

Every Beggar  
Is Odysseus.

*Wrong from the start —  
bent resolutely  
on wringing lilies  
from the acorn.*

---

**POETRY AND FICTION SUBMISSIONS WELCOME. WE WELCOME WORKS-IN-PROGRESS.**

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*The*  
LETTERS  
LITERARY  
SUPPLEMENT

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LETTERS • 838 EAST HIGH STREET NUMBER 115 • LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY • USA

*When I sit down to write I remember Ezra Pound – “the weeder is supremely needed if the Garden of the Muses is to persist as a garden” – and decide whether my own hands need to be cut off or if, instead, I should pursue the hands of others. **I do not decide.***

Never before has there been so much poetry, yet it has vanished, accumulated to the point of invisibility. But so the weight of irony, the false grail of authenticity weigh and press on this enormous and invisible mass, all our frantic writing and labor only make more invisible what we desire to be everywhere. *Turn back the tide of illiteracy! Return to the glory years of modernism, of surrealism, of Homer, of the Talmud, of Arthur Rimbaud, of César Vallejo, of Kenneth Patchen, of Delmore Schwartz, never alone and never dying! Poetry on every wall and every pair of lips! Yes, yes! But authenticity and pasts are not real, and it remains possible that the greatest triumphs will emerge from cocoons of isolation or silence. Then there is the pain*

and cramping stiffness of writing, knowing the likelihood of being wrong, feeling the temptations of action.

The written word is my only access to the sublime, to the halting moments of otherworldness so denied elsewhere. So I offer you, courteous reader, a few stories and poems and conversations. I offer myself to you in the absence of g-d, in the space left by g-d in exile.

*Every beggar is Odysseus because the journeys are over, and it is time to stop pretending. The gone-forevers and last-to-leaves will bring the feet of suns to rest, not on heaven's boughs, but on heads down here, leading us neither into deliverance nor the errantry of evil. Forever and ever, this is the fate of men.*

once again,

THE EDITOR

# Arguments

- |    |   |     |  |
|----|---|-----|--|
| I  | If, with heaving breaths, I<br>can climb this flight of<br>stairs | III | If my current standing is<br>flanked by obscene<br>windows |
| II | If this flight of stairs<br>reaches beyond my<br>current standing | IV  | If the casted light falls<br>curtly and lavishes me        |
|    |   | V   | If I am spent and grown<br>and elevated                    |



VI Then my heart will rest  
longer

VII Then my legs will collapse  
into themselves

VIII Then I will eat glass

IX Then I will live justly

X Then I will fly and rest  
and recede

XI Therefore, I will find  
myself below myself.

# The Parrot Cycle

---

*"I meant nothing by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions – which they have done, one thinking it means one thing, another another. I can't manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalised way. Whether it's right or wrong I don't know, but directly I'm told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me."*

VIRGINIA WOOLF

---

IN PASSING

Sun met cold steps  
Men congregated there, left  
To rest their hats  
To sit in other places.

(the time remaining)

Sun still met there  
Folding cold with light  
(the steps remained cold  
and with no exception,  
uneven)  
And there, alone, the parrot  
eater

Passing lone judgments  
Feathers in his teeth  
Set his will,  
The heir to no fortune.

On the day of the parrot eater's  
death

The sun met  
(as is familiar)  
Less the men and birds  
Less the cold  
To sit still in other places  
Not unkempt by the passing.

---

SWALLOWED

BIRD

The problem posed by bones

By the sharp bits, the feet

The beak, of course

The second wing, the claws

This problem assumes new weight

Just past the entrance of the mouth

And again, when you finish me.

---

THE  
FEATHERS  
IN MY  
TEETH

Four frightful eyes  
On our place of rest,  
The eyes of birds  
Who seek their swallowed brothers  
In the light of our windows  
And swell of our breast  
Who test our locks  
And may cut us down, and rightly,  
For the sins of the tongue  
Not a bird will sing  
Except in mourning or in passing, or  
For blood.

---

I am the tight rope, the tight  
wall  
The obedient answer  
And, a woman

And as a woman on these  
Stone steps of my taste,  
I scoff to eat parrots

With my hair left and tidied  
With ardor and without ado  
I eat parrots as my sisters in-  
struct me

"A man will want you  
to swallow the beak

and wear the feathers"  
"There is more room for a bird  
in your throat  
than there is for a cock"

"He wants a parrot eater,  
not a courtesan at the grating,  
teasing death"

It is on these, sisters,  
That I walk gingerly  
And fearing not but the future  
beneath me  
Cut clean what is last.

UNDER

---

INTRODUCING  
THE BIRD

In this frame we pass  
And nearly die in passing  
The great winged beast  
The great boast of  
Finishing the final bite

I concern myself  
With the feet  
I comfort to know  
Them and take them  
Without chewing

I concern myself  
With the beak  
And the last battle  
With Flight  
With light bones  
I lose my sense  
of bleeding  
Before it is done  
I concern myself  
with this.



---

EXCUSE    Verifiably, I offer no reason  
              No humble apology, no considered  
              Grimace, purpose, trying grin  
              My grammar knows nothing  
              To describe the heaven and jointless  
              Movement of my dining

I am alone, g-d, I am alone  
The birds will not consume me  
My fate is to be set  
And I will feast  
My fate will be  
And I will eat parrots.

# Other Poems

---

**DIVISION    The last and final cut and drawn  
fourthed crass and clean  
a divine division set amongst  
the greatest sets and skills  
of our time.**

---

SESTET    Shallow list impassive shoulder  
              Had invented no less than half  
              But so remained in cresting cold  
              Betrayed this and left the boulder  
              Sweat and fear and tightened calf  
              Remained still, lest off the bold.

---

This was stunning, defeat and  
causal excitement  
The rising formidables, your  
name-sake saying  
I am here, next week, this place

The fight is set, the fight is set  
The followed sequence will be  
fought  
With fighting, dropping, down  
and out  
A test is won, not passed  
Tonight the fight is set, at last

I am not down, not out, nor  
best

No followed test, this place  
Your name-sake will die  
Not disgraced but unheralded  
Unseen but at a nervous pace  
With softer hands, a fighter's  
face  
No heirs to calming women  
No lashing tongues and peace-  
ful eyes  
But here, and not only here  
Your name-sake will die  
Your name-sake will die.

ALMOST BOXING

---

VEINS    The veins of it  
will be veins  
for much longer

what else  
could be?  
she shuffled  
papers, I mean  
important papers

the veins of it  
have a while to go  
I don't mean distance  
you understand  
time, she stapled  
stacked folded cut  
not unlike the half of it.

*"Yehuda Halevi," the poet "knew  
that there was always only one  
right word, and that, in the  
perfectly non-rhymed Hispano-  
Hebrew poem, the same rhyme  
was never repeated, so that, as  
line followed line, fewer rhymes  
were available until a poem's  
last line and last possible  
rhyme were reached together."*

# Short Fiction



AS HE SAT ON THE DAMP HILLSIDE, he could view the East Bay hills. Spring rays had cut through the morning mist. He was alone on the green, with the sound of the J train behind him. The glasses on his nose slid down on his face closer to the book in his hand. The turn of the season hadn't brought out the regulars to the park. The cool currents from the Pacific Ocean kept the temperature moderate. The combination of cold ocean water and the high heat of the California mainland created fog that could cover the western half of the city all day during the spring.

The bicycle tire made little noise on the grass. She looked at him quizzically for a moment then spoke.

"Hey what are you doing here?" she asked.

"I'm meeting up with Chris Brown later, and I wanted to do some reading," he said, looking up at her. Her solid pink bicycle was offset by black handle grips. Her bars curved upwards. She stood next to the bike in tight pants, a light jacket, and a purple

## 1. **Dolores Park**

*by Matt Lucas*

*Most of the time,  
what's wrong  
with you is more  
interesting than  
what's right. What's  
right with you is  
fucking boring.*

JAY REATARD

winter hat. She took off her hat and put it in her pocket. Her shoulder length hair fell down.

“What are you reading?” she asked.

“It’s Chuck Klosterman. He wrote Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs, which is much better than this. Eating the Dinosaur,” he said, holding up the cover of the book to her. “But this last part is pretty good. Sit down; I’ll read it to you.”

“Okay.” She looked down on the wet grass and stood for a moment.

“I guess you’ll get your ass wet if you sit down” He pulled a sweater out of his bag and put it down for her.

“I’ve never read much Slavoj Zizek, I’m pretty sure he must be a genius though. He does tons of cocaine. Klosterman quotes Zizek when Zizek talks about the movie the Titanic. The Slovenian monster brain was arguing that people are out of touch with their true feelings and that they construct fantasies they don’t even want to

live out, so that that they can have control over their unknowable desires. 'How is the catastrophe [depicted in Titanic] connected to the couple, the rich upper-class girl and the poor lower class-boy?' Zizek asked. 'After making love, they go up on the deck and embrace again and then she tells him, 'I will stay with you and abandon my people.' At that moment the iceberg hits the ship. What's the point? I claim the true catastrophe would have been for them to stay together, because it wouldn't work and they would split. It's in order to save that impossible dream that the ship must sink.'"

She nodded and then looked at her wet shoes.

"I like being read to; it doesn't matter what is being read," she said.

"What if it was the Bible?"

"I guess that would suck, but there is something comforting about hearing another voice speak to you and just you."

"Do you want me to read more," he said.

"No, that's okay. I haven't seen you around much," she said.

"Yeah, I guess I've been busy."

"With what?" she asked.

"You know, I don't know, stuff, life," he said.

"What happened?" she said.

"What happened to what?" he said shrugging and looking away.

"You know ever since you told me that I have big calves that I've been looking at them more. Not in a bad way, but it's as if I'm noticing them for the first time. I guess you never see yourself the same way other people see you."

"You're changing the conversation," she said.

"I didn't even realize there was a thread."

"God, you're so emotionally unavailable."

"What the fuck does that mean?"

She sat in silence and picked up some grass. She held it in her palm, then blew it away.

**"I have plenty of emotions; they're all over the place. You could fill an entire high school with my emotions," he said pointing at the nearby high school. "Just stop by and fill yourself with as many of my emotions as you'd like. Hell, just ask I'll ship them to you in a box with your address."**

**"That's not what I meant," she said pausing. "You create barriers around people to prevent them from becoming intimate with you, and you're unwilling to commit to a relationship. You find some excuse to end it, or you start being flaky. I saw this before anything even happened between us."**

**"But I am available," he said. "I just haven't been approached right."**

**"No, you've been approached a million different ways. You act as if you care and then you pull back. Push and pull, push and pull."**

**"I want to focus on my career, on my work, on my stuff."**

**"That's fine, but that's not what this is about."**

"All the stuff that I make, that is where I put my emotions. I put my emotions into the things I do."

He pointed towards his bag.

"That's not enough. It's not even clear what you're expressing," she said.

"The thing I hate about relationships is that if you're the one that likes the other person more, you're the loser. You don't have control in the relationship."

"Conversation change," she said sharply.

"No, it's not." The pitch of his voice went up.

"We're arguing."

"Are we?"

He opened the book back up and looked at it.

"... the first thing anyone realizes the moment they enter a serious relationship is that words (especially during fights) never represent their precise definitions."

He read and reread the quote hoping that it would somehow open up the meaning of her words.

"You're still here," he said after a few minutes.

"I am."

"I'm still here too."

## **The Ride**

*by Matt Lucas*

2. The car's engine hummed silently as the wheels moved on the freeway. Far behind us was the city of quartz. Hollywood couldn't even be seen in the horizon. and the automobile moved us further away from the bookfair.

My companion dozed in the passenger seat. He'd had a long day tabling at the anarchist bookfair. I didn't feel as tired. I'd come down for the ride, ostensibly. While my companion provided free transportation, my real reason for the trip was visiting friends, not attending yet another ensemble of radicals selling their printed wares. The friends and I had a smashing time and a great dance party. The day of the bookfair I'd trolled around the streets of Hollywood, more interested in the small Thai town nearby than the books that would sit in the convention center for the day.

"You're steering a little out of the lane," my friend told me.

"Oh, you're awake," I replied.

"Yeah, I've been up for a while. You must be getting a little tired yourself."



"I don't feel so bad," I answered.

The song changed and my companion raised the volume. We listened to a Swedish pop group, The Knife.

"Did you do that well today?" I said. "Moneywise?"

"Yeah, I did," he replied. "There were a lot of young people there."

"Isn't that how it always is?"

"Well, last year it seemed more diverse."

We drove a few more miles before we spoke again.

"Why do you think that people leave anarchism?" I asked.

"It's so paradoxical. Anarchism gives you a way to judge the world and your place in it without being able to fundamentally change your role within that world. I think that contradiction is hard for people to handle. Anarchist ideas have been around for over a century, and so far anarchism has only achieved spectacularly at disappointing its adherents. Where is our revolution? Why aren't there more anarchists?"

"I remember why I got into anarchism: its emotional appeal to me. Really I think that's why people become involved in things. A system of belief is personally evocative, for whatever reason. Maybe your next-door neighbor is really into something, and their passion sparks a fire in you. Or you're down on your luck and some friend gives you a zine about another loser who is just like you. People want to see themselves. Anarchism was a reflection of who I was and who I wanted to be, but that reflection was limited. The mirror showed only the view of the room in which it was in, and the world is bigger than that." I looked in the rear view mirror after my monologue. Behind us was the dark highway, lit by the car's taillights.

"Yeah, anarchism is pretty poor at telling people how to engage beyond its critiques of capital and the state. How do I get along with my girlfriend without sounding like an asshole? How do I deal

with the kids that stole my bike wheels? How do I deal with my shit bag co-workers?"

"We all have to grow up at some point." My eyes stayed focused on the horizon.

"Do we? I thought childhood was right here."

I laughed as the unremitting tarmac surrounded us. The music played on as we continued to drive.

**3.**  
**Livitsky's**  
**Shower**

*by DA*

Reinhart Brodsky Livitsky's shower ended 14 seconds before he could trick his body into waking up. When the water stopped falling, he stood still, dripping, planted to the floor of the shower stall by the weight of half-way ended sleep. It took him 53 seconds to push aside the shower curtain and step outside. He dried off. He pulled on his pants – still asleep, moreorless – buttoning the button but leaving the fly undone. He did not want to expose himself to anyone, but he could not bring himself not to. He put on his hat, leaving his chest and stomach bare.

143 seconds after the shower ended, he was standing on a patch of concrete crowded with people. The world began closer to his shower than he knew.

His neighbors watched him shower. They watched him dry himself and dress. They watched him leave his fly undone, knowing, and shuddering at knowing, that he could not do otherwise.

"Reinhart Livitsky, what fate, what fate!"

"Brodsky, he ought to be hanged!"

"There should be curtains across more than showers. Look at Livitsky, there!"

"Thank g-d we do not have children!"

On the crowded concrete, Reinhart exposed himself to each person, one by one. It was an automatic and passionless series of gestures, almost resembling the orbit of the moon. (Does the moon want to orbit? Does it desire to fully expose itself each month?) The crowd received him with knowing but so embarrassed glances.

Beneath this washing and crowding and bodily exposition, the concrete was impassive. It carried some shower water from that morning and from previous mornings. It considered Livitsky's pitiful ritual and desired to swallow and bury him, even to feel him burn and to be scarred by the burning.

The day finished, and the crowd left. Livitsky did not recite the evening prayers. His neighbors did not pray for him.

*howls*  
*in favor of*  
Sadie

**V1** The dialogue about the most beautiful girl in the world, Sadie.

**V2** Howlings in favor of Sadie is dedicated to a certain Steinkirchner.

**V3** Sadie disappeared four years ago, and there has been no news of her whatsoever. We did not appeal to the police or the courts in the hope that her absence was due to adventure.

**V1** Love is only worthwhile in a pre-historic period. I did love her.

**V2** None of you loved her! Poetry begins, grows and disappears because frustrated men bypass the world of official expression and the festivals of its poverty. Love grows and disappears with her.

**V4** { *young girl, throughout* }  
Say, what do you know about love?

**V5** Before we start, we could say that this is not a play but a discussion, but that is not so. You didn't know her or love her.

**V3** All love is either movable or immovable.

**V2** In order never to be alone again.

**V1** She is ugliness and beauty.  
She is like everything that we love today.

**V2** The art of the future will be the overturning of cisterns or nothing.

**V3** And never in internet cafes!

**V1** You know, I like you very much.

**V3** Her fashion was generally impeccable, and she could always draw attention to herself, however quiet. I met her on the sidewalk in front of the post office. The overcast almost raining clouds and wind gave way to happiness.

**V1** Happiness is as old as Europe.

**V5** "I only know about the actions of men, but in my eyes men are transposed, one for the other. In the final analysis, works alone differentiate us."



**V1** We stopped kissing when I  
called her a conformist.

**V3** Conforming is the greatest  
act of civil life. It is no less painful  
than the alternatives.

\* \* \*

**V4** My dreams of her get wet  
in the shower. My memories are  
soaked in water.

**V1** I knew her quite well and  
thought nothing of her exploits, as  
I remained in a town that rotated  
with the Earth, as the Earth rotated  
in the Galaxy, which is itself only  
a tiny part of a little island which  
recedes away from us to infinity.

\* \* \*

**V2** She never wore black. Her  
eyes closed to the excess of  
disaster.

**V1** I tried very hard, in the  
beginning, to consciously create  
situations where we would meet  
in passing.

\* \* \*

**V1** A few lines from an old newspaper: "A leading young radio actress threw herself into the River Isere, Grenoble. Young Madeleine Reineri aged twelve and a half, who, under the pseudonym of Pirouette, used to liven up the radio program 'Happy Thursdays' on the Alpes-Grenoble station, threw herself into the Isere on Friday afternoon having placed her satchel on the river bank."

**V2** My little sister, these old stories are nothing to look at. The young and beautiful still run to heaven. We are powerless.

\* \* \*

**V4** But no-one's talking about Sadie!

**V1** I know where to find her: the hurried passage through the clouds of war, that catastrophic haste which destroys all; the rude lashing of the adventurous, swallowed up by the ocean... I can't bear to think of more.

**V3** We cannot construct our stories as if she didn't exist.

**V2** The perfection of suicide is ambiguity.

\* \* \*

**V2** What is a love that's unique?

**V3** I will only answer in the presence of my lawyer.

\* \* \*

**V1** Order reigns; it doesn't govern. Waitresses will inherit the earth.

\* \* \*

**V2** The first marvel is to come before her without knowing how to talk to her. Touching her hands, I was a prisoner. Touching her mouth and her breast, I was all innocence. The ropes would become water, and we flowed together towards the day.

**V4** I don't believe you'll never see each other again.

**V2** We would kiss where he lights of the winter street end.

**V4** That sounds very nice

**V4** I knew that already.

**V2** Think of a child thief who was never caught.

**V2** The drift of the continents pushes you further apart every day. The virgin forest has moved less than you.

**V4** Sadie said the same thing to me the last time she called on the telephone.

**V4** If the continents move, perhaps she will return tomorrow.

**V2** What defiant love!

**V2** She is gone. That's it. Nobody satisfies us.

**V4** She told me stories of her country that were very frightening.

\* \* \*

**V2** My dear, are you 15 years old? One day the most fashionable colors will no longer be worn.

**V1** She had a narrow escape.

**V2** The most girl beautiful is still to come, otherwise death would taste like a raw steak and wet hair on the beach which is too hot and too silent. Sadie is gone.

**V1** But ..!

**V2** She was ready to blow up all the bridges, but the bridges let her down.

\* \* \*

**V1** Young Madeleine Reineri, aged twelve and a half, who under the pseudonym of Pirouette used to liven up the radio programme 'Happy Thursday's' on the Alpes-Grenoble station, threw herself into the Isere.

**V2** The old newspaper again.

**V1** I loved her.

**V4** It must be terrible to die.

**V1** You'll see.

**V4** You drink far too much.

**V1** And you have too many childish love affairs.

**V4** I don't know what you're talking about.

**V1** But you do, and there will be a time when you will regret it very much.

**V4**

**V1** She tore me apart.

**V4** In the past.

**V1** I have nothing more to say.

**V2** Sadie is gone, youth are getting older, and night falls again from on high.

\* \* \*

**V2** We lived like the last children, Sadie least of all.



# *Unfinished* Discussion

Franz Kafka's  
*The Great Wall of China*



**DA** I wrote to you in my last letter that I read Kafka's story *The Great Wall of China* as a critical commentary on Jewish theology and community. The ever-present but never seen Emperor being the G-d figure, the Wall is a never-ending task to defend the Emperor who is never seen, messages from the Emperor arrive millennia after they are issued, and so on...

On the surface this reading seems too straightforward and is undoubtedly clouded by Gershom Scholem's analysis of Kafka.

*FD This story sets up a number of contradictory images, or points of stasis where two narrative conventions, two movements/discourses appear together and yet contradict each other... how is it possible to think two contradictory thoughts at the same time about the same object? We are presented with a 'great wall' that is full of holes; it is a straight wall that is supposed to serve as the foundation for a 'tower'; the all seeing, all powerful high command have created something imperfect; the messenger runs but does not advance; the people believe in the presence of emperors who are dead and yet disbelieve in the presence of the emperor*

*who lives; they are excluded by distance and yet still included and on and on.*

*It used to be said that Kafka's stories use the religious form to relate to meaninglessness, the message is that there is no message... where explanation and resolution should be, there is a blank, and only the meaningless story remains. I used to agree with that interpretation, now I don't know.*

*Perhaps the stories' meaning is precisely the making appear of two simultaneous ideas, antinomies. How do we live, think, speak at the same moment with those who frankly contradict us and yet form a community with them? We just do, and that is both strange and irrational. That is to say, there is a rationale for our having contradictory ideas but we must have the contradictory ideas in order for the rationale to function.*

*If we consider Tiqqun's texts as we have been doing recently and how we have identified within them certain continuities with other political and religious discourses, in particular at the point where they confirm certain actions, certain subjects, certain goals. At these junctures they appear as any other sect, as any other set of idealists, i.e. they have identified problems and now they are validating their solutions.*

*Imagine if they had those texts according to Kafka's theological method, i.e. if they had followed each assertive statement with a contradictory statement, saying how this action, this subject, this goal are all impossible... how much more radical and illuminating those texts would then be.*

**DA** But there is meaning in the story. The community exists, tradition exists, family exists, the dead emperors exist and are living in the people who follow them. The wall is the redemption that might never come, but we're working on it in small pieces. We're working so hard.

*FD The question is whether any of that really applies to our lives. Is it the 'great wall' or the unfinished wall, is it the belief in the dead emperor or the non-belief in the living, is it the idea of communication or non-communication? Which of the two thoughts, the first and the second really apply to us? I remember vividly the dismantling of one of those 'behold the hierarchy that is natural in ape societies, therefore it is natural in human societies because we are apes'. The rejoinder was, which system of domination in human society exactly resembles that of*

*the apes, as the human systems are all so different? In truth metaphorical comparisons rely on suppression of specific detail, therefore the Kafka stories seem to have meaning in our life (after all they are a product of this life), but the comparison or lessons work only if we suppress the actual details of our existence... the second thought in Kafka, the 'it is a rabbit and also a duck' quality, means we cannot really put our finger on what it is that is so like us...*

**DA** Community can be constructed around a dead and non-communicative leader; authority can exist without an Authority existing. When a man comes speaking on behalf of the emperor everyone smiles and nods, knowing that no messenger can speak for The Emperor. Religion without prophets. Good acts without redemption.

Are there examples of religious communities without prophets or central figures? Communities built entirely around the past, the texts, the task?

*FD That is difficult to imagine because religions are structurally displaced reflections upon social relations. I am certainly no expert, but I think there are secondary off-shoots of religions – Quakers, Zen, Taoism, Sufiism, probably some Judaic sects – all of which arrive at a further level of abstraction in their practice via a series of correctives to the original mythic structures of great men and their tribulations. Logically, there is a point where the central pole, the phallic signifier, is progressed beyond and a more diffuse and nuanced field of affects becomes established.*

*“My teaching does not serve that purpose, but that is what it is enslaved to. It serves, and serves to promote something that happened, and that something has a name: Freud.”*

*Jacques Lacan, ‘So, You Will Have Heard Lacan’*

*Lacan is perhaps the name by which the name Freud becomes diffuse, passing from a father figure to a reference point.*

*'Fundamentalism' is the return to the central figure; it occurs at the point where natural drift in a discourse's logic is about to cause its identity, its name, to disappear.*

*So, I guess I am saying, there is always a structured process in all religions which causes it to pass in stages from appearance to disappearance to reappear-ance. And this is the reason why I wonder at other people becoming 'Buddhists' (which is impossible anyway) when they could equally access the same insight-processes as Quakers or other equivalents. It is always a mistake to try and live as if one were far away, and include the exotic in oneself... why not let the exotic remain exotic?*

**DA** But the story does not take place in this world and is not governed by this world's laws. The conditions of the town are never transformed (even when so many young men go off to build parts of the wall and then return).

The Emperor never has to appear or send a messenger because there is no history. The eternal incompleteness of the wall keeps it from being a historical project; there is a constant starting over again at 0 and no way to see the big picture.

# A Very Short Interview

Horacio Castellanos Moya

*author of novels including Senselessness and Dance With Snakes,  
currently living in exile in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*



**1. How has exile affected how you think about and practice friendship?**

I think that my sense of friendship was established when I was in my late teens. Life was very intense then: the civil war was coming and there were many dangerous situations that allowed me to get an idea of friendship. Exile has not essentially modified that sense, only broadened it.

**2. Roberto Bolaño said that a writer's homelands are his tongue, the people he loves, his memory, his loyalty, and his courage; that the identity of his homeland depends a great deal on whatever he is writing. Today, what are your homelands?**

It was Elias Canetti who developed most the idea of the tongue as a writer's homeland. He regarded himself as a guest in the German language. It is important to say that in Spanish we don't have an

exact equivalent of “homeland”, but of “fatherland” (patria). I don’t have a strong sense of homeland as a normal person would have. I was born in one country, grew up in another and have spent most of my adult life living in different countries with different cultures. I like and identify myself with the definition made by Bolaño, who also said that his homeland was his personal library. I could only add that my homeland is where I suffer my hangovers ...

**3. Is a writer of fiction faced with an ethical imperative? Is an ethics of fiction possible or desirable?**

A fiction writer faces ethical imperatives inside his own work of fiction, according to the characters he is developing. But in real life, a writer faces the same ethical imperatives than any other citizen. I don’t see why we should be a special case. And an ethic of fiction, as a way of dictating rules in order to decide what might be written, is a stupidity that comes from Stalinist or fascist mentalities.

# A Longer Interview

Tim Wilkinson

*translator of Imre Kertész from the Hungarian*

“Everybody’s fucked.  
Be grateful you left.”

*from Moya’s novel ‘Senselessness’*

1. My first introduction to the Imre Kertész was a short article comparing his use of irony to that of Hannah Arendt in her article 'We Refugees'. Though brief, this comparison made me seek out Kertész's novels immediately. I began with 'Kaddish', then read 'Liquidation', 'Detective Story', and 'Fatelessness'. Reading those novels was like being clubbed over the head, the same feeling I get when I first read Kafka. How did you come across Kertész's work? What were your initial reactions?

It may be easier if I explain first that my direct contact with Hungary goes back around 1963, when I was still at school in Sheffield, England, because my grandmother, who was Hungarian by birth (but spoke German, English, French and Italian besides from the time she was a young girl and who married my equally multilingual Czech grandfather before moving via Bratislava and Vienna to the UK) fixed me up to be pen pals with the daughter of a long-standing family friend (their fathers had been close

friends even in the late nineteenth century). Anyway, I wrote her letters in French and out of that came a visit to Hungary in the summer of 1964. While on that holiday, much of it spent at a holiday camp on Lake Balaton which was run for employees of the State Opera and Ballet, I met a boy of the same age (only a couple of weeks difference) who introduced me briefly to his sister. She became my wife nearly forty years ago (we got married in a Calvinist church in Budapest in 1970), and in fact the first two and half years of the marriage I worked in Hungary, and I had learned Hungarian fairly quickly, and was actually translating academic and scientific texts by 1972 . That was only part time, but I kept it up alongside my main occupation for many years. I also visited Hungary at least once a year over a period of 30 years and more, and since reading has been a major passion since childhood, naturally I would spend some time on each visit just combing certain bookshops that seemed reliable.

That is a long preamble, but it is really just background to saying that my first conscious contact with the name of Imre Kertész must have been

reading a translated excerpt from what I now know is his second novel "The Failure" – or rather I had better refer to it by the title he prefers, which is, as in German, "Fiasco" – in 'The Hungarian Quarterly' (confusingly that was then called 'The New Hungarian Quarterly', because when the Communists took over in 1947-48 a Hungarian Quarterly had been started before WWII in the hope – vain as it turned out – of winning friends and influencing people in the English-speaking world). There was something about that I found intriguing, and I noted the name. I know that this was towards the end of 1989, because from the beginning of the next year and most of the Nineties I moved away from England to take a series of jobs first in Switzerland then the Netherlands, still making regular visits to Budapest. Although I did look for anything by Kertész in those countries, the first book of his that I came across was a Dutch translation of "Kaddish for an Unborn Child", but unfortunately I never had the time to sit down and work at that. So the first genuine encounter was being able to buy "Fatelessness" and "Fiasco" at one go in the summer of 1994, which I read near Lake Balaton as it happened. I

thought they were interesting, but I had other preoccupations so that was that until late 1995, when I bought a small Hungarian edition of “Kaddish”.

There I can connect utterly with your experience. “Kaddish” was mind-blowing, and I mean in the sense of blowing the cobwebs of received opinion out of my mind. I was pretty sure then that it was maybe the most staggering prose poem that had been written, but at any rate it was hugely meaningful for me at many levels. So much so that I was curious how it would come out in English. Before then I had very consciously steered clear of literary translation from Hungarian, because I felt that I wasn’t fitted for the task (and maybe I still have residues of doubt in my mind), but “Kaddish” just demanded to be translated. I did a draft translation in late 1996, which was when I found out that the Wilsons had translated it. I got a copy (through Amazon as it happens), but when it arrived and I started to read, I was flabbergasted from page one on. It was teeming with such bad errors that I spent a long time wondering what to do about it. Meanwhile I set about translating whatever else I could lay my hands on: I had “Fiasco” of course, and by then also, in German, what I call “Galley-Boat



Log" (I managed then via indirect way to get this from Kertész himself in Hungarian), and – believe it or not – the story that Melville House have just published under the title "The Union Jack".

The brief answer to the question you posed is, therefore: I was moved, and moved in exactly the same way, to read as much as I could from a writer I put in a category of his own.

## **2. How did your views of his work change as you began to translate it?**

Perhaps it is clear from the foregoing that my reading of the works was actually fairly close to getting down to translating them. I did it purely out of personal interest, and it greatly helped me reach what I think is a fairly close and detailed understanding of how the texts work. The only work that I did not touch as far as translating (or in fact re-reading it) was "Fatelessness" until I was contracted by Knopf at the end of 2003 to do translations of that (i.e. "Fatelessness") as well as of "Kaddish for an Unborn Child" and "Liquidation" – all by the end of May 2004. "Kaddish" I had already done

in draft translation, so that was more a question of tidying up what already existed. "Liquidation" was new anyway, and also fairly short, and for me was perhaps the easiest of the three. "Fatelessness" I would have to admit was just about the only time I have physically felt drawn into the world of the text, and particularly in Chapter 7, which ends on the near-death experience of its protagonist, György Köves, I felt very strange indeed. Otherwise, when I go over texts, I find new things all the time. "The Union Jack" now is different in several minor inflections from my first draft, to be sure!

**3. With the exception of a few early, and by all accounts poor, translations by Christopher and Katharina Wilson, you are responsible for all of Kertesz's work that has appeared in English. You are responsible for the Anglophone reception of the perhaps the most important writer in post-WW2 Europe. How do you navigate that responsibility?**

The responsibility does weigh heavily. It is a delight to engage with finding the right tone and language in English to match the Hungarian. In that sense, it is no different with any other good writer (and there are dozens

of excellent contemporary, living Hungarian writers). I think I have made it clear that I think Imre Kertész's writing is quite outstanding, so it is an honour to be his "English" voice, but I don't really think of it in terms of having any proprietorial rights over his writing. If someone else were to produce good translations of his writings, that would be fine by me. Just so long as the translator is able to get close to what and how he says it.

I only wish more people were reading.

**4. How would you place Kertész in the canon of Hungarian literature? How would he compare to a writer like Antal Szerb, whose writing is finally reaching an English speaking audience?**

It is hard to answer that question, if only because so few of what one can regard as 'canonical' Hungarian works have ever been translated into English (as compared with German in particular). Szerb, I would have to say, is not canonical – at least his novels aren't (they are very 1920s and 1930s English English). Ditto the novels by Sándor Márai that have appeared: much more significant are his "Journals" and a few fairly autobiographical works. In

short, I don't think either author represents the best of pre-1960 Hungarian literature – nor for that matter does Dezső Kosztolányi, whose flag has been waved occasionally. The truly interesting authors have simply not been translated, or for the most part rather poorly.

If you want some idea of what the canon looks like, I did attempt a few years ago to do a very quick survey for the Center for Book Culture/ Dalkey Archive Press, Chicago & Normal, Ill. ("Letter From Hungary. A Quiet Revolution: Hungarian Fiction since 1975," Context, No. 14). I also had some rather pointed comments on the "canon" not long ago for "The Hungarian Quarterly" (Spring 2009: "Rough Crossing: Literary Canons and Translations")

**5. Can you speak briefly to the two novellas you translated for Melville House: 'The Union Jack' and 'The Pathseeker'? How do these works fit into Kertész's oeuvre?**

To my way of thinking “The Union Jack” has a slot made for it (maybe in retrospect) which spans the time that the second novel “Fiasco” is set (i.e. the early Fifties) but with something nearer the style of “Kaddish for an Unborn Child”, which is more Hungary of the late Sixties and Seventies: it is densely allusive (it works in fairly long quotations from at least three writings by Thomas Mann), but it is written with a feather-light irony. and recurrent phrase to structure it and, as it were, add a poetic feel.

“The Pathseeker” is quite different. It first appeared in a small volume of short fiction that was first published in 1977, two years after “Fatelessness”. It reflects a real visit that Kertész made back to the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1964, which was then in East Germany (i.e. like Hungary but, as we know, under even harsher Communist rule), to find that it had been tidied away (Communist Germany had nothing to do with “the Holocaust”, of course). If one has read “Fatelessness” one can spot exactly the bits that are directly referred to. So it’s also a work about memories and responsibility and how one deals with these. Magical in quite

a different way. And, incidentally, very different from “Detective Story” with which it was paired in the 1977 book.

**6. In the novella ‘The Union Jack’, Kertész discusses the Hungarian rebellion in 1956, but it remains just out of focus. The only novel I’ve read that deals the ‘56 revolt in detail is Tibor Fischer’s ‘Under the Frog’. How is the uprising reflected in Hungarian literature?**

That’s quite a tricky question to answer. For one thing it’s necessary to understand that Hungarian writers nowadays tend to steer clear of politics. It has caused lots of trouble in the past, with writers typically setting themselves up as moral leaders and so on. One of the distinctive features of Hungarian writing since about 1975 (the year Kertész finally saw publication of “Fatelessness”) is that it has managed to develop not so much to avoid political topics but to subsume them into literature, as literature (part of the world) and not the main subject of the writing. But it is there to

be found. Péter Esterházy is a great example. He as a child was packed off into the Hungarian countryside as a class enemy in the Stalinist era under the Hungarian postwar Communist leader Mátyás Rákosi, whose vicious rule was essentially the direct cause of the 1956 revolution. Esterházy dealt with that in a fiendishly indirect novella with a title that I found a way of alluding to by an oblique reference to the IRA, which, as you may know, ran a bloody bombing campaign, partly on mainland Britain (London and other cities) during the Seventies and Eighties. "Fraighaoters". To explain that you would have to figure out that it plays off being cod-Irish and contains both the letters (jumbled) of IRA and A(V)O, which was the Hungarian secret service under Rákosi ... Well anyway, it appeared in the UK in a big anthology of postwar Hungarian prose and poetry in translation under the title of *An Island of Sound: Hungarian Poetry and Fiction before and beyond the Iron Curtain*, back in 2004, when there was a Hungarian "year of culture" drive in the UK, a bit like the more recent one in the States. But there are, of course, more direct memoirs. Just off-hand I can think of two short

extracts – one by Endre Kukorelly from “Ruin: A History of Communism” another by Gábor Németh from “Jewish, Are You?” – that were put up by the internet magazine Eurozine « [WWW.EUROZINE.COM](http://WWW.EUROZINE.COM) » around 25 October 2006 to mark the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the revolution. There is also a highly entertaining “children’s” reading manual by Péter Zilahy which was actually nominally published about 18 months ago in the US with the title “The Last Window-Giraffe”. Apart from being profusely and gorgeously illustrated, it is a sort of idiosyncratic memoir of growing up and how he came to see bits of the final break-up of Yugoslavia in Belgrade in the late Nineties. You can get a little taste of it from the start of a paragraph about holes: The city is riddled with holes: holes on house walls, holes between houses, new holes mixed up with old. Whether a house looks the way it does due to the siege or the revolution, because of ‘44 or ‘56, used to be a constant subject of debate: It can’t be ‘44, it’s a new building! The hell it is – typical Bauhaus! Can’t you see the curved terrace? ... That sort of thing: it’s important, but one doesn’t necessarily have to take a stand to reveal one’s real thoughts.



As far as Tibor Fischer goes, he's not in any accepted sense a Hungarian writer. I would add that "Under the frog" is a tidied up version of the real Hungarian phrase for "it's the pits": "under the frog's arse" (i.e. you can't get any lower).

7. With the exception of the article 'Europe's Oppressive Legacy', which you translated for Sight and Sound, none of Kertész's non-fiction has been translated into English. Most of it deals specifically with the Holocaust. Will you give our readers a brief overview of his essays and their reception?

I would have to be honest and say that I have read all the four or five volumes of writing, and they are almost without exception marvelously incisive pieces of writing, often addresses that he made on one occasion of another, which are tailored to his specific audience (though of course they have wider resonances). For an English readership Imre Kertész probably suffers two major handicaps. Quite apart from being a serious writer of a

kind that English writers (say, a Beckett or the like apart) never have been (no crime in that, but it entails a radical change in thinking by writer and reader), the “essay” has not been seen as particularly attractive or profitable, so it’s not a very popular way to go. On the other hand, the topics of the “essays” are, indeed, related to what is loosely called ‘the Holocaust’ because that is of particular interest to what is now a fairly well-defined public of academics and general readers. As a result Kertész tends to be labeled a “Holocaust” writer. He is well aware of the inevitability of that label, but it is clear that he rightly feels very uncomfortable with it. I can show you exactly what I mean though a couple of bits of the memoir-cum-pseudo-interview entitled “The File on K,” which was published simultaneously as “K Dossier” in Hungarian and German towards the end of 2006 [ SEE FACING PAGE ]

I suppose it is now not strictly true that the essay you mentioned has been translated, because the Guardian newspaper printed a translation made by Ivan Sanders back at the time it was announced that Kertész had

*"A COUPLE OF DECADES LATER, when I decided that I was going to write a novel, I was obliged to sort out, for my personal use so to say, what the difference was between the genres of the novel and the autobiography, the "memoirs", if only to stop me from adding yet another book to what already back in Sixties had swollen into a library of, how should I put it ... Holocaust literature. Isn't that what you wanted to say? Yes, that's what it's called nowadays. Back then, in the Sixties, the word "Holocaust" wasn't familiar; it only came into use later on – and incorrectly at that. I've just recalled what it was called back then: Lager literature ... You also use the word Auschwitz in an augmented sense, so what is your objection to the word Holocaust?"*

*It's an instinctive objection. I found the perfect formulation in the book Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben: "The unfortunate term 'holocaust' (usually with a capital 'H') arises from this unconscious demand to justify a death that is sine causa – to give some meaning back to what seemed incomprehensible." He also goes into the etymology of the word, the essence of which is that the original word, classical Greek HOLÓKAU(S)TOS, was originally an adjective meaning "totally burnt"; the history of the word's denotation then leads into the vocabulary of the Fathers of the early Christian Church, which we might do well to avoid here. As far as I'm concerned, I use the word because it has been made unavoidable, but I take it for what it is: a euphemism, a cowardly and unimaginative glibness."*

won the Nobel prize for literature. I also recollect that I posted the translation of a very interesting interview that he gave with the János Köbányai "Dilemmas of a 21st-Century Lot: An interview by Hungarian publisher and writer János Köbányai] with Imre Kertész," Hungarian Literature Online, 20 December « [WWW.HLO.HU](http://WWW.HLO.HU) », which gives some useful insight into some of Kertész's views on Hungarian literature. But yes, given Kertész's importance, it is disappointing, to say the least, that so little has appeared.

**8. Of all the untranslated work by Kertész, the most intriguing to me is the recent autobiography 'The File on K', which is described as a re-writing of a series of interviews with Zoltán Hafner that Kertész gave in 2003 and 2004. Is the title an intentional nod to Kafka? Are there any plans afoot to translate or publish the book?**

There are no definite plans that I know of. I think it's a stunning piece of writing as ever for the insight into the depths of thinking that lie behind

all of Kertész's work. But then you could say I was a convert to his world-view a long time ago. The little bit that I gave as a quotation a little earlier is quite typical of the way he talks about himself and his writing, and you have to realize that he has a formidable acquaintance with a very wide range of writing. So, there is a lot to digest there, but the important thing is that his major second novel "Fiasco" is finally out in English translation. It first appeared in Hungarian in 1988, though it was clearly written years before, in the Seventies but for reasons that will be obvious when you eventually get to read it, there was no hope of getting it published until the Socialist regime was on its last legs). But one shouldn't sell short the earlier "Galley-Boar Log" or (very different again) "Someone Else", which really a series of pinpoint-accurate sketches about Imre Kertész's experience as Hungary went from one-party socialist rule to an uneasy democracy in 1989-90 and especially in the early Nineties, when he did a lot of travel as he was beginning to make a name for himself in Germany. Actually my translation of around half of that marvelously acidly funny account was published in

the States as “Someone Else: A Chronicle of the Change,” by the journal ‘Common Knowledge’ (Duke University Press), also in 2004. Sad to say, I suspect that is not widely accessible.

**9. Finally, what advice do you have for our readers who seek a future in Hungarian literary translation? I’m certain we have a few of them!**

To give advice would be impertinent: it depends entirely on individual background, circumstances, interests, aspirations. Perhaps the main thing to realise is that you certainly can’t make a living from translating work at the interesting end of the scale. So, it’s not a career choice. However, if you get bitten by the bug, and you are prepared to immerse yourself in the language (which is a lot more sophisticated than it may seem: on the face of it very simple, but you have to learn to read the unwritten bits) and the history and culture, then do so by all means! But keep the day job.



# The Unseen

*A tale of revolt and defeat*  
by Nanni Ballestrini.

*We begin where we left off in the last issue.*



## 6

But meanwhile time was going by out there and nothing was happening and when the time came to go up because we were exercising in the volleyball court but no one was playing volleyball they were all walking up and down exchanging those rapid glances and now and then a few muttered words and time was going by and nothing was happening I was expecting somebody to be stabbed but nothing happened and even when the time came for the guards to take people back to the cells people started going back up with no fuss just as usual and so everybody went back up and I went back up lagging behind talking to another comrade and I didn't have the faintest idea that at that very moment a fuck-up like that was happening

I got back to my cell and it was just a few minutes after I got back to my cell when I heard shouts coming from the direction of the rotunda I should explain what the rotunda is the special section of the prison we were in was a small three-story block ground floor first floor and second

floor and each floor was split into two wings at the centre of these wings on every floor there were two gates and in between the two gates there was a space that was the rotunda the same rotunda where the stairs were and from there people dispersed into one wing or the other the right wing one side and the left wing the other side I was in the left wing of the top floor the second floor that is

on the first floor there were all the non-politicals and on the round floor there were the so-called working prisoners the ones that carry out food distribution duties in the corridors and do the cleaning in the corridors and so on the top floor on the other hand held all the politicals there were sixty of us politicals and incidentally it's worth mentioning that shortly before this there had arrived the overwhelming majority of prisoners both politicals and non-politicals who'd staged a very tough revolt in another special prison and who'd then been transferred it had been a very tough revolt there had been two dead two prisoners with a reputation as bastards had been killed and just about the whole prison had been wrecked and so

now in ours the political's floor was full there was no room at all to spare there were Sixty of us and it was full up

I was at that time in a cell with four other comrades and I heard shouting coming from the rotunda very agitated shouting and I saw the guards who patrolled the corridor of our wing at first I saw them running towards the rotunda at the far end of the wing and everybody in the cells came to look through the bars separating them from the corridors and a moment later the guards came back at a run shouting and they started closing the armoured doors because the cells have a barred gate and in front of it they also have an armoured door and precisely because of the protests there'd been in that prison we'd won the right to keep the armoured doors open all day and have them closed only between eleven at night and seven in the morning

so this was in the afternoon the armoured doors were open and so the guards reacted that way as soon as they realized what was happening was that the guards in the rotunda were being seized by two comrades

because at that time we came up the stairs in pairs which was later stopped so when those two comrades got up to the rotunda they brought out the knives they had on them and they seized the guards they seized them and threatened to kill them they got them to open no since the guards had the keys of the gates on them they removed them and themselves opened the two gates that led to the two wings the left wing on one side and the right wing on the other

and so the guards who happened to be in the two wings found the way closed off they found themselves closed in a trap because at one end of the corridor there was the gate to the rotunda with the comrades who had captured the guards and at the other end of the corridor were the big windows at the far end of the corridor and so there the guards were left with no way out they were scared stiff too because they had no idea how things would go so the thing they did instinctively because it's probably what's laid down in their rule-book is that in these cases they have to close the armoured doors and so all that occurred to them to do and all they did was to try and close the doors and so they managed to get some doors closed

no just one door they didn't get any others closed because in their confusion in their fear they didn't manage in time to get any others closed they didn't manage to close them because the comrades who were in the cells immediately stuck brooms

broom handles through the bars past the door between the bars and the door stopping the doors from closing you have to picture all this happening in a split second so they really only managed to close just one door there were others they tried to close or forgot about or didn't make it in time to close the fact is that all the guards surrendered at once they all surrendered in wholesale terror

but in the meantime while those two comrades were taking the guards in the rotunda they were taking three or four guards I don't know how many in the meantime it turned out that in the right wing I was in the left in a dormitory cell in the right wing the comrades had sawed through the bars there were eight comrades in that dormitory because then you could leave your cell for the midday meal to cook and eat together this was another thing we'd won with the protests there'd been in the months before

in that prison and you could get together in a dormitory cell to eat along with other comrades and so at that time up to eight of us could be together in a dormitory

they'd sawed through the bars of the gate and by the time those two comrades seized the two guards in the rotunda they'd already sawed through them and were waiting for that moment they removed the bars of the dormitory cell and the eight of them went out then there were really ten prisoners who were out the eight from the dormitory and the two in the rotunda and that's how they also got all the guards who were in the second floor corridor obviously I found this out later because I was locked in my cell I was in the left wing and I saw nothing we just heard loud shouting we heard shouting and we just heard all this uproar the guards trying to

close the armoured doors running up and down the shouting but it was all no more than a moment

what happened and what then became known later or at least in part because these stories can't always be told in full was that very quickly the

comrades who'd taken the guards came down with the keys they'd taken from the guards they opened the gate leading to the stairs and they went down to the first floor and they seized all the guards down there and in that way they opened the two wings of the first floor and then they began unlocking the cells of the non-politicals and so all the non-politicals came pouring out of the cells and then they too came up to the second floor and started unlocking all our cells as well

they didn't go down to the ground floor because it couldn't be defended like the upper floors and the working prisoners stayed there for the whole duration of the revolt cooped up in their wing between the two floors in revolt and the guards that were outside at this point I saw people wearing masks arriving in my wing they got to my cell and they unlocked every cell in the left wing they unlocked my cell too and then there was enormous confusion and some people told us there's a revolt we've taken the guards we must keep calm put mattresses over the windows because they're likely to fire teargas rockets into the cells and then everyone put

SHOULD READ:

mattresses over the windows and then we all poured into the coridor...



and they stayed awake all night with me to keep me company then there was the whole transfer trip which was very long the whole length of Italy chained up in that armoured van but I'd no sooner arrived at

the special when that fear more or less went when I got there I was pretty astounded by the way that prison worked I hadn't had any idea it was like that now that I'm describing it I realize that in fact the atmosphere there was tense to say the least there was enormous tension but on my arrival it looked to me like a big fair

that name special prison I thought when I first got there they could label it as that but it was really a fair and the cells were bazaars you could more or less have anything in your cell all the cells were overflowing with things of every kind you could play musical instruments there were guitars and tambourines bongo drums accordions there was even somebody who had a violin and he played it whenever he wanted you could have every kind and colour of paint you wanted you could have canvases oils tempera pastel crayons charcoal typewriters you could have the books you wanted all the magazines and newspapers you wanted you could have tape-recorders and

SHOULD READ:

cassettes football boots and tennis shoes there was no limit to the amount...

and search them as well and so everybody moved around with no fuss from one cell to another to go and eat it wasn't a case of applying a day ahead you did it there on the spot it was a formality for sure they couldn't keep track of the applications they could maybe do it later on and it helped them most of all to figure out how things fitted to work out from the people who spent time together what the political links were between the comrades the groupings the different political tendencies

the guards were really duty-bound to search you when you left your cell in the morning for exercise and they were duty-bound to search you again when you went back up to your cell and to search you again once more when you left your cell to go and eat in another cell but all this had become impossible they'd stopped doing it and so they'd stopped checking altogether there was this constant movement there was this constant cell locking and unlocking there was this huge mass of objects piled up in the cells and when this is the situation when there are all these areas that you take for yourself that you win for yourself then the situation becomes ungovernable what struck me there was the enormous scope there

was inside the prison it was a special prison but you could move around there just as you wanted

nor were the cell searches properly seen to the more stuff there is in a cell the harder it is to search it all well the difference from the normal prison that I'd just come from was that here they did one search a week where there they did one a month but here the way things were with the guards meant that if a ballpoint pen went missing during a search there was an outbreak of hammering on the bars in every cell so that right away this guy would come back with the pen and apologize and here the way things were with the guards meant that they put up with the worst insults and the worst threats and if you called a guard at midnight to get him to take cigarettes or a newspaper or wine or a plate of pasta to someone in another cell even if it wasn't his job he'd do it right away all the same and in double-quick time this was the way things were with the guards

if one day during a search you told him no don't you lay a hand on me he'd even stop searching you and if while they were searching the cells they found knives they didn't even say a word they didn't even give you a

hard time about it any more they'd got used to finding knives in the cells they confiscated them and that was all that was the atmosphere there was there before the revolt there were visits without glass screens the rules said they were to be an hour but they were always two hours to the minute and sometimes even longer if you pushed it and you could have four visits a month plus a special visit that you could have on top and if you didn't have a visit you could make a ten-minute phone call instead the non-politicals in the specials aren't the non-politicals of the normal prisons they're people who in prison have tried at least once to escape they're all people from the world of big-time crime or important gangs and there you could associate with the non-politicals too you could exercise with them and go and eat with them too all you had to do was apply to go

and see them so this amounted to a situation of progressive extension of areas inside the prison there was a state of permanent protest that had its effects on the regulatory structure because the prison is this it's a structure that elaborates the regulation of the body to the maximum and so the fact that this regulation is rearranged corresponds to a shift in the

balance of power between prisoners and custody I soon became aware of the strained and tense atmosphere arising from this situation and underlying the fairground appearance that had been my first impression there'd been a whole series of protests there were protests to stop the guards doing searches every time cells were left for exercise or demands about going to eat in another cell or demands about visits or meetings with lawyers and so on when you mount a protest and for instance when you refuse to be searched there are two outcomes either the administration gives way and as a result you wind up in a much stronger position and that's that or else the administration reacts and then the struggle goes on

and the tension rises until there's a confrontation so there were constant disruptions at exercise people would

refuse to go back to the cells and there'd be concrete hammering on the bars of the cell gates and things like that there's always a ceiling when a protest begins if the administration doesn't give in right away you trigger the

mechanism of mounting conflict but then there's a ceiling and this

ceiling measures the balance of power for example if the prisoners are in the position of power to threaten to take guards hostage then of course the administration yields first because it knows that the prisoners can go as far as taking hostages and the administration usually always yielded there because it was afraid of this that the prisoners would take guards hostage of course you couldn't ask the impossible you couldn't ask them to unlock the cells for you and let you go home but you could push all the time to extend social spaces and the protests succeeded because they were solid everybody joined in right away without even thinking about it by now the guards no longer took any responsibility the guards reacted on every occasion by passing on decisions to their superior who in turn dumped them on his superior and so on up to the prison governor and he'd take it to the minister which meant whatever you did inside the prison you were never confronting the guards but the strength of your position was such that you ended up dealing directly with the minister with every protest you made and since by now what was at stake was by now always the trigger for a sequence of events leading to taking guards hostage perhaps proceeding

merely from the fact that you wanted a blue felt tip pen it was their policy to give way over everything

also because the minister's strategy centered as always on the distinction making that special prison a cooling-down prison let's say at the positive end of the special spectrum while at the other end was a maximum security prison the prison regime is entirely based on this strategy of differentiation with its potential to blackmail you with the threat of a worsening of your conditions with its potential to warn you if you protest watch out or I'll send you to a prison worse than the one you're in now and so the comrades' argument was just because we're well off here it doesn't mean we don't have to make demands but we have to make demands just the same here as well so as to break this blackmail situation that threatens us all with ending up in a prison where we're worse off



Is this what befalls the  
incomparable ones?

*The third demand one has to make on a writer would be that he stand against his time. Against his entire time, not merely against this or that; against the comprehensive and unified image that he alone has of his time, against its specific smell, against its face, against its law ... He may wish for sleep, but he must never attain it.*

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