

GÜNTHER ANDERS



*ANCESTOR MURDER
AND OTHER MOLUSSIAN PIECES*

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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Ancestor Murder	7
<i>Commentary</i>	15
<i>Afterword (1973)</i>	19
<i>Annex I</i>	26
<i>Annex II</i>	27
<i>Annex III</i>	29
<i>Annex IV</i>	32
Rigonia	37
Scholarly Commentary	45

'Der Ahnenmord' (written in 1951, with additional material in 1973) and 'Rigonia' (written in 1966) were first published in the collection *Günther Anders Erzählungen: Fröhliche Philosophie* (Suhrkamp Taschenbuch 432) in 1978. The 'Scholarly Commentary' was found in Anders' posthumous papers, and published in the 2nd ed. of *Die molussische Katacombe*.

I do not own translation rights to these works. I am making them available online **free of charge**, purely to bring the name of Günther Anders to wider attention among readers of English. I hope in so doing to attract the interest of an Anglophone publisher, as has happened in the case of my translations of Alfred Döblin.

C D Godwin

INTRODUCTION

The Molussian Catacombs, the only novel by the ‘philosophical anthropologist of the atomic age’ Günther Anders, was written in 1930-33, with additions and amendments until 1936, while Anders was an exile in Paris. It remained unpublished until 1992, a few months before his death. Yet the fictional construct of Molussia for decades provided Anders with an intellectual playground, where philosophical and political questions could be explored in a playful-serious manner.

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Günther Stern was born in the German city of Breslau (now Polish Wrocław) in 1902, and died in Vienna in 1992. His parents were pioneer child psychologists; Walter Benjamin was a second cousin. He studied Phenomenology under Husserl, and also attended seminars by Cassirer and Heidegger. He was refused his post-doctoral Habilitation in 1930; his mentors (Wertheimer, Tillich and Mannheim) consoled him with the naïve excuse: ‘Let the Nazis come in for a year or so, then once they’ve been seen off, you can have your degree.’

From the late 1920s Stern lived mainly from his contributions to newspapers. The editor of the *Berlin Börsen-Courier* complained there were too many Sterns writing for him, so he responded: ‘Then call me something different (*anders*)!’

From 1929 to 1937 he was married to Hannah Arendt (a fellow student under Heidegger – with whom she had a passionate affair and a continuing infatuation). In 1933 he fled to Paris on hearing that the Gestapo had seized Berthold Brecht’s diary, in which he was frequently mentioned. (Hannah stayed in Germany working for a Jewish relief organisation, until she too was held for several days in a Gestapo cell. She fled via Czechoslovakia to join Anders in Paris.)

In 1936 Anders sailed to the USA, where his father was now a professor in North Carolina. The authorities, suspicious of his anti-totalitarian views, delayed the naturalisation process; his German citizenship was revoked in 1938. (Despite his divorce from Hannah Arendt, Anders helped her and her new husband to reach the USA.)

During the war years, Anders found work in Hollywood backstage prop and costume lots, and on assembly lines in Los Angeles factories – experiences that helped shape his critiques of media and technology. He lodged for a while in the house of Herbert Marcuse, and socialised with other émigré writers including Brecht, Döblin, Feuchtwanger, the Manns, as well as musicians and film directors. His interest in philosophy continued via seminars by Horkheimer and Adorno.

In 1945 Anders was briefly employed by the US Office of War Information, but resigned rather than draft anti-Japanese propaganda he considered fascistic. The atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945 brought a turning point in Anders’ view of the world. After returning to Europe in 1950, he attacked the ‘Apocalypse-blindness’ of a humanity whose technologies have outgrown its control. Looking back on his US years, he wrote: ‘Empty time in the USA. Only after returning to Europe did I find myself again. Back there I would have perished.’¹

For three post-War decades Anders wrote extensively on violence, the atomic menace, the Vietnam War, pacifism, technological overreach, and cultural issues. His major work of

¹ A note inserted in the MS of his novel, retrieved in 1990 by Herr Oberschlick.

philosophical anthropology *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen (The Obsolescence of Humanity)* appeared as two volumes in 1956 and 1980.²

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Anders began writing his fictional response to European totalitarianism in 1930. By early 1933 the MS was complete enough to be submitted (via Brecht) to the Kiepenhauer publishing house, just before the Nazis took over. The Gestapo grabbed the MS from the publisher along with other materials, but soon returned it, believing it to be a collection of South Sea folk tales. (The publisher had wrapped it in a map of Indonesia, with the island of 'Molussia' drawn in.)

Anders was one of the earliest to recognise the menace of totalitarianism. He took *Mein Kampf* seriously,³ judging it a 'mean, hatefilled, rhetorically enthralling, indisputably highly intelligent book ... This man says what he means and means what he says. And says it in such a vulgar way that the already-vulgar will find it irresistible, and even the not-vulgar will be vulgarised and enthralled.'⁴

One of the two MS copies of the novel was left behind when he fled to Paris. Hannah Arendt bravely brought it with her, wrapped in a covering that had spent a winter in a smokehouse surrounded by preserved sausages and hams. Anders later claimed the aroma provided a condiment for their frugal Parisian meals of plain baguette.

In Paris, Anders continued adding to the novel. His mythical land of Molussia provided almost endless opportunities for slogans, proverbs, anecdotes, fables and political reflections; the writing provided relief from the fears and hardships of exile. 'Molussia was an invented private myth, allowing observations, ideas, insights and reflections in such a way that they lie outside the rules of scientific responsibility, but for that reason can have a more forthright, direct and immediate impact.'⁵ His attempt to have the novel published by the only German-language publisher in Paris was sabotaged by the firm's Stalinist reader Manès Sperber, who, unhappy with the novel's exposure of conscienceless Machiavellianism from whatever side, branded it a deviation from the Party line. (Sperber denounced Stalin a few years later, and became a lauded anti-Communist. Anders found it distasteful that an earlier lack of morals could so easily be wiped away.)

The 1939 PEN World Congress in New York provided an opportunity to introduce Anders to a wider public. The pacifist writer Arnold Zweig presented an evening of readings, with the support of a famous actress, Olga Fuchs. But hopes for early publication of the novel were again dashed. Anders then set the MS aside, but carried it with him on his frequent changes of address. Not until 1990, at the urging of his executor Gerhard Oberschlick, did he authorise publication.⁶ So, why the long delay? Here we must rely on the author's own explanation. He claimed to be 'embarrassed' by the contrast between the revolution depicted at the end of the novel, and the failure of the Germans to rise up against Hitler, leaving their salvation to outsiders.

² Only a small part of Vol 1 has been formally published in English: the essay 'On Promethean Shame', in C. J. Mueller: *Prometheanism*. ISBN 9781783482399. A PDF of vol. 2 (translated from a Spanish translation!) can be found on the Internet with a little searching.

³ Unlike his 'clever friends': Brecht famously mocked Hitler as 'the housepainter'.

⁴ Quoted by K. P. Liessmann at a symposium lecture in Vienna in October 1990.

⁵ A comment by Liessmann, which pleased Anders. *Molussische Katakombe*, 2nd ed., p. 441.

⁶ *Molussischen Katakombe* 2nd ed., p.450.

The first edition of *The Molussian Catacombs* appeared in 1992, happily shortly before Anders' death. It had no editorial apparatus. The second edition of 2012 was augmented with almost a hundred pages of 'Molussian Apocrypha', some miscellaneous items, and a lengthy and richly annotated recollection by his executor of conversations with Anders in 1990-91.

Meanwhile a collection of stories (subtitled "fröhliche Philosophie" – 'gay philosophy', an allusion to Nietzsche's 'Gay Science') had appeared in 1978. It included two substantial 'Molussian' pieces. Anders had also freely quoted 'Molussian' slogans, proverbs, anecdotes etc in his other writings, to the bemusement of readers. The spoof archaeological reports that constitute *Ancestor Murder* offer fascinating perspectives on the ways archaic and alien cultures are (mis)understood by modern scholars. *Rigonia* resonates still in today's world of censorship and "conspiracy theories" and "fact checkers". A further intriguing piece, *Scholarly Commentary*, found among the posthumous papers, concludes this collection.

Anders, like Alfred Döblin, has attracted a modest but enthusiastic readership in the English-speaking world; but efforts to interest mainstream publishers have so far been less successful than in even the Döblin case. I hope that Anders' fictional world of Molussia will one day find its proper place in the literature of mid-20th century ideas, still resonant amid the war-trumpets and Great Resets of today.

C. D. Godwin
Stroud, U.K.
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ANCESTOR MURDER

(1951)

The necropolis beneath Molussia exhibits the following peculiarity: the cemetery, scarcely a thousand feet square, occupied a ridiculously small space for the hundreds of thousands populating the upper city. The massive wall enclosing this precinct was said to have stood forever, had never been constructed, and merited no less reverence than the cemetery itself. True, the population of Molussia over the centuries increased only marginally. But the number of dead must, as a matter of course, always have increased. Since time immemorial bodies had always lain tight-packed, more so even than among the poorest in the slums of the upper city. From one enclosing wall to the other they almost seemed bundled ready for shipping out, rather than in their final resting place.⁷ Nevertheless, and despite the starkest pressure on burial spaces, the living were forbidden to tamper with the wall in order to extend the necropolis. No second cemetery was available to relieve the pressure on the first, and (a second taboo) would have been just as unthinkable as an extension. And as for private burial in a garden or elsewhere, no one would have dared even think of it, just as no one at all, despite the galling annoyances of so many taboos, would regard any breach as other than inexpiable sacrilege. Hence the obstacles were total, and the situation would have proved intractable had not a counter-custom arisen. This counter-custom, the ritual *Murder of the Ancestors*, is the focus of the present report, based on the latest finds.⁸

Before we begin, we wish to preempt one question. The reader may wonder who imposed these conflicting taboos, and what the originators had in mind. We offer no answer. But even this lacuna is instructive. It seems to indicate that in the age when the taboos were in effect, there were no answers to questions of *whence* or *why*. To which I would add that taboos were viewed as facts as undeniable as air or the seasons, and so like these (and the supposedly eternal cemetery walls) were deemed to be not of human origin. The only pointer one might cite is the one on the cemetery portal, quoted in every source.⁹ The inscription, decreeing that *The number of ancestors shall remain immutable*, seems in fact to explain the wall-taboo. But this decree of constancy cannot be its own justification – for in the end the principle of a constant number of ancestors represents no *a priori* moral axiom – and so provides little headway. Who could decide whether the rule laid down in the inscription caused the taboo, or the taboo prompted the inscription? So we can only assume that the Molussians gave no thought at all to the origin of taboos. For them, taboos were simply *valid*. And by valid I mean (for such is validity) valid without foundation. Which brings us back to our theme. For if the Molussians, as distinct from ourselves, accepted the prohibitions and from time to time even ‘loved’ them, repellent as it may seem,¹⁰ it was because they had a custom which responded to the taboo by continually restoring the continually disturbed equilibrium in the number of graves and the number of dead. This was ‘ancestor murder’, or as the

⁷ *Molussic Excavations, Tablets A – D. Preliminary report* by Sir Allen J Godefroy, Calcutta U. P. 1932.

⁸ *Molussic Studies, a Symposium*. Princeton 1952.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 422 ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

euphemistic Molussian term expressed it: the *Ritual of the Second Death*. On this we report in the following pages.

*

The ritual proceeded step by step as follows: if a father gave up the ghost, the family at once brought up from the cellar three lifesize figurines made of clay, handed down from one generation to the next and supposedly representing (or substituting for) the deceased and the two eldest sons. Possibly the two sons believed that their souls had now entered these crude simulacra. Whether they had or not, the sons now retired, and with the help of masks (also kept in every family's cellar)¹¹ transformed themselves into rhinoceri, and in this disguise left the house, exiting via the back door so as not under any circumstances to be spotted by the ancestors. While they were going, armed with hammers, rakes and buckets, down into the realm of the dead to prepare for the burial of their deceased father, the rest of the family, in order to provide an alibi for the brothers' absence, sat the clay figurines on benches at the threshold of the house, and took places facing them, so that the entire family seemed to be assembled: a stratagem designed above all to deceive the souls of the ancestors, in case these might succeed during the night in slipping away to check whether the family were all present, or whether the father and the two eldest sons were missing.

Unconcerned for their neighbours' nocturnal tranquillity, the family would then begin to talk to the figurines loudly and with exaggerated laughter, and even skylark with them. It cannot have been easy for the family to sustain this apparent, and apparently boisterous, domestic conversation from sunset to sunrise, while the father's corpse lay on its bier in the house just a few paces distant. And the ruse would have been hard to keep up, were not ready-made conversation topics and texts apparently available. In any case, pauses in the conversation were never to arise, or else the dreaded ancestral spirits would find a way in. And it was equally strictly forbidden to break off the performance before the two sons returned safe and sound from the Lower City. It is easy to imagine how glad the family must have been, after such a night, to put the figurines back into storage and resume normal life. All four sources emphasise these facts with impressive unanimity. But we are running ahead of ourselves.

*

With regard to the costumes worn by the sons, especially the enormous rhinoceros horns, we find behind this custom a desire to remain totally unrecognisable to the deceased ancestors. Of course the role of a mask is never limited to disguise; in every culture, as here, masking also has a positive significance. The mask-wearers in their ghostly guise might hope to encounter ghosts, and arouse in them utmost horror. This hope was founded on the fact that the rhinoceros mask was no randomly selected instrument of terror. Rather the rhinoceros was the sacred totem animal of the Molussians, identified with the primal all-powerful progenitors of the entire nation, hence figures beside whom even ancestors mouldering in crypt niches remained mere

¹¹ Well preserved pieces in the Aberdeen Museum and the Ethnographic Collection, Bombay. Since all figures show the same archaic stereotypical smile and all look alike, there is clearly no question here of portraiture. Perhaps nothing of the kind was felt to be necessary.

children.¹² The great-great-grandchildren who transformed themselves by means of the masks into the most archaic beings did so in order to fool the ancestors, hoax them into believing they were being visited not by their descendants but on the contrary by their own more distant ancestors, thus paralysing any resistance. Moreover, the great-great-grandchildren were, as already said, themselves fooled by the masks – meaning they would never have carried through their sacrilegious enterprise without the masks. Godefroy goes so far as to assert¹³ that in the course of their ceremonial activity the two sons not only no longer *felt* themselves to be themselves, but in fact *were* not themselves: not the grand- and great-grandchildren of that ancestor into whose state of decease they were intruding, but on the contrary its great-grandfathers. Be that as it may, the two intruders must have remained as good as immune to any notion that what they were up to with their ancestor might be wrong or sacrilegious.

*

And so the two sons headed down the deserted alleyways and steps of the Old Town, in silence so as not to be recognised even by voice. Their accoutrements clattered warnings on the paving. Any who heard the approach slipped aside. Windows slammed shut as they passed. Even to see or hear the pair was deemed unlucky. The best one could do was pretend to ignore them completely. For they were no less taboo than their assigned task. Any who came into contact with them were deemed polluted.

At the portal of the Realm of the Dead – down there called simply *The City*, as if the upper world meant nothing – they gave the name of the deceased to the similarly masked gatekeeper, to be recorded: time of arrival, phase of the moon, and expected time of sunrise were ascertained, and the pair stepped into the subterranean city. They pushed goose-stepping along the narrow gullies searching for the abode of their ancestors. This was anything but simple, because the ghosts of the dead were believed to strive tirelessly to break free and seek an exit to the upper world. Such attempts had of course to be frustrated, and so every niche was massively bricked up and accessible only by demolishing the big nameplate. In addition, lighting in the lanes between the graves was purposely kept dim, and since the graves were in no wise distinguishable one from another, with row after row of name slabs stretching away, and the entire layout, despite its objectively modest area, being somewhat maze-like, it was almost impossible not to go astray, partly because of the ingenious design, and partly because of the general murk. In fact it often happened that brothers would lose one another and wander for hours, or they would both cast about for hours, perhaps passing by their goal several times before finding the correct ‘abode’. To the fear that they might not complete their task in time – for the task was laborious, and had unfailingly to be finished by sunrise – was added another: that they might light on the wrong grave and interfere with the wrong ancestor, the ancestor of a fellow citizen. For this reason no one would

¹² It remains so even today. This may sound strange, since the rhinoceros is known to be considered impure in today’s Molussia. But this fact speaks not against but for the original sacredness of the creature, under the rubric: untouchable. Any holy thing is a *noli me tangere*. But when the grounds for untouchability are forgotten, but by tradition still respected, then the holy is transformed into the equally untouchable impure.

¹³ *The Reality of Feeling*, Manchester 1950.

dare raise his hammer before spending at least an hour in the Realm of the Dead, and assuring himself repeatedly of the inmate's identity.¹⁴

It is no wonder, therefore, that even the route to their place of work instilled anxiety. And when Tablet B asserts that they were overcome during their search by 'an ambivalent excitement mounting to an almost fatal passion', we may find it credible, even while rejecting as the cause of this unwanted passion 'the scorn and powers of resistance of the ancestors'.

And so they strayed through the alleys of the dead, nudging one another on and next moment holding one another back. Their exaggerated scrupulosity went so far that they would play a game: they would maintain the appearance of searching even after they were sure they had reached their goal but had not yet put in the prescribed minimum duration of the search. The story of the unfortunate pair who by lucky chance located their family's grave at once and with no effort, but then, forced by ritual to go properly on their quest, lost sight of the location and spent all night until sunrise – in the end not really seeking but merely demonstrating that they were seeking (demonstrating to whom we can hardly say) – whatever, this story of the two brothers racing like madmen through the narrow alleys might well have sprung from Kafka's imagination.¹⁵ At any event, the long-delayed work now began in earnest, and at the most hectic pace. For, as said, the allotted work had to be completed by sunrise, and a second task awaited them after this first. But once again we are inexcusably getting ahead of ourselves. First we must describe the first phase.

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So, a start has been made on the task. To gain access to the remains of their oldest ancestor, they are faced first of all with the name slab that bricks the niche in. This must be removed. It would have been hard enough in the best of circumstances to dismantle this stout wall of masonry. But in this narrow space – which inhibits the use of the chisel, prevents any swing of the elbow, and poses a constant risk of the one with the hammer

¹⁴ Remarkably, no chronicler found it necessary to mention what threat the masked men faced if they failed to complete the task, or the frequency of such failures. General ethnological evidence shows that transgression against the most powerful taboos is met with the most extreme penalties, so we may assume that in this task, lives were at stake.

¹⁵ A literary-philosophical digression may be permitted here. The striking similarity of a Kafkaesque scene with these events steered by a purely magical conception seems to show unambiguously that even Kafka, now and then at least, depicted magical events, and that it is an error to regard his world as religious. Kafka was the child of an age whose irreligiosity brought a fascination with the magical. When more or less irreligious ethnologists and anthropologists like Frazer, Levy-Bruhl, Malinowski and Cassirer acknowledge magic (made more accessible by commercial and colonial contact with native populations) as a mode of living, thinking and worldview-formation *sui generis*, it was precisely because they were no longer religious; i.e. the magical was no longer measured against the yardstick of a (religious or progressive) dogma and thereby judged 'untrue' or 'primitive'. Growing interest in the exotic is likewise linked to the decline of religious faith. For absence of faith allows the possibility of being realised not only as unbelief but also as regression into a pre-religious state that appears to the regressor, especially when faced with the folly of unbelief, as still a 'religious' state: i.e. one that is magical. And in Kafka this regression found a magnificent embodiment – of a monstrous and uncanny kind. For he could represent our everyday reality as magical, even though he had no knowledge of ethnological materials. He had – and probably no higher praise can be bestowed on a writer – *no need for empiricism*: 'true' is for him the 'magical' depiction of social being insofar as, however it may be determined by what happens within, it encounters its victims (i.e. most of us) really as the playthings of anonymous powers and super-powers that inflict spiteful torments. And this seeming is really a part, and a decisive part, of our social reality.

striking himself in the face – here the work presents an indescribable trial of patience. And even when the name slab is loosened and lies on the ground, no more than the initial step has been achieved. For the name slab is not merely a physical obstacle, not merely a hunk of masonry blocking access to the dead, but is itself also a powerful part of the deceased. Simply loosening the slab is not enough. More importantly, the living power of the name residing in the inscription must be enfeebled. But no one can say what power might inhabit any fragment of the plate, or even a particular letter; hence the ritual requires each and every fragment to be hammered there and then until all that is left is formless and nameless dust. So the two men squat on the ground, hammering fussily away for hours, and but for the animal masks one might take them for nocturnal road-menders.

Surprising as it may sound, this clearly laborious, but in our eyes not especially repellent, phase of the task, the so-called *Murder of the Name*, was no less odious to the brothers than the ensuing phase, directed at the corpse itself; or more precisely at the mouldering pile that was all that remained. But the inscription was intact, it had not yet forfeited any of its living force, *the name knew who it was*,¹⁶ which could not be said of the pathetic remains of the deceased, however menacing they might be.

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So they have now demolished the name slab and pounded it to dust. They pause, leaning against the wall, before embarking on the second, decisive phase of their task. In the flickering half-light, the horned heads have a gruesome appearance, That they enjoyed the first few minutes of their respite cannot be doubted. So, for example, the scribe of Tablet D, taking an unmistakable and frankly unmagical delight in realistic detail, depicts them ‘arms dangling and legs stretched out, happy as quarrymen on lunch break’. And the assertion on Tablet A, that ‘time for them has stood still’, is equally unambiguous. For timeless is perhaps only one who, like a dreamless sleeper, has nothing in mind and nothing to do, and is for that reason happy.

It is not clear how long this happy respite lasted, or was supposed to last.¹⁷ We must assume only a very short space of time. It is significant that the pair ‘spoke not a word to one another’ (Tablet C), indicating a certain unease arising naturally from the now undeniable close proximity of the ancestors, as well as from the difficulty of recognising a brother in the monstrous being sat alongside.¹⁸

But within a few minutes, more positive symptoms appear: ‘repeatedly they look in fear up to the heights’ (Tablet C), possibly to see through gaps in the vaulting whether dawn is already breaking. Their unease increases: soon they ‘resemble beasts deprived of sleep, that keep shifting the position of their limbs’ (ibid.). It is however unlikely that any sign of day would appear at this hour. But their eyes are adapted to the night, dust from the crushed name slab shimmers palely, and since cold cellar air penetrates even

¹⁶ *Molussic Proverbs*, London 1949, p.307.

¹⁷ The question (see *Molussic Studies*, p.200) whether this pause between the frantic pretend-work and the forthcoming horrors was merely allowed or rather prescribed, is of course ethnologically naïve. For it is generally acknowledged that in magical societies, interruptions to a ceremony never occur unless ceremonially required. Hence this pause too had a fixed name: *Windcalm*. And no better term than this (found on all four tablets) could be coined even today for the ambivalent state in which the two brothers now found themselves.

¹⁸ Charles Lawrence, ‘Some remarks on techniques of mutual depersonalisation’, in *Psyche* XXII, Denver, 1950.

beneath their disguise and fear of missing the deadline is ever with them, 'none there were who did not become convinced that time had advanced farther than it really had.' (Tablet C). Hence fundamental enjoyment of this break in the work can hardly be assumed. True, Tablet A asserts that 'during Windcalm, no loss of freedom of any kind occurred', that 'no demand was made' of the resting figures, and even that 'the utterance of magical incantations was not obligatory'. But such assurances are unconvincing, for of course it is precisely the freedom that ruins their repose. In this situation and these surroundings, even the most detestable activity, provided it consists of prescribed steps, is preferable to inactivity. In short: 'Windcalm' was an ingeniously predetermined step. We may readily conclude: the break had no other purpose than to render the two men eager to set about the horrid task that faced them, and drive them on to it.

So no wonder they now bestir themselves and take up their tools 'long before the allotted period is over' (Tablet C).

And so they set about their work again. This time, the real task. For now they must break through the wall that still separates them from their distant ancestor. They are not silent as they do so. Rather, their blows are accompanied by a constantly repeated shout, a shout whose meaning is at first glance hugely surprising, for it sounds as if they are embarking on a particularly innocuous phase of the work. At frequent intervals they shout in the direction of the ancestor the formula '*You're a Nobody, you're a Nothing!*' However, innocuous as the shout may sound, it is anything but. If one listens for the true meaning, one hears not so much an assertion as an incantation, an attempt to convince the greatly feared ancestor's spirit that it no longer possesses the slightest power, and to convince themselves that they are many times stronger than the spirit.

Accompanied by these shouts they dig through the wall of the tomb. Of course, it is not possible to assert that they do so with especial vigour. They would be unable to do so, even if they had the will. For their worksite has not so far grown any bigger; now as before they are constrained to limit their hammer blows to a degree quite incommensurate with their zeal, their strength and their goal. In fact there is a ceremonial rule pertaining to this phase: *Do not toil, but simulate toil!* Meaning: the toiling men are deceived even about their own activity, and must thereby seem to themselves rather pathetic.¹⁹ The remark on Tablet B that some were driven 'near to fury' by these hours of niggling toil, while others 'would have let their hammers drop as if in a sudden attack of weakness', has a plausible ring to it. But it is no longer possible to conclude that they ascribed this frustration and torment, not to the rule, but to resistance by the ancestor.

*

Gradually, however, their labours provide them with a certain satisfaction. In place of the far too small pick, ill-fitted to a male hand, there comes at last a heftier long-handled sledgehammer, a joy to wield since it requires exertion; its menacing blows reverberate

¹⁹ Note the artless and unrefined effect of the Greek myth of Sisyphus when compared with this rule. For Sisyphus was deceived only about the outcome of his toil, not about his toil as an activity.

into the upper city. The hammer-blows fall, splinters fly. And if the two men could continue like this, they would do so with pleasure.²⁰

‘Moreover’, says Tablet A, ‘during this phase, now and then those left at home become aware of those toiling underground.’ It cannot have been easy for the family chattering away up above to maintain the farce with the ‘images’ while distant thuds echo up to them. For the thuds are to them a signal that the ‘real thing’, the Ancestor Murder, will soon take place. One suspects they had to exercise iron discipline in order that, instead of concentrating on the nonsense which was their duty, their attention should not be diverted to their relatives who would soon arrive at the ‘maw of the departed’, i.e. the niche that they will have to grope around in or even climb into. With this their masquerade becomes truly urgent, for the wider the breach down below, the more acute the danger that the spirit of the late ancestor will slip away and come looking for them to demand satisfaction for the spoliation of his resting place.

The time when those above seemed linked to those below evidently did not last very long. The laboriousness with which the initial hole had been hacked was matched now by the speed (much faster than the toilers would wish) with which the breach was enlarged many times. Those above, no longer hearing sounds from below, are again cut off, and those below are once again cheated of any satisfaction in their work. Before their joy in the work reaches its apogee, the breach has already reached a dimension that allows (which in this case means ‘requires’) a start on the main business. But at this point we are stymied. The Tablet texts leave us in the lurch. Not one devotes even a syllable to the Ancestor Murder itself.²¹ And if there were no other sources, if other supporting materials were not available, then here we would have to leap over the most important part (which would be pointless) and leave our actual theme in the dust, by turning at once to the return of the brothers to the Overworld, and there calling a halt.

But this, of course, is not necessary. Of course there is another source. I repeat the words ‘of course’ because if this were not the case, we would naturally be in no position to mention Ancestor Murder, as we have done from the start; indeed, we would not even be able to use or understand the term Ancestor Murder. What do we glean from this other source?

It concerns a text discovered only ten years or so ago, which in a certain sense is even more recent than that, since its decipherment and translation by the former missionary Andreas Elliot was published only very recently.²² The contents make it very probable that the great stone inscription belonged to the cemetery wall, even if not to the portal itself. In actual fact, further excavations are being undertaken under the expert direction of Elliot at the location of the find, which have already brought to light some pieces of an equally sensational nature. Of which more later.

²⁰ In fact only one sledgehammer was used. As Tablet B states, the narrow confines preclude the wielding of two hammers at the same time. Tablet C nicely complements this with a careful description of how one stands parallel to the wall, hammering away at the edges of the breach, while the other shouts into the widening gap his *A Nobody are you, you are a Nothing!*, and how they frequently change places.

²¹ See Annex 1.

²² *The Cipher*, XXXVI, p.253, London.

As for the language of the almost intact texts, it represents a highly archaic stage of Molussian; hence the slowness with which the hardly more than one hundred and eighty hieroglyphs have been deciphered. But the very antiquity of the linguistic form proves that with these finds we have a piece of ‘Molussia in the flesh’ (Elliot). We follow Elliot’s readings:²³

1. Open (the) jaws (of that which) has been
2. Every arrival (is) sweet
3. Call within: ‘A nobody (that’s what) you are, you are a nothing!’
4. Jump in, be swallowed up!
5. Your ancestors’ ancestors
6. Your teeth ...²⁴
7. The oldest one (must) yield
8. Gather his (remains) in your bowls
9. Lead (him) to (the) valley (of those who are) no longer separated
10. Pour (him) out
11. (that he may) die once more
12. for the last time
13. (And that) he go under in the dust of his fathers
14. Return (to) his chamber
15. (Proceed) from there to his son’s chamber
16. Move him (from) his bed (to) his father’s bed
17. (thereby) promoting him
18. (And) move the son’s son (from) his bed (to) his father’s bed
19. (thereby) promoting him
20. (And the) next one (to) his father’s bed
21. (thereby) promoting him
22. (And the) next one to his father’s bed
23. (thereby) promoting him
24. bustling about (like) puppies
25. Promote them, promote them, (that they may)
26. gather honours the older (ones and that) finally
27. (an) empty bed be ready
28. (for the) youngest one
29. (who is) your father
30. Cleanse (yourself), cleanse (yourself)
31. (that) the *gory*²⁵ (be) over and
32. (that) you emerge spotlessly from (the) darkness
33. to (the) day (that is) yours.²⁶

²³ Words in brackets were inserted by Elliot to make the readings completely lucid. [GA provides these readings in English, with German translation. – *Tr.*]

²⁴ A break; the stone is damaged here.

²⁵ See Annex 2.

²⁶ Their follows a graphical symbol with an irrefutably taboo role – Elliot considers it a phallic horn-symbol – but we cannot know whether it had a semantic or only phonetic referent.

This, then, was *The Challenge*. While it conceals some obscurities in need of elucidation (to be pursued in our commentary) its very bluntness leaves nothing to be desired. The document must convince the most obstinate sceptic that any further doubt will make him the laughing stock of future developments.

COMMENTARY

.1. The first line requires no explanation. Clearly it refers to the breaking open of the bone-niche. On the other hand the 2nd line –

.2. *Every arrival is sweet* poses a problem. It seems remarkable that reaching the disgusting remains of the earliest ancestor should be considered joyous. But the meaning is psychologically totally correct. For it is incontestable that the achievement of any goal towards which we strive – even one that in itself is detestable – fills us with satisfaction the moment it is achieved. When I try mentally to recreate this phase down to the details of the physical state, I imagine the pair now heaving a sigh of relief, stretching their limbs, and savouring the gradual slackening of the nervous tension: – as said, regardless of the fact that their task means entry into the Underworld, emptying the niche, actual sacrilege. In other words, the moment of horror should for them at the same time be a moment of satisfaction. Evidently the pair have been deceived about their situation. For they are cheated now of their utmost dread. Or in other words: the dreadful is not so very bad, because it marks an end to another evil, more precisely an evil of a different kind: their uncomfortable hacking away at the masonry.

.3. *Call within*: ... This call, as pointed out earlier, is an *apotropaion*: a means by which the caller protects himself from the peril latent in the ancestor's remains. But the call is perhaps no mere auto-suggestion, but is also addressed to the ancestor himself. In order to deter him from applying the terrible powers immanent within him, he is being advised that those powers have long since flown, that he has long since forfeited all existence.

.4. *Jump in* ...: A blunt invitation to step into the niche. And – however obvious to us the notion of entering the niche may seem – this compared to the contents of the Tablets is something new. As for the metaphor *swallowed up*, this seems to speak directly even to us. But according to Elliot, it contains such an important mythological association that we cannot simply gloss over it. It alludes to the father who devours the son. For the Molussians too had their myth of Tantalus, or of Kronos.²⁷ In their version, unlike the Greek, the devouring god never assumed human features; in place of the god was the totem animal, namely the Ur-rhinoceros. But possibly the original figure was animalistic for the Greeks too. And a more convincing embodiment of the Ur-father than this beast equipped with the menacing phallic horn could not even have been *invented*. Be that as it may, the idea of a Father-god who devours his children – one of the foundational ideas of Molussian myth – should be kept in view, according to Elliot, if one intends to act upon the first and fourth lines of the 'challenge': *Open (the) jaws (of that which) has been*, and *Jump in*. For in a certain sense the *ancestor murder* represents a most singular recapitulation of the *child murder*, albeit with significant divergences. The motifs of

²⁷ This is no doubt still alive today, albeit underground. It is known that the Molussians celebrated the son's rite of puberty on the same day they sacrificed their first harvest offerings. (*Molussia Today*, p. 82) No one truly familiar with rituals will believe this a mere calendrical coincidence. Mere coincidences occur nowhere in the world's rituals. The obvious inference is that originally the sacrifice of the first fruits of the field and the stables was accompanied by the murder of first-born sons.

similarity and divergence are so intertwined that they can be untangled only with considerable effort.

An exoteric comparison of the two situations shows that in the ancestor murder situation the sons are not *devoured*, but pretend to place themselves in the jaws. This nuance, which I have designated elsewhere the 'Isaac Complex', is hence (Elliot again) a kind of deceptive manoeuvre. Precisely because the sons in the ancestor murder situation wish to avenge the cannibalistic injustice wrought on them in the distant past, they must present themselves as voluntary sacrifices, or at the very least persuade themselves and the ancestors of their readiness. Where authenticity ends and dissembling begins is now impossible to decide, for like every true ceremony – it is the very criterion of a ceremony's genuineness – this one too was ambiguous. For sure, this offering of oneself as a sacrifice was not pure dissembling. Breaking into the niche was in fact dangerous. We have already stressed the severe penalty to be paid if the task was not completed on time, i.e. if the 'mouth' was not carried away before sunrise. In a certain sense the sons were in reality repeating the mortal danger of being devoured, by their audacity in meddling with the ancestor and thereby laying themselves open to punishment – the harshest possible. In this light, they behave like terrified sons. But precisely because they are terrified sons, they dare not acknowledge themselves as sons during their vengeful enterprise. Here the fifth line is relevant –

.5. *Your ancestor's ancestors*. Hence they themselves step forth as rhinoceroses, meaning: possessors of life and the phallic horn that embodies the right to life. Thus they confront their forefathers as the latter's forefathers, dishonouring them as children were dishonoured by child murder.

.6. *Your teeth* - : This incomplete line on the one hand continues the anthropophage motif, but at the same time denotes a quite concrete operation. Because the Molussian word for 'tooth' means also 'rake', and because all four Tablets mention an iron rake to be taken along, this line enjoins the use of these 'teeth' to rake the *yielding* remains (line 7) out from the niche. The word *yielding* for such a sacrilegious step is certainly very feeble. But it is commonly the most frightful things that are designated by 'portentous-innocuous circumlocutions' (Elliot) or euphemisms. More direct, of course, is the injunction in line 8 to gather the remains of the ancestors in a *bowl*. The word *bowl* is rather neutral, but we know from descriptions in Tablets A – C that a quite ordinary bucket is meant.

Likewise relatively harmless, even celebratory, is the purport of the decisive 9th line: *Lead (him) to (the) valley (of those who are) no longer separated!* The phrase 'no longer separated' designates those who are definitively robbed of their name, their own billet, in short, their *principium individuationis*, who are hardly deceased humans any more but rather spend their time of being dead alongside and within one another as a 'poured out' (line 10) mass of 'generalised dead material' (Elliot). This is the meaning in lines 11 -13 of the expressions 'die once more', die 'for the last time', and 'go under in the dust of his fathers'. Not quite literally, but conveying the meaning perfectly, Elliot adopts the phrase 'the blurred ones', i.e. those obliterated in each other's intermingled dust. But if the dead are intermingled, this can of course only mean that they spend their second and last time of being dead in a mass grave. The phrase 'lead (him)' in line 9 represents the high point of euphemism, for we need not repeat that the 'leading' consists of filling the bucket and emptying it in a mass grave.

If we view the opening of the niche as the first phase of the ceremony, and the dumping of the ancestors in the mass grave as the second, then lines 14-29 show us the third phase: the

transfer (line 16) of the second-oldest to the billet hitherto occupied by the oldest, the transfer of the third-oldest (line 18) to his ancestor's billet, and so on, until the last billet – the one for the latest deceased – is free (line 20). To be sure, the technical methodology used by the two sons during this transfer operation remains unclear. That it consisted – as Elliot suggests – only in 'shoving coffins about' seems to me a trivialising hypothesis. As far as we know, coffins were not found in Molussia. I suspect, rather, that the two sons engaged in a much less trivial task: forced to busy themselves with bones or mould or dust and actually to reposition these remains. Be that as it may, in so doing the two men must go 'bustling about (like) puppies' (line 24). This simile at first seems incomprehensible, but once the actual activity of the two men is made clear, the obscurity is illuminated. What is meant is that the two men hasten from the discarded clan progenitor to its future, i.e. to its son so that the latter can be placed farther back in the past, 'promoting' it (lines 17, 19, 21, 23, 25) to the billet where its father has hitherto rested; and that once they have achieved this they again run back (or rather ahead) to the 'nearer future' of the antepenultimate ancestor, to fetch it away to deposit it in the deeper past. The first time they run back and forth in one stage in order to promote the fourth to the fifth billet, but from billet five they must run to billet three and then back to billet four, i.e. two stages ahead and one back. This they do three times, until the First Ancestor lies in the original billet of the second – a back and forth (not only in space, but to some extent also in time) which is convincingly conveyed by the word 'bustling'. Moreover, Elliot considers – and I think he is right – that the comparison with tumbling puppies refers not just to the back and forth, but also to the suite of rooms in which the two sons must accomplish the transfers: they must creep on all fours as the space does not allow them to stand upright. The overcrowding of the City of the Dead emphasised by all the Tablets, and the fact that the billets were piled four storeys high on top of one another, makes Elliot's thesis entirely plausible.

As a translation of the Molussian vocable <wan>, the English word 'promoting' in lines 17 etc might equally well be 'moving' – an issue which does not arise with the German 'befördern', which encompasses both senses. Elliot felt compelled to switch between both verbs (lines 16 ff.). The Molussian <wan> conveys not merely a change of position, but at the same time a rise in status – such as the elevation of the penultimate to the status of clan father, of the antepenultimate to the penultimate, and so forth.²⁸

Moreover, Elliot provides as evidence for the change of location a striking observation from present-day Molussia. In itself this observation would not suffice as evidence, but as a reinforcement to the certain facts found in the texts, it is highly amusing. It happened that during his excavations in a remote Molussian valley, Elliot encountered a children's game that reproduces with a truly incontestable exactitude the ceremonial scheme of the Ancestor Murder. We emphasise: a game that is still played today. 'The children,' Elliot writes,

draw a field system in the sand, which at first glance resembles in a most striking way the famous hopscotch game of Heaven and Hell that I played as a child in Ireland. That Heaven and Hell, with its heaven, its earth, its limbo, and its hell, represents the Christian world view is obvious. In exactly the same sense the Molussian hopscotch is an innocent representation of an originally deeply serious concept. The children hop from field to field, at a competitive pace. Each pushes a stone along ahead, which in the first field is called 'grandfather', in the second 'great-grandfather', until in the final field it is called 'clan father'. The last to arrive at the final field (meaning: has failed to

²⁸ See Annex III below.

complete the ceremony in the allotted time) is called 'dead', and drops out from the next round. It goes without saying that certain elements of the ceremony have not made their way into the game, or have not been preserved. No rhinoceros associations are apparent. And I cannot deny that the girls play as eagerly and as often as the boys.

AFTERWORD

(1973)²⁹

With this Commentary on the ‘Challenge’ (more accurately, with the ‘Return Scene’ that at that time directly followed the Commentary), I concluded in 1952 my depiction of the *Ancestor Murder*. The Return Scene, based on the Tablets, is still provided unaltered here as the coda to my depiction. But between the commentary and the coda we need to insert an extensive piece of text based on finds previously unknown, which prove that our previous assumption that the ‘brothers’, having accomplished their ‘ancestor murder’, now put it behind them, quit the City of the Dead without delay and return to the bosom of their family, is incontestably false.

One might of course argue that at that time we had no reason to reach a different assumption. For neither the Tablets (apart from ten obscure words on Tablet D) nor the ‘challenge’ (apart from line 30) contain anything to indicate explicitly that between the ceremony and the homecoming something more takes place – something relevant. And yet. This fact actually offers us Molussiologists, ethnologists and linguists no excuse. For every one of us should have possessed the minimal psychological intuition to suspect that people having such a stressful task behind them (regardless of whether the stress is real or merely artificial), and who are as begrimed as this pair after their activities with the remains of their forefathers, might have needed a *transitional phase* of some kind before re-entering everyday life. I regret that we all failed to have such an intuition. And that today we have to catch up with what was left out.

Now if we know today that a separate ceremony intervened between the ancestor murder and the return home, this tells us not only that our knowledge has been extended, but that this second ceremony presents proof beyond all doubt that the brothers did not play-act the first ceremony, but took it in deadly earnest. In fact, the second ceremony would have been completely meaningless and superfluous if its function had not been to remedy the mental disturbance caused by the first ceremony and wash away the physical and mental besmirching consequent upon their interaction with the dead. But let us look first at what kind of documents we call in aid.

If I emphasise that we are not dealing here with texts, this may at first glance seem to assert a negative. The opposite is the case. What we have at our disposal is a quantity of images, more than sixty, each of which shows an exact depiction of one phase of the proceeding. Mutatis mutandis, this being a series of pictures (in this case, bas-reliefs) that narrate a story, we might speak here of ‘cartoons’. But once again we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us stick to a chronological ordering.

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The first clue was provided, once again, by one of the Tablets, in this case Tablet D, which contains a brief allusion, hitherto completely obscure, to a transitional stage, a phrase to which, for some inexplicable reason, no Molussiologist ever paid attention. There it says: ‘After they had completed their task, the two landed in the Mill (<ram>) where they subjected themselves to the necessary in order to return to their family meek and shining like angels’.

²⁹ See Annex IV below.

Not exactly an enlightening description. If we are now able to clarify what is meant by <ram> and offer a detailed description of what happened in the <ram>, it is because of the successful labours (one might almost speak of teamwork) of two Mussolilogists (one of whom, to be sure, had not the slightest idea he was working with the other) in lifting the fog that hung over this portion of text.

The first pointer was provided by the author (the unsuspecting scholar mentioned above) of a philological paper, as unpretentious as it was scholarly, on the syllable <ram>.³⁰ It transpired that this syllable occurred in words for the following: *flog*; *music*; *educate*; *grind maize*; *initiation* and other rituals; *the act of love*, especially *orgies*; *baths*; *festive banquets*; *medicinal cures*; and *disguise*. As listed by Löwy, these seemed nothing more than a random pile of meanings. He never knew what a key he had provided for ethnologists and philosophers. Years before his pedantic effort was properly evaluated, he died an emigrant, in miserable circumstances.

Once again it was Professor Elliot who took the decisive step, by smelting Löwy's neglected trove into a key. As he tackled the material, he was guided by this statement of the problem: what the diverse procedures adduced by Löwy had in common seems so obvious that one fails to comprehend why Löwy himself did not see it, and why a man of Elliot's calibre was required to identify the common denominator. Elliot recognised, as it were, that what the actions enumerated by Löwy had in common was that they 'retune' the holistic condition, the 'tone' of the person. From this he adduced the once hypothetical conclusion that the 'mill' (<ram>) mentioned in Tablet D represented in his words a 'Transformatorium', an institution in which by various means such as propitiatory bathing, music, sexual intercourse, meals, massages, disguises, or by all these means together, the tension arising from the ancestor murders would be totally transformed or (since it has already been transformed by the previous ceremonial work) would in a very broad sense be 'restored' or 'reformed'. 'The over-excitement and disequilibrium,' Elliot writes,³¹

in which the sons found themselves following the ancestor murder ceremony was probably so extreme that they could not at the drop of a hat overcome their abnormal condition and re-adapt to everyday life. Hence we must suspect that the task of normalisation was lifted by first of all transforming their agitation into another kind of agitation, as heat is transformed into electricity.

He goes on to explicate this kind of procedure:

I recall in my student days, when for reasons I no longer remember I had fallen into a state of utter despair, I was hauled off by friends to a symphony concert. The music did not dispel my agitation, but rather *revaluated* it, lending it a form of bliss purer than any I had ever experienced; my despair became unrecognisable. I suspect a similar 'revaluation' might have occurred, albeit in no such chance manner, but rather by way of a methodical procedure, in the two 'visitors' to the 'transformatorium'. As a working hypothesis I therefore propose to assume that the Molussians, or more precisely the spiritual officials

³⁰ Fritz Löwy: 'A contribution to the study of the semantic field of the root syllable <ram> in Neomolussian'. *Acta Philologica Helvetica*, Bern 1941, No. 4.

³¹ <Ram> or the Transformatory. London 1949.

appointed for the task, transformed the complex of actions and arrangements identified by Löwy in the root word <ram> (floggings, concerts, baths, hierodules, meals, etc) into a catering business in order to flick the switch on the over-excited ancestor-murderers, and that the latter gave themselves over to everyday life again only after successful completion of this procedure.’³²

And in another place:

It would be just as futile to seek a single modern English word for the multi-faceted complex <ram> as it would be to transcribe Molussian music using our notation. Hence it was necessary to concoct the new word ‘transformatorium’. If I now advance my hypothesis – or better, my firm conviction – that the Transformatorium provided at the same time a sanctuary, a dining hall, and apartments for lovemaking and sleep, I do not imply that it might have been a *post hoc* combination of previously separate facilities – a synthesis of overnight accommodation, restaurant, baths, brothel, church and concert hall such as certain fashionable hotels offer these days. Rather the Transformatorium was from the start an integral entity which only *post hoc* fanned out into various departments. But we must bear in mind that even the most profane facilities, such as meals and the possibly obligatory orgies, fulfilled a ceremonial function, while what looks to our eyes to be a purely ritual procedure, such as propitiatory bathing, also served for cleaning up, or at least had that result.

So much for the Elliot Hypothesis, of which its author could no more let go than the astronomer could let go of the heavenly body whose existence he has confirmed by calculation. It was the grand old man’s last wish that his hypothesis, which at first found no echo among his professional colleagues, should find empirical support. And in this he succeeded admirably. At an advanced age (he was already approaching 80), for the fourth time in his life, accompanied only by his daughter Myrtle, he actually undertook the laborious voyage to Molussia – feasible only by rickety fishing boat from Madras – in order at his own cost (he actually used all his resources on this enterprise) to conduct excavations in the necropolis. And two years later he found what he was looking for. The Transformatorium was unearthed, and has recently been made accessible to the public much like the buildings in Pompeii.³³

While the roof is missing, the walls still stand, and with them those items of concern here – items we have already mentioned: the almost completely preserved relief friezes that clarify, and in the most striking way confirm, Elliot’s hypothesis that in this establishment various methods were implemented serially to effect the transformation. No question: we latecomers can see more, and at greater leisure, than could any Ancient Molussian; for at most once in a lifetime – just after the ancestor murder, and in a most unfavourable state of mind! – could he have the opportunity to visit the Transformatorium.

It is not only the well-preserved friezes that indicate the characteristics of this facility, but also to some extent the rooms themselves. In them are found what can still be recognised as items of furniture, shards of eating utensils, and other objects that

³² Ibid., p.58.

³³ ‘A Pompeii of the South Seas III’. *The Green Traveller’s Guide*, vol. 261, London, 1954.

confirm the activities so astutely predicted by Elliot. In short, we may without hesitation assert that we are today in a position to reconstruct in broad strokes the events that once took place in the Transformatorium.

Let us turn at once to the frieze in Room A. This picture series, comprising sixteen panels starting on the left hand wall of the entrance lobby, presents a scene of pummelling: two men, collapsing screaming under the blows, are clearly discernible. Although the figures wielding the clubs remain out of sight – only their muscular arms can be seen – we may take it that the pummellers, if not the insulted ancestors themselves, are at least creatures of these, exacting vengeance for the crime in lieu of the Great Ancestor. Clearly it was unthinkable to leave unpunished the breach of taboo committed by the sons. The sons, although in a guiltless manner, had made themselves guilty (as they would, if asked, have freely conceded). As impossible (in the sense of ‘impermissible’) as it was on the one hand to leave undone the murder of the oldest and debasement of the more recent ancestors – these deeds were categorically and undeniably *commanded* – it was on the other hand just as impossible that deeds done in obedience to those commands should remain unexpiated. In other words – and we ask that this paradox not be laid at the door of us, the later interpreters – *what was commanded was at the same time forbidden*, and fulfilment of the command had unambiguously to be avenged in order that the insulted ancestors not be robbed of a modicum of justice. And it is this avenging that we see on the first eight panels. They clearly show eight stations of a beating down. The other eight show nothing but enlarged faces, and these almost all masked with wide-open, hence yelling, mouths. Out of these ascend little rhinoceros-like figures, not dissimilar to Greek depictions of the dying yielding up their *ker* of death – the only detail that Elliot, as he admitted, never interpreted (to say nothing of lesser Molussiologists such as myself).

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Room B, which we enter over the still recognisable threshold, also displays a frieze running around all four walls. A first glance shows that the pummelling has ceased. While the two figures on the first four panels are not yet free, let alone happy, but rather disoriented and bewildered as the unspeakable torment is suddenly lifted from them, now they seem to hover helplessly in a void reaching out for a handhold. These helpless beings are depicted on panels 1 – 4. But from the fifth panel on, we can follow ever more clearly what once occurred in this space. The seekers have now found something, their hands land up amidst hair, breasts, faces and thighs, whatever they touch they clutch at and pull close. Just now they were dazed from lack of sleep, blind, deaf, incapable of discerning what was going on. From panel 5 we see unambiguously that their bodies and those of the strangers have found each other, a savage amatory tussle is in train. In fact the depictions of couplings in various positions (panels 5–16) are of such magnificent shamelessness³⁴ that they leave all similar attempts in the history of European art in the dust, as timid and ridiculous botches.³⁵

³⁴ Photographic reproductions of the friezes may be obtained from the Pictorial Archive of the so-called Transformatorium, Molussia, off Madras, Asia.

³⁵ Not without a chuckle, we note that Elliot called several of the positions ‘most instructive, indeed’, which allows the surmise that either they were quite unfamiliar to him, or that he had forgotten them. The idea of the old man surveying and describing these reliefs frame by frame together with his daughter is ‘most

The fact that no less than twelve panels of ever more novel, ever more licentiously entangled, ever more ornamental and complex configurations were felt necessary to illustrate this orgiastic phase is evidence not so much of its duration (of that we know nothing) but rather of the importance accorded to it, and the insatiability of the two men's craving to procreate themselves in the tangle of body parts, and the consolation, following their visit to the realm of the dead and the pummelling that avenged the visit, in finding themselves reconciled and reaffirmed back in the world of the living.³⁶

I use the word 'consolation' in full knowledge of how surprising, implausible and feeble it must sound after all that has happened, and is happening at the moment – it sounds inapt even in my ears. But the last two panels show indisputably the two sons in a state of calm content. In addition we must clearly appreciate that having passed through the nadir of the ceremony, the life-trajectory of the two men now trends slowly back upwards, the first stirrings of joy are felt, and they are already restored to the realm of the living. Of course that realm is still a dark, rank and subterranean one, but there is no doubt they are 'back in the world'. 'And anyway,' the possibly naïve, but possibly also not so clueless daughter of Professor Elliot says, 'what could be sweeter and more consoling than the beginning of such a return?'³⁷

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Before we set foot in Room C (as said, we rely here in general on the *Green Travellers' Guide*, for I myself have never been to Molussia) we must pose a question – a question, note, and not an insight, for our answer will remain quite general. What niggles at me, and no doubt not just at me, is the fact that on this journey from the realm of the dead to the realm of the living, the principle of the Feminine plays such an important role. The salvational and redeeming function attributed to Woman in the 19th century (e.g. in *Faust II*, and by Wagner) cannot possibly have existed in the Molussia of the second millennium before our era. Does not the role played here by hierodules contradict the fact that the ritual of ancestor murder applied solely to male ancestors? Room A posed no such question, for the reliefs showed males taking revenge on the two brothers who had dishonoured them. But women, in this context? This is our question, a question that Elliot, as he often acknowledged, was unable to answer. All I can tentatively offer is the notion that the two men are actually in danger, or have been in danger, of falling victim to the ancestors they desecrated in such a cursed manner. Perhaps the fundamental notion behind the Molussian orgy is that salvation from the perilous revenge of the ancestors and their envy of the lives of their great-grandchildren can be ended only by a countervailing power, namely the chthonic power of the maternal and the feminine. In fact, if one considers valid the matriarchal primacy hypothesis, this power represents an older authority than that of the fathers, and even apart from this remains a constant presence as an eternally proliferating power. In other words, what the reliefs show is that only when the two men hide in the darkness of an embrace can

amusing, indeed'. But we cannot claim that the accuracy of his depictions suffered from any probable prejudices or ignorance on his part. In this case the professor triumphed over the puritan – no small achievement.

³⁶ The fact that the Molussian language knows only one and the same verb for 'love' and 'affirm' is more fruitful philosophically than many a fat volume on the metaphysics of love.

³⁷ *Green Travellers' Guide*, p.167.

they make themselves unattainable and untraceable by the (long since impotent) vengeful spirits of the forefathers. Only when they let themselves be seduced by the 'eternal Feminine' can they return from the sterile darkness of Hades to the light of Life. This explanation is, as said, a quite tentative hypothesis, mentioned neither by Elliot nor by his daughter in her *Green Travellers' Guide*. Both investigators restrict themselves to a plain description of the reliefs, laying emphasis of the fact that the successive panels reveal a complete change in the *tone* of the two brothers. Which is true, but it hardly satisfies our thirst for knowledge.

A door leads directly from Room B to Room C, a bathroom in which even today there stands undamaged the almost swimming-pool sized tub hewn from stone, the tub in which the two men find calm after the wild orgy that now lies behind them, and in which they can wash off the impurities that have besmirched them since they first entered the Underworld. The wall panels show that they did not attend alone to their cleansing, but were seen to by old women whom we Europeans might designate as 'conductresses'; pail after pail of steaming water was poured over them; and having climbed from the tub they were laid out on the flagstones to be massaged by beefy males kneeling over them.

The question of how long this stage lasted remains, as usual, unanswerable. But what happens next is known: they are carried by the masseurs into the adjoining Room D and laid down on prepared cots, on the two rug-covered beds that stand even today in this room. No doubt the two men have now reached the uttermost nadir of exhaustion, a state of total relaxation, for on the first three panels we see them with eyes closed. No doubt they are allowed to sleep here; at the very least nothing more is demanded of them for the moment, and clearly they are left unmolested, or almost so. Of course, if the room was so well lighted then as now, it would have promoted not so much deep sleep as a doze, an assumption supported by panels 4–8, which show two female musicians, a flautist and a lyre-player (both girls, dressed very modestly compared to the women in Room B) who entertain the two men with their playing. The plinth, three steps high, on which the girls sat still exists, as well-preserved as the six holes in the clay floor that clearly result from the two tripods on which they sat.

But we may doubt whether the two men paid great attention to the music being played for them, for as said, all panels show them with eyes closed; which allows the inference that the musicians produced mere *background music*, that genre of which we are supposed to remain unconscious and whose existence only becomes noticed the moment it ceases. This is no theoretical hypothesis, for panel 9 shows the simultaneous cessation of the performance and the awakening of the two men: the girls lay down their instruments and the two men sit up rubbing their eyes. In panel 10 the musicians have left, only the two men are seen standing, each holding a *peplos*, obviously a clean gown, preparing to put it on. In panel 11 the girls are back, this time not to play music but to place little tables by the bed. In panel 12 the girls, their duties clearly not limited to music-making, are again missing; they return in panel 13 to place trays on the tables. We see baskets of fruit, jugs (the contents of course unidentifiable), and bowls filled with little objects that according to Elliot resemble *krosa*, a shortbread delicacy still to be found in Molussian cake shops.

We naturally expect the next panel 14 to show the men eating, but are disappointed: this panel, for some unknown reason perhaps connected with a taboo, is simply omitted, and the final panel 15 shows us a back view of the men leaving the room hand in hand, clearly setting out on their homeward journey. The girls, meanwhile, have retrieved their instruments, apparently to play a couple of farewell themes, though this is not certain: they might just as likely be welcoming the entry of more clients, the next fraternal pair, with the same melodies with which they welcomed 'our' brothers. For let us not forget that our pair are but two of an uncountable multitude, the stream of brothers never lets up, preceded by a myriad of brothers who have trodden the depicted path, to be followed by a myriad more. But we are not concerned with these newcomers; we shall stay with 'our' pair, accompanying them on the final stretch back home.

*

The two returnees from the Underworld now climb the steep alleyway back to the city, hardly identifiable as the two fearsomely masked creatures who twelve hours before had headed down the alley, dragging buckets and hammers noisily over the paving. The two young men now step out carefree and debonair. Clearly they give no thought to the heavy masks and tools they left behind underground, and Molussian citizens seem to have just as little notion that these are the same two men a merest glimpse of whom they had avoided like the plague yesterday evening. In any case, wherever the two men are seen or heard approaching, or when they are merely rumoured to be about to pass by (for news of their return speeds ahead of them), windows fly open, men, women and children crowd at the sills, and shout and wave greetings. And although the words of greeting are formulaic and are to some extent part of the ceremonial proceedings, they are nevertheless enthused and happy, presaging the completion of the ceremony.

And when the two men at last approach their own home, the giant clay figurines that spent the night in the open in lieu of themselves and their late father have already been cleared away. The family members are formed up expectantly in front of the house. All, even the widowed mother, bow deeply to the pair as they come to a halt, and they in turn bow to the family. And one and all cry out – we take no responsibility for the vapidness of the words; they are taken once again from the Tablets, which depict the Return Scene with great gusto – they all cry out: *Now the family's whole again!* Yes, they cry 'whole', this is the word specified for the occasion. The fact that the body of their father lies a few yards off awaiting burial clearly conflicts not in the least with their sense of wholeness. Not by chance do we find even in today's Molussia the abhorrent proverb *Families are always whole*. The link is obvious between this proverb, and the strict taboo on remembering the departed any longer than strictly necessary. Regardless, the complementary demonstrations of reverence and the cry *Now we're whole again* are the concluding fixed phases of the Ancestor Murder ceremony. A few minutes later the two groups are mixing, they hug and kiss and all set off to perform their daily duties; and the play is finally over.³⁸

³⁸ Every reader of our text must surely be amazed that we deal not in the slightest with the father's funeral, of which we know only that it was to take place on the same day. But what we omit is only what was omitted from the tablets and the Challenge. It cannot be by mere chance that not one of the documents depicts the proceeding, and three make absolutely no mention of it. Clearly the funeral, in contrast to the depicted scenes,

ANNEX 1

Of course an explanation is needed of this sudden halt to the information – what Elliot termed a *negative explosion*, which must appear incomprehensible to those who are not professional anthropologists or ethnologists. How is it possible, most readers will ask, that all four reporters go on strike at the decisive moment?

But the question is naïve, for two reasons.

First, the authors of the Tablets were not reporters as we understand the term today, and maybe not even story-tellers writing for a thrill-seeking public. The intended readers and purpose of the depictions of the ceremony can only be guessed at. But surprise at finding ourselves left in the lurch at the climax of the events is truly naïve, not least when we consider that the approach of our European novelists until well into the modern period was not at all so fundamentally different from that of their archaic colleagues, for at the very moment when the breach of a taboo should have been depicted, a total nullity was trotted out. If we ignore the literature of the last two decades: what romantic novel, otherwise so explicit, ever failed to leave blank the climax towards which they steered us, i.e. coitus? The Lucians, de Sades, the Lawrences can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Have most not fobbed us off with generalities, or with three dots hinting at something unspeakable now taking place? And have they not picked up the thread of their narrative at the moment when the rays of a rising sun show the world restored to decent order?³⁹

What we find in reports A to D is in principle no different. Since the uttermost taboo, or the ritual breach of the uttermost taboo, commences with the reaching or climbing into the niche and since representation of the Forbidden is hardly less strictly forbidden than the Forbidden itself, the report writers leave us in the lurch. There is no denying that a contradiction exists between the detailed depiction of preparations for the breach of the taboo, and the total renunciation of any description of that breach. If it is true, as Franz Müller suspects,⁴⁰ that the authors of the Tablets were also concerned to rescue a ritual, already beginning to lapse in their day, by fixing it in writing, then by omitting the climax of the rescue operation, they themselves sabotaged it. Of course there is nothing exceptional in that. For in the breast of every conservator a battle plays out between the desire to eternalise tradition, and the fear of falling foul of even a single taboo or esoteric principle; a battle that belongs in essence to the dialectic of every tradition. Inevitably one or other of the two desires always comes up short, and this applies no less to the four Tablets than to most documents in the histories of magic, religion, and in particular the Mysteries. One may with a grain of salt assert that Tradition mostly downplays what is most important, and even to some extent views it

was a quite trivial matter. The neglect of what for us would be the most important phase of the ceremony can only be noted; we are as little able as Elliot to explain it.

³⁹ Of course for a long time now, latterly in the beloved 'Life Philosophy' of the past half century, the Unspoken was taken to be the Inaccessible, not the Unspeakable; something that *cannot* be attained by language, not something that *may not* be so attained. But are not modern Irrationalist theories that dispute the competences of language in the end no more than shamefaced versions of taboo anxiety, meaning: evidence of anxiety about taboo anxiety, and proof that admitting to being *unable* to do something is more tolerable, and less prejudicial to honour, than not being *allowed* to do it?

⁴⁰ *Writing as Rescue*, Frankfurt, 1950, p.37.

with suspicion, while what has entered into the treasury of traditions is of second or third degree importance. Even Plato's famous mention of the "unwritten doctrine" in the Seventh Letter seems to point in this direction.⁴¹ History has hampered its self-knowledge not only out of forgetfulness, but also out of shame, fear, pride, and other motives for silence and concealment.

ANNEX II

What is <gory>? This term appears already on Tablet D, exactly in a place where other versions use the Molussian equivalents of 'work', 'ritual' or the like. It means in Molussian (in fact is still normally so used today) 'song' or 'piece of music'. At first glance it cannot have this meaning here. On the other hand, a slip of the pen or a misspelling are equally out of the question. Numerous stonemasons laboriously hammering their texts into granite cannot possibly have allowed one and the same error to 'slip into their chisel', not once but again and again. What's more, Tablets A and C also employ the same expression, albeit only once. What can this peculiar Molussian word be up to?

The only scholar to have taken a stance on this perplexing problem is McObreen.⁴² While he did not solve it, he at least pointed in the right direction. "For is it not the case," he asks (based solely on the Tablets, before the discovery of our new documents), "that cultic events were always clad in music, and in such a manner that it remains unclear whether it was the sequencing of the event that articulated the progress of the music, or whether the sacred music lent its articulation to the sequencing of the event? And," he asks, referring to Max Wertheimer's work on Gestalt psychology, "were not ceremonies accompanied by music always experienced as a whole – where once again it is unclear whether it was the wholeness of the ceremony that made the accompanying music into a whole, or whether on the contrary the wholeness of the music lent its character to the ceremony?"

McObreen's terms 'wholeness' and 'articulation' are in fact the key. If we were to pursue his thoughts farther, we would have to ask: must the word <gory> apply solely to 'a piece of music'? Might it not denote any sequence of convincingly articulated events that is perceived as a whole? And one that is not primarily concerned with the acoustic? Might not the word acquire a breadth of connotations like, for example, our word 'rhythm', which can be used in all kinds of non-musical contexts, even though its core meaning lies in music? Is it not conceivable that in the richly articulated ritual process of the Ancestor Murder the tempi, changes of tempo, mutual balancing of elements, tensions, surprise effects and the like were similarly arranged and composed to form a whole, as in a musical sequence? This conjecture seems to me all the more justified in that from time to time, as I read reports of the ritual, I had a sense that its style, its syntax, its contrasts were infected by the 'musical' life they were informing us about. As, for example on Tablet B, the half presto, half ritardando entry of the two rhinoceroses passes stylistically into the ostinato of the hammering, and this in turn, at

⁴¹ The doctrine states that nothing of importance should ever be committed to writing. [Tr.]

⁴² In *Molussian Studies*, p.409 ff.

once oppressive and liberating, makes a pause that corresponds to the caesura following the removal of the name slab. Hence with a modicum of goodwill one can sense that inherent in the text too is something convincingly musical. Anyway, what stands out for me is that to my mind the sons were in a position to conceive the course of the various elements of the articulated ritual work as a whole, much as a musician can keep in view as a whole a symphony with all its changes of themes and tempi, its surprises, its numerous phrases long and short, retain them in memory and be able to reproduce them all. If this hypothesis is correct, then it is possible that the two men can endure the entirety of the dreadful ceremony only because, for them, all the separate elements taking their course represent a convincing Whole; they can imagine it as a Whole, and are able to reproduce it.

What I have in view here is not so much that the thing we call a 'work of art' emerged from (often shocking or even dreadful) ritual events – which is pertinent, but merely a truism. What is important in this connection is rather the fact that we can endure, and even enjoy, something shocking (for example, an overpowering piece of music) insofar as we perceive it as an orderly Whole. It reaches a point where, expressly in order to enjoy it, we intentionally subject ourselves to the shock, and even produce symphonies and tragedies, for example, explicitly to generate enjoyment through overpowering and unbearable stimuli.

Now, we have no indication that, at the dawn of history of which we are reporting, people went so far as to find the overpowering enjoyable. But I do think nevertheless that the Molussians aimed to make the truly shocking *tolerable* – by lending it a psychologically convincing and articulated form. When, 'disdaining' to allow ourselves to be 'destroyed by terror',⁴³ we accompany a funeral with music, we are doing something quite similar. Of course, in the Molussian usage the music was not separate, no mere garnish to the ceremony. Rather it made of the ceremony itself a <gory>, meaning a fully articulated and (for them) perceptible Whole, and thereby in a certain sense something that can be mastered. Let one inwardly digest this word 'mastered'. For do we not also speak of 'mastering' a piece of music or some such other thing that overwhelms us? But as we do so, we master not only the musical work of art alone, but also the superior power invested in it. More precisely: through Art we master, in reality or apparently, that which masters us – and that 'mastering' is called 'Art'. The necessity, and the drive, somehow to overcome what threatens to overcome ourselves is the wellspring of Art, which in its earliest days had no 'art objects' of its own but worked directly on the unbearable. In fact, the root of aesthetic enjoyment is the enjoyment of the (real or apparent) liberation achieved by this overcoming.

But these thoughts lead us far astray from our theme. What we have here, at least as a hypothesis, is primarily that the Ancestor Murder ritual with its successive steps and modulations would have presented to the Molussians an articulated, holistically graspable and manageable event. Which is not to say that we would be able to perceive what the Molussians perceived. We are in fact seldom capable of achieving an overall grasp. The transition from one point to the next in a ceremony may be obvious – and here too our representation seeks to trace the inner plausibility of the ritual. But mentally to master or even to 'enjoy' the Whole is beyond our own capacities. I

⁴³ Rilke, *Duino Elegies* #1.

emphasise this, because in the course of reading the sources and writing this text I repeatedly felt frustrated at continuing to be ‘unmusical’, meaning that I did not understand the musical qualities of the ceremony I was reconstructing, that the tempi, the caesuras and the segues seemed unconvincing, to the point where my fingers would itch to intervene editorially in the sequence of events presented in the sources, to correct a tempo or remodel unattractive proportions – temptations to which as a scientist I could of course never give in. But now and then during my reconstruction, I felt as a musician would feel if tasked with performing in public a long piece of exotic music to which he was unable to feel any inward connection. I do not see why my audience or readers should be any more ‘musical’ than I. And so I must ask that, if they should come upon places that seem to them ugly, they blame not me but the Molussians, or rather, that they ascribe responsibility to the great distance that separates them from Molussian culture.

ANNEX III

Some comments on the apparent artistic qualities of the document are called for. Not only have the international mass media pontificated freely on these qualities – who can say how many times the words ‘musical’ and ‘Orphic’ have flown through the aether! – but so has Elliot himself. Let no one brand us disrespectful when we assert that he, no less than the journalists, fell victim to an illusion. I too fared no better initially: at first reading I too was unable to resist the urge to experience deep emotions. For days I believed that the text spoke in primal tones, by means of which collective Antiquity resounded across the millennia directly to *me*; and that for centuries whatever had presented itself as ‘poetry’ was, compared to this document, no better than a bloodless, non-committal and implausible concoction by individual latecomers. At the risk of being regarded as a disrespectful and hardened philistine, I must confess that these initial emotions now seem to me suspect, and I resist with all my strength the temptations of this first impression. With good reason: for nobody can deny that the peculiar beauty of such linguistic documents (insofar as they really are beautiful, which is debatable) – their peculiar beauty can only be recognised and evaluated by those conversant with the *profane idiom* to which this document is a counterpoint. Only knowledge of the gulf between everyday and elevated diction – such as sacral speech – would equip us to sense and appropriately evaluate the document’s solemnity, ‘profundity’, or beauty.

But since none of us is conversant with the Molussian Everyday and its idiom, and since none of us (including Elliot) knows anything of the gulf between the two modes of speech, it follows that nobody (including Elliot) can orient himself and grasp the ‘artistic’ qualities of such strophes. Moreover, the language of the document is no doubt extremely *archaic*. But the Archaic is not amenable to interpretation, and whoever claims to interpret and find delight in it is (without any clear notion of the fact) delighting in something quite other, namely the shock that earliest times produce in us by their refusal to manifest themselves. Whatever we don’t understand we interpret as

transcending ourselves, as sublime. In short, when we believe ourselves overwhelmed, this is nothing but a misprision of our own ignorance, our own inadequacy.⁴⁴

It may be objected that it would be no great task to remedy our ignorance of the distant Everyday through other historical methods, by turning our focus to a 'history of the Everyday'. There can be no objection to such a goal, and if it should be possible to tack in that direction and write a *History of the History that History has covered up*, then the attempt should of course be made. But it seems naïve to place too great a hope on such attempts. The very formulation 'History of the History that History has covered up' suggests that the past does not on the whole offer new perspectives. The 'past' handed down to us by History has already been 'passed' through many layers of sieves – material already selected and sorted by the historical process, including that which lies closest to our hearts. The history of the – for the most part unhistorical – Everyday has for the most part been destroyed, by History itself. Without question, History is a process of continual self-liquidation, a kind of endless 'ancestor murder'. And we, the grandchildren toiling away at History, seeking to summon up what has been, must come to terms willy-nilly with the fact that this Ancestor Murder is almost totally beyond recall.⁴⁵

Our ignorance of History is thus not merely 'ignorance' (of something actually knowable), and not merely the consequence of a deficient selection of historical pointers (which might be substituted ad nauseam by better ones), nor, finally, merely a random historical fact (which might equally well be another). Rather, since History as a transmission process is already a process of sifting and discarding, it necessarily condemns us to an absence of knowledge of what has been sifted away. In other words, *our ignorance of History belongs to the essence of History itself*. That which transmission passes on to the next and later epochs as 'permanent fact' is always only that which, in its own eyes, is prominent. This is what we are allowed to know, in contrast to the Everyday, not to mention the gulf between the two which constitutes the acme of every historical situation.

In a certain sense, this sieving and selecting that condemns us to ignorance can be termed 'falsification'. And because the prominent fact selected by History does not necessarily represent, for example, a moral or spiritual optimum, but at best that which comes to the fore on the basis of its dominion over what is ephemeral, anonymous, monotonous, powerless, the blame for this falsification (if we may speak here of 'blame') falls not so much on 'History' (for who is that?) as on the respective *power-holder*. How far such power-holders may have falsified, or falsify, or act in bad faith – it matters not to us. For in every case it is they who give rise to the deception, since it belongs to the mechanism of power that the possessor thereof can himself seek to conserve the justice

⁴⁴ The same applies, of course, not only to Molussian documents. The everyday life and everyday speech of other defunct cultures, even those (e.g. Mediterranean) with which we have the closest connections because without them we would not be who we are, are unknown to us. And yet we never tire of expounding on the beauty of their artistic and literary products. More skew than true.

⁴⁵ Ridiculous as it may sound, it is only where a culture comes down to us, not through History but as the result of a natural catastrophe seizing hold of one historical day and fixing it forever (as in the case of Pompeii), that we have by chance a comprehensive image of the Everyday. For just as Nature in its blind cruelty destroys the sublime along with the Everyday, so in certain circumstances does its blindness graciously preserve the Everyday along with the sublime.

of his claims and the glories of his dominion. It is this mechanism that determines the criteria for sieving and discarding. In other words: the decision as to what we may or may not know of History was made in the power struggles of bygone days. Only History's victories enter into History, only those who were once subjects of History have survived as its objects, as components of History (whether tradition or science). The utterly defeated, on the other hand, the exterminated, no longer belong in History. They are not even missing from History. Those who once were oppressed, defeated, driven out, or ignored are now once again oppressed, defeated, driven out, or ignored – by History.⁴⁶

But however dubious we may find all these falsification processes and actions that play out in History, it remains a fact that, without such falsifications, transmission would not be true transmission, and History not true history. If History wants to continue on, it is fundamentally impractical to carry with it all the baggage of its past. On the other hand, every now and then, in order to proceed with confidence, History has to load up with an invented past. So it is necessarily a history of its own creation and own forgetting, and from time to time even a history of its own retrospective garbled self-production.

This places the intentions of historians, even our own, in a highly peculiar light. For in their efforts to unveil History, to conserve or even refute its ongoing Ancestor Murder, they operate counter to the living fundamental principles of History. In a way, they too falsify – for a second time – as they struggle against and try to refute the falsifications that comprise History.

But this refuting, this second falsification, is not simply one contingent historical event among others. By inaugurating a new epoch, indeed a new kind of historicity, it becomes the essence of History. For History is not only a sequence of various events and epochs, it is also a sequence of various *kinds of History*. The emergence of the first historians whose successors we are, brought a new kind of History into existence – just as a person who pursues his own history or even sets it down in autobiographical writings is creating a new kind of historical existence that colours the actual past. Once you internalise this seemingly paradoxical thought, it becomes crystal clear that the object of our investigation is not just any old historical subject. Since, as historians, we strive against the self-liquidation of History, even while the principle of self-liquidation is incarnate in the Ancestor Murder, this becomes not only our theme, but its polar opposite.

⁴⁶ There is in fact no such thing as 'Slave History' – not only in the secondary sense that there is no such formal scholarly theme, but in the more fundamental and tragic sense that without a minimum of freedom (embodied in a minimum of power) no history can arise, and so it is intrinsic to the situation of the Unfree, as one of their Unfreedoms, that they are denied any opportunity to pass their existence down to posterity, unless as 'co-historical' bit-players in the history of the power that they serve. If anyone wanted to write a 'History of the Unfree' – and to a large extent a History of the Everyday would tend to become a history of those condemned to anonymity – there would be no documents of their own to refer back to, rather only those of the ruling powers that extol and eternalise *their* names. If anyone did succeed in writing such a history, it might be asserted that the formerly 'unhistorical' (or merely co-historical') have entered History now only as an afterthought. There have been some such re-historicisings, when formerly unfree groups have attained a certain measure of autonomy and power – and hence become history-competent and history-justified – and so are able to construct a pseudo-mythological version of their past.

ANNEX IV

It would of course be pleasing to close with this interpretation of the ‘challenge’. It is irksome that we scientists cannot allow ourselves such conclusive pleasure. There remains a suspicion (which I do not share, or only half-heartedly) that cannot simply be brushed aside as a *quantité négligible*, especially as it stems from the work of Karl Andres.⁴⁷ Until now I have refrained from addressing Andres’ arguments, for fear they might prejudicially weaken Elliot’s and my own. Now that I have laid out the task and Elliot’s and my arguments, I can no longer justify holding back. The concern is as follows.

Andres suspects (I say ‘suspects’ rather than ‘knows’ or ‘proves’) that the actual performance of the ceremony by our two ancestor murderers did not seem to them nearly as serious or disgusting as Elliot’s and my descriptions may have suggested. How does Andres come by this suspicion?

We respond as Devil’s Advocate, i.e. with the arguments that Andres himself adduces.

Andres begins by considering what we too have considered, namely the vocable <gory>. The astonishing fact that Tablets A and C and especially D designate the ritual as <gory> led even me to expand the narrower meaning of the word (‘song’) and include under <gory> every artistically configured production, every performance perceived as a whole. Andres, as said, mentions this point.

Secondly, Andres continues, and here we have his decisive argument: we cannot simply overlook the fact that the ancestor murderers, when they vanish into the Realm of the Dead, betray not the slightest apprehension about the task before them. The hesitations mentioned in the Tablets must have been nothing but suspense-enhancing *ritardandi* specified in the ceremonial script itself. But when we consider, says Andres, that, by the very nature of the operation, each ancestor murderer engages in the ceremony only once in a lifetime, their assurance as they set about the task seems remarkable. The suspicion must therefore arise that the two of them knew the ceremonial <gory> by heart before embarking on it; that they had already ‘mastered’ it as soon as they set about it in earnest. We must therefore conclude, he continues, that they had undergone regular practice and rehearsals, much as we might rehearse the role we are to ‘play’ in an actual performance. While we have no evidence of such rehearsals, he says, this is not surprising, for ‘who would be interested in handing down such evidence?’ The selection of what is handed down is never random, but depends always and entirely on whether some power-centre felt some benefit in transmitting and ensuring continued knowledge of a fact, or not.⁴⁸

But if the hesitations and suspense-building that permeated the ceremony were detailed and prescribed and hence, being detailed and prescribed, belonged to the category <gory>, then the thought arises that the real function of the prescribed emotions was to take the wind out of the sails of any ‘authentic’ emotions. It is quite conceivable that the actualising of such commanded or preset fears was meant to have

⁴⁷ Karl Andres: *Tractate on Earnestness*. Tübingen, 1950.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.63.

a similar effect to the fulfilment of every other commandment, and that the obligatory experience of pretended emotion effectively suppressed the emergence of real emotion.

This train of thought, in particular the probability that the <gory> of the Ancestor Murder was rehearsed, puts the attitude displayed by the pair during the 'gorious' ceremony in a new light: they were to some extent merely *acting* the ceremony. Whoever rehearses a piece of music a hundred times ('in play' so to speak, perhaps under conditions that mimic more and more those of an actual concert) no longer finds the actual performance threatening. For the goal of rehearsal consists in removing the distinction between the possible and the actual, between practice and the real thing, making the real thing simply one of many occasions, a repetition of many repetitions. Meaning: to render it so innocuous that the player, when the real thing comes along, need only do once again what he has been doing during rehearsals. If he fully attains the goal of practice, then he can come through the real thing in a *spirit of play*. Every note comes right, every prestissimo is perfectly achieved, the external world has lost its power to disturb. In short: nothing can happen.

What applies to musical rehearsals applies *mutatis mutandis* to ceremonial rehearsals, hence also to rehearsals of the Ancestor Murder. The state which such practice is supposed to induce, and for which alone it has been undertaken, is probably a state of play, of being able to play; hence an attitude that we (not without reason) customarily distinguish from a 'serious' attitude towards reality.

The only questionable aspect of this hypothesis, according to Andres, is whether our formulation 'what goes for musical rehearsals goes also for ceremonial rehearsals' might be putting the cart before the horse (and vice versa); whether the inference from artistic rehearsal might be invalid in the case of a ritual rehearsal; whether on the contrary the playful character familiar to us in artistic contexts must have been derived from ritual itself. It may, he says, in fact be presumption to see in 'pretending' and the play situation home-grown features specific to art. The transcendental question of the 'conditions of possibility' (rather: 'of necessity') of pretend-activity and pretend emotions in the 'realm of appearance' is merely postponed by pointing to the existence of the artistic realm. Nothing is gained, says Andres, by asserting that playfulness is 'a specific characteristic of Art'. Rather we should see art as the product of a compulsion to pretend, and should acknowledge that Life develops 'unreal' attitudes based on very real grounds: namely in the cunning intent to master excessively serious situations, which are in fact beyond one's capability, by rendering them unreal. The Molussian, accustomed to singing during play-fights, and now drawn singing into battle as if it were but another play-fight, by reproducing the ceremonial text converts the real battle into a play-fight, and hence renders it tolerable and survivable. One may suppose without exaggeration that any such play-actor who falls in battle does not actually conceive of his death in all seriousness, that to some extent he suffers only a pretend- or stage-death, and when the end comes, all it means is the end of a game.

Supposedly purely aesthetic performances and phenomena such as 'rehearsal', 'play', 'shutting out the world', 'dexterity', and even prescribed affects and emotions (Andres continues) originate in the action-sphere of ceremony. If we find them today only in the arts, it is purely because they have survived only there. Humanity has constructed for itself a 'play room' that it calls 'art', which has acquired for itself such a degree of

autonomy, is so taken for granted, that the question of why and how it was constructed has grown dormant. But it was not by allowing serious ceremonial motifs to degenerate to mere play that art distinguished itself from ceremony; rather, by forgetting the play-motivations of ceremony.

The first game (says Andres) had its 'what for', and was motivated. When the Ancestor Murder ceremony – however perilous and horrifying the situation in which it was performed – proceeded with long-rehearsed pedantry, always obeying the same reliable and undeviating rules of the game, when every motion, even every emotion (as with a piece of music) followed a fixed template, it was precisely *because* the situation had become so perilous and incalculable. Or rather: *in order that* the actors in the ceremony could ward off their fear of the unpredictable, and could gloss over the horror of the situation. And if the actors took their game so seriously, it was *in order to* make the unforeseeable foreseeable, the incalculable calculable, and the unpredictable predictable; and in order to master or keep at bay what was overwhelming in the violence of their own actions. In short, the serious situation that the actors had to face was to be stripped of its absolute seriousness.

I have now conveyed Andres' theory. His suspicion that the ancestor murderers did not actually suffer so terribly under the terrors we have depicted is based on the premise that they might, must and were able to play away the terrors they had to act out. And that they were able to do so with such facility that they were not only spared the need to confront the occasion for the ceremony (the death of their father), but were able also to avoid actually living through the horror of their activity. And the dangers they were facing would have required just as little of their attention.

And anyone today who parrots the platitudinous old formula that 'Ritual gave birth to the Aesthetic', and that present day culture is merely a watered-down play-form of our ancestors' more earnest and committed activities, sweeps under the carpet the decisive fact that ceremony itself is a play-format, that it already bears within it the aesthetisizing ingredient, that it owes its very existence to escapist motives, and that its executants are merely 'reproducing' their motions and emotions. And when such a person (Andres insists) has at his fingertips, in his very pen, the expression 'reproduce', which is likewise taken from artistic practice, from music and the theatre, then he may tick this off as further confirmation of his approach.

And yet it would be an inadmissible simplification to assert that the executants of a ceremony, having only 'reproduced' the prescribed feelings, actually felt nothing, that their unease, their fear, their horror were mere simulations. The crude alternative 'either real or pretended' brings us no nearer to the difficult phenomenon of reproduction and play. Even those who reproduce music and its moods cannot be said, simply because they are playing, to be emotionally alienated. That the pianist who plays a cycle of Schumann's mood pieces is free from the moods 'rueful' or 'skittish' or however the score is annotated is no more true than that he actually feels rueful or skittish.

Imagine, Andres concludes with a very witty conceit, a musicologist from the year 5000, who discovers these Schumann pieces during an excavation. His temporal distance from the composer is roughly similar to our temporal distance from the ancestor murderers. Naturally the exact notations of emotion would for this investigator be a find of first importance. And he would have little reason to ascribe to performers

from 1850 or 1950 emotions any different to those prescribed by the composer. But if anyone were to ask him how far these emotions really existed, or how far they were only reproduced or performed, or how far the reproductions or performances themselves were meant 'seriously', the musicologist, insofar as he might understand the questions, would probably be unable to answer them.

"The situation in which this Schumann archaeologist finds himself," Andres concludes, "is our situation today when we are confronted with Molussian documents relating to Ancestor Murder. We are unable to pronounce a final verdict on the dosage of seriousness and play in these emotions. Everything hangs in the balance."

* * *

RIGONIA

(1966)

One morning – why exactly that day and not months or even years earlier I have no idea, and even the Molussians seemed totally uninterested in the question – one morning, then, news spread in the business quarter of Molussia that Rigo, the so-called ‘popular’ commodore and seasoned expedition leader who, as every adult could no doubt remember, had set off to sea ten years earlier at the head of a hundred-strong contingent in three big sailing ships – that Rigo, even though his return was already long overdue, and he had never sent back any word – that no one could even be sure if he and his hundred men had not suffered shipwreck soon after leaving port – or that he might have perished in some distant region discovered by him for the Fatherland⁴⁹

This latter possibility was clearly the more likely, and anyway, as thousands of conversations piped up on every city street corner, ever more details were brought to light. What kept coming up – it could not have been purely by chance – was a southern isle, discovered by Rigo himself, soon expanding to an entire continent, verdant, smothered in treasures, and all but undermined by precious metals. But just as often it was said that Rigo, venturing into this new continent and attempting to acquaint himself with the blessings of the local culture, might have met with certain setbacks: maybe he and his band died of thirst in a desert, or maybe – for similar instances were alas common knowledge – he was slain by primitive or ungrateful natives; again, nothing conclusive could be asserted. But on the other hand – and this ‘other hand’ never failed – there was no absolute proof of Rigo’s death and the fate of his expedition, so there was still a possibility that these proud sons of Molussia might yet be rescued. Maybe, really.

But ten years are a long time. Between then and now lay plagues, wars and earthquakes. So no surprise if among the good citizens of Molussia there were not many who could at once attach any clear details to the name Rigo, or recall any precise image of the flotilla as it set sail that evening across the darkening bay; and, let us be blunt, some, in fact, could had no recollection whatever.

We should be even less surprised, being aware that memory often requires a certain arousal time before it swings fully into action; it needs, so to speak, to warm up. And this was the case with untold thousands back then. In fact, the chances of recovered memory were never more favourable: the resurrection of the old names and images could not have been better promoted than by that atmosphere of collective anxiety and collective hope that swept suddenly through Molussia and engulfed everybody all at once. I do not mean to state or imply any suspicion that for some individuals it might have been too big a task, maybe even a spiritual imposition, to recuse themselves from the collective concern about the possibly lost expedition, or the collective hope of possible rescue, or that such an act of desolidarity might have come simply from being more than any individual could be expected to shoulder. Nothing of the sort. Rather I wish to state up front and quite unambiguously that solidarity here was an actual positive, an actual strength: namely an instrument that helped thousands who had meanwhile forgotten or suppressed the old days to regain the capacity to remember

⁴⁹ *Sic.* No main verb in the original. [Tr.]

Rigo, and once again visualise the flotilla as it sailed across the darkening bay. In other words, images that when the news first broke were in many cases mist-shrouded and only vaguely outlined soon acquired a sharper focus; names that had in the meantime been forgotten soon acquired a familiar ring, evoking the good old days.

And so, by the evening of the day when the first spark of news flared (heaven knows where, why, and from whom) and wildfire began to race up and down every street – on the evening of that first day, the population of Molussia comprised once again hundreds of thousands with vivid memories of the expedition, and many more ready to swear to having been eye witnesses as the flotilla sailed away ten years ago.

Now, no less assured than the Molussian population – honour to whom honour is due – was the stance of the Molussian government. It reacted with truly exemplary promptitude to this outbreak of rumours.

Ignoring the incalculable chances of success, and despite the enormous financial risk posed by such an impromptu enterprise, it pulled together within a matter of days (in itself a respectable feat of organisation) a second expeditionary corps, this time of five thousand men, its vast size suggesting one task only: to find Rigo and his men, rescue them, and bring them home in triumph. In fact this improvised corps, which from the quantity of beasts of burden, wagons, armaments, tents, provisions and medicines, not to mention scientists and their equipment, demonstrated how committed the government was to effect a rescue. Within just three days, this corps assembled ready for deployment at the harbour, where already – everything came together perfectly – a fleet comprised this time of ten warships and freighters awaited them. That very evening the fleet set sail, under the command of Rigo's younger brother, who as admiral and leader of the expedition achieved during those three days a popularity scarcely less than that enjoyed by his brother back in the day. Once again, this expedition, like its predecessor, headed due south. The thousands who attended the ceremonial sendoff with prayers, cries and waving arms – many were nostalgic, having attended the first sendoff and feeling suddenly transported back to the old days – they stood on the dark quayside long after the last of the sails vanished over the horizon, proud to be Molussian and incapable of going back home, simply going home as if this evening was like any other. An emotion not just reasonable, but noteworthy.

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Now – we too have left the harbour of Molussia some days behind us – the voyage of these ten sailing ships extended over a long stretch of time, several weeks in fact, and apart from the loss of four soldiers (but what are four among five thousand?) and a case of scurvy among the mules it proceeded, despite the southern heat, remarkably free of accidents and diversions.

To those risking this extraordinary rescue mission, and those who had brought it together in such a rapid and well-organised fashion, success seemed to prove its rightness. At any event, one morning a cry came from the crow's nest high above the deck of the admiral's vessel: "Land ahoy!" And Rigo's brother descried with his telescope (later made famous among philatelists by the well-known series of postage stamps) an island marked on none of his numerous charts. And not just some ephemeral atoll, but an actual solid island, its extent giving substance in the most convincing manner to

those rumours of a new continent. The crew, summoned at once on deck, stood open-mouthed: they gazed on a rapidly growing richly verdant coast that seemed to promise all the world's delights, a line whose eastern and western ends extended beyond the range of vision. To the south as far as the eye could see, a hinterland seemed to stretch out behind it – distant volcanoes and shining golden mountains offered proof. In short, they had arrived, they really were there, and every other possibility weighed in the balance before they took the matter in hand like men and pulled it all together – the possibility that Rigo had drowned on his outward voyage or that he had never made it so far south or that he had landed not here but on some other island – all such foolish hypotheses were now, for obvious reasons, not worth a mention.

They went ashore, the landscape was lush and exuberant, the earth smelled now fruity, now metallic, and so they really were in their sought-after land. The very next morning they set off, in such good order they might almost have been rehearsing an opera, armed men in the van, mules behind, then wagons, behind these the scientists, and – thanks naturally and exclusively to the genius of their leader – with such a self-evident nose for the direction they should head in if they were to rescue Rigo and his men, that no one, on the first day at least (since they encountered no natives and met with no resistance), harboured the slightest doubt, and every manjack was convinced that (as they put it) they would soon “trim Death's sails”.

Now, the matter was not actually so simple. Talk of “trimming” was misplaced. The adventure they had committed to, alas, proved from Day Two on to be bigger and somewhat bloodier than expected, not least of course because of certain primitive, ungrateful and legally ignorant native tribes, whose presence on precisely this island was no more justified than their very existence on this Earth. And the hope of finding Rigo and his men was not to be fulfilled so soon. Yet, when we look back on what they achieved in just a couple of months – on the extent of territory they traversed – on the maps they drew – on the metals they assayed and found good – on the provinces they cleared of pestilential forests, animal species and human tribes, thereby opening them up to cultivation: beside the grandeur – or let us say, with no false modesty, beside the spectacular world-historical scope of this cultural achievement, the few setbacks were naught but minor and isolated blemishes.

Nowadays everyone in Molussia knows that the political and cultural upswing and the economic boom that our Fatherland has enjoyed since those days were due solely to the discovery of the island by the daredevil pioneer Rigo, and to its laborious conquest by his brother Rigo the Second. There cannot be a schoolboy in Molussia who does not feel a frisson of awe at the sound of the island's name, for it betokens sacred ground. Yes indeed: sacred. Perhaps the word at first seems excessive to the ears of the uninformed. But if in explanation I add (having been unable to do so earlier, given the abundance of information to be imparted) that thanks to the thorough combing of the entire island, the search for Rigo and his men proved in the end not entirely fruitless – that the vanished expedition was in fact found, albeit only in the lamentable condition of smashed bones, in a narrow pass that the heroes had clearly defended to the utmost against the cowardly superiority of cunning natives – and that now those smashed bones lie beneath the simple block of granite (famous from a thousand reproductions) which in the meantime has become the National Molussian Shrine. Having added all this, I

hope the reader will concede that the expression “sacred ground” is by no means overblown pathos, and that the shiver of the *numinous* experienced even by children at the sound of the name RIGONIA (as the island is known these days, of course) needs no explanation. One may well assert that the majority of our people (which happily also means the best), when they hear the name Rigonia, actually see the two heroes there before them, and think of them with pride, with humility, with both gratitude and grief. Yes, grief, given that Rigo the Younger is meanwhile no longer among us, but, being no less of a mortal, has found his eternal rest at his brother’s side beneath the granite slab.

*

This then is the tale I wanted to tell. And I should not need to emphasize how happy I was to conclude with those solemn words. If I now replace them with a highly contradictory Afterword, the fault is not mine. On the contrary: I would render myself guilty of lies and self-deception were I to lay down my pen and act as if we might gaze carefree and with confidence into the future. Why can we not?

*

There is an old Molussian saying: “When great events occur, ordure falls never far behind”. This not exactly golden rule applies, unfortunately, to this case. Hardly had the great event “Rigonia” – truly not unworthy of a future heroic saga – been acclaimed and inwardly appropriated by the Molussian populace, with the same understanding that the simple person instinctively and with no need for study brings to any solemn affair, than ordure was already whirling, spattering this mythopoeic event like lumps of carrion. What I refer to by the term “ordure” is probably clear enough; there are similar phenomena in every country. Anyway: I mean our “intellectuals”, some of them, an inferior sort, some even employed in our higher education institutions (hence, *nota bene*, supported by tax funds), whose occupation appears to consist of nothing but poking their noses into matters that do not concern them, casting aspersions on splendid enterprises, and besmirching every nest – preferably their own.

Naturally these intellectuals would not endorse my depiction of their profession. On the contrary: they always have expressions at the ready for their activities, mostly very high-sounding and of course always totally negative, e.g. the expressions “clarify” or “unmask” or “get to the bottom of” and so on; this type never lacks for words and rhetoric.

Well then: our island, only just explored and ploughed over by Rigo the Second, had not yet even acquired its name Rigonia when these gentlemen stretched their grimy hands towards it in order to tear it away from us. I don’t mean that they had any desire to take ownership of this treasure for themselves, or that they possessed the manly urge to head there in person – that would have been worthy of a man, and perfectly reasonable. No, they simply begrudged possession of Rigonia by our Fatherland Molussia (i.e. by ourselves); if indeed a grudge was the actual linchpin of their spirit, which perversely is not (at least not primarily) interested in the target of its busyness – in effect to lay a hand and claim “this is mine”. No, that is not at all what this type wants.

To be specific: what these intellectuals did was to perpetrate under the rubric *The Rigonia Affair* (just imagine: the trashy term “affair” for a matter sacred to the Fatherland!), to invent under this insolent title the most outrageous lies about Rigonia,

and not be shy about publishing them. For example, that the first expedition ten years earlier was never undertaken – this, despite the thousands and thousands of eye witnesses, and many hundreds even today who had viewed the flotilla’s departure with deepest emotion. Truly inexplicable. Conclusive is the principle that evidence can ever only be grounded and attested in perception and feeling, as expounded both by the profoundest thinkers and by ourselves, who invoke nothing more than the public spirit. For those types, on the other hand, for our flat-headed hollow-chested intellectuals – for them this principle seems not to apply.

The fact that an entire people had seen and attested to an event that could never fade from memory – in their eyes this deserved not the slightest credence. Rather, they “established” that what millions had perceived with their own eyes was a sheer phantom; and of course since each of these vain literati put forward his own personal caprice and insisted on his own personal favourite account, each had his own approach to deconstruction. Thus, for example, one asserted that Rigo the First never lived, and so never stepped ashore on Rigonia and so could not have met his end there. That consequently the so-called “Rescue Expedition”, insofar as it made sense to speak of such a thing, was a fictitious construct; that the motives and interests behind such a fiction must be subjected to “the utmost scepticism” and “the most ruthless scientific scrutiny”. This, I feel, approaches the mystical. At the very least, it is puzzling that anyone can be bold enough to dispute the existence of an ancestor, even when the ancestor’s presence in history is attested not only by the perceptions of his contemporaries but also by the gratitude of succeeding generations, and, not least, by the consequences for which we all owe our thanks: in this case, the almost breathtaking prosperity of Rigonia, and of Molussia with it.

Now, this version is, as said, but one among many, for other “scholars” (as some would call themselves) concede the reality of the *first* expedition. But they tolerate this concession only in order to slander the *second* (which, as we recall, was improvised in great haste as soon as news about Rigo first began to circulate). They malign the latter by depicting it as having in fact been prepared by the government, industry, the navy and the army quite systematically over many months and years, while the government released the news about Rigo (the news with which our report began) only at the very last moment, when preparations for the second expedition were already complete.

Now this version exists also in a less provocative form, put forward by a “historian”, which asserts that there is no basis at all for talk of two Rigos, that the existence of two brothers is supported by no eye witnesses or documents at all. That possibly the one Rigo who did exist, and who really does seem to have been an uncommonly capable and enterprising captain, discovered the island by accident, correctly adjudged its profitability, and after a brief sojourn there returned posthaste to Molussia to alert the political class there, and eventually, after many years of preparation by the government and the power groupings supposedly supporting it, was entrusted with a second stab at the island in order (I cite our favourite historian) “in the most physical sense to conquer it and prepare it for systematic exploitation”. A version that, when one thinks it through to the end, actually proves even more shameless and insulting than the previous one. For it implies that Rigo the Second, when he embarked on his second expedition ostensibly to come to Rigo’s rescue, was actually engaged in a hunt for *his own* mortal

remains, or that alternatively, despite the existence of the ponderous, massive and truly evidential monumental shrine mentioned above, any remains of Rigo the First that might have been discoverable in fact never existed.

But why should I speak of matters that were only “implied”, when among our “historians” and “interpreters” there is even one in whose shoddy but not unskilfully composed confection we can read in black and white that Rigo’s supposed remains were actually from the thousands of baggage animals conveyed to Rigonia by the second expedition; but this case involved one particular piece of baggage *sui generis*, one piece imported specifically *in order* for it to be found there. Which our historian admittedly views as no isolated case, rather as one expressly characteristic of present-day trends, for we (as he declares in a head-exploding thesis which even to rebut would grant too much honour to this “theoretician”) – for we “live in an epoch that basically invents and produces by itself whatever it wishes to be discovered”.

To whom the mortal remains at rest beneath our National Shrine belong, to what man of flesh and blood who once trod our Earth they belong is, according to this author, unknown but also insignificant; for one fact only is certain, one fact only matters: that under no circumstances can it have anything to do with Rigo’s bones, since the supposedly lost leader either never existed, or was identical to the leader of the second expedition.

I must confess: the diverse trains of thought outlined above seem to me less than lucid. I have a feeling that I should perhaps apologise for this – although it would be otiose to declare that I bear no blame for the views I have pilloried. But there is one point to which I have a duty to respond, for everyone has a right to know why I consider it imperative to report so extensively on this tiny, and certainly ineffectual, little clique, or rather worthless gaggle. The question is all the more appropriate given that (a point on which we have not yet touched) these intellectuals are at the same time very cautious chaps, meaning that they as good as never have the courage to leap into the broad public forum, into the truly democratic mass media, in order to pour out their scorn in an obvious, mainstream and comprehensive manner, giving full vent to their lies. Why they won’t do it (and we invite them most heartily to join in) these brethren know full well. I mean they are no less aware than we are of the steadfastness of our national Molussian virtues, and they have a quite realistic picture of the echoes that their infamy would call forth, were they to shout it out too loudly. That is why, in contradiction to all our democratic Molussian customs, they hide away in tiny specialist and gutter-press publications where they can remain among themselves, to some extent beyond the reach of hostile fire.

And with that, the question of why I take these men so seriously is answered.

What makes them so dangerous is precisely their tactic of playing hide-and-seek, their preference for darkness, which allows them to be obscurantists whose influence cannot be evaluated and hence cannot be monitored. The situation is graver than ever. It is beyond imagining how many, how many thousands, of clandestine little sheets may be circulating in which this rabble spreads its rat poison, and which we cannot confront because they can nowhere be seized and closed down. Indeed, there is no truer saying, one we should take constantly to heart, than that old trusty democratic maxim: *nothing*

is more dangerous than a minority. And the threat, and our duty to liquidate it, increases the smaller and less visible that minority is.

It is not what remains hidden that is sinister, but rather what has the ability to remain totally asymptomatic. Precisely because those “intellectuals”, samples of whose detestable notions we have explored above, are not encountered at every turn is why we must hold ourselves constantly alert to their existence. And this is why my conclusion – and probably no one could coin a more lapidary warning – is the incomparable warcry that as we know originates from one of the two Rigos, but from which of the two matters not, for either one could be just as good an author as the other:

“Stay alert!”

* * *

SCHOLARLY COMMENTARY

found among Anders' posthumous papers

Since the originals of the files published here are located in far-off Germany (in the storerooms of the Museum of Ethnology), no attempt has been made to establish an authoritative final text. The enormous toil involved in such textual comparisons is in any case well known. Apart from the files presented here, we know of all those other sources – the official documents cited in our manuscripts, the decrees, chronicles, tables of prohibitions, catalogues of promises inscribed in immensely gargantuan (hence unreadable) lettering. A fact which is the basis for the rather implausible so-called “reverential hypothesis”, regurgitated uncritically by a thousand unscientific mouths as scientific truth: that the Molussians were giants. In our opinion such a hypothesis can be neither fundamentally proven nor discarded, given the paucity of Molussian cultural relics that have come down to us.

Not even the finds of improbably colossal Molussian weaponry offer decisive evidence. Mee himself, Director of the Meteorological Office under Gey XII, Mee himself, whose infamously scurrilous and *faux*-wise sayings we may consider credible, repeatedly asserts that the Molussians could never live up to themselves, or more particularly live up to their products, indeed that the history of Molussia is not a history of the Molussians; rather it consists, in the context of a fairly constant Molussian people, of a madly progressing and ever-accumulating development of Molussian products and inventions.

Be that as it may – and the implications of Mee's philosophy of history seem to us dubious and unsound – Molussian documents are inscribed in lettering of such unmanageable size that they must without any exaggeration be termed unreadable. In order to decipher a single sentence, one must pace out several metres of the document. Should the last word of the sentence be reached – and this applies most of all to the pigskin *Catalogue of Promises* – the first word is already several metres behind, and by then usually forgotten. A calculation has been made that in many cases a complete reading would, all things considered, require a trek of some 20 kilometres, a fact which certainly served the interest of the scribe, since inability to envisage the functioning of an intellectual without associating some athletic achievement was considered glorious.

If an inscribed object were to be unrolled in its entirety, then, as indicated by the proverb “The underlay of a slogan is Power”, the already-read starting point curls back on itself like an unwound spring, and the scroll rolls up with such vehemence that its power seems to lie wholly in this self-concealment. It acknowledges no hindrance to its power. It hits the reader in the face, and at last stands upright, like a pillar, or a rolled-up carpet.

So it is almost impossible to gain an overview of any larger context without risking a rebuff from the unrolling parchment, or even becoming trapped in it. The story of Piu is well known. Everyone who has been obliged even once to work with these scrolls finds the tale totally unsymbolic and frankly plausible: how he made his way into the “Hall of Words” and attempted with extreme physical exertions and the application of every hand and foot to hold open the scroll containing the government's promises, merely to compare the first and last lines of the law. “It's almost unbelievable,” he declared to the

accomplices who had lifted him in through the window, “how the material underlay seems to be the only thing that links together this cornucopia of individual promises.” When Piu became caught up in the tightening scroll and the parchment wrapped him up so that only his hands poked out and his own muffled voice called for the watchman and he was captured without difficulty and taken away, the official report stated that Piu had been overtaken by Fate because “he doubted the gigantic scroll of codified promises, trampled it with his feet and besmirched it. Let his death be a warning. Molussia must never succumb to a raw state of mistrust.”

That the scrolls are actually inscribed with letters is, as said, not to be asserted without further evidence. For centuries, as long as no one touched them or tried to unroll them, they served as heavy ballistic weapons. They are mounted as such in the Bangkok museum, as the label attests. Later they were used as works of pure surface-covering art, mostly as carpets, and most no doubt went missing through such use. They became scattered across the islands of the Ba archipelago, which had no indigenous carpet industry. It would be unreasonable to deplore the ignorance of uneducated islanders as they stepped daily through their carpeted rooms. Quite understandably they had no inkling that there was more here than just content-free decoration. For the patterns on the scrolls were now just as deprived of context, of just such mediocre contrivance and exuberance of line as any other carpet with which they were familiar.

It was, then, an act of almost sensational boldness to propose that the scrolls are neither ballistic weapons nor carpets, and that with each of these gigantic graphic designs we are dealing rather with an actual thing whose purpose (perhaps magical) remains unknown to us, unless at least to terrify and intimidate; it might have been a banner, a torch, an outstretched arm, an open mouth, etc. These technically advanced designs had, perhaps paradoxically, a Palaeolithic meaning and function; in short, we had here various individual words of a pictorial writing system. Expert opinions that were sought claimed that, while such a paradox might exist in the imagination, history showed no actual examples of this kind, for history is rational, every culture reaches its own predetermined apex and no other, and anyone who can write cannot at the same time use magic ...

The proposition that these gargantuan graphical designs convey meaning and that each image is a word is today half proven, in particular by the “Secret document on the renewal of language”, whose ruthless import Olo cited to his pupil Yegussa,⁵⁰ declaring, so the file reads:

“Sentences are unimportant; they say something, and thereby forego the best virtues of language. Music may make connections, but what does it say? Music is innocuous. The virtue of language, on the other hand, consists in the single word hoisted like a banner and carried about like a thing; in the single word that cannot be false because a thing cannot be false, for it says nothing, just as music says nothing, and yet it is like a picture that is fixed and singular, but can be repeated by all, because the word is language despite everything, and all can speak it out. And so this, the single word, is the consolidation of every art, and the gathering of all power within the smallest space. It is irrefutable, because it

⁵⁰ Olo and Yegussa are the two main characters in *The Molussian Catacombs*.

asserts nothing. It is more than affirmation, for it is magic. It is more than magic, for it is available to all. Within a few days we shall pass to the word-leaders the list of our favoured words – which mean more than all the hymns, maledictions and long-winded declarations of loyalty. There will be no more than twenty-four, since the Molussian race is terse and modest, even when aroused. And instead of a dainty five-course sentence he will find the judgement seat of the single word sufficient for the salvation of himself, and others.”

In the implementing regulations conveyed at the same time by Olo to his pupil, we find the most important part, for a prohibition is more important than a command. It says there:

“Traitors to the country are those who *say* something, say anything *no matter what*, and who want more from what they say than is offered by the single great word; rather like the menace of a crowd that wants more than is offered by the moment and the folly of a single great man. For the sacral force of the constantly-repeated word wrecks the bloviating multi-limbed sentence, which augmented by the banned word ‘hence’ pretends to universal validity, hence even beyond the frontiers, hence independent of Molussia, hence enjoying its own freedom, hence impossible for us to ban. But what we are unable to ban, what boasts of its own freedom, what is independent of Molussia: the separate, separateness, the alien, the alien principle they call ‘objectivity’. Hence those Molussians who speak in complete sentences must be closely monitored. But those who link multiple sentences together – who are much worse than the first lot – in order once and for all to extinguish the magic of the single word and who make themselves guilty of sacrilege against the divinity of the individual elements by demeaning them in their chains of many words, those Molussians are to be called out by name and denounced by the crowd: so that they learn it is the single word and the single name that conjures up impact. So that they experience this to their shame, and our salvation.”

Still not enough. The documents are legion. “Just”, for example, in the venerable ancient Molussian codex *The Revaluation of Speech*: “‘Just’ in the Molussian justice system refers not to the fact that it is just, but to the fact that it is Molussian. And that is why this justice is just.” A later part of the same codex says:

Nouns, or what until now have been presented as the ‘nouns’ of a language, are not worth mentioning. On their own they are nothing, as a horse is nothing without its rider, the wife nothing without her husband, the material without the spiritual. On their own they are nothing but an instance. Therefore it is ordered that words called ‘adjectives’ up until now, in complete misapprehension of the situation, from now on shall be called ‘strongwords’ or ‘guardwords’, for they lend strength to the words they are attached to, and protect them. They shall be called strongwords or guardwords in honour of the most powerful Molussian strongword, namely MOLUSSIEN, and MOLUSSIEN shall as here always be written in capital letters, to signify its power.

But if any should ask – and this question could be posed only by Unmolussians – ‘What is the greatness of the word MOLUSSIAN that it must be written in capitals?’ – here is the answer:

that it has no fear of any word or noun;

that it can grace every word as a splendour, a blessing, or a terror;

that it renders superfluous the knowledge of any who utter it;

that it renders all other adjectives superfluous;

that it makes any inconspicuous thing conspicuous and colourful;

that it sanctions bitterness and sweetens the already-sanctioned;

that it causes the recalcitrant who flout it to tremble;

that it consoles the wretched on whom it is bestowed; that it protects the decree to which it is superordinate;

that it connects up all the things of Molussia as MOLUSSIAN in general, for what could be better to know of a MOLUSSIAN thing than that it is by its very nature and purpose MOLUSSIAN?

This makes for Power, Empire and Glory. And in nothing are Molussians of every MOLUSSIAN stripe in the one MOLUSSIAN empire so united, and in no quality do they discover their communal power and their powerful community, as in their being MOLUSSIAN. But when used in the language of barbarians as a loan-word, it borrows from what is MOLUSSIAN to the greater honour of the MOLUSSIAN language.”

To be sure, these citations provide extensive support for the thesis that the Molussian files contain at best single words rather than texts. On the other hand we have the fact that these citations can actually be cited and deciphered, a counter-argument not to be dismissed lightly. Otto and Theodor Rax put forward the well-known thesis that even terms devoid of meaning (like *insanity*, *carpet*, *dreams*, *music* in the documents) “imply” something without in the strictest sense expressing anything; and that a much more penetrating interpretation is required than for typical objects of interpretation, e.g. already mainly unambiguous texts; that in the end the Humanities must occupy themselves not with the human spirit in a narrow sense, but precisely with its “mysterious and pre-spiritual preliminary phases”.

This thesis for the first time brought the Molussian scrolls within the fertile field of hermeneutics. The first photographic reproduction of an entire unrolled scroll, extremely miniaturised and made for purely art-historical purposes, gave a convincing impression overall of a page of text. “Whoever suspects that these phantasmagoric images form a text,” the Brothers Rax wrote, “is a rationalist of the oldest school. He might just as well take a lunatic’s scribbles for a floor plan. Here speaks more than Spirit: here speaks Existence.” And so pathbreakers became true reactionaries.

Old-style philologists on the other hand were unperturbed. Their detailed work – e.g. grapheme-counting, calligraphic comparisons – was unimaginably painstaking. And only after every one of these self-sacrificing scholars was provided with reverse binoculars did the work proceed somewhat faster and less laboriously. The letters became smaller, the texts that had been too close up for anyone to gain perspective now

receded, and exotic antiquity began to speak, Molussia emerged as a complex of decrees and prohibitions. Any translation, however complete, of course presents in some sense a diminished image, for their incalculable immensity is no doubt an intrinsic feature of these texts. Even when proportions are preserved the text becomes something else, for now it can be read without further ado. It becomes, to use an expression of Mee's, "distorted into truth".

It is regrettable that the recorded conversations of Olo and Yegussa offer so little overview of Molussia as a city and a nation. This deficiency has several causes. Firstly the public for whom the post-revolutionary Molussian Control Commission undertook publication knew the city of Molussia as thoroughly as we know our own city. Secondly, neither Olo nor Yegussa had any interest in providing a sketch of the city. To hope for the possibility of being read and perhaps even understood a thousand years later in another hemisphere, in a non-Molussian world, would have seemed absurd. Their hope for an impact was specific to one time and place, a hope founded not on empirical data but on morality. "This is our minimal theory," Olo declared one day: "anything not impossible must not be discarded. Our theory is only a small distance removed from mysticism, we discover the very last possibilities, in order not to land up in the quandary of hoping for the impossible." So the conversations of the two men were at best stories to aid understanding of what might turn out to be important for their successors. Providing us with data and descriptions of Molussia lay quite outside their intent. "Descriptions are always reactionary," Olo asserted, "because they preserve a living thing in its stock of qualities." Little as we may claim to understand such a blunt formulation, we also consider it sufficient when scenes of Molussian times or glimpses of Molussian territory emerge like islands. Olo also said:

"Typical descriptions of land, people, especially of buildings, usually of ones that stand around on our streets and in our squares from earlier times and claim to present the face of the city, feign a false concreteness. True reality is invisible for two reasons. Firstly, because it consists not of *things* but of *functions*. A reduction in Pariah wages caused by a barely visible perturbation in the markets of distant lands – this function has more reality than the paving stones that we call concrete; but it is invisible. Paving stones are only concrete because they also pave over that kind of supposedly abstract relationship. For sure we must try to translate these invisible relationships into visibility, to translate them so that we can read them correctly, can read the 'natural' as the work of human hands, and then deal with them in the proper way – as the work of human hands that we can change for that very reason."

The second wonderfully illuminating place where Olo talks of the world's invisibility reads:

"We do not see *things*, but rather *functions*. But neither do we see with the eyes, but rather with *opinions* – with opinions that others give us so that we see what they want us to see. Such opinions are power, hence reality. And because they first determine *how* we see, they themselves are invisible."

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Günther Anders *The Molussian Catacombs*

The only novel by the philosopher of the 20th century's Promethean hubris, written in the 1930s but not published until 1992, plays very entertainingly with the many ways language is perverted to serve tyranny.

Richard Bermann *The Jungle Ship*

Austrian magical realism from the 1930s depicts Orellana's pioneering voyage down the Amazon.

Paul Gurk *ToZoB-37, or, The Myth of Grey Humanity, or of the Number 1*

A techno-dystopia that unaccountably evaded Nazi censors, written in a style that masterfully matches the subject matter. When will an Anglophone publisher show an interest?!

Robert Müller *TROPICS – The Myth of Travel*

Published in 1915 (the same year as Alfred Döblin's first big epic novel *Wang Lun*), this masterpiece of Viennese Expressionism starts as a Boys' Own adventure, segues into hallucinatory explorations of consciousness, civilisation, evolution, and Viennese manners, and ends as an unsolved murder mystery. It lay forgotten for 60 years after the author's untimely suicide.

Leo Perutz *The Third Bullet*

Several of Perutz's beautifully-constructed thrillers were published in English around 1990. This title was somehow left behind. How did an obscure conquistador come to kill the Mexican emperor?

Last but not least:

Alfred Döblin *Wallenstein*

Written during the First World War, this epic work redefined the historical novel.

The Babylonian Exile, or, Pride goes before a Fall

Written just before and just after exile, this picaresque epic follows a fallen Babylonian god proceeding as a human through 1930s Europe.