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Boris Khazanov – Writer in Freedom? Roots and Expulsion: Two Millennia

Kurt Marko (Wien)

When in 1976, more than twenty years ago, a story by a completely unknown author reached the publishers of a Russian magazine for exiles via the mysterious ways of the then underground press, there was great surprise. The bottle post did not fit within any of the established genres of the unofficial literature. The subject of *Die Königsstunde* (*The Hour of the King*) was fantastic, but at the same time, highly and dramatically political, and hardly disguised: the occupation of a small, defenceless country, like Denmark, by the army; the absurd doctorpatient relationship between the king, whose civil occupation was urology, and the incurably sick dictator; the demonstrative support of the royal couple for the Jews in their country... all related in a precise and laconic tone where fantastic, absurd and cruel elements occurred seemingly casually, with the precision of an etching or an anecdote by Heinrich von Kleist.¹ It was not surprising that Viktor Perelman, into whose hands the manuscript came, spoke of a miracle and placed the newcomer – Boris Khazanov – on the same level as Mikhail Bulgakov in terms of the Russian literary tradition.

This implied that the literary mole would have a high standard to live up to.

The year of Khazanov's birth, 1928, meant that the punches suffered by the Russian-Jewish child, the young man, his parents and his brother in Leningrad and Moscow, during the war, and in the prison camp, were in effect pre-programmed; the customary comradely denunciations of the unruly student led to him participating in the profitable felling of the North Russian forests. A second try: studying medicine, gaining a reputation as a young doctor in the brutal depravity of Kolchos poverty. Not only was he capable; he made progress. But he also remained true to his early passion, ancient languages and ancient thinkers, the languages of the West and their masters; he translated, wrote, and was published. The years of apprenticeship of his generation under Stalin and Stalin's heirs, the ever more precarious attempts to live as a symbiosis of Russian and Jew, demanded expression and form which looked beyond the end of the day. Meanwhile, he had become a doctor (like his wife, and later, in the West, his son) and a writer in Moscow, who translated for the Russian Academy of Sciences Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hans Küng and others, and published articles on unknown figures such as Franz Rosenzweig and Robert Musil. However, in addition to the calamities of „normal“ Soviet everyday life, there were further, trickier ones. Working for the samizdat press, promoting the interests of Jewish emigrants, he used the nom de plume Khazanov, but the disguise was soon penetrated.

¹ *Chas korolya*. Republished in the collection *Ya voskresenie i Zhizn'* (New York 1985) and with *Antivremya* (Moscow 1991) with the German titles *Die Königsstunde* and *Ich bin die Auferstehung und das Leben* and *Der Duft der Sterne* (Stuttgart 1990).

From 1973 onwards there were repeated searches of his home by the „people’s sword and shield“. Publication of his work abroad led to his increased oppression. Following publications in Israel in 1980 his home was broken into, searched on the public prosecutor’s demand. All his archives and the manuscript of his novel *Antivremya* were confiscated; he had worked on it for three and a half years, devoted every free minute to it. He rewrote it from memory...

The threat of further reprisals compelled him to emigrate with his wife and son. The urge towards freedom of speech played no little role in this decision to go, against his own convictions.²

In 1977 the exiled writer had been preceded in Tel Aviv by a volume of prose in Russian, and in 1978 by a selection of texts in French. The journey of the latecomer was somewhat shorter; it is not far to Munich via Vienna, and Khazanov has been living there since 1982. He published prolifically, and also co-published the journal *Strana i mir* (1984-1992), „The country and the world“, which was written with emigrants in mind as well as for „the country“. This and other publications of the house were designed to counter disinformation, the dangers of losing cultural values, and mutual misunderstanding between East and West.

Khazanov could now at last publish! He started with a series of essays, which attracted immediate attention. This new style, factual and sober, was appreciatively received: from such a source; the new aspects outweighed the old-fashioned ones.³

For those who could read Russian, Khazanov’s reputation was enhanced, after a number of publications in various places, by a volume of prose and another of essays – and it is from then that the dictum of Viktor Perelman, his discoverer, could be applied on a broader basis.

Ten years later, in 1986, German readers could also check whether their first impressions had been correct. In this year a collection appeared under the title *Mythos Russland*.

² Concerning his expulsion, Khazanov expressed his views on his former fellow citizens in Exilium, in *Novii mir* (Moscow) 1994/12, pp. 148-156.

³ *Vom Winterpalast zur Kreml-Wand* (From the Winter Palace to the Walls of the Kremlin), in Merkur, Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken, March 1983. *Die russische Intelligencija. Die Geschichte einer unerwiderten Liebe* (The Russian Intelligentsia. A Story of Unrequited Love), *ibid.*, September 1983; *Mythos Russland* (The Myth of Russia), *ibid.*, April 1984 (Der Spiegel, No. 25, 18.6.1984); *Mythos Deutschland* (The Myth of Germany), *ibid.*, March 1985; *Moskau als Zeichensystem* (Moscow as a system of symbols), *ibid.*, February 1988; *Wie wandlungsfähig ist die Sowjetunion?* (How transformable is the Soviet Union?) in Conturen (Vienna), October 1988; *Was ist das Gesetz, Michail? Anmerkungen zum sowjetischen Begriff von Recht und Gerechtigkeit* (What is the law, Mikhail? Notes on the Soviet concept of Law and Justice), in SZ, No. 48, 27/28.2.1988; *Besuch aus dem Morgenland. Ein Gespräch über das Absurde an der Perestrojka* (Visit from the Orient. A Conversation on Absurd Aspects of Perestroika), *ibid.*, No. 87, 15/16.4.1989. Khazanov was introduced to readers in the German-speaking area by Kurt MARKO in: *Remigrant und Immigrant: Norbert Elias und Boris Chazanow über ihre Erfahrungen mit den Deutschen* (A Re-emigrant and an Immigrant: Norbert Elias and Boris Khazanov on their experiences with the Germans), in Wiener Journal, December 1985/January 1986; Kurt MARKO: *Chazanow zu entdecken* (Discovering Khazanov), in *Studies in Soviet Thought* 33 (1987) pp. 245-250; further bibliography in Wolfgang KASACK: *Lexikon der russischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1992, columns 209-212; with an almost complete bibliography, including publications in Russian in several countries (with reference to Italian and French editions): Marion MUNZ: *Boris Chazanov: Erzählstrukturen und thematische Aspekte* (Boris Khazanov, Narrative structures and thematic aspects), Munich 1994, 122 p. (*Arbeiten und Texte zur Slavistik*, 59). – Vide Kurt Marko, in *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie*, 1994/2 pp. 423-425 (published December 1995).

Betrachtungen aus deutscher Zuflucht.⁴ This consisted of repeatedly reprinted essays typified by his objective and sober style, dealing with Soviet Russian history and the present.

Khazanov's stories also appeared in German, including *Die Königsstunde* (*The Hour of the King*), which had provoked the wrath of the state. The German version was published in 1990,⁵ and although the critics made heavy weather⁶ of the story giving the volume its title, a parable of a king under a Nazi occupation siding with his Jewish subjects, they were captivated by the two others, *Der Duft der Sterne* (*The Scent of Stars*), a glimpse into the gulag, where the sufferer is not Ivan Denisovich, but a carhorse, portrayed with a precise empathy. This descriptive exactness brings to mind Robert Musil's *Fliegenpapier*, and at the same time, develops massive force by representing symbolically, in the form of a horse, all the millions in gulags. Similarly, *Ich bin die Auferstehung und das Leben* (*I am the Resurrection and the Life*), the recollection of a child's growing up, developing under the obscure oppressions of adults in a Stasi regime.

Khazanov's essays and stories translated into German, and his two novels (1986 and 1993) brought him appreciative recognition from perceptive critics. However, Khazanov is not a man who bears the mantle of a prophet or produces manifestos, who goes to meetings and courts the media and chases literary prizes, etc. The price for such anachronistic abstinence is well known. After 1989, the year when communism broke down, Khazanov's stories and essays were once more read in Russia. By 1990 the wheel had turned so far that some prose works of Khazanov, including the confiscated novel and the novella that had aroused displeasure in the 'seventies, were 'repatriated'⁷ and he is again being published.

The Agony of a Symbiosis

His own small, short life is not merely a personal matter; it does not pertain only to the fate of his generation alone, but equally to the fate of Russia and Russian Jewry. Thus the beginnings of the storyteller Khazanov are primarily to be found in the complex of questions central to himself, the question of Russian identity, of Jewry, of Christianity. His problems may seem old-fashioned and provincial, dating back to Dostoyevsky, pre-revolutionary Russia in postrevolutionary morass. For Khazanov it is evidently essential, not merely with regard to his personal fate, to live through the enduring conflicts in this constellation, and to reshape them. He neither wants to nor is able to give up his Russianness of his Jewishness – a position which would impose on him the obligation to stay in his homeland, and confrontation not only with official Soviet and Russian antisemitism, but also with Russian Orthodoxy. It was not so much the political and social conditions, however demeaning to human dignity, which prompted Khazanov's opposition, but the themes recurring in his mind, Jewish and Jewish-Russian history. In addition, the impetus of

⁴ Mainz, 189 p.

⁵ Stuttgart, 272 p.

⁶ Elsbeth Wolffheim, in *NZZ*, No. 85, 12.4.1990, Tadeusz Nowakowski, in *FAZ*, No. 153, 5.7.1990; but note Wolfgang Kasack, in *Die Welt*, No. 81, 5.4.1990.

⁷ *Strach*. Rasskazy (Fear. Stories). Isdatelstvo „Pravda“, Moscow, 1990, 48 p. (Print run 150,000). On the title page, Khazanov is not only looking at his countrymen; it also features the familiar Lenin vignette. *Chas Korolya. Antivremya. Moskovskii roman*. Moscow 1991, 254 p. (Print run 25,000); *Nagl'far v okeane vremen* (*Heaven is Below*). Moscow 1993, 222 p. (Print run 60,000).

philosophical reflection leads him into constant dialogue with himself. His triangle of themes marks him out as an outsider, ignoring short-lived fashionable pseudorenaissances. He adopts no linguistically or stylistically fashionable style to draw attention to himself, to stay abreast of the 'world level', but remains firmly attached to Chekhovian precision. Medical aspects are prominently present not only in his choice of themes and pictures, but also guide the storyteller's view and lie behind the probing observations of the historical analyst.

Idushchii po vode (Walking on the Water), a collection of stories, with that of the book's title relating to childhood memories, his first contacts with Christian ideas, contains twelve works of varying length, some dating from his Moscow days, some from Munich. They revolve around the central themes of Khazanov's existence and thought (especially *Is 'Pisem bes shtempelya' - From the 'Uncensored Letters'*). Some of them are compared to „hard and slow boring through hard planks with passion and precision simultaneously“ (M. Weber). They are apologia for the Jewish-Christian-Russian identity, protests against misunderstanding this identity, analysing its origins and the dangers to which it is exposed. *Walking on Water* - the fate of the Russian Jews.

Given the circumstances imposed upon him, the basis of self-discovery by the autodidact is not particularly wide; Spinoza, Pascal, Flaubert, the great names of Russian literature; and powerfully, in the background Leibniz, the metaphysician. Two letters are addressed to *otez* Sergei Zheludkov, a priest who concerned himself with the non-conforming Russian intelligentsia, and contain an explanation for Khazanov's departure. In two essays Khazanov reflects on the formal side of his storytelling, especially his narrative technique regarding dreams. *Et resurrexit*, the concluding piece, combines belief in the indestructible with the depiction of destruction. The metaphor may stand for literary creation, for works of art, for Khazanov's philosophical theology, but for other things as well.

The Hour of the King, with its irrational and highly moral symbolic plot, is shaped by Khazanov's personal and highly idiosyncratic motive that makes an appeal equally to all and everyone. Indirectly, parallels become apparent between the Nazi and the Stalinist regimes; the occupation of a defenceless neighbouring country also conjures up comparisons.

However, political aspects and the rule of unlaw are not in the foreground. This is also true of the following story, dating from 1976, *Ich bin die Auferstehung und das Leben (I am the Resurrection and the Life)*. A quotation from Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften (The Man Without Qualities)* precedes it. It portrays the turmoil of a boy in the nineteen-thirties, in the political world of the Stalin era, involved in family conflicts which bring to light the tension between Jewish-Russian and fragmentary Jewish-Christian attitudes.

*Antivremya. Moskovskii roman (Antitime. A Moscow Novel)*⁸ recapitulates the historical burdens of the central conflicts found in Khazanov, as seen via the ripening consciousness of a boy growing up in the war and post-war years. *Antivremya* includes Khazanov's settling up with the Soviet system, in the form of a furious imploring speech,

⁸ German title: *Gegenzeit. Ein Moskauer Roman*, Stuttgart 1986, 248 p. Published in paperback by Piper, February 1990.

the interpretation of Russian and Jewish history, which deserves to be read all around the world! The accusation and complaint (1948) impel the young man to leave the Soviet Union. The imploring monologue over nearly 25 pages, towards the tumultuous finale of the novel, shows Soviet history with all its murderous logicity: the usurpation of an autocratically ruled dark empire by powers which develop all elements of darkness to the extreme. The author tells his story of suffering and horror through the mouth of a Bolshevik of the first hour, of Jewish origin, who has gone through the bad times of trials and camps. It is a matter of freeing his son from the Russian tradition in which he was brought up, and of bringing him to Judaism. However, the boy declines to go along with the disillusioned counsellor and admonisher. For he has an inalienable right to a home in *another* Russia. He chooses a Russian future, and thus, as soon turns out, a Soviet prison. In a postscript dated 16th May 1982, now printed as a foreword, Khazanov informs the reader that *guests* from the *big house* (Lubyanka) had visited him and had taken away the almost finished manuscript to read it... *of course, without giving it back*. He was continuing to write, and waiting for their next visit.

On the eve of his seventh decade, in exile in Munich, like the many who had shared a similar fate through the course of time, with their very different national, social, occupational and philosophical origins, already material for statisticians, he thought about Russia's history and present, the „silent, miserable land, literally deserted by God“⁹ - looking behind the media tinsel.

Perhaps it should be said that as regards emigration positions dominated - to use the labelling of our time - where one extreme is denounced as that of the 'cold warriors' whilst the other is attributed to nostalgia for home and pathetic proponents of „dialogue“. Khazanov remains outside this field of tension. He does not belong to those who live physically there and spiritually here, or, conversely, physically here, and spiritually there, but regards it as the most natural thing in the world and as a spiritual obligation to maintain this retaining link of conventional, negative or positive ties to his former homeland. He is not a commuter in unhappiness, like Svetlana Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter, but like Vladimir Voynovich, capable of antipatriotic sacrilege, not liking the birches around Munich any more or any less than the *beriosy* around Moscow. So it is quicker to say (rather than to derive from numerous passages in the book) who and what Khazanov and his relationship to his „German refuge“ is not: he was no go-between with an attitude of aiming to teach and improve the East regime from the West (an attitude which, however, would be adopted least of all by apostates, the accursed and the simultaneously envied there) or of lecturing the West as an expert with the bonus of experience of the East, thus from force of habit - what's learnt is learnt - acting out resentment and, hedging, also keeping his distance, swimming on the current western wave of self-damnation. This may be labelled opposition and resistance, but in fact is nothing more than opportunism. (Dead is the echo of Manès Sperber's call that anti-Americanism, a sort of Pavlovian reflex, shares many characteristics with antisemitism).

Khazanov thus stands outside the market of opinions where the competition is great, but the demand for serious information less than small. Who should speak as an empiricist, an analyst, an objective and sceptical enlightener, an accountant of history, even as

⁹ Boris CHASANOW: *Briefe aus meiner wunderschönen Ferne* (Letters from my Marvellous Distance), in *Glaube in der 2. Welt*, 1983/2, pp. 29-32.

the devil's own archivist or auditor? What place has such a rare bird in the face of such insatiably encouraged love of illusion? In addition, his curious and amused, thankful and merry view of his German surroundings is not at all critical, so one may well take exception to it. He did not return from, say, British or American exile as an accuser, and as a survivor, with feelings of guilt towards the afflicted and murder victims; he himself knows the gulag from inside. This teaches – many – a view of things where others stand before internal walls, and not everyone is capable of overcoming them. Here, too, his origin and his incorruptible view put Khazanov into a nonrepresentative and marginal position within the shifting terrain of Russian-Jewish-German history, a position both provocative and lighthearted.

Such a lack of illusions has also had its effect on his assessment of his exile and that of others, and on intellectual life and literature here in the West, as Khazanov stated with unqualified severity and sharpness in an essay in 1987:

„It may be that only one thing welds together the Russian authors abroad: their revulsion against the regime they have broken with. Naturally, this regime deserves no better.

But literature that is dominated by this feeling, this really unanimous hatred, is endanger of deteriorating into publicity seeking, and it looks as if this has already happened... The past cannot be paid for at the customs barrier; it comes with us, and constantly flickers before our eyes. What else is there to be done except constantly to exorcise it? Russian exile literature has consisted at throwing the inkpot at the devil for over twenty years... Ultimately the loneliness of the Russian writer abroad is only an individual example of a general rule, namely, the isolation of Russian writers in toto. Having broken out to freedom, it did not find the power in itself to recreate the artificially severed link to the mother, to the literature and culture of Europe“.¹⁰

Khazanov acknowledges, on the one hand, the burden of bearing the inevitable and insurmountable, but on the other, has irrevocable reservations regarding all earthly things, pointing out the barrier between them and ideals.

Russian literature in exile „retains an identity, despite everything, if we have the courage to call it literature. Exile and the Kingdom: thus the Bible categorises the two categories of existence, and they characterise the fate of the writer exactly. The true writer is always an exile, even when he does not leave home. Ultimately it depends on him, whether he finds the kingdom“.

This should not be taken as meaning that it is a kingdom of this world. Such an attitude, such conviction, is not fashionable, and not only in times of „new thinking“. Since the great illumination over Eurasia has dissipated, Khazanov is borne out: for even previously, *contra spem*, he had been right.

Does he, too, look back? In his case this means without being influenced by the transparent business of the actors on the world stage. He regards himself as unable to lull himself and others with wishful thinking. But he is aware of the paralysing power of those who fear things might get worse. We are touching on the political nerve of Khazanov's storytelling, which means to say western not-wanting-to-know, self-deception, the delusion of the good life, which renders one so susceptible to blackmail.

¹⁰ BORIS CHASANOV: *Fremde und Fremdheit. Ein russischer Schriftsteller über Leben und Literatur im Exil* (Abroad and Being Foreign. A Russian Author on Life and Literature in Exile), in SZ No. 7, 10/11.1.1987.

The Hindu parable of the salt doll might help to illustrate the mysterious nature of the „object“.¹¹

„A doll carved of salt arrived during her wanderings by the shore of the sea. She had never seen the sea and asked ‘What is that?’ The sea replied ‘Come to me, and you will find out’. The doll approached, dipped her finger into the water, and immediately removed her hand: the finger was gone. ‘You have taken my finger away’! she cried. ‘But you have learned something in return’, was the answer. The doll went ever deeper into the water, the waves washed away her salt crystals and when she had completely dissolved, she said: ‘Now I know. I am the sea’. One must lose oneself and one’s individuality and dive into this element, this element called Russia, to understand that there is no rational answer to the question as to how it can maintain life“.

Heaven is Below

Russia’s culture at its best is to be found in the expression of such themes as the bewailing of the lack of culture in the population, its tales of woe and persecution and expulsion, by the people and the power elite. The corruption Khazanov describes, the vulgar shabbiness, is so extensive that even (dead) cat and dog converse in gutter slang. Therefore it is not incomprehensible (Elsbeth Wolffheim) but only all too comprehensible that Khazanov, „the moralist in disguise“ (Tadeusz Novakovsky) will continue to remain a tip for insiders only. True, Khazanov has not declined to comment in public on events in his former „homeland“, but his profound knowledge and lack of illusions are not called for, in contrast to the compulsively anxious and vague hopes of those who seek to create a stir in the influential media. Khazanov pervades the (Soviet) Russian empirical experience with ironic reflections on the topsy-turvy world that arises when ideological certainty is imposed on the present and the past. The derealisation of the actual world by the universal power of a fictional future convulse the firstperson narrator’s experiences of space and time; and this continued impulse towards reflection found in the author and the characters in his novels, up to and including his latest one, *Heaven is Below*¹² is married to the tricky mixture of themes of Russianness and Jewishness, their real presence in Russia, and of belonging to an even older historical origin preserved through two millennia. Anyone not merely wanting to discuss nationalism, xenophobia and antisemitism in Eastern Europe, but seeking to recognise what it is that is causing anti-western feeling to swell so much (bogies exploited by Yeltsin and his opponents), would do well to take a look at the furious concluding chapter of *Antitime*. The truth of it, alas, is repeatedly being confirmed.

It is not mere chance that Khazanov, who in the Brezhnev era smuggled Musil as contraband into a professional journal, preceded his story of childhood *I am the Resurrection and the Life* by a passage from Musil on the fictional character of both the narrator and the real „I“ in most people. His story involves the thoughts of the first-person narrator, the „chronicler“, regarding the dubiousness both of narrating, and of what is narrated, and ultimately the paradoxes of time, and the reader, who is brought into the book by the traditional device of being directly addressed by the author. From *Antitime*, through the short stories, to *Heaven is Below*, the abnormality of the life of normal citizens of Moscow is

¹¹ Boris CHASANOV: *Mythos Russland (The Myth of Russia)* (see footnote 4), p. 57 ff.

¹² *Unten ist Himmel (Heaven is Below)*. Subtitle: *Ein Roman aus Russland (A Novel from Russia)*, Stuttgart 1993, 319 p.

portrayed, in desolate miserable conditions, redolent of Charles Dickens's revelations concerning early capitalism. It presents via the miniature chaos of a single family the corruption of a hereditarily diseased preurban society whose civilisation is only a veneer.

Childhood and youth in Soviet Russia: Khazanov's recurrent theme, is however not the only one. Whereas in *Antitime* in the last 25 pages the tabooed history of Russian Jewry intrudes into the story, a reckoning where no punches are pulled, in *Heaven i Below* a Jewish fate is woven into the Wandering Jew legend, retiled by Khazanov elsewhere in more detail,¹³ into a flurry of action: the denunciation and the disappearance of an old Jew who, living in a cellar, is no longer tolerated. The differences: *Antitime* was addressed to the Russian reader; in *Heaven is Below* Khazanov, the interpreter of otherness, has in mind the reader in the West. In the coarse and concrete passages of narration, the multifunctional narrator, now also speaking as a doctor, looks even more grimly at the pupils than the under-age chronicler did. The irony has become sharper; the many headings indicate the sceptical distance that the caustic narrator is keeping. The surgical precision is maintained (thanks to Annelore Nitschke, the translator). *Antitime* ends with the arrest of the youthful main character; whether the protagonist of *Heaven in Below* dies by suicide or by accident, the cause of his fall from the roof of the accursed house remains open, as does so much in this world of cripples, sharp etchings in the manner of Callot.

Such reading presupposes that the reader is something of a sleuth, can anticipate and empathize, can reflect with the characters and has some knowledge of the milieu, of Soviet reality. Khazanov's pointillist fragmentation of reality, to put it in extreme terms, derives from the questionableness of every relation to reality, and from the inevitably inadequate knowledge of the narrator. Time, a constituent factor in grasping reality, thus becomes a central problem, both in philosophical terms, and in the composition of the novel.

How does one cope with time? How does one cope with the inevitable disappearance, one way or another, of our ego?

Language: Khazanov's mediator between „Exile“ and „The Kingdom“

With the magic of words?

Khazanov: „... Language, where sound and image, thought and movement of the lips cannot be separated, since originally they formed a whole, and because it seems peculiar that things could have other names and that wishes can be formulated with the help of other phonemes. Language lives indivisibly in all its forms like the body with its limbs; language permeates our being to the unimaginable limit where reality turns into dream and the world of the day touches the world of the night; language trickles into the unconscious, for it exists before its own forms of representation, before words are articulated, before the expression of thought and before reflection. Language is contemporary with the soul... The frail old man who taught me Hebrew long ago - we sat in his little room under the roof of an old Muscovite house; I was wearing a moth-eaten velvet cap and he told me that the ban on reading the Pentateuch with one's head uncovered was a very modern innovation, not more than a thousand years old - this old man told me of the incredible debase-

¹³ *Zeitbuch über Cartaphilus (Time-book on Cartaphilus)*, in *Das Leben ist schön und traurig. Russisches Lesebuch (Life is Beautiful and Sad. A Russian Reader)*. Edited by Heddy Pross-Weerth, Munich-Zurich 1989, pp. 364-481.

ment his brother had suffered. Thirteen generations of their family had presented thirty scholars of the Talmud and their holy language to their people. In the ninth decade of his life his brother came to Jerusalem, went on the streets and asked a bare-footed boy a question, to which came the reply, 'Grandpa, you speak bad Ivrit'! The emigration begins when the deceptive picture of the heavenly Jerusalem disappears in the tumult of the earthly Jerusalem, when a little guttersnipe corrects their verb forms, when philology has to capitulate to life. Emigration is life in the element of another language that oppresses you on all sides, threatening you with a fine for trespassing, that calls you to the telephone, talks to you from the glowing TV screen; a language that sticks its tongue out at you, and makes fun of you under the mask of an incomprehensible dialect, and then suddenly lets the mask fall to show you that it is still the same, foreign and yet not foreign, familiar and yet unfamiliar: a language that calls to you, with false embraces, whilst your mother tongue, that old, trusting wife, looks on reproachfully and shrugs her shoulders. Emigration is like swimming in the sea, always further from the shore, so that gradually one is covered with silver scales, one's lungs are filled with water and gradually gills grow; emigration is like transmutation into an amphibian, still able to move on the land, but already dreaming of the quickest way to get back to the water...".¹⁴

Not everyone who has escaped, who has been driven out, thrown to the – other – shore can regard it again as home. Khazanov, in May 1994: „I cannot return to the land where nobody needs me, where nobody is expecting me. My true fatherland is the Russian language, which nobody can take away from me“.¹⁵

Before Publication

In reply to my question in April 1994: „I hear you have finished a new novel. What is it about? Is it a story about Russia, about Moscow?“, Khazanov answered:

„Wel, a new novel... Perhaps it is another blunder. The scene of the action, alas, is Russia again. But not Moscow: rather an old, faraway provincial town on the bank of a great river, a dull place; a little town such as one might find in Gogol, from which, as the mayor says, someone could ride away for three years without ever reaching a frontier. The main character might remind you of the famous Russian Utopian, Nikolai Fyodorov, with his philosophy – which I have parodied – of *The General Cause*; but it is set in our time. The theme: Russian Marxist-Communist but also Orthodox-Slavophile Messianism“.¹⁶

Chronika N. appeared in September 1995 in Moscow in the magazine *Oktyabr*,¹⁷ and in German in August 1996 with the title *Der Zauberlehrer (The Magic Teacher)*.¹⁸ Khazanov's fourth novel, *Posle nas potop (After us, the Deluge)*, appeared in *Oktyabr*

¹⁴ From: Boris Chasanow/Geronim Faibussowitsch: *Die Sprache (Language)*, in Ulrich Lange (Ed.): *Identität, Integration und Verantwortung (Identity, Integration and Responsibility)*. Lectures and Papers of the First Görlitz Academic Symposium, Berlin 1994, pp. 173-176.

¹⁵ Final sentences from *Exsilium*; see also footnote 2.

¹⁶ *Boris Chasanow, für wen schreiben Sie? Ein Interview von Kurt Marko* (Boris Khazanov, for whom do you write? An interview with Kurt Marko), in *Wiener Journal*, April 1994, p. 33.

¹⁷ Subtitle: *Zapiski nezakonnogo cheloveka* (Notes by an illegitimate man), in *Oktyabr*, September 1995, pp. 9-103.

¹⁸ Stuttgart 1996, 253 p. Unverständlich-ablehnend (Senseless-rejecting), Ulrich M. Schmid, in *NZZ*, No. 257, 20.12.1996.

1997/6 and 7, and a contract has been negotiated for the German version, to be published in autumn 1998.

The book portrays, woven into a KGB investigation, i.e. like a detective story, conditions in Moscow shortly before the break-up of the Soviet Union. Corresponding to what we today call the mafia milieu, there is confusion in the actions of the protagonists, their twisted, senselessly ending lives, corresponding to the „shifted“ composition, sometimes satirical, sometimes comic, sometimes poetic, sometimes relieved with many-fingered reflections, also by occasional interventions by the narrator. Is it an obituary for the age of the secret police, as the inventor of the narrator, that shadowy final instance, might have it? Hardly.

Postscript: If we also consider the shorter and longer stories, the critical observations on Russia's history and present, then in the light of Khazanov's discoveries twenty years ago, it does not seem over-bold to say that this writer, with some delay imposed by political pressures, like all unique and unmistakable creators of word-worlds, is writing the *one* possibly uncompletable book that will show the path from the insoluble exile - to the immortal. The language makes poets and ourselves believe, although in itself it is no more than the sphinxlike mask of the unexplainable, of our consciousness.

Translated from the German by Roger Peniston-Bird.