# QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW

FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

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# *Harper's* Index

Estimated percentage change since 2000 in the U.S. defense budget, not including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: +80

Number of American civilians who died worldwide in terrorist attacks last year: 8

Minimum number who died after being struck by lightning: 29

Estimated spending by Afghans on bribes last year: $2,500,000,000

Portion of the country's GDP to which this figure is equivalent: ¼

Average bribe: $158

Percentage of Americans who say they believe the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting: 34

Price for a cup of ice cream at the Ice Pack, an Iranian-owned dessert franchise, in Baghdad: $2.50

Price for a hamburger at the Freedom Restaurant in the Green Zone: $3

Chance that a female West Point cadet was a victim of "unwanted sexual contact" last year: 1 in 10

Percentage of victims who reported such incidents: 14

Percentage who said they "took care of it" themselves: 65

Estimated number of people caned in Malaysia every year: 10,000

Minimum number of cockfighting-advocacy groups operating in Texas: 3

Number of divorces in Britain in 2009 that were processed by Divorce-Online.co.uk: 7,316

Portion of these in which the word "Facebook" appeared in the court filing: 1/5

Percentage of United Kingdom residents accepted into Oxford University's undergraduate class last year who are black: 1

Percentage of U.S. high school seniors who have smoked a cigarette in the past month: 19

Who have smoked marijuana: 21

Date on which student loans first passed credit cards among the largest sources of private debt in the United States: 6/30/10

Percentage of U.S. households that are shared by more than one family: 13

Minimum number of people living in the flood tunnels beneath Las Vegas: 300

Portion of single or widowed Americans over 65 who receive all their income from Social Security: ¼

Amount the U.S. economy loses for each murder committed, according to an Iowa State University study: $17,000,000

Pounds of antibiotics produced in the U.S. in 2009 that were consumed by humans: 7,275,254

Pounds consumed by animals raised for human consumption: 28,808,023

Estimated number of red-winged blackbirds that fell dead from the sky in Arkansas on New Year's Eve: 4,500

Estimated percentage of New Hampshire's bat population that died in 2010: 65

Number of suicides last year in one Indian state that a government investigation attributed to unpaid microfinance debts: 54
Chance that a U.S. $100 bill is currently held outside the country: 1 in 2

# Iraqi Treasures: Theft from Humanity

by *Walter Sommerfeld*

The danger was obvious. Iraqis the birthplace of civilisation. Ten thousand sites, all of which are of crucial significance for all of humanity, tell the story of the ancient cultures that once thrived between the two rivers. It is an immense wealth of cultural heritage, thousands of years old. For it was here that Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians established and maintained the leading culture of antiquity, from the urban revolution in the fourth millennium BCE down to Alexander the Great, when the centre of power shifted to the Mediterranean region.

Again, with the spread of Islam in the seventh century CE, Iraq became the centre of the dominant culture for another five hundred years. Its famous capital, Baghdad, governed a region larger than all Europe or even the USA. It attracted an extravagance of material resources, as well as scholars, artists, experts of all kinds from all across the world.

In Iraq – ancient Mesopotamia – some of the earliest writing was invented, the first wheel, mathematics, astronomy, a society organised on the basis of the division of labour. The patriarch Abraham lived in what is today Iraq, likewise Imam Ali, the founder of Shiite Islam, who was martyred there. His shrine in Najaf attracts millions of pilgrims from across the world. Without

doubt, human society can only be explored fully with reference to its primogenesis in the landscape overlaid by modern Iraq.

Two months before the invasion of March 2003 a small group of experts warned Pentagon officials about the possibility of looting once the shooting war stopped. It had happened wholesale in the chaos after the 1991 Gulf War, and US forces could expect the same this time, the experts said.

And so it proved. After the sudden fall of Baghdad on 9 April 2003 anarchy reigned. A city with a population of roughly five million was without government, police, courts, traffic lights or offices. The amazingly efficient military strategists had occupied the country but without a plan for its civil control.

In this vacuum looting started, slowly at first, but when people noticed that they did not face any opposition it spread like a blaze. Soon systematic, organised looting and arson began. In one district after another all the buildings and offices of the old regime were pillaged. What was not worth taking was destroyed, toppled or scattered. Among those buildings affected were the museums, libraries, archives, galleries and cultural centres. All fifteen universities in Iraq were pillaged, as were all ministries and state departments – all except, most tellingly, the Ministry of Oil, hospitals, national warehouses, larger hotels and banks.

Many sources tell of frantic efforts to beg the military for help, without success. Even appeals to the command centre, from UN workers to protect their installations, for example, remained unheard.

Many looters came from the poorer districts of the city. However, at least in some districts, there were also many middle-class people among them. They stole out of poverty, rage, revenge and greed. The loot was often sold on the streets on the same day, sometimes for absurdly low prices. Air conditioners could be had for five dollars. The looters pillaged and destroyed, but did not burn. The arsonists came afterwards, systematically dousing the looted buildings with gasoline, in some cases even with incendiary chemicals, and lighting them ablaze.

After the conquest of Baghdad in April 2003 the world witnessed, in astonishment and shock, the looting and vandalisation of the National Museum over several days. The US military did not lift a finger to protect it. This museum is the premier repository of Mesopotamian artefacts, holding as it does the largest collection in the world.

On Tuesday 8 April heavy fighting took place in the direct vicinity of the museum, which lies in the centre of the city and is surrounded by strategically important sites. The civilians stationed to guard the museum fled the area in fear for their lives. After further heavy fighting (the museum was described as a battlefield) the museum grounds fell to the Americans. Most large and identifiable objects were still inside at that point since their transport was rather more difficult; only small objects from the cases had been brought into safe storage.

The Iraqis who happened to be outside were then incited to help themselves to the museum. An American officer was heard to shout at the crowd, 'Go in Ali Baba, it's all yours.' From Thursday to Saturday (10-12 April) the looting continued unchecked. The looters were sure of themselves, shamelessly carrying objects out of the building. These were the infamous scenes seen around the world: brazen looters grinning as they stole from the museum. The few museum employees who had returned to their posts could do nothing to stop them, although they tried in vain to obtain help from American troops in the area. A few soldiers did appear briefly. They observed the mayhem and departed, saying flatly, 'this is not our order'.

Since the looting could not be stopped the museum staff were very concerned that arsonists would, as elsewhere, go to work

here and destroy the irreplaceable documentation, excavation reports and library. Two directors of the Antiquities Department made their way to the American command centre in the Palestine Hotel and, after a four-hour wait, were admitted to ask for immediate protection of the museum. The commander promised to send tanks and soldiers immediately. Nothing came until 16 April – days later. One of the directors then managed to borrow a satellite telephone and contact a colleague at the British Museum This led to the mobilisation of American and British authorities and the stationing of the tanks which have guarded the museum since.

The damage is immeasurable. Some of the most famous objects in the museum, which had still been in the galleries, are certainly lost. The looters were even able to break open the magazines, in which objects catalogued under roughly a hundred and seventy thousand inventory numbers were stored, and carry off the contents over the span of several days.

The most valuable pieces, which include the famous gold treasures of the crypts of the Assyrian queens in Nimrud, were stored in the vaults of the central bank. Here, too, the looters had free reign before soldiers finally secured the building. However, the construction of the repository was too solid for people with simple tools to break in.

In the end, when the Museum was secured, the employees began the weeks-long inventory of damages. They identified roughly fifteen thousand stolen pieces. Through the efforts of the Iraqi police, US and Coalition law enforcement and international efforts, some of the stolen artefacts were recovered. Yet the fact remains that, more than eight and a half years after looters sacked Iraq's National Museum, Iraqi authorities and police forces throughout the world are still searching for thousands of stolen items. These include a handful of the most famous artefacts in history. In all, an estimated ten thousand pieces are still missing.

It was not a complete loss but it is bad enough. The library was spared, as were many excavation reports and most inventory records. The vandalism was terrible but a catastrophic blaze was avoided. Nothing could be done about the fire-gutted National Library and the loss of five centuries of Ottoman records, as well as works by Picasso and Miró.

Outside the capital lie some ten thousand sites of incomparable importance to the history of civilisation. Only a fraction of these sites have been properly excavated – most not at all. Yet they are being looted as systematically as was the museum in 2003. Hardly any other nation possesses such a dense archaeological heritage, giving Iraq exceptional historical and cultural depth. This also meant, under the prevailing anarchy, it became an Eldorado for looters.

The Sumerian heartland in southern Iraq has been hit the hardest. Whole 'tels' (ruin mounds), some of them covering several square miles, have vanished or are reduced to pockmarked lunar landscapes. Their names are haunted with history: Adab, Isin, Umma. The digging is wholly due to the frantic activities of looters. Gangs of them, sometimes several hundred strong, have turned up with bulldozers and dump trucks guarded by men with AK47s. In this way one site after another is lost to illegal archaeology.

Beyond the fact that looting sites for artefacts constitutes theft, the destruction of archaeological contexts results in an irreversible loss of information. Ruins of cities which have survived virtually untouched for five thousand years, and which have now been ransacked, contain precious information of all kinds. Streets and places, city walls, temples, palaces of the rich and hovels of the people, craft business, libraries with literature and

administrative archives, art and everyday objects – archaeologists yearn to discover who once lived there and what they created.

Modern scientific excavation is meticulous. Archaeologists glean all details with delicate precision. They work like detectives. Everything is of significance, including the mud bricks of ruins, rubbish pits, rotten trees. During an excavation of two months in Mesopotamia on average twenty thousand shards and five hundred fragments and small finds are revealed. Between only twenty to fifty complete objects are discovered which would be of interest for the antiques market – less than one percent in comparison to scientifically valuable objects.

Since only marketable artefacts are retrieved during clandestine operations most other objects are discarded, resulting in a tremendous additional loss of archaeological data. Searching for valuables, looters destroy many cubic metres of a complete site and unique architecture in order to wrest one saleable object for the antiques market. The main body of information, vital for our historical consciousness, is not connected with the object itself but with its context in the ground. This makes precise documentation the most important aspect for archaeologists. Excavation without documentation is like tearing single letters out of a page. Letters without context lose their meaning. Objects from illicit excavations are like these single letters. They might be grand to look at but they have lost their meaning, their real value. A stolen object may be confiscated and returned to the rightful owner but an undocumented site can never been replaced. It is lost forever.

Illicit excavations in Iraq had been stopped almost completely after independence in 1932. This state of affairs remained until 1991. The Department of Antiquities took great care of the heritage, developing efficient laws and protective measures. The great disaster began during the sanctions which were imposed for thirteen years after the invasion of Kuwait. As a result the population fell into poverty and people began to welcome any kind of additional income. At the same time collecting ancient Near Eastern antiquities became fashionable in rich Western countries. The international antiques market discovered the chance to do business with smuggled Iraqi treasures at exorbitant profit margins. Since 2003 the market has been flooded with antiquities and profits are going through the roof.

The rare artefacts recovered from these sites are merely a grab bag, usually including some cylinder seals, pottery, clay tablets, stone carvings and other small items. The question has to be asked: where is all this material going?

There is no doubt that without a market for illegally excavated objects there would be no illegal excavations. It is the ever-growing demand for antiquities in a worldwide market that provides the incentive for looting and illegal excavation. Insufficient legislation in some countries continues to guarantee the marketability of these stolen goods. Moreover, the grey and black markets of antiquities are very busy and resourceful. The margin of profit is extremely high, comparable only to drug or human trafficking. A poor Iraqi peasant will get a few dollars for a nice object from an ancient site but when a rich enthusiast of historical artefacts obtains it from an established dealer, or a vaguer source, its financial value is inordinately increased. Also worrying is the fact that the looting of archaeological sites is a major source of terrorist funding – not only in Iraq.

It is abundantly clear that the Americans and British were not protecting Iraq's historic sites. Before the invasion of March 2003 all foreign archaeologists had to leave. Troops were doing nothing to prevent the 'farming' of known antiquities. This is in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention that an occupying army

should ‘use all means within its power’ to guard the cultural heritage of a defeated state.

With the ongoing insurgency neither US nor Iraqi forces could justify using even scarce manpower to guard sites in the countryside, thus widespread looting and destruction have proceeded unimpeded for more than eight years. There is still no end in sight as long as overburdened Iraqi security forces remain preoccupied with grave security problems.

The Iraqi Antiquities Department, which has to carry out the Herculean task of protecting the nation’s cultural heritage under unprecedented circumstances, has only a few teams combing the country. They try their best to salvage and document sites and artefacts. Mostly they collect detritus left by looters. The small force of site guards is no match for heavily armed looters able to shift objects to eager European and American dealers in days. Against such prospects of gigantic profit any number of site guards will inevitably prove futile.

Only the consistent international prohibition of any kind of trade of looted artefacts from illegal excavations could effectively restrain this devastation. Currently, one could term it, without exaggeration, a war against our shared archaeological heritage, which is resulting in the systematic destruction of the cultural memory of mankind.

Perhaps one of the saddest stories – one that could serve as a symbol of all the desecrations – is the manner in which American forces converted Nebuchadnezzar’s great city of Babylon, possibly the most famous city of the ancient world, into a huge camp of a hundred and fifty hectares for two thousand troops. In the process, the two thousand five hundred year- old brick pavement to the Ishtar Gate was smashed by tanks and the gate itself was damaged. The archaeologically rich subsoil was bulldozed to fill sandbags, and large areas covered in compacted gravel for helipads and car parks. Babylon is being rendered archaeologically barren.

Many people assumed that the March 2003 invasion would at least lead to a more civilised environment; but something else has happened. Authority has collapsed, with the effect that Iraq’s people have been murdered in droves. While Britain and America remain in denial over the anarchy they have created they clearly feel they must deny its devastating side-effects. More than two million refugees now camping in Jordan and Syria are ignored, since life in Iraq is supposed to be better than before’.

Iraq is a country with a unique legacy. It is also the origin of western civilisation. Its precious treasures and its precious people are being refused all guardianship, all in defiance of international law. Much world heritage is being lost forever. ♦

# Foraging: The Food at Our Feet

by *Jane Kramer*

I spent the summer foraging, like an early hominid with clothes. It didn't matter that the first thing I learned about that daunting pastime of hunter-gatherers and visionary chefs was that nature's bounty is a thorny gift. Thorny, or, if you prefer, spiny, prickly, buggy, sticky, slimy, muddy, and, occasionally, so toxic that one of the books I consulted for my summer forays carried a disclaimer absolving the publisher of responsibility should I happen to end up in the hospital or, worse, in the ground, moldering next to the *Amanita phalloides* that I'd mistaken for a porcini. I was not deterred. I had foraged as a child, although it has to be said that children don't think "forage" when they are out stripping raspberry bushes and blackberry brambles; they think about getting away before the ogre whose land they're plundering catches them and turns them into toads. I could even claim to have foraged as an adult, if you count a mild interest in plucking berries from the caper bushes that cling to the walls of an old hill town near the farmhouse in Umbria where my husband and I go, in the summertime, to write. Caper berries are like blackberries; they amount to forage only in that they are not *your* berries.

I wasn't the first throwback on the block. The pursuit of wild food has become so fashionable a subject in the past few years that one eater.com blogger called this the era of the "I Foraged with René Redzepi Piece." Redzepi is the chef of Noma, in Copenhagen (otherwise known as the best restaurant in the world). More to the point, he is the acknowledged master scavenger of the Nordic coast. I'll admit it. I wanted to forage with Redzepi, too.

**JUNE**

I began working my way toward Denmark as soon as I arrived in Italy. I unpacked a carton of books with titles like *Nature's Garden* and *The Wild Table*. I bought new mud boots – six euros at my local hardware store – and enlisted a mentor in the person of John Paterson, an exuberant Cumbria-to-Umbria transplant of forty-seven, who looked at my boots and said, "What's wrong with sneakers?" Paterson is a countryman, or, as he says, "not a reader." He is the kind of spontaneous forager who carries knives and old shopping bags and plastic buckets in the trunk of his car. (I carry epinephrine and bug repellent.) Being lanky and very tall, he can also leap over scraggly brush, which I, being small, cannot. Cumbrians are passionate about foraging – perhaps because, like their Scottish neighbors, they have learned to plumb the surface of a northern landscape not normally known for its largesse. What's more, they share their enthusiasm and their secret places, something the old farmers in my neighborhood, most of them crafty foragers, rarely do. The peasants of Southern Europe do not easily admit to foraging – at least not to strangers. For centuries, foraged food was a sign of poverty, and they called it "famine food," or "animal food." The exception was truffles and porcini, which today command enough money for a good forager to be able to wait in line at the supermarket, buying stale food with the bourgeoisie. Some of my neighbors have truffle hounds penned in front of their chicken coops, ostensibly keeping foxes at bay. But they never ask to truffle in the woods by my pond when I'm around and, by local etiquette, they would have to offer

some of the precious tubers they unearth to me. They wait until September, when I'm back in New York, and keep all my truffles for themselves.

Paterson got his start foraging – "Well, not actually foraging, more like scrumping" – as a schoolboy, combing the farms near his uncle's Cockermouth sawmill for the giant rutabagas, or swedes, as the English call them, that children in Northern Europe carve into jack-o'-lanterns at Halloween. He worked in his first kitchen at the age of twelve ("I washed the plates," he says. "I was too shy to wait on tables") and twenty-five years later arrived in Umbria, a chef. Today, he has a Romanian wife, two children, and a thriving restaurant of his own – the Antica Osteria della Valle – in Todi, a town where people used to reserve their accolades for the meals that Grandmother made and, until they tasted his, had already driven away two "foreign" chefs, a Neapolitan and a Sicilian. In early June, I was finishing a plate of Paterson's excellent tagliarini with porcini when he emerged from the kitchen, pulled up a chair, and started talking about the mushrooms he had discovered, foraging as a boy, in a patch of woods near a bridge over the River Cocker. "All those beautiful mushrooms!" he kept saying. He told me about green, orange, and red parrot mushrooms and parasol mushrooms and big cèpes called penny buns and bright, polka-dotted fly agarics "so huge they could fill a room" and mushrooms "like white fennels that grow from the shape of saucers into gilled cups." He ate judiciously, but admired them all. In Italy, he started foraging for porcini to cook at home. At the Osteria, where he has to use farmed porcini, he roasts the mushrooms in pigeon juice, fills them with spinach, and wraps them in pancetta. He said that foraging had inspired his "bacon-and-eggs philosophy of little things that work together."

A week later, we set out for some of his favorite foraging spots. We stopped at the best roadside for gathering the tiny leaves of wild mint known in Italy as *mentuccia* ("Fantastic with lamb") and passed the supermarket at the edge of town, where only the day before he'd been cutting wild asparagus from a jumble of weeds and bushes behind the parking lot ("Great in risotto, but it looks like I took it all"). Then we headed for the country. We tried the field where he usually gets his wild fennel ("The flowers are lovely with ham and pork") and found so much of that delicious weed that the fronds, rippling across the field in a warm breeze, looked like nature's copy of Christo's "Running Fence." I was hoping to find *strioli*, too. *Strioli* is a spicy wild herb that looks like long leaves of tarragon. It grows in fields and pastures in late spring and early summer and makes a delicious spaghetti sauce – you take a few big handfuls of the herb, toss it into a sauté pan with olive oil, garlic, and *peperoncini*, and in a minute it's ready. But there was none in sight, so we turned onto a quiet road that wound through fields of alfalfa and wheat and soon-to-be-blooming sunflowers, and parked next to a shuttered and, by all evidence, long-abandoned farmhouse that I had passed so often over the years that I thought of it as *my* house and dreamed of rescuing it.

Foraging places are like houses. Some speak to you, others you ignore. I wasn't surprised that the land around that tumbledown house spoke to Paterson. He jumped out of the car, peered over a thicket of roadside bush and sloe trees, and disappeared down a steep, very wet slope before I had even unbuckled my seat belt – after which he emerged, upright and waving, in an overgrown copse enclosed by a circle of trees. Cleared, the copse would have provided a shady garden for a farmer's family. To a forager, it was perfect: a natural rain trap, sheltered against the harsh sun, and virtually hidden from the

road. Everywhere we turned, there were plants to gather. Even the wild asparagus, which usually hides from the sun in a profusion of other plants' leaves and stalks, was so plentiful that you couldn't miss it. We filled a shopping bag.

Wild asparagus has a tart, ravishing taste – what foragers call a wilderness taste – and a season so short as to be practically nonexistent. It's as different from farmed asparagus as a morel is from the boxed mushrooms at your corner store. I was ready to head back and start planning my risotto, but Paterson had spotted a patch of leafy scrub and pulled me toward it. He called it *crespina*. I had never heard of *crespina*, nor, after months of searching, have I found it in any Italian dictionary. It's the local word for spiny sow thistle – a peppery wild vegetable whose leaves taste a little like spinach and a lot like sorrel and, as I soon discovered, come with a spiky center rib sharp enough to etch a fine line down the palm of your hand if you've never handled them before. (I regard the small scar that I got that day as a forager's mark of initiation.) We added a respectable bunch of leaves to the shopping bag, and carried the overflow up to the car in our arms. An hour later, we were separating and trimming the morning's spoils in the tiny restaurant kitchen where, six days a week, Paterson cooks alone for fifty people ("Where would I put a sous-chef?" he said, stepping on my foot) and comparing recipes for wild-asparagus risotto. Here is his "most beautiful way" to make it: Snap off the fibrous ends of the asparagus spears and crush them with the blade of a knife. Simmer them in water or a mild stock until the stock takes flavor. Strain the stock. Pour a cupful of white wine into rice that's been turned for a minute or two in hot olive oil and some minced onion. As soon as the wine boils down, start ladling in the stock. Keep ladling and stirring until the rice is practically *al dente* and the last ladle of stock is in the pan. Now fold in the asparagus heads. In no time, all you will need to do is grate the Parmesan and serve.

I made Paterson's risotto for dinner that night, along with a roast chicken and the *crespina* leaves, sautéed for a minute, like baby spinach, in olive oil and a sprinkling of red-pepper flakes; the spines wilted into a tasty crunch. The next night, I chopped my fronds of wild fennel and used them to stuff a pork roast. When I called Paterson to say how good everything was, he told me, "Free food! There's nothing like it. It always tastes better."

**JULY**

I went to Oxford to give a talk, and got to forage in Pinsley Wood, an ancient forest near a village called Church Hanborough. You can find the original wood in the Domesday Book – the "unalterable" tax survey of English and Welsh land holdings compiled for William the Conqueror in 1086 – and, indeed, the only altered thing about that venerable preserve is that now it's a lot smaller, and everyone can enjoy it. In spring, when the ground is covered with bluebells, foragers complain about having to contend with lovers, nestled in sheets of sweet-smelling flowers, watching the clouds go by. By July, the bluebells are gone and there are no distractions.

My friends Paul Levy and Elisabeth Luard – writers, foragers, and distinguished foodies (a word that, for better or for worse, Levy is said to have coined) – walked me through Pinsley Wood, armed with bags and baskets. Our plan was to make a big lunch with everything edible we found. Levy, a polymath whose books range from a biography of G. E. Moore during his Cambridge Apostle years to a whirlwind sampler of culinary erudition called "Out to Lunch," has been the food and wine editor of the *Observer*, an arts correspondent of the *Wall Street Journal*, and, for

the past eight years, the co-chair of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery. Luard, who began foraging as a botanical illustrator and traveller and whose many cookbooks include the estimable "European Peasant Cookery" – a virtual travelogue of foraged and home-grown food – is the symposium's executive director.

My husband and I were staying with Levy and his wife (and self-described "arts wallah"), Penelope Marcus, at their Oxfordshire farmhouse, a rambling place, almost as old as Pinsley Wood, with a kitchen garden so vast and various in its offerings that I was tempted to ditch my mud boots, which had turned out to be plastic-coated cardboard (six euros do not a Welly make), and do my foraging there, in flip-flops, with a pair of gardening shears and a glass of iced tea waiting on the kitchen table. In fact, we began our foraging at the Levys' barn wall, in a small overgrown patch of wild plants where fresh stinging nettles were sprouting like weeds (which is what they are) among the blackberry brambles and the dandelion greens and the malva, a purple flower often used in *melokhia*, a delectable Egyptian soup that I once ate in London but, alas, have never been able to replicate. We were going to use the nettles for an English broad-bean-and-vegetable soup that afternoon.

We drove to the wood in Luard's old Mazda – past a village allotment with wild oats growing outside the fence and, inside, what looked to be a bumper crop of opium poppies – and listened to Luard and Levy talk about forest plants. Don't bother with "dead nettles" – stingless flowering perennials that had no relation to *our* nettles and, to Luard's mind, were not worth eating. Don't overdo the elderberry unless you need a laxative. Beware of plants with pretty berries or pretty names, and, especially, of plants with both – which in the Hanboroughs means to remember that the flowering plant called lords and ladies, with its juicy scarlet berries and sultry, folded hood, was more accurately known to generations of poisoners as the deadly Arum "kill your neighbor." "A stinky plant," Levy said. I wrote it all down.

Levy considers himself a "basic local forager," which is to say that he doesn't drive three or four hours to the sea for his samphire and sea aster; he buys them at Waitrose. He loves wild garlic, and knows that sheets of bluebells in Pinsley Wood mean that wild garlic is growing near them. He "scrabbles" for the food he likes at home. "I can identify Jack-by-the-hedge for salad," he told me. "And I can do sloes, brambles, elderberries. Anyone who lives in the countryside here can. Elisabeth is the more advanced forager, but I do know a little about truffles and wild mushrooms. Three of us once identified more than twenty mushroom species near here in Blenheim Park, and I'm quite good at chanterelles and porcini." Levy thinks of Pinsley Wood as his neighborhood mushroom habitat. It has an old canopy of oak and ash, but it also has birch trees (chanterelles grow in their shade), and most of the interior is beech (porcini and truffles). Summer truffles are pretty much what you find in England. They are black outside and pale, grayish brown inside, and you have to dig twice as many as you think you'll need to match anything like the deep flavor of France's black winter truffles in a *sauce périgueux*.

Levy and my husband, who had been planning to spend a quiet day at the Ashmolean but was shamed out of it, immediately started following a network of burrowed tunnels – a "sett" – that led them into the wood near clusters of beech trees with small, circular swells of dark, moist earth beneath them. Swells like those are a sign of truffles, pushing up the ground. Setts mean that badgers probably got to the truffles first. A good truffle dog, like a hungry badger, can sniff its way to a truffle by following the scent of the spores left in its own feces from as long as a year before. The difference between a truffle dog and a badger – or, for that

matter, the boar that trample my sage and rosemary bushes in their rush to my pond to root and drink – is that your dog doesn't go truffling without you, and when it digs a truffle, as many Italian truffle dogs are trained to do, it mouths it gently and gives it to you intact. Or relatively intact. A few weeks later, when Paterson and I went truffling with an obliging local carabiniere named Bruno Craba and his two truffle terrier mutts, one of the dogs surrendered so helplessly to the intoxicating smell of semen that the tubers emit – known to foodies as the truffle umami – that she swallowed half a truffle the size of a tennis ball before presenting the rest of it to her master.

Being without benefit of a truffle dog, let alone a small spade or even a soup spoon for loosening the soil, Luard and I abandoned the men, who by then were up to their wrists in dirt, hoping to find a truffle that the badgers had missed. They didn't. With lunch on our minds, we went in search of more accessible food. "Pea plants – plants of the *Leguminosae* family – are mostly what you get here," Luard told me. You have to look for seed-bearing pods and single flowers with four "free" petals (which *The New Oxford Book of Food Plants* describes as "a large upper standard, 2 lateral wings, and a boat-shaped keel"). I left the identifying to her. Luard, who has foraged in twenty countries, has been called a walking encyclopedia of wild food. She was.

While we gathered pea plants, I learned that British countrywomen thicken their jellies with rose-hips, crab apples, and the red fruit clusters of rowan bushes, which people in Wales, where Luard lives, plant by their doors to keep witches away. (There's a recipe for "hedgerow jelly" in her new book, *A Cook's Year in a Welsh Farmhouse*.) Passing what looked to be the remains of a wild ground orchid, I was instructed in the virtues of "saloop," a drink made from the powder of crushed orchid roots which, for centuries, was the pick-me-up of London's chimney sweeps – "The Ovaltine and Horlicks of its time, with more protein than a *filet de boeuf*," Luard said. (You can read about saloop in Charles Lamb, who hated it.) We walked past silverweed plants ("Edible but not tasty") and meadowsweet ("The underscent of vanilla in the flowers makes a nice tea") and the leaf shoots of young, wild carrots ("Skinny as can be means good in soup") and teasel ("Not for eating; for combing wool") and butterwort, which, like fig-tree sap in Italy, is a vegetable rennet, "good for making cheese." Along the way, I discovered that farm children in southern Spain, where Luard lived with her family in the seventies, ate wild-fennel fronds and "sucked on the lemony stalks" of wood sorrel on their way to school, by way of a second breakfast. "Children are a huge source of information about wild food," she told me. "In Spain, I would ask the village women to tell me what they foraged and how they cooked it, and they wouldn't answer – they were embarrassed by foraging, like your Italian neighbors – but their children knew. My children would walk to school with them, eating the leaves and berries that their friends plucked from the roadside verges. They learned from their friends, and I learned from them. I've lived in a lot of places, and I've discovered that a basic knowledge of food runs all the way through Europe. The people I lived with cooked, of necessity, what they grew, and the wild food they added – the changing taste of leaves and nuts, for instance – was what gave interest to those few things. It taught me that when you grow enough to eat you begin to make it taste good. That's not a frippery, it's a need."

Luard, as senior forager, was in charge of lunch. Levy was in charge of fetching claret from the cellar and coaxing heat from an unpredictable Aga. Marcus was in charge of setting the garden table, while my husband, who had volunteered for the washing up, wandered around, keeping up the conversation. And I was stationed at the sink, sorting and cleaning a good deal of Pinsley

Wood. It was an unfortunate assignment, since I tend to daydream at kitchen sinks, and the better the dream the slower my pace. Sorting our forage took me half an hour. Cleaning it took twice as long, given the number of bugs clinging to every leaf and flower, not to mention Luard's instructions, among them separating the yarrow leaves we'd collected from any lingering trace of petals, and scraping the hairy calyxes from the bottom of borage flowers. We sat down to lunch at four-thirty. The soup was a vegetarian feast of flageolets with (among other good, wild things) nettles, yarrow leaves, and dandelions, and the salad a spicy mix of wild sorrel, dandelions, onion flowers, and borage flowers. But my favorite dish was the scrambled eggs that Luard made with an unseemly amount of farm butter and double cream and a mountain of fresh sorrel. The sorrel for that came from the Levys' kitchen garden, a few feet from the back door.

**AUGUST**

I wasn't really ready for René Redzepi. I had tried to prepare. I downloaded the stories that appeared last spring, when a jury of chefs and food writers, convened by the British magazine *Restaurant*, named Noma the world's best restaurant for the second year. I studied the photographs in Redzepi's cookbook, memorized the names in his glossary of plants and seaweeds, and even tried to improvise on some of his simpler recipes with my local produce – impossible in a part of Italy where the collective culinary imagination is so literally "local" that broccoli is considered a foreign food and oregano is dismissed as "something the Tuscans eat." But I flew to Denmark anyway, planning to make a trial foraging run in western Zealand with my Danish friend (and fellow-journalist) Merete Baird, who spends her summers in a farmhouse overlooking Nexelo Bay – a trove of wilderness food – and likes to eat at Lammerfjordens Spisehus, a restaurant run by one of Redzepi's disciples. My foraging trial ended before it began, in a freezing downpour, and, as for the restaurant, the storm had left me so hungry that, at dinner that night, I passed up the young chef's lovely deconstructed tomato-and-wild-herb soup and his leafy Noma-inspired offerings and ordered two fat Danish sausages and a bowl of warm potato salad.

I met Redzepi at Noma early the following afternoon. He arrived on an old bike, chained it outside the restaurant – a converted warehouse on a quay where trading ships once unloaded fish and skins from Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands – and tried to ignore the tourists who were milling about, their cameras ready, hoping for a shot of arguably the most famous Dane since Hamlet. In fact, most of them barely glanced at the small young man with floppy brown hair, in jeans, battered sneakers, and an untucked wrinkled shirt, locking up his bike. Redzepi is thirty-three, with a wife and two small children, but he can look like a student who slept in his clothes and is now running late for an exam. The most flamboyant thing about him may be the short beard he frequently grows – and just as frequently sheds. It is hard to imagine him in a white toque or a bloody apron or, à la Mario Batali, in baggy Bermudas and orange crocs. When I left for my hotel that day, one of the tourists stopped me: "That kid you were with earlier? His bike's still here."

Redzepi opened Noma in 2003, at the age of twenty-five, backed by the gastronomical entrepreneur of a successful catering service and bakery chain (whose bread he doesn't serve) and a "new Danish" furniture designer (whose advice he routinely rejects). He was nine years out of culinary school, during which time he had apprenticed at one of Copenhagen's best restaurants, endured a long *stage* in the unhappy kitchen of a testy three-star Montpelier chef, and made molecular magic in Catalonia with

Ferran Adrià. "I ate a meal at elBulli," as he tells the story, "and as soon as I finished I went up to Adrià and asked for a job. He said, 'Write me a letter.' So I did. A few weeks later, I found a job offer, complete with contract, in the mail." He stayed at elBulli for a season, and, in the course of it, landed his next job – at Thomas Keller's French Laundry, in Napa Valley, where he was much taken with the emphasis on local food. He was back in Copenhagen, cooking "Scandinavian French" at the restaurant Kong Hans Kælder, when the call came asking if he'd like a restaurant of his own.

"We had the idea: let's use local products here," he told me the next morning. We were at a diner, making a caffeine stop on the way to a beach at Dragør – a town on the Øresund Sea, about twenty minutes from the outskirts of Copenhagen – where he likes to forage. "But I was very unhappy at first. Why? Because we were taking recipes from other cultures, serving essentially the same 'Scandinavian French' food, and just because you're using local produce to make that food doesn't mean you're making a food of your own culture. I started asking myself, What is a region? What is the sum of the people we are, the culture we are? What does it taste like? What does it look like on a plate? It was a very complex thing for us – the idea of finding a new flavor that was 'ours.' "

Five years later, having raised the money for a research foundation called the Nordic Food Lab, he hired an American chef named Lars Williams – who arrived with a degree in English literature, a passion for food chemistry, and fifteen lines of the first book of *Paradise Lost* tattooed on his right arm – to preside over a test kitchen on a houseboat across the quay from Noma and begin to "release the umami of Nordic cuisine." At the moment, they were looking for some in a liquid concentrate of dried peas, which I had sampled on the houseboat the day before. (It was quite good, with the rich bite of a soy concentrate and, at the same time, a kind of pea-plant sweetness.) And they planned to look for more in a brew of buckwheat and fatty fish, starting with herring or mackerel. They were also "looking into" Nordic insects, Redzepi said. (On a trip to Australia last year, he had eaten white larvae that he swore tasted "exactly like fresh almonds.") "The question for us is how to keep that free-sprouting spirit here," he told me. "In gastronomical terms, we're not at the finish line, but we know what it could be."

A Nordic cuisine, for Redzepi, begins with harvesting the vast resources of a particular north – running west from Finland through Scandinavia and across the North Atlantic to the Faroes, Iceland, and Greenland – and using them to evoke and, in the end, re-imagine and refine a common culture of rye grains, fish, fermentation, salt, and smoke, inherited from farmers and fishermen with hardscrabble lives and a dour Protestant certainty that those lives wouldn't be getting easier. Redzepi's mother, who worked as a cleaner in Copenhagen and loves to eat at Noma, comes from that Protestant Danish stock. But the cook in the family was his father, a mosque-going Muslim from Macedonia who drove a taxi. "When I was growing up, we'd leave the city for long periods in the summer and stay in the village where my father was born," Redzepi told me. "It was a two-car village, and cooking, for him, was kill the chicken, milk the cow. When he eats at Noma, he says, 'Well, it's not exactly up my alley.' His alley is homey stews, homey peasant flavors, and lots of beans." When I told Redzepi about a blog I'd read, calling him a Nordic supremacist, he laughed and said, "Look at my family. My father's a Muslim immigrant. My wife, Nadine, is Jewish. She was born in Portugal and has family in France and England. She studied languages. If the supremacists took over, we'd be out of here."

Redzepi remembers foraging for berries as a boy in Macedonia. He loves berries. Gooseberries, blueberries, blackberries, lingonberries – any berries in season, at hand, and edible. He carries a bowl of berries around Noma's kitchens, popping them into his mouth while he checks a prep station or talks to a chef or even stands at the front stove, finishing a sauce. He also loves mushrooms. There are some two hundred edible varieties in Denmark's woods, and he is working his way through them all. But, at the moment, the food he cherishes is cabbage – from the big, pale cabbages that he slices and steams, at home, in a knob of butter and a half inch of his wife's leftover tea, to the tiny, vividly green-leaved wild cabbages that sit in pots, basking in ultraviolet light, on a steel counter in the middle of one of Noma's upstairs kitchens, waiting for the day they're ready to be wrapped with their stems around a sliver of pike perch and served to customers on a beautiful stoneware plate, between a green verbena sauce and a butter-and-fish-bone foam. One of the first things he told me, the day we met, was that, for him, the great surprise of foraging in Nordic Europe was to see cabbages sprouting from rotting seaweed on a beach, and to realize how much food value the sea, the sand, and the nutrients released in the rotting process could produce.

It's an experience that he wants the people on his staff to share before they so much as plate a salad or get near a stove. Seventy people work at Noma. They come from as many as sixteen countries – English is their lingua franca – and it's safe to say that every one of them has made a foraging trip to the sea or the woods (or both) with Redzepi. "There's a new guy from the Bronx working here," he told me, when he was introducing the kitchen staff. "I want to take him to the forest. I want to see the first time he gets down on his knees and tastes something. The transformation begins there."

The beach near Dragør was bleak, but it was bursting with plants I had never dreamed of eating, and I was ready for transformation. "Foraging is treasure hunting," Redzepi said; you'll find the treasure if you believe it's there. It's also homework. When he began foraging in Denmark, he stayed up nights reading. He bought botany books and field guides – the most useful being an old Swedish Army survival book that had taught soldiers how to live for a year in the wilderness on the food they found. At first, he foraged with the Army manual in his pocket. Then he began consulting other foragers. Now he forages with his iPhone. "I know a great professional forager in Sweden," he told me. "If I see something I can't identify, I call her up, point my iPhone, send her a picture of what I'm seeing, and ask her what it is. At the beginning, I had a little problem with beach thistles – my throat started to close from those weird flowers – but that was the worst time. I got connected to the sea and soil, and now they're an integral part of me. I experience the world through food."

We started out in a thicket of rose-hip bushes at the edge of the beach, where wild grass was just beginning to give way to sand and seaweed. The berries looked like tiny cherry tomatoes, and there were so many of them that, after a few minutes, we left Redzepi's "scavenger sous-chef," who had driven us out that morning – Redzepi hates driving – with the job of locating a couple of large garbage bags and filling them. (I ate some of the berries that night, at dinner, in a warm salad of lovage, zucchini, wild herbs, and an egg fried at the table in a hot skillet.) Redzepi pickles his rose-hip flowers in apple vinegar, and preserves the berries as a thick purée, for winter dishes. The picking season is short in Denmark, and he has to start gathering in mid-spring in order to dry, smoke, pickle, or otherwise preserve – and, in the process, concentrate the flavor of – a lot of the vegetables and

fruits that his customers will be eating in December. He told me about beach dandelions with nippy little bouquets of flowers and tiny roots that taste "like a mix of fresh hazelnuts and roasted almonds," and about the vanilla taste of wild parsnip flowers, and about pink beach-pea flowers that taste like mushrooms. By the time we got to the water, we were sampling most of what we found. We ate a handful of short beach grass that tasted like oysters, and a cluster of spicy lilac beach-mustard flowers that made the mustard in jars seem tame. We snacked on enormous leaves of sea lettuce that came floating by. They tasted, to me, like mild, salty cabbage that had just been scooped out of a pot-au-feu. Redzepi serves a lot of sea lettuce at Noma. He breaks it down in a *saporoso* of white-wine vinegar (to make it "easier to eat," he says, and also to bring out its "ocean flavor") and wraps it around cod roe or oysters, or folds it into a poached-egg-and-radish stew.

The weather in Denmark begins to turn in August. It was too late in the summer for sea goosefoot, or for the bladder wrack that bobs near the shore like bloated peas and, according to Redzepi, is just as sweet. The scurvy grass we discovered was too old to eat. But the beach horseradish that day was perfect. It had the "big hint of wasabi taste" that Redzepi likes so much that he serves the leaves folded over sea urchin. By late morning, with the wind cutting through our sweaters, we were still roaming the beach and tasting. "It's amazing, all these foods in the sand," Redzepi said. "One of my most important moments foraging – important in the history of Noma – was on a windblown beach like this one. I saw this blade of grass, this chive-looking thing, growing out of some rotting seaweed. I put it in my mouth. It had a nice snap, with the saltiness of samphire. And a familiar taste. A taste from somewhere else. I thought, Wait a minute, it's cilantro! This isn't Mexico, it's Denmark, and I've found cilantro in the sand." That night, his customers ate beach cilantro, which turned out to be sea arrow grass. "We put it in everything that was savory."

There are never fewer than five or six foraged foods on Noma's menu, and usually many more. By now, Redzepi depends on professional foragers to supply most of them, but he and his staff still provide the rest. Earlier this year, they gathered two hundred and twenty pounds of wild roses for pickling, and a hundred and fifty pounds of wild ramps. By November, there were thirty-three hundred pounds of foraged fruits and vegetables stored at Noma, ready for winter. Redzepi told me that ninety per cent of everything he serves is farmed, fished, raised, or foraged within sixty miles of the restaurant, and while most chefs with serious reputations to maintain will occasionally cheat on "local," even the Jacobins of the sustainable-food world acknowledge that Redzepi never does. Early this fall, a food critic from the *Guardian* noted that the millionaires flying their private jets to eat at restaurants like Noma leave a carbon footprint far more damaging than the one Redzepi is trying to erase at home. Redzepi thinks about that, too, but not much. He says that the point of Noma isn't to feed the rich – that in his best-possible-world Noma would be free, because "there is nothing worse than charging people for conviviality." The point is to demonstrate how good cooking with regional food, anywhere in the world, can be. His mission is to spread the word.

On an average Saturday night, Noma's waiting list runs to a thousand people. The restaurant seats forty-four, and Redzepi has no real desire to expand. His partners keep asking, "When will the money begin to flow?" He ignores them. For now, at least, whatever profit Noma makes (last year, three per cent) goes right back into the business of sourcing and preparing the kinds of food that people who *do* get reservations come to the restaurant to eat. Most of the cultivated crops he uses (including his favorite

carrots, which are left in the ground for a year after they mature, and develop a dense texture and an almost meaty taste) are grown for him on a polycultural farm, an hour away in northwest Zealand, that he helped transform. His butter and milk (including the buttermilk with which he turns a warm, seaweed-oil vegetable salad dressing into an instantly addictive sauce) come from a nearby Zealand biodynamic farm. Everything else he serves is "Nordic" by anyone's definition. His sea urchin comes from a transplanted Scot who dives for it off the Norwegian coast. The buckwheat in Noma's bread comes from a small island off the coast of Sweden; I downed a loaf of it, watching Redzepi cook lunch. The red seaweed I ate that night at dinner – in a mysteriously satisfying dish involving dried scallops, toasted grains, watercress purée, beech nuts, mussel juice, and squid ink – came from a forager in Iceland. The langoustine that was served on a black rock (next to three tiny but eminently edible "rocks" made from an emulsion of oysters and kelp, dusted with crisped rye and seaweed crumbs) came from a fisherman in the Faroe Islands. Even Redzepi's wine list, which used to be largely French, now includes wines from a vineyard that Noma owns on Lilleø, a small island off Denmark's North Sea coast. I tried an unfiltered, moss-colored white from the vineyard that night. It looked murky in the glass, but I wish I had ordered more.

Redzepi was fifteen, and finishing the ninth grade, when his homeroom teacher pronounced him "ineligible" for secondary school and said that he would be streamed out of the academic system and into trade school and an apprenticeship. He chose a culinary school only because a classmate named Michael Skotbo was going there. Their first assignment was to find a recipe, cook it, and make it look appetizing on a plate. "You were supposed to dig into your memories of food, of taste, and my most vivid was from Macedonia," Redzepi told me. "It was my father's barnyard chicken – the drippings over the rice, the spices, the cashew sauce. I think that my first adult moment was cooking that spicy chicken. My second was when we found a wonderful cup and put the rice in it – with the chicken, sliced, next to it on the plate. I had an idea. I said to Michael, 'No, don't put the sauce on the meat. Put the sauce *between* the chicken and the rice. We came in second in flavor and first in presentation." I asked him who won first in flavor. "A butcher," he said. "He made ham salad. It was terrific."

The boy who couldn't get into high school now speaks four or five languages, publishes in the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, speaks at Yale, and last year disarmed an audience of literati at the New York Public Library with a philosophical riff on the beauty of aged-in-the-ground carrots, not to mention a biochemical acumen that many scientists, and most other chefs, would envy. To call Redzepi an autodidact is beside the point. His friends say he was born bored. "Wherever I go, I read, I look, I taste, I discover, I learn," he told me. "I'm cooking with mosses now. They were a whole new discovery for me. I tasted them for the first time foraging in Iceland. Some mosses are hideous, but those were so lush and green I had to try them. I took some back to Reykjavík, where a guy I'd met ground it for me and put it into cookies. Then I went to Greenland. For years, in Greenland, it looked like the reindeer were eating snow. Now we know they were eating moss. We call it reindeer moss. The moss on trees and bushes has a mushroomy taste – we deep-fry it, like potato chips – but the ones growing from the ground, up near caves, they have the taste and texture of noodles."

I ate reindeer moss at Noma, deep-fried, spiced with cèpes, and deliciously crisp. It was the third of twenty-three appetizers and tasting dishes I ate that night, the first being a hay parfait – a long infusion of cream and toasted hay, into which yarrow, nasturtium, camomile jelly, egg, and sorrel and camomile juice

were then blended. The second arrived in a flower pot, filled with malted, roasted rye crumbs and holding shoots of raw wild vegetables, a tiny poached mousse of snail nestling in a flower, and a flatbread "branch" that was spiced with powdered oak shoots, birch, and juniper. I wish I could describe the taste of those eloquent, complex combinations, but the truth is that, like most of the dishes I tried at Noma, they tasted like everything in them and, at the same time, like nothing I had ever eaten. Four hours later, I had filled a notebook with the names of wild foods. Redzepi collected me at my table, and we sat for a while outside, on a bench near the houseboat, looking at the water and talking. I didn't tell him that I'd passed on the little live shrimp, wriggling alone on a bed of crushed ice in a Mason jar, that had been presented to me between the rose-hip berries and the caramelized sweetbreads, plated with chanterelles and a grilled salad purée composed of spinach, wild herbs (pre-wilted in butter and herb tea), Swiss chard, celery, ground elder, Spanish chervil, chickweed, and goosefoot, and served with a morel-and-juniper-wood broth. I told him that it was the best meal I had ever eaten, and it was.

**SEPTEMBER**

I came home to New York, checked my mail, and discovered that I had missed the Vassar Club's "foraging tour" of Central Park. It was quite a relief. I ordered a steak from Citarella (by phone, for delivery), walked to the Friday greenmarket on Ninety-seventh Street for corn and tomatoes, and was home in fifteen minutes. I spun some salad from my corner store, unpacked my suitcase, plugged in my laptop, uncorked the wine, and cooked dinner. It seemed too easy. Surveying my kitchen, I wondered where I would put a Thermomix or a foam siphon with backup cartridges or a Pacojet or a vacuum-pack machine or even a No. 40 ice-cream scoop – all of which I would need just to produce the carrot sorbet and buttermilk-foam dessert that I'd been eyeing in Redzepi's cookbook. Where would Redzepi put them in his own kitchen? Then I remembered the sliced cabbage, steamed with a knob of butter in a half inch of leftover tea.

Noma isn't about home cooking or even foraging. The restaurant is a showcase, a virtuoso reminder that only a small fraction of the planet's bounty gets to anyone's dinner table, and that most of it is just as good as what does get there – even better, if it's cooked with patience, imagination, and a little hot-cold chemistry. It seems to me now that if you take John Paterson's enthusiasm for little wild things that work together and Elisabeth Luard's conviction that those things express the timeless "taste-good" ingenuity of peasant cooking, the message is not so different from Redzepi's. Most of us eat only what we know. It's time to put on our boots (or our sneakers) and look around. ♦

# The Changing Body: Health, Nutrition, and Human Development

by *Frank Armstrong*

A YouTube video called 'The Joy of Stats' is doing the rounds. It features Hans Rosling, a livewire Swedish professor of International Health. In just five minutes he conveys, with the aid of vivid graphical representation, the dramatic increase that has occurred in human life expectancy over the past two hundred years.

In 1800 no country had an average age above forty; yet by the early twenty-first century citizens of most developed countries can expect to reach eighty and beyond. Many developing countries, especially those outside Africa, are converging with Western levels.

Rosling concludes with bullish optimism: 'I see a clear trend into the future with aid, trade, green technology and peace it's fully possible that everyone can make it to the healthy wealthy corner.'

Explanations for this seismic leap, which has brought global population from about one billion in 1800 to seven billion today, are offered in a recent publication: The Changing Body: Health, Nutrition and Human Development in the Western World since 1700. Written by four academics from a range of fields, it applies a scientific rigour that is rarely encountered in historical work. The distinct educational tracks laid for science and humanities from a young age in this country usually militate against such joined-up thinking. Historians do not understand science, and scientists do not get history. Fortunately the twain meet in this work which offers a treasure trove for future scholars.

The authors' assessment accords with Rosling's: 'The process of industrialisation that began in Western Europe in the eighteenth century has allowed human beings to reach further towards the achievement of the potential which resides in every human being'; 'We are taller, heavier, healthier, and longer-lived than our ancestors; our bodies are sturdier, less susceptible to disease in early life and slower to wear out'.

They assert: 'there is every reason to expect that average life expectancy will continue to increase for many years to come, with profound implications for current assumptions about the limits to human longevity'. It seems likely that we will be living longer than our parents. This has profound implications for governments and for individuals. How did we get to this point? And, should we be quite so optimistic about the future?

## Indicators

The authors' essential thesis is that 'the health and nutrition of one generation contributes, through mothers and through infant and childhood experience, to the strength, health and longevity of the next generation'.

The 'primary evidence of nutritional status lies in our bodies and in particular our height and weight'. They cite a study by Waaler [1984] which shows that shorter men and women are more likely to die at younger ages than taller men and women. It would seem that as we grow taller we live longer too.

The important developmental stages are in utero, early infancy and adolescence. Inadequate nutrition at those stages stunts normal growth and brings long-term health sequelae. The Barker hypothesis posits that poor nutrition of a foetus predisposes that person to develop diseases in adulthood.

Moreover, the authors argue it is in 'no way fanciful to see the influence of the health and welfare of grandparents in the bodies of their grandchildren and the effect may be even longer-lasting'. A woman inadequately nourished in childhood has a reduced reproductive capacity. Her own diet may have improved but the legacy of poor nutrition and attendant disease will stunt the development of her offspring in utero. That offspring's offspring will also be affected, though less so as nutrition levels improve and health problems diminish. Thus, it has taken a number of generations for Italian- and Japanese-Americans to converge with the height of their fellow Americans.

**Strong Argument for the State**

In recent times there has emerged an increasing clamour against state interference in the economy coupled with restored faith in an Invisible Hand, the self-regulating nature of the marketplace. One such Free Market- enthusiast is Niall Ferguson who attacks the levying of taxation in his new book Civilisation: 'Private property rights,' he says, 'are repeatedly violated by governments that seem to have an insatiable appetite for taxing our incomes and our wealth and wasting a large proportion of the proceeds.'

Libertarianism might emerge as a popular political movement in the twenty-first century and not only in the US where Ron Paul is making waves. But The Changing Body provides an irresistible argument in favour of state intervention in the economy.

From the beginning of the seventeenth century there was a surplus of grain in England as agricultural capacity exceeded the requirements of the population. Carryover inventories of food averaged between thirty-three and forty-two percent of annual consumption. As a result in that period:

'famines were man-made rather than natural disasters'. The typical English subsistence crisis after the ascendancy of Henry VIII did not take place because of insufficiency but because 'the demand for inventories pushed prices so high that labourers lacked the cash to purchase grain'.

During the late Tudor period 'paternalistic' authorities recognised this, acquired grain surpluses and sold it on at prices affordable to the lower echelons of society, much to the annoyance of merchants, brewers and bakers. That system unravelled during the Civil War of the 1640s when Roundhead mercantile interests began to exert authority over government decision-making. It was only in the 1750s, in the wake of food riots of 'unprecedented scope', that the state began to subsidise grain once again. As a result, by the early nineteenth century, famines had been conquered in England 'not because the weather had shifted, or because of improvements in technology, but because government policy ... had unalterably shifted'.

That beneficence did not, however, extend to Ireland in the late 1840s when the potato blight phytophthora infestans struck what was nominally a part of the United Kingdom since the Act of Union of 1801. Here the Invisible Hand wrought hunger, pestilence and emigration that reduced the population by two million. An independent state dedicated, presumably, to the welfare of its citizens would have sought to mitigate its effects but for Charles Trevelyan, who was invested with responsibility for directing relief, the famine was 'a direct stroke of an all-wise and all-merciful Providence'.

In order to maintain a consistent food supply and to put a stop to environmentally egregious practices national and supranational interference is necessary. The natural environment, especially the soil, is a country's most important resource. Only governments have the wherewithal, democratic legitimacy and range of expertise to negotiate a path away from the present fossil fuel-reliance of farming. Although the authors of The Changing Body devote considerable attention to agriculture they fail to highlight that the dramatically increased productivity which facilitated population growth in the first place is utterly dependent on oil and natural gas. The recent BBC documentary, 'A Farm for the Future' (available on YouTube), analyses the issue and shows some of the innovative new approaches emerging, such as permacultures and forest gardens.

**Industrial Development**

Increased life expectancy did not coincide with the Industrial Revolution. The first four decades 'did little to change either the proportion of the English ultra-poor or the level of their real earnings'. Indeed, most commentators agree that there was even a decline in the important indicator of average heights of both men and women between circa 1820 and 1850.

The slums of the early nineteenth century were breeding grounds for disease. Governments did little to improve the workers' lot beyond maintaining a secure food supply. Moreover, nutritionally-empty sugar became a working class staple, a point that is not analysed by the authors. Significant discussion of nutritional quality as opposed to nutritional quantity (measured in terms of calories) is absent from this book. There is no mention of the development of the nutritionally-ruinous Chorleywood Bread Process in 1961, which allows for super-quick fermentation and has given bread a bad name, and the invention of high fructose corn syrup in Japan in 1967, which has been described as 'revenge for Hiroshima'. Both have caused regressions in human health in the Western world and are causes of obesity. A wider discussion of the declining nutritional value of many common foodstuffs that has occurred in recent times is called for, including the deleterious effect of the pesticides and synthetic fertilisers used in agriculture.

The authors assert: 'it was only between 1870 and 1913 that the standard of living in the industrialised world rose noticeably above early modern levels'. This was the legacy of government interference in many countries. Germany led the way with the introduction of Health Insurance in the 1880s.

A crucial breakthrough came with the availability of clean drinking water at the end of the nineteenth century. An important consequence of early nineteenth-century urbanisation had been 'the deterioration of the quality and quantity of the water supply'. Drinking water only improved after substantial state-funded infrastructural investment in the l890s. Thereafter a range of water-borne diseases like diarrhoea, cholera and dysentery ceased to trouble the population to anywhere near the same extent.

Clean water and a steady food supply improved child health, thereby allowing adults to live longer and enjoy enhanced reproductive capacity. Improvements in diet and public housing after World War I, in England at least, increased life expectancy further. The technological advances of the Industrial Revolution were being deployed for the benefit of the entire population. The Invisible Hand was being kept in the pocket.

**Disease Authorities**

The authors make a claim with substantial implications. They say: 'it would be easy to exaggerate the importance of scientific medicine when one considers that much of the decline in the mortality associated with infectious diseases predated the introduction of effective medical measures to deal with it.' Until about fifty years ago those infectious disease were the main cause of mortality in the Western world.

They acknowledge that drugs like insulin, penicillin and prontosil, as well as the mass immunisations of the post-Second World War era, made some difference but the authors conclude that the availability of sufficient food and clean water were the main determinants of overcoming those diseases. The main causes of mortality today are, of course, heart disease and cancer. The key to overcoming them is also strongly linked to nutritional inputs. Unfortunately, the Western approach to medicine has long been pathology-led rather than preventative. Doctors 'fix' illnesses in discreet parts of the body, including diseases of the mind, by administering pills that provide the patient with a sense of security. That reassurance might well be more important than the drug itself, as shown by the placebo effect. Perhaps we really have nothing to fear except fear itself.

Cancer and heart disease are pathologies strongly linked to lifestyle choices, especially emanating from the foods and drinks we ingest and a lack of physical exercise. The Department of Health (or should we say the Department of Disease? The War Office went the other way by changing its name to the Ministry of Defence despite an undimmed enthusiasm for waging wars) has been conspicuous in its failure effectively to communicate a coherent health message since the 1970s when obesity began to replace tobacco as the most significant threat to long-life and well-being.

The population may be growing older but 'it has been claimed that the majority of the years which have been added to life are years of disability'. Lifetimes of poor quality diet and a lack of physical activity are putting huge pressure on the national exchequer. Many seem resigned to an old age of stasis, atrophy and expensive medical treatments.

It seems that the present approach to Medicine is not fit for purpose.

Doctors are considered experts in human health yet their life expectancy is not noticeably higher than the population at large when adjusted for social class. The model of Eastern medicine is different. It emphasises health, especially through nutritional inputs, rather than addressing symptoms.

Rather than prescribing pills willy-nilly, doctors should be advocating the consumption of different foods for medicinal purposes and strenuous outdoor exercise, as well as learning about 'unscientific' but effective treatments like shiatsu, homeopathy and acupuncture. The nature of medical studies should change. Positive aspects of Western medicine, particularly in the area of surgery in which remarkable advances have occurred, should be retained but the emphasis on pills for every conceivable condition should be revealed as a conspiracy on the part of the pharmaceutical industry. Overall, health, rather than disease, should become a doctor's expertise.

More generally, initiatives to address the terrible food sold in many dominant food businesses are required. Just as merchants between 1640 and 1750 held back improvements in health, similarly today the merchant- owners of supermarkets and fast food chains participate in bringing premature death and poor quality of life through promotion and supply of unhealthy food. Governments should not refrain from interfering, and perhaps anticipate a reaction every bit as belligerent as that which emanated from the

Roundheads. This is not a call for a Communist chain of supply but rather for a break-up of monopolies and a tempering of the market. It is hard to see how the model of the supermarkets is part of the solution.

The unprecedented age which many of us are going to reach if the authors' predictions are proved correct requires we maintain good health from a young age. Preparation of healthy food and the cultivation of crops should be integrated into the educational system. Planning for the future should mean events fifty years hence rather than the life of a government.

The message also needs to be broadcast that consumption of meat at current levels is unhealthy and environmentally irresponsible, and that refined sugars are a slow-acting poison. (Perhaps people need to look at units of sugar in the same way as units of alcohol.)

**Getting the Message Across**

Nutritional status is intimately tied to social class. The authors observe how, in response to nutritional prompting by the state, 'people in the "higher" social classes are more likely to eat healthy foods and engage in voluntary physical activity, and less likely to smoke'.

The authors identify a worrying trend whereby government health policy actually 'tends to exacerbate health differences': higher social classes take on board health advice, rather than the poor for whom the need is most pressing. The level of income disparity in a society is reflected in nutritional status. Inequality breeds obesity.

Extreme income variation compounds underlying poverty by bringing psychosocial stresses that deter people from improving their lifestyles. A person living in dire, crime-bedevilled accommodation amidst a rampantly materialistic society will draw reassurance from food and a fag rather than listen to what their social betters urge them to do. It is no coincidence that European countries with less social inequality are also less prone to obesity. ♦

(Roderick Floud, Robert W. Fogel, Bernard Harris, Sok Chul Hong: *The Changing Body: Health, Nutrition, and Human Development in the Western World since 1700*. Cambridge University Press, 2011. pp. 456 [Paperback], Ł19)

*Side by...*

## The Mimic Men (I)

by *V. S. Naipaul*

WHEN I FIRST CAME TO LONDON, shortly after the end of the war, I found myself after a few days in a boardinghouse, called a private hotel, in the Kensington High Street area. The boarding-house was owned by Mr Shylock. He didn't live there, but the attic was reserved for him; and

Lieni, the Maltese housekeeper, told me he occasionally spent a night there with a young girl. 'These English girls!' Lieni said. She herself lived in the basement with her illegitimate child. An early postwar adventure. Between attic and basement, pleasure and its penalty, we boarders lived, narrowly.

I paid Mr Shylock three guineas a week for a tall, multimirrored, book-shaped room with a coffin-like wardrobe. And for Mr Shylock, the recipient each week of fifteen times three guineas, the possessor of a mistress and of suits made of cloth so fine I felt I could eat it, I had nothing but admiration. I was not used to the social modes of London or to the physiognomy and complexions of the North, and I thought Mr Shylock looked distinguished, like a lawyer or businessman or politician. He had the habit of stroking the lobe of his ear and inclining his head to listen. I thought the gesture was attractive; I copied it. I knew of recent events in Europe; they tormented me; and although I was trying to live on seven pounds a week I offered Mr Shylock my fullest, silent compassion. In the winter Mr Shylock died. I knew nothing until I heard of his cremation from Lieni, who was her-

*...by side*

## Pantomim (I)

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

NEM SOKKAL A HÁBORÚT KÖVETŐEN jöttem először Londonba, és néhány nap elteltével egy panzióban szálltam meg Kensingtonban. A ház tulajdonosa, Mr. Shylock nem lakott ott, de a tetőtér számára volt fenntartva; Lieni, a máltai házvezetőnő szerint néha egy fiatal lánnyal töltötte ott az éjszakát.

– Ezek az angol nők! – lamentált Lieni. Ő maga az alagsorban lakott házasságon kívüli gyermekével. Egy futó kaland gyümölcse rögtön a háború után. Mi, bérlők a tetőtér örömeinek és az alagsor bűnhődésének szorításában éltünk.

Tükrökkel felszerelt, magas, könyvalakú szobámért heti három fontot fizettem; szekrényem, mint egy koporsó, mégis Mr. Shylock iránt, aki tizenötször három font bevételhez jutott, csak csodálatot éreztem. Szeretőt tartott és olyan finom anyagú öltönyöket viselt, hogy úgy éreztem, bele tudnék harapni. A Londonban folyó társasági élet számomra ismeretlen volt, az északi emberek szokásai idegenek. Mr. Shylock egy arisztokrata benyomását keltette bennem, ügyvédnek, üzletembernek vagy politikusnak véltem volna. Beszélgetés közben fejét elfordítva a fülét simogatta; ez a mozdulata annyira tetszett, hogy utánozni kezdtem. Európa közelmúltbeli eseményeivel tisztában voltam, a dolgok állása mélyen elkeserített, és jóllehet mindössze heti hét fontból gazdálkodtam, Mr. Shylock kivívta szótlan de teljes odaadásomat.

Mr. Shylock télen hunyt el. Hamvasztásáról Lienitől értesül-

self affronted, and a little fearful for the future, that she had not been told by Mrs Shylock of the event of the death. It was disquieting to me too, this secrecy and swiftness of a London death. And it also occurred to me that up to that time in London I had not been aware of death, had never seen those funeral processions which, rain or shine, had enlivened all our afternoons on the Caribbean island of Isabella. Mr Shylock was dead, then. But in spite of Lieni's fears the routine of his boarding-house did not change. Mrs Shylock didn't appear. Lieni continued to live in the basement. A fortnight later she invited me to the christening of her child.

We had to be at the church at three, and after lunch I went up to my narrow room to wait. It was very cold. It went dark in the room, and I noticed that the light outside was strange. It was dead, but seemed to have an inner lividness. Then it began to drizzle. An unusual drizzle: I could see individual drops, I could hear them strike the window.

Hectic feminine footsteps thumped up the stairs. My door was pushed open; and Lieni, half her face washed and white and bare, a bit of cosmetic-smeared cottonwool in her hand, said breathlessly, 'I thought you would like to know. It's snowing.'

Snow!

Screwing up her eyes, compressing her lips, she dabbed at her cheeks with the cottonwool – big hand, big fingers, small piece of cottonwool – and ran out again.

Snow. At last; my element. And these were flakes, the airiest crushed ice. More than crushed: shivered. But the greater enchantment was the light. I went out to the dark passage and stood before the window. Then I climbed up and up towards the skylight, stopping at each floor to look Out at the street. The carpet stopped, the stairs ended in a narrow gallery. Above me was the skylight, below me the stair-well darkening as it deepened. The

tem, aki a jövőtől való félelmében kissé sértőnek érezte, hogy Mrs. Shylock csak utólag tájékoztatta őt férje haláláról. A titokban és hamarjában elrendezett temetés engem is elgondolkodtatott. Egészen addig a halál eseményével nem találkoztam Londonban, és felrémlett, hogy egyszer sem láttam gyászmenetet, ami, ha esett ha fújt, színt adott a karibi Isabella szigetén délutánjainknak. Nos, Mr. Shylock elhunytával a panzió mindennapjai, Lieni félelmei ellenére, mit sem változtak. Mrs. Shylock meg sem jelent a színen, Lieni továbbra is az alagsorban élt. Két héttel később meghívott a gyermeke keresztelőjére.

A templomi szertartás háromra lett meghirdetve, így ebéd után volt még időm keskeny szobámban lepihenni. Nagyon hideg volt aznap. A szoba elsötétült és a kinti fényeket is furcsának találtam. Minden halottnak tetszett, mintha valami ólomszerű, kékes fény borult volna a városra. Aztán szokatlan módon szemerkélni kezdett. Láttam és hallottam, ahogy a cseppek egyenként az ablakot érik.

Szapora női lépteket hallottam közeledni a lépcsőn. Nyílt az ajtóm, Lieni jelent meg, egy vattadarabbal tisztogatta az arcáról a sminket, zihálva mondta:

– Gondoltam érdekli. Havazik.

Hó!

Lieni hunyorított, nagy kezével a vattát az arcához érintette, aztán elsietett.

Hó. Végre: lételemem. Nagy pelyhekben hullottak a könnyű, morzsolt, szilánkos hókristályok. Ám még jobban elbűvöltek a fények. Kimentem a sötét lépcsőházba és az ablakhoz álltam. Aztán fölfelé indultam a tetőablakhoz, lépcsőfokonként megmegállva. Ahol a szőnyeg véget ért, a lépcsők egy keskeny folyosóba futottak. Fölöttem a tetőablak, alattam az egyre sötétülő lépcsőház. A tetőtér ajtaja nyitva állt. Beléptem, és egy üres szobában, tompa, halott neon-fényben találtam magam, ami

attic door was ajar. I went in, and found myself in an empty room harsh with a dead-fluorescent light that seemed artificial. The room felt cold, exposed and abandoned. The boards were bare and gritty. A mattress on dusty sheets of newspapers; a worn blue flannelette spread; a rickety writing-table. No more.

Standing before the window – crooked sashes, peeling paint-work: so fragile the structure up here which lower down appeared so solid – I felt the dead light on my face. The flakes didn't only float; they also spun. They touched the glass and turned to a film of melting ice. Below the livid grey sky roofs were white and shining black in patches. The bombsite was wholly white; every shrub, every discarded bottle, box and tin was defined. I had seen. Yet what was I to do with so complete a beauty? And looking out from that room to the thin lines of brown smoke rising from ugly chimneypots, the plastered wall of the house next to the bombsite tremendously braced and buttressed, looking out from that empty room with the mattress on the floor, I felt all the magic of the city go away and had an intimation of the forlornness of the city and of the people who lived in it.

A mattress, a writing-table. Had there been more while Mr Shylock lived? Such a distinguished man, so carefully dressed; and this his room, the scene of his pleasure. I opened the drawer of the writing-table. An identity card, fuzzy at the edges. Mr Shylock's: his neat signature. A creased photograph of a plumpish girl in a woollen skirt and a jumper. The photographer's hand had shaken, so that the photograph, like the photograph in some magazine article on great events, seemed rare, as of a person who would be photographed no more. An innocent, unarresting face, untouched by the wonder which vice and the word 'mistress' ought to have given it. She stood in a back garden. The house behind her was like its neighbours. Her familiar home: I sought to enter it in imagination, to re-create the moment – an early

természetellenességével taszított. Hideg, elhagyatott és csupasz volt ez a szoba. A padlót nem borította szőnyeg. Porlepte újság-lapokon egy matrac hevert, rajta egy megviselt, kék, flanell ágy-takaró, a fal mellett pedig egy rozoga íróasztal. Semmi több.

Vetemedett ablakszárnyak, málladozó festék: ami odalent olyan szilárdnak tűnt, itt fenn csupa törékenység. Ahogy az ablak előtt álltam, a neon halott fényét éreztem az arcomon. A hó-pelyhek szállingóztak, táncoltak; amint az ablak üvegéhez értek, olvadó jéghártya lett belőlük. Az ólomszürke ég alatt a háztetők foltokban fehérnek vagy fényes feketének látszottak. A bomba-tölcsér fehéren virított, minden bokor, eldobott doboz, üveg, konzerv élesen rajzolódott ki a behavazott háttérből. De mit kezdjek ezzel a látvánnyal, a matraccal a padlón? Ahogy abból az üres szobából a csúnya kémények vékony barna füstjét néztem, a bombatölcsér melletti vakolt házfal rettentő támaszait és dúcait, úgy éreztem, hogy a város összes varázsa elszáll és az emberek szánalmas elhagyatottsága látomásszerű jelet küld.

Egy matrac és egy íróasztal. Volt vajon más is itt Mr. Shylock életében? Egy ilyen kivételes, finom öltözetű ember, és ez a szoba: örömei színtere. Kihúztam az íróasztal fiókját. Egy iga-zolvány: a kártya szélén elmosódott nyomat. Mr. Shylock szép aláírása. Egy gyapjúszoknyás, pulóveres kövérkés lány gyűrött fényképe. A fényképész keze bemozdulhatott, mert a felvétel olyannak tűnt, mint néha az újságok elmosódó fotói, amikor látszólag valami nagy eseményről számolnak be, és mintha az ábrázolt személy utolsó fényképét tennék közzé. Egy ártatlan, szürke arc. Nem tükrözte a bűnbeesés vagy a szeretői viszony misztikumát. A háttérben egy kert. A lány mögötti ház – mint akármelyik ezen a környéken – a lány otthona. Képzeletben megpróbáltam belépni a képbe, újraélni a pillanatot. Egy nyári vasárnap kora délután, talán épp ebéd előtt. Nem Mr. Shylock felvétele. Inkább a lány apjáé vagy bátyjáé. Mindenesetre a von-

summer Sunday afternoon perhaps, just before lunch – when the photograph was taken. Not by Mr Shylock surely? Brother, father, sister? Here anyway it had ended, that moment, that impulse of affection, in an abandoned room among the chimneypots of what to the girl from the back garden must have seemed like a foreign country.

I thought I should preserve the photograph. But I left it where I had found it. I thought: let it not happen to me. Death? But that comes to all. Well, then, let me leave more behind. Let my relics be honoured. Let me not be mocked. But even as I tried to put words to what I felt, I knew that my own journey, scarcely begun, had ended in the shipwreck which all my life I had sought to avoid.

A sombre beginning. It could not be otherwise. These are not the political memoirs which, at times during my political life, I saw myself composedly writing in the evening of my days. A more than autobiographical work, the exposition of the malaise of our times pointed and illuminated by personal experience and that knowledge of the possible which can come only from a closeness to power. This, though, is scarcely the book to which I can now address myself. True, I write with composure. But it is not the composure I would have chosen. For, so far from being in the evening of my days, I am just forty; and I no longer have a political career.

I know that return to my island and to my political life is impossible. The pace of colonial events is quick, the turnover of leaders rapid. I have already been forgotten; and I know that the people who supplanted me are themselves about to be supplanted. My career is by no means unusual. It falls into the pattern. The career of the colonial politician is short and ends brutally. We lack order. Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the accla-

zalmak és az ösztönök láncolata ide vezetett: egy kémények ölelte, elhagyatott szobába, ami a kertből érkező lány számára feltehetőleg egy idegen ország benyomását kelthette.

Először arra gondoltam, megőrzöm a fényképet, aztán mégis otthagytam, ahol találtam. Nehogy engem is utolérjen! A halál? De hiszen az mindannyiunkért eljön. Akkor hát, ne így! Azt szeretném, hogy emlékemet tiszteletben tartsák. Senki ne gúnyolhasson. Ám amint szavakat kerestem érzéseim kifejezésére, tudtam, hogy a pályát, melyen még épphogy csak elindultam, már korábban, hajótöröttként befejeztem, pedig egész életemben éppen ezt igyekeztem elkerülni.

Homályos kezdés. Másképp nem is lehetne. Ez az írás nem egy politikus visszaemlékezése, melyet politikusi pályám során időnként úgy éreztem, majd éveim alkonyán összeszedetten meg fogok írni. Több, mint önéletrajz. Korunk visszásságainak személyes élményeimen keresztül történő bemutatása, a lehetőségek ismerete, amely csak a hatalom közeléből származhat. Ez azonban, amihez most hozzáfoghatok, aligha lesz olyan könyv. Igaz, higgadtan írok, de nem azzal a lelki nyugalommal, ahogy önként választottam volna. Hisz oly messze még életem alkonya: még csak negyven éves vagyok, de politikusi pályám már a múlté.

Tudom, hogy szülőföldemre és a politikához nem térhetek már vissza. A gyarmati vezetők és az események gyorsan váltják egymást. Engem máris elfelejtettek, és azokat is, akik engem követtek, hamarosan mások követik majd. Pályám egyáltalán nem rendkívüli, csupán egy nagyobb rendszer része. A gyarmati politikus karrierje rövid és általában brutális véget ér. A rend hiányától szenvedünk. A szavakat és a szavak dicséretét, tévesen, hatalomnak hisszük. Amint felfedezik a csúsztatást, elvesztünk. A politika számunkra élet-halál kérdése. Aki egyszer elköteleződik, nem csak politikai csatát vív: gyakran szó szerint az életéért harcol. Átmeneti és összetákolt társadalmaink nem nyújtanak

mation of words for power; as soon as our bluff is called we are lost. Politics for us are a do-or-die, once-for-all charge. Once we are committed we fight more than political battles; we often fight quite literally for our lives. Our transitional or makeshift societies do not cushion us. There are no universities or City houses to refresh us and absorb us after the heat of battle. For those who lose, and nearly everyone in the end loses, there is only one course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home counties.

There are many of us around living modestly and without recognition in small semi-detached suburban houses. We go out on a Saturday morning to do the shopping at Sainsbury's and jostle with the crowd. We have known grandeur beyond the football-pool dreams of our neighbours; but in the lower-middle-class surroundings to which we are condemned we pass for immigrants. The pacific society has its cruelties. Once a man is stripped of his dignities he is required, not to die or to run away, but to find his level. Occasionally I read a letter in The Times, a communication on a great topic from a mean address; I recognise a name and see with enormous sympathy the stirring of some chained and desperate spirit. Just the other day I was in the West End, in the basement of one of those department stores where the assistants carry their names on little plastic badges. I was among the unpainted kitchen furniture. I required a folding wooden clothes-airer, which I thought I might introduce at nights into the bathroom of the hotel where I now live. An assistant had her back to me. I went up to her. She turned. Her face was familiar, and a quick glance at the name pinned to her blouse left no room for doubt. We had last met at a conference of non-aligned nations; her husband had been one of the firebrands. We had seen one another in a glittering blur of parties and dinners. Then she had worn her 'national costume'. It had given her a seductive

védelmet. Nincsenek egyetemeink, civil fórumaink, ahol megtisztulhatnánk a csatározások után. Azok számára, akik vereséget szenvednek, és végül majdnem mindenki vereséget szenved, csak egyetlen megoldás kínálkozik: a menekülés. Menekülés a még szétziláltabb rendetlenségbe, Londonba és az anyaországba.

Sokan élünk itt, szerényen, elismerés nélkül, apró kertvárosi sorházakban. Szombat délelőtt vásárolni járunk a Sainsbury's áruházba, tolakodunk, lökdösődünk, ám mi ismertünk egyéb patinát is, mint szomszédaink szerencsejáték-álma. Az alsóközéposztály környezetében, amelyre ítélve vagyunk, jöttmentnek számítunk. A pacifista társadalom is hordozza a maga kegyetlenségeit. Nem kell meghalnunk vagy világgá mennünk, amint elveszítjük méltóságunkat, de be kell sorolódjunk a társadalomba, ki-ki a maga szintjén. Alkalmanként ha a Timesban olyan olvasói kommentárra bukkanok, amit egy alsóbb társadalmi réteghez tartozó levélíró küldött a szerkesztőségnek, azonosulok a szerzővel, és mérhetetlen szimpátiát kelt bennem a leláncolt és elkeseredett lélek megnyilvánuló panasza. A minap a Westenden jártam, egy olyan áruház alagsori üzletében, ahol az eladók kötelesek a nevüket egy kitűzőn viselni. A konyhabútor-osztályon történt. Egy összecsukható, fa ruhaszárítót kerestem, éjszakánként a panzió fürdőszobájában használhatnám, gondoltam. Egy eladó háttal állt nekem. Odaléptem hozzá, megfordult. Ismerős volt az arca, egy pillantást vetettem a nevére, igen. Utoljára egy el nem kötelezett államok résztvételével szervezett konferencián találkoztunk, a férje indulatos hozzászólásaival vétette észre magát. Csillogó estélyeken és fogadásokon is összefutottunk korábban, ilyenkor, nemzeti viseletben, az asszony vonzó benyomást keltett, a selyem kihangsúlyozta bőrének gazdag ázsiai összetettségét. Most a kötelező áruházi viselet melleit és csípőjét rendezetlenné bugyolálta. Emlékszem, egyszer, ahogy a repülőtéren elköszöntünk, nagykövetségük titkársegédje, a protokollt

appearance, and the colours of her silks had set off her own rich Asiatic complexion. Now the regulation skirt and blouse of the department store converted her breasts and hips into untidy bundles. I remembered how, when we were saying our goodbyes at the airport, the third secretary of her embassy, breaking the precise arrangements of protocol, had run up at the last moment with a bunch of flowers, which he offered to her, the personal gift of a man desperate to keep his job in the diplomatic service, fearful of being recalled to the drabness of his own background. Now she stood among the unpainted kitchen furniture. I couldn't face her. I left the purchase unmade, hoping that she would not recognize me, and turned away.

Later, sitting in the train, going past the backs of tall sooty houses, tumbledown sheds, Victorian working-class tenements whose gardens, long abandoned, had for stretches been turned into Caribbean backyards, I wondered about the firebrand. Was he pining away tamely in some office job? Or was he, too broken to take up employment, idling on a meagre income in a suburban terrace? Many of us, it must be said, are poor. The tale is there in the occasional small paragraph on the financial page which tells of the collapse of some little-known Swiss bank. Too much shouldn't be made of this, however. Most of us were too timid to make a fortune, or too ignorant; we measured both our, opportunities and our needs by the dreams of our previous nonentity.

They talk of the pessimism of the young as they talk of atheism and revolt: it is something to be grown out of. Yet less than twenty years after Mr Shylock's death, with this journey to London which I feel is final, sealing off such experience and activity as were due to me, my present mood leaps the years and all the intervening visits to this city – leaps the Humbers, the hotels, the helpful officials, the portrait of George III in Marlborough House; leaps my marriage and my business activities – leaps all

felrúgva, egy csokor virággal szaladt oda hozzá, átnyújtotta, mintegy privát ajándékként, egy olyan ember ajándékaként, aki retteg, hogy elveszítheti az állását és visszarendelhetik a diplomáciai szolgálatból szülőföldje szürkeségébe. Most, a festetlen konyhabútorok között nem tudtam a szemébe nézni. Vásárlás nélkül jöttem el, remélve, hogy nem ismert rám.

Később, ahogy a vonaton ültem – magas, koromszínű épületek, düledező viskók, Victoria korabeli munkás-bérházak mögött húztunk el, ápolatlan kertek mellett, amelyek karibi hátsó udvarokra emlékeztettek –, azon tűnődtem, vajon heves szónok férje is megszelídült hivatalnokként emésztődik-e, vagy inkább megtörten, munka nélkül, éhkoppon tengődik egy külvárosi sorházban. Sokan elszegényedtünk, ez az igazság. Az újságok a gazdasági rovatban néhány mondatban beszámolnak egy-egy apró svájci bank csődjéről, túl sok jelentőséget nem kéne tulajdonítanunk ennek. Legtöbbünk nem volt elég előrelátó ahhoz, hogy vagyont szerezzen. A kilátásainkat és a szükségleteinket is előző életünk, nemlétünk álmaihoz mértük.

A fiatalok pesszimizmusáról szokás úgy beszélni mint az ateizmusról vagy a lázadásról: majd kinövik. Ám majdnem húsz évvel Mr. Shylock halála után, visszaérkezésem Londonba, úgy érzem, végleges; élményeimet és korábbi tevékenységemet pecséttel zárja le. Az emlék átível az évek fölött, minden megérkezésem azóta, az egykori népautók, a panziók, a segítőkész hivatalnokok, III. György Marlborough házbeli portréja, házasságom és üzleti vállalkozásaim – mindez zárójeles megjegyzés csupán ahhoz az élményhez képest, amit Mr. Shylock padlásszobájában éltem át. Melyik a valóság? Az emlék élménye vagy ügyleteim azt követően és abból fakadóan?

Néhány éve láttam Mr. Shylock házát utoljára. Nem kerestem. A miniszter, akivel éppen ebédeltem, a közelben lakott. A nehéz betétes, mintázott üvegű, szegecselt bejárati ajtót lecserél-

this to link with that first mood which came to me in Mr Shylock's attic; so that all that came in between seems to have occurred in parenthesis. Which is the reality? The mood, or the action in between, resulting from that mood and leading up to it again?

I last saw Mr Shylock's boarding-house some years ago. I wasn't looking for it; the minister with whom I was dining lived nearby. The heavy panelled front door with its studs and its two panes of patterned glass bad been replaced by a flush door, painted lilac, on which the number was spelt out in cursive letters; it suggested the entrance to a ladies' underwear shop. I felt little emotion: that part of my life was over and had been put in its place. I wonder whether I would be as cool today. Kensington, though, is not the part of the city I live in or care to visit. It has become a little too crowded and is, I believe, rather expensive. It has also become a centre of racialist agitation, and I do not now wish to become involved in battles which are irrelevant to myself. I no longer wish to share distress; I do not have the equipment. No more words for me, except these I write, and in them the politician, chapman in causes, will be suppressed as far as possible. It will not be difficult. I have had my fill of political writing. My present urge is, in the inaction imposed on me, to secure the final emptiness.

I have seen much snow. It never fails to enchant me, but I no longer think of it as my element. I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them. All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality. I could not, like so many of my fellow exiles, live in a suburban semi-detached house; I could not pretend even to myself to be part of a community or to be putting down roots. I prefer the freedom of my far-out suburban hotel, the absence of responsibility; I like the feeling of impermanence. I am surrounded by

ték; az új, lilára festett, dőltbetüs házszámú ajtó olyan volt, mintha egy női fehérnemű üzletbe vezetne. Kicsit szomorúan úgy éreztem, hogy életemnek egy szakasza véget ért és a helyére került. Vajon ma is olyan nyugodt lennék? Nem Kensingtonban élek, és nem is szívesen látogatok oda; az utóbbi időben kissé zsúfolt és nem is éppen olcsó. Rasszista megnyilvánulások színtere is lett, magam nem kívánok belebonyolódni olyan csatározásokba, amelyek számomra lényegtelenek. Nem akarok már mások nyomorúságában osztozni, nincs rá gyógyszerem. Nem szeretnék fecsegni. Abban, amit most írok, a politikus, a jótevő, az ügy szolgálata, amennyire csak lehetséges, el lesz fojtva. Ez nem esik nehezemre. Politikai nézeteimet már korábban kifejtettem. Jelenleg az motivál, hogy a passzivitásban, amit rámmértek, megragadjam a végső ürességet.

Azóta sok havazást megéltem. Mindig elbűvöl, de már nem gondolom, hogy ez az én elemem. Már nem álmodok ideális tájakról vagy keresem a módját, hogy bárhova kötődjek. Minden táj előbb-utóbb földdé válik, a képzelet aranya a valóság ólmává. Nem tudnék, mint oly sok száműzött társam, társasházban, tömblakásban élni. Magammal sem tudnám elhitetni, hogy egy közösség részévé váltam vagy gyökeret eresztettem. Jobban szeretem városszéli panzióm szabadságát, a felelősség hiányát, az átmenetiség érzését. Olyan házak vesznek körül, amilyenek azon a fényképen voltak, amit Mr. Shylock padlásszobájában találtam egykor, de a szentimentalizmus zavarba ejt. Alig veszem észre ezeket a házakat és soha nem gondolok az itt élő emberekre. Már nem keresem a szépséget az elnyomottak sorsában. Gyűlölöm az elnyomást. Félek az elnyomottól.

A keresztelő három órára volt kitűzve. Öt perccel három előtt lementem Lieni szobájába. Nagyobb volt nála a rendetlenség, mint máskor, a kandallópárkányon szövetdarabok, számlák, naptárak és üres cigarettásdobozok, az ágyon ruhák, lenolaj. A

houses like those in the photograph I studied in Mr Shylock's attic, and that impulse of sentimentality embarrasses me. I scarcely see those houses now and never think of the people who live in them. I no longer seek to find beauty in the lives of the mean and the oppressed. Hate oppression; fear the oppressed.

The christening was at three. At about live to I went down to Lieni's room. It was in a greater mess than usual: assorted haberdashery on the mantelpiece together with bills; and calendars and empty cigarette packets; clothes on the bed and the limo and the baby's crib; old newspapers; a sewing machine dusty with shredded cloth. Beyond the grilled basement window the small back garden, usually black, was white: snow lay on the weeds, the bare plane tree, the high brick wall. It added to the dampness inside and seemed to add to the chaos. But the baby was ready, and Lieni herself, filing her nails before the fancy mantelpiece mirror, stood clean and polished and almost ready. It was a transformation that always interested me. She was in the habit of talking of the 'smart London girl', a phrase I had first heard her use in a discussion with the fascist and others, mostly disapproving, about the marriage of an English girl to the chief of an African tribe. Lieni saw herself as a smart London girl; and whenever we went out together, sometimes with the young Indian engineer with whom she had a relationship, she spent much time on the creation of this smart London girl, whether we were going to the cheap Italian restaurant round the corner, or to the cinema, which was not much farther. It was like a duty owed more to the city than herself.

The christening party had assembled in the front basement room. Now, as three o'clock came and went, they began drifting into the bedroom to make inquiries and to remind Lieni of the time She calmed them, they stayed in the bedroom to talk. One couple had come up from the country I had met them before She

bölcső, régi újságok, a varrógép cérnavégekkel. A szuterén ablakrácsain túl az amúgy apró fekete hátsókertet most hó takarta, fehérlett a gaz, a csupasz platán, a magas kőfal. Ez a látvány fokozta a szoba nyirkosságát és rendetlenségét. De a gyerek már kész volt és Lieni is majdnem, makulátlan sminkkel állt a kandalló előtt, és a körmét reszelte a díszes tükörnél. Olyannyira átalakult, hogy meglepődtem. Egy „csinos londoni nő" benyomását keltette. A kifejezést – elmarasztalólag – ő maga használta egyszer egy nácival folytatott vita során egy angol nő és egy afrikai törzsi vezető házassága kapcsán. Lieni csinos londoni nőnek látta magát. Amikor a városban mutatkoztunk, néha a fiatal indiai mérnökkel együtt, akivel kapcsolata volt, Lieni sok energiát fordított arra, hogy megtestesítse ezt a csinos londoni nőt, függetlenül attól, hogy a sarkon lévő olcsó olasz étterembe mentünk-e vagy kicsit messzebbre, például moziba. És ezt sokkal inkább a város iránt, mint önmaga iránt érzett kötelességtudatból tette.

A keresztelőre érkezett társaság a szuterén nappali szobájában gyülekezett, de most hogy három óra is elmúlt már, egyesek be-bekukkantottak a hálószobába, hogy érdeklődjenek vagy jelezzék Lieninek, mennyi az idő. Lieni türelemre intette őket, de néhányuk ott maradt beszélgetni. Egy házaspárral, akik vidékről jöttek, korábban már találkoztam. A feleség olasz volt, keserű emlékei maradtak a háborúról és főként a papok harácsolásáról. A férje meglepően apró angol ember volt. Hogy kapcsolatuk a háború idején alakult ki és hogy gyermekeik születtek, jó adag magabiztosságot kölcsönzött a férfinak, de tekintete komor és gondterhelt maradt. Magabiztosságában úgy érezte, ki kell állnia Lieni mellett, mi több, ő volt a leendő keresztapa. Egy másik vendéggel, egy vékony, középkorú olasz hölggyel nem találkoztam korábban. Álla szögletes volt, tekintete fáradt, mozdulatai lassúak. Lieni szerint grófnő volt, a nápolyi arisztokrácia tagja.

was Italian, she had bitter memories of the war and especially of the greed of priests He was English, the tiniest of his race I had seen This wartime romance, and the fact of children, had given him a good deal of confidence; but his eyes remained dark and creased with suffering. From his new security he saw himself 'standing by' Lieni; he was in fact to be the godfather. Another guest was a thin middle-aged Italian lady I had never seen before She had a square Jaw, very tired eyes, and was slow in all her movements Lieni said she was a countess and 'in society' in Naples; in Malta she had once been to a ball which Princess Elizabeth had attended. 'The Countess is thinking of buying this crummy house, Lieni said; the American slang word fitted her Italian accent. I smiled at the Countess and she smiled wearily at me.

At last we were ready. The tiny Englishman ran out to get a taxi. After a little time Lieni, now impatient, took us all out to the portico to wait. The street was already brown and squishy. But the snow still lay white on the columns of the portico, obscuring the name of the hotel. Presently the taxi came, the tiny Englishman sitting forward on the tip-up seat, overcoated and absurdly diminished but spry and restless. The church was not far. We got there at about twenty past three. We were in good time. No one was ready for us. The church had been bombed out and the christening was to take place in an annexe. We sat in an anteroom of sorts with other mothers and children and waited. Lieni was smiling all the time below her hat, the smart London girl. A baby squealed. A box of candles had a card: Candles twopence. Two young girls went to the box, dropped coppers, lit candles and fixed them in a stand. The mother of the girls looked round at us and smiled, inviting witness and approval. At half past three an unshaven man with a dirty collar entered in a rush and said, 'Christening?' 'Yes, yes,' the mothers said. He went Out again and

Máltán egyszer jelen volt egy estélyen, amin Erzsébet hercegnő is részt vett.

– A grófné lehet, hogy megvásárolja ezt a lepukkant panziót – mondta Lieni. A köznyelvi fordulat jól illett olaszos akcentusához. Egy mosolyt küldtem a grófnő felé, ő fáradtan viszonozta.

Végre elkészültünk. Az apró angol elszaladt taxiért. Nem sokkal később Lieni kissé türelmetlenül kiparancsolta a társaságot az előtérbe. A panzió cégtábláját hó takarta a bejárat fölött. Megérkezett a taxi, az apró angol a lehajtható ülésen ült, furán beleveszve a kabátjába, és nyughatatlanul izgett-mozgott. A templom közel volt, húsz perc késéssel érkeztünk, még éppen jókor. Az asszisztencia még nem készült elő. Az épületet bombatalálat érte a háborúban, a keresztelőre a mellékhajóban került sor. Valami előszobában várakoztunk más családokkal együtt, Lieni egyfolytában mosolygott a kalapja alatt, mint egy csinos londoni nő. Az egyik csecsemő nyűgös volt. Egy persely előtt a következő felirat állt: gyertya 2 penny. Két fiatal lány lépett oda, pénzt dobott be, és elhelyezett két égő gyertyát az állványon. Az anyjuk mosolyogva pillantott felénk, elismerésünkre számítva.

Fél négykor egy borostás, koszos gallérú férfi rontott be és csak annyit kérdezett:

– Keresztelés?

– Igen, igen – felelték az anyukák. A férfi kiment, de egy pillanat múlva visszajött.

– Hány lesz? Hány lesz? – Megszámolta a csecsemőket. – Három – motyogta és újra eltűnt. Majd éppolyan gyorsan visszajött, mint az előbb, kinyitotta az ajtót és intett, hogy menjünk vele. Fölmentünk egy lépcsőn, a fal mentén gyertyaállványok, gyertya 2 penny, és egy okker színűre festett tágas helyiségbe jutottunk. A férfi leakasztott egy fehér köpenyt és beleerőltette magát, aztán mosolyogva belépett a pap, az egyik polcról egy

reappeared a second later. ‘How many, how many?’ He counted the babies himself and said, ‘Three.’ He disappeared once more, returned as quickly as before, opened the door and asked us to follow him. We followed him up the stairs, candlestands all the way, candles twopence, and came into a large room with. ochre walls. He took a ‘white gown off a hook and forced himself into it. A priest came in silently, smiling. He went to a rack, picked up a purple scarf with gold crosses and arranged the scarf carefully over his shoulders. The unshaven man scuttled about, seeking the three godfathers to hand them little cards in transparent glossy sheaths. The christenings began. At last it was the turn of Lieni’s baby.

‘John Cedric, what doest thou ask of the Church? Say Faith.’

Our godfather didn’t like being told. He hunted out the response on the card he had been given. Then he said, ‘Faith.’

‘What does Faith give you? Say everlasting life.’

‘I know, father. Everlasting life.’

The priest hallowed the baby with his saliva, his thumb and his fingers. With his nose he made the sign of the cross over the baby. I believe – my memories of the ceremony are now a little vague – that at a certain stage he put a pinch of salt into the baby’s mouth. John Cedric made a sour face and worked his tongue. Through his godfather he renounced the devil and his works and accepted God instead; and presently the ceremony was over. Lieni grew grave towards the end. She was almost in tears when she went to the priest and offered money – I believe – which was rejected. No longer the smart London girl; and for the first time that afternoon I remembered that she was an unmarried mother. It war left to the tiny godfather to revive our spirits in the taxi, and even Elsa, his wife, passionately anti-clerical, agreed that it bad been a beautiful ceremony of forgiveness.

There was to be a party afterwards. Lieni had invited all her

arany keresztekkel díszített bíborszínű stólát vett le, és gondosan eligazította a vállán. A borostás férfi kapkodva rendezkedett, a három keresztapának egy-egy átlátszó fólia-tokban lévő papírt nyomott a kezébe. Megkezdődött a szertartás, végül Lieni gyermekére is sor került.

– John Cedric, mit kérsz az Anyaszentegyháztól? Válaszoljuk: hitet.

A mi keresztapánknak nem tetszett, hogy a pap segíteni akar a válasszal. A kártyáján megkereste a vonatkozó részt és csak azután válaszolt:

– Hitet.

– Mit biztosít számunkra a hit? Válaszoljuk: az örök életet.

– Tudom, atyám. Az örök életet.

A pap benyálazott ujjával megérintette a csecsemőt, az orrával a kereszt jelét formálta fölötte. Úgy rémlik, bár a szertartásról őrzött emlékeim már elhalványultak, hogy egy csipetnyi sót is a gyermek szájához érintett. John Cedric savanyú arcot vágott és nagyot nyelt. Keresztapja által ellene mondott a sátánnak és minden cselvetésének és átadta magát Istennek. Ezzel a szertartás véget ért. Lieni a vége felé elkomorult, szinte sírt, amikor a paphoz lépett, és, gondolom, pénzt nyújthatott felé, amit az egyértelműen elhárított. Lieni már nem egy csinos londoni nő benyomását keltette és azon a délutánon ekkor először ötlött fel bennem, hogy hajadon. A taxiban az apró keresztapára hárult a feladat, hogy felvidítson bennünket, és még Elsa, a felesége, szókimondó ateista létére is, a megbocsátás gyönyörű szertartásaként nyugtázta az eseményt.

Eztán az otthoni ünneplés következett. Lieni az összes barátját meghívta. Hat óra körül kezdtek érkezni, néhányan egyenesen munkából. Lieni a konyhában ügyködött, délutáni ünnepélyes öltözetét kicsit tompította egy nagyon koszos kötény. Az apró keresztapa házigazdaként tevékenykedett az alagsori nappaliban.

friends. At about six they began arriving, some coming straight from their jobs. Lieni was in the kitchen, her afternoon grooming partly abolished by a very dirty apron. The tiny godfather acted as host in the front basement room. Several damp, macintoshed Maltese came in together and talked glumly in English and their own language. I got the impression they were talking of jobs and money and the current London prejudice that turned every Maltese into a white slaver. The Countess smiled at everyone and said little. Johnny the fascist came in with his wife. He wore his black shirt, a sign that he had been 'working' some district. His wife was drunk as usual. All the Maltese greeted him warmly. 'Hi, Johnny-boy! Where you been operating tonight, Johnny?' 'Notting Hill Gate,' Johnny-boy said. 'Not much of a crowd.' 'The weather,' one of the Maltese said. 'Her ladyship was getting sozzled in the Coach and Horses,' Johnny-boy said, as though this was the better explanation. He wore his usual air of patient exasperation. Her ladyship, bearing herself referred to, blinked and tried to steady herself on her chair. Other boarders came down. The girl from Kenya; her man friend, a blond, vacant alcoholic incapable of extended speech and making up for this with a fixed smile and gestures of great civility; the smiling, mute Burmese student; the Jewish youth, tall and prophetic in black; the bespectacled young Cockney who had as much trouble with his two Italian mistresses, according to Lieni, as with the police; the Frenchman from Morocco who worked all day in his room, kept to Moroccan temperature with a paraffin stove, translating full-length American thrillers at speed – be did one or two a month. It was always good to see them, familiar in all the unknown of the city. But this was how they always appeared: two-dimensional, offering simple versions of themselves. Conversation, apart from that conducted by the Maltese group, was not easy. We sat and waited for Lieni, whom we could hear in the kitchen.

Néhány elázott, esőköpenyes máltai együtt érkezett és komor tónusban hol az anyanyelvükön, hol angolul beszélgetett. Az a benyomásom támadt, hogy beszélgetésük a munka és a pénz körül forog, és sérelmezik az akkor Londonban elterjedt előítéletet, miszerint minden fehérbőrű máltai rabszolgakereskedő. A bárónő mindenkire kedvesen mosolygott, de alig szólalt meg. A náci érzelmű Johnny a feleségével érkezett. Fekete inget viselt, tehát „terepen" volt az egyik kerületben. Felesége, mint általában, részeg volt. A máltaiak mind melegen üdvözölték őket.

– Helló, Johnny-boy! Hol ténykedtél ma?

– Notting Hill Gate – mondta Johnny-boy szárazon. – Nem volt semmi.

– Biztos az időjárás miatt – vélekedett az egyik máltai.

– Őnagysága egy kicsit átázott a mulatóban – fűzte még hozzá Johnny-boy a beletörődő elkeseredés hangján, mintha ez mindent megmagyarázna. Őnagysága, észlelvén, hogy róla van szó, pislogott és megpróbált egyenesen ülni a székén. A többi lakó is lejött. A kenyai lány a szőke fiújával, aki képtelen volt egész mondatokból álló beszélgetést folytatni, üres, részeg tekintettel állandóan vigyorgott és udvariassági gesztusokat gyakorolt. A mosolygó burmai diák, a prófétai zsidó fiatalember tiszta feketében, a szemüveges londoni ifjú, akinek, Lieni szerint, legalább annyi problémája akadt két olasz szeretőjével, mint a rendőrséggel, a marokkói francia, aki egész nap a szobájában dolgozott, egy parafin-kályhával marokkói hőmérsékletet teremtett, és amerikai horror-regényeket fordított, egyet-kettőt havonta. Mindig jó volt találkozni velük, ismerőseim voltak ők a város idegenségében, de mindenki egyszerű, kétdimenziós lényként szerepelt; a beszélgetés, kivéve, amit a máltaiak maguk között folytattak, nehézkesen csordogált. Csak ültünk és vártuk Lienit, a hangja beszűrődött a konyhából.

Aztán megérkezett Lieni bátyja. Elengedték a West End-i ét-

Lieni's brother came. He had got time off from the West End restaurant where he worked as a waiter. He was pale, handsome, fatigued. He spoke little English. Lieni came in with a scuttle of coals. The room had been cold at the start of the evening; now it was getting a little too warm. Putting the fresh coals on, killing the heat a little, Lieni said to her brother, 'Rudolfo, why don't you tell them about the time I asked you to go and buy a sheet of paper.' Rudolfo sucked his teeth and made a gesture of impatience, as he always did when he was asked to tell this story. The gesture itself aroused laughter. Then the story came. Rudolfo, just arrived in London, knowing virtually no English, had been sent out by his sister to buy a sheet of writing paper: some momentous letter had to be despatched. He had gone to the W. H. Smith bookshop and asked for 'a sheet paper'; he had been directed by an imperturbable assistant to Boots the chemists and had returned, flaming with anger, with a roll of toilet paper.

Her ladyship rocked on her chair and fell forward on to the floor without a cry. Johnny-boy, like one used to these happenings, set himself first to arrange her clothes and then to raise her and lead her out of the room.

'Hi, Johnny-boy!'

This was from Paul, entering the room as Johnny-boy and her ladyship left it. We had heard his shoes crushing the ice and cinders on the basement steps. Paul was short, thickset, almost bald, and wore glasses. He was gentle; his English accent was rich; he was a homosexual. In Lieni's basement rooms this was his 'character'. He liked wearing an apron and doing household things. He liked sweeping up dirt, storing it and, before throwing it away, gloating over its quantity. He liked smoothing out tablecloths and bed sheets; he was frequently to be seen ironing. The first thing he did whenever he came to Lieni's was to express horror at the disorder and to set to sweeping. This was what he

teremből, ahol pincérként dolgozott. Sápadt volt, jóképű, fáradt. Alig beszélt angolul. Lieni egy kanna szénnel jött be. Míg korábban hideg volt a szobában, most kezdett egy kicsit túl meleg lenni. Ahogy a friss szenet a tűzre rakta, lefojtva kissé a lángokat, a bátyjához fordult:

– Rudolfo, meséld el nekik, hogy volt, amikor elküldtelek levélpapírt venni.

Rudolfo, mint mindig, amikor arra kérték, mesélje újra ezt a történetet, a fogát szívta és türelmetlen mozdulatot tett. Már maga a mozdulat mosolyt fakasztott, aztán jött a történet is. Frissen érkezett emigránsként, gyakorlati angol nyelvtudás nélkül, Rudolfo egyszer levélpapírt kellett szerezzen: a húga valami fontos levelet akart írni. A W.H. Smith könyvesboltba tért be és egy „bizonyos papírt" kért. Az eladó rezzenéstelen arccal a Boots drogériába irányította át, ahonnan Rudolfo méregtől vörösen egy tekercs toilet-papírral tért haza.

Őnagysága a székén hintázott, majd egyetlen hang nélkül előrebukott. Mint aki számára az ilyen események szokványosak, Johnny-boy először elrendezte felesége ruháját és csak azután segítette föl és vezette ki a szobából.

– Helló, Johnny-boy!

Ez Paul volt. Épp akkor lépett be, amikor Johnny-boy és őnagysága elhagyták a szobát. Korábban hallatszott, ahogy a jeget és a salakot leveri a cipőjéről az alagsori lépcsőkön. Paul alacsony volt, köpcös, majdnem kopasz és szemüveget viselt. Finomkodó angol kiejtése árnyalt; Paul egyébként homokos. Lieni szuterénjében ezek voltak személyiségének ismert jegyei. Szeretett kötényt viselni és kedvelte a házimunkát: ha összesöpörte a port, örvendezett a kupac mennyiségén, mielőtt a lapátra húzta. Szerette elsimítani a terítőt, az ágytakarót és gyakran látták vasalni. Lieninél általában majd eláj ult a rendetlenség láttán és azonnal söprögetni kezdett. Most is rögtön szaladt a partvisért

did now. He went out to get his broom and apron. Lieni came back with him, carrying another scuttle of coals for a fire that was now scarcely bearable.

'Poor Johnny-boy' Paul said.

'Tell them, Paulo,' Lieni said.

Paul made a face.

'Go on, Paulo. Tell them about one tit this way and –, The glum Maltese laughed.

'I wenta one day to see Johnny-boy, you see,' Paul said, picking up his accent. 'They was sleeping. Ladyship was naked. That is all.'

'Rubbish,' Lieni said. 'Go on, tell them.'

'She wazza sleeping, you see. And she wazza naked. And – she hadda one titta thisaway and one titta thataway.' He wrinkled up his nose and made the requisite face of disgust.

The fire had stupefied most of us. The young alcoholic mechanically passed around cigarettes. The Frenchman sat blank and quite still in the American army tunic he always wore in the boarding-house. Elsa and her husband went in and out of the kitchen. The Countess sat and smiled. I don't know what Lieni was preparing for us; but she was determined that we should do nothing to spoil our appetites. She had no more stories for us; but whenever she came in, with yet another scuttle of coals, she stopped to make us sing or do dances or play a game. We did as she directed; we became hotter. At the end we were all hugging the damp walls.

The basement bell rang. Lieni ran out to the passage. We heard conversation. A male voice was subdued: we guessed it was her engineer. We waited for her to bring him in. He was shy and had little English, but the occasion was also partly his. We waited. We heard the bedroom door slam; we heard it locked. There were footsteps in the passage; the basement door gently opened and

és egy kötényért. Lienivel együtt jött vissza, még egy kanna szenet hoztak a tűzre, amely már így is szinte elviselhetetlen volt.

– Szegény Johnny-boy – mondta Paul.

– Mondd el nekik, Paulo – szólt Lieni. Paul grimaszolt. – Gyerünk, Paulo. Meséld el, hogy egyik cici erre, a másik ...

A komor máltaiak nevettek.

– Egy nap beugrottam Johnny-boyhoz, érted? – kezdte Paul, Johnny-boy modorában. – Aludtak. Őnagysága meztelenül. Ennyi.

– Egy fenét – mondta Lieni. – Folytasd!

– Aludt, érted? És meztelen volt. Az egyik melle balra, a másik jobbra. – Az orrát ráncolta az undor félreérthetetlen kifejezésével.

A kályha szinte már őrjítően ízzott. Az ifjú alkoholista gépiesen kínálta körbe a cigarettáját. A marokkói üres tekintettel, mozdulatlanul ült amerikai, katonai öltözetében, melyet a panzióban állandóan viselt. Elsa és a férje ingázott a konyha és a szoba között. A grófnő csak ült és mosolygott. Nem tudom, mit főzött Lieni, de határozottan kérte, üres gyomorral érkezzünk, hogy legyen étvágyunk. Több történet nem volt a tarsolyában, de ahányszor csak bejött egy újabb vödör szénnel, éneklésre, táncra, játékra buzdított bennünket. Engedtünk kérésének és egyre inkább melegünk lett. Végül már mindannyian a hűvös falhoz húzódtunk.

Csengettek. Lieni kiszaladt az előtérbe, párbeszéd hangjai szűrődtek be hozzánk. Egy halk férfihang, gondoltuk, Lieni mérnök barátja. Arra számítottunk, hogy bemutatja, de az szégyenlős volt, és alig tudott angolul, ám az ünneplésben talán ő is részt akarhatott venni. Várakoztunk. Hallottuk, ahogy becsapódik a hálószoba ajtaja és a kulcs elfordul a zárban. Léptek zaja szűrődött be az előtérből, a bejárati ajtót kinyitották majd óvatosan becsukták. A léptek nesze odakintről, ahogy a salakot és a

gently closed; and there were footsteps outside climbing up, crushing the cinders and frozen snow like dry leaves. Lieni didn't return.

Elsa told us what had happened. The engineer had brought his laundry; this was his custom. Once, on Lieni's birthday, he had left a gift, a piece of jewellery, in the pocket of his white coat; and had said nothing. Now Lieni, seizing the laundry, went through the pockets of the coat. She came upon a letter. It was from the engineer's home in India; he was married, with children. It might have been a deliberate act of brutality, or bravery; it might have been accidental. The engineer denied nothing; he made no attempt to defend himself or reassure Lieni. When Lieni locked herself in her bedroom, he simply took back his laundry and went away.

That was the end of the party. One by one and two by two the Maltese and the boarders left. Rudolfo went back to his restaurant. Johnny-boy was trying to revive his wife in the kitchen; he was succeeding; she was becoming obstreperous. Elsa and her husband were getting ready to catch their train back to the country. Lieni kept herself locked in her room, out of the chaos of which a few hours before she had arisen, the smart London girl. The Countess sat and looked. Paul, still in his apron, cleaned up and offered food.

I went to a dance at the British Council in Davies Street. I fell into a flirtatious, mock-witty conversation with an idle French girl. These conversations with French women always wearied me. Still, at the end, I prepared to do what was expected of me. I said, 'Do you dance?' She at once rose. It was then that out of nowhere the impulse of cruelty came to me. I said, 'I don't.' And I left. I walked back across the park. Snow was sharp below my shoes; it astonished me to find that in spite of the cold I was thirsty.

jegesedő havat taposták, száraz falevelek ropogására emlékeztetett. Lieni nem jött vissza.

Elsa mesélte el, mi történt. A mérnök a szennyesét hozta, mint általában. Egyszer, Lieni születésnapján valami ékszert hagyott fehér köpenye zsebében ajándék gyanánt, de nem szólt róla. Lieni most is átkutatta a szennyes ruhák zsebeit, és egy levelet talált. A mérnök otthonról kapta, Indiából, kiderült belőle, hogy nős és gyermekei vannak. Lehet, hogy véletlenül hagyta a zsebében, lehet, hogy szándékos kegyetlenségből vagy merészségből. A mérnök nem tagadott semmit, meg se kísérelte tisztázni magát vagy Lienit vigasztalni. Miután Lieni bezárkózott a hálószobába, egyszerűen fogta a szennyesét és elment.

Az ünneplés így ért véget. A lakók és a máltaiak egyesével, kettesével haza indultak, Rudolfo visszament az étterembe. A konyhában Johnny-boy megpróbált életet lehelni a feleségébe, sikerrel, az asszony hangoskodni kezdett. Elsa és a férje el akarták érni a vidéki vonatot. Lieni, a csinos londoni nő, a szobájában maradt, elzárva magát a káosztól, amelyből, néhány órája még úgy tűnt, kievickél. A grófnő csak ült és maga elé bámult. Paul, még mindig kötényben, kezdett rendet rakni és étellel kínált.

Jómagam a Davies Streetre mentem, a British Council szervezett egy táncos összejövetelt. Egy unatkozó francia lánnyal kezdtem flörtölni, ál-bölcselkedő párbeszédbe elegyedtünk. Francia nőkkel ez mindig fárasztott, végül mégis megléptem, ami elvárható volt.

– Akarsz táncolni? – kérdeztem. Azonnal fölállt. Ekkor valahonnan a semmiből kegyetlen dac hajlama villant belém. – Én nem – mondtam és otthagytam. A parkon át gyalogoltam haza, a hó élesen csikorgott a talpam alatt. Meglepett, hogy a hideg ellenére szomjas vagyok.

Már ágyban voltam, amikor szipogást hallottam a folyosó fe-

I was in bed that night when I heard someone sobbing outside my door. It was Lieni, red-eyed in the cold passage. I let her in. I sat on the edge of the bed and she sat on my lap. She was not a small woman and I thought beyond her unhappiness to her weight, to the pressure of her bone on my flesh. I had an idea where her tears were leading. But I was unwilling. I shook my cramped legs; she clung to my neck. I stood up and she glided down to the floor. She sat on the chair and cried, her big fingers beating softly on the padded arms of the chair. I told her to be silent; she sobbed more loudly. I asked her to leave. To my surprise, she got up and left without a word. I felt foolish and uncomfortable. She had once told me that Lieni was the Maltese for Helen, and had added: 'Have you ever seen a Helen so fat?' But she was not fat. I thought of the incidents of the day; they seemed so far away. I thought I would go to her. Down the dark stair-well; past the frozen musty smell of the ground floor, where were the public rooms nobody used; to the cooking and baby and scorched smells of the basement. A night-light was on in Lieni's room, sufficient to show, through the frosted glass, the clothes hanging on her door. I tried the knob; the door opened. A chaos of weak light and deep shadow: clothes and paper and boxes, wash-basin and crib and sewing machine and wardrobe. Lieni was in her bed, fast asleep.

This was my first snow. ♦

lől. Lieni állt az ajtóm előtt, vörös szemekkel. Beengedtem. Az ágy szélére ültem, ő az ölembe. Termetes nő volt, a boldogtalanságán túl azt is éreztem, ahogy súlya a húsomba nyomódik. Volt elképzelésem róla, hova vezethetnek ezek a könnyek, de nem éreztem kedvet magamban ilyesmire. Ahogy fölálltam, ő a padlóra csússzant. Megráztam elzsibbadt lábamat, ő a nyakamba kapaszkodott, aztán a karosszékbe ült, és nagy ujjaival a karfa puha kárpitján dobolt. Rászóltam, hogy hallgasson el, de erre még hangosabb zokogásba kezdett. Megkértem, menjen a szobájába, meglepetésemre szó nélkül fölállt és távozott. Kényelmetlenül butának éreztem magam. Egyszer mesélte, hogy Lieni az Ilona máltai megfelelője, majd hozzátette:

– Láttál már ilyen kövér Ilonát?

Jóllehet nem is volt kövér. Ahogy a nap eseményeit újra átgondoltam, minden olyan távolinak tűnt. Felötlött bennem, hogy talán le kéne menjek hozzá. Végig a sötét lépcsőházon, a fagyos, dohos szuterén közös helyiségei mentén, amiket senki nem használt, egészen az alagsor hőségtől perzselő csecsemő- és konyhaszagáig. Lieninél egy éjjeli lámpa égett, a tejüvegen át megvilágította az ajtóra akasztott ruhákat. Lenyomtam a kilincset, engedett. A halvány fény és a mély árnyak káoszában ruhák, papírok, dobozok, egy mosdótál, gyerekágy, egy varrógép, ruhásszekrény. Lieni ágyban volt, aludt.

Emlékeimben így él életem első havazásának élménye. ♦