



„Überwindung der Diktaturen – Dichter, Künstler und Schriftsteller in der Begegnung.“

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Two Days at a Polish Castle, One Day in Dresden

Not long ago, I attended one of the events in a series scheduled to unfold within the space of two years, hosted in turns by each of the participating countries – “Überwindung der Diktaturen – Dichter, Künstler und Schriftsteller in der Begegnung”. This is a project supported by the European Union within the framework of the “Culture 2000” programme. It was initiated by Dresden University’s Hannah Arendt Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, together with cultural institutions in Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Italy and the United Kingdom. The event I’m talking about, the first in the series, took place in a magnificent castle near Wałbrzych in Poland, which has been converted into a culture centre: *Schloss Fürstenstein*, as the Germans call it, or *Zamek Książ* by its Polish name. I have to mention from the very beginning the excellent organization of the colloquium – a clockwork-like German affair – for which all credit goes to the project leaders, Prof. Dr. Gerhard Besier, Dr. Katarzyna Stokłosa and Gert Röhrborn. Let me add without further delay the names of the other Romanian participants – the visual artists Mirela Dăuceanu and Vlad Nancă and the young poet Denisa Mirena Pișcu. I would also like to underscore the good impression they’ve made. The declared purpose of the reunion is to put together an anthology of texts and an art exhibition expressing the relationships of the participating artists and writers with totalitarian systems.

In my opinion, and I did make this viewpoint clear during the debates, the really valuable texts, at least as far as poetry is concerned, are those written *back then*, under pressure, under threat, not today, when we are writing from memory. Consequently, in order to be representative, an anthology ought to include, by all means, the works of writers who at the time in question wrote and published significant subversive texts. Of course, it is an altogether different story as far as prose is concerned. In order to encompass, comprehend and describe such bizarre times, one needs distance, reflection, and thus the time that has elapsed from the *event* plays into the author’s hands. Still, to be writing today, as it were by appointment, about the years of communist dictatorship is both risky and somewhat verging on comedy: it is strikingly reminiscent of the former situation when writers abiding in communist countries were encouraged to pillory capitalism with proletarian fervour. Professor Corni of Trento University has made it plain in his answer to my question that the exercise the project initiators had in mind goes much deeper: it aims at a sort of redemption by means of confession – one frees oneself from what one was forced to live through by resorting to words or, alternately, to lines and colours, without any conditioning coming from outside one’s mind and feelings. One is under no obligation whatsoever to condemn that period – all one has to

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do is describe it the way one sees it. I called attention to further dangers posed by such an approach: the kind of book that does have something to say is hard to turn out – it should be written in solitude, without deadlines. It is quite improbable that the opinions exchanged at these workshops are liable to trigger off a genuine masterpiece. Furthermore, what matters most for writers is not *what* they write about, by *how* they write. A mediocre writer can fail lamentably when confronted with such a hugely momentous topic as the individual's relationship with an oppressive history, while a writer worthy of the name can make a masterpiece out of a commonplace subject such as describing an afternoon spent at a seminar in a Silesian castle...

Joining the colloquium entailed a rather complicated journey: I flew Tarom to Frankfurt, continued by Lufthansa to Dresden, and thence, together with the other guests, I boarded a bus to the Polish castle. On the way back I followed the same route with a detour: I'd asked my hosts for the favour of spending a night in Dresden – I was rather keen on visiting the city, which turned out to be quite an inspired decision. Personally, I feel greatly enriched by the Sunday I spent in the city on the Elbe.

Since we've been talking of communist dictatorship and its overcoming, Dresden is a living lesson on that topic. The city, abounding in baroque monuments and once known as “the Florence on the Elbe” was, early in 1945, bombed by the Anglo-American air force and destroyed to a great extent. As if to add insult to injury, history aberrantly went on to cast it into East Germany, under Russian hegemony. The urban “caries” caused by the war were promptly filled with Soviet architecture. Incongruously inexpressive, the additions look absolutely ridiculous and quite unacceptable next to the astounding edifices that have made the city famous: the *Zwinger Palace*, the *Royal Palace*, the *Kreuzkirche*, the *Albertinum*, the *Kathedrale*, the *Semperoper* with the *Brühlsche Terrasse*, known as “Europe's balcony”, with a splendid view of the river. Bucharest's city planners ought by all means to go to Dresden for some schooling: at the moment, the city is an impressive example of what it means to have everything reconstructed “wie es war” (the way it used to be), with care, love, accuracy and with an absolute feeling for beauty and quality. The famous *Frauenkirche*, the largest protestant cathedral in Central Europe, raised in 1743 and razed in February 1945, was rebuilt, and reopened in 2005. Currently, all the buildings that used to exist in its vicinity are being reconstructed based upon period photographs. The city-planning system has been impeccably updated and each separate block of flats (those ugly, Soviet-style structures we know so well which are a recurrent eyesore all over the city...) is singled out, given some “plastic surgery” and miraculously rejuvenated – a major feat, a breathtaking transfiguration, an act of self renewal through optimally rediscovering the former spirit of the place. It is with great respect and admiration that I look towards Dresden.

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