Preface

The essays in part one explore the European Holocaust from a number of different vantage points. The first essay views the Holocaust in the context of cultural history, with the emphasis falling on the egocentricity of Western civilization and its continuous urge towards increasing self-affirmation. This process over time has led to that idolatry of self which, at its height, we see reflected in modern totalitarian states and mass movements.[1]

With Lawrence and Mayakovsky the focus shifts to the personal and tragic consequences of political idolatry and self-glorification. These two case studies show how it is in the nature of colonial or totalitarian states to destroy all those whose individuality cannot be fully controlled by the arbitrary and pragmatic demands of state power. Leon Trotsky, himself one of these practitioners of inhumanity, said as much in his obituary of the Russian poet Sergey Esenin who committed suicide in 1925:

> Our epoch is a grim epoch, it is perhaps one of the grimmest in the history of so-called civilized humanity. The revolutionary born for these decades, is possessed by the furious patriotism of his epoch, which is his fatherland in time. Esenin was not a revolutionary. The author of *Pugachev* and *The Ballad about the Twenty-Six* was the most intimate of lyrical poets. Our epoch, however, is not a lyrical one. In this lies the *main* reason why Sergey Esenin left us and his epoch willfully and so early.[2] (Trotsky's italics).

„The Aestheticization of the Holocaust" counters Theodor W. Adorno's view that after the horrors of the Nazi German concentration camps art and poetry could or should no longer be written: „I would not like to water down my statement that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (1966).[3] I might add here that this essay has a wider perspective of the Holocaust than, for example, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's recent *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996). „The Virus of Inhumanity" explores the impact of the Holocaust on modern Israelis.

The last essay of part one tests the extent to which we, as a whole, are still capable of healing ourselves. I should also like to acknowledge that in part one Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1967), with its philosophical latitude and wide historical perspective, has done much to encourage me in my thinking.

In part two the essays examine a number of major themes in Russian literature. The essay on synesthesia explores the metaphorical texture of Russian writing and tests Wellek's and Warren's findings that metaphor is at home in romantic but not rationalistic periods of cultural development. „Woman as Nemesis" in Russian fiction gives us a vital and, I would say, almost prophetic insight into the chemistry of the Russian mind and Russia's cultural and spiritual destiny. The next essay is surprising in that the predominance of the romantic over the mystic in Russian poetry seems to take away

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1 See, for example, Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer. Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York, 1951).

2 L. Trotsky, „Pamyati Sergeya Esenina," in *Pravda*, January 19, 1926, p. 3.

3 Theodor W. Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur III* (Frankfurt am Main, 1966), p. 125. My translation.

from the traditional religious thrust of Russian culture. The essay on paradox explores Russian literature as a reflection of historical experience.

In part three – the more whimsical essay on God aside – the essays on Borchert, Camus and Lowry try to give a sense of the disorienting and disfiguring impact of twentieth-century war on the literary imagination and on the image of man.

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