

Lviv, Always

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“Only to Lviv!” I would repeat when I was fifteen, and when I was sixteen too, as if slightly altering the chorus of that saccharine Polish tune¹ about whose existence I could not possibly have known back then. “Only to Lviv!”—that was my reply when asked where I would like to go to study.

Why there? I had only a rather vague notion of it back then, stemming mostly from its train station, from which we traveled to Prague many years ago. And that, honestly, was it. It turns out that I had always wanted to go to Lviv because I imagined it to be a train station somewhere in the suburbs of Prague. I’m afraid that I wasn’t mistaken about that.

Nevertheless, I still get excited about the fact that in 1944 the English didn’t succeed in convincing Stalin to let the Poles have it. If they had pulled that off, Lviv would have ended up on the other side of the border, and all my hopes would have vanished. The border between the USSR and Poland would have been somewhere near Vynnyky,² and thus the West would have begun just beyond it. And we would not have been allowed to go there.

Since history does not play “what if,” I not only experienced five of the most intense and poignant years of my life there, but also produced everything that I have written to this day. So, if I have a Dublin of my own, it is Lviv.³

When I write about it, I can’t help repeating myself. That said, if it is indeed unavoidable, I will attempt at each instance to unearth at least one new revelation. Without revelations, first and foremost for the author, writing ceases to be writing and becomes rewriting. And if, when I do repeat, I choose completely different words, then it won’t count as repetition.

Still, From Lviv, paraphrasing Taras Prokhasko, one can still make a few novels.⁴ Moreover, I am convinced that many novels could continue to be made from it. Lviv is novelistic, in the sense that its novels have yet to be written. Yes, I agree—a few novels have already been written about it, some

¹ The tune is *Tylko We Lwowie* (Only in Lviv), a popular song written in 1939 by Henryk Wars and Emanuel Shlechter. (Translator’s note)

² Vynnyky is a town located six kilometers east of Lviv. (Translator’s note)

³ Including Dubliany (a suburb of Lviv). (Author’s note)

⁴ Taras Prokhasko (b. 1968) is a prominent Ukrainian writer. One of his publications has the title *Z tsioho mozhna zrobyty kil’ka opovidan’*, which translated as “One Could Make Several Stories from This.” (Translator’s note)

pretty good ones among them. But how do you capture all the possible meanings of this city and its fluctuating features?

I select them at random, understanding that there will always be more.

Port City

Once I referred to it as a city-ship, now let it be a harbor.

That is, let it be a shore, perhaps the estuary of a large river, an aquatic territory, piers, docks, cargo and passenger transports, freight cranes, barges, and 24/7 brothels.

Stanisław Lem, in his *Highcastle*, mentions a bureau of the "Cunard Line" company that had models of ocean liners (the *Lusitania*, the *Mauretania*) in each window. It was located in Lem's interwar Lviv, I believe on Słowacki Street. I wonder when it disappeared—maybe 1939?

In any case, it was then that Lviv ceased being a visible port and became a secret one. It simply cannot not be a port—that was the will of its founders who had for several centuries sought a place for it exactly between the Baltic and Black Seas.

That's why so many dolphins are found on its buildings. They are the second most common (after lions) feature one finds among the city's oldest building ornaments. Maybe they are what give the city its particular fishy chill. You could assemble an entire photo album filled just with them, filling a whole photographic sea.

A whole novel could be written about the Atlantic eels in the underground river of the city's sewers: the life of an eel from the Sargasso Sea to the Shatsk Lakes, then to the Bug River basin, to the Poltava River, and then back to the ocean. It would be another *Odyssey* or another *Ulysses*. Or, at least, a poem such as this one:

It seems completely possible to me—
 the Lviv Opera was built
 directly on top of a freshly bricked-up river,
 to a certain extent
 it can be regarded as
 a gigantic river gravestone
 or maybe even a mausoleum.
 But in that case
 the most attuned musicians,
 when entering the orchestra pit,
 cannot but hear
 (that's why they have ears),
 how, in the stifling darkness within the pipes,
 filling them with quivering and droning,
 nearly moaning,
 all those eels

try to break through again
in the only possible direction—
towards the Atlantic.
It is known that eels can survive
even in sewer pipes,
thus providing city-dwellers
not only with hope,
but also, an example.

Sometimes it seems that Lviv is first and foremost an underground city. In other words, what is most essential in it continues with great effort to exist somewhere deep below us. And the orchestra pit, in this case, is something of a transitional space, a waiting or reception room, below which only the waters of the Styx are found.

Chase after two seas and you won't reach either one. Lviv's intermarium condition turned into a non-marium condition. In mid-July of every year of the 1980s, we meandered in a drunken ritual through night-time courtyards along what was once Along-the-Pipes Street,⁵ striving to unearth in the darkness at least the remnants of water mills and an old pier. It all smelled of water and slime, and it seemed that we were just about to stumble onto the Wallachian Bridge with its statue of St. John, where we would cross over to the right bank and lay down in its reeds. Small merchant sailboats from Gdansk and Lübeck silently sailed past us along the established Poltva–Bug–Narew–Vistula–Baltic Sea waterway. Salt was traded for amber and Carpathian juniper for Caribbean spices. Lviv's great nautical past couldn't keep up with us and was left far behind.

A longing for it echoes to this day—for example, along Black Sea Street, smack in the center of the Older City. Not the Old City, but the even Older one—the one where Old Rynok is to be found and towards which Fish Street runs.

Lviv's sealess state turned into a waterless condition. Water became its drama and its karma. Existence became existential, a dreary campaign involving toilets and dishwater, waiting and listening for *when they'll turn it on and when they'll turn it off* and, finally, a drawn-out dripping of hours and years among mountains of dirty dishes and overfilled ashtrays, with a stubborn stone in your throat and sharp sand on your teeth. Life became a dying in never-laundered, sticky bedsheets. A foul stench became an indispensable element of everyday life—it crawled into dwellings as if into prison cells and never left.

It is in Lviv that I first understood the meaning of the saying "to capture the water." It really was a hunt, that endless filling up of the bathtub with rust stains on its sides, those buckets and basins set up all over the place and all filled to the rim. This was hunting for water and keeping it

⁵ Now Kost Levytskyi Street. (Translator's Note)

captive. And then, letting it go—downward into the sewage pipes, down to the eels and rats, to the underground port in the estuary of the great river, homeward.

Crossroad City

This designation refers to the intersection of not only space but also of time. Thus, a crossroad is also a layering. A list of the ancient trade routes that brushed by Lviv in one way or another would not fit on the pages of this book. Lviv was conceived not only in the midst of ages but also in the middle of lands. Trade from Europe came through it on its way to Asia and trade from Asia on its way to Europe, although, in those times, Europe and even more Asia were as yet unknown concepts, and all that was known was the Old World. Besides, the very existence of Lviv triggered the subsequent division of the continent into Europe and Asia.

The city was so ideally positioned that neither caravans going from Britain to Persia nor caravans going from Korea to Portugal could avoid it. You had to go through Lviv to get from Moscow to Rome or from Amsterdam to Bombay. And not all travelers simply paused temporarily at this intersection point. Some unexpectedly decided to remain there forever. Among them were not only merchants but also traveling musicians, sermonizers, deserters from various armies, spies, soothsayers, scholars, teachers, healers, escaped slaves, and fugitive freemen. I once tried to put together a list of them all but had to stop when I realized it would be endless.

In the mid-19th century, when Austrian engineering authorities were selecting a site where to build a central train station, they were able to reach a consensus swiftly. The central train station was constructed along the line of Europe's Central watershed, that is, at a height of 316 meters above the two closest seas. Although the word for "watershed" in Ukrainian is *vododil*, the second root of which, *dil*, implies a breaking apart or division, I would once again prefer to approach this from the other side. A watershed is a geological part of the earth's surface that can be seen not only as an edge but also as a stitch, one that binds seams together, connects, and unites.

That is why Lviv is (as I have already written) a joint endeavor of both the West and the East. This time let me add that it is one of the North and the South as well.

This could best be conveyed in a novel about strange metaphysical merchants who, having gathered in some Lviv pub, take turns telling tales about the most distant worlds. They form a circle, in which each of the merchants picks up the story line from the previous storyteller, employing his motifs. What is key is that this chain of storytelling is never interrupted. If that were to happen, everything would disappear, blow away, and scatter. Thus, the novel has neither an end nor a beginning—one can start reading it on any page. It is imperative to complete the cycle and return once again to

that same page, to realize that there's now a different story at that spot, because while the reader was making his way along the circle, some of the storytellers left, taking their stories with them, and new ones had taken their place. A novel like that could contain everything in it—just as Lviv can. The name of that novel: "Rotations."

Circus City

Any crossroad tends to attract eccentric spectacles (known as eccentricacles) and eccentric people. The city of Lviv doesn't just attract them—it sucks them in.

It began with the beggars and the cripples. As if on some kind of secret mission, they crawled into Lviv during the first few centuries in such great numbers that the city leaders had to allot them all of Cripple Mountain, where they were kept in cages by Lilliputians (in wintertime they were split between monasteries and hospitals). The city provided them with Sunday and holiday dinners, always accompanied by several barrels of Italian wine sweetened with spirits. In return, the thankful beggars would provide the city dwellers with jesters' processions ("cripple manifestations") and entertaining dances by the legless on Ferdinand Square. No less entertaining for the residents of Lviv were the beggars' concerts ("hobo choirs") that were accompanied by a quartet of blind cellists enhanced by a small and portable military organ, a trophy from the environs of Grunwald.

Lviv's golden years coincided with an era of great geographic discoveries, when the people of the Old World came to realize, in awe, how exotic real life could be. It was then that pioneering showmen would occasionally appear by the city walls with their curiosities on display. Someone pulled up with an Indian savage in a cage, someone with a couple of lemurs, and someone else with a wagon filled with minerals, shellfish, and embryos. A special decree dating from the end of the 16th century allowed them to enter the city. As for zoos, they were allotted enough space in Pohulianka (not yet a park but a forest on the edge of the city). There the animals could drink from the wells of the Poltva, more accurately, from its tributary—the Pasika. Beginning in the second quarter of the 17th century, Pohulianka, was filled with the roars and howls of hundreds of fantastic creatures, like a tropical jungle. Its green glades were crushed by stomping hippopotami, elephants, and rhinos. Panthers and cheetahs loped among the trees. Hour after hour, parrots and monkeys squabbled and hissed high in the treetops.

Around that time, close to the middle of the 17th century, the traveling circus "Vagabundo" made its first stop in Lviv—a wonderfully vibrant international throng of all kinds of curiosities, which did not leave the boundaries of Central Europe for three hundred years afterward, even if it would occasionally disappear for entire decades. Anything and everything that is known about the circus can be shared in a few sentences. It had a

dynastic structure—as a result, its actors had one and the same surname for centuries. Its directors were always appointed by an Investor,⁶ an individual never seen by anyone because he controlled everything while remaining in the Swiss canton of Valais, in the fatherland of the circus trade. The last of the directors, Ananda, launched an unprecedented coup and, removing the reigning Investor, personally took over the circus. But this happened just before the days of the final collapse, when all its troupes were forced to save themselves from political repression by escaping overseas.

A novel about their last days could simply be titled “The Vagabundo Circus.”

It could begin like this: “Anomalies wandered all over the world and could not, in any manner, avoid Lviv. The anomalies were drawn to the greatest of anomalies, which had the name Lviv.”

From Lem’s *Highcastle* we know that, in his youth, he saw the final relics of the “Vagabundo.” He remembers how “countless tricksters would wander through the courtyards in those days eating fire, together with acrobats, singers and musicians, and also authentic organ grinders, some even with parrots picking fortune cards.” It is true that in the period described by Lem, a certain number of actors were expelled from the circus.

The expelled imposters (and the novel is about them) take over the circus archive, which contains the following:

- magic instructions for sorcerer and hypnotic séances
- secret plans for underground connections between the prisons, monasteries, fortresses, and banks of the 111 most important cities
- several dozen maps, handmade and printed, indicating the locations of the most famous buried treasures
- thousands of pages of incriminating evidence against prominent city officials and politicians of all eras
- other esoteric things—examples: magic wands, vinyl records featuring the voices of spirits, witches’ mirrors on which one can see porno-films, mandragora roots that were gathered by the gallows on Dogcatcher Hill.

The entire “Vagabundo” circus archive fits in one suitcase. It goes without saying that this is the world’s most valuable suitcase.

It is once again appropriate here to mention account of Lem, who writes about “traveling, clandestine, family circuses, which, together with all of their props (fencing foils, dumbbells, swords made for swallowing), are capable of fitting in a single suitcase, one that is quite frayed and made of imitation leather.”

By the way. I saw suitcases like that in the late 1960s. But only the insane carried them. So then, back to the novel.

⁶ Some experts are inclined to explain the concept of Investor by the word InWestor—somebody who is in the West. (Author’s note)

Obviously, a hunt for the suitcase containing the archive ensues. And at least four sides are trying to get their hands on it. They are the state security organs, a private detective bureau, an Indian brahmin preacher, and relatives of the first Investor. The imposters, who were able to sneak away and cover their tracks, finally become so tangled up in their own conspiratorial deeds that they lose the suitcase at a city dump near Zbyranka and Hrybovychi, where it gets picked through by tramps.

In the novel, the city transforms into a permanent hypnotic séance or one big attraction, suspiciously cheap and democratically open to all, with a park orchestra, jazz music, the first sound cinema, and mechanical dolls. In the novel, the city appears as head-spinning carousels, a ghosts' palace, a barrel of laughs, a string of funhouse mirrors, endless kiosks, and offices where naïve and enchanted souls of the suburban proletariat are bought and sold.

In the final scene, it turns out that the city is actually a flea circus and that all the novel's conflicts are just the hallucinations of a schoolboy sick with scarlet fever who is playing hooky in an amusement park and wanders into an entertainment pavilion where he becomes engrossed in watching a performance of trained fleas.

Swindler City

Lviv and money are an everlasting topic.

Money follows temptations. If a city fills up with temptations, then money also enters. The more temptations—bars, bordellos, circuses, and casinos—the more money. After it reaches a certain peak, it begins to work in the opposite direction. Temptations give birth to money and money to temptations. Later, they—the temptations and the money—begin to identify with one another. The accumulation of money ceases to mean anything and itself becomes the goal, one that cannot be inhibited by death or inflation. And that is exactly what happened to Lviv. There, money was uncoupled from existence and rose above it as a particular absolute.

In fact, because it is located in an unhappy part of the world, Lviv is generally a poor city. Being at the crossroads of all trade routes, as it turns out, does not guarantee you substantial wealth. Especially if you are passed along hand-to-hand (another Kyiv?) twenty times a century and those hands do nothing but strip you down to your last thread.

The combination of the cult of money and poverty is very undesirable.

And it is because of this that an inversion of values came to Lviv, and basic human needs—a roof over one's head, water flowing from a faucet, heating, the minimal arrangements necessary to go about daily life—came to be regarded as temptations. Exploiting these needs became a favorite pastime for several generations. In that manner, In Lviv there emerged an entire class of the city's inhabitants that exists solely from deceiving their fellow losers. The expensiveness of Lviv, never justified and always brazen,

became the leading theme of every single letter, dispatch, and report that shocked visitors sent and continue to send worldwide.

Imagine what would happen if Lviv could attract even more visitors. If it had a hundredth of the allure that Venice has, one-twentieth of Prague's, one-tenth of Vienna's!

(By the way, there is another connection to the first of these cities—through cheating. And as familiar and accepted as Venice's cheating is, so Lviv's cheating is absurd. And thus, Lviv's swindling is now an art for art's sake—that is, cheating for the sake of cheating.)

But if it were all only just about prices! It is a matter of honor for every Lviv dealer not only to rip you off but also to screw you over as much as possible.

Lviv, beyond any doubt, is a city with its own criminal character. Researchers,⁷ however, note a predominance of soft (mild) crimes and list its four versions:

- the just-mentioned cheating in its maximum amplitude—from marked cards to the selling of real estate that does not exist
- counterfeiting, forgeries—even of completely unexpected things; not just coins, precious gems, or valuable paper, which everyone has already gotten used to, but also, for example, wax, oils, Persian rugs, rare reptiles, cocaine, other medications
- hooliganism
- prostitution

I don't know if the last two are considered crimes—in my view, on their own, they are not, although they do border on crime situationally. Instead, I would add here a mild fifth form—murder by poisoning. Although it can be seen as a subspecies of counterfeiting and forgeries, it takes on its own significance because of the fatalistic nature of its consequences. It is precisely through it that the city-dwellers of Lviv, over centuries, have developed a particular dexterity, to the extent that such poisonings are officially not even considered to be poisonings. If there were records of their actual frequency, we'd be horrified.

The direct perpetrators of these crimes are traditionally those dear and close to the victims. But they receive all that is necessary—beginning with consultations and ending with deadly concoctions—from a group of scoundrel-pharmacists who make a very considerable profit from the love of poisoning among the locals.

In a novel entitled "Lethargy", a young ambitious detective from Vienna, right-hand man of the director of the city police—Leopold von Sacher, Sr.—notices a suspicious link between 5–7 deaths. Prominent city dignitaries leave this world, one by one, in very similar circumstances—

⁷ In this case, Andriy Kozytskyi and Stepan Bilostotskyi, authors of the extraordinarily informative study "The Criminal World of Old Lviv" (2001). (Author's note)

they simply fall asleep and never wake up. Doctors always designate a weak heart as the cause of death, but this does not satisfy our detective. Moreover, through truths and untruths, butting heads with close and distant relatives, all kinds of other heirs—Jewish and Armenian loan sharks, good Catholics, envious Uniates, and, most importantly, pharmacists-competitors—he comes across a trace of that very same, rare, pharmaceutical concoction that was ingested by the dead, apparently to ease certain maladies. The detective-hero tries it on himself, taking a minimal dose—and wakes up in a coffin, in a fresh grave at the Lychakiv cemetery. This means that he too was considered to have been dead and was buried! Having been prepared for such a turn of events, he forewarned a handful of his assistants, in the event of his possible death from “a weak heart,” to place an axe and a spade in his coffin. With their assistance, in the middle of a dark cemetery night, he smashes the coffin lid and digs himself out. And now he has a case. He quickly obtains permission from the governor-general to exhume all five, or even six, of the bodies. Each of them is found in a dramatically twisted pose which attests to them having been being buried alive. So now a path to the truth has opened—chemical analyses, together with simple sleuthing, quickly bring to trial the criminal grouping known as “The Laboratory” from the “Under the Black Eagle” and the “Under the Gold Deer” pharmacies. But that is not what is most important.

Most important are the visions that our detective experiences during his 70-hour dream in the coffin, his wandering onto the other side of being, the tribulations and hindrances of the land underground. On the final page, the reader should, for a second, suspect that, actually, the hero never did wake up. And that the successful investigation and righteous trial of the guilty are nothing but a metaphorical recollection of the concept of Judgement Day.

Executioner City

According to an ancient and very erroneous human sensibility, all crimes are corrected by a corresponding and proportional criminal justice machinery that is predicated on repressions, particularly physical violence. One executor (I will return to this word later) of the latter, among others, is the executioner. Notwithstanding their officially confirmed status as legalized killers, practitioners of this profession have never been afforded warmth or respect from their fellow citizens—in fact, the opposite was often true. Executioners were avoided at all costs. If one had to (there was no way out!) greet them, one wouldn't shake their hand.

The function of the executioner is not so much to deliver punishment as to instill fear—that's the whole point. And every average non-criminal understands this.

In European cities executioners would be given dwellings far away from the rest of the populace. Nobody wanted to have such an unusual

neighbor nearby. Anyone who has looked west from the top of Mount Mönchsberg in Salzburg knows what I mean. The lonely little cottage in the middle of the meadow personifies the melancholic isolation of the executioner's position in society.

In Lviv the executioners were settled less dramatically—for example, between the walls of the Halych Gate. "Between" means that the Halych Gate was double layered, with internal and external walls. In that manner the executioner too ended up "between"—somewhat in the city and somewhat outside it. Keeping that compromise in mind, we can suppose that, regarding the shaking of hands, Lvivites did not exactly follow the morals and imperatives of European city-dwellers. It's more likely that, upon running into the executioner, they stretched out their hand and firmly pressed his as an act of loyalty. But, having just parted with him, they would run over to one of the fountains on Rynok Square to publicly cleanse themselves.

And only Ivan Pidkova, executed in Lviv in 1577, willed that even after the executioner had cut off his head, he not dare to lay a finger on him. But Ivan Pidkova was a Lvivite only in a very narrow sense—as broad as the neck on which he was punished. In truth, he was a Cossack Hetman and a Voivode of Moldova. This explains his extravagant behavior.

I will relate the pre-history of his Lviv execution, following a text of it⁸ closely but in my own words.

That ill-fated year, he and his Cossack-brethren ambushed Moldova, slyly—as it seemed to him—becoming part of another civil war in that country. After routing the Voivode Petro VI the Lamé, Pidkova took Iași and proclaimed that, from that day on, he was the ruler of the land. The Turkish Padishah Murad, who was Petro the Lamé's protector, was terribly upset at this news and quickly sent a huge army to attack Pidkova. Having suddenly realized the idiocy of what he had done, Pidkova gathered his buddies and set off on an escape to the territory of the Polish Commonwealth. But as soon as he crossed the border, he was captured and sent to Lviv. The Padishah pulled back his army but wrote to King Stephen Báthory demanding a public execution for Pidkova. Otherwise, his still-assembled army would bring war to the Polish Commonwealth. The King, although he liked Pidkova, was forced to comply with this ultimatum. It is possible that he was hoping to contrive some sort of arrangement in which the execution would appear to have taken place, but Pidkova would remain alive.

Predicting this, Padishah Murad added another stipulation: the execution was to take place in the presence of his special envoy, who was later to confirm personally, to the Padishah, that it had in fact taken place. There was no way out for the King. Pidkova's fate had been determined.

⁸ Authored by the very same, brilliant Andriy Kozytzkyi and Stepan Bilostotskyi. (Author's note)

The novel wrapping itself around this event will take the form of a diary whose author is that very same high-ranking envoy—a certain Mustafa, Muhammad or Ibrahim. The novel will include an account of his journey from Istanbul to Lviv and then of his several days in Lviv. The city authorities, following the King's orders, greet him with all the proper honors and throw a welcoming banquet. The Padishah's envoy's subsequent days and nights are no less eventful: ceremonial meals, card games, girl flutists and castrated boys, baths, incense, hashish. The diary's author, exceptionally observant, sensitive, and energetic, takes notes of his impressions in great detail. His jaunts through the city are like an encyclopedia compiled by an outsider. Closer to his last entry, however, an inexplicable dread begins to appear.

June 16th, 1578, arrives—the day of the public execution. The King, who, it seemed, had come to Lviv for just that reason, leaves the city early in the morning, purportedly on a hunting trip. Rynok Square is filled with people eager to witness this spectacle of punishment. At the scaffold Pidkova is behaving impeccably and gives a menacing speech mostly about how his Cossack blood would come to splatter all over them in the end. In conclusion, he asks for two things. The first, that his brethren, after praying over and washing his dead body, to take it out of the city without impediment. The second: the executioner be forbidden to touch him. After taking a gulp of wine and saying a prayer, Pidkova was prepared for death. However, his collar got in the executioner's way. Pidkova follows the executioner's final demand and convincingly rips the collar off of his shirt. A few seconds pass and the executioner completes his task. The narrator sees everything from up-close—a special higher platform had been erected for him from which he attentively watches, surrounded by a triple circle of Tatar bodyguards.

Then something unexpected happens. Almost simultaneously with the separation of Pidkova's head and the spouting of a red fountain from his torso, the deck that had been built adjacent to City Hall—a sort of temporary grandstand from which to watch the execution—collapses under the weight of excited on-watchers. Horrific mayhem ensues, tens of people are crushed under the boards, the square erupts in in panicked pandemonium. The Padishah's envoy manages to witness a city official displaying Pidkova's head in three cardinal directions. But what happens with it, just a minute later, he is unable to see because of the raging throng and columns of dust.

The head disappears.⁹ The envoy, who was to deliver it to the Padishah's feet in a special container, is now in a real bind. Aware that he has not fulfilled his mission, the Padishah's envoy (it is here that, by chance, it is revealed that he is actually a Turkified Greek-Cypriot) orders a fake

⁹ It was stolen by Pidkova's henchmen. His wife would later sew the head back onto the body with her own hair and this is how he would be buried. (Author's note)

head in Lviv—but, as a result of a whole chain of fatal misunderstandings, he himself becomes the victim of his own order. By the time he finds out that it is from him that the fake Pidkova is to be constructed, it is too late to escape to safety. His Tatar bodyguards disperse, and he hears the killers' footsteps on the stairs. The final words in his diary (and thus—of the novel) turn out to be the 20th ayat of the 69th surah of the Qur'an "al-Haqqah": "I knew I would be found accountable for my deeds." The novel would have the same title as the aforementioned surah—"The Inevitable."

* * *

Like in all other cities, executioners in Lviv not only executed but also tortured. A case was considered to be closed if the accused confessed to everything. The executioner had a decisive role in the investigation process. His key mission—to act as a middleman between the judge and the accused—rendered him a most loyal servant of the former and a best buddy to the latter. The greatest occupational accomplishment for an executioner was a confession by the victim delivered not because of the use of torture, but as a result of the mere demonstration of what possible forms the torture could take. The most successful Lviv executioners were the so-called executioner-demonstrators.¹⁰ When they retired, they liked to boast: "These hands didn't harm anybody."

By the way—regarding hands. One particular, scorching July, Viktor and I had meandered throughout waterless Lviv for several days in a row, searching for our friends, both male and female. The incidental results of this stroll through courtyards, basements, and attics were my "Traveler's Notes in July," among them "The Rib" and in it—"the hands of the last executioner after the twelfth sentence."

On one of those days, we made our way over to the Lviv Museum of the History of Illnesses, which was then known as the Museum of Pathological Anatomy. There, among countless examples of horrifying abnormalities, such as the oversized hearts of butchers and lovers, "the sagging and bloated lungs of smokers, trumpeters, and glass-blowers," and "the melancholy innards of drunks" (the liver!), we also saw still another noteworthy vessel, in which, preserved in formalin, were the hands of the last Lviv executioner. Legend has it that it was he who bequeathed them to the faculty of medicine and, through it, to eternity.

The fact that the abovementioned executioner designated himself to be the *last* one may seem strange. It is completely understandable that the profession of executioner has to have a chronological boundary. And being that it is a position within the magistrate—even more so. That's probably

¹⁰ Another definition of the word "de-monstrator"—to be freed from the monster, un-monstered. In the sense of metaphorically getting rid of the creature in the criminal's soul, real or imagined. (Author's note)

what that good fellow, bragging about his lastness, had in mind.

But, as a calling, the executing business does not have chronological boundaries. And even if you eliminate the position and profession, if you stop using the word "executioner" and replace it with "executor," the essence of the calling does not change.

I am referring to specific research dedicated to the handling of death sentences in a Lviv prison, the notorious Brygidki. It concerns the post-war era in the USSR, up to the moment when the death penalty was finally abolished. Moreover, I learned that Lviv, and its Brygidki, was the only place in Soviet Western Ukraine where death sentences were carried out. Not Franyk, not Chernivtsi, not Kolomyia, not Lutsk, not Drohobych, not Uzhhorod.

"The condemned were held in post No. 1," the authors of the research write, "each in their own cell. The executions would take place during the day, but only when an especially selected team was scheduled to do the work (there it is—that calling! – *Auth.*). The prisoner was not informed. One of the controllers-executors would lead him from his cell. The prisoner seldom had any suspicions regarding when "the time had come" because they were regularly taken out of their cells. The handcuffs would rattle behind their backs. If one looks at the prison building from Horodotska St. (yes, I looked! – *Auth.*), then Post No. 1 is on the right, on the first floor. The convict was led down a corridor to the other side of the building though special doors in the wall (they are now walled in). The corridor was utilized so that the condemned would not be led past everyone on the way to his execution. The controller would carry on a conversation with him, would joke around (there's that best buddy! — *Auth.*), in order to distract him and erase any suspicion. Along the way, they passed several other doors, until they got to a set of stairs that led up. And there, under the grating and the stairs, was a small entrance into a basement. The prisoner was led down into it, where members of a commission awaited him. The basement was small and had three rooms. In the first was a table and two or three chairs. The members of the commission, following procedure, would ask the convict for his basic personal information and then they informed him that his appeal for amnesty had been rejected and that the sentence would now be carried out. Before he realized what was happening, the convict was taken by two controllers to the neighboring room, in which the executor awaited. And before the prisoner got to the center of the room a shot rang out. In the Lviv prison, service weapons, including the Makarov pistol, were not utilized because of its strong ricochet. Such shootings were made with a small caliber rifle. The executor rarely had to shoot twice (professionalism – *Auth.*). The first shot to the back of the head was fatal. The members of the commission would verify the death (this was often done by a doctor) and would sign a certificate that confirmed the carrying out of the death sentence. As hardship pay, they each received a couple of extra rubles, but if that was spent on a bottle of booze, then there wouldn't be anything left

over for accompanying snacks. However, their salaries and bonuses were decent. And you'd be issued an apartment without having to be on a waiting list (and it wouldn't be some small shack on the edge of town! – *Auth.*). Sometimes a few death sentences were performed simultaneously and, in those cases, the third room would be utilized. While the controller was fetching the next prisoner sentenced to death, the corpse would be pulled into that room and the blood would be hosed down (and for this, water in Lviv was always available! – *Auth.*). The corpses were buried in a so-called special-zone, located in a village near Lviv. The authorities have recently sold this tract of land for the construction of some kind of new development (those living there now must surely be lucky—living on top of bones! Or perhaps it's the site of a new stadium? – *Auth.*). The corpses were taken away by car. They were not washed, but their heads were wrapped in cloths, so that the car's interior wouldn't get splattered with blood. The special-zone was a closed off area and a someone constantly stood guard there."¹¹

And that man will be the protagonist of another novel. It will be the intimate notes of this special-zone guard. Coming from an old dynasty of executioners, he dreams of becoming an executor, but the authorities don't trust him—if only because he is *iz miestnykh*.¹² So he grabs hold of whatever he can, for the chance to at least in some way be involved in executions. And that is why he spends his days and nights at the special-zone, burying corpses and then watching over them.

That same research about him has this to say: "He would dig the graves ahead of time. He dug them under the roof of a shed constructed specifically for this; the car would drive right up to it and no one would see what (is it now a "what," not a "who"? — *Auth.*) was unloaded from it. They would be buried without coffins. When the center of the field got filled with graves (it is he who filled them — *Auth.*), then the shed would be dismantled and reconstructed nearby. In this manner it would move across the whole special-zone. The graves were made level with the ground, leaving no visible signs of their existence. The place of burial was not made know to the families."

A while later, regarding the end of a wonderful era: "Towards the end of the '80s, the democrats, headed by Chornovil,¹³ asked if there were any special-zones in the Lviv region. Immediately there came the command

¹¹ O. Kushchii and V. Sahaidak. The publication's name—*Smertnyk ne znav dnia smerti* (The Death Row Inmate Did Not Know the Day Of His Death 2001). (Author's note)

¹² The author used the Russian phrase "iz miestnykh," meaning "local, to note that the Soviet authorities occupying and ruling Lviv after WWII generally didn't trust the indigenous population. (Translator's note)

¹³ Viacheslav Chornovil (1937–1999) was a prominent Soviet Ukrainian dissident who came in second place in the elections for the President of independent Ukraine in 1991. His death in a car accident in 1999 has been seen by some of his supporters as a political murder. (Translator's note)

from Kyiv to suspend all executions. And from then on, there were no more shootings-executions at the Lviv prison.”

From then on, Lviv loses a part of its essence: it ceases to be an executioner.

At the end of the novel, the protagonist from the special-zone does end up executing a sentence—his own. There are no more shootings, new construction slowly arises on all sides. He loses the tiniest thread of sense that tied him to existence. He has no one left but the executed. But they too are gone.

Victim City

This is a little addendum to the definition above—its opposite side and reflection.

Killings always took place in Lviv. But sometimes these killings would be massive. In truth, this lightheartedly friendly, café-strewn, and beer-filled city is a horrific pit full of human bodies. In the older districts every stone should be screaming.

Lviv is an intersection of languages, religions, and ethnicities. It’s a layering of cultures. You’ve already read about this.

However, to a much greater extent Lviv is the heaping together of anti-cultures. And there was never harmony there. If a relatively peaceful period did occur, then it only hung by a thread. Or perhaps on a spider’s web. But this spider’s web was spun not in Lviv.

The mutual, ethnic-confessional hatred, held in check only by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, burst out of control together with its—that is, Austro-Hungary’s—demise. Following the social revolutions and upheavals in Russia and Europe, a class hatred was added to the ethnic-confessional one.

In the first half of the 20th century Lviv is a war between everyone and everyone else. Otherness (linguistic or ritualistic) becomes a reason for ridicule and animosity, and later, utilizing acts of wartime, for repression, with the goal of completely removing the others. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth—the only functioning slogan and the only motivation for relationships. Each side wants a purge of the others. If not assimilation, then at least marginalization. A further variation of this *cleansing oneself of the others* was decisively announcing, or even effecting, the removal of other groups from beyond the boundaries of the city:

- of the Ukrainians—by the Poles
- of the Jews—by the Germans, the Poles, and the Ukrainians
- of the Poles—by the Soviet Russians, the Soviet Ukrainians, and the Soviet Jews
- of the Western Ukrainians—by them as well.

Fighting within Lviv was, of course, manipulated from the outside. Let us not forget that Lviv, like the rest of the part of the world it belongs to, is

located between Germany and Russia. Both of these imperialisms played their own part. By the middle of the century the city had lost almost all of its previous inhabitants. As a result, there would seem to be a decrease in the amount of hatred in the city. But it simultaneously saw a decrease in the number of languages, cultures, and continuities—the last decreased catastrophically.

All those whom I so miss in the city were either murdered, or they escaped, or they could endure no longer endure, or were never born.

For a city like Lviv, which is not so large, there are too many accursed places.

Their names—the Prison on Łacki St., Brygidki, Stalag 328—the Citadel, the Yaniv concentration camp, the ghetto, the Lysynets forest.

Once you realize how many of them there are, you finally cease asking: why is there always the sense here that these city-dwellers came to take the place of someone else?

Patriot City

Patriotism, writes my old army buddy Rost to me in a letter from Toronto, is territorial, while nationalism is cultural-linguistic.

Each of the sides of Lviv's polygon of hatred were made up of patriots of their city. They all loved its territory, loving it sincerely and devotedly. But then why is Lviv so misfortunate, why are there so many accursed places?

The dominant historical drama that runs through Lviv over the centuries is the battle for "national proprietorship," mostly Polish-Ukrainian. Whose city is it? Ours or yours? Polish? Ukrainian? The battle is older than those very nations as they are defined today. It is older than the city. The city is its manifestation. It needed such a city in order to have something to dispute. Its additional components: confessional (sometimes more primal and more important than national), class, and wealth.

This main historical drama concludes with Yalta. The possibility of a future Polish Lviv ceases to exist. The Polish locals, swallowing tears and seething in anger, abandon Lviv in echelons. All that remains are the folklore of resettled Lvivites in Western Poland and the banner "ODDAJCIE LWÓW!"¹⁴ (from a 1967 soccer game at the Ruch Stadium in Chożów between Górnik Zabrze and Dynamo Kyiv, Knockout Phase of the European Champion Clubs' Cup) accidentally caught on Soviet television.

"Give Back Lviv!"—as if it were a toy, and a sexual one at that. Or a bar rented out for two decades.

Poland lost Lviv but won the West. It became smaller, shrank, and shortened, but it got rid of its most destructive and conflicting lands. This was rescue via a strengthening of the weight of the center. Poland's

¹⁴ In Polish—"GIVE BACK LVIV!" (Translator's note)

territorial mass moved westward, and Poland ceased to be an Eastern country. If at Yalta the British had bargained and got Lviv for the Poles, then Ukrainians would not have had a place from where to start. They wouldn't have been taken into consideration at all. But then the Poles too would never have climbed out of the forsaken world.

As a result of Yalta, the primordial drama of Lviv seemingly ends in favor of the Ukrainians. But what Ukrainians, and from where? Obviously not those Ukrainians who, as a result of this apparent victory, for a quarter of a century were ending up in prison or in the Gulag or even in the other world. For whose benefit? Perhaps only for some sort of Ukrainians of the future. For those who, through the 1950s, through the conformist strivings to combine the Ukrainian with the Soviet, and, later, through the creeping Ukrainization of the 1960s, especially in Lviv, will mature into their own selves.

That already includes, to a large extent, those who in the autumn of 1969 spilled out onto the squares and streets because of (you won't believe it—yep, once again it's soccer!) a victory by Karpaty¹⁵ in the Soviet Cup. (According to my father, a correspondence student at the Lviv Polytechnical Forestry Institute, they carried banners—hey, we can do that too!—on which, in huge letters, was spelled out: "LVIV GETS THE CUP! KYIV GETS THE GOLD! MOSCOW GETS ZILCH!"). Moscow was left with nothing. This is something that was not agreed upon at Yalta.

But then the USSR responded with the 1970s, that is, with repressions. When, in 1971, the graves of Sich Riflemen¹⁶ were being leveled by bulldozers at the Yaniv Cemetery, the system was already preparing massive arrests, searches, prosecutions, campaigns—all those things that, having not killed Lviv, made it stronger.

Dissident City

Having taken away from the Poles their last hope for Lviv, Stalin must have understood, and definitely did understand, that he was now in a prickly situation. What he didn't understand were perspectives. He had been very successful in vanquishing all things Ukrainian in the past, and so it should have been the same with Lviv: an optimally dosed mixing of repressions with free medicine and education. However, like all dictators inclined towards megalomania, he did not take into account at all that he would soon die. His successors would successfully ruin everything.

In the wasp nest that was Lviv things were getting increasingly testy. The underground, which seemed to have been systematically uncovered and

¹⁵ In Soviet times Karpaty was the name of Lviv's soccer team and it continues to be so in independent Ukraine. (Translator's note)

¹⁶ The Sich Riflemen (*Sichovi striltsi*) were a unit of the Army of the Ukrainian National Republic that fought for Ukrainian independence in 1917–19. (Translator's note)

wiped out, nonetheless never fully disappeared but would instead take on new forms and be personified by new individuals. The city turned out to be a temporarily compressed spring. Despite an atmosphere full of rumors, suspicions, denunciations, whispering and listening-in, provocations, butting heads and, ultimately, betrayals, Lviv was always suspended in a yoga-like pose of patience. The key was to hold on until better times. In Lviv this was known as "Long live Soviet rule and we right next to it." However, better times don't just arrive on their own—they need to be summoned and invited, and not only by thinking differently but also by speaking differently. Sometimes—by shouting differently.

The appearance of a whole community of leaders-dissidents was, of course, not just a Lviv phenomenon. Dissidents appeared from everywhere, even from the seemingly helpless South and from the Donbas. But only in Lviv were these individuals—these tested and, simultaneously seemingly compromised survivors of prisons and psych wards—able to bring hundreds of thousands of followers with them to the squares and streets.

Lviv is the response to the painful and neglected need to have *My City*. At the beginning of the 1980s, when everything was just starting, Mykola Riabchuk, then still a poet, perceived it as "our city, one and only." Actually, here is the poem in its entirety—let everything begin again with it:

Finally, they've collected the trash. They've shoveled
the snow. And the streets are empty.
And we, the forgotten rovers of the night,
turn to the narrow streets.

Because only here is winter found. Because only here
tattered Christmas trees still lie,
dented ornaments, lemon peels,
a festive carnival of clutter.

And time flows slowly. It doesn't flow—
it lies, like the snow, awaiting a sound—
not voices, not clanking steps,
not the rustling of shoulders brushing by.

Sense it and say the word,
let time and snow move on, in an avalanche—
our city, one and only,
like affection and affliction, and once again—affliction.

What a harsh and incessant sound!
How it will haunt both our dreams!
Like a sharp nail, like a pine's needles,
that prick the hands and crumble away.

Cemetery City

In the penultimate stanza of the poem cited above affliction surfaces not once but twice in one line. Of course, there is something of a literary pun at play here, as it is whenever "affliction" is regarded simply as a word that forms a most banal rhyme with "affection," and the latter is also taken to be simply a word.¹⁷ But suddenly they stop being simply words. This city, *our* city, the one and only is an adage that is radical and even edgy. The affliction that is mentioned twice—now without quotation marks, and now in no way simply a rhyme—is yet another evocation of Lviv as victim.

In places where there are so many victims, burials take on a special meaning: there are more of the dead here than there are of the living. At times the significance of city cemeteries becomes greater than the significance of the city itself.

No, I am not saying that an increase in signs of decay, including an increasingly noticeable discordance between the inhabitants and the city in which they live, will inevitably end in ruin. Maybe not. Maybe it's too early to write about the city as hospice.

But it is indeed time to write about the city-cemetery, as about a past more alive than the present. When, in 1978, we spent several hours circling the unkempt alleys and faded pathways of the Yaniv cemetery (there were five of us, all of us eighteen), it all had to do with Antonych's grave.¹⁸ Actually, it was about us, ourselves—the fact that we had begun to live. We needed some kind of an initiation. We searched for our mystical sense. And when the almost impossible happened—that is, when we found it, it became like a confirmation or an inspiring sign. Because, on that day, we did not find something—we found ourselves.

The Lychakiv cemetery is a city within a city. Moreover, as always, it is only the internal city that turns out to be real. And, in fact, it shoulders the whole weight of Lviv's existence. Lychakiv is harmony among the deceased. They all co-exist ideally, all together and so close to one another—Banach and Kotsko, Gorgolewski and Levynskyi, Zapolska and Krushelnytska, Grottger and Trush, Jan Zahradnik and Nazar Honchar, Franko and Smolka, Shashkevych and Goszczyński, Konopnicka and Rudnytska, insurgents and archbishops, astrologers and chaplains, revolutionaries and pilots, the victims of Thalerhof, Bereza, Brygidki and all

¹⁷ In the original poem, the Ukrainian words translated as "affliction" and "affection"—*krov* (blood) and *liubov* (love), respectively—form a very popular and rather *clichéd* rhyming pair. (Translator's note)

¹⁸ Bohdan-Ihor Antonych (1909–1937) was an outstanding modernist Ukrainian poet, whose writings were very influential in Ukrainian culture of the second half of the 20th century and continue to be so today. Locating his neglected and unmarked grave at Lviv's Yaniv cemetery was something done by successive generations of late-Soviet Ukrainian intellectuals. (Translator's Note)

the other victims and the victims of those other victims.¹⁹

Sometimes you would like to see others among them as well, because they really are lacking there. For example, Wittlin, Kuroń, or, say, Giacomo Joyce and Jim Morrison. Above all—Admiral Yaroslav Okunevsky. Where is his Austria-Hungary? Where is that Austro-Hungarian navy he commanded? It would be good if a golden tomb the size of an ocean liner arose at Lychakiv.²⁰

Then Karol Bauer, the university botanist, could touch these Lviv seamen with his long, green finger-sprouts.²¹ And it is about him that yet another novel should be written, “Harmony Among the Deceased”—about how flowers, bushes, and trees are planted, gradually transforming the cemetery into a paradise, and memory into hope.

In the novel’s epilogue there’s a sweet couple—Yka and me. I didn’t want us to be seen, so I chose the cemetery as our place to meet. In other words—paradise. Only towards the end of April and among the graves does it get so green. Exhausted by the sun, the closeness, the birds and sweat, we could no longer talk. And we didn’t even know what to talk about or why. All there was left to do was touch one another (the lower lip trembles!)—as it turns out, at the base of the Eaglets’ Memorial.²²

¹⁹ All these individuals are buried at Lychakiv cemetery. Stepan Banach (1892–1945) was a leading 20th century Polish mathematician. Adam Kotsko (1882–1910) was a Ukrainian student activist who worked towards establishing a Ukrainian university in Lviv. He was killed in a conflict with Polish students. Zygmunt Gorgolewski (1845–1903) was a Polish architect who designed the Lviv Opera Theater. Ivan Levynskyi (1851–1919) was a Ukrainian architect and businessman who designed many modernist buildings in Lviv. Gabriela Zapolska (1857–1921) was a Polish writer and actress. Solomiya Krushchynska (1872–1952) was a Ukrainian opera singer and one of the leading sopranos in Europe in her time. Arthur Grottger (1837–1867) was a Polish Romantic painter and legendary lover of Wanda Monné. Ivan Trush (1869–1941) was Ukrainian painter and active community figure. Jan Zahradnik (1904–1929) was a Polish poet and literary critic. Nazar Honchar (1964–2009) was a Ukrainian poet and member of the Lu-Ho-Sad poetry group. Ivan Franko (1856–1916) was a one of Ukraine’s most revered writers and community figures. Franciszek Smolka (1810–1899) was a Polish lawyer and politician. Markiiian Shashkevych (1811–1843) was a Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Priest and a writer who was part of the Ruthenian Triad literary trio. Seweryn Goszczyński was a Polish Romantic poet and prose writer. Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910) was a Polish writer and activist for women’s rights. Milena Rudnytska (1892–1979) was a Ukrainian women’s activist and politician. (Translator’s note)

²⁰ Jacek Kuroń (1943–2004) was a democratic opposition leader in Soviet-era Poland. He was born in Lviv. Józef Wittlin (1896–1976) was a Polish novelist, poet, and translator, who grew up and studied in Lviv. He is the author of the autobiographical work *Mój Lwów* (My Lwów; 1946). Yaroslav Okunevsky (1860–1929) was a Ukrainian civic leader who served as a general physician in the Austrian navy.

²¹ Karol Bauer (1818–1894) botanist and landscape architect. He was involved in the design of Lviv’s Lychakiv cemetery.

²² The *Cmentarz Orłat Lwowskich* (Cemetery of Eaglets) is a burial place and

Simulacrum City

In just five of my student years in Lviv, three films were shot there in which the city pretended to be someplace else. That began with “Boyarski and the Three Musketeers” (Paris and another France), continued with “The Gadfly” (Rome and another Italy), and, almost-simultaneously, the Georgian comedy “Tiflis—Paris and Back” (Paris again, as the title implies).

For some reason, we were rather openly proud of this. In the USSR, from which one couldn’t generally travel to the real Paris, even this could serve as a reason to be proud. The local press, for the first time in the Soviet period, began to refer to the city as Little Paris. Actually, that is what Leipzig is called, along with several thousand other, predominantly German, cities. On the other hand, no one has ever called Paris Big Leipzig or Big Lviv. And even Vienna hasn’t been referred to by anyone as Big Lemberg. Besides, Little Vienna is Chernivtsi.

To be honest, Lviv is a provincial city, little-known in the world, that sees itself as a famous metropolis. Its ambitions are embodied mostly on the outside—pretending and imagining itself, as well as convincing itself what it is. In Soviet times, it was recognized as one of four European cities in the USSR. Lviv was a replacement for places to which it was impossible to go—there was no chance. It shattered into fragments of all kinds of Parises, Romes, Pragues, and Budapests, intensely simulating the West in any way it could. I think that is what its secret mission was—one that it performed heroically. Educated Lvivites loved to come up with arguments (unfortunately, the same ones over and over) that were supposed to raise Lviv’s standing in anybody’s eyes. Among them:

- according to UNESCO, the Rynok Square ensemble is one of the five most notable town squares of the Renaissance;
- the cupola of the Dominican Church is an exact copy of the cupola of Rome’s St. Peter’s Cathedral, although two and a half times smaller;
- the Old City was planned and built to exactly resemble Florence;
- the Opera House has been officially designated a perfect crowning achievement of architectural perfection and in this is only second to—attention!—Milan’s La Scala;
- to his final day Napoleon truly regretted that after his victory at Austerlitz, he did not proceed to Lviv;
- Lychakiv Cemetery is older than Paris’s Père Lachaise;
- a certain Professor Brettschneider, a learned librarian, upon coming to Lviv at the university’s invitation, noted: “I’ve never seen a city so

cemetery within Lychakiv Cemetery where Poles who died in the Polish-Ukrainian War (1918–19) and the Polish-Soviet War (1919–21) are buried. (Translator’s note)

dedicated to debauchery. There are so many whores here that, compared to this Babylon, Berlin is Jerusalem;"

- at various times Mozart Jr., Giacomo Casanova, Count Cagliostro, Honoré de Balzac, and Vladimir Lenin stayed in the city.

- The last of these persons, to be truthful, was not recalled with very much pride, but he nonetheless was never forgotten. That is how it was then.

And that is the way it is today, for the most part. Lviv still strives to be compared to, placed side-by-side, and interrelated with somewhere else. It's as though the city does not believe in its own self-sufficiency. I know that in order to feel more self-confident, it becomes many different cities. Once, at night, I became completely disoriented in the area between Pekarska Street and Levytskyi Street. Then I felt like it was Munich, only with much poorer lighting and completely lacking the smell of roasted chestnuts and not completely lacking the odor of vomit and dog shit. It's a good thing that a couple of my buddies were with me, and I didn't lose my way in search of the S-Bahn heading toward Starnberg.

Sometimes it's Odesa. That happens when it once again seems that if you look just past those distant buildings, you can catch a glimpse of the sea or, at least, a bit of the port.

Sometimes it's Kaliningrad. Sometimes Trieste.

But ever more often Kryvyi Rih, Kramatorsk, or Nikopol.

And most often—a city without a name. That is—without distinctiveness. Two-thirds of it (some would say seven-eighths) is still taken up by the unimaginable, shabby buildings of the Horodok, Zhovkva and Lychakiv suburbs. From what years, times, eras does it date? Pre-war or post-war? If post-war then post-which-war? And is it not from that Lviv that Professor Mieczysław Orłowicz, in his guide-book, tries to shield us when he advises that we “stay away from third-rate, dirty Jewish hotels in the suburbs”?

“But without them it wouldn't exist at all,” I would say in answer to the professor, had he not died in Warsaw the year before I was born. “And it is together with them that it finally, truly, becomes its own self, not pretending to be, or copying, anything else.”

Phantasm City

My favorite novel will be all about wandering. The protagonist will enter an endlessly long labyrinth at night-time, having earlier swallowed, for example, Trihexyphenidyl. In his city he will search for all other cities—their parts, fragments, and reflections. He will find them there. His Lviv will grow before his eyes, and it will finally seem to be the largest Lviv in the world. The protagonist will run along its inflated surface and will skate upon its glass sidewalks. Going from one neighborhood to another, the protagonist will actually be traversing many different countries—a little bit of Armenia, a bit of Greece, or even Ethiopia. Countless sushi bars will

elicit thoughts of Tokyo or Kyoto. He will end up having to converse with plants and animals, and to acquire fifty or sixty languages in order to do so. The real city will be layered with visions—St. George's Cathedral will end up on the back of a whale, one that has been covered with grapevines, High Castle Hill will become Mont Blanc, and the Cunard Line's ocean liners *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* will sail down Akademichna Street's riverbed. At dawn, at the first rooster's crow, the protagonist will make it into the local pub, where strange merchants simply cannot finish any one of their stories.

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