runs council meetings, and takes on the might of Rome. Her alliance with Anthony is far more political than erotic, and she maintains the upper hand. She is of Greek descent, but perceives herself as largely Egyptian, with responsibilities toward Egypt. After her death, it is the Greek women in Alexandria, Hipparchia and Aristonoë, who continue her work to undermine Rome. Men are peripherally involved, but they

64 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 201.

can do little because they would come under more suspicion. The women characters are often educated and relatively independent, with helpful spouses, or, in Cleopatra's case, devoted women companions. The novel's themes of political and philosophical understanding, as well as its undercurrents of revolutionary sexuality, are articulated mostly via female characters. Women are represented as desiring men in considered, tactical ways, although the Queen is the shrewdest in planning her liaisons; while she enjoys sex with generous ingenuity, on occasion also with women,[65] she is adept at contraception,[66] and her vitality is implicitly contrasted with the sexual arrangements represented among the Romans, which range from prostitution to domestic violence. In these respects, this novel builds on earlier works, but its sexual buoyancy seems almost prescient about the historical changes ushered in by the feminism of the 1970s.[67]

The initial revolution is spearheaded by Cleopatra herself. The revolutions in Mitchison's earlier works on Kyrene and on Sparta are led from the top, by aristocratic and even royal figures, in a way that is contradictory and usually compromised. *Cleopatra's People* endeavors to square that circle by making the Queen both an ordinary mother beloved of the ordinary people and a revolutionary monarch. It attempts this by way of the figure of Isis. We see the Queen identifying herself ever more closely with Isis, both devastatingly powerful and maternal.[68] As her plans to defeat Rome founder, Cleopatra understands herself also as Isis who suffers for others, and in death she identifies with the goddess even more closely.[69] However, Cleopatra differs from other aristocratic revolutionaries in Mitchison's fiction. Unlike Kleomenes of Sparta, who died in exile, Cleopatra can really claim to have died for her country, and, moreover, when she becomes Isis on death, her companions, Charmian and Iras, who will die with her, will also be worshipped as cult figures. She reassures them: "through you will come help and healing. You will never die so long as women suffer."[70] Although Iras answers that "that will be always," the Queen counters that "we shall intercede." The last classicizing novel thus gives up the quest

65 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 17.

66 Ibid., 16.

67 The same year 1970 saw the publication of both Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Greer's *Female Eunuch*. Both of these had a huge cultural impact.

68 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 12, 48.

69 Ibid., 72, 158.

70 Ibid., 157.

for a dying king and invests fully in the dying savior queen instead, adding the hopeful note that she died for the good of women.

Despite this investment in Cleopatra's positive leadership, it is never completely clear what her revolution entails, as it appears under different signs at different times. When Cleopatra is traveling on the Nile, she sees the temple of Akhnaton and contrasts the god's peaceful way of uniting the world with that chosen by her ancestor Alexander.[71] She, meanwhile, builds up her country by means of trade and plans to evade the increasing power of Rome; Romans may rule by force of legions, but she proposes that money will ensure genuine dominance.[72] Later on, she offers her council two alternatives as counters to Rome. First, she suggests that they could leave Alexandria and found a new city "looking to East and South,"[73] forging connections to India and other parts of Africa. Or they could accept that Egypt must take sides in Rome's civil struggle and support the weaker side against the stronger in order to encourage Rome's self-destruction.[74] Her plans to marry Antony are simply a method to secure Egypt.[75] She dreams too, it seems, of living in friendliness with other nations, trading fairly, and promoting brotherhood. After all, both her ancestor Ptolemy II Philadelphos (ca. 309–246 BC) and her son, Ptolemy XVI Philadelphos (36–29 BC), bear it in their names (Φιλάδελφος, lit. brother-loving).[76] Others claim that she wanted even more, convinced that the expulsion of the Romans would usher in an age of peace and justice. A councillor remembers that: "The Queen has said it will be different. We shall live in friendliness, trading fairly with other nations, not forcing our will on them."[77] Charmian speaks of her as wanting:

> a golden age when there would be enough for everyone. No wars. No famines. A kind of light over us all … She could have been like the great Alexander and conquered the world, but not by war. By trade and friendship, by treaties, by justice everywhere.[78]

Similarly Iras says of Antony that "he seemed to want the same things as she did. The Golden Age, the rule of love. She showed him that and

71 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 14–15.
72 Ibid., 21.
73 Ibid., 45.
74 Ibid., 46–47.
75 Ibid., 50–51.
76 Ibid., 58.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 69.

he followed."[79] Charmian's daughter Elpis, however, gives a slightly different notion of what Cleopatra wanted: "Certainly she wanted to rule the world. And destroy Rome. Who wouldn't?"[80] If Cleopatra's revolution appears in different guises for different followers, we might nonetheless conclude that it continues to inspire, perhaps because of its very amorphousness.

Although this revolution is thus represented in sketchy terms, it commands the allegiance of many ordinary Egyptians and Greeks in Alexandria, especially once the Queen is dead. Aristonoë's maid explains that the ordinary people remember the Queen and "believe she will give them justice and mercy."[81] Even if Cleopatra was mainly interested in resisting imperial Rome, we can conclude that it is her "people" who have developed the further progressive implications of her politics, toward justice and brotherhood, and that this is how the figure of Cleopatra inspires the second revolution by which Hipparchia and her associates try to incite the Egyptians to rebellion. Although this rebellion is crushed, Cleopatra's children manage to escape the destinies designed for them by Rome, and we are invited to conclude that they are free to initiate their own kinds of political change. Her daughter Selene is set to build a new Alexandria in her husband's land of Numidia, and her son Philadelphos escapes into the unknown regions of Africa.

This novel thus canvasses two related revolutions, one inspired by the other, both led from the top, and in one case by a figure who is not only royal but also eventually divine. This duality is developed by the double way in which revolution is discussed, being both desirable and also highly difficult and improbable – unlike, for instance, the troublingly swift resolution in "Lovely Mantinea." The novel opens with a scene in which Aristonoë says of the Queen "I know two things … two separate kinds of things."[82] These turn out to be the two stories about Cleopatra, in which she is either a scandalous horror, as for the Romans, or as for the loyal Egyptians, a goddess. The "truth" is different in Rome and Alexandria.[83] Different characters acknowledge the supreme difficulty of mounting a revolution, in a way that has not been notable in the narratives previously discussed. Aristonoë questions her aunt: "Everyone hates the army of occupation, but that

79 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 70.
80 Ibid., 107.
81 Ibid., 53.
82 Ibid., 3.
83 Ibid., 106.

doesn't prove that they'd risk their lives, does it?"[84] Aristonoë's father Polemo, weighing up the fact that Egyptians pray to the Queen as Isis, reflects that "Praying and fighting, they're two different things."[85] Elpis concurs: "The people … love the memory of the Queen and the story of the Queen. But it is another thing to risk one's life."[86] Juba, Cleopatra's son-in-law, wonders how long oppression can go on if it has the means: "Forever? Or is it possible that, after all, there are gods watching? It did not look like that to him."[87] The duality of the discussions about revolution, simultaneously insisting on its success and doubting it, suggests stories told by the victors and the defeated respectively, but they are not the only possible stories. We know that the uprising in Alexandria has been defeated, like the earlier plans of Cleopatra herself, but the escapes of Cleopatra's children allow us to imagine other possibilities.

It is relevant that the salvation of Cleopatra's children is entrusted to Africa. Selene and Juba decamp to Numidia, and Philadelphos escapes to Punt, where the stories of being eaten by barbaric cannibals shield him from Rome. The prominence of Africa in the novel connects with Mitchison's own life, as Murray notes,[88] but also registers the geopolitical shifts of the postwar period and the profound changes in relations between Britain and her former colonies. By 1972 the various successful movements for independence in Africa could contribute to the idea that positive political change, even revolutionary liberation, is a realistic goal and not always doomed to failure; "other possibilities" had sometimes been successfully imagined. The African dimension of the novel also opens up the classical world beyond Greece and Rome, and beyond even Egypt, which had figured prominently in *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931). It thus returns to the classical world of the 1920s and 1930s fiction with a renewed optimism about the possibilities of revolution in antiquity.

As noted above, the work of Naomi Mitchison is frequently rediscovered, and the time may be ripe for such a development again.[89] It would be highly appropriate for classicists to take their places among those who are thus rereading the relations between classics and the progressive movements of the early twentieth century.

84 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 66.
85 Ibid., 155.
86 Ibid., 179.
87 Ibid., 199.
88 Murray, "Introduction" to Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, ii.
89 See Purdon, *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*.

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ABSTRACT

The writer and activist Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999) came from a prominent establishment family but was a member of the Labour Party and the wife of a Labour MP. Her work was explicitly marked by the Russian Revolution, even when she wrote about antiquity. In the 1920s and 1930s, she produced a number of works of historical fiction set in ancient Greece and Rome, which were highly regarded at the time. The works use the canvas of antiquity to experiment with many forms of political and social radicalism, with a challenging focus on female sexuality. The article discusses four specific representations of revolution which mobilize female agency in ways that are themselves highly unconventional. However, these representations also invoke the Fraserian figure of the dying king who leads the revolution to disaster, compromising the revolutionary energy. This tension speaks to Mitchison's own contradictory social positioning as a patrician radical. In 1972, however, the novel *Cleopatra's People* revisits the theme and stages a more successful uprising. This novel is centered on the sacrificial queen instead of a king, it enlists a mass of people, and saves the revolution by hiding its key figures in Africa. During her final excursion into antiquity, Mitchison thus found a way to press history into useful service.

KEYWORDS: Naomi Mitchison, revolution, Scotland, Labour Party

Revolucija v antiki: Klasiki in leposlovje Naomi Mitchison

IZVLEČEK

Pisateljica in aktivistka Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999) je izvirala iz ugledne in visoko situirane družine, vendar je postala članica laburistične stranke in žena laburističnega poslanca. Njeno delo je bilo izrazito zaznamovano z rusko revolucijo, tudi ko je pisala o antiki. V dvajsetih in tridesetih letih 20. stoletja je napisala več dobro sprejetih del historične proze, postavljenih v antično Grčijo in Rim. V delih je na platnu antike eksperimentirala s številnimi oblikami političnega in družbenega radikalizma, pri čemer se je izzivalno osredotočala na žensko spolnost. Članek obravnava štiri upodobitve revolucije, ki žensko agentnost izkoriščajo na nekonvencionalne načine. A te upodobitve se sklicujejo tudi na Fraserjev lik umirajočega kralja, ki vodi revolucijo v katastrofo in ogroža revolucionarno energijo. Ustvarjena napetost govori o lastni protislovni družbeni poziciji patricijskega radikalca, ki jo je izkušala avtorica. Leta 1972 se je v romanu *Kleopatrino ljudstvo* vrnila k revolucionarni tematiki in uprizorila uspešnejšo vstajo. Omenjeni roman se osredotoča na žrtveno kraljico namesto na kralja, k delovanju spodbudi velik del ljudstva, revolucijo pa na koncu reši tako, da ključne osebe skrije v Afriki. Med zadnjim izletom v antiko je Naomi Mitchison torej našla način, kako prisiliti zgodovino, da postane koristna.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Naomi Mitchison, revolucija, Škotska, laburistična stranka

Athens, Olympieion – Primož Simoniti, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Nataša Stanič, Mirko Juteršek, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti.

Athens, Odeion.

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Pasolini's Greeks and the Irrational

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INTRODUCTION TO THE IRRATIONAL

This article traces the shifting concept of the "irrational" in Pier Paolo Pasolini's work through his engagement with Aeschylus' *Oresteia* from the end of the 1950s.[1] Any treatment of this topic must be selective, given Pasolini's prolific output and the sheer volume and diversity of the critical responses it has received. I offer a wide-angle view of the problem to draw out some of its even broader theoretical implications, at the cost of ignoring several important debates and skipping over several of Pasolini's works. Since several explorations of Pasolini's deployment of the "irrational" by classicists and philosophers already exist, I favor a historical approach focused on assessing a specific literary dialectic between Pasolini and Aeschylus as a lesson in the politics of classical reception.[2] This line of inquiry was prompted by the question mark at the end of the conference title "A Proletarian Classics?" But it also locates Pasolini's reception of Aeschylus within a wider set of debates about what I take to be moments of left-wing "failed" reception. Receptions of classical works are necessarily transformative, and I do not mean to suggest that any such labor of adaptation and creative translation "fails," in the hackneyed sense, because it strays too far from the original or

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1 I would like to thank Mark Payne and Andrew Ollett for providing feedback on earlier drafts of this article, as well as the editors and anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions.

2 I am not the first to take this angle, and I have learned a great deal from D'Alessando Behr, "Pasolini's *Orestiade*, the Irrational, and Greek Tragedy." One further excellent example of work on the "irrational," more broadly, is Vighi, "Lo sperimentalismo di Pasolini."

because it ignores aspects that may appear, from a critical vantage, to be more salient than those emphasized in the process of reception. Rather, I submit that some receptions "fail" to achieve the kinds of political ends or ambitions of their authors. This is a study of such a "failure," and one that traces Pasolini's own reflections on how Aeschylus resisted the generative instrumentalization that Pasolini desired to effect. In brief, I will show that Pasolini believed that a return to Aeschylus' tragic trilogy might offer the grounds for a proletarian revolution, implicitly posing a broader question about whether the classics might play a broader role in Marxist thought.

I argue that Pasolini's early work on Aeschylus attempts to answer this question in a positive. He initially read the *Oresteia* as an instrument to posit a proletarian resistance to the emboldened and subtler forms of fascism and capitalism that emerged in postwar Italy.[3] For him, the concept of the "irrational" was always inseparable from this broader polemical project. However, as I argue, it is through its interpenetration with discourses surrounding the value of the classics that this concept reveals itself as a frustrated and empty signifier. Ultimately, I follow several recent scholars in reading a disappointment with the "irrational" into Pasolini's late works – a disappointment that coincides with other forms of disillusionment registered in books and movies left unfinished at the time of his murder in 1975. At the end of the article, I return to the enduring value of compromised or failed classical receptions, and the broader theoretical lessons that might be drawn from Pasolini's localized disappointments.

For clarity, I want to outline the textual and conceptual itineraries relevant to my argument. This narrative begins in Section 1 with documents (an article, letters, a translator's note) surrounding Pasolini's translation of Aeschylus (his *Orestiade*, first performed in May 1960 and published simultaneously). Then, in Section 2, I explore his engagements with the "irrational" in Gramsci, structuralism, and Marxist linguistics (in an essay dated 1965). Section 3 turns to Pasolini's extension of the *Oresteia* in his *Pilade* (1967), which I read concerning a piece of his later political writings (his well-known article on the "fireflies," one symbol of the "irrational," from 1975). Finally, Section 4 explores the "irrational" in two works left unfinished at the time of his murder (his study for a film that was never made, *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana*, from 1970, and

3 That Pasolini was asking these kinds of questions is made clear in Todini, "Un antico agli antipodi," and Flores, "Una classicità di rottura," 245.

his posthumously published notes toward a novel, *Petrolio*, which he had begun in the mid-1970s).[4]

Politically, the overarching tenor of Pasolini's career in this period might be summarized, all too briefly, regarding his growing, quasi-obsessive concern with how social transformations replicate parts of earlier ideological structures. The paradigmatic examples are fascism and capitalism, both of which enter new phases for Pasolini after the war. While the Fascist regime had been defeated, Pasolini believed that a lower-case "fascism" persisted in Italian politics (carrying forward its earlier transmutations of Christian values and ideals). Similarly, capitalism had found a successor in neocapitalism – no longer a mere mode of production but a way of life with a now unabashed globalizing and coercive force (akin to what Anglophone scholars have labeled late-stage capitalism).[5]

Amid these political arcs, one must locate the initial optimism that drove Pasolini to engage with the concept of the "irrational." Nevertheless, there is also an academic background to this concept that discloses its precarious affective position. The "irrational" is ultimately a rubric for Pasolini, which includes and adapts various terms drawn from anthropology and classical scholarship that imply (if they do not explicitly describe) forms of political and cultural nostalgia. It closely resembles the Tylorian concept of "survivals," i.e., those aspects that persist in vestigial form across social transformations, which were of great interest (under a range of similar labels) to the Cambridge Ritualists.[6] Indeed, Pasolini also speaks consistently of *sopravvivenza* ["survival"] in his works. It is distinguished from the "irrational" in Pasolini by a terminological slipperiness investigated below, transforming the survival of the past's "irrational" aspects into more than a passive remainder. It becomes a force in and of itself, an "irrational" capable of effecting its own active transformations.[7]

The most important, if more indirect, source is E. R. Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), a watershed publication in

4 This itinerary is partly analogous to others taken before, with important exceptions, in clarifying the history of Pasolini's many receptions of Aeschylus. A key text is Picconi, "La furia del passato."

5 For an outline of these polemics, see Righi, "Pasolini and the Politics of Life of Neocapitalism."

6 On the Cambridge School as a context for Pasolini's *Orestiade*, see discussions throughout Usher, "An African *Oresteia*."

7 For the connection between Pasolini and Tylor (and on Pasolini's possible sources) see Bazzocchi, "Costellazione di immagini," 21 (with bibliography).

the history of classical scholarship for its paradigmatic reframing of the seemingly total rationality of the Greek tradition. While Pasolini's engagement with Dodds is less transparent than his borrowings from other scholars, they, in any case, share an attitude toward the ancient past. Both held that the recovery of the "irrational" would serve as a corrective to the ingrained rationality of the present, not being found as much as being retrojected into antiquity. Whereas African and Aztec art had taught a generation of anthropologically-minded scholars to foster an "awareness of mystery in the ability to penetrate to the deeper, less conscious levels of human experience," the reception of the classical past fell squarely into rationalistic exercises that tracked with political expediencies both Dodds and Pasolini sought to resist in their own ways.[8] But this series of realizations – clear to Dodds when he published his book – was more belatedly attained in Pasolini's oeuvre. Indeed, one can see at the end of this paper that Pasolini's own turn to Africa plays into this processual revaluation of antiquity's purchase on the present. But it remains salient that the initial optimism toward the irrational, which later dissipates, finds its origins in an earlier disappointment toward the inability of the West's classical inheritance to disclose the unconscious depths of human experience seemingly. Thus, one can see that the paradigm shift effected by Dodds when he folded affects surrounding the irrational (disappointment, guilt, shame) into the study of rationalism spoke to a much broader discontent, which then had a powerful catalyzing impact on the broader landscape of Italian and European classical studies.

To foreshadow my conclusions in plain terms, Pasolini posed what was at least initially an eminently reasonable question: if the values of the past can persist in such a way as to strengthen the dominant holds of fascism and capitalism, why might one not attempt to locate the similar survival of aspects of the past that will allow the people to disrupt these ideologies? However, this investigation was hindered by Pasolini's inability to formulate a much-desired Marxist aesthetics to approach the classics. The issue is the possibility of a revolutionary form of reading that comes to be hampered by his slow but growing awareness of his fatal equivocations concerning the posited structure of the "irrational" and its possible political promise.

8 Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 1.

LEAD UP TO THE *ORESTIADE* (1959–60)

There are substantial traces of Pasolini's creative process surrounding his translation of the *Oresteia*. These paratexts unambiguously attest to the emergence of the "irrational" as a concept that carried a personal sense of urgency for Pasolini, grounded in what he defines as Marxist criticism. Indeed, since Pasolini was generally preoccupied with the question of unexpected continuities across political systems, the invitation he received in 1959 to translate Aeschylus for the *Teatro Popolare Italiano* (TPI) seemed to offer him precisely the kind of personal proving ground he had been seeking for his larger ideas. In this section, I trace the affective attachment to the *Oresteia* that is extant in documents surrounding the *Orestiade*. My objective is not to summarize the process, as has already been done, but to highlight how the "irrational" is given its first determinate shape in a landscape filled with generative contradictions that speak to the difficulty in balancing creative, academic, and political gestures of self-positioning.[9]

As the winter of 1959 gave way to the 1960s, Pasolini worked on his translation. In the same period, he wrote several articles expressing his discomfort with how contemporary Marxist criticism tended to retreat into bourgeois aesthetic categories, eroding the proletarian or popular historical specificities of poetry. Such is Pasolini's explicit position in a polemical piece, *La reazione stilistica* ["The Stylistic Reaction"], published in 1960, which includes a portion subtitled *La critica Marxista e l'irrazionalità* ["Marxist Criticism and Irrationality"].[10] He proposes that Marxist critics ought to find space for the "irrational" within the confines of rational thought. Edi Liccioli has referred to this argument as countering both the "crisis of engagement" in Marxism and the concomitant abandonment of more flexible, earlier forms of critique. The notion of a "crisis of engagement" is very effective in this context, as it designates specifically a kind of Marxist-internal feeling of alienation that foreclosed the possibility of entertaining the transformative potential of anything deemed "irrational." Pasolini's view is that the stalemate could be broken: an acceptance of the "irrational" within the confines of rational thought would resolve the tension between how, on the one hand, the "irrational" had become a commodified instrument of bourgeois nostalgia (through which it could no longer serve any role in the formation of actual knowledge, having become a symbol of prestige), and how, on the other, the Marxist adherence

9 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1213–18.

10 *Saggi* 2, 2290–97.

to dogmatic rationalism, which would not touch anything irrational without a ten-foot silver spoon, was itself developing into a disaffected bourgeois pragmatism.[11] Marxist materialism needed, however, to leave the door open to the kinds of fantasies in which real-world processes commonly play themselves out. Thus, the importance of the "irrational" in poems is that it allows a reader to extract qualities from the text that can then act as resources for a critique of the same text's dominant ideologies. By extension, the admission of the "irrational" into the fold of Marxist critique is one of the very things that grant it dialectic efficacy – recovering this, Pasolini proposes, it will be possible to break the very real conceptual stalemate toward which his specific polemic concerning *Decandentismo* and bourgeois aesthetics was aimed.

As Pasolini struggled to concretize his argument, he turned to his work on the *Oresteia*, articulating his *più profonda e totale emozione* ["deepest and most total emotion"] at the passages at the end of the *Eumenides* in which Athena transforms the Erinyes into Eumenides, *lasciandole tale e quali, ossia forze irrazionali* ["leaving them just as they are, as irrational forces"].[12] He reads the work of Athena as an exercise in purposefully preserving aspects of the past that rub against the new order, offering this peculiar conservatism as an example of that which Marxist criticism appears to be unable to appreciate. (We will see later that he reads the trilogy precisely as an instantiation of dialectical synthesis.) However, the ineffability of the "irrational" and its lack of correlates – its *espressività irrelata, non definibile* ["nonreferential, indefinable expressivity"] – raises several questions about its standing as a conceptual object. The vestigial, irrational elements of a poetic composition speak obliquely to something perceived as urgent but frustratingly opaque. In the opening of his article, Pasolini admits that he is writing from a reactive position because earlier writings of his had been misunderstood, and he fails to arrive at a satisfying explanation. However, this suffices to conclude that Pasolini is voicing an affective investment in the potentially revolutionary status of the "irrational."

Indeed, while they shed little further light on Pasolini's conceptual argument, his letters from the period help us draw a broader picture of this investment. Pasolini's affective struggle and the desire to define his position pop off the page with unusual intensity, even for a writer who characteristically employs a colloquial and hyperbolic idiom. In a peculiar case of life imitating art, Pasolini was haunted by this

11 Liccioli, *La scena della parola*, 152.

12 Pasolini, *Saggi 2*, 2295.

project. The pressure of getting the work done amid an already packed schedule becomes something of a persecution and, eventually, its own legal battle. Corresponding with Luciano Lucignani, who would go on to direct the performance alongside Vittorio Gassman, Pasolini dispenses with formalities and refuses to be rushed.

> Roma, dicembre 1959. Gentile Lucignani, non sono mica un Robot! Sto lavorando, ma lei sa che ho altri impegni [...] ma sto lavorando.[13]

> Rome, December 1959. Dear Lucignani, I'm no Robot! I'm working on it, but you know I have other things to do [...] but I'm working on it.

But their impatience was only one kind of pressure. In March of 1960, he tells another correspondent: *ho, nel prossimo mese, un calendario infernale: finire due sceneggiature, fare la traduzione delle* Eumenidi ["this next month, I've got a hell of a schedule: finish two screenplays, translate the *Eumenides*"].[14] In another letter, he makes the toll this all is taking on him explicit: *sono in un periodo di lavoro massacrante* ["I'm getting massacred by my work these days"]; again, in yet another, he punctuates a list of his duties with the same verb, *massacrato* ["massacred"].[15] Once he was done with the project, he felt alienated and dejected. Having returned to Rome, he writes to Lucignani apologizing for not having lingered around after opening night, mingling rhetorical flourishes of emphasis with a stripped-down confession of exhaustion: *non sono fuggito, da Siracusa! Sono scomparso dentro Siracusa stessa... Avevo bisogno di stare solo e riposare* ["I didn't flee *from* Syracuse! I disappeared *within* Syracuse itself... I needed to be alone and rest"].[16]

He barely returns to the translation in his letters until, as if at the end of his exculpatory exile, he is forced to do so due to a legal dispute. Again, to Lucignani:

> non do il benestare perché venga ristampata: assolutamente. L'Istituto del Dramma antico doveva darmi ancora le metà della somma pattuita per contratto, cioè 750 000 lire, come sai: e non me la dà perché dice che la pubblicazione di Einaudi ha danneggiato la sua. Sicché io i soldi non li ho da nessuno dovrò rivolgermi a un avvocato.[17]

13 Pasolini, *Lettere*, 463.
14 Ibid., 471.
15 Ibid., 474, see also 472 et passim.
16 Ibid., 476 (my emphases).
17 Pasolini, *Lettere*, 488.

> I *absolutely* do not give my go-ahead that [the *Orestiade*] be reprinted. The Institute for Ancient Drama still owes me half of the contractually agreed-upon amount, that is 750,000 lira, as you know. They won't give it to me because, they say, the publication with Einaudi has damaged their own. Since I haven't gotten money from anyone, I will have to turn to a lawyer.

Whether this unhappy legal situation was brought to a gracious close by any Athena is unknown to me. (I do not intend to suggest that Pasolini should not have expected his contractually agreed-upon sum for his labors.) Nevertheless, it remains curious that Pasolini's affective investment was amplified in the financial troubles that resulted from publishing houses vying to appropriate some portion of his supposedly radical recasting of the *Oresteia* – coincidentally indexing his overarching concerns about the way literary markets digest ideas into commodities. A further irony is that both publishers (along with the TPI) had, in principle, sought to popularize the classics by cutting across class boundaries. Finally, it is striking that Pasolini should make recourse to a legal system that had been and would otherwise be deeply inimical to his labors and his very person. This emphasized the oscillation between deeply-felt personal contexts (the suffering, laborious author at work on preserving the "irrational" as a source of revolutionary potential) and institutional ones ultimately concerned with their bottom lines.

This tension between personal and institutional selves is repeated in the better-studied *Lettera dal traduttore* ["Letter from the translator"] that prefaces the published text of Pasolini's *Orestiade*.[18] In that note, Pasolini casts himself as an anti-philological academic outsider while making unexpected recourse to his qualifications and philological acumen. Pasolini emphasizes, again and again, the rushed nature of his work, offering what has even been recognized as an *excusatio non petita*, sequentially buttressed by several surreptitious recourses to authority.[19] In his words, he was *impreparato* ["unprepared"] when no one less than Gassman himself asked him to translate Aeschylus.[20] The results were necessarily amateurish, he says, since time constraints meant that he had to do without all sound philological approaches. He

18 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1007–9. On the note, see inter alia Fusillo, "Pasolini's *Agamemnon*," 224–26.

19 Casi, "Pasolini," 71.

20 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1007.

explains that he turned this evident embarrassment to his advantage by relying instead on his irrational (poetic) instinct:

> non mi è restato che seguire il mio profondo, avido, vorace istinto […] Mi sono gettato sul testo, a divorarlo come una belva, in pace: un cane sull'osso, uno stupendo osso carico di carne magra, stretto tra le zampe, a proteggerlo […].[21]
>
> There was nothing left for me to do but to follow my deep, greedy, voracious instinct […] I threw myself on the text, devouring it like a beast, in peace: a dog going at his bone, a stupendous bone loaded with lean meat, held tight between the paws, to protect it […].

Pasolini continues to explain that he consulted resources only sparingly and haphazardly. When it came down to differences between translations or the critical editions, he just chose what seemed most pleasing to him: *peggio di così non potevo comportarmi* ["I couldn't have behaved worse"]. He allowed his own irrationality to take command.[22]

This bad-boy philologist persona served Pasolini rather well for several reasons (despite its contradictions) related to his desire to inspire direct "engagement" between text and audiences. Primarily, his instinctive approach allowed him to counter the restrictions implicit in the aesthetic tradition of Italian translations of the classics – melodramatic, highfalutin, and exaggerated in performative emphasis to the point of monotonality.[23] Out with the *toni sublimi* ["sublime tones"] of the old-fashioned aesthetes and musty professors and bring on the *toni civili* ["civil tones"] – the tones of the people.[24] There were fundamental conceptual reasons for wanting to do this. First and foremost, poetic intelligibility – Pasolini's fundamental desire to render the classics more directly accessible to wider audiences by translating the lyric choral portions in a straightforward rather than enigmatic manner. Nevertheless, there are also concomitant dramaturgical reasons, as explained by Gassman in the production notes that accompanied the original publication of the translation, who makes a series of striking remarks about the basic aural experi-

21 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1007.

22 Ibid., 1007.

23 Discussed further below.

24 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1008.

ence of microphone-equipped stone theaters.[25] He clarifies that, since open-air theater requires considerable voice projection, this entails a risk: narrowing the expressive tonal ranges might controvert the desire for a more direct idiom that would close the gap between a chorus and an audience – in addition, there are problems surrounding ambient sounds and the echoes caused by an actor's movements.[26] The implication is not merely that the sublime tones carry the usual classist difficulties of literary Italian but that the orthodox modes of performing those translations themselves make the experience partly unintelligible – to attend a classical performance is not to understand and think through the play but to be present at a transcendent event, a status symbol, in which audiences are inured to the effect of the "irrational."

But Pasolini's perplexing and oblique self-contradictions once again creep into his letter. He justifies his decision to adopt the colloquial registers of spoken Italian by making recourse a generalized, impressionistic philological claim – precisely the kind of (empty) technical claim that a professor might make when introducing the text to students. He asserts that Aeschylus' Greek seems to him a language *né elevata né espressiva: é estremamente strumentale* ["neither elevated nor expressive: it is instrumental to an extreme"], substantiating his point with vague references to a lack of complex syntax and a lack of historical specificity in its allusions to the political events of the time.[27] Make of such comments what you will, but note the affectation. Pasolini is caught between a reasoned (if impassioned) defense of his choices as a translator and the desire to come across as a connoisseur. His posturing performs the very kinds of equivocations he had accused contemporary Marxist criticisms of making.

Returning to the head of the letter, another example of this tension can be adduced. Pasolini claimed that Gassman had invited him to translate Aeschylus *because* word had gotten around that Pasolini was at work translating Virgil. It is not clear anyone could have known that he had undertaken that project (he never got very far with it in any case), and, as scholars have noted, that is a strange and self-congratulatory reason to suppose he had been invited to translate the trilogy. Gassman chose Pasolini because he was a public intellectual of great importance and, not coincidentally, one with a literary and

25 This aspect of the creative process has been commented upon already, in Casi, *I teatri di Pasolini*, 91–92.

26 Gassman, "Lo spettacolo del TPI" = Pasolini, *Orestiade*, 175.

27 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1008.

political agenda that aligned with the TPI's explicitly popularizing mission.[28] Undoubtedly aware of these dynamics, which are flattering, Pasolini could not resist casting himself as a connoisseur of the Classics. On the verge of a turbulent *recusatio* that he transformed into a manifesto of instinctive poetics, a reflex of insecurity has him grasping for established forms of authority.

From this perspective, it is perhaps no surprise that Pasolini would contradict himself again by offering an exegesis of the *Oresteia* based not on instinct but rather on academic reading. His summary of the plot and its political implications is indebted to the contemporary work of the Marxist classicist George Thomson, whose idiosyncratic *Aeschylus and Athens* (1941) had recently been translated into Italian.[29] Through him, Pasolini came to see in the *Oresteia* a narrative of dialectic societal transformation centering on the value of a vaguely defined "irrational" force from the past. It is worth quoting this passage of the translator's note at length.

> La trama delle tre tragedie di Eschilo è questa: in una società primitiva dominano dei sentimenti che sono primordiali, istintive, oscuri (le Erinni), sempre pronte a travolgere le rozze istituzioni (la monarchia di Agamennone), operanti sotto il segno uterino della madre, intesa appunto come forma informe e indifferente della natura.
>
> Ma contro tali sentimenti arcaici, si erge la ragione (ancora arcaicamente intesa come prerogativa virile: Atena è nata senza madre, direttamente dal padre), e li vince, creando per la società altre istituzioni, moderne: l'assemblea, il suffragio.
>
> Tuttavia certi elementi del mondo antico, appena superato, non andranno del tutto repressi, ignorati: andranno, piuttosto, acquisti, assimilati, e naturalmente modificati. In altre parole: l'irrazionale, rappresentato dalle Erinni, non deve essere rimosso (ché poi sarebbe impossibile), ma semplicemente arginato e dominato dalla ragione, passione producente e fertile.[30]

28 Casi, "Pasolini," 70.

29 In the letter, Pasolini does not mention him by name, although he cites Thomson's critical edition of Aeschylus' plays as one of his reference texts. It is clear from related correspondences that Thomson's work shaped this translation and that the directors of the TPI even wanted to have Thomson come to lecture in Syracuse (he declined due to previously scheduled engagements). The original publication of the translation includes the epistolary exchange and portions of Thomson's work.

30 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1009.

> The plot of Aeschylus' three tragedies is this: in a primitive society, primordial, instinctive, obscure sentiments (the Erinyes) dominate, always ready to steamroll over crude institutions (Agamemnon's monarchy), working under the uterine aegis of the mother, understood, in point of fact, as the unformed and indifferent form of nature.
>
> But against such archaic sentiments, reason arises (still archaically charged as a virile prerogative: Athena was born without a mother, directly from her father), and it overcomes them, creating for society other, modern institutions: the assembly, suffrage.
>
> Nonetheless, some elements of the ancient world, just now overcome, will not be entirely repressed, ignored: they will be, instead, acquired, assimilated, and naturally modified. In other words: the irrational, represented by the Erinyes, does not need to be eliminated (which would, in any case, be impossible) but simply shored away and dominated by reason, a productive and fertile passion.

On the one hand, Pasolini offers a relatively straightforward account of a dialectic process (thesis, antithesis, synthesis – with a heavy emphasis on the latter), showing an immediate indebtedness to Thomson. But on the other, this account is shot through with oracular and complexly gendered language concerning irrational forces that persist indelibly. Massimo Fusillo is correct to note that Pasolini departs from Thomson, showing a crisis in his Marxism and a related turn to Freudism, but also echoes Johann Bachofen's theories on matriarchy.[31] The importance of Bachofen to Pasolini has been noted in connection to his possible reliance on Friedrich Engels' preface to the fourth edition of *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staats* (1884), a text mentioned by Thomson as the inspiration for his own work.[32] This preface, which was available in Italian to Pasolini, is crucial also for another reason: it explicitly (and critically) connects Bachofen to Tylor. This intellectual history does little to properly clarify Pasolini's argument above (and I would resist attempts to make it make sense at all costs). It remains a problem that the language of older scholarship floods Pasolini's language with a hypotactic, oratorical exposition precisely where the turns in the dialectic process ought

31 Fusillo, "Pasolini's *Agamemnon*," 224, 226. On Bachofen's theories and their limitations concerning Aeschylus, see Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny." On Pasolini's departures from Thomson, see Picconi "La furia del passato" (in dialogue with Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*).

32 Vitali, "Fortuna dell'*Orestea*," 27; Thomson, *Aeschylus at Athens*, front matter (preface to first edition).

to have received a more explicit elucidation – a concrete example, some of that plain speech for which Pasolini was a life-long partisan. Allowing this contradiction to stand helps to clarify how and why Pasolini understood his political commitment to theories of survival and the "irrational" not to clash with his preoccupations concerning the antiquarian aesthetics of bourgeois culture (discussed further in my next section). At this stage in his career, Pasolini understood the "irrational" as a potential break-away force carried from the past into the present – an irreducible and subterranean power of dissent shored away by Athena in the transition to the new world order. Further, he believed Athena to be acting – to an extent – benevolently and in such a way that the "irrational" could be recovered in its subversive terms. This is his optimism and the source of his eventual disappointments.

To be clear, I am not interested in a critique of the substance of Pasolini's, let alone Thomson's, claims on Aeschylus.[33] Scholars have long noted that very motivated readings at play in the summary above connect to the broader political expedients to which Pasolini bends Aeschylus.[34] But the form of Pasolini's encounter with Aeschylus is at stake here. Like Thomson, Pasolini's work was shaped by ideological ratiocinations that are interesting in and of themselves and attest to a curious reaction to anthropological scholarship and the Cambridge School. However, another subtext should be made explicit: Pasolini also followed Thomson in another sense, reacting to earlier and ongoing fascist appropriations of classical tropes and the instrumentalization of the literary past.[35] His attempt to define the import of Aeschylus sought to subtract the *Oresteia* from such contexts – or to show how it might be used to subvert those conversations. His broader project to turn the classics into a tool of the proletariat finds one of its earliest expressions in the confused methodological and theoretical pastiche of the translator's letter.

One last word on the translation itself, since I do not engage with it here. Partly, this is because it has been studied at length already elsewhere.[36] Except for some of its psychologizing aspects and some

33 For an attentive reading of Pasolini's views on Aeschylus in relation to those of other classical scholars, and specifically on the oddness of his brief claim concerning Aeschylean language, see D'Alessandro Behr, "Pasolini's *Orestiade*, the Irrational, and Greek Tragedy."

34 Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*, 187; Flores, "Una classicità di rottura."

35 On Pasolini amid the broader Italian turn against Fascist visions of the classical past, see Caruso, "Classical, Barbarian, Ancient, Archaic."

36 Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*, 196–214; Morosi, "Vittoria sui contrari"; Piva, "Pasolini Traduttore di Eschilo."

of the politicized elements already discussed above, Pasolini cribbed (sometimes very haphazardly, sometimes ingeniously) from existing translations, and critical debates about this creative process are ongoing.[37] By way of an example, I will merely mention the often-brilliant translation of Greek gnomic and proverbial utterances into rough Italian equivalents, such as the "ox on the tongue" of the watchman's opening monologue into *muto* [...] *come una tomba* [akin to English "sepulchral silence"], that attest to his interest of rendering the original in an idiomatic and popular language. Nevertheless, this aspect of his creative endeavor does not address the question of the "irrational" as much as the contexts surrounding the translation continue to do long after 1960.[38]

GRAMSCI'S *BIRIGNAO* (1965)

This brief section highlights what I consider a watershed moment in Pasolini's awareness of how the "irrational" is implicated in language politics, leading to a partial reversal in his valuation of the "irrational" more generally. In his *Appunti* en poète *per una linguistica Marxista* ["Notes in a Poetic Key toward a Marxist Linguistics"] (1965), Pasolini offers lengthy and scattered speculations on a range of problems he perceives at the core of structuralist linguistics.[39] At the heart of the essay is a critique of Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*. His intervention raises questions about whether structuralist linguistics is supple enough to account for popular idiom and class. Pasolini is clearly reprising elements of the dissatisfaction with Marxist criticism that he had discussed in terms of the *Oresteia* at the beginning of the decade.[40]

But what interests me here is the document's peculiar opening salvo: a critique of Antonio Gramsci's use of language. Pasolini effectively and ironically lambasts Gramsci for the kinds of rhetorical tics that Pasolini later admits he recognizes in his writings, some of which I

37 Degani, "Eschilo, *Orestiade*, traduzione di Pier Paolo Pasolini" (the early, unfavorable review); Vitali, "Fortuna dell'*Orestea*."

38 On the linguistic innovations of the translation, further observations are collected in Liccioli, *La scena della parola*, 156–58.

39 Pasolini insists throughout on his lack of technical knowledge and offers his ideas up for scrutiny, hoping experts will correct him as needs be. Pasolini, *Saggi*, 1307–42.

40 Italo Gallo reports similar concerns regarding Saussure, *langue/parole*, Marx, and the *Oresteia* translation all arose during Pasolini's visit to Salerno in 1959. See Gallo, "Pasolini traduttore di Eschilo," 33–34.

sketched out above. He writes Gramsci's early papers *sono scritte in un brutto italiano* ["are written in an ugly Italian"], characterized by professorial-sounding wordplays, recourses to *l'espressività enfatica dell'italiano letterario* ["the emphatic expressivity of literary Italian"], and lapses into an academic translationese that is a consequence of his debts to French and German thinkers.[41] In brief, the young Gramsci is understood to retreat into the safe harbor of bourgeoise aesthetics – a striking observation, given that Gramsci was so concerned with his linguistic register, the intermingling of official language and regional dialects, and, as Pasolini acknowledges, even raised the idea of formulating *una possible lingua dell'egemonia comunista* ["a possible language of the communist hegemony"] that would, by definition, resist highfalutin, obscurantist tendencies.[42]

Pasolini connects this ironic predicament to the emergence, in the 1960s, of *un particolare « birignao » probabilmente nato contemporaneamente a quello teatrale* ["a particular *birignao* that was likely born at the same time as the theatrical one"], employed by nationalist politicians to promote an aestheticization of authoritarianism. The uncommon word *birignao* refers by onomatopoeia to an over-emphatic recitational technique, an actor's tendency to nasalize speech patterns and affect an unnatural, exaggerated, saccharine register. This is precisely the monotonal register that had been conventional in Italian performances of Greek tragedy (and it remains so today, for the most part), which one saw above that both Pasolini and Gassman had gone to great lengths to avoid for the *Orestiade*. Pasolini's diagnosis of Gramsci is most incisive because it also recognizes a pattern in the occurrence of such slippages in Gramsci's registers. They are not casual or random stylistic slippages. Instead, according to Pasolini, they tend to occur precisely when Gramsci's ideological analyses betray a faulty understanding of a dialectical process.

These sites of the tonal shift are thus occasioned by the persistence of survival of some fundamental *lacerto dell'antica irrazionalità* ["fragment of the ancient irrationality"] that Gramsci fails to recognize as a constructive interference in the systems he is explaining. Whatever this may precisely signify is left undetermined. On the one hand, the insecurity of the young Gramsci (an autodiagnosis for Pasolini) prevents him from allowing the unpredictable aspects of quotidian experience to shine through, instead suppressing them in the cold rationality of the dominant systems of expression. Compared to Pasolini's note on

41 Pasolini, *Saggi*, 1307–10.

42 Ibid., 1308.

the *Oresteia*, the young Gramsci is here figured as an incompetent Athena – unable to effect an expedient synthesis of the new and the old, flattening the power of the past to disrupt the present. The risk is that the new order is constructed without questioning the basis of the value system at stake: reason conquers the irrational by placing it on the margins, avoiding the implicit threat of inconsistency.

But the irrational is not properly extrinsic to language, Pasolini argues, nearly to the point of over-rationalizing its survival. He offers his own upbringing as an example, citing the bad petit-bourgeoise habits of his language, which he identifies as a direct product of having grown up in the 1920s. The reification, nearly fetishization of the irrational in poetic terms, then becomes a site for recovering the putatively primordial forces that structured his linguistic (and, by extension, political) consciousness. It turns out that to affect a *birignao* is both to depart from oneself and also to recover that aspect of oneself pre-emptively alienated by formative habits, an evident contradiction but one without which no real dialectic can take place.

Exploring in these terms, and through an explicit theatrical metaphor, how the conceptual apparatus of a rational/irrational binary might operate in an author, Pasolini offers an implicit key for understanding his subsequent engagement with Aeschylus – and for reading Pasolini through himself.

FROM TRILOGY TO TETRALOGY: PYLADES AND THE FIREFLIES (THE LATE 1960S-1975).

While Pasolini's reading of Aeschylus in 1960 in some ways emphasized the productive potential of reason as a governing force in society, he was – as shown above – still confident that the irrational still had its role to play as a disruptive force. From 1966 to 1970, his attention shifted squarely to unpacking the implications of the latter half of this problem, questioning whether the reasoned transformation produced by Athena preserved the "irrational" in terms that might make it worthwhile to revolutionary projects or merely as precisely the kind of vestige to which bourgeois aesthetics pays exiguous homage while ignoring and curtailing its import. His exploration of this problem is not in essay form but in a theatrical experiment, his *Pilade*, which extends the Aeschylean trilogy by transforming the *Oresteia* into a tetralogy.[43] In this play, Pasolini reinvents himself as a kind of Aeschy-

43 Pasolini had explicitly adumbrated this move as a completion of the Erinyes' transformation into their ancient selves in *Bestia da stile* (ca. 1966), which I do

lus – exploring an ambition stated at the end of his translator's note, when he announced that Aeschylus was *un autore come io vorrei essere* ["an author of the kind I would like to be"].[44] This assumption of an Aeschylean vantage is often read in terms of his desire to explore the *Oresteia* from a new angle as well as by a desire to make its political implications even more transparent for contemporary audiences. My argument in this section is that, as far as the "irrational" is concerned, one arrives here at a moment of clear, pessimistic rupture.

A substantial amount of scholarship has engaged with this play's allegorical recasting of political themes, so I give only a summary here.[45] The premise is telling: Pylades, essentially mute in the Aeschylean text, is here a vocal critic of Orestes, who had returned as a leader to Argos, espousing ideals of reason and progress that Pasolini sees as part of the transition from fascism to capitalism. Elektra, holding onto the past, serves to underline the continuity in values from fascism to what follows – how the cult of progress instituted by Orestes is hardly revolutionary and is, in its way, just as authoritarian as the old order.[46] Pylades is left grappling aporetically with how to conceive of a revolution that will not plunge society back into a form of tyranny – how to activate the supposedly irrepressible irrational now that it is found to be on the verge of disappearing.[47] He vacillates between ideological poles, finding them all saturated with potential or actual authoritarianism. He claims he is consistently unable to speak, to find a voice to articulate an alternative to the status quo. He cannot position his investment in the irrational in any other terms than those of negation, which he fails to transform into active resistance to Orestes' narratives of progress and reason. Indeed, at the end of the play, Pylades finds himself in a despondent exile, seemingly bringing the "irrational" with him off-stage. Pasolini's pessimism here comes to the fore in a way that distinguishes the *Pilade* from his previous engagements with Aeschylus.

However, for a moment, the play engages in imagining what a moment of successful revolution might look like, although it is left void of concrete ideological content. The Eumenides provide Pylades with a prophecy of new-found concord, a utopian fantasy of success-

not explore here due to lack of space. See Mango, "Il cielo puo cadere sulla nostra testa," 229.

44 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1009.

45 Fabrizio di Maio, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Il teatro in un porcile*, 162–200.

46 Berti, "Mito e Politica," 110–12.

47 Albini, "Pasolini e la storia dell'antico," 27.

ful synthesis between the "strange" irrational-imbued past and the proleptic emergence of a new, "good" world.

> È strano. Allora gli uomini saranno buoni…
> I loro visi avranno fisionomie nuove…
> Sia il ragazzo allegro – padrone delle strade di sera
> e delle osterie tra le viti e i glicini –
> sia quello timido – che tace, invece, aspettando
> serio il suo turno di amore,
> negli angoli dove stanno madri e lucciole –
> avranno qualcosa di nuovo che tiene
> in sé luminose e comuni possibilità per l'avvenire […][48]
>
> It's strange. Then men will be good.
> Their faces will have new physiognomies…
> Both the happy boy – master of the streets at night
> And of the taverns between the vines and wisterias –
> And the shy one – who is silent, instead, waiting
> Seriously for his turn in love,
> In the corners where mothers and fireflies are –
> They will have something new that holds
> Within itself luminous and communal possibilities for what is to come […]

In this fantasy, men encounter the feminine matrix of productivity (already identified in the Erinyes by Pasolini, as discussed above). They do so in the meeting with mothers and "fireflies," the latter, here as elsewhere in Pasolini, slang for prostitutes. But the final verses of the quoted passage literalize the insects, calling to mind the flashes of light that disrupt the night's darkness. This psycho-sexual metaphor will go on to carry enormous weight in Pasolini's political thought.

Indeed, Georges Didi-Huberman's recent archaeology of the fireflies in Pasolini has shown that this image has had a long and complex gestation as a symbol for the survival of the "irrational" and how it operates. It can be traced back as early as to letters from 1941 when fireflies (and prostitutes) abounded in Pasolini's countryside escapades.[49] There, the young poet envied their lateral movements, their ability to create networks of experience that flitted in and out of sight in unpredictable, irrational ways – resisting the habitus of

48 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 407.

49 Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles.*

fascism. In the period in which *Pilade* was written, the fireflies also reoccur in other plays where their prophetic potential remains active, signaling agreement between generations and the possibilities of new and unexpected forms of concord between people. But in a famous article from February of 1975, Pasolini announced that for some time now, the fireflies had disappeared. The possibilities for slipping out from the subtle, totalizing fascism that had saturated Italian politics since the end of the war were gone. The irrational was not preserved as a site of potential transformation. Instead, the vestiges nodded to the past, reminding people that the past is a foreclosed country, from whose ruins the modern nation has been formed irrevocably. In the move from the *Orestiade* to *Pilade,* skepticism grows toward the "irrational" as latent power until those fantasies vanish somewhere between Pylades' stage exit and the article of 1975.

The splicing of the debate about the irrational into the metaphoric of fireflies raises a host of likely unanswerable poetic questions about how long the two had been connected in Pasolini's mind. Might one re-read the *Orestiade* for its investigation of flickering lights – the sequence of beacons that drives news of the fall of Troy to Argos, the constellations in the sky above the nightwatchman on the roof? Were fireflies on Pasolini's mind as he translated these passages? As will be demonstrated in a moment, whether or not he realized it at the time, the passage became yet another way to interpret the disappearance of fireflies in his later works.

UNFINISHED DISAPPOINTMENTS (1970-?)

At the same time as he was at work on his *Pilade*, Pasolini prepared a cinematic sketch titled *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana* (1970). This work's title is often translated as "Notes toward an African Orestes," but this erodes an explicit callback to his translation of the trilogy using the more unusual form "Orestiade." This is perhaps the more studied text of Pasolini's Aeschylean receptions, but its position in the debate around the "irrational" is relatively under-discussed.

The movie combines shots taken by Pasolini during his visits to several African countries, archival footage, seminar-style discussions with African students at Rome's Sapienza University, and musical portions. Pasolini narrates over large portions of the film, making observations and explaining his basic thesis that Africa (construed as a pre-capitalistic space) offers the ideal grounds for staging the *Oresteia*. Scholars have noted the Eurocentric bias in his work, which construes Africa much like the Cambridge anthropologists had done

earlier in the century, as well as clear elements of condescension in Pasolini's questions and answer segments with the students, whose unease concerning Pasolini's easy equivocation between the pre-capitalist and the "primitive" is evident.[50] There are other issues, including what appear to be fundamental misunderstandings or misapplications of the Aeschylean plot (Argos is not a democratic city) – and other examples of a selective remembering of Greek mythology surrounding the Trojan War (Thersites makes an unusual appearance, perhaps colored by Pasolini's readings of Hegel and Nietzsche, as a captain of the Greek troops). The "irrational" surfaces in several instances but most tellingly in Pasolini's assertion that it is *animale* "animal" (as an adjective, describing the animal part of human activity). As such, it figures neatly into Pasolini's attempt to excavate the pre-capitalist and pre-colonial out of Africa he has problematically constituted as a homogeneous, non-European whole. Thus, the transposition of the irrationality of the Greeks onto Africa that Pasolini wanted to make legible does not work.

While the on-screen Pasolini, talking to and over the students he invited to participate in his project, appears unabashedly oblivious to the criticisms raised by his interlocutors, one does not know his reflections on these materials after the fact. Alessia Ricciardi, and, later, independently, Sarah Nooter, have concluded that perhaps Pasolini may be intentionally putting his mistaken conceptualizations on display by releasing this film *as* notes. (After all, why preserve and screen scenes in which his biases are readily exposed?)[51] Reading the *Appunti* as a documentary of failed reception, Pasolini's work becomes a self-admission of defeat – and may help explain why he never seems to have attempted to complete the project, having realized (by 1975 at the latest, as shown above) that there was a fundamental problem with trying to extract the "irrational" from a synthesis that presupposes badly construed prior elements. Indeed, taken with the *Pilade*, the *Appunti* speak to a double recognition of the misconstrual of both ancient Greek political history and the history of pre-colonial Africa. The "irrational" survivals are merely optical illusions, unruly artifacts of the synthetic process, not routes into an actual (and recoverable) dimension of experience.

50 Raizen, "Voicing the Popular"; Wetmore, *Black Dionysus*; Hawkins, "Orestes on Trial in Africa"; Usher, "An African *Oresteia*"; for a slightly different set of views, see Fusillo, "Pasolini's *Agamemnon*," and *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*.

51 Ricciardi, "Umanesimo e ideologia"; Nooter, "The Loss of Telos."

This speculative exploration of Pasolini's dejected self-realizations may find support in his novel *Petrolio*, left unfinished at his death in 1975 and published posthumously in numbered notes. In this work, the "irrational" figures, more an adjective than a noun, as a direct component of fascist thought: the irrational philosophies that would fix the form of the past in terms applicable to the present – a past out of which fascism and capitalism find fertile soil, growing irrationally and exponentially.[52] It may be difficult to argue for a proper reversal in Pasolini's position, given the nature of the evidence. However, it is striking that in the second paragraph of the first page of the extant text (following a laconic description of a decadent house in the first), Pasolini locates the origin of the philosophical conceits of his novel in May of 1960 – the same month in which the *Orestiade* hit the stage and in which Pasolini retreated into the shadows of Syracuse, exhausted from his translation project.

> Ma in quel Maggio del 1960 il Neo-capitalismo era ancora una novità troppo nuova, era il termine di un sapere ancora troppo privilegiato per cambiare il sentimento della realtà.[53]

> But in that May of 1960, Neocapitalism was still too new of a new thing, it was the end of a knowledge still too privileged to change the feeling of reality.

Whether or not this passage can be taken as an autobiographical, metaleptic rupture of the narrator's voice cannot be finally determined, although Pasolini intended to insert the opening verses of the *Orestiade* into a later portion of *Petrolio* (emphasizing the connection between the stars of the night sky in Aeschylus and the flickering fires set up on the roadside by prostitutes).[54] But even as a coincidence it encapsulates the despondency of *Pilade* and the defeatism that has been read into the *Appunti*.

IRRATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

Taking an unusual route through texts that surround and extend Pasolini's work on the *Orestiade*, I have forwarded the argument that Aeschylus' trilogy served as a literary lodestone for exploring

52 Pasolini, *Petrolio*, 263.

53 Ibid., 10.

54 Ibid., 292–93.

how the "irrational" might serve as a literary and political category in Pasolini's oeuvre. There was an initial optimism, a hope that the irrational may offer a route out of the saturating affective reality of fascism's persistence in Italian politics alongside the entrenchment of capitalism as a way of life. This vision turned sour as the years went by, leading to the pessimistic preservation of the "irrational" as constructed object offered up to critique before it was perhaps recognized as a concept fundamentally antithetical to Pasolini's project because it is in many ways precisely a fascist construct.[55]

The stakes of this argument for how Pasolini can be read as engaging in advancing "proletarian classics" are twofold. On a merely historiographic plane, one can identify Pasolini's positive intent to generate a version of the classical accessible to broader, non-bourgeois audiences. This is in line with his broader literary endeavors that I did not discuss but which included, for instance, the production of anthologies of popular poetry, the promotion of folklore, and many critiques of bourgeoise aesthetics in poetics and essayistic form. The affective investment of Pasolini in conceiving proletarian classics was, therefore, not merely significant in scope. It was also a necessary component of a broader attempt to reframe the boundaries of literary history in constructing imagined communities that resisted the nationalistic trends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The disappointment of his late career, perhaps aligned with a more general disappointment with the postwar paradigms of artmaking concerning the vacuousness of discourses on progress, might even be compared in future work to the cold conjunction of rationality and horror in Pasolini's engagements with sadism and fascism, in *Salò* (1975). What kind of "irrational" might stand against the supreme reason of Sadean horror without resorting to ethnographic essentialization and caricatures of the past?

But I want to end by considering how Pasolini's failed experiment with the "irrational" teaches us something about the importance of classical reception as a kind of artistic and political practice, entrenched to a large extent within the confines of an academic milieu characterized by exclusive intellectualism and elite ideologies of rigor. Pasolini challenged his contemporaries by raising questions of access, democratization, and even revolution – he tried to productively and radically subvert conservative, empty talking points surrounding shared heritages and their ability to form public consciousnesses.

55 On Pasolini's long and fraught wavering between political poles, see Baldoni and Borgna, *Una lunga incomprensione*.

In this endeavor, he found it remarkably difficult not to fall into a hermeneutic trap, whereby classical works were made to speak to the present with unexpected consequences. The Aeschylus that Pasolini read, translated, and ultimately posited seemed to speak directly to the disenfranchised masses, even inviting a certain kind of resistance to oppressive regimes. But Aeschylus' plays also quickly revealed themselves as inimical to such a project – at least to an extent, since his work required extension in the direction of a sequel, as well as spatial and temporal translation to overcome certain boundaries of historical specificity. Aspects of the ancient poet that did not fit the desired mold were suppressed until they could not be – until Athena's putative success, which Pasolini strove to replicate while he played the role of the Erinyes, became transparently a rejection of the very "irrational" forces that she performatively shored against ruin. As a whole, then, Pasolini's trajectory teaches us to be very careful with the classics. Ancient texts contain mystified and dissimulated ideological coordinates that are not merely historically problematic. As ideological formations, they will continue to forge subjects even out of dissenting reasons – leading to surprising outcomes. In this sense, the classics and the canon can partly foreclose future transformations. In the desire to conceive of proletarian classics, akin to Pasolini's desires, one must not forget that the elite products of past literary history do not themselves share in this ambition.

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ABSTRACT

This article traces Pasolini's engagement with Aeschylus *Oresteia* and the concept of the "irrational," through which he sought to excavate patterns of ideological resistance in the classical past. I argue that Pasolini's translations and adaptations of Aeschylus ultimately failed to achieve his desired ambition to forward an Aeschylus fit for the proletariat, and whose words might spark new kinds of Marxist thought. However, there is value in reading into Pasolini's practices and his reflections on his work. Acknowledging and parsing his affects of disappointment and resignation, the broader conceptual outlines of his ambitions become clearer as gestures of kind of "failed" classical reception – an attempt to turn the classics to new political ends. An analysis of this kind of failure teaches us broader theoretical lessons about what it might mean to perform a generative and politically fruitful appropriation of the classics, necessarily confronting the entrenched ideologies of the past and their tenacious ability to reproduce themselves even in the most unexpected literary and political contexts. The article engages with selections from Pasolini's literary, personal, and political writings from the 1960s until his death – connecting his translations and adaptations of Aeschylus to other contemporaneous essayistic, novelistic, and cinematic projects.

KEYWORDS: Pasolini, Aeschylus, irrational, reception, ideology

Pasolinijevi Grki in iracionalno

IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava Pasolinijevo ukvarjanje z Ajshilovo *Orestejo* in pojmom »iracionalnega«, s katerim je skušal najti vzorce ideološkega odpora v klasični preteklosti. Trdim, da Pasolinijevi prevodi in priredbe Ajshila na koncu niso dosegli tega, kar je želel, in sicer, da bi predstavil Ajshila, ki bi bil primeren za proletariat in čigar besede bi lahko sprožile nov premislek znotraj marksizma. Kljub temu je vredno raziskati Pasolinijeve prakse in njegova razmišljanja o lastnem delu. Ob priznavanju in razčlenjevanju njegovih afektov razočaranja in resignacije postanejo jasnejši tudi širši konceptualni obrisi njegovih ambicij, kot geste neke vrste »neuspešne« klasične recepcije – poskus, da bi klasike uporabil v nove politične namene. Analiza tega neuspeha prinaša širše teoretsko spoznanje o tem, kaj lahko pomeni generativna in politično plodna prisvojitev klasikov, ki se nujno sooča z zakoreninjenimi ideologijami preteklosti in z njihovo vztrajno sposobnostjo, da se reproducirajo tudi v najbolj nepričakovanih literarnih in političnih kontekstih. Članek obravnava izbor Pasolinijevih literarnih, osebnih in političnih zapisov od šestdesetih let 20. stoletja do njegove smrti; njegove prevode in priredbe Ajshila poveže s sočasnimi esejističnimi, romanesknimi in filmskimi projekti.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Pasolini, Ajshil, iracionalno, recepcija, ideologija

Athens, the view of Acropolis from the west.

Athens, the view of Acropolis from the Areopagus – Franc Žužek, Ksenija Rozman, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Primož Simoniti.

Athens, the view of Acropolis from Philopappos Hill.

Athens, Philopappos Hill, with Acropolis in the background – Primož Simoniti, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Nataša Stanič, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Mirko Juteršek.

THE PRISON GRAVES

Too rarely, rarely in heroic strain,
The Players stir us in these hurrying years,
Too seldom thrill our hearts with noble pain,
Or ask for olden grief our gift of tears.

Now thanks to those by whom at length is shown,
Oh not unworthily, or with light intent,
The unyielding tyrant on the Theban throne,
All his outspoken pride and punishment.

By the blind seer foretold, the awful power
Of Divine Justice smites for deeds unjust;
Low, low among his helots see him cower
Like a poor maniac, moaning in the dust.

Stricken he lies; vain all that hoard of wealth
So cowardly hurled to make the helpless fear,
For even Ismene, the frail and trembling, hath
Proved brave at last, for love of her sister dear.

And who that saw thee, sad Antigone,
Bearing the burnished urn with stately tread.
But thought of some among us, sad as thee,
Forbidden to pay due rites unto their dead.

For these the August, the Antique Voices plead
Vainly – in vain Tireisias warns of fate:
Hear one speak lightly – "Not half bad indeed,
And nicely staged, but scarcely up to date."

A three-starred Captain speaks, who might have stood
In grim Kilmainham yard to give the word,
Yet cannot now see Cleon's crime renewed
Who flung the Argive's corpse to wolf and bird.

"Not up to date!" he says. This very day
In an English Prison yard men turned the sod
A strangled malefactor's corpse to lay
Nigh his, whom some have named "that Knight of God."

And oh in gentle hearts how keen the pain,
Knowing that last vain wish that he might be,
After the scaffold's ordeal, brought again
To some sequestered grave among the free.

In Ireland? No – far, far beyond his hope
Such thought as that, too wise was he to crave
After the judgement hall, the cell, the rope,
The glorious guerdon of a martyr's grave.

But since he had served so well the world's sad poor,
England has proffered honours in the past,
And would forgive (his generous heart felt sure)
When whom he loved the most he served the last.

So while he calmed his soul to meet the end,
With gloom of prison walls o'ershadowing round,
He asked (not much to ask of foe or friend)
Outside those walls a space of holy ground.

For answer (heavier their's than Creon's blame
Who grudged his foeman's body covering dust)
A burden he was given of blackest shame,
Fit comrade deemed in death for muderous lust.

* * * * *

And so for England fear the ultimate
Divine decree, as on the Athenian stage
Was shown the just inevitable fate
Dealt to the tyrant of an earlier age.

--Anon., "The Prison Graves," 1918.

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The Posthuman and Irish Antigones: Rights, Revolt, Extinction

Natasha Remoundou*

One of the earliest connections between Sophocles' *Antigone* and Irish history emerges in the form of an anonymous poem written during the Great War entitled "The Prison Graves" (see facing text). The poem's composition is usually dated to the period following the Easter Rising, which marked a period of political violence in Ireland's struggle for independence. The fourteen-stanza poem survives as an undated broadsheet, kept in the Department of Ephemera at the National Library of Ireland.[1] The following information regarding the poem's publication is printed below its title: "Written on the production of Sophocles' *Antigone* at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, March 5th, on which day the perpetrator of the Soho sack murder was buried in Pentonville, adjoining the grave of Dr. Crippen and Roger Casement." A secure year of publication is not immediately apparent, but the "Soho sack murderer," also known as "the butcher of Soho," was a man called Louis Voisin (1875–1918), executed by hanging at HM Prison Pentonville for the murder of Emilienne Gerard on March 2, 1918. Given that the broadsheet poem mentions the burial of this man coinciding with a production of a specific *Antigone* only a few days after his death ("March 5th"), one can be reasonably confident that its publication is March 1918.[2] There is also no reason to doubt

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1 The National Library of Ireland digital archive, "The Prison Graves," Call Number EPH B446.

2 I would like to thank Henry Stead for identifying Voisin as the "sack murderer." The publication date of March 5, 1918 is further corroborated by a refe-

that the poem was not, as the broadsheet declares, written specifically for this occasion. Furthermore, the content of the poem corroborates the contextualizing introduction since stanza eight alludes to Voisin's ("malefactor's") corpse being laid "Nigh his, whom some have named 'that Knight of God'" [i.e., Roger Casement's].

The digital archive of the National Library of Ireland summarizes the item as follows:

> First line of verse reads: "Too rarely, rarely in heroic strain…" Roger Casement was buried in quicklime without a coffin in unmarked grave beneath the skeletons of two hanged murderers inside Pentonville Prison, North London, after his execution on August 3, 1916. In 1965 his remains were repatriated to the Republic of Ireland and following a state funeral, his remains were buried with full military honours in the Republican plot in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin.

The poem is indeed a response to the death of the Irish revolutionary nationalist, progressive, and anti-imperialist Roger Casement (1864–1916).[3] It raises ethical questions regarding human dignity and civil rights, reminiscent of those later enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). As we shall see, the poem evokes Polyneices' burial and "the political use of the body after death."[4] The poem thus uses the new staging of *Antigone* as a contemporary hook to celebrate Casement, and in turn, uses the allusion to Voisin's interment to demonstrate the relevance of both the ancient play and the poem's subject. "The Prison Graves" aligns Sophocles' *Antigone* with notions of revolt, mourning, and minority rights at the outset of Ireland's revolutionary curve during the first half of the twentieth century.

rence to the performance of *Antigone* at the Abbey in Hogan and Burnham, *The Art of the Amateur: 1916–1920*, 159–160. Hawley Harvey Crippen was an American homeopath convicted for killing his wife Cora Henrietta Crippen. He was hanged in Pentonville Prison, London, in 1910. According to Abbey Theatre archivist Mairéad Delaney, the Abbey Theatre production to which the pamphlet refers has yet to be fully confirmed. It appears that it might refer to a rental rather than a self-produced Abbey theatre production. The same broadsheet poem may also be found in the Irish Nationalism Pamphlet Collection database, University of Montana, where it is tentatively dated as of 1917 without attribution.

3 Boyce, "Casement, Roger David (1864–1916), diplomatist and Irish rebel," ODNB.

4 Enright, "Antigone in Galway."

Productions of *Antigone* in Ireland have always been critical gestures of social protest, exposing the fragility of human rights.[5] This paper examines how applying a posthumanist lens to two key yet underexplored Irish figurations of *Antigone* might unveil new and radical understandings of the tragedy as well as the modern injustices and "inhuman politics" that fuel their Irish reception.[6] For this study on the possibilities of a posthumanist theorization of *Antigone*, I examine the connecting threads (political, aesthetic, and critical) between the anonymous "The Prison Graves" and the unpublished play-version *The Antigone* by Aidan C. Mathews in 1984.[7]

ROGER CASEMENT AND "THE PRISON GRAVES"

Roger Casement worked for the British Foreign Office as a diplomat. He was also a poet, a humanitarian, and an anti-slavery activist who supported the rights of the powerless across continents while condemning as an eyewitness the colonial atrocities against indigenous communities in Africa and South America.[8] As early as 1905, he was honored and knighted for his catalytic role in exposing human rights abuses in Congo, documented in the famous "Casement Report." In 1911 he unveiled the horrors of the rubber industry of the London-incorporated Peruvian Amazon Company in the Putumayo region of the Amazon rain forest. He spent his life collecting testimonies of torture, mass rape, execution, mutilation, and genocide of the region's native population. The report was designed to stir public outrage and thus push for legislative reforms. Casement's knighthood was annulled, and he was executed after being convicted of treason by the British for his role in the Irish Easter Rising rebellion of 1916. Casement's homosexuality, which had remained a subject of controversy after the British government leaked his private diaries, was also used to discredit him, both before and after his death, as an alleged sexual deviant and criminal.[9]

Read as an elegy for Casement's arrest, conviction, and execution for high treason on August 3, 1916, the poem draws an uncanny parallel

5 See Remoundou-Howley, "Palimpsests of Antigone."

6 Negarestani, "Drafting the Inhuman," 183.

7 Remoundou, "Rehearsing Instabilities in Aidan Carl Mathews' *The Antigone*," 37–62.

8 Boyce, "Casement, Roger David (1864–1916), diplomatist and Irish rebel," ODNB.

9 Ezard, "Sex Diaries of Roger Casement found to be genuine." See also Boyce, "Casement, Roger David (1864–1916), diplomatist and Irish rebel," ODNB.

between his corpse as a real-life political metaphor and the contentious corporeality of Polyneices. In the eyes of the British government, Casement's body was a traitor's corpse, guilty of crimes on several counts (political certainly, but also perhaps sexual, racial, cultural). It was also, however, (or would become) a hero's corpse for the Irish people: "whom some have named 'that Knight of God'" (8.4).

The treatment of Casement's body, buried in quicklime in the unholy ground within the walls of Pentonville Prison, is of no little importance here. All traces of his material existence were to be removed. This type of erasure is twofold. In a posthumanist context, the recontextualization of the contempt for the nationalist male hero's or fallen foe's racialized, sexualized, and politicized extinct biological corpse (Irish, homosexual, activist) mutually destabilizes a version of Irish identity that contests sexual, cultural, and racial purity. Casement's posthumous corporeal precarity further problematizes this. He embodies the spectrality of an intersectional otherness that persists while positing itself as a threat to the community even in death, i.e., while the dead remains absent or extinct. Despite its Edwardian tone and imagery (its focus not on the body erased so much as the erasing location in which it is laid to rest), the poem, partly through its irony – "*The glorious guerdon of a martyrs grave*" (10.4) – gestures toward an early posthumanist repudiation of a kind of ontological erasure that remained a source of controversy for fifty years. Via *Antigone*, the poem denounces the Western anthropocentric supremacy of humanist ethics in so far as it exposes the corrupt guise of humanitarian imperialism, selective justice, and burial rights. In addition, it is a critique of denying the claim to a decent burial and the effects this denial has beyond the terrain of the human. While it was legitimate to deny burial rights to traitors of the state in Greek antiquity as the ultimate punishment, the same rights have been held fundamental and inalienable since then. Breaching the right to burial is a sign of inhumanity.

Casement was one of the first humanitarians to use the concept of "crimes against humanity,"[10] which now lies at the core of inter-

10 The concept, first codified in the London Charter in 1945 and the legal basis of the Nuremberg trial, appears in Casement's Putamayo Journal, the controversial diary he kept while conducting thorough humanitarian investigations on rubber slavery and the atrocities committed against the Putamayo Indians in Brazil. In October of 1910, Casement writes in two separate passages of the report: "Besides, these men have never been punished for the most awful offences against humanity. Not one." – "This thing we find here is carrion – a pestilence – a crime against humanity, and the man who defends it is, con-

national criminal law. He was committed to a sense of anti-colonial solidarity with indigenous minorities. His condemnation of the tragic regime of racism and oppression precipitated by powerful, capitalist forces in the Congo and the Amazon was (as Casement himself wrote to his friend Alice Green) similar to Ireland's revolutionary claim for independence from British Imperialism: "I was looking at this tragedy […] with the eyes of another race of people once hunted themselves."[11] The ethical ramifications of burial rights and hegemonic power are, of course, played out in the ancient text to which the poem alludes. The choice of this dramatic subtext serves the political impetus to reclaim the right of the living to negotiate the rights of their dead.

During the decades after Casement's execution, successive British governments refused formal requests for the repatriation of his remains, while the details of his burial were kept secret from the Irish public and political opinion for many decades. Casement's reinternment in 1965, echoed in the case of his contemporary Thomas Kent (1865–1916), also executed in 1916 and whose exhumed remains were buried in his Irish hometown as late as 2015, exemplifies the importance of burial, mourning, and memory in countering the erasure of the dishonored dead. Through the prism of *Antigone*'s drama, the following lines capture not simply the ethico-political frame of reference rejecting fundamental burial rites and rights but also the impact this dismissal bears on the immediate environment, human and animal:

> And who that saw thee, sad Antigone,
> Bearing the burnished urn with stately tread.
> But thought of some among us, sad as thee,
> Forbidden to pay due rites unto their dead.
>
> For these the August, the Antique Voices plead
> Vainly – in vain Tireisias [*sic*] warns of fate:
> Hear one speak lightly – "Not half bad indeed,
> And nicely staged, but scarcely up to date."

sciously or unconsciously, putting himself on the side of the lowest scale of humanity." In *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, 1997, 173 and 178; see also Goodman, 2009.

11 Quoted in Mitchell, *The Amazon Journal of Robert Casement*, 280, from a letter to Alice Green written on April 20, 1907. The phrase is also read as an allusion to Casement's sexuality and the persecution of gay men by British law as "another race of people"; Mirzoeff, *Introduction*, 80.

A three-starred Captain speaks, who might have stood
In grim Kilmainham yard to give the word,
Yet cannot now see Cleon's crime renewed
Who flung the Argive's corpse to wolf and bird.

The anonymous poet casts David Lloyd George, the current Prime Minister, as a Cleon figure overseeing the immoral treatment of a corpse.[12] Following a series of protracted legal battles and diplomatic negotiations between the Irish State and England, Taoiseach Éamon de Valera began formal requests for the return of Casement's remains from Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1953. The specific binding legal obligations cited by Churchill then demanded that the remains of executed prisoners not be exhumed. Casement's remains were finally repatriated to Ireland in 1965. Preceding the results of this legal and sovereign struggle regarding the ownership of the corpse, some of the most memorable lines of "The Prison Graves" highlight Casement not only as a shamed national martyr but as an ally of the proletariat, of the defenseless, the vulnerable, and the poor across a transnational trajectory:

In Ireland? No – far, far beyond his hope
Such thought as that, too wise was he to crave
After the judgement hall, the cell, the rope,
The glorious guerdon of a martyr's grave.

But since he had served so well the world's sad poor,
England has proffered honours in the past,
And would forgive (his generous heart felt sure)
When whom he loved the most he served the last.

Read both as anti-colonial critique and lament, the poem eulogizes the legacy of an early twentieth-century human rights advocate and revolutionary activist who fought for the rights of the disenfranchised and the working class. In its astute dramatic and political energy, the stark proem to *Antigone*'s modern currency enacts a decolonial, human rights performative claim to justice. As such, the classical myth, filtered

12 The Casement debate is also taken up in the poem "The Ruby Kid" by W. B. Yeats, who also wrote about Antigone in his series "A Woman Young and Old," written between 1926 and 1929. "From the 'Antigone'" is used as the coda to *Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933); see Yeats, *Winding Stair*.

across genres, resists a rigid sense of classification because it decenters the humanist idea of *anthropos* sung in the famous choral "Ode to Man" (*Antigone* 332–375). By the end of the twentieth century – the era of failed utopias and revolutions on the one hand and advanced capitalist aspirations on the other – the play provides fresh insights into what it means to occupy the category of the human in historical and material terms. Such mutually bold interrogations between *Antigone* and human rights discourse delineate an organic posthumanist horizon highlighting the relevance of classics to contemporary intersectional perspectives regarding class, gender, law, and environmental justice.

AIDAN MATHEWS' COLD WAR ANTIGONE

The profound posthumanist imbrications of human rights discourse and *Antigone* in Ireland move past the postcolonial premise of the second half of the twentieth century. The myth transforms into a potent feminist subject that confronts in performance the ever-growing injustices of neoliberal capitalism, sexism, racism, and ecocide. The following pages examine the *Antigone* of playwright Aidan Carl Mathews (b. 1956). Mathews was educated at University College Dublin, Trinity College, and Stanford University, where he studied anthropology and religion under the French philosopher René Girard. A prize-winning author in diverse genres, Mathews has published plays, poetry, short stories, and a novel.[13] His *Antigone* was first performed in 1984, the year of the Irish *Antigones*.[14] The

13 Recently, he retired as a drama producer in RTE radio. He taught English at St. Louis High School, Rathmines Dublin, and at Belvedere College. Mathews won many literary awards: the Irish Times Award in 1974; the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Award in 1976; the Macauley Fellowship in 1978–79; the Ina Coobrith Poetry Prize in 1981, and an Academy of American Poets Award in 1982.

14 For an excellent discussion of Irish receptions of the play, see Macintosh's "Irish Antigone and Burying the Dead." See also Remoundou-Howley, *Palimpsests of Antigone*, "Antigone stopped in Belfast: Stacey Gregg's Ismene," "'Rehearsing Instabilities in Aidan C. Mathews' *Antigone*," and "The Suppliants of Syria." At the beginning of the twentieth century, *Antigone* is translated into the Irish language by Pádraig de Brún in 1926 and by Seán Ó Carra in 1973 and Prin Duignan (2008) from Jean Anouilh's version. Other Irish versions of *Antigone* include works by Christine Longford, Brendan Kennelly, Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, Conall Morrison, Stacey Gregg, Owen McCafferty, Pat Murphy, Declan Donnellan, Colm Tóibín, Darren Murphy, Marina Carr, Frank McGuinness, and Carlo Gébler. See also Arkins, *Irish Appropriations of Greek Tragedy;* Barry, "Cinema and Feminism"; Brown, *Uncompromising Female Spirit;* Cairns, "Soph-

year that had become synonymous with totalitarian terror thanks to George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighy-Four* (1949) was a bumper year for productions of Sophocles' *Antigone* in Ireland. After Mathews' play, which opened in August, three more *Antigone*s appeared: Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act*, Brendan Kennelly's *Antigone*, and Pat Murphy's film *Anne Devlin*.

Mathews has always been fascinated by the sweeping forces of gender violence upon the immediate community, historical victims and scapegoats, neglected figures, missing identities, and the unsafeguarded topography of human rights. A few months before the premiere of his *Antigone* on August 1st, 1984,[15] his play *The Diamond Body* (with Olwen Fouéré also in the leading role) was staged in Dublin and London, dramatizing the lynching and murder of its Greek transgender protagonist, Stephanos. Mathews would later collaborate again with Fouéré and Roger Doyle on a play based on Antonin Artaud's visit to Ireland during the late 1930s and his subsequent confinement and death in a psychiatric clinic in Paris. As an Irish Independent reviewer explains, Mathews' *Antigone* was not "just the Classic Greek play in modern dress" but "a retelling of twentieth-century experience and apprehensions."[16] In the playwright's own words:

> It is a tragedy that Antigone should die. But it's more of a tragedy for the State than it is for her. Enigmatic and admirable, she has always represented the dignity of conscientious objection of heroic

ocles' *Antigone*"; Causey, "Review of Conall Morrison's *Antigone*"; Deane, "Field Day's Greeks (and Russians)"; Harkin, "Irish Antigones"; Heaney, "Me as in Metre"; Kennelly, *Antigone;* McDonald, "Classics as Celtic Firebrand," "The Irish and Greek Tragedy," "Translating *Antigone*"; Murrey, "Three Irish Antigones"; Paulin,"The Making of a Loyalist," "Antigone"; Richards, "In the Border Country"; Roche, "Ireland's Antigones"; Steiner, *Antigones;* Taplin, "Difficult Daughter"; Tóibín, "Oh, oh, Antigone"; Enright, "Antigone in Galway"; Wilmer, "Prometheus, Medea and Antigone," "Women in Greek Tragedy Today," *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism;* Torrance, "Post-Ceasefire Antigones and Northern Ireland."

15 The cast included Fidelma O'Dowda (Ismene), David Heap (Creon), Paul Raynor (Haemon), Mannix Flynn (Chorus), Susie Kennedy (Chora), Nigel Mercier (Critic/Guard); the play was directed by Michael Scott who was also responsible for the lighting, music, and sound of the production. The set and the costumes were designed by Barbara Bradshaw and Brian Power, while Amelia Stein was responsible for the photography.

16 Anon. "Getting Away from Heroes and Villains."

> dissent. Her pregnant sister Ismene, on the other hand, stands for a thankless sanity, the decency of daily life. Creon, in turn, embodies the appalling dilemma of a man torn between duty and inclination, family feeling and political responsibility. And the Chorus, as always, expresses the fickleness of a collaborationist rabble, of those who never fail to see the writing on the wall.[17]

Feminist readings of *Antigone* tend to interpret its protagonist's mourning labor as the female task of sustaining life and the body.[18] In Mathews' play, the opaque entanglements of classical humanism are represented in proletarian ethics and gender politics. Antigone's female suffering, for example, is intensified by her social class, which is figured against the abstractness of law and kinship. Mathews' experimental *Antigone* is a speculative examination of the complex relationship between historical materialism and myth against the backdrop of Cold War Ireland. Flawed and vulnerable in her anti-revolutionary figuration, this Antigone demonstrates the imperfection and disunity of being human. As such, the play creates a provocative contestation of both the classical tradition and political ideologies and allegiances. In a post-nuclear plot twist, Antigone's praxis is not simply defined by her human status. She is rather transfigured into an archetype, immune to extinction, and forced to relive her classical afterlives by repeating the same labor for millennia. She is caught in a cycle of resurrection, trapped between survival and extinction, which creates an environment in which violence and constant struggle have been normalized.

In 1982 the director Michael Scott and designer Bronwen Casson were struck, while reading a Penguin translation of *Antigone*, by the tragedy's experimental possibilities. Mathews, still a student at Stanford University, was invited to translate the play, a job for which he was qualified since he had begun studying ancient Greek at school in Dublin in the late 1960s. On Mathews' return to Dublin, the team began their collaboration on what the young playwright would boldly call *The Antigone*. The script could not be called a translation in the traditional sense but was considered by its author as a conversation or dialogue with the ancient tragedy.[19] He dedicated his new version to his mentor, the philosopher René Girard. The play was produced in a year that marks a reawakening of political tensions and losses

17 Mathews, *The Antigone*, 1.

18 See, e.g., Rawlinson, "Beyond Antigone," esp. 104.

19 Jones, "Cognizant of the Past," 97.

for working-class rights and civil liberties in Ireland. In Mathews' hands, Sophocles' tragedy becomes the platform for a robust critique not only of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the "disappeared" paramilitary rebels of the IRA[20] but perhaps of the human species itself. The play reaches further in its ambition than Irish politics, making a global statement about martyrdom and human rights crises.

Ireland in 1984 experienced widespread unemployment and high levels of emigration. The Irish Labour Party was defeated in the European elections, and Britain and Ireland were rent by industrial action, rioting, and protest. Days before the premiere of Mathews' *Antigone* in Dublin's Project Arts Centre, Mary Manning, a young cashier at Dublin's Dunnes Stores, refused to put South African grapefruit through the till and was suspended by her employers. Her and her colleagues' anti-Apartheid strike ran parallel to one of the most entrenched industrial disputes in British history – the miners' strike in England, resulting from Margaret Thatcher's conservative government's closure of twenty coal mines, causing the loss of more than twenty-thousand jobs. In addition, the Criminal Justice Act was passed in 1984, a bill that gave the Irish Police the right to detain and interrogate anyone suspected of criminal activity in Ireland.[21]

The spirit of political agitation and class struggle is proportionately reflected in the rich archival holdings surrounding the production of this 1984 *Antigone*. The production, funded by the Youth Employment Service and the Arts Council of Ireland, was plagued by financial adversities. The production cannot be disentangled from the wider culture of economic recession, unemployment, and sectarianism.

THE ANTIGONE ARCHIPELAGO

Historical time is collapsed in Mathews' *Antigone*. It is set during an urban plague in 1980s BC Ireland "soon after Sparta entered the war on the German side," where "Communist terrorists are being brought to justice by the democratically elected interim Government."[22] Antiquity and modernity are mixed, creating a state of timelessness or omnitemporality. With Olwen Fouéré in the leading role, the first 1980s Irish Antigone is reconfigured as a worn-out actress-archetype

20 See Remoundou-Howley, *Palimpsests of Antigone*.

21 The Criminal Justice Act of 1984 is available online at irishstatutebook.ie.

22 Mathews, *The Antigone*, 1.

who has performed her role on a loop for the past three millennia. She and a troupe of actors gather on stage to give their farewell performance. The writer sought to emphasize a sense of ideological disorientation, a sense of the protagonist's not-belonging. To this end, the cast suffers from amnesia, and they have no clear notion of space and time in their meta-theatrical no-man's land:

> It seemed an excellent idea to collapse the stage space, blur the line of demarcation between actor and audience and thereby achieve a moment of deconstruction, of reciprocal leakage from one sanitized area to another. Besides we had a warrant from the play itself: "Antigone" does not just mean anti-violence; it also means anti-theatre.[23]

Written and produced as a critique of systematic institutional violence and neoliberal capitalist oppression during the epoch of the anti-revolutionary zeitgeist in a language reflective of the savage and fragmentary nature of human action, Mathews' *Antigone* is essentially an anti-tragedy and an anti-play. Mathews was influenced by the ideological bewilderment expressed in the Theater of the Absurd, surrealism, and the work of Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco,[24] Franz Kafka, Jean Anouilh, Luigi Pirandello, Dario Fo, and Judith Malina. Above all, he is critically indebted to post-structuralism, cultural anthropology, and theology, for his is an *Antigone* of postmodern conjectural antagonisms. In the Brechtian sense of theater as a practice of dialectics, it is a play that is both political and philosophical, written on the limits of a farce, agitprop satire, and the tragic. It is also a play that emerges against the backdrop of working-class struggles and cataclysmic political, environmental, and historical traumas of the twentieth century.

Cognizant of Brecht's and Anouilh's versions of the tragedy, Scott sought to "recuperate the text from tradition and to renew the hysteria and crisis of the primal plot so that the Theban site could host a thermonuclear scene."[25] Antigone is imagined as a

23 Mathews, "The Antigone," 18.

24 In his *Rhinoceros*, Ionesco criticizes blind allegiance to totalitarian ideologies like Nazism and communism by alluding to the atrocities committed by both the Nazi and Soviet regimes. At the conclusion of the play and in a posthumanist framework, Ionesco has one last man who survives on Earth and resists metamorphosing into an animal in the form of a rhinoceros.

25 Mathews, "Aidan and Antigone," 18.

hypochondriac resident of the proletariat's slums and a member of a degenerate acting troupe. Her classical, aristocratic (white, European, Western) figure has become a commodity. A proletarian actor now, she has been performing the same role for millennia in a post-nuclear contaminated prison state located in Thebes/ Dublin. Peteokles (Eteocles) is a bourgeois-turned-rebel mediary. Polyneikes (Polynices) is remembered as a communist terrorist who has been airbrushed from the records of the police state. A bibliophile Ismene religiously reads leftist texts such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), and the Chorus is the real state oppressor.[26]

Solzhenitsyn's autobiographical narrative is woven into the fabric of *The Antigone's* production, helping it confront the collective historical legacies of political systems based on necropower, the central motif of which is the concentration camp. The organic Gulag-like habitat of the post-apocalyptic, post-World War II, polluted Thebes/Dublin is constructed around the imaginary of progress, humanism, and democracy. To paraphrase Cornelius Castoriadis, this transforms Thebes/Dublin into a tragic biopolitical regime.[27] In such an environment, military surveillance and the kinds of thought control associated with carceral enclosures are, in the universe of the play, suffered by indignant neo-proletarians of the late twentieth century (BC).[28] As a trope for the knowledge systems, technologies, networks, and mechanisms akin to this type of inhuman continuum, Antigone is metamorphosed into an inmate who

26 Russian Nobel-Laureate writer, Soviet dissident, and Soviet Gulag prisoner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008) documents abject life in the Soviet prison camp system in his historical memoir *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), which he wrote between 1958 and 1968. An outspoken critic of communism, he fought to raise global awareness of political repression in the USSR by exposing the Gulag system. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the three-volume opus was officially published in Russia in the 1980s, outraging the Soviet authorities. The writer lost his Soviet citizenship rights and found refuge in Germany, Switzerland, and then in the US, where he taught at Stanford University. In West Germany, Solzhenitsyn stayed in Heinrich Böll's house, another writer who was inspired by *Antigone* in his work and who lived in Ireland. In 1990, he returned to Russia with his citizenship fully restored after the dissolution of the Soviet Union to remain there until his death in 2008.

27 Castoriadis, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary," 112.

28 On "carceral archipelago" and carceral society more broadly, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, esp. 333.

speaks as if history has reached a point of forced interruption. The torture of the community consists of perpetually surviving atrocities and reliving their suffering and auto-extinction.[29] Mathews' play features arrests, show trials, slave labor, camp rebellions, passive uprisings, strikes, and internments to the neoliberal panopticon, the Western Gulag of the late twentieth century, looking back at a history of inherited humanist ideals.

Along the way, reflecting the fate of female victims of fascism (past and present), Antigone's examination of her *moira* ("destiny") of internal exile epitomizes the rift between revolt and gender oppression while detailing the commonplace events in the life of a prisoner. Antigone despairs because her brother Polyneices, who lurks in folk memory illegally, has been reduced to a non-person. He has been assassinated and buried somewhere by the secret police, he is one of the "disappeared." Moreover, Creon, *il Presidente*, has erased his name from state documents. His identity has suffered a *damnatio memoriae*; there is no official photograph of him, no body to bury, no trace left.[30]

Solzhenitsyn traces the root of all evil to ideological fanaticism. He writes:

> Ideology – that is what gives evildoing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps make […] acts seem good instead of bad […] That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis, by race; and the Jacobins (early and late), by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations […] Without evildoers there would have been no Archipelago.[31]

"Ideology" is responsible for the sprawling network of totalitarian terror through Nazi racism and the Leninist or Stalinist interpretations and implementations of Marxism. Totalitarian zealotry and ideologues rest on the power to implement destructive policies as a vision of a

29 Castoriadis has discussed briefly and suggestively the effects of *monos phronein* ("being wise alone") upon the community in the tragedy of *Antigone*, presenting it as a test case in the complexity of the dialectics inherent in collective life. Castoriadis, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary," 112.

30 Remoundou-Howley, *Palimpsests of Antigone*.

31 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 77.

so-called rational Eden, a redemptive humanist utopia that potentially becomes a force of radical evil.[32] Such ideas are keenly operative in Mathews' *Antigone*. Via Sophocles' *Antigone*, Girard's philosophy, and Solzhenitsyn's novel, Mathews stands opposed to communist and religious dogmatism. Instead, he may be seen to recognize the destruction of individual qua individual in posthumanist terms.

MATHEWS' GIRARD'S ANTIGONE

Girard's philosophical formulations and their impact on Mathews' *Antigone* are rich and complex and require the space of an essay of their own. We know, however, that Girard's teachings were essential to Mathews at this time because he said as much in an interview. He felt that Girard, under whom he studied several myths, had "a new teaching, which he offered with authority."[33] During the play, a "Pogrom Note" (in place of a Program Note) was handed out to members of the audience, along with copies of the controversial Justice Bill. The play was, according to Mathews, "a study of martyric energies" and biopolitical abjection.[34] At the end of the tragedy, Creon is alone, a "half-demented witness to a casual massacre."[35] Drawing inspiration from Girard's theory of "mimetic desire" and "scapegoat mechanism," Mathews mobilizes a posthumanist agenda regarding structural exclusions and systems of violence that is thoroughly anti--revolutionary.[36] In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987), Girard responds to Simone Weil's interpretation of *Antigone* as a precursor of Jesus in antiquity.[37] He writes about mimesis and desire in anthropological and largely anti-Marxist or anti-Freudian terms. In brief, Gerard felt that Antigone, as a proto-Christ figure, reveals collective hatred and the false difference – the presentation

32 See, e.g., Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, esp. 470; 458.

33 Jones, "Cognizant of the Past," 97.

34 Girard discusses Sophocles' *Antigone* in his *Violence and the Sacred*, incl. 303, 293; *Job, the Victim of his People*, passim but esp. 86, 113–114; and *Things Hidden*, 244–245. See also Mathews' essay, included in an edition celebrating Girard's thought, "Knowledge of Good and Evil," 17–28.

35 "Pogrom Note," 1984.

36 Girard theorizes on the notion of "mimetic desire" in "Mimetic Desire in the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky." Spatially, the underground metaphor can be transferred to Antigone's cave in Sophocles and in Mathews' interrogation room, where the tragedy is sealed.

37 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 244–245; Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Greeks*, chapter 3.

of unanimous persecution – as the foundation of humanity.[38] This is in striking contrast to Ireland's historical genealogies, which, since the Irish Civil War and the Easter Rising, increasingly demonstrated a proclivity for nationalist martyrdom. From the 1960s onwards in Northern Ireland, a legitimate, nonviolent civil rights movement was catalytic in castigating the visceral reign of the IRA against the Catholic population of the region while protecting human rights.

THE ANTIGONE (1984) IN CONTEXT

Discussions about *Antigone* for Dublin's Project Art Centre stage began when Ronald Reagan (the US president at the time) visited Dublin as part of his Irish tour. Mathews recalls: "It was oddly prophetic. The whole area in Dublin Castle had been cordoned off. We spent the day walking empty streets."[39] Reagan called the Soviet Union an evil empire that would be left on the "ash heap of history." The anti-communist Thatcher, too, was fearful of the Soviets, whom she described in 1976 as being "bent on world dominance."[40] During his visit, Reagan claimed his direct Irish ancestry dated back to the period of the legendary Brian Boru.[41] The four-day visit of Reagan, described by Ronal O'Leary as a "pollution of our shores" (*Hot Press* 1984), involved, among other things, a trip to his ancestral home in the small town of Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary. He addressed a joint session of the *Dáil* (Lower House of Parliament) and Senate in Dublin, during which he stated that US policy was not to interfere in matters relating to Northern Ireland. However, he criticized the violence in the region and supported the *New Ireland Forum*, a report established to discuss ways of restoring peace and political stability in Ireland, North and South. Despite his support, the visit caused a storm among intellectual and leftist circles, precipitating protests. The 1984 Irish demonstrations protested against US foreign policy, particularly Reagan's backing of the Contras in Nicaragua and Honduras, as well as his political coalition and friendship with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, whose stance toward Irish politics and social matters had proved provocatively rigid.

38 Gerard, *Things Hidden*, 244–245. For discussion, see also Coillie, "Antigone," esp. 92–93.

39 Anon., "Getting Away from Heroes and Villains."

40 Thatcher, "Britain Awake: Speech at Kensington Town Hall."

41 References to Brian Boru can be found in the old texts and chronicles *Annals of Tigemach*, *Annals of Ulter*, and *Brjáns saga*. Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig (941–April 23, 1014) was the first and only High King of Ireland. For further reading, see Chatterton Newman, *Brian Boru: King of Ireland*.

Mathews' *Antigone* was staged with the notoriously political corpse of the imprisoned Northern Irish hunger striker Francis Hughes (1956–1981) in the forefront of Irish minds.[42] Since Hughes died in the custody of the sovereign British state, his body, like Casement's before him, was held by the enemy (this time Thatcher's England). *The Antigone* appeared just three years after the 1981 hunger strike when ten republican inmates of the H-Blocks had starved themselves to death to protest the British government's attempts to impose a criminalization policy within the Northern Irish prison system denying republicans the status of political prisoners. Their deaths led to riots in Northern Ireland.

An integral aspect of the movement's ideology entailed the reanimation of a discourse of martyrdom whereby famous republican heroes and martyrs of the past served in the struggle for independence that would lead to a united Ireland, north and south. Mathews' text, attuned to these historical and ethical intricacies, employs the rebellious gestures of civil disobedience, mourning, and death as acts of defiance against autocratic rule, economic, ideological, and religious. However, the idolatry of martyrs cannot hold insofar as the chain of violence and scapegoating persists. Revolt gives way to hubris with the enunciation of fanaticism, terrorism, and totalitarianism.

In Mathews' version, the streets of a pandemic-stricken Thebes/Dublin are littered with weapons, burned-out jeeps, bazooka shells, and ash. At the same time, the streets reverberate with the political and social unrest of the previous century. "The immediate location of the play is vaguely post-nuclear: It could be Stalingrad in 1943; St. Petersburg in 1917, Nagasaki in 1945; any shattered culture."[43] The character of Heman (Haemon), in military dress, forces the Chorus into submission from the first act signaling the end of history: "We have an opportunity to collapse History […] To begin all over. To resume time. To step out of the soiled clothing

42 Seamus Heaney wrote his version of *Antigone*, *The Burial at Thebes*, in 2004, with Hughes' case in mind. In his article "Title Deeds: Translating a Classic," Heaney argues: "But before the remains of the deceased could be removed that evening from Toome, they had first to be removed from a prison some thirty or forty miles away. And for that first leg of the journey the security forces deemed it necessary to take charge and to treat the body effectively as state property. The living man had, after all, been in state custody as a terrorist and a murderer, a criminal lodged in Her Majesty's Prison at the Maze, better known in Northern Ireland as the H Blocks." Ibid., 122.

43 Anon., "Getting Away from Heroes and Villains," 18.

of culture."[44] Such interrupting accords the state with the role of the oppressor of the people, the tyrant of the masses. Likewise, Mathews' state ruler is a dictator, and Antigone performs her anarchic revolt in a hegemonic environment of law-making and law-preserving. Antigone's example enacts doubting the legitimacy of manmade laws, "whose origin," as Leroux writes, "remains unknown, unattributable, and undecidable."[45] Embodying a posthuman feminist claim rather than a mere material apparatus emanating from a strictly unitary classical (therefore humanist) perspective, Antigone's agency both resists and embraces her persistent extinction – cultural, literary, ontological, or biopolitical – as an act of revolt. In a predominantly post-industrial, post-anthropocentric age of militarized "surveillance capitalism,"[46] she survives beyond the human and despite the monolithic humanist category of the figure of "Man" as a *zoe*-driven paradox.[47] Antigone resists her species and survives her death. Hence, as an ecofeminist subject, Mathews' version of *Antigone* is written in direct opposition to multiple sites of oppression, providing expanded scrutiny of the intricate workings of bio/necropower. Under these terms, it encompasses a series of forms of resistance.

As Christopher Murrey writes:

> Mathews takes the postmodern position that *Antigone* is an ongoing drama, a script built on other scripts, a script that only seems to have a conclusion, and in its application to Irish life, a script which uses the stage space as a metaphor for the vacuum which echoes back the cries of unheeded repression, in what has already been termed the "Uncertain Eighties."[48]

The play thus draws attention to a time of ethical and socio-political contingencies marked by a bipolar distinction between human exceptionalism and dehumanized others in both Irish and transnational contexts.

44 Mathews, *The Antigone*, 5.

45 Leroux, "Communal Blood, Fraternal Blood," 163.

46 Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

47 I use the term *zoe* here in the context of Rosi Braidotti's theorization of the *zoe*--oriented lines of inquiry in the Humanities currently as a critical posthuman politics of life. See Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism*, 134–139.

48 Murrey, "Three Irish Antigones," 128.

ANTIGONE V. CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL

The Antigone responds to a number of heated social issues and working-class struggles, which remained insoluble and marked the "crashing defeat for liberal opinion."[49] "This was the year," as Murrey explains, "of the New Ireland Forum Report; […] the year of the Kerry Babies' Case; the year after the failure of the abortion debate and the year before its sequel, the debate on divorce among others."[50]

The overtly militant stance of American and Soviet powers that are inextricably linked to these tensions are acutely reflected in Mathew's *Antigone*. On an international level, this is the time following the Soviet War in Afghanistan when Reagan supported counterinsurgencies in third-world regions while denouncing the Soviet Union and its ideology. Within a human rights framework, the play serves as an anti-imperialist critique of US politics and simultaneously resists a specific legislative order with the passing of the Irish Criminal Justice Bill of 1984. Drawing its political and cultural force from posthumanism, the play-version both contains and enacts the debate marked, according to Rosi Braidotti, by three momentous and interconnected shifts in the Anthropocene:

> First, at the social level we witness increasing structural injustices through the unequal distribution of wealth, prosperity and access to technology. Second, at the environmental level we are confronted with the devastation of species and a decaying planet, struck by climate crisis and new epidemics. And third, at the technological level, the status and condition of the human is being redefined by the life sciences and genomics, neural sciences and robotics, nanotechnologies, the new information technologies, and the digital interconnections they afford us.[51]

In locating one of the most emblematic Greek tragedies of the humanist tradition at the crossroads of the posthuman in modern Catholic Ireland, it is important to read Mathews' *Antigone* as a quintessentially decolonial effort to identify the historical conditions of the emergence of a critically anti-classical re-cognition. In this critical post-Marxist and post-Christian light, in his own writings almost four decades ago,

49 Murrey, "Three Irish Antigones," 129.

50 Ibid.

51 Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism*, 3–4.

Mathews anticipates the posthumanist turn of the classical tradition in the late twentieth century:

> *Antigone,* like all the major tragedies of the Greek canon, exists in cowed form. It had been sedated by its own stature. The harm of its art has been drained from it. As a result, it's suffered a sea change, a fate worse than death; it has become a classic. There are a great many reasons why this is a shame. For one thing, *Antigone* subverts the very notion of a classic, if by classic we understand the text which inscribes the meaning of history – and indeed, the history of meanings – in a fashion approved by ruling parties through their deputies in the Departments of English. *Antigone*, in fact, is the record of a refusal on the part of an individual to assent to such practices. Creon attempts to manipulate narrative, to found a text, to write a classic.[52]

Mathews' critical strain thus reflects the period's multiple crises in Ireland and globally. The early 1980s in Ireland were a time of political and socioeconomic instability. The Troubles continued in the North of Ireland, with the Hunger Strikes causing severe unrest through 1981, the year that forty-eight people died and nearly two hundred were injured in a fire at the Stardust Ballroom in Artane, Dublin. On an international level, the first part of the decade was dominated politically by Reagan and Gorbachev, culminating with the collapse of the Soviet Union and of Communist rule in Eastern Europe. Without losing faith in its leftist leanings, Mathews' *Antigone* condemns a history of violence that is law-preserving, for it "expound[s] its relation to law and justice" as a threatening force.[53] Without fundamentally denouncing it, Mathews' work is also critical of communist ideology and its legacy, utopian revolutions, totalitarian regimes, and the abuse of law. For this, police repression, state surveillance, and carceral systems of oppression are the focus of his *Antigone*. Above all, it is a critique of the promise of the New Man of humanism, the inherited tradition from which *Antigone*, law, and the foundation of human rights spring.

The central matter of contention he interrogates deals with the passing of the Criminal Justice Act,[54] the rigid Bill that provided

52 Mathews, "The Antigone," 18.

53 Benjamin, Critique of Violence, 277.

54 "This Bill, introduced in Dáil Éireann on 17 October 1983, had caused enormous controversy and was vehemently opposed by Irish liberals, because it purports to limit the rights of suspects and to increase the powers of the Garda Síochána. It had been passed in the Dáil on 5 July 1984, but [had] not [been passed] by the

"certain new powers" to the Garda Síochána (Irish police force). Among issues such as abolition and the death penalty, the part of the Act containing specific stipulations for "detaining persons for the purpose of questioning them" without trial for forty-eight hours "for anything that [the police] deemed to be a criminal activity to do with the security of the state,"[55] had particularly close resonances with Sophocles' *Antigone*. The provisions of this stringent legislation implied the "subsequent erosion" (and erasure) of Irish rights tied with the motif of the erosion and erasure of the citizens' identities in the play.[56] Seeking to reclaim their traces, like Antigone does when she perseveres in looking for her disappeared brother, is a source of constant struggle. What is more, her claim is an act of revolt. The specific stipulation of the law at the time, which was overtly a reaction to terrorism, opposes what Jacques Derrida terms the "ideological capturing of the trace" in his *Spectres of Marx*.[57] Polyneikes' disappeared corpse, like Casement's and Kent's in the past, continues to haunt and challenge the living. The memory of the decaying body that, in its elision, preserves its enduring phantasmagorical presence becomes the source of pollution. The mourning community, thus, afflicted by this non-appearance, is traumatized because there is no closure, no body to bury:

> As in the work of mourning, after trauma, the conjuration has to make sure that the dead will not come back; quick do whatever is needed to keep the cadaver localized, in a safe place decomposing right where it was inhumed, or even embalmed as they liked to do in Moscow.[58]

Compelled to recover the body of her brother, Antigone devotes herself to a hopeless quest for the missing remains of Poly. She is a "woman standing outside a police station in a city whose name she cannot remember, looking for her brother." As a metonymic ritual of mourning and rebellion, she writes the letter P on the city walls. The secret police seek to arrest the dissident while painting over Antigone's graffiti to erase her traces. Mathews explains:

Senate." (It passed both Houses of the Oireachtas on November 28, 1984). See Murrey, "Three Irish Antigones," 128.

55 ECHR 328; Jones, "Cognizant of the Past," 105.

56 Roche, "Ireland's Antigones," 230.

57 Derrida, "What is Ideology?"

58 Ibid.

> They're part of the vocabulary of institutional violence everywhere […] merely echoes of what exists. And indeed, there's a more explicit antecedent […], because there is a famous photograph of Trotsky in which he has been removed, if you look over the platform.[59]

Antigone's disappearance (or recurrent extinction) at the final act and the erasure of Polyneikes from the state records of the totalitarian city can be read as tropes for the Disappeared, the Irish civilians who were abducted, murdered and buried in secret places during the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

The play's intertextual and meta-theatrical methodology, in synergy with Antigone's corporeal memory and performative extinction, were enacted through a series of gestures of dramatic defiance. While the audience members entered the Project Arts Centre site, a multi-tasking one-man Chorus was roaming around the stage, dressed in a military uniform reminiscent of a Gestapo officer holding a Dictaphone that played classical music interspersed with agitprop, putting up posters with messages such as "Hear no Evil," "See no Evil," "Speak No Evil," "Loose Talk Costs Lives," "Think Yes," and pinning photos of war dead, refugees, and lovers.

CONCLUSION

In one of his interviews, Mathews said that he had seen his first performance of *Antigone* in Athens after the dictator Papadopoulos' arrest: "The Athenians were booing the colonels, but I knew that as soon as they came out of this nonviolence play, they would go out and beat up policemen."[60] In its evocation of Brechtian communist affiliations and proletarian art, Mathews' treatment of *Antigone* reiterates a genealogy of Antigones of the Greek left, such as those by Aris Alexandrou (1951)[61] and Yiannis Ritsos.[62] Departing from a post-World War II framework, communist writer Alexandrou wrote his version in Greece while detained as a political prisoner between 1949–1951 on the island of Ai Stratis.

59 Jones, "Cognizant of the Past," 98. See also King, *The Commissar Vanishes*, for censoring of Soviet photographs.

60 Mathews, "Aidan and Antigone in Athens," *The Irish Press*.

61 See Van Steen, "The Antigone of Aris Alexandrou."

62 On Ritsos, see Pourgouris, "Yannis Ritsos, Marxist Dialectics."

Incapable of revolutionary action to topple the oppressors, in this instance, the capitalist or militarist regime of Thebes, class distinctions leading to prosperity and justice fail to be abolished. Antigone is more of a petty bourgeois who plays her role in return for her glory. The rag-proletarians remain dominant: Chorus, Chora, and the Guard are all part of a retrograde class that oppresses Antigone. The irreconcilable conflict is enacted between myth and culture, the past and the present, history and modernity, fiction and realism. The sisterly "autadelphon" is transformed into a childish sibling competition between Antigone and Ismene. What is more, Antigone has become a commodity. Her surplus value consists in her exhausting acting part of the oppressed martyr for three millennia.

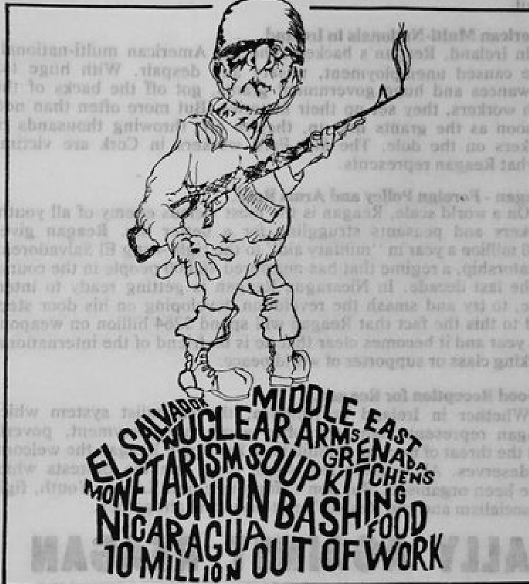
However, Antigone's solitary defiance does not result in revolutionary triumph and the liberation of the masses. Before she disappears from the play-within-the-play in the Gulag, she is punished with her arrest and incarceration at a psychiatric hospital to be ideologically rehabilitated in the carceral archipelago of Thebes/Dublin. Echoing the myriad disappearances of other Antigones, such as Dominik Smole's Slovenian one (1960),[63] Aho and Doretti's "Desaparecidos" in Argentina and Cyprus, Mathews is cynical about capitalist societies, hierarchies of class, and social inequalities. As the play draws to its open-ended conclusion, Antigone's incarceration irrevocably thwarts the possibilities of a heroic class struggle or a revolutionary uprising. However, "*Antigones* don't really exist, but their heroism, small and local, exists in martial law Poland, in Greenham Common, in Argentina, everywhere."[64] The play ends with Heman uttering the last word. He is certain Antigone is still alive despite her absence from the stage. She is "lost and found"; rumors of her being in Munich and Kharkiv are spoken by the characters. She achieves fame in her absence.[65] Antigone's supposed disappearance can be read as the symbolic documentation of the destitution and emotional degradation suffered by post-Soviet society as a site where the memory of a traumatic history becomes an allegory of social and economic malaise. The downfall of the Soviet empire prefigures the downfall of any totalitarian regime and testifies to the misery endured before, during, and after such a downfall. Against all odds, Antigone's meta-theatrical departure creates certain expectations and possibilities of a deferred *catharsis yet to come* in an endured return of potential revolt, an upsetting of the biopolitical order.

63 Inkret, "Images from Slovenian Dramatic and Theatrical Interpretations of Ancient Drama," 99–109.

64 Mathews, "Aidan and Antigone in Athens."

65 Jones, "Cognizant of the Past," 107.

Not wanted



Reagan and the system he represents has put 10 million Americans on the dole, while 32 million live in poverty. The same parasites who are responsible for 214,000 unemployed in this country - big business, Fine Gael, Fianna Fail - welcome Reagan. Labour Youth is opposed to the visit and all that Reagan stands for.

LABOUR YOUTH

Campaign against Reagan

Fig. 1: Labour Youth Campaign poster campaigning against Ronald Reagan's visit to Ireland in 1984 (Irish Political Ephemera digital archive).

Fig. 2: Mass demonstrations in Dublin (*The Irish Times* Photographic Archive).

VOICE of REVOLUTION

20p

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE!

MARXIST-LENINIST WEEKL'

Vol.8 No17 Sept 5 1984 — In continuation of RED PATRIOT

ORGAN OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND (MARXIST-LENINIST)

MASS MOBILISATION TO STOP THE FASCIST CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL!

The weekend of September 14th/16th sees Days of Action being organised to mobilise the masses of democratic people against the Criminal Justice Bill as it comes before the new session of the Dail.

"Voice of Revolution" calls on the working class and all democratic people to participate militantly in this important struggle in defence of the democratic rights and judicial liberties , which the Irish people fought so hard to establish in the past, at the cost of so many generations of self-sacrifice, and which the national traitors of today -- all the bourgeois parties in the "Free " State Dail, both government and opposition, are striving to abolish with this new draconian bill.

The bourgeoisie - as represented by all these parties, whether Fine Gael, Labour, Fianna Fail or Workers' Party - have spent recent years in constant propaganda efforts to whip up hysteria that : "Some-

Contd on P.2 - CJB

MAJOR FASCIST MEASURES OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL :

1) The Bill is designed to deprive the people of the right to be considered and treated as innocent until proven guilty. The Bill gives gardai unrestricted powers of arrest on the sole basis of "reasonable suspicion" against the citizen, in the case of "serious offences", and abolished the obligation of the gardai to lay definite charges to justify arrest.

2) This Bill is designed to deprive people of many existing rights while under arrest and during interrogation, in particular by abolishing the "right to silence"; and this measure still applies (even after amendements) to "suspicion of committing serious offences ", despite the government's deceptive claims about the amendments. In addition, the gardai are given a carte blanche to exercise duress, from threats to torture, to extract signatures to false statements, as well as providing the inducement of immunity for the accused where he/she is prepared to inform on others - in other words inducement to perjury as is the case in the current informer cases of British colonialism in the north.

3) The Bill is to deprive defendents of many existing rights during trial, for instance by ending the existing "benefit of the doubt" by abolishing the necessity for unanimous jury verdicts, and substituting majority verdicts, as well as giving the state prosecution new rights of access to the defence case prior to the trial, such as alibis, which stacks court procedure still more strongly in favour of the state and against the individual defendent.

4) The Bill provides for still more severe jail sentences etc. including mandatory sentences for certain "serious offences", than the already severe penalties .

PROGRAMME OF MASS MOBILISATION

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 14th -- Trade Union DAY OF ACTION throughout26 Counties

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 15th - DAY OF MASS PROTEST throughout 26 counties

11am -- Pickets on local garda stations

2.30 pm DUBLIN DEMONSTRATION assembles at Store Street Garda Stn. by Busaras, for march via Pearse Street Garda Station to conclude at Mountjoy Jail.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16th -- Dublin Inner City "Festival of Freedom".

Fig. 3: Front cover of the *Voice of Revolution* (issued by the Communist Party of Ireland, Marxist-Leninist Week, Sept. 5, 1984, Dublin, Ireland).

Fig. 4: Olwen Fouéré and David Heap (photo: Amelia Stein).

Fig. 5: Posters on the wall of Dublin’s Project Arts Centre, 1984 (photo: Amelia Stein).

Fig. 6: Antigone (Olwen Fouéré) and the Chorus (Manix Flynn). *Antigone* by Aidan C. Mathews, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 1984 (photo: Amelia Stein).

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ABSTRACT

Antigone's afterlives in Ireland have always enacted critical gestures of social protest and mourning that expose the fundamental fragility of human rights caught up in the symbolic conflict between oppressors and oppressed. This paper seeks to explore the scope of rereading certain Irish figurations of *Antigone* – the exemplary text of European humanism – through a posthumanist lens that unveils new and radical understandings of modern injustices, legal fissures, and capitalist insinuations of an "inhuman politics" against proletarian minorities in twentieth-century Irish society in transnational contexts. The possibilities of a posthumanist theorization of *Antigone* at the intersection with gender, class, and human rights, reflect the connecting threads, political, aesthetic, and critical, between two texts: an early twentieth-century anonymous poem titled "The Prison Graves" dedicated to Irish human rights activist and revolutionary Roger Casement and an unpublished play-version of *Antigone* by Aidan C. Mathews in 1984, dedicated to René Girard. Written and produced as a critique of systematic institutional violence and neoliberal capitalist oppression during the epoch of the anti-revolutionary zeitgeist, the myth of *Antigone* shifts its dialectic from the nationalist nostalgia of "The Prison Graves" to the play-version of the Cold War era to reciprocate a counter-protest against the passing of the Irish Justice Bill. Antigone is reimagined as a hypochondriac resident of the slums of the proletariat and a member of a degenerate acting troupe. Her classical (mythical), aristocratic (white, European, Western) figure has become a posthuman commodity: a proletarian actor now, she performs the same role for millennia in a post-nuclear contaminated prison state in Thebes/Dublin. Peteokles is a bourgeois-turned-rebel mediary; Polyneikes is remembered as a communist terrorist who has been airbrushed from the records of the police state; a bibliophile Ismene religiously reads Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago,* and the Chorus is the real state oppressor.

KEYWORDS: Antigone, posthumanism, Irish history, Irish drama, human rights, gender, class

Posthumanistične in irske Antigone: Pravice, upor, izumrtje

IZVLEČEK

Nachleben pri Antigoni je na Irskem vedno kritična gesta družbenega protesta in žalovanja, ki razkriva temeljno krhkost človekovih pravic, ujetih v simbolni konflikt med zatiralci in zatiranimi. Namen tega prispevka je raziskati obseg ponovnega branja nekaterih irskih upodobitev Antigone – eksemplaričnega besedila evropskega humanizma – skozi posthumanistično prizmo, ki razkriva nova in radikalna razumevanja sodobnih krivic, pravnih razpok in kapitalističnih insinuacij »nečloveške politike« proti proletarskim manjšinam v irski družbi dvajsetega stoletja v transnacionalnih kontekstih. Možnosti za posthumanistično teoretizacijo Antigone na presečišču spolov, razredov in človekovih pravic odražajo politične, estetske in kritiške vezi med dvema besediloma: anonimno pesmijo z začetka dvajsetega stoletja z naslovom »Zaporniški grobovi«, posvečeno irskemu borcu za človekove pravice in revolucionarju Rogerju Casementu, ter neobjavljeno dramsko različico *Antigone* Aidana C. Mathewsa iz leta 1984, ki je posvečena Renéju Girardu. Mit o Antigoni, napisan in uprizorjen kot kritika sistematičnega institucionalnega nasilja in neoliberalnega kapitalističnega zatiranja v obdobju protirevolucionarnega duha, preide v dialektiki od nacionalistične nostalgije pesmi »Zaporniški grobovi« k igrani verziji iz obdobja hladne vojne, ki je odziv na protest proti sprejetju irskega zakona o pravosodju. Antigona je na novo predstavljena kot hipohondrična prebivalka proletarskega sluma in članica degenerirane igralske skupine. Njena klasična (mitska) in aristokratska (bela, evropska, zahodna) figura je postala posthumano blago: zdaj kot proletarska igralka že tisočletja igra isto vlogo v postnuklearni kontaminirani zaporniški državi v Tebah/Dublinu. Peteokles je meščanski posrednik, ki se je spremenil v upornika; Polinejka se spominjajo kot komunističnega terorista, ki so ga izbrisali iz evidenc policijske države; bibliofilska Ismena z versko predanostjo bere *Arhipelag Gulag* Aleksandra Solženicina, Zbor pa je resnični državni zatiralec.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Antigona, posthumanizem, irska zgodovina, irska drama, človekove pravice, spol, razred

Athens, the view of Acropolis from the Areopagus – Franc Žužek, Matija Pogorelec, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Primož Simoniti.

Athens, the view of Lycabettus Hill from the Areopagus – Primož Simoniti, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Franc Žužek, Matija Pogorelec.

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Five-Year Plans, Explorers, Luniks, and Socialist Humanism: Anton Sovre and His Blueprint for Classics in Slovenia

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About a year before the pandemic struck, personal archives of Anton Sovre (1885–1963), the doyen of Slovenian classicists in the postwar period, were rediscovered and eventually made their way to the National and University Library in Ljubljana.[1] During the fifties, Anton Sovre was an inspiring professor at the University of Ljubljana[2] and a member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Among the new sources now available to researchers is an essay on the Prospective Development of Classical Philology from 1959. The document was written in the course of preparation for the Third Yugoslav Five-Year Plan (1961–1965), or the "prospective plan," *perspektivni plan*, as the project was called in contemporary lingo – written because every discipline had to provide one, but destined to remain, as Tacitus would say, *in arto et inglorius labor*, while failing to touch the hearts and minds of the decision-makers.

The original five-year plans for developing the national economy of the USSR consisted of a series of nationwide centralized economic

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1 I am grateful to the head of the Manuscript Department at the National and University Library in Ljubljana, Marijan Rupert, and his colleagues, who kindly assisted my work with these documents even though they have not yet been cataloged.

2 Smolej, "Filozofska fakulteta (1919–1971)," 64 ff.

plans, 13 in total. In the 1920s, there was a debate between Bukharin's followers on the one hand and Trotsky's supporters on the other. The former group considered that the existing economic policies provided sufficient state control of the economy and sufficient development. The latter argued in favor of more rapid development and greater state control.[3] The plans focused on the economy, but science and scholarship were also put on a planned basis.[4]

These five-year plans outlined programs for vast increases in the output of all sorts of industrial goods. However, the output levels planned were "usually wide of the mark" – and more importantly, they were wide of the mark "in ways that became familiar to all involved."[5] After the communists gained power in Yugoslavia in 1945, they copied the idea immediately. The First Five-Year Plan was prepared for the years 1947–1952. Its objectives were to overcome economic and technological backwardness, strengthen economic and military power, enhance and develop the socialist sector of the country, and narrow the gap in economic development among regions.[6]

Significant effort was made to communicate this strategy to the impressionable masses. It is difficult to pick *unum ex multis*. But it might suffice to give an example: the assiduous book of encouraging poems about the endeavor, *Long Live Tito's Plan* by the Croatian poet Ferdo Škrljac, published by Farmers' Unity in 1947, alone included no less than 34 rhythmical masterworks along the following lines:

Mi, borci iz rata,
Pozdravljamo Tita,
Naša pjesma rada
Slavi novi dan.
S lica nam se radost
Zrcali i čita,
Jer smo opet borci
U bitki za Plan!

3 For the details of this transition, see Cook, "Party and Workers in the Soviet First Five-Year Plan," 327–51.

4 For a contemporary overview, see Brožek, "Current Five-Year Plan of Soviet Science," 391 ff.

5 Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of Soviet Economy*, 27.

6 Prezidij ljudske skupščine LRS, "Zakon o petletnem planu … v letih 1947 do 1951."

We, fighters from war,
Send greetings to Tito,
The song of our work
Now hails the new man.
As joy is reflected
From each of our faces,
We are once again fighters,
We fight for the Plan![7]

Despite all the good intentions, the First Yugoslav Five-Year Plan followed suit of the wildly overambitious First Soviet Five-Year Plan. Both were based on the naive paraphrase of Karl Marx as formulated by Party activists in 1927: "Our task is not to study the economy but to change it."[8] Instead of rising, Soviet consumption collapsed, resulting in disastrous famines. While the results of Yugoslav economists were not as horrific as the ones achieved by their Soviet mentors, the country was soon to become acquainted with the economic problems that would eventually become chronic. These included significant foreign debt, low labor productivity, and inefficient use of capital.

This is where the protagonist comes into the picture. Anton Sovre (1885–1963) was a school inspector with the reputation of being an outstanding translator.[9] Before the war, he published translations from Plato (1923 and 1929), Apuleius (1925), Sophocles (1922) and Euripides (1923), Seneca (1927), Marcus Aurelius (1934), Augustine (1932), and Horace (1934–35). His productivity increased during the war and exploded afterward; he translated a selection from the Pre-Socratics (1946), Lucian's *Satires* (1946), the complete works of Homer (1951), substantial selections from Plutarch (1950 and 1959), Plato (1955 and 1960), Herodotus (1953–1955), Plautus (1954), Aeschylus (1963), Sophocles (1962), Euripides (1960), Erasmus (1952), Theophrastus (1971, posthumously), and the Greek lyrical poets (1964, posthumously).[10]

Unlike several other Slovenian classicists,[11] Sovre was not considered a threat by the Communist powers that be. He knew how to talk up

7 Škrljac, *Živio Titov plan*, 5.

8 Hunter, "The Overambitious First Soviet Five-Year Plan," 255. For this homage to Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, Hunter is citing Stanislav G. Strumilin, "Industrializaciya SSSR i jepigony narodnichestva," 10.

9 His youth and education were analyzed by Kristan, "Anton Sòvre in Anton Sovrè," in 2021. His approach to translation was evaluated by Gantar, "Sovretov prevajalski ideal," in 1986.

10 For a detailed bibliography, see Gerlanc, "Bibliografija Antona Sovreta."

11 See Movrin, "Classics in Postwar Secondary Education."

his relatively uneventful conduct during the war and make himself a bit of a silent hero. In the archives of the Central Committee, one can still find his autobiography, with a charming description of what he did – or perhaps did not do – during the occupation: "I was an 'activist without a function,'" he wrote in the questionnaire. "Apart from propaganda, my work was mainly in suppressing faintheartedness among comrades and strengthening their will to persist, advancing passive resistance, defending or covering for teachers and professors who were suspected or charged, etc."[12] The same archives have preserved his *karakteristika*, or character evaluation, written by a Party member for the Party, which duly stressed the facts that mattered: "He did not sign the infamous memorandum against Communism and the Partisan movement. Even today, we may count him among the positives, despite his not being politically active because of his professional work."[13]

Sovre was one of the representatives of the country's literary life chosen to publish their welcoming compositions in the newspaper printed on May 9, 1945,[14] the day the Partisan army entered Ljubljana, just hours after the German occupation and the war in Europe had ended with the armistice signed in Berlin – and thus stood a good chance of a late-bloomer academic career.[15] The only obstacle was his lack of a doctorate. This difficulty, shared by other aspiring academics of the time, was overcome by a new government decree on university personnel, which allowed for "summoning specialists regardless of their formal qualifications," as well as removing professors from the university "due to their professional, moral, or social unsuitability."[16] Based on this paragraph and the opinion of two professors, Sovre was rapidly made associate professor in April 1946.

He was not an international scholar. "I had no contacts abroad, nor do I have any today," he wrote in his application for full professorship (*o tempora, o mores;* but these were times when contacts, particularly

12 SI-AS 4483, "Vprašalna pola, Anton Sovre," March 16, 1949; cf. Movrin, "The Anatomy of a Revolution," 154. For the original documents, see Movrin, "Fran Bradač, Anton Sovre, Milan Grošelj, Jože Košar in Fran Petre," 449.

13 SI-AS 4483, "Vprašalna pola, Anton Sovre," March 16, 1949; the evaluation was written by Jože Košar.

14 Sovre, "Zahvaljeni, rešitelji, in iz veselih src pozdravljeni," published in *Slovenski poročevalec*, May 9, 1945, 1.

15 For the context, see Gabrič, "Odpuščanje profesorjev Univerze v Ljubljani," 14–19.

16 Kozak and Kidrič, "Začasna uredba Narodne vlade Slovenije o univerzitetnih oblastvih in učnem osebju," 158.

in the West, could do serious harm, and Sovre was aware of that).[17] His translations, nonetheless, remain a groundbreaking achievement; most are still used, and after he died, the national translation award was named after him. His output was crowned, in 1959, by a translation of *De rerum natura* by Lucretius.[18] Welcomed by the proponents of dialectic materialism,[19] over 500 pages of this publication remain one of the most majestic editions and the stateliest Slovenian classical translation of the era, if not the century. In 1959, when Sovre published Lucretius, he was already the decision-maker among Slovenian classicists – and was thus asked to submit his proposal. The manuscript preserved represents a unique insight into the status quo and the timid hopes of the discipline, whose suspiciously bourgeois credentials frequently made it the scapegoat of the regime.

The broader context of the document was the Third Yugoslav Five-Year Plan, covering the years from 1961 to 1965. The preparations started in early 1959. The institution behind the process was the Federal Institute of Economic Planning – and unlike the earlier attempts, which

17 Anton Sovre, "Personalna mapa – življenjepis," January 20, 1951; University of Ljubljana Faculty of Arts, archives.

18 Researching the archives of the publisher which brought out Lucretius, I happened upon a case of a manuscript submitted by what George Orwell might term an unperson. In 1954, Slovenska matica was trying to decide whether to publish "The History of Greek and Roman Philosophy," written by Dr. Josip Jeraj (1892–1964). National and University Library Ms 1987 preserves its carefully-worded evaluation. The editor Božidar Borko wrote that the level of the text might be somewhat high for the "Philosophical Library" series since it is "based on careful examination of the sources, attested by quotations, some of them in Greek," and "has the scholarly apparatus." He showed the text to Alma Sodnik, who taught history of philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, and together, they reached the inevitable conclusion: "The manuscript must be first inspected by comrade Boris Ziherl; he should decide whether, in principle, the text ideologically corresponds to what is needed in contemporary philosophical thinking and philosophical education." On May 15, 1954, publisher's representatives Anton Melik and Ferdo Godina sent the text to Boris Ziherl, the head of the Ideological Commission of the Communist Party's Central Committee. It seems that he was not impressed; one suspects that his final decision was influenced by the fact that the author, Dr. Josip Jeraj, got his doctorate in theology – and was indeed a Catholic priest. His manuscript was never published. It took another quarter of a century before a book on this topic, Primož Simoniti's translation of Karl Vorländer's History of Philosophy, became available in Slovenian – alas, again with scholarly apparatus, but the publisher had decided that this was still better than nothing.

19 For a representative review, see Pirkovič, "Nesmrtni helenski genij," published in *Naša sodobnost* in 1959.

focused on heavy industry and agriculture, this one tried to balance the economy[20] and even included a chapter on science and research. It required every department in every university to report its ambitions, and the report signed by Sovre was duly submitted.

This Five-Year Plan was stillborn from the very beginning and marked by significant political disagreements. The two northern republics, Slovenia and Croatia, pushed for decentralization and for giving the republics more influence regarding their budgets. The southern and less-developed republics saw this position as somewhat selfish. They demanded the return of uncompromising central planning, which meant significant investments in heavy industry in their regions.[21] True to style, the authorities in Belgrade published the plan five-to-twelve on Saturday, December 31, 1960, only a few hours before it was supposed to come into effect.[22]

The necessary input was gathered during the two years before that, with institutions over the country queried for suggestions. On October 17, 1959, Anton Sovre opened the proposal in his prodigiously bombastic style:

> Considering today's immense speed of progress within the technical sciences, in the time when humans are successfully preparing for the occupation of the solar system, it does not seem strange that humanist education once again got the role of the sacrificial lamb, to be slaughtered at the altar of the disciplines of the natural sciences. What is the meaning, we hear people grumble, for our society to spend the money to get acquainted with the world that was extinct thousands of years ago while this precious workforce could be better used in other fields? Away with this anachronistic rubbish, what need is there of Homers, what need of Platos, of Aristotles? All very lovely, but such reasoning is essentially an echo of vulgar practicalism, which does not see (or cannot see) the dialectical connection between the average level of general culture and the external technical achievements. True, dealing with antiquity does not have such shining perspectives as nuclear physics or astronautics, yet the ancient culture is nonetheless the cornerstone of our entire cultural building.

20 Borak, *Ekonomski vidiki delovanja in razpada Jugoslavije*, 48.

21 Prinčič, *V začaranem krogu*, 151–75.

22 Zvezna ljudska skupščina FLRJ, "Družbeni plan … od leta 1961 do 1965." Specific steps to be taken in 1961 were published on the same day; see Zvezna ljudska skupščina FLRJ, "Zvezni družbeni plan za leto 1961."

He then promptly proceeded to show the three reasons which make antiquity relevant for the present generation. These reasons are 1) science, 2) culture, and 3) education. First, science, because antiquity remains to be explored, despite centuries of research; discoveries appear daily, Sovre explains, bringing methodological enrichment of other disciplines, such as literature and art history. "If we remember that classical philology in some of its branches, such as syntax and stylistics, remains several horse lengths ahead of the philologies of the modern languages, it would be truly pity to undercut its research activity."

It is easy to believe his claims since his own stylistics certainly shine when it comes to defending the role classics can play in the field of culture.

> The entire European culture, our entire way of thinking, and the relationship toward sciences and arts have their roots planted in the ground of antiquity. To remove antiquity from our cultural life means to cut the branch on which we are sitting. I am saying this with full presence of mind, and I wish from all my heart that the decision-making circles would think about this metaphor. If the modern man were to forget everything that these millennia of heritage have brought to him, he would be back to the primitive level, and there would be no Explorers and no Luniks![23] Whenever during the course of history, a certain period has disavowed antiquity, it always got lost in unimportant experiments; when antiquity provided rebirth, it created great things.... To cut the story short, the cultural tradition of antiquity has to be the seed and the impulse for independent creation, and the humanism of antiquity should be the first step to the realization of socialist humanism. It is precisely the literature of antiquity that represents an inexhaustible treasury for the education of the new, complete, and rich socialist personality.

Having proven the cultural significance of antiquity for the education of socialist personality, Sovre eventually proceeded to show its educational relevance.

23 Explorer 1, the first US satellite and America's answer to Sputnik 1, was launched on February 1, 1958. "Lunik" was a media nickname for the Soviet Luna program, a series of robotic spacecraft missions sent to the Moon, with Luna 1 being the first spacecraft to escape the Earth-Moon system in January 1959 – and Luna 2 successfully hitting the Moon surface in September 1959, inspiring Sovre to write these lines a few weeks later.

By learning Latin grammar, young people train their brains, and this training helps them in their further studying for their profession, as well as in their later practical life,[24] where they generally know their way around for the most part easier than their colleagues who did not go to humanist schools. I remember how, right after the First World War, the shoe factory manager in Ptuj – a German from Vienna – kept offering me a job. “Sie haben,” he said, “die klassische Schulbildung hinter sich und verfügen daher über ein trainiertes Gehirn: und die Industrie *braucht* trainierte Gehirne.”[25] Despite his capitalist ideology, this man valued the worth of classical education correctly. This recognition is nowadays finding its way even in America, and classical studies have been gaining much ground there. For even America needs trained brains. The more meager and slower successes of the American astrophysicists[26] seem to have their cause, in the final analysis, in the fact that the Russian brain, after centuries of humanist education, is trained better than the American brains, which have no such tradition. (I do not know what is going on with classical schools in Russia today; even if they really curtailed it, the sediment of tradition is there, and this leaven keeps having an effect. In any case, after the last war was over, they published the translation and extensive commentary of Lucretius’ poem *On the Nature of the World*.) Suppose I add to this practical side of classical education its ideal side, the very fact that studying ancient authors cultivates aesthetic sensibility and imparts universal knowledge. In that case, one can easily understand what loss it would be to discard this precious ideological material. That is why classical languages need to be given the position that belongs to them, not because of tradition and piety but because of their utility and actual worth. One probably does not need to point out all the areas where the influence of antiquity is manifested, starting from Greek drama, still alive on the stages of the world, through Greek philosophy, which is the basis for all the European currents of thought, to the Roman law,

24 One can vividly imagine Sovre crossing this part out while rereading the program and deciding that sometimes, less is more.

25 “You have had the classical education in school, and you thus possess a trained brain – and the industry needs trained brains.”

26 This was in 1959 when the USA was still lagging in the space race. The Soviets were triumphant with the first artificial satellite, Sputnik 1, in October 1957, as well as with the first animal in a spacecraft, Laika, aboard Sputnik 2, in November 1957 – and were well underway to put the first human in orbit, Yuri Gagarin in Vostok 1, in 1961.

> the foundation for the legal consciousness of the world. These are well-known facts. We should consider these facts when preparing the prospective plan of scholarly work. Otherwise, time might show cracks in the sensitive field of social sciences, and future generations might be starved of classical humanism because we are pushing it today into, one could say, hopeless defensive.

This is where the crude reality can suddenly be gleamed behind the cautious rhetoric. One doubts whether Anton Sovre harbored any illusions regarding life in the Soviet Union, where his younger brother Baltazar Sovre lost his life during the Great Terror, shot at 42 "for spying, anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" on December 22, 1937.[27] He was certainly able to observe, with his own eyes, the Stalinist onslaught on the Slovenian classical gymnasia that lasted from 1945 to 1949, and his feigned ignorance must have been rhetorically crafted *dissimulatio*. But all that was ancient history. Written in 1959, these pleas came only one year after the school reform of 1958,[28] which destroyed the few remaining classical gymnasia, once again significantly undermining the position of Latin. Latin gained some ground after Yugoslavia was ostracized by Stalin and his Cominform in 1948 and was forced to look for help in the capitalist West.[29] Ten years later, Stalin was dead, even if not yet buried;[30] the threat was gone, and there was no need for the Yugoslav communists to dialectically compromise with the class enemy any longer.

That is why the proposals regarding classical studies that followed in the "prospective program" were little more than a wish list. They called for research in medieval Latinity in the region, understanding the influence of European Renaissance humanism on the local Reformation movement, and the influence of antiquity on Slovenian literature. They included a daring proposal for the division of labor between classics departments in Yugoslavia; Ljubljana would become the center for historical syntax; Skopje in Macedonia for Mycenaean and Belgrade for Byzantine studies.

27 Vujošević Cica, *Nestajali netragom*, 253. For details about Baltazar's life, see Kristan, "Anton Sòvre in Anton Sovrè," 93.

28 Gabrič, *Šolska reforma 1953–1963*. For a concise overview of the economic context of the Second Five-Year Plan – namely crisis, strike actions, and stagnation, see Prinčič, *Slovensko gospodarstvo v drugi Jugoslaviji*, 48–57.

29 See Movrin, "*Gratiae plenum*," *Keria* 12, no. 2–3 (2010). For English translation, see "Yugoslavia in 1949 and its *gratiae plenum*."

30 The Father of Nations was only taken from the mausoleum on October 31, 1961, under cover of Halloween night, to be quietly interred near the Kremlin wall.

In the sphere of culture, the document suggested a translation program, calling for prioritizing Plato, Aristotle, Greek lyrics, Greek tragedy, Polybius, Vergil, Cezar, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus, as well as those Byzantine writers that deal with the Slavs.[31] Finally, in the sphere of education, it called for new dictionaries. In the end, it proposed an institute for classical studies to be created within the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts while calling for returning Latin to schools to allow classics students a modicum of hope for a career.

A remarkable feature that stands out in the essay is another colleague who participated in the writing – mentioned in the very beginning. In the opening paragraph, Anton Sovre refers to one of his students:

> After a discussion with several colleagues in the profession, and particularly with the help of my student Dr. Gantar, I propose the following prospective work program for my discipline.

At that time, Kajetan Gantar (1930–2022) had already defended his PhD thesis on Homer. Due to political reasons, he was initially blocked from getting a university position. However, the situation changed somewhat during the thaw in the sixties, when he could finally get the position of lecturer, and he eventually became the leading classical scholar and translator in the country.[32] In January 2022, weeks before he was to be presented with the Prešeren Award, the highest national recognition in the sphere of culture, for his lifetime achievement in translation, I interviewed him in front of the audience in the great hall of the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences. I could not resist the temptation; I asked him about the program submitted by his professor over six decades earlier, specifically about the curious fact that the leading figure of the discipline referred to his student in the opening paragraph. As usual, Gantar's answer was highly informative – and marked by his characteristically understated humor:

> Professor Sovre wanted me to be his successor, and after my first seminar paper, he came up excitedly and said, "Come to me and our head of department, [Milan] Grošelj; you will become my successor." However, I did not have the moral and political qualifications needed;

31 True to its name, Yugoslavia fostered Slavonic studies and instigated a search for the relevant sources; for the political discussion of this topic on the highest level, in the Politburo, see Movrin, "Yugoslavia in 1949 and its *gratiae plenum*," 306.

32 For an overview of his work, see Čop, Hrovatič, and Rott, "Bibliografija."

I had been imprisoned by the OZNA [secret police] for a while, and so on – even though classical philology was not a particular priority of the regime. [...] I was then offered a job by my former headmaster, Stane Melihar. He had been dismissed from the headmaster's post [at Ljubljana Classical Gymnasium] because he had allowed various subversive activities – various literary study groups not exactly in line with Marxism – to appear at the Classical Gymnasium. However, Stane Melihar was sent [by the Germans] to Dachau during the war, so he was untouchable as a personality. Still, he was deprived of the directorship since the fact that he had allowed such things suggested that he was not alert enough. A similar thing happened [at the Classical Gymnasium] in Maribor, [Jože] Košar was removed from his position [of the headmaster] when dissidents appeared there. Well, Melihar eventually became a high-ranking official in the administration of the Slovenian republic in the Secretariat – this was what you would now call a ministry, but then it was called Secretariat for Culture and Enlightenment – and he oversaw the Council for Science. Whenever there were various five-year or seven-year research plans to be produced, this Council for Science asked for such plans to be made – plans of what was to be done. Melihar told me, "If you are out of a job, I will take you; I need somebody, and you are reliable." He knew me from my student days. "And you know languages; you will help me." His Council for Science was the predecessor of what is today the Ministry of Science, except that there were only two people back then – Stane Melihar as the head and me as a clerk. The University did not come under our jurisdiction at all, nor did the Academy, only certain technical institutes which were not a part of the University. Our only non-technical institute was the Institute for Ethnic Studies, which was somewhat different. [...] The institutes had to work out these plans, which were more like wish lists – and above all, calculate what should be done. I knew how the technical institutes and the Institute for Ethnic Studies did it, so Professor Sovre once called me to his home. I was living nearby, he knew me as his former student, and he said, "I am the only classicist at the Academy, now I am trying to arrange for Professor [Milan] Grošelj to become a member as well, but I have to submit this [prospective plan] by such and such a deadline, so write something down." So, I wrote something after the same pattern I saw with the technical institutes – I no longer have that paper; I gave it to Sovre. Then Sovre told me: "But Mr. Gantar," – not just me, he called everybody "Mister," never "Comrade" – "but Mr. Gantar, I cannot submit this [under my name], this is yours." I said, come on. So, he said, "I suppose it was

> done the way it should be done." I told him I do not consider the text to be my personal masterpiece; I did it the way they did at the Institute for Research of Materials and Structures or the Laboratory for Hydroelectric Power Stations – if they can do it, we can do it for classical philology, too.[33]

Gantar's insider information explains the sudden change of tone after the first two and a half pages, from what Cicero might term *genus orationis Asiaticum*, beloved by Sovre, toward the stricter standards of the *oratores Attici* (or at least *genus medium … atque ex utroque mixtum*, to use Quintilian's phrase). *Le style, c'est l'homme;* one can safely say that sections 2 and 3 of the document were predominantly based on the draft prepared by Gantar, with Sovre only occasionally writing over the top of his initial draft, while the magnificent introduction on "the topical relevance of classical philology" in section 1 was penned by Sovre, apparently to avoid the feeling of merely signing somebody else's rough copy.

More importantly, Gantar's testimony underlines the problems with such planning. First, the context of the five-year plans, "the instability, the cycling behavior, and the tendency toward radical administrative strategies that excessive bureaucratization imparts."[34] This was deeply flawed. None of these plans were successful, but this one was particularly ill-conceived.

The proposals were submitted in late 1959, duly analyzed, and then put together by the end of December 1960. One sterling example of the economic fiascos from that period was a facility in Velenje, initiated by Slovenian authorities in 1961 and meant to convert coal into gas. It would cost an obscene amount of money, about 6 percent of Slovenia's GDP at the time,[35] and was canceled when it became clear that the local brown coal could not provide enough energy to compete with cheap gas from abroad – but not before the equipment had already been bought. It was later dubbed "The largest non-natural economic disaster in Slovenia."[36]

33 Movrin, "Filologija ne gradi samo na logiki," 169–70. The interview was published posthumously, paying the journal's respects to the scholar who published one of his last scholarly papers in its first issue; see Gantar, "Ovidijeva poezija ob soočenjih z Avgustovim režimom."

34 Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power*, 298.

35 According to the official data from World Bank, GDP in Slovenia was worth 61.53 billion US dollars in 2021; adjusted for recent inflation, those 6% would currently mean around 4 billion USD.

36 Repe, "Energokemični kombinat Velenje," 119.

Already in June 1962, a mere year and a half into the project, Tito proclaimed that the solution for the problems that had accumulated in the country called for the revision of the Prospective Plan. Only a month later, the Central Committee held a plenary meeting and declared that the Five-Year Plan had become unrealistic and that "organized work should immediately start" for creating the Seven-Year Plan for 1964–70.[37] The whole circle started again. Indeed, the soundest study of that context, the analysis of the socialist economy in Slovenia between 1955 and 1970 by historian Jože Prinčič, is titled *The Vicious Circle*.[38]

The second and perhaps more significant problem was that the Party was not interested in what classicists had to say. Even the republics themselves had a minimal role. As Boris Kraigher, the president of the Executive Council of the People's Republic of Slovenia, noted on the eve of the project, December 30, 1960,

> a constitutional right of the republic to make its own Plan would be unrealistic. In fact, the republic has no such possibility. Yugoslavia is a space united; everything is decided by the federal Plan. From that perspective, the republics can have programs but no plans.[39]

This somber realization explains why Sovre, far further down the pecking order from Kraigher, speaks of a "program" and not a "plan" in his first sentence. His input was mostly irrelevant; classicists, with their modest proposal, were just one of the many scholarly communities involved in what was, in the end, a pointless ritual. The policy toward Latin in schools remained the same; if anything, it became more hostile during *anni di piombo* of the seventies, when the very concept of a gymnasium was attacked and demolished.[40]

Interestingly, the proposals suggested by Gantar and Sovre eventually came to fruition once this policy fell apart – together with the

37 The Seven-Year Plan was another example of parroting the Soviet system, where Khrushchev had been espousing this innovation; see Hoeffding, "Substance and Shadow in the Soviet Seven-Year Plan," 394–406. For the Yugoslav variant (and the Slovenian opposition), see Prinčič, *V začaranem krogu*, 195–210.

38 Prinčič, *V začaranem krogu;* for a wider context, see Ellman, "Rise and Fall of Socialist Planning."

39 The minutes of Session 68 of the Executive Council, held on December 30, 1960, are cited by Prinčič, *V začaranem krogu*, 161. For further details about the "program" in question see Ljudska skupščina LR Slovenije, "Resolucija o programu … od 1961 do 1965. leta."

40 Baskar, *Latinščine, prosim*. For the context, see Milharčič-Hladnik and Šušteršič, *Šolska reforma je papirnati tiger.*

Berlin wall.[41] In the early nineties, gymnasia returned and started teaching Latin; some of these students went on to study classics, and the number of translations eventually far surpassed those proposed above. Research on Slovenian Humanists, interdisciplinary studies in the Reformation, translations of Greek philosophy, lyric poetry, tragedy, and historiography, as well as Roman epic and lyric poetry, philosophical and historical prose; Latin-Slovenian dictionary in six volumes; thriving contacts with universities all over Europe; specialized scholarly journals; and the expansion of the Department of Classics in Ljubljana – everything that Kajetan Gantar was envisioning at the turn of the sixties was eventually achieved. Primarily due to his focused grassroots efforts, as he translated key texts by Aeschylus (1957 and 1982), Aristotle (1959 and 1964), Procopius (1961), Horace (1966 and 1993), Sappho (1970), Propertius (1971), Catullus (1974), Hesiod (1974), Ovid (1977), Pindar (1980), Plautus (1970 and 1991), Herondas (1971), Sophocles (1973, 1978 and 1985), Terence (1987), Homer (1994), Euripides (2001), Longinus (2011), and others – and tended to the discipline, *in dürftiger Zeit,* bringing up generations of classicists who then translated many more. As the notorious Soviet mantra had proclaimed back in the thirties: *Plan – zakon, vypolneniye – dolg, perevypolneniye – chest';* "Plan is law, fulfillment is duty, over-fulfillment is honor." Paradoxically, it took the system's collapse to bring about the dream of every socialist planner: the Plan that was not only fulfilled but over-fulfilled.

A thought that lingers, however, is the one articulated by the astute scholar and researcher of Soviet economy, Holland Hunter: "A number of alternative paths were available, … leading to levels of capacity and output that could have been as good as those achieved … yet with far less turbulence, waste, destruction, and sacrifice."[42]

41 For an evaluation of the broader phenomenon, see the final chapter by Ellman, *Socialist Planning*, 362–95.

42 Hunter, "The Overambitious First Soviet Five-Year Plan," 256.

PERSPEKTIVNI RAZVOJ KLASIČNE FILOLOGIJE

Po razgovoru z nekaterimi stanovskimi tovariši, posebno pa ob sodelovanju mojega učenca dr. Gantarja, predlagam za svojo stroko tale perspektivni delovni program:

I

Aktualni pomen klasične filologije

Ob silovitem tempu, s katerim napredujejo danes tehnične vede, v času, ko se človek uspešno pripravlja na okupacijo sončnega sistema, pravzaprav nikar čudno ni, da je humanistična izobrazba pri nas iznova prevzela vlogo daritvenega jagnjeta, ki naj se zakolje na oltarju prirodoznanskih disciplin. Kakšen smisel ima, slišimo zabavljati, da naša družba troši denar, zlasti pa dragocene delovne moči, ki bi jih koristneje porabljali na drugih področjih, za spoznavanje pred tisoči let izumrlega sveta? Proč s to anahronistično navlako, kaj nam treba je Homerjev, kaj Platónov, Aristotelov? Zelo lepo, ali takšno umovanje je v bistvu odmev grobega prakticizma, ki ne vidi ali ne more videti - dialektične povezanosti med splošnim kulturnim povprečjem in zunanjimi tehničnimi dosežki. Res je, da ukvarjanje z antiko nima tako bleščečih perspektiv kakor jedrska fizika in astronavtika, zato pa je antična kultura slej ko prej temeljni kamen naše celotne kulturne stavbe.

Trije momenti so, ki se mi kaže v njih pomembnost antike za nas, to je znanstveni, kulturni in vzgojni moment.

Znanstveni pomen. Kulturna dédina antike navzlic stoinstoletnemu proučevanju še davno ni dovolj raziskana. Tako rekoč vsak dan prihajajo na svetlo nove arheološke najdbe ter nam osvetljujejo antično družbeno in gospodarsko pa tudi politično življenje z vedno novo lučjo. Novi prijemi in nove metode v analizi literarnih in likovnih umetnin so privedli do razkritja novih estetskih in etičnih vrednot, obenem pa pomenijo metodološko obogatitev slovstvene in umetnostno-zgodovinske vede sploh. (Celo Slovenci, ki tudi po mednarodnem merilu ne pomenimo na tem področju tako rekoč nič, smo pred nedavnim v Gantarjevi disertaciji Oblikovanje prostora in časa v Homerjevih epih dobili delo, ki je vpoštevanja vreden doprinos k homerskemu slovstvu.) Če pomislimo k temu, da je klasična filologija v nekaterih panogah, recimo v sintaksi in stilistiki, za več konjskih dolžin pred filologijami modernih jezikov, bi bilo resnično škoda, da bi ji povsem spodvezali raziskovalno dejalnost.

Kulturni pomen. Vsa evropska kultura, ves način mišljenja in odnos do znanosti in umetnosti ima korenine v antičnih tleh. Odpravljati antiko iz našega kulturnega življenja se pravi žagati vejo, na kateri sedimo. To trdim ob popolni prisebnosti in odkritosrčno želim, da bi se odločilni krogi zami-

slili ob tej metafori. Ko bi moderni človek nenadoma pozabil vse, kar mu je prinesla ta tisočletna dedina, bi zdrknil nazaj na raven primitivnosti, in ne bilo bi Explorerjev in Lunikov! Kadar koli se je v zgodovini kaka doba odtujila antiki, vselej se je izgubila v brezpomembnih eksperimentih; ko pa jo je antika spet prerodila, je ustvarila velike reči: zakaj antika je bila, kakor pravi dr. I. Prijatelj, vsem velikim dobam zlat korektiv zoper mlado zaletelost in staro okorelost. Nam antična kultura ni več norma, kakor je bila srednjemu veku - tedaj je odkritje klasičnega strokovnega slovstva (medicine etc) pomenilo pozitivno povečanje znanja -, četudi se še danes lahko učimo od grške filozofije in umetnosti; nam zanimanje za antično kulturno tradicijo ne narekuje potrebe po obnavljanju konkretne vsebine preživelih virov, pač pa potrebo po obnovitvi humanistične kulture kot žive oblike, ki jo moramo polniti z novo vsebino: skratka, antična kulturna tradicija nam mora biti seme in spodbuda za samostojno ustvarjanje, antični humanizem prvi korak na poti do ostvaritve socialističnega humanizma. Zakaj ravno antična književnost predstavlja neizčrpno zakladnico za vzgojo nove, polne in bogate socialistične osebnosti.

Vzgojni pomen. S tem sem prišel do tretjega, to je vzgojnega pomena antike. Po znanem neohumanističnem naziranju je učenje latinščine nenadomestljivo sredstvo za logično šolanje duha in za pridobivanje formalne izobrazbe. Res je, da opravljajo to nalogo poleg matematike tudi materinščina in drugi moderni jeziki, vendar ne v tolikšni meri kakor latinska slovnica. Moderni jeziki so si podobni v zgradbi, območje iste kulture pa razvoj tehnike in civilizacije jih zbližujeta: gramatični procesi so pri vseh bolj ali manj enaki, besede dobivajo isti pojmovni obseg, razlike postajajo minimalne. Zato je tudi napor pri usvajanju modernih jezikov razmeroma majhen. Namen učenja modernih jezikov je njih vladovanje, pedagoški pomen latinščine pa izvira iz njenih specifičnih lastnosti, kakršne so racionalnost, strumna duhovna disciplina, smisel za natančnost in red. O tem priča vsaka Livijova in Ciceronova perioda, arhitektonska zgradba, ki nam omogoča, da z enim pogledom objamemo cel kompleks prerazličnih sodb. Kdor ne pozna latinske periode, sploh ne ve, kaj zmore človeški jezik.

Ob učenju latinske slovnice si mladi človek trenira možgane, in ta trening mu pomaga, da se tudi pri nadaljnjem študiju za poklic ~~in v kasnejšem praktičnem življenju~~ znajde povečini laže kakor njegovi tovariši, ki niso obiskovali humanističnih šol. Spominjam se, da me je neposredno po prvi svetovni vojni vabil direktor ptujske tovarne za čevlje - bil je dunajski Nemec -, naj stopim pri njem v službo. "Sie haben," je dejal, "die klassische Schulbildung hinter sich und verfügen daher über ein trainiertes Gehirn: und die Industrie braucht trainierte Gehirne." Mož je kljub svoji kapitalistični ideologiji pravilno ocenjeval vrednost klasične izobrazbe. To spoznanje si danes utira pot celo v Ameriki, [in klasični študij se tam močno uveljavlja.]

[Zakaj tudi Ameriki so potrebni trenirani možgani. Slabši in počasnejši uspe-

hi ameriških astrofizikov - kaj velja, da imajo vzrok konec koncev v tem, ker so ruski možgani po stoletja trajajoči humanistični vzgoji bolj trenirani mimo ameriških, saj ti te tradicije nimajo. (Kako je s klasično šolo v Rusiji danes, ne vem; pa tudi če so jo omejili, usedlina tradicije je tu, in ta kvas učinkuje naprej. Vsekakor so ob koncu zadnje vojne izdali prevod in obširen komentar Lukrecovega poema O naravi sveta.) Če pridenem tej praktični strani klasičnega pouka še idealno stran, namreč, da študij antičnih avtorjev kultivira estetski čut in posreduje vsestransko razgledanost, je pač ka-li umljivo, da bi bilo škoda zavreči ta dragoceni ideološki material. Zato je treba klasičnima jezikoma dati tisto mesto, ki jima pripada, ne zaradi tradicije in pietete, ampak zaradi njih koristnosti in stvarne vrednosti. Saj menda ni treba posebej poudarjati vseh področij, na katerih se manifestira vpliv antike, od grške drame, ki na svetovnih odrih še zmeraj živi, preko grške filozofije, ki je osnova vseh evropskih miselnih tokov, pa do rimskega prava, ki temelji na njem svetovna pravna zavest. To so znana dejstva. In ta dejstva moramo imeti pred očmi, kadar sestavljamo perspektivni program znanstvenega dela, da se ne bodo s časom pokazale razpoke na občutljivem področju družbenih ved in da ne bodo prihodnji rodovi stradali klasičnega humanizma, ker ga danes potiskamo v, rekel bi, brezupno defenzivo.

II

<u>Naloge klasične filologije v naši republiki</u>

Perspektivne naloge na področju klasične filologije bi bile trojne: raziskovalne, kulturne in pedagoške.

<u>Raziskovalne naloge.</u> Spričo širokega razmaha, ki ga je klasična filologija doživela v zadnjih sto letih, je izključeno, da bi v naši republiki imeli specialiste za vsa njena področja. Zategadelj je nujno, da se omejimo na nekatere posamezne veje, in to predvsem take, ki imajo pogoje v naših stvarnih potrebah in možnostih. Najpomembnejše med temi nalogami so:

a/ Srednjeveška latinska književnost na naših tleh. To delo bi bilo treba organizirati v sodelovanju z rokopisnim oddelkom NUK.

b/ Vpliv evropskega humanizma na naš protestantizem. Tu naj bi poleg klasičnih filologov sodelovali še slavisti, romanisti in zgodovinarji.

c/ Slovenski humanisti na tujem. Precej naših humanistov je delovalo na Dunaju in v drugih evropskih univerzitetnih centrih: treba jih je le odkriti. Kako se taki reči streže, je pokazala A. Sodnikova s svojo študijo o "Kranjcu Matiji Hvaletu iz Vač".

d/ Antični vplivi na slovensko kulturno preteklost. Razen vpliva antike na Prešerna ni bilo o tej stvari napisano tako rekoč nič. In vendar je znano, da je bil Gregorčič goreč oboževalec Homerja; da je Aškerc rad zajemal snovi tudi iz rimske zgodovine; da je Finžgar za svoj roman Pod svobodnim soncem

dodobra predelal Prokopia; da so vsi naši literarni mentorji in kritiki od Zoisa in Čopa do Levstika in Stritarja bili, če že ne poklicni klasični filologi, pa vsaj dobri poznavalci in vneti častilci antičnih avtorjev. V okviru te naloge bi bilo treba obdelati tudi taka poglavja iz naše preteklosti, kakor so pravda za slovenski šestomer, boj za odpravo in obstoj klasičnih gimnazij itd. itd. Študija, ki bi v tem smislu raziskala vse antične vplive, bi gotovo marsikako poglavje slovenske kulturne zgodovine postavila v novo luč.

e/ Poleg teh raziskovanj ožjega značaja bi se naša klasična filologija morala ukvarjati tudi s problemi širših obsegov, ki bi ustrezali mednarodnemu merilu. Nujno bi bilo, da bi si katedre za klasično filologijo po vsej državi dogovorno razdelile področja, tako da bi, recimo, Ljubljana postala center za historično sintakso, Skopje za kretsko-mikenske napise, Beograd za bizantologijo i. p. To bi bilo treba upoštevati zlasti pri organizaciji podiplomskega študija. Sleherna katedra naj bi si prizadevala, da bi v določni smeri ustvarjala tradicijo, vzgojevala strokovnjake ter postala središče z vso razpoložljivo strokovno literaturo. V Ljubljani naj bi namesto sedanje Lingvistike, ki životari kot privesek Slavistične revije, izhajalo obsežno samostojno lingvistično glasilo, kjer naj bi nalagala svoje izsledke tako klasična filologija kakor germanistika in romanistika.

Tudi ustanovitev stolice za orientalistiko v Ljubljani se mi zdi priporočljiva. V poštev bi prišla na primer arabistika zaradi kulturnih stikov z grškim in rimskim antičnim svetom (filozofija, medicina, prevodi Aristotela, Galena, Porfiria, Ptolemaia etc).

<u>Kulturne naloge.</u> Še važnejše kakor znanstvenoraziskovalne so kulturnopopularizatorske naloge klasične filologije. Antiko je treba približati našemu delovnemu človeku, to pa morejo doseči le kvalitetni prevodi antičnih avtorjev, opravljeni z uvodi in komentarji, poleg tega pa popularne monografije. Nekaj sadov tega dela pri nas je že dozorelo, še večja pa je ledina, ki čaka obdelave. Prevajanje antičnih piscev ni lahek rutinski opravek, zahteva marveč intenzivno koncentracijo in poglobitev v strukturo izvirnikovega jezika in miselnost avtorja, ki je s svojo dobo za cela tisočletja odmaknjen od nas. Pa tudi poljudnoznanstvenega dela na tem področju ni podcenjevati, saj gre v bistvu za aplikacijo tujih izsledkov na naše razmere in presaditev v naš jezik, a to ni nič manj zahtevna naloga nego aplikacija tujih tehničnih dosežkov na naše gospodarstvo. Kakor se v tehniki in naravoslovju aplikativne raziskave uvrščajo na isto stopnjo s fundamentalnimi, tako moremo v klasični filologiji kulturne naloge vrednotiti enako kakor znanstvene.

Dosedanji prevodni literaturi iz klasike bi bilo v prihodnjih letih treba dodati še [tale dela:]

a/ prevod vseh nedvomno pristnih] Platonovih dialogov (štirje so že prevedeni) in Pisem, [predvsem pa Države in Zakonov;]

b/ prevod Aristotelove razprave O duši in [odlomkov iz] Nikomahove etike, dalje,

c/ izbor iz grške lirike;

d/ prevod nekaterih grških dram, in sicer: Aishilos Oresteia in Uklenjeni Prometeus; Sofokles Elektra, Filoktet, Oidipus na Kolonu; Euripides Medeia, Ifigenia na Tauridi, Bakhe. Kot nujno dopolnilo k prevodom pa bi bil potreben prikaz izvora in razvoja grške dramatike, antičnega gledališča in odrske tehnike;

e/ prevod Polibiove Zgodovine;

f/ poljuden, z literarno pretenzijo pisan prikaz helenistične kulture in prevod poglavitnih del iz njenega obdobja, na primer Teofrastovih Značajev, Herondovih Mimiambov in nekaterih lirikov (Kalimaha, Asklepiada, Meleagra);

g/ izbor iz Vergila, ta naj bi obsegal Ekloge v celoti, odlomke iz Georgik in vsaj I, IV in VI spev Eneide;

h/ prevod rimskih zgodovinarjev Cezarja, Salusta, Livia in Tacita.

i/ Poleg prevoda celotnih del Platona in Aristotela bi bilo treba pripraviti iz njih še filozofske čitanke; isto velja za Cicerona, Seneka, Boetia, pa tudi za kasnejše avtorje, denimo Spinozo, Bacona in Humea.

k/ Pomembno nalogo vidim tudi v prevodu nekaterih bizantinskih piscev, recimo Prokopia, Ane Komnene, Nikefora, Konstantina V Škrlatu rojenega, ki obravnavajo tudi zgodovino južnih Slovanov. K temu bi bil potreben še prikaz bizantinske zgodovine in kulture. O tem Slovenci nimamo še nobenega dela. Tu je bržda naše poznavanje antike najbolj pomanjkljivo. Napačna je predstava, da je bila bizantinska doba samo petrefakt slavnih antičnih tradicij, narobe: Bizanc je po razpadu zahodne polovice rimskega imperija živel še 1000 let in nosil v sebi še toliko vitalnih sil, da je razvil naravnost neverjetno kulturno ekspanzijo, vključil v svojo idejno sfero vse Podonavje in Balkan, prekvasil duhovno življenje južnih in vzhodnih Slovanov ter mu s cirilskim pismom dal neizbrisen zunanji pečat. Oči srbskih kraljev in bolgarskih carjev so bile tudi v časih njih največje moči uprte v zlato mesto ob Bosporu, oblito z magičnim sijem davnine. Veličastne kupole kraljevskih zadužbin na Kosovem, stroge poteze pravoslavnih ikon, barvite inicialke v srednjeveških rokopisih so poleg cirilice še danes glasna priča bizantinskega kulturnega vpliva. Že zavoljo tega mogočnega vpliva na južne pokrajine naše države je nujno, da se tudi pri nas bizantologiji posveti večja pazljivost.

l/ Glede na čedalje živahnejše gospodarske in kulturne stike med našo državo in Grčijo bi bilo treba na naših univerzah uvesti tudi pouk novogrškega jezika in književnosti.

Pedagoške naloge. Pedagoške naloge pravzaprav ne sodijo v ta okvir, marveč v področje šolstva; vendar se mi kljub temu zdi prav, da opozorim na potrebo izdaje nekaterih pripomočkov za uspešno pedagoško, pa tudi kulturno-prosvetno in znanstveno delo. Predvsem bi bilo treba

a/ izdati latinsko-slovenski besednjak. Da bi se nadaljeval tisk Wiesthalerjevega rokopisa, ne kaže, ker je delo za naše razmere preobširno in po frazeologiji močno zastarelo. Potreben je nov slovar (v obsegu 1500-2000 s strani), delo zanj pa naj bi se organiziralo kolektivno, ker ga en sam člo-

vek ne zmore v doglednem času. Tudi na izdajo grško-slovenskega slovarja bo treba misliti, vendar zanj sila še ni tolikšna kakor za latinskega.

b/ Potreben je, dalje, filozofski slovar, ta naj bi vseboval poleg izrazoslovja antične filozofije tudi srednjeveško.

c/ Oskrbi naj se priročnik antične mitologije, bodisi v leksikalni obliki, bodisi kot sistematski prikaz, pisan z literarno ambicijo.

III

Finančno in kadrovsko vprašanje

Da bo moč izvršiti nakazane naloge, je treba zagotoviti poseben sklad za zbiranje gradiva, ki je v zvezi z našo kulturno-zgodovinsko preteklostjo, in za pripravo latinsko-slovenskega besednjaka. Sklad za znanstvene naloge naj bi znašal vsaj 3oo.ooo din letno, ravno toliko sklad za slovar, ali pa naj bi se nastavil poseben uslužbenec. Slovenski založniški svet bi moral izdatno podpreti izdajanje prevodov iz obeh klasičnih literatur in poljudnoznanstvenih del s tega področja.

Predvsem pa je treba rešiti kadrovsko vprašanje. Zanimanje za antiko je pri našem delovnem človeku presenetljivo živo. To se je pokazalo n. pr. ob izidu Iliade, Odiseje in prvega dela Plutarha, saj so bile knjige navzlic razmeroma visoki nakladi razprodane že v nekaj tednih. Zato ni dvoma, da bi se našli tudi mladi talenti, ki bi bili voljni posvetiti se klasičnemu študiju, samo ko bi imeli perspektive za eksistenco v svoji stroki. Tako pa se mora še tistih nekaj ljudi, ki so dokončali ta študij, ubadati s pisarniškim in računovodskim delom pri Kompasu, Medexu in drugih podjetjih ali pa s poučevanjem matematike, zemljepisa in kaj vem katerih predmetov še, ker ni možnosti za namestitev v njih matični stroki, odkar so klasične gimnazije odpravljene in latinščina izrinjena iz šol. Tak odnos prosvetne politike do klasičnih jezikov je krivičen, krivičen pa tudi do teh mladih ljudi samih, ker jim ni dano, da bi delali v stroki, za katero imajo kvalifikacijo. Zategadelj je nujno potrebno, da se na določnem številu gimnazij obnovi obvezni pouk klasičnih jezikov: zanimanje zanj je še zmeraj precejšnje. Dalje bi bilo treba okrepiti klasični seminar na filozofski fakulteti ali pa - če bi ta seminar zaradi brezperspektivnosti glede zaposlitve absolventov kot pedagoška ustanova izgubil pogoje za obstoj - ustanoviti poseben institut za klasično antiko oziroma posebno sekcijo za antično književnost pri Institutu za literature na SAZU. Tak seminar (sekcija, institut) bi moral imeti vsaj pet sodelavcev:

univerzitetnega predavatelja ali znanstvenega sodelavca ali asistenta za grški in latinski jezik;

univerzitetnega predavatelja ali znanstvenega sodelavca ali asistenta za

antično književnost in umetnost;

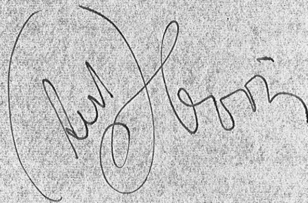
univerzitetnega predavatelja ali znanstvenega sodelavca ali asistenta za bizantologijo;

lektorja za latinski jezik;

lektorja za klasično in novo grščino.

Vsekakor je nujno, da bi po odpravi klasične gimnazije ostalo v naši republiki vsaj še eno močno žarišče humanistične kulture.

Ljubljana, dne 17. oktobra 1959.



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ABSTRACT

About a year before the pandemic struck, personal archives of Anton Sovre (1885–1963) were rediscovered, and they eventually made their way to the National and University Library in Ljubljana. During the fifties, Anton Sovre was the undisputed *éminence grise* of the field of classics in Slovenia and among the new sources now available to researchers is an essay on "Perspective Development of Classical Philology" from 1959. The document was written in the tradition of the Five-Year Plans, and its rhetoric is often amusing. Its content, however, was written mainly by Sovre's best student. At that time, Kajetan Gantar (1930–2022) had already defended his PhD thesis on Homer. Due to political reasons, he was initially blocked from getting a university position. However, the situation changed somewhat during the thaw in the sixties, when he could finally get the position of lecturer, and he eventually became the leading classical scholar and translator in the country and Sovre's successor. His proposal for the future of the discipline shows strategic thinking, which was confirmed by the decades that followed.

KEYWORDS: five-year plans, Anton Sovre, Kajetan Gantar, classical tradition, history of classical scholarship, University of Ljubljana

Petletke, Explorerji, Luniki in socialistični humanizem: Anton Sovre in njegov načrt za klasično filologijo v Sloveniji

IZVLEČEK

V obdobju pred izbruhom pandemije se je znova pojavila rokopisna zapuščina Antona Sovreta (1885–1963) ter sčasoma prispela v Narodno in univerzitetno knjižnico v Ljubljani. V petdesetih letih je bil Anton Sovre nesporna siva eminenca klasične filologije na Slovenskem in med novimi viri, ki so zdaj na voljo raziskovalcem, je tudi njegov spis »Perspektivni razvoj klasične filologije« iz leta 1959. Dokument je nastal v tradiciji petletnih načrtov, njegova retorika je pogosto svojska. Njegovo vsebino pa je v veliki meri napisal Sovretov najboljši študent. Kajetan Gantar (1930–2022) je takrat že obranil svojo doktorsko disertacijo o Homerju. Zaradi političnih razlogov so mu sprva onemogočili zaposlitev na univerzi. Razmere so se nekoliko spremenile med odjugo v šestdesetih letih, ko je končno lahko začel predavati, sčasoma je postal vodilni klasični filolog in prevajalec v državi ter Sovretov naslednik. Njegov predlog za prihodnost discipline priča o strateškem razmišljanju, ki se je potrdilo v naslednjih desetletjih.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: petletka, Anton Sovre, Kajetan Gantar, klasična tradicija, zgodovina klasične filologije, Univerza v Ljubljani

Athens, Kerameikos, the grave stele of Hegeso.

Athens, Mount Lycabettus – Majda Gabrovšek, Matija Pogorelec, Nataša Stanič.

Athens, Theseion.

Athens, Kerameikos, the grave of Dionysius of Kollytos.

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Kazimierz Majewski: A Marxist among Classicists

Elżbieta Olechowska*

COMMUNISM – NO SUCH WORD IN POLISH

For Poles, Communism has become synonymous with Soviet domination at the end of World War I, an ideological smokescreen hiding imperial aspirations inherited from czarist Russia. In the chapter *Nation or Class?* Piotr Wandycz carefully documents how the Bolshevik right to national self-determination theoretically accorded to all nations of the empire evolved into the right to self--determination of working peoples of these nations. When Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia declared their independence from Russia in 1918, their "national masses" allegedly could not accept separation from Russia and "clamored" for a return to the former empire. Similar scenarios developed in all border states. In late 1918 and early 1919, the Red Army invaded and, using tactics adapted to each situation, installed national Soviet governments in Latvia, Lithuania, and Belarus. Ukraine declared independence already in 1917. It was a crucial territory for Russia, but its situation was more complex as it struggled between two competing projects, the Ukrainian People's Republic and Soviet Ukraine. Poland became fully independent in November 1918.[1]

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1 Wandycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations*, 65–72; for the right to self-determination of minorities, see Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union*, 55–58. Schnell, *Empire in Disguise*, 208–215, provides the details of the Sovietization of Ukraine and a precise timeline of the former czarist territories becoming independent and then returning under the Russian Soviet control, a process ironically labeled the Reconquista. Only Poland and the Baltic states escaped the reintegration.

The word Communism entered the Polish public sphere in 1918 when the radical wing of the Polish Socialist Party (called "The Left") merged with the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL). They took the name of the Polish Communist Workers' Party (*Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski*, KPRP).[2] At a time when the country was united in the hope of regaining a sovereign state after one hundred and twenty-three years of foreign occupation and several major armed uprisings against the partitioners, especially Russia, the new party championed the renunciation of Polish independence. It advocated joining the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR), as the country was called before the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on December 30, 1922.[3] Lenin and the KPP leaders, most of whom resided in the RSFSR, were convinced that the victorious march of Communism was unstoppable and expected an imminent and spontaneous outbreak of revolution in Poland, reinforced by the advance of the Red Army into Polish territory in 1920. This was a gross miscalculation on the part of Lenin. Along with Stalin and other Soviet generals, he underestimated the Polish Army's military and intelligence expertise.[4] The 1921 Peace Treaty of Riga ended the Polish-Soviet war. The RSFSR was forced to recognize sovereign Poland and abandon its plans of spreading the revolution to Germany and, eventually, to the rest of Europe.[5]

The PCWP had minimal success in the Polish parliamentary elections of 1922; three years later, at the Third Party Congress in Minsk, a turn toward Bolshevism was decided, and the party dropped "Workers" from its name, becoming the Communist Party of Poland. Within a few years, it met with a tragic fate. Stalin took a personal and rather unsympathetic interest in the organization, blaming it for consecutive electoral failures, and finally disbanded it in 1938. Most of the Party's active membership (approx. 5000 people) were summoned in groups to Moscow during the years of

2 On the birth and evolution of Polish socialism, see Wandycz, Soviet-Polish Relations, 20–22; on the political thought of the PCWP, see Trembicka, *Między apologią a negacją;* see also Koredczuk, "Zwalczanie działalności ugrupowań komunistycznych w polskim prawie," 119–120.

3 See Davies, *God's Playground*, vol. 2, 403, and Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union*, 53–58.

4 See Hanyok, "Before Enigma," 25–32, as well as Bury, "Polish Codebreaking during the Russo-Polish War," 199–200, about the Polish Cipher Bureau breaking Soviet codes and jamming internal communication of the Red Army.

5 See Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, 279–290.

the Great Purge and promptly executed (like, for instance, Julian Leszczyński (1889–1937), the driving force behind the ideological left turn of the party and the 1925 change of name), or sent to the gulags on Stalin's orders.[6]

Stalin's alliance with Hitler – the secret protocols of the infamous Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact (August 23, 1939) – and the coordinated attack on Poland in September 1939 did nothing to improve the image of Communism. Neither did the Soviet refusal to assist in any way in the Warsaw Rising in 1944, when the Red Army, stationed on the opposite shore of the Vistula, let the Germans raze Warsaw to the ground. Given over four decades of a Soviet-enforced regime, it is no wonder that no political organization has dared to include the word "Communist" in its name since 1938.[7] Ironically, the name "Polish Workers' Party" (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*, PPR) was suggested in 1941 by Stalin, who realized that openly calling the new party Communist may disincline prospective members.[8] The PPR ruled Poland from the end of the war. It then merged with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) forming, in 1948, the Polish United Workers'

6 See Davies, *God's Playground*, vol. 2, 402–406; on the activities of the Communist movement in Poland in 1918–1925, see Sacewicz, "Organizacja i działalność ruchu komunistycznego," 367–393.

7 The only exception was the illegal Communist Party of Poland, a Maoist group with anecdotal membership founded in 1965 by the anti-Gomułka Stalinist politician Kazimierz Mijal (1910–2010), who, after fleeing from Poland to Albania, used the Polish shortwave programs of Radio Tirana as his propaganda medium from 1966 to 1977. After spending five years in China (1978–1983), he illegally returned to Poland and unsuccessfully attempted a political comeback. See Dziuba, *Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu* and Mijal's entry in the Parliamentary Library [Biblioteka Sejmowa] database, available online. After the collapse of Communism, a small group of veterans who still believed in the ideology were happy to abandon hypocrisy and created, in 1990, a short-lived Union of Polish Communists, "Proletariat" (UPCP). Twelve years later, once the UPCP officially ceased to exist, it was replaced with the Polish Communist Party (KPP, est. 2002), which has not yet succeeded in having a single representative elected to the Polish parliament. Based on Article 13 of the current Polish Constitution, which "prohibits the existence of political parties or organizations whose programs refer to totalitarian methods and practices of Nazism, fascism, and Communism (…) and allow violence as a means to obtain power or to influence state policies," Polish authorities have been attempting to delegalize KPP, so far unsuccessfully. Article 13 of the Polish Constitution may be accessed online.

8 See Stalin's instructions to Georgi Dimitrov, Secretary General of Comintern, in Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, 191–192.

Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR), which would rule the Polish People's Republic as a one-party state until 1989.[9]

THE POSTWAR SITUATION OF CLASSICS IN POLAND

Among Polish classical scholars decimated during the six years of Nazi occupation,[10] some opportunists viewed Party membership as an aid in their academic careers. Still, few were convinced Marxists or even Marxist sympathizers.[11] How these few fared in the tense and highly uncertain situation of the first postwar decade depended on their personalities and connections in the Party and the community. Along with all their compatriots, classicists were traumatized by the atrocities and losses they suffered during the war. Those from Eastern Poland, occupied by the Soviets in September 1939, already knew how the ideology, from 1945 imposed on the whole country, translated into practice. They were under no illusion as to what was coming. Archaeology and ancient history were two disciplines considered helpful by the Party for legitimizing, if not the new regime as such, at least the new western Polish borders, as they provided evidence of Polish and Slavonic pre-historical presence in the territories "recovered" from Germany. The ideological pressure on these disciplines was the most noticeable and resulted in a higher proportion of Party members among historians and archaeologists.[12]

KAZIMIERZ MAJEWSKI

For Polish scholarship, the redrawing of the Polish borders in 1945 meant that two universities, Jan Kazimierz in Lviv (est. 1661) and Stefan Bátory (est. 1579) in Vilnius, became part of the Soviet educational system. Classicists who worked there before the war found refuge in the new universities in Wrocław and Toruń. Kazimierz Majewski (1903–1981), an ancient historian and archaeologist from Lviv, was tasked by the Ministry of Education to oversee the opening of the

9 See Lukowski and Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland*, 285–286.

10 For some classicists, World War II was an indirect cause of death, like for Tadeusz Zieliński (1859–1944) or Ludwik Ćwikliński (1853–1942). Others disappeared, were killed by the Gestapo, or died in concentration camps, like Leon Sternbach (1864–1940), Kazimierz Zakrzewski (1900–1941), Marian Auerbach (1882–1941), or Emil Urich (? – 1942); see Kowalski, *Elogia defunctorum*, 3–9.

11 Axer, "Kazimierz Kumaniecki," 194–195; Olechowska, "Bronisław Biliński," 213; "*Mulierem fortem quis inveniet*," 46.

12 See Axer, "Kazimierz Kumaniecki," 194.

University of Wrocław as a new Polish university. Alongside the former rector of the Jan Kazimierz University, the botanist Stanisław Kulczyński (1895–1975) and other colleagues, including the classicist Jerzy Kowalski (1893–1948), Majewski managed, against all odds, to inaugurate the University of Wrocław in the 1945/1946 academic year.[13] Majewski was a *rarissima avis*, a Marxist who commanded quasi-universal respect in the classical community as an outstanding scholar, academic leader, and honorable individual. A brief analysis of his academic career and priorities may help to explain what it meant to be a Marxist scholar in postwar Poland.

BEFORE AND DURING WORLD WAR II

Kazimierz Majewski enrolled in Jan Kazimierz University in 1922. An unfortunate event during his second year of study impacted his *cursus honorum* in rather unexpected ways. He was falsely accused of illegal political activities and arrested. The police found reports from a cause célèbre in Majewski's possession, the so-called St. George's trial (1922–1923), against members of the Communist Party of Eastern Galicia (*Komunistyczna Partia Galicji Wschodniej*, KPGW) who assembled in an underground hall of the Greek Catholic St. George [St. Jur] Cathedral in Lviv on October 30, 1921. Professor Edmund Bulanda (1882–1951), chair of classical archaeology at Jan Kazimierz University, intervened on Majewski's behalf and had him released after almost a year of detention.[14] Nothing untoward happened during the rest of his studies. He began to teach ancient history, research, participate in archaeological excavations, and travel abroad on grants from the National Culture Fund (*Fundusz Kultury Narodowej*) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education (*Ministerstwa Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego*). He visited universities and museums in Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, and, first and foremost, Italy and Greece.[15] Interested by what he heard about research conducted by Soviet scholars, Majewski also visited Soviet Ukraine in 1934 but was not impressed with their theories about Aegean culture.[16] He was probably the only Polish scholar

13 For Majewski's activities in Wrocław from his appointment to the team organizing the university to his departure for Warsaw, see Press and Kolendo, "Kazimierz Majewski," 157–159.

14 Ibid., 153.

15 Ibid., 154–155.

16 Ibid., 155.

whose publications were listed in the *Bibliography of Archaeology of the USSR 1918–1980* (Kyiv 1989).[17] He was appointed head of the Department of Ancient History at Jan Kazimierz University in 1939.

When the Red Army occupied Lviv in 1939, Majewski remained the head of Ancient History at the renamed Ivan Franko University and worked as a senior researcher at the Lviv Section of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In January 1941, he traveled to Kyiv to speak at a conference organized by the Institute. When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 and entered Lviv, they closed the University. Majewski sought alternative employment, joining a construction company. Immediately following the German withdrawal from Lviv in 1944, he began to organize teaching ancient history and archaeology at the reopened Ivan Franko University. He also headed the Department of Archaeology at the Lviv Historical Museum.[18]

The City of Lviv changed hands three times during World War II. It was occupied by the Soviets in 1939, by the Germans in 1941, and again by the Red Army in 1944. About half of the prewar Jan Kazimierz University professors lost their lives during successive waves of occupation. They were targeted first by the Soviets as potential anti-Communists and then by the Nazis as the undesirably educated elite. Shortly after the war, Majewski joined the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and became a member of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) when the PPS and the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) merged in 1948. PZPR was an organization under Soviet control, Communist in all but name.

THE NEW REALITY

In July 1945, Majewski was tasked by the Polish Ministry of Education to protect exhibits and monuments in the partially devastated museums in Lower Silesia. Furthermore, as mentioned above, he was to organize the opening of the University of Wrocław, or more specifically, the new Departments of Classical Archaeology, Ancient History, and Art History on the smoking ruins of Festung Breslau, defended, on Hitler's orders, to the last German soldier.[19] Majewski was able to create modern structures for classical archaeology and

17 Quoted by Gurba, "Kazimierz Majewski," 286.

18 Ibid., 286–287.

19 Davies, *God's Playground*, vol. 2, 382; see also Hargreaves, *Hitler's Final Fortress*, 165, and Głowiński, *Zaopatrzenie lotnicze Festung Breslau w 1945 roku*, 160.

ancient history, which were needed for the development of teaching and research. He founded the Polish Archaeological Society, the yearly journal *Archaeologia* and other serial publications, *Biblioteka Archeologiczna* and *Studia Pradziejowe.*

THE MILLENNIUM PROGRAM

In the darkest Stalinist era, Majewski played a significant role in transforming Polish medieval studies. He was a leading member of an unusual body called the Department of Studies on the Origins of the Polish State (*Kierownictwo Badań nad Początkami Państwa Polskiego*), which had been created in 1949 as a Marxist counterbalance to the expected religious celebrations coinciding with the millennium of Polish Christianity in 1966.[20] Piotr Węcowski's article on the role of the Department of Studies highlights Majewski's effective handling of the Communist officials of the Ministry of Culture and the ensuing benefits that would prove to be crucial to Polish scholarship. These included continuous and generous funding, a collaboration between various related disciplines, and the elaboration of a *modus vivendi* between academics and Party executives. In the Millennium Project, Aleksander Gieysztor (1916–1999) was the leading figure in all matters apart from complex dealings with the Party. This delicate task was performed expertly by his two deputies, scholars and Party members, Kazimierz Majewski and Zdzisław Rajewski (1907–1974), who were happy to play this role.[21] Under the Department's guidance, historical and archaeological research was undertaken in large interdisciplinary teams who worked closely and harmoniously for almost two decades leading up to 1966. The Party's goal in financing this collaborative research was to produce evidence for Poles' descendance from pre-Slavonic peoples who originally inhabited the lands within the 1945 Polish borders, i.e., including the so-called Recovered Territories (*Ziemie Odzyskane*) to the North and West of prewar Poland. It was a central element legitimizing the change of borders and integrating the old and new territories as traditionally Polish, or at least pre-historically Slavonic (not German) lands.

20 Noszczak, "Sacrum" czy "profanum"? 29–64.

21 Węcowski, "Między nauką a ideologią," 59–100; see also Szczerba, "Powołanie Kierownictwa badań," 13–18, and "From the History of Polish Archaeology Studies," 247–254; Reichenbach, "Research Program on the Beginnings of the Polish State," 19–34.

As discussed above, the direction of the Department was given without much enthusiasm from the Communist side to an eminent historian of the Middle Ages, Aleksander Gieysztor, who had been an active member of the non-Communist World War II resistance, or "Home Army" (*Armia Krajowa*), established in the aftermath of September 1939, in German-occupied Poland.[22] His two deputies, Majewski and Rajewski, were both ostensibly nominated to guarantee the promotion of Marxist research methodology. They, Majewski in particular, provided a buffer in case of problems or frictions between the Department and the Party. Contact with the authorities, mainly the Ministry of Art and Culture (from 1947–1952 under Minister Stefan Dybowski),[23] was the special responsibility of the two archaeologists. Węcowski draws on Gieysztor's correspondence and Ryszard Kiersnowski's article in *Przegląd Historyczny* (2000). Both illustrate Majewski's crucial protective role for the Millennium Project active during the unforgiving Stalinist period.[24] Given the importance of the Millennium Project for Polish scholarship, Gieysztor, Kiersnowski, Szczerba, Reichenbach, and most recently, Węcowski provide precious data on its activities and quite admirable achievements. The last four who did not participate but only researched the project all regret the continuing lack of a comprehensive historical study of the entire enterprise.

22 See Koczerska, "Aleksander Gieysztor," 345–351.

23 The Millennium project was under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Art because the organizational impetus for its creation came from The General Direction of Museums and Protection of Monuments, which was initiated and headed by Stanisław Lorentz (1899–1991), an art historian and pre- and post-war director of the Polish National Museum. Since 1939, Lorentz managed to curtail Nazi theft and devastation of Polish art collections and, since 1945, championed restitution of masterpieces that survived the war. His authority and expertise were unquestionable and acknowledged by the Communists, who granted him considerable autonomy. At his instigation, on April 3, 1949, Stefan Dybowski, the Minister for Culture and Art, created the Department of Studies on the Origins of the Polish State, financed by the General Direction of Museums and Protection of Monuments.

24 Ryszard Kiersnowski (1926–2006), a historian from the Jagiellonian University and a former soldier of the Home Army, worked closely with Gieysztor as head of administration for the Department; see Reichenbach, "The Research Program on the Beginnings of the Polish State," 24; Węcowski, "Między nauką a polityką," 74–75, 100.

HISTORY OF MATERIAL CULTURE

After six years of pioneering work in Wrocław and four years of contributions to the Millennium Program, Majewski convinced the Communist authorities to create, in late 1953, the Institute of the History of Material Culture (IHKM)[25] within the Polish Academy of Sciences. It was to assume administration of the millennial research, as shortcomings in managing such a massive undertaking were becoming evident, causing instability in the workforce and administrative problems. It was not a coincidence that the creation of the Institute happened when the Party attempted to restructure Polish research and higher education to subject them to the totalitarian Party-state, Soviet institutional and methodological models.[26] That such a structure followed a Soviet template helped him in his proposal for the new Institute. This template (scholarship organized in specialized institutes within an academy of arts and sciences in parallel to the same disciplines practiced and taught at universities) was also introduced in many countries of the Soviet bloc. When IHKM took over from the defunct Millennium Program, Majewski became the Institute's director for the first year of its existence. The new Institute began publishing the *Quarterly of the History of Material Culture* the same year – a journal still going strong after seven decades; its 70th issue appeared in June 2022. Unfortunately, Majewski's successor, Witold Hensel (1917–2008) from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, followed the Party directives rigidly and without imagination and an attempt at innovation.

Additionally, he was the first who mentioned the need to prepare for the millennial anniversary in 1946.[27] He resented not having been appointed head of the Millennium in 1949.[28] This was at least part of the reason he gradually reduced the interdisciplinary collaboration which had previously flourished and was a fundamental premise of the program.[29]

25 In 1992, IHKM was renamed the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology.

26 Degan and Hübner, "Polityka naukowa władz polski ludowej," 11–38; Stobiecki, "Między kontynuacją a dyskontynuacją," 127–155. Szczerba, "Powołanie Kierownictwa badan," 16.

27 Hensel, "Potrzeba przygotowania wielkiej rocznicy," 193–206.

28 See Reichenbach, "The Research Program on the Beginnings of the Polish State," 21–22. Hensel, while a Communist, was not a member of the Polish United Workers' Party but belonged to a Communist satellite party called the Alliance of Democrats. From 1985 to 1989, he was a Member of Parliament.

29 See Szczerba, "Powołanie kierownictwa badań," 15; Węcowski, "Między nauką, a polityką," 100.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Majewski, having set up the organization to his satisfaction in 1954, became the head of the Department of Ancient Archaeology within the Institute and had developed new priorities, which found the approval and support of the Communist authorities. Formulated early on and repeatedly expressed in his writings, these priorities were all rooted in Majewski's understanding of the obligations of classical archaeologists toward their own society. First, he believed that the studied topics should illuminate both Graeco-Roman antiquity and the history of the scholars' own country. Their most essential duty in that respect is to work on the collections of ancient artifacts held in Polish museums and publish catalogs and monographs to make these collections more accessible and valuable to the public. He started implementing this when still in Lviv and wrote several papers about it.[30] According to Majewski, another duty of the archaeologist was to increase awareness of ancient culture in society through popular literature, lectures, and exhibitions, reinforcing general education, and preparing and encouraging school students to study antiquity.[31]

Links and contacts between ancient Greece, Rome, and the Polish territories were another priority area. Majewski began researching Roman imports to Polish territories when he was still in Lviv and continued this work in Wrocław. At that time, such studies were rare, innovative, and pioneering. In 1949 he published *Roman Imports in Slavonic Lands* (*Importy rzymskie na ziemiach słowiańskich*), and in 1960, when Majewski had already been appointed Professor in Warsaw, came out *Roman Imports in Poland* (*Rzymskie importy w Polsce*).[32] This publication strongly advocated the need to research the Roman *limes*, provinces, and neighboring territories, which were also sources of imports. The priority Majewski gave to the study of imports was directly connected to the vital role he attributed to material culture as

30 See Press and Kolendo, "Kazimierz Majewski," 164.

31 Majewski blamed secondary schools for lack of adequate preparation for studies and spoke at conferences of the Polish Philological Society, suggesting to Latin teachers how to increase awareness of Antiquity at school. He also insisted well before the war on the importance of popularization of scholarship and published in the classical journal for the general public, *Filomata* (1929, 1931, 1932, 1934); see Kołakówna, *Bibliographie des travaux de K. Majewski*, 15–16. He was giving public lectures long before he could have encountered any outside pressure "to educate the masses." See Press and Kolendo, "Kazimierz Majewski," 156.

32 Majewski, *Roman Imports in Slavonic Lands;* Majewski, *Roman Imports in Poland.*

a historical source, crucial to understanding antiquity as an essential complement to ancient art, the traditional, single focus of prewar Polish archaeology.[33] This change of research emphasis was combined with advancing studies on ancient technologies, occupations, and crafts, which created a unique resource: a quasi-journalistic Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How of ancient labor and its reality.[34] It was also a thrust toward, if not interdisciplinarity in the current sense, at least collaboration between different disciplines, classical archaeology, national archaeology, ancient and pre-history, ethnology, and classical philology. Majewski, for example, recruited several early-career philologists to a) participate in his material culture seminars, b) collect *testimonia* from ancient Greek and Roman literature related to material culture and ancient labor, and c) discuss them with archaeologists and historians. Professor Anna Komornicka (1920–2018) worked for Majewski from 1953 to 1960 at the Department of Ancient Archaeology of the Institute of the History of Material Culture and published three papers on Aristophanes' comedies as sources for the history of Greek material culture in 1955–1958, see Rybowska and Witczak, 1995, 11. Her colleagues at the IHKM, all future professors of archaeology at the University of Warsaw, included Ludwika Press (1922–2006), Maria Nowicka (1927–2015), Aleksandra Dunin-Wąsowicz (1932–2015), and Małgorzata Biernacka-Lubańska (1933).[35] There were no Communist sympathizers in the group.

Along with the emphasis on historical research on slavery championed by Professor Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist (1917–1995), a specialist on slavery in Greek and Roman Egypt,[36] there was a series of dissertations and monographs on artisans and workers in general, as well as works on specific ancient authors. For example, A. M. Komornicka wrote an MA thesis entitled "Workers in Aristophanes' Comedies" (1951), O.

33 See, e.g., Majewski, "Uwagi do metodologii historii kultury materialnej," 113–118.

34 See, e.g., Press, *Problemy periodyzacji budownictwa sakralnego na Krecie;* Wąsowicz, "Remarques sur la chronologie," 739–743; and Nowicka, *Budownictwo mieszkalne w Egipcie hellenistycznym.*

35 Based on the interview given in Polish on April 6, 2010, for Classics and Communism project by Komornicka preserved in the archive of materials recorded during the project, frequently referred to but never published.

36 Since 1971 she was part of the Groupe International de Recherche sur l'Esclavage dans l'Antiquité (GIREA), her bibliography lists many publications on the theme of slavery from 1959 to 1989, including *La schiavitù nell'Egitto greco-romano*, published in Rome with Editori Riuniti, 1984, and *La schiavitù nel mondo antico*, published in Naples with Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1989.

Jurewicz wrote a PhD dissertation, which was later published as *Slaves in Plautus' Comedies* (1958).[37]

In 1960, Majewski also succeeded in launching Polish-Bulgarian joint archaeological excavations in Novae on the Danube in northern Bulgaria. Now in their sixty-second year of continued operations, they have resulted in many seasonal reports and other scholarly publications.[38] None of the historians quoted in this paper expressed a negative opinion about Majewski, regardless of their political views; neither Communist censorship nor post-1990 reluctance to value anything from that period appears to have colored the image of this exceptional scholar.

CONCLUSION

The consecutive excavations combined Majewski's priorities of *limes* research and hands-on field training for young archaeologists. He succeeded in his attempts to bring to the fore what had previously been neglected and reorganize the teaching of ancient history and archaeology. He widened research horizons and initiated collaboration between related disciplines. Moreover, he accomplished all this using the Soviet blueprint, automatically approved by the Polish Party. He was able to translate it into a vision that was logical, sensible, and acceptable to the largely non-Communist and receptive milieu.

In the words of his Communist friend and colleague, the ethnologist Witold Dynowski (1903–1986),[39] Kazimierz Majewski owed his prominent position and official support for his academic endeavors to his "prewar connections, which allowed him to play a significant role in the organization of scholarly and cultural life in the situation of a state being reborn after the war."[40] Dynowski did not elaborate on the origin and nature of these "connections," neither did his other colleagues or

37 Komornicka wrote her thesis under the direction of Professor Tadeusz Sinko at the Jagiellonian University; Jurewicz's PhD advisor was Kazimierz F. Kumaniecki at the University of Warsaw.

38 See Kołkówna, "Bibliografia prac," 221–237, listing bibliography related to Novae for 1961–1978. In 1989, Majewski's former student, Professor Ludwika Press, became editor-in-chief of an annual journal Novensia focussing on the excavations in Novae. The journal is now past its 30th issue; its editor-in-chief is Piotr Dyczek, current director of the Archaeological Research Centre "Novae" of the University of Warsaw.

39 Dynowski was Majewski's contemporary and the author of his obituary in *Etnografia Polska*, published in 1981.

40 Dynowski, "Kazimierz Majewski (1903–1981)," 9–10.

students who have written about Majewski. Two possibilities come to mind: 1. Connections made during his lengthy detention in 1922–1923 prior to an anti-Communist trial may have provided him with credentials and an introduction to Soviet educational decision-makers who took over the university in 1939. His status as a victim of the anti-Communist Polish regime could have strengthened his academic position during the Soviet occupation. 2. (And in my opinion, this is more likely) Dynowski is referring to Majewski's contacts with Soviet scholars since at least 1934, which intensified during both periods of Soviet occupation, in 1940–1941 and 1944–1945, and which were reflected in his papers published only shortly after the war as Soviet journals were in practice as silent during the war as the Polish ones.[41] Both these reasons may have given Majewski the credentials required for successfully navigating the corridors of power.

This was, however, only one side of the coin. He must have also been simply lucky, but the core reason for his successes was his extraordinary tenacity in following his priorities and his intellectual capacity for explaining and using those credentials. He used them in teaching, research, national and international networking, and publishing activities in classical studies, to name his main lasting achievements.

Looking briefly again at over three decades of Majewski's postwar academic career, one may observe a characteristic evolution of his priorities constructed as a series of connected goals. Once a goal was achieved, he let someone else continue on the path he paved and began pursuing another goal, repeating the same sequence again and again. When the war was over, he accepted the challenge of creating an academic home for classical scholars among the refugees from Lviv, on the ruins of *Festung Breslau* and within new Polish western borders. Four years later, he moved to Warsaw, leaving behind three well-functioning and vibrant departments of Classics (philology, archaeology, ancient history), a scholarly association, specialized journals, colleagues, and students ready and willing to continue his task. In Warsaw, he created an institute of material culture. A year later, he left the running of the place to others and concentrated on creating a multidisciplinary research team and model training of archaeologists for which he needed active excavation sites. Staking

41 For Majewski's publications from 1928 to 1972, see Kołkówna, "Bibliographie des travaux," 15–52, who lists a significant paper on his participation at an archaeological conference in Moscow in 1940, published in 1947: "Kultura egejska na obradach konferencji archeologicznej w Moskwie w 1940 r." For his bibliography from 1972 to 1981, see Press et al., "Kazimierz Majewski," 40–42.

his reputation on international cooperation within the Soviet bloc, he was able to conduct digs in Olbia and Novae and train generations of classicists. Under his leadership, scholarly journals flourished, publishing the results of the conducted fieldwork.

His legacy remains in institutional infrastructure, renewed research themes (material culture, Roman imports, limes, museum collections), publishing, and didactics. If new generations changed the name of his Institute to the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology in 1992, this only marked a departure of the history of material culture from the main road to a side track, but certainly not to an archive or a discard pile.

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ABSTRACT

There were few Marxist sympathizers among Polish classicists decimated during World War II. How they fared during the tense and uncertain first postwar decade depended on their Communist connections and personality. Kazimierz Majewski (1903–1981), a classicist from Lviv, commanded quasi-universal respect in the academic community – despite his Communist views – because of his scholarly, organizational, and didactic achievements. Tasked with organizing and inaugurating a new Polish University in Wrocław in 1945, he contributed to creating three thriving classical departments – philology, ancient history, and archaeology – a scholarly society, academic journals, and a vibrant academic community. When he moved to Warsaw four years later, he founded an institute for material culture, developed a multidisciplinary research team, and launched within the Soviet bloc two major archaeological excavation projects, in Olbia and in Novae, where generations of archaeologists learned how to perform fieldwork and communicate its results internationally through regular publications and cooperation. Through his Party connections, he protected and ensured support for colleagues less fortunate in this respect.

KEYWORDS: Kazimierz Majewski, University of Wrocław, classical tradition, history of classical scholarship, Olbia, Novae

Kazimierz Majewski: Marksist med klasičnimi filologi

IZVLEČEK

Med poljskimi raziskovalci antike, zdesetkanimi med drugo svetovno vojno, jih je le malo simpatiziralo z marksizmom. Toda njihove perspektive v napetem in negotovem prvem povojnem desetletju so bile odvisne od njihovih povezav s komunisti in njihovih osebnosti. Kazimierz Majewski (1903–1981), znanstvenik iz Lviva, je zaradi svojih znanstvenih, organizacijskih in didaktičnih dosežkov kljub komunističnim stališčem užival skorajda vsesplošno spoštovanje akademske skupnosti. Leta 1945 je bil zadolžen za organizacijo in odprtje nove poljske univerze v Vroclavu, kjer je prispeval k ustanovitvi treh uspešnih klasičnih oddelkov – filologije, antične zgodovine in arheologije – ter znanstvenega društva, akademskih revij in živahne akademske skupnosti. Ko se je štiri leta pozneje preselil v Varšavo, je ustanovil Inštitut za materialno kulturo, razvil multidisciplinarno raziskovalno skupino in v okviru sovjetskega bloka začel dva velika projekta arheoloških izkopavanj, Olbia in Novae, kjer so se cele generacije arheologov naučile terenskega dela in kako z rednimi objavami in mednarodnim sodelovanjem sporočati njegove rezultate. S svojimi partijskimi povezavami je zaščitil in zagotovil podporo kolegom, ki so imeli v tem pogledu manj sreče.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Kazimierz Majewski, Univerza v Vroclavu, klasična tradicija, zgodovina klasične filologije, Olbia, Novae

Athens – Primož Simoniti, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Jožica Škof, Matija Pogorelec, Zlata Grošelj, Milan Grošelj, Vlasta Tominšek, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Franc Žužek, Majda Gabrovšek, Mirko Juteršek, Nataša Stanič, Zorka Šubic Ciani.

Olympia, the view from Philippeion towards the Temple of Hera.

Olympia, two columns of the Temple of Hera.

Olympia – Milan Grošelj, Zlata Grošelj, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc, Franc Žužek, Nataša Stanič, Majda Gabrovšek, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Primož Simoniti, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Jožica Škof, Ksenija Rozman, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Mirko Juteršek.

Olympia – Franc Žužek, Ksenija Rozman, Mirko Juteršek, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Milan Grošelj, Nataša Stanič, Primož Simoniti.

Olympia, palaestra – Ksenija Rozman, Primož Simoniti, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Jožica Škof, Majda Gabrovšek.

Olympia – Milan Grošelj, Zlata Grošelj, Nataša Stanič, Vlasta Tominšek, Mirko Juteršek, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Ksenija Rozman, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Franc Žužek, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Matija Pogorelec, Majda Gabrovšek, Jožica Škof.

Corinth, Temple of Octavia, sister of Emperor Augustus – Majda Gabrovšek, Franc Žužek, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Mirko Juteršek, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Jožica Škof, Primož Simoniti, Nataša Stanič.

INTERVIEWS

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Benedetto Bravo (1931), University of Warsaw

Adrian Szopa and Andrzej Gillmeister

A summary of an interview conducted by Adrian Szopa and Andrzej Gillmeister on April 22, 2016, in the cycle "Conversations with Mentors," sponsored by the Centre for Film Documentation of Polish Scholarship, Pedagogical University of Kraków and the Polish Society of Ancient Studies. Available online at the Oral History Archive of the Polish Society for Ancient Studies (SHS). Translated by Elżbieta Olechowska.

Born in a village now integrated into Bassano di Grappa, a city in the province of Vicenza, in Veneto, son of two elementary school teachers. He was educated first at the village school, then in Bassano. From his childhood in Mussolini's Italy, he remembers compulsory, quasi-military physical training on the so-called fascist Saturdays, at the end of which all students would chant: *Per il Re: Viva il Re! E per il Duce: A noi!* After high school, Bravo enrolled at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa; on graduation, he was offered a one-year bursary to study at the University of Oxford during the academic year 1953/1954. When his School, in consultation with the British Council, wanted to offer him a yearly extension of the bursary, he refused because the offer was not adequately consulted with the Student Council in Pisa. Professor Hugh Last, Principal of Brasenose College where Bravo was staying, bid him goodbye, saying: "Here, students do not arrogate such rights." In Italy, at that time, working at the university or even at high school was not easy to come by. After tutoring private students for a while, Bravo was granted a nine-month bursary by the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici in Naples, created in 1946 by Benedetto Croce. Next to Thucydides, his main subject there, Bravo attended lectures; of particular interest was the history of the nineteen-century French historical thought (Tocqueville), taught by Federico Chabod (1901–1960), an outstanding scholar from Aosta specializing in modern political history and political thought. In 1955, Bravo obtained a bursary

at the University of Hamburg – through the services of the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) – attracted by the scholarly and didactic fame of Bruno Snell. In Hamburg, participating in many discussions, he realized that the West-German society dealt successfully with the Nazi past. Snell was one of the rare German scholars who were, from the beginning, consequently against Hitler. He was aware that German professors from the 1930s–1940s had little understanding of politics, and this blind spot allowed Hitler to confuse them easily. Snell undertook as his postwar mission to open German academia to the world and actively promoted this approach. Among other projects, he created the Europa-Kolleg, barely a decade after World War II. When Bravo visited him many years later in Hamburg, he fully approved of Willy Brandt and said about him that "He is clean."

Questioned how Italian professors dealt with the fascist past, Bravo said that already in 1943, Mussolini's popularity had gone down, and the ideology as such was "rotted" from the inside. This trend continued, especially when Italian imperial power proved to be an illusion. The postwar de-fascization was rather superficial and mild, but according to Bravo, there was no real need for firmer action. What remained of fascism led to bloody civil unrest under German occupation up to the Spring of 1945, but later the threat did not present any danger. The fascist dictatorship never went as deep as in Germany. For example, Benedetto Croce, generally known as an enemy of fascism, could publish and function within his circle in relative safety. Croce's intellectual authority was such that the Mussolini regime did not dare to question it.

In 1956, Bravo, who, like his former fellow students from Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa still did not find a university position, started teaching Italian at Parisian high schools. At the same time, he attended lectures that interested him at local universities. He became part of a circle of intellectuals "de gauche," who put him in touch with the two famous French anthropologists of ancient Greece, Jean-Pierre Vernant (1914–2007) and Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1930–2006), and with an eminent Hellenist and sociologist, already at the close of his career, Louis Gernet (1882–1962).

Vernant, a convinced pacifist, became a leader of the French Resistance *Libération-sud* ("colonel Berthier" at Forces françaises de l'intérieur de Haute-Garonne). He was a member of the Young Communists during his university studies and remained in the Communist Party after the War. However, he was strongly opposed to the war in Algeria and finally quit the Party in 1969 – for the same reasons he joined it in the first place, as he told Bravo.

Another scholar who made a deep impression on Bravo was Ignace Meyerson (1888–1983), the founder of historical psychology, born in Warsaw and as a seventeen-year-old forced to flee Poland under the threat of arrest by police because of a speech delivered to workers in front of the electrical plant in Powiśle (Warsaw). Bravo had difficulties imagining this quiet, softly-spoken man involved in something as loud and tense as a speech to an angry crowd.

The last fascinating French personality Bravo encountered during his stay in Paris (and later) was Louis Robert, a Greek epigraphist at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, who had an unusual custom of inviting foreign students for dinner at his home. On one of these occasions, in 1969, Bravo met Ewa, a young assistant on a yearly stipend from the University of Warsaw, whose attractive personality he liked very much, especially because she seemed so decisive. She attended seminars on papyrology and epigraphy. Several years later, she became Bravo's wife.

When still in Paris, Bravo became intrigued by the subject of Hellenistic intellectuals and their culture, how it emerged and acquired specific qualities. He was strongly influenced by the reasoning of Antonio Gramsci, who expressed many inspiring thoughts on the position and function of various kinds of intellectuals. He was still looking for his research path. Vernant's teaching and publications, which he highly admired, seemed refreshing but he did not feel called to follow in Vernant's footsteps. Vidal-Naquet's later publications had a similar impact on Bravo. In 1960, he returned to Italy and worked as a high school teacher. This episode, unpleasant as it was, lasted only a few months. Ewa was back in Warsaw, and they both agreed that he could try for a bursary in Poland.

At the time, there was a Polish-Italian academic exchange agreement in force. Italian candidates were few, and Bravo quickly obtained a bursary for a year, which was then extended for several more months. During that time, he learned enough Polish to function. When Ewa's mentor, Professor Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist (1917–1995), realized that Bravo intended to settle permanently in Poland, she started looking for a position for him at the university, and indeed, he was hired as a Latin and later Greek instructor. When his Polish improved, he was asked to conduct ancient history workshops. He did this successfully until he was promoted to teach the history of ancient historiography. Struggling with presenting the subject easily and excitingly, he remained unhappy with his performance as a teacher. Several years later, in 1966, he defended his PhD on the German ancient historian Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–1884).

Questioned about his impressions of Warsaw upon his arrival in the early 1960s, he said that the city seemed colorless and cold, but that did

not matter, as he was interested in Poland when he was still in Paris. As a dissident Communist inclined to revolt and entirely unorthodox, he was fascinated by the events of the Polish October '56. He was aware of changes aiming at the liberalization of the regime. When Bravo arrived in Warsaw, this liberalization was in retreat, causing resentment and regrets in the academic community. However, while this unwelcome change could have impacted the study of the most recent history, there were no such pressures in the Department of Ancient History. Bravo fully expected to be able to discuss Marxist revisionism, but, to his great disappointment, it proved impossible. In the community, where at the time, intellectual discussions were open and free, Marxism was a dead subject. The hope for a "socialism with a human face" to spring from the basis of Marxist convictions by then almost entirely vanished, but he was not inclined to abandon his hope and the views that he shared with his Italian and French friends. He was changing his mind slowly but irrevocably, step by step. His revisionist Marxism also ebbed away. The last, definitive stroke was delivered by the shameful events which occurred in Poland in March 1968.

Bravo felt at ease working in the group of ancient historians led by Professor Bieżuńska-Małowist. She managed her team capably and with skill. From her and her team – and especially from his wife – Bravo learned discipline in didactics. But his research interests remained all over the place. Initially, he continued working on Hellenistic intellectuals but with no concrete effects on the horizon. Professor Bieżuńska advised him to write his PhD dissertation on the nineteenth-century studies of Antiquity, a topic he read about when still in Hamburg.

Bieżuńska's suggestion proved salutary. Bravo worked on Droysen and demonstrated that his Hegelian views illuminated his historical research and that this Hegel's enthusiast, a student of the classicist August Boeckh (1785–1867), discovered something that his views did not foresee. In 1964, Bravo defended his PhD dissertation, which, after some modifications, became his first publication in 1968. He underlined the influence Bronisław Baczko (1924–2016) and the seminar he conducted at the Stanisław Staszic Palace in Warsaw had on his thinking about the history of historiography and ideas. Another scholar he encountered at that time was Krzysztof Pomian (1934), whose books *The Past as a Matter of Faith* and *The Past as a Matter of Knowledge*,[1] made a significant impact on Bravo. He also read extensively Leszek

1 The second book was ready for print in 1968 but the March events followed by Pomian's loss of employment interrupted the editorial process. Subsequently,

Kołakowski (1927–2009), his book *Presence of Myth* was left in typescript with Irena Krońska (19915–1974) when Kołakowski, who lost the right to teach in 1968, had to leave the country. The book was published four years later, in 1972, in France by the Polish Instytut Literacki.

Bravo obtained the degree of habilitation on the basis of a 1980 monograph on συλάν, or extrajudicial private seizure against foreigners in Greek cities. Like the fate of many key breakthroughs in scholarship, it came about accidentally. Having read in *Vestnik Drevnej Historii,* published in 1972, the oldest known Greek letter (ca. 500 BC) written on a lead tablet excavated on a small island near Olbia on the northern Black Sea coast, Bravo became fascinated by these archaeological finds and produced his own, different interpretation of the text. As his knowledge of Greeks on the Black Sea was rudimentary, he thought guidance from one of the students of Professor Kazimierz Majewski (1903–1981), the Polish specialist on Olbia,[2] Professor Aleksandra Dunin-Wąsowicz (1932–2015). He started also following the work of Russian and Ukrainian archaeologists, as well as orientalists, on other lead tablets found on the northern shore of the Black Sea, offering several new interpretations. The result of this fascination was the habilitation monograph on συλάν, as well as the later book on Herodotus' description of Scythia and another on Greeks living on the coast of the Black Sea, entitled *Pontica varia.*

As Professor *emeritus*, Benedetto Bravo continues to conduct a seminar with a small number of participants based on readings and interpretations of ancient Greek literary texts.

Pomian emigrated to France. The book was finally published in Warsaw in 1992. Bravo read it still in typescript.

2 The archaeological site in Olbia has been studied by Polish classical archaeologists from the Institute of the History of Material Culture, later renamed The Institute of archaeology and Ethnology, and in 2016–2018 also by a team from the National Museum in Warsaw.

Corinth, with Apollo's temple in the background.

Corinth, view of Acrocorinth.

Corinth, museum‘s courtyard.

Corinth, museum‘s courtyard – Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Matija Pogorelec, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Mirko Juteršek.

Mycenae, Lion Gate.

Mycenae, Lion Gate – Mirko Juteršek, Zlata Grošelj, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc, Ksenija Rozman, Majda Gabrovšek, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Franc Žužek, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Primož Simoniti, Nataša Stanič, Jožica Škof, Matija Pogorelec, Meta Masič Prelesnik.

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Ewa Wipszycka (1933), University of Warsaw

Adrian Szopa and Andrzej Gillmeister

A summarized fragment of an interview conducted on April 22, 2016, as an installment of the cycle "Conversations with Mentors," sponsored by the Centre for Film Documentation of Polish Scholarship, Pedagogical University of Kraków and the Polish Society of Ancient Studies. Available online at the Oral History Archive of the Polish Society for Ancient Studies (SHS). The summary covers only Prof. Wipszycka's biography until the change of regime. Translated by Elżbieta Olechowska.

Ewa Wipszycka's exceptional grades at high school gave her unconditional access to the university: she was exempt from entrance exams. Since she combined her academic attainments with voluntary organizational work, she was labeled one of the "leaders in the social and academic effort," as it was then called. She began to study history at the University of Warsaw in 1954. She was quickly noticed by the Head of Ancient History, Professor Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist (1917–1995), who took her under her wing. Bieżuńska-Małowist was an exceptionally motivating educator, even if her lectures were less than ideal, says Wipszycka. Able to convince students of the many exciting periods in ancient history that must be studied anew, Bieżuńska captured the imagination of young people and inspired them with enthusiasm for her discipline. During the first year, history students learned about ancient and medieval history, but Wipszycka was never tempted to specialize in anything but antiquity.

Some of the talented students Bieżuńska-Małowist attracted at that time were truly outstanding, such as the future professor Jerzy Kolendo (1933–2014). Quite a few people attended the second-year seminar. Bieżuńska-Małowist and her husband Marian Małowist (1909–1988), a medievalist, knew how to gather bright and capable young students. These students would often later choose to specialize in another discipline but always did so having absorbed something of their working method and their vision of what the study of history entailed and why it mattered from the seminars. As Wipszycka said,

working with the Małowists, students were conscious of being close to authentic scholarship.

Aleksander Gieysztor (1916–1999), a hero of the Resistance during World War II and a legendary figure in Polish medieval studies, was another key historian in Wipszycka's professional development. It was the period of intensive research conducted in preparation for the Millennium of the Polish State, a major interdisciplinary program including a robust archaeological component.[1] Gieysztor visited site after site and knew how to infuse the excavations with a sense of history. Still, it was Bieżuńska-Małowist whom Wipszycka considered her mentor. First of all, she forced the young historian to choose her specialism. Her preparatory seminar was excellent: engaging, very lively, with plenty of discussion. The MA seminar was similar. Bieżuńska did not teach facts as such but what to do with them. In Wipszycka's academic life, she played an inestimable role. She was positive that Wipszycka should study papyri. Purely pragmatic considerations decided the matter. Professor Jerzy Manteuffel (1900–1954) was still alive but in poor health and practically inactive. On the other hand, Rafał Taubenschlag (1881–1958), the prewar professor of Roman law and papyrology at the Jagiellonian University, who returned from the United States in 1947, became the Chair of Ancient Law at the Faculty of Law in the University of Warsaw, and together with Manteufel taught at the Department of Papyrology at the Faculty of History. Taubenschlag brought his impressive library from the States and, as a renowned scholar, received huge numbers of various offprints, the main instrument of exchange and communication between scholars at the time. The circulation of offprints kept academics informed about who did what in their discipline. Taubenschlag's library saved Wipszycka from a depressive inferiority complex. There was simply no way anything could have been missing from that library. Indeed, everything was there, in its proper place, a solid basis for research. Wipszycka, for a long time, resisted Bieżuńska's idea that she should study papyrology. She admits that this resistance originated in external reasons, i.e., in her political interests, orienting her toward studying the late Roman republic. However, her mentor was convincing and stood by her proposal, which proved right.

Wipszycka said she was not only guided by her mentor, but was a child of the Institute of History, an unusual place open to the world even before the 1956 thaw and much more so following the subsequent wave of liberalization. A great school of historical sciences, once the borders

1 Cf. the paper of Elżbieta Olechowska in the present issue.

opened, it promoted personal exchanges abroad and demonstrated to all of Europe how economic and social history should be taught. Not many people know or remember the Institute today, but Aleksander Gieysztor, Marian Małowist, Witold Kula[2] (1916–1988), Antoni Mączak (1928–2003), and to a lesser degree Henryk Samsonowicz (1930–2021) were scholars who had shown what could be achieved when history is practiced with intelligence and wisdom. It was undoubtedly history influenced by Marxism but adopted highly selectively and with discernment. Wipszycka said she was the product of this community with which she identified and which taught her a whole spectrum of values. For that reason, when she first traveled abroad and found herself in Paris in 1959, she was aware of the difference between herself and her fellow students in seminars. She was a historian, and they… Her perception of history, research tools, and historical research themes were diametrically different from theirs. She was conscious of lacking only technical skills and accepted this shortcoming with humility and desperation, simultaneously realizing that the Institute of History had taught her the difficult art of dealing with economic and social history.

During the last year of her studies, Wipszycka worked as a history teacher at a teacher-training high school in Stawki Street in Warsaw. She covered the work of a teacher on sick leave and kept this post for a year after graduation. She admits that she hated university then and still does not love it. She considers the pervasive, inbuilt dependence of young people on the old incredibly unhealthy. Also, her attitude to people who surrounded her was – how to define it – uncompromising. Later, she mellowed. She always knew that teaching was her destiny, and it came naturally.

She thinks she was a good lecturer. Her grandfather taught at the first Warsaw polytechnic. Growing up, she could observe her mother's example and be psychologically prepared for this profession. She started teaching at the university at a time when failing the first

2 W. Kula was the only member of this group who belonged to the short-lived and ill-fated Marxist Association of Historians (Marksistowskie Zrzeszenie Historyków). It was created in 1948, several months before the merger of PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and PPR (Polish Workers' Party), by activists of both organizations. It was never truly launched and remained on paper until its reactivation in 1950, which led to a short period of activity, after which, it expired again. See Marcin Kula, "Dobrymi chęciami piekło wybrukowane: Refleksje nad Marksistowskim Zrzeszeniem Historyków" in Społeczeństwo w dobie przemian: wiek XIX i XX. Księga jubileuszowa profesor Anny Żarnowskiej, edited by Maria Nietyksza, Andrzej Szwarc, Katarzyna Sierakowska et al. (Warsaw: DiG, 2003), 452–465.

year meant not being able to continue. If she did not give a passing grade to students, they automatically dropped out. In the case of male students, it had exceptionally unpleasant consequences: compulsory two-year military service. Obviously, like all beginners, she was inclined to be excessively severe. In any case, during exams, she was strict until her retirement. She admits that in teaching matters, she always had enormous help from Iza Bieżuńska, who conducted her didactic activities perfectly. Bieżuńska insisted that her assistants be present when she was examining students. It was an excellent way to learn how to do it. When Wipszycka worked at the Institute of Archaeology, she examined older students in a different, more tolerant manner. She was very flexible when selecting readings and due dates, and she never gave failing grades. She was willing to give as many chances as necessary. She remembers these exams with great satisfaction.

Wipszycka believed that sharing her knowledge with society without the Communist Party's participation in the process was crucial for her a historian. She therefore took part in creating and running a popular monthly, *Mówią Wieki* [The Past Speaks], founded in 1958 on the wave of the post-October '56 liberalization. There were surprisingly few problems with Party censorship. Wipszycka and her colleagues were worried that they had done something wrong if the censors did not molest them enough.

The topic of her PhD dissertation did not stray from the general research practice of all members of the so-called Małowists' stable and was chosen under their guidance. Scholars such as Mączak, Samsonowicz, Benedykt Zientara (1928–1983), Kolendo, and herself would tackle similar subjects from economic history. Iza Bieżuńska, her PhD Adviser, instructed her to work on crafts in Egypt. A month later, feeling bold, she told Bieżuńska that she could not learn the technologies of all crafts and proposed to limit the topic to weaving. Her adviser immediately accepted the change of subject. The sources for this branch of crafts were impressive. Still, during the first six months, she studied weaving technology and learned ancient methods of the craft, even if this is not immediately evident in her book. That was the beginning of her adventure with Egyptian weaving. Once the dissertation was published, she traveled the world sharing her knowledge of this craft. She says with satisfaction that to this day, the book remains the fundamental economic study of the subject, even though one recent publication does complete certain areas. Even when she was still writing *L'Industrie textile dans l'Égypte romaine*, she knew what she would research later, and this new research area would have nothing to do with Bieżuńska. She was going to study the early Christian Church.

Bieżuńska ensured that Wipszycka received a bursary for a one-year stay in Paris; she knew how to guide people. Before Wipszycka left, Bieżuńska told her to use the whole time to study, attend seminars and lectures and not pretend to do any research, only study, study, study. This advice met precisely with Wipszycka's own desire. Indeed, during that year, Wipszycka attended scores of classes and got to know many scholars. She met two authorities on papyrology. One of them, Roger Rémondon, was particularly inspiring, and because his area of expertise was Late Antiquity, she decided to focus on that period. She thought then that her choice was unusual but soon learned she was far from alone in her preference. Late antiquity became nearly the forefront of research on antiquity and gathered an increasing number of scholars. Still, even before she began researching the history of the Egyptian Church, she realized through her familiarity with papyri that the institutional history of the Church had been untouched. That is how she found her niche, over which she has retained a monopoly.

From her stay in Paris, Wipszycka brought back a husband, an Italian classicist, Benedetto Bravo. They attended the same seminar conducted by an eminent epigraphist, Louis Robert (1904–1985). She describes her marriage as contracted according to the best academic models. Robert used to invite international students home for dinner. Wipszycka and her future husband met there and realized they lived on opposite sides of the same *cité universitaire*. They kept in touch, which also allowed Wipszycka to enter a circle representing a way of thinking quite new to her. It influenced her greatly. Her next study trip, facilitated by Iza Bieżuńska, took Wipszycka to Berlin, where she could select the papyri she wanted to publish. The Berlin collection was at the time recently recovered from Soviet Russia. She remembers being taken by the curator of the collection to an enormous hall filled with low cabinets housing papyri mounted under glass. With his hand toward the cabinets, he said: "Go ahead, take your pick" – and left. It was not a simple task. There were tens of thousands of papyri in the hall, but if the curator thought she would be overwhelmed, he was wrong because she knew how to tackle the problem. She looked through the inventory and, based on that, selected several papyri. She thought that her habilitation dissertation would be based on these sources. Luckily, this was not what happened, but already then, she was looking for the word *ekklēsia* in the papyri. In Warsaw, she acquired a solid papyrological basis thanks to Anna Świderkówna (1925–2008)[3] and underwent additional training in Paris. She was, first

3 A classical philologist and Chair of Papyrology at the University of Warsaw from 1962–1991.

of all, a social-economic historian, and that was her focus in the study of the Church. When she began to broaden her interests, she met almost insurmountable obstacles. In the early 1960s, no adequate library in Warsaw specialized in this aspect of ancient history. Rev. Marek Starowieyski (1937)[4] was just beginning to build his library on the subject. As Wipszycka reports, Anna Świderkówna used to say he had charisma for books, and she was right. However, when Wipszycka started researching Church history, Starowieyski's library did not yet exist. She needed to be introduced to the study of the Church. Finding partners in Poland who could provide such assistance then was not easy. What was on offer at the Academy of Catholic Theology[5] was unacceptable. Wipszycka had to find out on her own what the main research tools were and learn to use them. The Catholic clergy unconsciously believed that the history of the Church is like a mosaic to which subsequent generations add their tiles according to divine design. Protestants were exactly the same. There were, however, still remnants of a prewar circle of historians of theology who assumed that scholarship, such as the history of the Church, its institutions, doctrine, and liturgy, could not rely on a, let us call it, *transcendental* endpoint. Wipszycka was unaware of that, however. She was fortunate because what she chose as her niche was primarily the domain of theologians – something she was never interested in – and second, that of editors of theological texts. Historians were practically absent from the field. She could read "her" papyri in peace as the confessional researchers gave them a wide berth. They trembled at the very sight of papyri because the text was incomprehensible, with holes, torn in pieces, missing the beginning and the sides. While deciphering papyri, Wipszycka systematically read literary texts and tried to draw a whole picture from these elements. At first, she looked for consultation among the Polish clergy, the only ones she could contact. To no avail. Then, a third type of source revealed itself – archaeology. She realized that it was impossible to study antiquity without a different discipline, let us call it technical. For her, it was papyrology. For her friend, Jerzy Kolendo, it was archaeology. She understood the importance of archaeology, but

4 Eminent specialist of early Christianity, in particular of the Apocrypha of the New Testament and Fathers of the Eastern and Western Church, Professor emeritus of Classical Philology at the University of Warsaw, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum and Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.

5 Akademia Teologii Katolickiej was created by two decrees of the Communist Council of Ministers in August 1954 simultaneously closing down the Faculties of Theology at the University of Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Canonical approval of the Academy was received from the Vatican Congregatio de Studiorum Institutis only on June 29, 1989.

her road to working with archaeological material took some time. It finally happened in Egypt. When she published her habilitation book, she went with a copy to Kazimierz Michałowski.[6]

She told him there was no valid reason for her going to Egypt other than a deeply felt necessity to see the sky and the land. Michałowski granted her a two-month bursary, and in the early 1970s, she went to Egypt for the first time.

The timing was not ideal, as the country was under martial law, but she still managed to see a lot. In the early 1980s, she received a three-month grant that was hardly sufficient to cover the price of bus tickets. However, she met many new people and took advantage of any chance to travel. She observed the excavations, but a historian without archaeological training and any talent for drawing or taking photographs is useless at an excavation site. On the other hand, she was knowledgeable about Egypt, its clergy, and the saints. Later on, Wipszycka returned to Egypt almost every year, and she visited some monastic sites each time. She probably saw 90 percent of all there was to see. That is how she augmented her niche. At some point, Marek Starowieyski asked her to write an introduction and a commentary to a selection of previously translated texts about St. Anthony. The translator used Migne's *Patrology*, a Latin version of an Arabic translation of the original, and had no clue about St. Anthony's times. Wipszycka found the rule that Anthony allegedly dictated to fathers from Naqlun. Reading this text, she vaguely remembered having read about this monastic site in a book written by a Jesuit, an eminent specialist in monastic Egypt.

In her copy of the book, the pages about Naqlun were missing. She called a friend in Paris and asked him to read them to her. Later, she solicited other people for works about the convent in Naqlun. Finally, in desperation, she went to the National Museum, to Włodzimierz Godlewski (1945).[7] She told him that they have to try because first of all, she has in hand the rule of her monastery, and second, at the edge of the

6 The best known Polish twenty-century classical archaeologist who conducted excavations in Edfu (Southern Egypt) in 1936–1939; in Mirmeki in the Soviet Crimea in 1956–1958; in Tel-Atrib in the Lower Egypt in 1957–1969; in Palmyra (Syria) in 1959–1969; in Alexandria, since 1960, where the first ancient theatre in Egypt was discovered and reconstructed; in Deir-el-Bahari, since 1961; in Faras (North Sudan) in 1961–1964; in Dongola (also North Sudan) in 1964–1966; in Nea Paphos on Cyprus, since 1965. Michałowski directed also UNESCO project of moving Abu Simbel temples to save them from flooding by the Aswan Dam in 1964–1968.

7 Professor of archaeology at the University of Warsaw, student of Kazimierz Michałowski, specialising in the archaeology of Egypt and Christian Nubia.

Faiyum Oasis, there are remains of a monastic complex that has never been examined. She knew he was supposed to depart soon to work as the secretary of Cairo archaeological station for a year. After some time, he wrote that he traveled to Naqlun and found a great *kom* or hill created in the desert by sands covering old buildings. There was certainly something there. She thought that one excavation season would be enough, but work continues to this day. Work on the site began in 1984. Wipszycka admits her admiration for Włodzimierz Godlewski's organizational talents. Her task was to run up and down the hills and identify possible emplacements of *eremitoria*. Finally, one afternoon, she told Godlewski: "Tomorrow, the workers arrive. Come with me to decide where they should start digging." They looked at a few *eremitoria* along a small valley, and Godlewski decided, "We are digging exactly here." This was indeed the most exciting place. Some call it intuition, but it was simply a combination of exceptional knowledge, erudition, and experience. Conditions were difficult, with water shortages and abundant bugs, including flees. Still, it immediately became apparent that this site probably flourished as the most important monastic complex in Central Egypt. They were fortunate because, already during the first season, they uncovered papyri and a fragment of parchment with what proved to be a page from the lost eleventh book of Livy. Benedetto Bravo, Wipszycka's husband, a true classical philologist, was beyond himself when she brought photographs of the parchment. These initial successes helped in obtaining money for further digs. The effect of the first season was simply triumphal.

Marian Małowist and Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist, with their friends Nina Assorodobraj-Kula and Witold Kula, Paris 1947 (photo courtesy of Włodzimierz Lengauer).

Mycenae – Zlata Grošelj, Vlasta Tominšek, Nataša Stanič, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc, Franc Žužek, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Mirko Juteršek, Matija Pogorelec, Primož Simoniti, Majda Gabrovšek, Ksenija Rozman, Jožica Škof.

Mycenae.

Mycenae.

Mycenae, part of the mass grave.

Tiryns – Franc Žužek, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Zlata Grošelj, Majda Gabrovšek, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc, Milan Grošelj, Ksenija Rozman, Mirko Juteršek, Primož Simoniti, Nataša Stanič.

Tiryns, remains of the city walls.

Tiryns – ὄνῳ τις ἔλεγε μῦθον, ὁ δὲ τὰ ὦτα ἐκίνει.

Epidaurus, theatre.

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Ferenc Hörcher (1964) University of Public Service, Budapest

Anja Božič

Toward concordia: Dialogue and Poetry. – The question whether the governance and autonomy of medieval and early modern cities and the participation of their citizens in communal affairs may gesture toward a form of communal self-governance or it is yet another form of the rule of the privileged has re-emerged with new answers in recent scholarship. It was also one of the topics of the lecture series, *Urban Governance and Civic Participation in Words and Stone*, as part of which Prof. Ferenc Hörcher also gave a talk.[1] Prof. Hörcher is a Hungarian philosopher, historian of political thought and aesthetics, a critic, and a poet. Currently, he is head of and research professor at the Research Institute of Politics and Government at the University of Public Service, Budapest, and senior fellow at the Institute of Philosophy of the Eötvös Loránd Research Ntework. One of his latest books is titled *The Political Philosophy of the European City: From Polis, through City State, to Megalopolis?*[2] His lecture, "The Political Ideology of the Renaissance and Early Modern City – from Bruni to Althusius," explored the explicit

1 The lecture series was co-organized by the Democracy in History Workgroup of the CEU Democracy Institute, the Department of Medieval Studies at CEU, the Department of History of Art at Birkbeck, University of London, and the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Erfurt. The talks of various renowned speakers focused on the origins of civic participation in political thought and explored its forms of expression in written and visual media from late antiquity to the seventeenth century. The lecture series also served to prepare the ground for a Summer University titled, Urban Governance and Civic Participation in Words and Stone to be organized by the Open Society University Network (OSUN) in July 2022; details are available online. Prof. Hörcher's talk is available on YouTube.

2 Ferenc Hörcher, *The Political Philosophy of the European City: From Polis, through City-State, to Megalopolis* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2021).

and implicit principles of political thought in the medieval and Renaissance European city. Taking Leonardo Bruni's panegyric *In Praise of Florence* (c. 1403–4)[3] as a paradigm case, Prof. Hörcher first illustrated the example of Florentine civic humanism to demonstrate the intellectual foundations of governance in the medieval Italian "city state." Embedding this overview into a short summary of Max Weber's meta-description of the Western city,[4] Prof. Hörcher then shifted his attention to the paradigm of the Northern European city through the exposition of Althusius' *Politica* (1603)[5] and discussed the influence of the Reformation as well as the birth of the modern state on the self-governance and autonomy of cities. Although the following interview is based primarily on Prof. Hörcher's lecture, the discussion joyfully meandered through a number of other, fascinating topics, like the value of philosophical dialogue vis-à-vis debate, the literary figure of the flaneur, the political ideas of Dante and the philosophical potential of poetry.

You began your lecture, "The Political Ideology of the Renaissance and Early Modern City - From Bruni to Althusius," in a manner of a true Renaissance rhetorician, with a bit of an apologia referring to your profession as a political philosopher and not a historian. It appears to me, however, especially after reading your recent book, The Political Philosophy of the European City, *that you travel through the major epochs of European history, from antiquity to the modern era, with an intellectual historian's ease and expertise. Was there a reason as to why you did not identify as both – a political philosopher and a historian – or was this differentiation tailored to this specific audience, which consisted primarily of historians? How do you think your methodology and questions differ from those employed by a historian?*

Indeed, I emphasized the distinction as I find the difference in the self-perception of these two professions important and although I think of myself as a historian of political thought, I think that to be a historian is something different. My perception was that most

3 Leonardo Bruni, *In Praise of Florence: The Panegyric of the City of Florence and an Introduction to Leonardo Bruni's Civil Humanism*, intr. and transl. Alfred Scheepers (Amsterdam: Olive Press, 2005), 77–99.

4 Max Weber, *The City*, trans. and ed. Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth (New York: The Free Press, 1958/1966, 65–81.

5 Althusius, *Politica: An Abridged Translation of Politics Methodically Set Forth and Illustrated with Sacred and Profane Examples*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995).

of the speakers in the series were historians in that more "proper" sense and approach the city from the purely historical perspective. In contrast, I approach urban republicanism from the perspective of the problems I derive from political philosophy. This is where my normative questions originate from and I try to answer them with the help of historical materials, for in politics this is our empirical material and I explore the urban communities and their documents with this in mind. I see a similar example in David Hume, for instance, who is now regarded primarily as a philosopher but in his own time he was considered to be more of a historian and a man of letters. According to Hume, the main distinction between political science and the natural sciences is the following: in the former case, you cannot experiment and test your hypothesis by submitting it to a research procedure in order to see the results. Instead, you can examine concrete historical examples that pertain to the problematic in question and generalize on this basis. This is what he calls political science, that is, philosophy applied to historical material and this is my assumption, too. Political philosophy, history of political thought, and history: these are the different phases that I schematize for myself, and my arena is the history of political thought, which I perceive as the overlap between political philosophy and proper political history.

Moreover, historians receive special training and have a specific set of technical resources and procedures at their disposal for approaching their textual sources from archives. I was not trained in that vein and even though I did some work in archives for my PhD in Scotland, my sources primarily derive from printed versions. Add to this that I was also primarily educated as a literary historian, my undergraduate majors having been Hungarian, English, and Aesthetics.

Which is also reflected in the way you choose your sources, including also literary and art works among them...

Of course, for I believe that they are relevant historical resources: as much as politics, art and literature are also activities through which individuals try to make sense of the world around them. Therefore, they can tell us a lot about this world as long as we learn to read them with an eye on politics. These materials themselves, however, must be understood within the framework of the life of their producers, since anything that is a product of ours will be better understood if we place it in our biographical narrative. Thus art, politics, reli-

gious ideas make better sense in the specific contexts of our lives. In contrast, this is not true for activities in science: you can have a scientific discovery but it does not necessarily have anything to do with your life. Neither does it have a relevance in technology. You can have a technological invention and it does not matter what you use it for or why you had that idea. But in the humanities, and in anything dependent on meaning or interpretation, there is this further dimension that if you include it in the life narrative of the person in question, you will probably better understand it.

Which already hints toward the key concepts that you invoke, drawing from Coulanges, civitas *and* urbs.[6] *For those who did not attend your lecture, could you elaborate a bit on the meaning of these two concepts as they fit into your own scholarly discourse?*

Certainly. As Coulanges outlined, these two terms, both of which are usually translated as "city," were actually not understood as synonymous by the ancients. Instead, *civitas* denoted the religious and political associations of families and tribes, and thus had a more abstract, interpersonal connotation; while *urbs* was the place of assembly and of dwelling and, therefore, represented the concrete physical environment. I myself use these two terms to explain the connection between my two main interests that concern the city, the political and the aesthetic. They explain my two approaches: *civitas* requires the political-philosophical aspect, to look at the city as the association of human beings, a community of living persons; and *urbs* is the geographical area, both natural and constructed, where we can see the imprint of the activities of earlier generations of citizens/inhabitants.

It is, thus, convenient for me to use this established distinction to separate the communal aspect from the created, material aspect of the city, the latter being the sort of "hardware" and the former, the "software."

These are, no doubt, dynamic relations and in a way, this is an age-old question, i.e., the relationship between the intellectual and cultural spheres on the one hand and their material expressions on the other. How are the two connected in the city?

6 Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*, transl. by Willard Small (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 110.

Well, they are often in direct parallel. The social structure of the community corresponds to the topographical stratification of the *urbs*. We can understand a community, for instance, by looking at the distance between their cathedral and the town hall, by looking at the arrangements of the guild quarters – the ways in which these various groups were positioned inside the city walls. Each community in the city is, thus, subtly represented in the geographical locations of their dwellings and not only through their ranks in the council house. And this is, in fact, the main idea of my book, namely to understand an urban community by their acts, thoughts, norms and settlement arrangements.

This brings to my mind your praise of dialogue, which you mentioned as your favored approach both in philosophy and understanding human interaction in general. You employ a distinction between dialogue and debate in one of your articles.[7] *Could you briefly sum up how you connect it with the urban context?*

Inspired by the ideas of the twentieth-century German thinker, Hans-Georg Gadamer, I think that philosophy, which is now usually understood as debate, was originally, in its classical period, closer to the form of the dialogue, the main distinction between them being that in a dialogue all participants can have their share of the discussion, while in a debate participants want to dominate. This connects to my understanding of urban politics: I see the basic concept of the European city as striving for concordia, i.e., balance or peace. This means that the expression of differing views within an urban community should not necessarily foster factionalism or become a mechanism for exclusion among the rival parties – this is possible in a dialogue but less so in a debate. There is a minimum set of shared agreements as soon as one enters a discussion; otherwise there would be no foundation upon which to build arguments. According to the basic teachings of theoretical linguistics, there must be some elementary level of common understanding for language to appear.

A dialogue, therefore, is not only the foundational philosophical genre, but also the grounding force of political relationships within the community in European cities. The preservation of communal peace is more important here than pushing one's own truth. This

7 Ferenc Hörcher, "Dialógus és vita a nyugati filozófiában: Töredékes feljegyzések [Dialogue and Debate in Western Philosophy: Fragmentary Notes]," *Forrás* 32.5 (2021), 3–12.

can be generalized to a certain extent: according to the teaching of the natural law, a desire to preserve peace within the community is an attribute of human beings as such, not the privilege of particular cultures and civilizations. On the other hand, this metaphor of the dialogue cannot be applied to groups whose members do not live together. This is, again, a crucial advantage of the life of the city as opposed to the life of the state: in an urban setting, one lives in a very well-defined and circumscribed area with members of the community, which influences one's notion of the other inhabitants in that one gets directly acquainted with them by living together with them. And, as I mentioned earlier, this close encounter caused by living together is what interests me.

So, go for dialogue not debate…

Well, at least that is what I see as the European urban ideal, but of course it is not always possible, sometimes we simply miss it. But such is the nature of ideals – we strive for them, miss them, and go for them again.

Accordingly, you described the history of political theory as a history of constantly changing problems, whose solutions are also constantly changing. As you put it, dialogue is the way to understand both ends: if one wants to understand the answer, one needs to know the question. This, of, course, comes from R.G. Collingwood (1889–1943),[8] to whom you also make a reference in your book. How did his thinking influence you?

I came to Collingwood through [Quentin] Skinner and in terms of methodology, his perspectives on the theory of speech acts were crucial for me. I also perused his works owing to my interest in political philosophy and in particular, in conservatism. But most importantly, he inspired me greatly because of his personal example and educational program. I published an article about this in a bilingual book of mine, which I dedicated to the question whether the humanities are worthwhile to study in the twenty-first century.[9] Let me try to

8 Robin G. Collingwood, "An Essay on Methaphysics," in *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, ed. by James Connelly (Oxford, Clarendon Press 2005 (1940), 23: "Every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question."

9 Ferenc Hörcher, "Sailing with your students to Greece: Collingwood, teaching and praxis," in *Of the Usefulness of the Humanities* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2014), 13–24.

briefly summarize it. First, Collingwood believed in the importance of connecting theory and practice, especially in education. This was crucial for him as a historian, in other words for his attitude toward the past. He believed that a historian cannot step out of his own temporal framework; therefore, in his historical inquiry he is determined to always remain within the context of his own "real life." Nevertheless, through the re-enactment of past thought in the present, the historian gets a clearer view of his own way of thinking, and through that, his own self as well.[10] In connection to this, he also touched upon the moral problem of a university professor in his ivory tower and – in accordance with the European tradition of the university as a community of professors and students – advocated teaching by example.

Based on personal example, he took his students on an excursion to Greece in 1939, just before the outbreak of the new (second) World War, with the idea that it was a tribute to the birthplace of European civilization and with the wish that with the students they would in a way re-enact the past. He thought of it as an occasion for them to learn more about what a living European tradition means and about what the concept of civilization means. On the sailing ship he and his students had the chance for sharing the same form of life. This was his own way of teaching by example and awakening the desire for knowledge in his students.

Amazing, and this is also very much hand in hand with the Renaissance educational ideals…

Exactly. The importance of education in the Renaissance was otherwise also brought to my attention by Jim Haskins when we invited him to the Institute of Philosophy at the Hungarian Academy of Science for a conference on the topic of educating the Prince. But as I mentioned, I came to Collingwood earlier through the influence of the Cambridge School and their history of political thought. During my PhD, for which I did my research partly in Cambridge, but which I defended in Budapest, I worked with István Hont (who knew my background as he himself got to Cambridge from Budapest) and he helped me to familiarize myself with the Cambridge School. So, Quentin Skinner, John Dunn, John G. A. Pocock, Richard Tuck are the figures I should also mention as integral to my own thinking.

10 "Historical knowledge is the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying." Collingwood, "An Essay," 112.

I see. With this, we return to the sequence prescribed by handbooks of rhetoric, noting the so-called auctoritates maiorum… So let us now turn to the Renaissance ones. The emphasis on change and our responses to it remind me of Machiavelli, who argued that the primary quality of an ideal ruler was flexibility, the ability to adapt to any situation at hand. He even defended Julius Caesar for starting the civil war as he believed that it had been, actually, the correct response to the circumstances at the time. On the other hand, Bruni – as we learned from your lecture – was quite critical of Caesar in The Panegyric of the City of Florence. *Why did you choose to talk about Bruni, who is an earlier humanist, even if you are otherwise more interested in the period after Machiavelli's time?*

Indeed, one of my primary concerns is the late sixteenth century, which is more about the reception of Machiavelli and Protestantism, when Althusius comes into the picture. But I wanted to offer a broader perspective and Bruni represents a sort of medieval and early Renaissance paradigm – "scene one," as it were. Moreover, in the history of political thought, we usually start with Machiavelli and the age of the founding fathers, and Bruni is often left out. He is in a certain way criticized by Machiavelli, actually, and he is a great example of striving for this ideal of concordia we discussed earlier and he proposes an idea of the city that I cherish cherish as a political philosopher.

Machiavelli, on the other hand, contradicts it, especially in *The Prince* (1532). I certainly acknowledge that he is a supremely original thinker and that his work has greater philosophical value than that of Bruni. He reintroduces this negative notion of human nature, which goes against the Scholastic as well as Ciceronian tradition and which recalls the more skeptical Greek and Roman historians, such as Thucydides and Tacitus. Machiavelli is very important to me, because he presents a challenge for a traditionalist like myself. I look for those authors who can preserve the traditional idea of concordia and at the same time answer Machiavelli or even integrate his ideas for their own purposes. In this respect, Botero is crucial. It is enough to mention his *Reason of State* (1589), as he works with the concept of reason of state, or what we would call today "national interest" regarding geopolitics, international relations, economy, etc. Also, he tries to preserve the classical European understanding of living together and civic life, and he remains loyal to his Jesuit upbringing. Such authors, who manage to incorporate all these contrasting conceptions, are very interesting for me, for instance

Montaigne or Lipsius. This more refined view of human nature was of vital importance in the German context and also in the context introduced in the first talk of our series by Prof. Prak;[11] and Althusius is one of these authors as well.

Discussion of human nature is also relevant for another concept that we did not have a chance to delve into during the lecture but you mentioned it in passing: liberty. Libertas *had many meanings already in the writings of humanists and the conceptions of liberty are still a subject of fierce debate nowadays. How do you position yourself with regard to these?*

True. Liberty is, of course, crucial and very much discussed in the period we are talking about as well as today, but this is precisely one of the reasons why I did not see much point in doing it in my talk. Also, my idea of civic liberty (in an orientation best identified as "Aristotelian-Ciceronian urban conservative republicanism") is a bit different. To sum up my position, let us start with the theories of negative and positive or ancient and modern liberty in political philosophy.[12] The ancient one emphasized the participation in the governance of a (political) body, while the modern one is based more on free will and requires the non-interference of the state in the affairs of the individual. However, as Skinner already pointed out, there is no personal freedom under tyrannical rule, even if the tyrant does not interfere in our own personal life.

Here, the republican Machiavelli's originality already stands out. He, too, claimed, that tyranny indeed cannot provide one's personal liberty, because the rule of a single person can jeopardize

11 Prof. Maarten Prak was the first speaker in the same lecture series. See his "The Dutch Republic as a Bourgeois Society," in *The International Relevance of Dutch history*, ed. by Klaas van Berkel and Leonie de Goei (The Hague: Royal Netherlands Historical Society, 2010), 107–138, and "Citizens without Nations," in *Citizens without Nations: Urban Citizenship in Europe and the World, c.1000–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). The talk Prof. Prak held within the lecture series is available online, on YouTube.

12 The difference between the two conceptions of freedom, one held by "the Ancients" and one by the members of the modern societies was discussed by Benjamin Constant in his essay, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," published originally in 1816. His discussion was elaborated further by Isaiah Berlin who defined the conceptions of "negative" and "positive" liberty. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118–172.

the liberty of the others – Machiavelli's concern was, of course, Florence, where the rule of the Signoria led to the individual rule of the Medici princes. However, that is only one way of framing the problem. On a closer look we can realize that we do not necessarily lose our liberty because of monarchs per se since in history, the cities in fact quite often invited a powerful king or emperor to take the final control over their sovereignty, to make order possible and peace achievable in a world of competing jurisdictions and rivaling camps. As the Florentines had to experience, factionalism actually can directly lead to the loss of liberty, while *concordia* and peace are its prerequisites. Therefore, according to Florentine ideology, in order to have liberty one needs to live in a free, balanced city – city in the sense of a political community.[13] True personal liberty, consequently, is not merely the enjoyment of non-interference (negative liberty) but the enjoyment of certain conditions by the political community, and most importantly the practical elbow room to make their own decisions. According to the notion of republican urban liberty, everyone needs to have the opportunity to participate in the common affairs, and a society needs to be practically, and at least partially, self-determined. Its members are individually free, however, only to the extent that they participate in and support its self-governing process. Factionalism is fatal for both common and individual liberty. That is why peace needs to be preserved, and a balance (which is, though, by no means a sclerotic and frozen form of stability) of the internal agents (in other words *concordia*) is a first prerequisite of smooth operation within urban governance, no matter if in a communal, aristocratic or monarchical regime. At least that is how I understand the early modern teaching of urban republicanism.

I see, it is a sort of paradox. It seems that by attaining one type of liberty, one loses the other and vice versa …

13 Most prominently, Machiavelli put this forward in his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy* (1517), in which he praised the perfection of Roman republic for its balanced constitution and giving sovereignty to the people (in contrast to Sparta, where the ultimate power belonged to the senate). He considered the people to be better guardians of liberty because their desire to usurp power for their own advantage was weaker and they only wished to remain free and avoid domination by others.

Well, the Germans would call it a sort of dialectic, but you are right, and that is the reason for all the debates about how to find a functional equilibrium. And here we return to Skinner. He already called attention to those early conceptions of liberty before liberalism, and as I understand, for him the two concepts of liberty do not pose an either/or question but represent, rather, a kind of synthesis and that is why he formulated a third concept.[14] And a further point: we must also keep in mind that there are two understandings of the republic in the European tradition, too. One is the modern one understood in the French model, the "post-French-Revolution" model of the republic, where liberty is something that the state provides and secures for the individual citizen and the citizen is happy to have it. However, I do not think this is a particularly fruitful framing of liberty in other contexts and therefore I prefer the traditional one, according to which all participants in a political community are responsible for the liberty of that community and for its preservation. This means that every individual has his or her own duties and privileges. Thus, the rights of the citizens are not a given, a thing that exists beforehand, but citizens actually have to take part in the "liberation" of the city; they need to actively contribute before asking for privileges. This "traditional" account is connected to the idea of *libertas*, something more than the negative and personal liberty of liberalism.

It is also different from the present-day discussions on republicanism; the literature on republicanism grew out of Skinner's work and then, Philippe Pettit elaborated on this with his account of the state in accordance with the republican mode.[15] I do not find this line of arguments fully satisfactory. The problem is size or scale: I think that in order for the participatory model of republicanism to work, you need people to be more dependent on each other, you need those who are living together and know each other from personal acquaintance, like in the urban context.

These different conceptions remind me of those popular discussions of "Ciceronian" or "Cesarean" liberty among humanists as they debated

14 Skinner names this concept "neo-Roman liberty." Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

15 Pettit referred to his conception of liberty, inspired by that of Skinner, as "non--domination." Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

the goodness or badness of Caesar. Already Salutati (in De Tyrano*)*[16] *argued in favor of the legitimacy of Caesar's rule supporting it with the fact that Caesar had won the approval of the vast majority of the Roman people – through his beneficent governance, charisma and virtue… And even before, already Dante found in Caesar a kind of paradox placing him in Limbo, while throwing his murderers in the ninth, deepest circle of Hell. But you discussed Dante yourself.*

Indeed, I was really interested in Dante partly because of his political ideas. Officially, Dante endorses monarchy as the preferred institutional framework, but while doing so, he keeps the republican language.[17] This is partly because the tyrants in Florence also used a republican terminology to legitimize their power (look at the Medici for instance), but also, because the divide between the proponents of republicanism and monarchism was not that wide. So, in that respect the Florentine ideology is false, as there is no real polarity between majority rule and republican freedom on the one hand, and the rule of the monarch on the other, and a fortiori, there is no loss of liberty. What Dante is trying to show is only that an external leader can solidify and stabilize power in the city and in that way contribute to its autonomy.

In fact, if you look at the medieval and early modern Hungarian kingdom, the royal cities did not strive for autonomy to become a city state; that was impossible, unachievable. What they wanted, instead, was to have privileges as a royal free city, being directly under the rule of the king. The king could protect their freedom from other potential overlords and reduce the latter's influence. Of course, the price the cities had to pay for this were heavy taxes, but they were prepared to pay them in exchange for securing their liberty. Such liberty or, to put it better, "semi-autonomy" can thus be achieved within the framework of monarchy.

This is how I translate all that to the ideology of the European city: urban constitutions are not necessarily about becoming an

16 Collucio Salutati, "On Tyranny," in *Political Writing*, transl. by Rolf Bagemihl (Harvard: Harvard UP, 2014).

17 For an argument in this direction see Alexander Lee, *Humanism and Empire: The Imperial Ideal in Fourteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Prof. Hörcher showed the republican elements of Dante's language in *On Monarchy* in a talk titled, "Republican Vocabulary and Monarchical Regime – about Dante's *Monarchia*; Republikánus nyelv és egyeduralmi rezsim – Dante Az egyeduralom című művéről" at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2021. Dual language slides of the lecture are available online.

autonomous or sovereign political entity. Rather, it is about how to ensure a practical state of affairs within which burghers can "do their business" to run economy, can bring up their children in a safe environment and do their usual cultural activities. These sorts of advantages or freedoms are to be provided by the city for the citizens and the citizens themselves want to do their best to help to make it. And most importantly, this cannot be achieved, especially from the seventeenth century onwards, without the help of a monarch, as the territorial state becomes so important and overwhelmingly powerful that the cities cannot compete with that. Of course, absolute rulers tended to oppress cities as well, but they had to make practical concessions to ensure the inflow of the required tax revenue.

Thus, Dante shows us that already in the Renaissance, some people understood that this was the way to avoid factionalism. In the second part of his life and career, Dante was himself a victim of Florentine factionalism and he realized that concordia could not be maintained unless there was some external guarantee for that.

I see, so political communities should always strive for internal balance. From politics to a way of life: at first glance, discussions about the two conceptions of liberty remind me of the famous duality of vita activa and vita contemplativa, which was also widely discussed among humanists. Another enigma?

I agree with you again: I do not see a real solution to balance the two forms of individual life; there will always be tension between them. I understand their relationship within the Aristotelian-Ciceronian framework: citizens are active as long as they can be, and when they are not active anymore, they have to withdraw from public life, which allows them to reflect on their life. Behind all that, however, one can also recognize the Platonic teaching, according to which it is the contemplative mode of life that is fundamentally human, and the real human flourishing is there. As my hero in practical matters, Aristotle is perhaps less certain about that, I am still undecided as well.

I think there is an unresolvable logical contradiction there. You cannot act and reflect on it at the same time,[18] and yet refleftion might be needed to make the right practical judgement. The contradiction was illustrated well in the twentieth century: for some time, people were forced to get involved in public life, so when the tension was

18 The paradox of the social standing of the philosopher, and the difference between the thinker and the man of action, was also an interest of Collingwood.

released, they certainly and quite naturally distanced themselves from politics. The notions of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, as I see them, represent two extremes, and the ideal is to try to find the right balance between the two or, again, a synthesis of the two, if you will, or, finally, to do the right thing at the right time…

But how do you know when it is the right time?

Well, you can never know it with absolute certainty and clarity. The only thing that can serve as your guide is the teaching of Kairos about right timing.[19] You will never find an algorythm which could serve as a key to your life and so you have no basis for generalization; you do not possess any perfectly reliable form of knowledge about it and the only available source of wisdom is experience and memory, yours and that of others. We can learn from earlier failures what to avoid or from successes what to pursue and this is the only way to find out what to do and what to avoid.

However, there is also the general knowledge of the human being: at a younger age, one is more active and able to pursue things that require greater physical effort, and in advanced age, one has more experience to rely on in order to achieve general wisdom. This is a biologically determined tendency in human life.

I see. This is also what Renaissance educational treatises espouse (e.g., Pier Paolo Vergerio's De ingenuis moribus*)*[20] *but in philosophy, there is more debate and it is interesting to observe the changes in perspective, for instance, from Petrarch to Vergerio or Bruni, and then to Machiavelli.*

Indeed. Let us take Petrarch: he was not that successful in political affairs, he had a strong inclination toward the philosophical, contemplative mode of life, while Bruni was not particularly gifted as a philosopher but he was able to achieve great political successes. This also connects to your question about my choice of Bruni for the lecture: he was also an experienced political agent, even a leader, just as Althusius was. Arguably, Machiavelli was one as well but he could

19 *Kairos*, or καιρός in ancient Greek, denotes "the right, critical, or opportune moment" (e.g. for action).

20 Pier Paolo Vergerio, "De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus adulescentiae studiis liber," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. and transl. by Craig Kallendorf, 2–91 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

not remain long in power – he had no real future as a political leader and that is why he became so great in philosophy. So, sometimes it is actually a blessing to lose power and then become a philosopher and secure eternal glory for yourself.

Which is precisely what Petrarch rebuked Cicero for, for not letting go of political power and not retreating to a contemplative life. So, these debates and treatises could also be conceived of as the performative actions of these intellectuals?

Of course, and here the sensibility of the Cambridge School and Collingwood shines through again: to understand the political thought of the past, you need to understand the political situation in which the people were involved, and then you can have a clearer grasp of their references and you can make better judgments about their intellectual claims as well. In other words, you need to keep in mind the function of these writings. For instance, in Bruni's case, his panegyric was undoubtedly a young man's work, composed before he attained the respectable status of the notary. Thus, it was a tactical, or perhaps a strategic move on his part. As I mentioned earlier, we can only make sense of the activities and productive output of people if we reflect on them within the narrative of their lives. I was looking at Bruni's panegyric more from the point of view of the ideology of the city. In his piece, he presents a useful summary of those ideas: no matter for what reason and from which political perspective, it is a fruitful overview of the elements of that ideology.

It also bears to say that the literary influences on Bruni's panegyric were equally numerous: Aelius Aristides' Panathenaic oration *was the most important but inspiration came from another source as well, Manuel Chrysoloras, the humanists' famous teacher of Greek. If we read Chrysoloras'* Comparison of Old and New Rome, *we can notice similar concepts, especially with regard to balance and concordance.*[21]

21 In Chrysoloras' case, this comes from his implicit encouragement of the union of the Eastern and Western Church. In his *synkrisis*, he takes us on a walk through the ancient ruins of Rome that survived until his time and then, among the buildings of contemporary Constantinople. See Christine Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Eloquence 1400–1470* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), Chapter 7, "Byzantine learning and Renaissance eloquence," 133–149. An English translation is available in the same volume.

How should we respond to the critics who deem these works mere rhetorical pieces full of literary devices?

The models are very recognizable, indeed, but I do not think his utilization of earlier material should be considered a problem. We know that at that time, they had a very different notion of authorship from what we have now. More importantly, Bruni as a Florentine approached the inherited patterns creatively: he did not use what he learned from his Greek models as they did but rather, he applied them to make sense of his own position as a citizen of Florence. These transformative practices are what makes political thought so interesting: one takes arguments from others and uses them for one's own purposes. The fascinating thing is what stays and what changes in the semantics of the reappropriated concepts. This is what ensures the continuity and what brings forward the narrative, as neither the making of a narrative nor change is possible otherwise. I look at these works with an eye on how they transformed the Ciceronian and Aristotelian notions, but I keep my other eye on how the tradition will remain more or less intact.

Again, the context is very important. We can identify the literary techniques by examining the social position of the person, their possible intentions (including the target audience), the ways in which they achieved their objectives and the reason why they had chosen specific mannerisms.

This is a great answer. Could one say that Bruni's choice of format already indicates in some ways his political outlook? And to take the literary discussion a bit further, do you find the difference in literary genres of the works you compared in your lecture relevant? Althusius' Politica is a very theoretical piece while Bruni's panegyric is obviously a rhetorical text par excellence.

Genres are very relevant in philosophy, as in literature, rhetoric or history, and we can indeed connect Bruni and Althusius to rhetoric and theory, respectively. Althusius' *Politica* belongs to a new genre of the same name, *politica*,[22] which is part of the post-Machiavellian

22 Between the 1580s and the 1620s, numerous new treatises were published throughout the Empire dealing primarily with politics. They discussed topics such as the establishment and the meaning of government, guidance for developing imperial public law, and advice on the upkeep of order with the help of the *artes liberales*. They all reflected the constitutional experience of the Empire

discussions that I have mentioned above and is meant to provide a sort of ars conservandi in troubled times. For Atlhusius, the practical and the theoretical issue is about trying to keep the community governable while acknowledging the nature of man – how to avoid or suppress internal conflict for the sake of the common good and to preserve unity and internal harmony. Althusius, therefore, writes like a philosopher would, he is establishing concepts, creating connections between them, and building up structures from these connections and concepts. His *Politica* is a kind of "hard science," at least harder than what we find in rhetoric. He uses different linguistic techniques when compared to Bruni and we have to understand their efforts differently. This goes hand in hand with what I said before. When we are looking for Bruni's "truth," we have to analyze his piece as a rhetorical performance and we are looking for something that is understood as truth within that framework and consequently, presupposes different truth conditions than Althusius' work. Yet one should also note, that Althusius' book served as a handbook of teaching, as well.

And why did you choose to focus on Bruni's panegyric and not his Histories, which would be a bit closer in terms of genre?

To be honest, I was looking for a work that clearly transmits a general idea. History-writing works with a lot of examples and tries to point vaguely toward a far-away theoretical conclusion, while panegyric is a relatively short piece, which, despite the addition of some rhetorical ornamentations, offers a concise message about the author's stance – again, Bruni's ideology of the city, which was in this case my primary concern.

I see, that is quite pragmatic. Some generalization is, I assume, also required in such a large scope of analysis as yours, for the difference is not only in the formats of these two works but also in their geographical origins and cultural backgrounds. How come you decided to embark on this long journey from (late medieval and Renaissance) Florence to the seventeenth-century German lands in your book?

and a common concern for concord. For a discussion of Althusius's work in the framework of its genre, see Horst Dreitzel, "Neues über Althusius", *Ius Commune* 16 (1989), 276–302.

First of all, in this geographical division (North–South axis) I follow, among others, the work of Jacob Burckhardt, Johan Huizinga,[23] Max Weber, Thomas Mann and recently Maarten Prak, but with that we come upon another duality of my research interests. Thinking back to the context of Italian city states, I wish I had majored in Italian. The European South has always been my favorite, as well as the ancient literature of Romans and "Neo-Romans," as Skinner labels them, and their understanding of the community.

On the other hand, my family came to Hungary from Switzerland so my own cultural background has a German angle, too, even if that is not coming from imperial Germany. Also, Northern Europe, and particularly the Netherlands and the United Kingdom played a major role in developing the constitutional democracy we achieved. I also think that the devastating history of Germany should not blind us to the fact that there were competing historical trajectories before nineteenth-century Germany, and therefore there were real alternatives, which were, however, missed. Perhaps we could learn from that even in the twenty-first century. The fate and value of the traditional constitutional structure called the Holy Roman Empire needs to be reconsidered. The cities within the Holy Roman Empire, the connections between them, and the networks they formed, like the cities of the Hanseatic League, require further reflections, and they had, I think, an unrecognized potential. It should not be the privilege of Italian scholars to talk about city states and as you see, these two orientations of Europe are somehow quarreling – or dialoguing? – with each other within me.

It is refreshing that you so explicitly mention these personal histories of deep significance with regard to your scholarly interests, especially in the context of today's increasingly and dismayingly impersonal academia. Reading your book, I noticed that you were aspiring to connect theory and practice, perhaps encouraged by Collingwood. Accordingly, in your exploration of the artistic expressions of different civitates, you made reference to Baudelaire's concept of the nineteenth-century flaneur,[24] i.e., the urban explorer, the observer of modern urban life engaged in the constant creation of ekphrasis. In one of the chapters of your book, you aimed to embody the figure of the flaneur

23 Johan Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century and Other Essays* (New York: Harper&Row, 1941).

24 Keith Tester, Introduction," in *The Flâneur*, ed. by Keith Tester (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1–21, 1.

yourself – reconstructing your own relationship to your own urban surroundings, which I really enjoyed.

Thank you. Concerning ekphrasis, I build on the well-known theory of Svetlana Alpers and her book, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*. But the approach is also connected with my outlook on poetry, as I believe ekphrasis is what much of twentieth-century poetry is about. The modern poetry which is based on Eliot and Rilke tend to rely on fine descriptions of the world of objects, offering sensual data (auditory, visual, olfactory and tactile) for the readers. The poem always springs forth from empirical elements and ideas are unfolded from that "aesthetic" basis. In that sense it is indeed very much dependent on personal experience; experience, in art, as in politics and in all areas of practical knowledge, is crucial. This is, by the way, characteristic of my own poetry.[25] No wonder that ekphrasis, deriving from a sensible experience, is also crucial for contemporary aesthetic theory as well.[26]

In connection to this, I should also mention that in the book on the European city I explore Buda. It used to be a royal capital and for me personally, it is a community that I feel I belong to. This approach gave me an opportunity to look at Europe from a particular perspective, which I thought could be interesting to my readers. The book was published within an American publishing house's project, so – when writing – I expected a primarily American audience. Thus, I thought it might be instructive as well as enjoyable for them to see Europe, which is for them already a foreign world, from a perspective that is even more distant and exotic: Central Europe.

Let us remain on this poetic ground. 2021 was the 700th anniversary of Dante's death, who passed away on September 14, 1321. You seem to have a special relationship with the poet, which goes much beyond "mere" scholarly interest in his politics that we mentioned earlier. The poet seems to have been a source of inspiration for your Hungarian collection of poems titled, A Dante-paradoxon *[The Dante Paradox],*

25 Ferenc Hörcher published four volumes of poetry, from *Fényudvar* [Court of Light, poems] (Budapest: Seneca, 1996), to *The City of the Meek* (Budapest: Orpheusz, 2018).

26 See Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

published in 2011.[27] *Could you describe this book briefly and how it came to be?*

It is a collection of poems, in free as well as metric verse and "The Dante Paradox" is the longest one in that volume. However, the title actually has its origins in an issue that is quite distant from Dante's political thought. The inspiration is rather Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the paradox is about the entrapment of midlife crisis. Then, one is not lost in an external labyrinth but in a labyrinth within oneself and the only way out is to find peace within. (In this sense it can recall Plato's effort to compare the governance of the human soul to the governance of the city. The labyrinth is a classical symbol of the complexities of the human spirit). Dante's great epic poem is itself a labyrinth, a proof that Wittgenstein was right, and language can indeed build up complex structures, comparable to the medieval city.[28]

I see, and your Virgil leading the way is…?

My own poet-guide? Well, indeed, Dante was in that book my Virgil. But I guess, the most important influence for me to think about the European city is Géza Ottlik and his novel *Buda*. I have also written about him in English.[29] I interpreted his *Buda* as a reflection on Central European *Bürgerlichkeit* (burghership). His other great work, *Iskola a határon* [School at the Frontier] tells the story of the young pupils of a military school on the border between Austria and Hungary and I also look at it as a valuable source about life in a provincial town in Hungary.

Literature, especially poetry, seems to be central for both your personal and academic endeavors around the urban phenomenon. I have been

27 Ferenc Hörcher, *A Dante-paradoxon* [The Dante Paradox] (Budapest: Naplo, 2011).

28 "Our language can be regarded as an ancient city (*alte Stadt*): a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, The German text, with a revised English translation by Gertrude Elizbeth Margaret Anscombe, ed. by Peter M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §18.

29 Ferenc Hörcher, "The Philosophy of Heroic Civility in G. Ottlik's Novel Buda," *Santalka: Filosofija, Komunikacija* [Coactivity: Philosophy, Communication] 25 (2017), 155–166.

wondering in the run-up to our interview how these two identities – poet and philosopher – have co-existed in your life. I hope you will allow me to close our discussion with this rather big question: have your philosophical inquiries been in some ways nourished by your poetic sensibility and vice versa?

This is indeed a big question, but also crucial for me. Actually, I have recently published an article on the topic of poetry and philosophy where I tried to explain the relationship between them.[30] There, I rely on [Michael] Oakeshott, and claim that sometimes philosophy can be cultivated better in poetry. It is only in modernity that we started to think of philosophy as a fully separate discourse. You were right when you implied that one should look into my poetry as well, to make sense of my philosophical position. Poetry in a certain extent is closer to the dialogue model, and in that sense keeps something of the inheritance of classical philosophy.

In our present post-phenomenology era of Continental philosophy, the claim of early modern philosophy, that it is an objective form of knowledge, has disappeared. Analytic philosophy is still closer to science, yet it remains less sensitive and true to our personal experience as poetry or literature can be. Philosophy understood as a discipline that is dedicated to conceptual analysis cannot give a full account of the human experience – in that respect I share the serious doubts of Roger Scruton about the potential of "science" in human interpersonal affairs. In fact, it cannot be accidental that a number of philosophers chose poetry as the vehicle for expressing their ideas; for instance, Heidegger wrote philosophy in a form that resembled poetry, also Pascal, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. For me, this is crucial. Maybe this is simply a return to earlier forms of writing and the end of the modern methodology of science that can be traced back to Bacon, an effort to express things in an objective and conceptually reliable form.

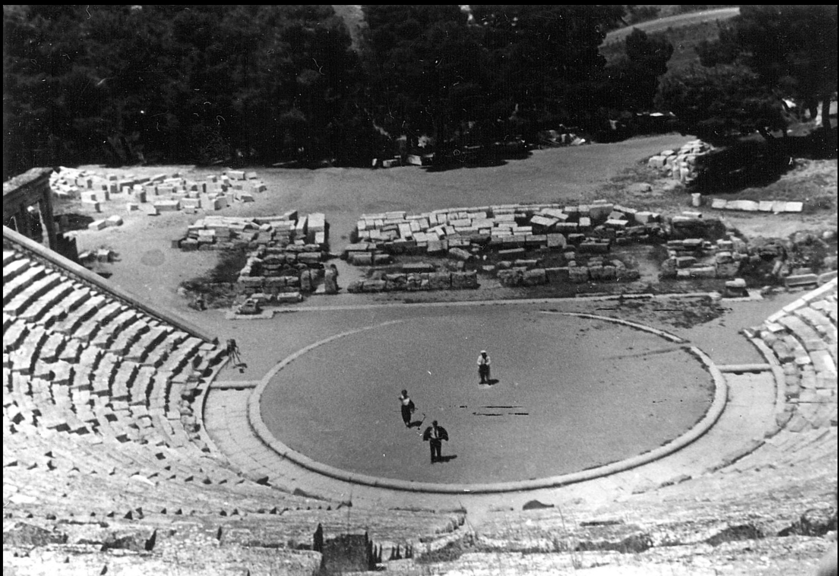
In this respect, the Renaissance is extremely interesting with its rhetoric. From the philosophical point of view, we usually think that it has little to offer, as there are no formidable thinkers of the likes of Aquinas or Descartes. But if you look at the period from the perspective of rhetoric and literature, then it becomes quite relevant and provides an amazing amount of the rhetor's or poet's richness of

30 "A brief enchantment the role of conversation and poetry in human life," in *The Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, ed. by Corey Abel (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 238–254.

understanding of human life. Moreover, it actively engages the readers who themselves need to interact with the experience – and there we arrive, again, back at the question of dialogue. Thus, the Baconian/Prussian idea that philosophy by its very nature is something practiced in a confrontational way, and the professor stands in front of the students telling them the truth, is perhaps not so successful, nor is it ideal, rigid and alienated, and that form of interaction should sometimes be replaced with something more promising to address the particular issues of a case, such as conversation and dialogue, or interview, for that matter.

(2021)

Epidaurus, theatre – Zorka Šubic Ciani, Mirko Juteršek,
Ksenija Rozman.



Epidaurus, theatre.

Epidaurus, theatre – Jožica Škof, Vlasta Tominšek, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Zlata Grošelj, Franc Žužek, Milan Grošelj, Majda Gabrovšek, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Matija Pogorelec, Nataša Stanič, Primož Simoniti.

Epidaurus, theatre – Franc Žužek, Mirko Juteršek, Primož Simoniti, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Nataša Stanič, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Vlasta Tominšek, Jožica Škof, Majda Gabrovšek, Ksenija Rozman, Matija Pogorelec, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc.

Epidaurus, theatre – Franc Žužek, Mirko Juteršek, Primož Simoniti, Milan Grošelj, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Jasna Šetinc Simoniti, Nataša Stanič, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Vlasta Tominšek, Jožica Škof, Majda Gabrovšek, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc.

Epidaurus – Milan Grošelj.

Nauplia.

Nauplia – Jasna Šetinc, Jožica Škof, Meta Masič Prelesnik, Nataša Stanič, Milan Grošelj, Mirko Juteršek, Primož Simoniti.

PHOTO ESSAY

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Excursion to Greece in 1958 with the Classicists from the University of Ljubljana

Ksenija Rozman

The first excursion to Greece for classicists after World War II – and likely the first one since the university was established in 1919 – was devised by Professor Milan Grošelj for his classical seminar in 1958.[1]

Those were the years when every effort was made to eliminate classical gymnasia in Slovenia, and they were eventually abolished in 1958. This meant eliminating and ridiculing the teaching and knowledge of Greek and Latin. Other students called us *Lateinpatzer*, an odd German slur for "Latin goofs" ["latajnpocarji"]. One of the highly absurd justifications for the abolition of Latin teaching in Ljubljana was the statement that the classes were "attended by children from well-functioning families." [Cf. Bojan Baskar, *Latinščine prosim*, Ljubljana 1988, p. 137, for the precise wording in the document.]

However, we, the students of those days, still considered ourselves fortunate. Our professors were professionally sound; they took their calling seriously and were aware that they were not merely experts but also teachers and educators. Therefore, the excursions were a serious matter, far from merely fun and charming trips.

1 This issue's photo essay and the accompanying text were kindly provided by dr. Ksenija Rozman. The photos were taken by several of the participants in the excursion and then pooled together. *Clotho* would like to thank Ksenija Rozman, Zorka Šubic Ciani, and Nataša Stanič for identifying, *post tot discrimina rerum,* all the participants. These were Milan Grošelj, his wife Zlata Grošelj, and their friend Vlasta Tominšek; and twelve students – two art historians, Ksenija Rozman and Mirko Juteršek; two archeologists, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc and Zorka Šubic Ciani; and eight classicists, Majda Gabrovšek, Meta Masič, Matija Pogorelec, Primož Simoniti, Nataša Stanič, Jasna Šetinc, Jožica Škof, and Franc Žužek.

Before our trip at the end of April and the first days of May 1958 could even begin, an unexpected difficulty arose. There were only eight classicists. This was not enough for the discounted rail ticket, for which a minimum of twelve participants was required. Professor Grošelj solved the conundrum himself. He asked Professor Josip Klemenc, who taught ancient history and classical art, to assign two students from his seminar; and Professor France Stelè, an art historian, to assign two students from his. I was one of them and remain a witness to those days.

As the saying goes: "First comes the work, then comes the fun." We felt this even before the trip when Professor Grošelj defined the responsibilities of each student, not only his classicists but also the four of us who were their guests. We were allotted individual ancient monuments in places visited, prominent literary authors and philosophers, as well as events, both historical and mythological. Each prospective participant had to come to the seminary and provide a short report of what he or she would later say in situ. I was entrusted with a paper on the development of classical art and its examples that we would later see ourselves. I can assure the reader that my report was nothing to write home about. However, the classicists who took the assignment carelessly were held to a higher standard and had to repeat the exercise. No one dared to return with another perfunctory report and to risk a third appearance.

It was a long train ride from Ljubljana to Athens. One of the classicists, the good-natured and talented but somewhat idiosyncratic Franc Žužek, decided to shorten his journey by interviewing the Greeks in his compartment about Modern Greek pronunciation and grammar. The Greeks he encountered were enthusiastic, he was showered with lessons, and upon our arrival in Athens, one of his colleagues remarked that between Belgrade and Athens, Žužek had mastered Modern Greek.

As soon as we came to Athens, we were warned and instructed what to do in case we encountered demonstrations – we were to retreat into the doorway of the nearest building. During that week, protests were organized in Athens in support of the Greek Orthodox Cypriot theologian and politician Archbishop Makarios III, a vocal advocate of the independence of Cyprus, who had to flee the country.

The day after arriving in Athens, life's arduous seriousness began for us, too. While climbing to the top of the Acropolis, we marveled at the architectural monuments in various states of preservation, a mixture of styles and meanings. The students had to perform with their papers, with the professor supplementing them where necessary.

The intoxicating mixture of architectural remains in Doric and Ionic styles, memories of the people of letters that have frequented this place, and gods to whom these temples were dedicated, was crowned with the mighty remains of the Parthenon, dedicated to Athena and built under Pericles, the orator and statesman. The recollections of Sophocles, Phidias, Anaxagoras, Herodotus, Protagoras, and the like were enough to make us walk, look, wonder, and, for the most part, keep silent. I remember this captivating atmosphere from the other places we visited as well.

Before the trip, Professor Stelè told me: "Make sure you go and see Daphni." We had one free afternoon, which everyone could spend as they wished. Professor Grošelj asked me about my plans for using this free time. I mentioned the remark by professor Stelè and told him that I intended to go to Daphni. He found the idea intriguing, as he had never visited this Byzantine monastery with its remarkable eleventh-century church and mosaics, so eventually, the whole group went there.

I remember the amazement during our visit to Olympia. We walked through the thicket to the Temple of Zeus from the fifth century BC and to the even more monumental Temple of Hera from the sixth century BC, one of the oldest temples in the Doric style, marked by its imposing dimensions. Both are outside the present-day settlement. The enormity of the two temples and their position in the charming countryside with the pleasant and mild atmosphere took everyone's breath away. The professor sighed: "Isn't it beautiful?" However, the silence was broken by the Faustian Geist der stets verneint – the spirit that always negates. It was Žužek, adding, as so many times before: "Yes, but …" Well, this time, the professor cut into his ceaseless remarking: "Mr. Žužek, there is no 'but' here." And we were allowed to watch in silence.

We had no money for the bus ride to Sparta.

The following two stops were the old and the new Corinth, marked by prominent historical events, archaeological remains, and the realization that the ancient Greeks preferred their theater to the bloody amphitheater introduced by the Romans, who built it there, as in so many other places.

Corinth was followed by Mycenae and Tiryns, the sites of the Cretan-Mycenaean culture of the third and the second millennia BC, where one is astounded by the gigantic stone blocks of the ancient fortress palaces and the prominent Lion Gate. However, at the Tiryns railway station, we were eventually forced to let those dreamlike impressions go and to shift our focus to the timetable – our next connection would

only come several hours later since only local trains were stopping there. The stationmaster saw our desperate company. He was pleased with us having visited their somewhat unusual monuments and let it be known that the express train would come soon – and that he would stop it for us. He asked us to climb on it as fast as possible. Indeed, he did what he had promised, his omnipotent baton allowing us to leave quickly for our new destination, Epidaurus.

The Epidaurus Theater, built in the late fourth century BC, is the best preserved Greek theater. Like all such theaters, it leans against a hill; it has 55 semicircular seating rows with exquisite acoustics reaching each spectator. Professor Grošelj's wife, Mrs. Zlata, wanted to experience this. She kept suggesting that two students go into the orchestra and sing something. The professor was eventually fed up with her persistent requests: "Zlata, please stop; this is not your school singing choir, the Magpie Society." Two students of classics, Primož Simoniti and Matija Pogorelec, finally went to the orchestra, laughing uproariously. When they arrived at the center of the theater, they put their arms around each other's shoulders and started singing a Slovenian folk song from the period of the Ottoman raids, "There Beyond the Turkish Hill": "The boy pleaded with his friends so true: / Dig a hole for me, I beg of you. / Put my poor corpse in it with due care, / Let the horse cry since the girl is not there." The acoustics in the theater were outstanding; we heard everything down to the last syllable.

The last place to see before going home was Nauplia, the first Greek capital, which served as the seat of government between 1824 and 1834 after the uprising against the Ottoman occupation. Reader, forgive me, but all I can remember was the seaside location and the good-natured wine seller who turned a blind eye to the mandatory financial deposit for the bottles after the boys assured her of their imminent return. And indeed, that was what happened.

There are many kinds of monuments. One of them is a sense of pedagogical duty combined with enormous knowledge and a kind demeanor toward everyone. It was my good fortune to study and spend my student years, from 1955 to 1959, in the company of such personalities as professors Grošelj, Stelè, and others.

Their authentic sense of humor was part of it all.

Ljubljana, December 2022

ITINERARY

ATHENS (May 1, 1958): Hadrian's Gate / Olympieion / Lysicrates Monument / Agora / Tholos / Stoa of Attalos / Hephaisteion / Church of the Holy Apostles / Museum of the Stoa of Attalos / Buleuterion / Theater of Dionysus / Parthenon / Lycurgus Theater / Asclepeion / Odeon of Herodes Atticus / Kerameikos / Philopappos Hill / Temple of Athena Nike / Erechtheion / Propylaea / Tower of the Winds / Kapnikarea / National Museum / Schliemann Palace (exterior) // ELEUSIS: Telesterion / Museum // DAPHNI // OLYMPIA (May 5, 1958): Temple of Zeus / Heraion / Palaestra / Exedra of Herodes Atticus / Remains of the apsidal buildings / Metroion / Stadium / Hall of Echoes / Philippeion / Leonidaion / Museum / Heroön / Theokoleon // CORINTH (May 7, 1958): Temple of Apollo / Peirene / Lechaion Road / Baths of Eurikles / Sacred Spring / Opus tessellatum / Remains of the Christian church / Glauke Fountain / Odeion / Theatrum / Museum // MYCENAE: Lion Gate / Shaft tombs / Tomb of Clytemnestra / Treasury of Atreus // TIRYNS: Casemates / Cone remains // EPIDAURUS: Theater / Tholos / Sanctuary of Asclepius / Odeion / Palaestra / Hestiatoreion / Stadium / Museum // NAUPLIA.

Nauplia – Zorka Šubic Ciani, Primož Simoniti.

Nauplia – Franc Žužek, Zorka Šubic Ciani, Jožica Škof,
Primož Simoniti, Majda Gabrovšek.

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