GOLI OTOK

THE ISLAND OF DEATH

A DIARY IN LETTERS

BY VENKO MARKOVSKI

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

Goli Otok: The Island of Death is a remarkable and controversial work—remarkable because much of it was "written" without paper or pencil, in the author's mind, during his five-year incarceration; controversial because it presents a highly emotionally-charged and partisan view of its historic period, that of the mid-century schism in the ranks of international communism. It is published by the East European Monographs because it is a powerful and moving account by a sensitive and gifted poet of courage in adversity, of the triumph of the human spirit under the most brutalizing conditions. It is published for its universality, not for its particularism.

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INTRODUCTION

Tito's accomplishments were many and extraordinary. He led Yugoslavia's wartime Partisans to victory, he co-founded the world's nonaligned movement, he ended his many years in power as a world elder statesman, admired and listened to by kings, dictators and presidents. But none of these, or other, triumphs had in time's perspective the scope, endurance or seeming finality of his 1948 defiance of Stalin and the Cominform that shattered forever the unity of international communism.

Perhaps awareness of the magnitude of this deed, certainly in the interest of the West's global struggle against communism, led Western historians and journalists writing about Tito and the Yugoslavia of his day, to ignore the darker side of Tito's defiance of Stalin and its costs in Yugoslav victims. Western accounts, without exception, to my knowledge, give the impression that once Tito and his close circle of associates—Djilas, Ranković, Kardelj, Pijade—made the fateful decision to resist Stalin, the Yugoslav party gave them practically unanimous support, something that defied logic considering the earlier worship of Stalin and the Soviets.

That is certainly the impression conveyed by Sir Fitzroy Maclean in his now classic, *The Heretic, The Life and Times of Josip Broz Tito*. The same impression is given by Phyllis Auty in her volume *Yugoslavia*, written at greater distance and less personal involvement. Typically Auty dismisses the matter of Yugoslav Communist opposition to Tito in a couple of terse sentences: "All leading Yugoslav communists except one important leader, Arso Jovanović (shot whilst trying to leave the country), stood firmly behind Tito. Two

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other leaders, Hebrang and Žujović, together with a number of other 'Cominformists' were imprisoned. Some escaped abroad."

Maclean, Auty, as well as Ernst Halperin in his perspective *The Triumphant Heretic*, John C. Campbell in *Tito's Separate Road*, and scores of other American and European authors, said almost nothing about Yugoslav Communist opposition to Tito. Aside from mentioning the fate of a few top Communist opponents, such as Arso Jovanović, Hebrang and Žujović, they say nothing about the number of the purged or their treatment. The inevitable impression is that the number is insignificant and that most were treated relatively benignly, despite the uncertainty and danger the Tito regime faced at the time.

This in turn contributed to the perception that Tito, unlike other Communist revolutionaries, was relatively tolerant and humane toward political opponents. Tito's subsequent tolerance of Milovan Djilas, and particularly Alexander Ranković, after they were denounced and disgraced for various heresies and oppositional activities, contributed to the mythology of Tito as a benign autocrat. It was often stressed with approval that with the possible exception of the Croat Communist Andrija Hebrang, Tito did not physically liquidate his fallen associates, belying Vergniaud's dictum that like Mars, revolutions devour their own children.

Since Tito's demise in 1980, his legend has been subjected to a constrained though clearly mounting attack in Yugoslavia. All sorts of dark revelations have surfaced in novels, plays, biographies and newspapers.

Thus, Tito's climb to the top of the Yugoslav Communist leadership was revealed in all of its abjectness in *Enigma Kopinić* by Vjenčeslav Cenčić. Similarly, a number of books have appeared about Goli Otok, the island in the Adriatic where tens of thousands of "Cominformists" were confined, tortured and/or killed after 1948. The revelations, in turn, forced Tito's political heirs to respond and defend in the media what happened in that terrible place of confinement and mass death.

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Goli Otok is a small, desolate island north of the much larger island of Rab, and across a sea channel from the town of Senj, under stony, grey Mt. Velebit. Goli Otok—meaning "barren island" in Croatian—is about seven miles long and two miles wide. Before thousands of prisoners were brought there, it was uninhabited. Next to Goli, separated by a narrow channel, is Sveti Grgur, a somewhat larger but equally desolate island, where most killings were carried out.

In 1948, someone, it is not known who, chose Goli Otok as the place of detention for "Cominformists"—members of the Communist party, army and security forces—who sided, or were suspected of sympathizing, with Stalin and the Communist Information Bureau. At the time, few people besides the prisoners and possibly some members of their immediate families, knew about Goli Otok. And for those who knew about it, it was far wiser to say nothing. Nothing about this terrible place was ever mentioned in the Western media, whether by design or out of ignorance. In fact, this book is the first account of Goli and what happened there to appear in the West.

As was already mentioned, since Tito's departure, Goli Otok has become the subject of literature in Yugoslavia, and the growing scandal of the torturing and killing forced Yugoslavia's leaders, and journalists in the regime's employ, both to concede the horrors and defend them on the ground of necessity. Thus, Milika Sundić, the well known Zagreb commentator, stated that "Goli Otok existed because it had to exist; had Goli Otok not existed, all of Yugoslavia would have been transformed into what Goli Otok was." Mitja Ribičić, Slovenia's former secret police chief and more recently President of Yugoslavia's League of Communists, sought to justify Goli Otok with the following argument: "We must not be ashamed of Goli Otok. All that happened there was legal because it was revolutionary."

Some of the novels and plays treated Goli Otok that appeared in Yugoslavia in recent years, openly named the place, while others, in Aesopian manner, pretended to describe some other, unnamed, place of horror. Branko Horvat's

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Noč do jutra (From Night to Morning), which received the prize of Slovenia's novel for the year 1981, was described in advance publicity as being about "the Nazi death camp in Dachau." Actually, its hero, Peter spent eight years on Goli Otok because he had offhandedly said at a party meeting that took place after the break with Stalin, "I don't know if they were lying then or now," alluding to the radical shift in official Yugoslav attitude toward Stalin and the Soviets. In 1982, Ferdo Godina published in Maribor, Slovenia, a book on the persecution of suspected Cominformists called *Molčeči orkester* (The Silent Orchestra). In the same year, Dušan Jovanović, a Slovene dramatist of Serbian origin, brought out his play *Karamazovi* (The Karamazovs), which dissected the psychological torture to which the prisoners at Goli were subjected.

But the novel that gave the subject of Goli enormous authority and forced Yugoslav leaders and the officially-manipulated media to respond and defend their record in 1948, was Antonije Isaković's novel *Tren II* (The Moment 2). Born in 1923, Isaković had joined Partisan resistance in its initial stage in 1941. He is a member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, a one-time member of the Serbian Communist Party Central Committee, and one of Serbia's foremost writers and a leading nationalist. *Tren II* is written as a narrative. Isaković is telling a friend named Ceperko about the horrors and suffering he witnessed on Goli. At one point Isaković describes the following scene: "At last, I saw him: a man reposing against a smooth cliff, almost buried in a heap of stones. I recognized him: It was Tomo. He had been stoned to death. His head was whole, his eyes open, his face had a peaceful, slightly quizzical expression—there was no trace of revenge in his expression. The left arm was free. His legs from the knees down, protruded from the stones. Someone noticed blood. Twice a dark substance oozed from his mouth. His face was peaceful, his eyes open."

How many Cominformists were imprisoned on Goli and other places of internment? Contradictory figures have

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been given about the imprisoned, none at all, not even vague estimates, about those liquidated. Ranković, Yugoslavia's longtime secret police chief, speaking in 1952, claimed that 13,700 persons were sentenced as Cominformists, of whom 7,531 were already released from detention. Christine von Kohl, writing in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (May 7, 1982) said Belgrade sources had mentioned the figure 250,000. Perhaps to spike such exaggerated claims, Yugoslav authorities had Dr. Radovan Radonjić, a Montenegrin historian who wrote his dissertation on the subject, *The Conflict of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia with the Cominform*, give an interview to the Zagreb weekly *Danas* (August 16, 1983), in which he asserted that official Yugoslav documentation shows that from 1948 to 1963, when statistics ceased being compiled, 55,663 individuals had been arrested as suspected Cominformists. Radonjić claimed that most of the arrested were eventually released and many were "reintegrated" into Yugoslav life. Some, apparently, were even given minor government positions.

Neither Isaković, Jovanović, Godina, nor any of the others who had written in Yugoslavia about Goli, had actually been prisoners there, but were recounting the experiences of others. In this important respect, Venko Markovski is different. He is telling his own story, that of a Communist from Macedonia, who was tormented for five years of detention on Goli Otok, from 1956 to 1961. By the time he was brought to Goli conditions, though still inhuman, had improved somewhat in the sense that mass killings of prisoners were no longer a routine. Markovski, who is a lyrical poet, somewhat inclined to florid expression, insists, however, that all the events he describes are literally true and factually accurate, as for instance the discovery of, and content, of letters written by women prisoners before they were killed.

Markovski's story is a first in several ways. It is the first account in English about Goli Otok. Markovski lives in Bulgaria, where he has served in that country's parliament (Sobranje); he is Bulgaria's poet laureate, the recipient of

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numerous literary and state honors, notably the Dimitrov prize, Bulgaria's highest order. Though Markovski placed no obstacles to the publication of his memoirs of Goli in the West, it has not, so far, appeared in his own country, or anywhere else in the Soviet bloc, where more than a score of other volumes of his poetry and prose have been published.

The publication in the U.S. of Markovski's account of one of the darkest deeds of the Tito regime, the senselessly cruel torture and murder of thousands of erstwhile comrades will, almost certainly, provoke sharp Yugoslav reaction against Markovski, Bulgaria and its Soviet ally. For, it would have been extremely risky for Markovski to permit the book's publication in the West, without some powerful political placet. Judging by the fact that Moscow's *Pravda* suddenly published one of Markovski's poems praising the Soviets in its October 7, 1983, issue, shortly after the Yugoslavs had bitterly denounced his anti-Tito writings, and had demanded the removal of his books from the Moscow book fair, is an indication that the author continues to enjoy high esteem in the East.

* * *

At this point, more needs to be said about Markovski. He is a Bulgarian born on May 5, 1915, in that part of Macedonia that was annexed during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, by the Kingdom of Serbia, and which, at the end of World War I, in 1918, became part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later renamed Yugoslavia.

My impression is that Markovski's commitment to communism and the Soviet Union is intertwined with determined Bulgarian patriotism. Like other young Macedonians of the interwar years, Markovski became a Communist revolutionary because he wanted to free his people from Serbian oppression. As a teenager, he joined a clandestine group calling itself the "Macedonian organization." Again, like many of his young contemporaries engaged in the political underground, Markovski was jailed for the first time in 1934,

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spending a month in prison. Feeling himself a Bulgarian, and believing that Sofia would assist the cause of the Bulgarians in Macedonia, Markovski went to Bulgaria for the first time in 1937. In Sofia his first volume of poetry was published. But the monarchist, strongly anti-Communist Bulgarian regime had no sympathy for Markovski and his ilk. Eventually, to escape political persecution in Bulgaria, Markovski had to return to Yugoslav Macedonia.

There, in 1941, he joined the Communist party. In the same year Yugoslavia was attacked and dismembered by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria which annexed Macedonia. But Markovski, already marked as a leading Communist intellectual, was immediately confined by the Bulgarian authorities. Two years later, while temporarily transferred to a hospital, Markovski made his escape, and with his wife Filemena—also a lifelong Communist—and their infant son, joined the Communist-led Partisans in Macedonia, still a miniscule band of only 80 fighters. By the war's end, their numbers had vastly increased. Markovski had become a member of the Macedonian Partisan high command.

Markovski emerged from the war as one of Macedonia's top Communists and leading poet. He was elected deputy to both Macedonia's assembly in Skopje and the Yugoslav parliament in Belgrade. More importantly, he was entrusted with the task of chairing a commission which devised what is today the Macedonian literary language, as part of the revolutionary effort to mold the Macedonian Slavs into a distinct nation. At that time the Communists believed that this was the best way to resolve the tangled Macedonian problem, that has caused bitter conflict and five wars between the Bulgarians and Serbs.

In 1878, the San Stefano Treaty, imposed by Russia on the defeated Ottoman Turks, gave all of Macedonia to the newly created Bulgarian state. But Bulgaria's gain was of short duration. In the same year, the Congress of Berlin deprived Bulgaria of most of its territory. During the First Balkan War of 1912, Bulgaria and Serbia were allies against

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the Turks, but soon quarreled about the division of Macedonia. In the Second Balkan War, Bulgaria was in turn defeated and lost most of Macedonia to Serbia and Greece. During World War I, from 1915 to 1918, Bulgaria again briefly regained Macedonia, but lost it at the war's end.

My impression, derived from extensive conversations with Markovski in Sofia, was that he rapidly became disillusioned with Tito's post-World War II policies, even though he himself was a member of the new political and intellecual elite. Was Markovski's disaffection caused primarily by Belgrade's policies toward the Macedonian question? Or was he increasingly suspicious of the general drift of the Tito regime? The answer is not clear to me!

In any case, during the years 1946-1948, Tito tried to win the support of Georgi Dimitrov, the head of the Bulgarian Communist party, for a merger of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania, into a federation. Difficulties arose on the specifics of the union. Belgrade proposed that Bulgaria simply join Yugoslavia as its seventh republic, while the Bulgarians countered with a proposal for a union of the two states as equals. Stalin was evidently opposed to the idea that favored Tito's ascendent ambitions and blocked all concrete steps toward the union of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, thereby cancelling the project.

Though the West was surprised by the 1948 Tito-Stalin feud (U.S. intelligence became aware that strains had developed only a few months before the open break), relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviets had been strained since 1945, when Stalin, fearing an all-out war with the U.S. and Britain, refused to back Yugoslav annexation of Trieste.

Markovski told me that as early as 1946, he smuggled to Dimitrov by way of the Bulgarian ambassador in Belgrade, a secret 62-page report denouncing Tito's ambitions and dangerous scheming. Dimitrov forwarded the report to Stalin. Markovski did not describe to me in detail the content of his secret report, but did mention that two of the specific accusations raised in the 1948 Cominform resolution denouncing Tito, were taken from his report to Dimitrov

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and Stalin. My impression is that Markovski perceived Tito as an individual moved by excessive personal ambition and vanity, who would not hesitate to put his own interests ahead of those of the international Communist movement, a judgment that turned out to be correct.

Markovski was evidently disillusioned about how things were going in Macedonia. The Partisan war had been fought under the banner of *brotherhood and unity* of the Yugoslav nations and nationalities. All were promised equality and free development and even the right to secession, if they so desired. But, in practice, Tito and his predominantly Serbian entourage were restoring Serbian hegemony behind the paravent of communism. The Serbs had finally realized that their earlier policy of remaking the Macedonian Bulgarians into Serbs had utterly failed, so they abandoned it, in favor of a new plan calling for a separate Macedonian people. This artificial, and numerically weak Macedonian nation, hard pressed in its own territory by a growing Albanian population, would have to submit to Serbian leadership, in order to maintain itself.

Markovski blames the Titoist schism on the fateful dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, to which Stalin agreed under American and British wartime pressure. If the Comintern had not been disbanded, Tito and his associates would have found it more difficult to embark on their separate road which irreparably splintered international communism. But at what point in his career did Tito actually turn against Moscow? Markovski was not precise on this point. But he did say that the "Soviets got plenty of evidence from the British defectors Burgess, Philby and Maclean that Tito's collusion with British intelligence started way back."

As soon as the Cominform issued its condemnation of the Tito leadership, Markovski was placed under house arrest in Skopje. In Yugoslav terms, he was treated relatively mildly. But, why? Because he was Macedonia's leading poet and patriot. Because, at this point, Yugoslav intelligence knew nothing about his secret report smuggled to Dimitrov

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and Stalin. Possibly because the Yugoslav leadership still hoped that Markovski would rally to its side. After all, Macedonia is a kaleidoscope of shifting loyalties. Lazar Mojsov, Alexander Grlickov, and others had also once declared themselves to be Bulgarians, but are now leaders of a distinct Macedonian people. Markovski was offered the same choice, but refused it.

For the next eighteen years, Markovski's fortunes, and those of his family, mirrored the flux in Soviet-Yugoslav relations. In 1949, when a Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia was imminent (as former Hungarian general Bela Kiraly and others who had been directly associated with the planning testify), the Markovski family was transferred to a Skopje prison. By 1951, the emergency was over. Apparently, as Milovan Djilas tells it, Stalin scuttled his plans for an invasion of Yugoslavia after American military intervention in support of South Korea convinced him that a similar military response might be forthcoming in Yugoslavia's case. So Markovski and his family were allowed to return home. Markovski is convinced that the temporary reprieve was at least partly the result of numerous protests Belgrade received from West European Communist leaders, notably France's Maurice Thorez, with whom the Yugoslavs did not wish to break altogether.

Markovski was again arrested in 1956, this time for clandestinely circulating a scathing poem about Tito and his associates titled, *Suvremeni paradoksi* (Contemporary Paradoxes). He was betrayed by an associate, and this time formally charged and tried in court, and sentenced to five years of imprisonment which he served to the last day of his term on Goli Otok. Following his release in 1961, Markovski was allowed to return to Skopje where he continued under virtual house arrest. Finally, in 1966, he was allowed to leave Yugoslavia. He had applied for a passport to go to the Soviet Union, which was denied. On Markovski's passport the Yugoslav authorities had listed his profession as "poet." In Bulgaria, as Markovski put it, "we began a new life." He was welcomed as a noted artist, revolutionary, and Bulgarian.

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From Bulgaria Markovski continued to criticize the Tito regime in his writings and to assert the Bulgarian character of Macedonia. For this reason, the Belgrade authorities continued to regard him as a dangerous enemy, who should be destroyed. Over the years, the Yugoslav press has repeatedly attacked Markovski, calling him a subversive émigré Cominformist. The Belgrade government tried, on a number of occasions, to get the Bulgarians to ban Markovski's political and literary activities in opposition to Yugoslavia, but without success, with resulting strains between the two states. Markovski is convinced that his stubbornness provoked the Yugoslav secret police to take vengeance on his only son, Mile. In 1975 the younger Markovski was visited in Sofia by a friend from Macedonia. The two spent the day together and then parted. Soon afterward, Mile crashed his car and was killed. The autopsy revealed the presence of drugs in his body, though he never took any, and even did not drink. The Bulgarian authorities apparently fear for Markovski's own life, for he is constantly under guard in Sofia and can only be contacted through trusted intermediaries.

* * *

What seems to have pained Markovski most during his Goli Otok imprisonment was that both tormentors and victims were Communists, former Partisan fighters, comrades, men and women who had fought together for the triumph of the same idea. All those caught up in the Goli Otok tragedy seemed pawns of blind, implacable, merciless fate, beyond control. Many of those arrested as Cominformists were the most convinced of Communists, the truest of the believers, men and women who refused to believe that Stalin and the Soviets, whom the Yugoslav Communists had worshipped, had suddenly become the personification of evil and treachery. Those who fared best in the cataclysm that followed the Tito-Stalin schism, were those whose ideological commitment was weakest, who were personally loyal to Tito, those who simply acted as bureaucrats, policemen and spies of the Yugoslav state.

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In its essential character, of course, the tragedy that took place on Goli and Sveti Grgur is not unique in history. In times past, for instance, witches were persecuted with brutal vengeance. They were discovered everywhere, even in high places, among the clergy and nobility. Once persecution started, it fed on itself. The agents of Satan appeared legion. Only those who denounced others, confessed their sins in full and did appropriate penance, could hope for forgiveness in time. So, too, with those prisoners on Goli who finally under brutal beating and torture, "revised their beliefs," and finally perceived that their torture was justified and cleansing.

Saddle River, New Jersey Dr. Matthew Mestrovic

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FOREWORD

More than once the memory of Goli Otok has disturbed my soul and has possessed my imagination. Over the years, I have touched on the subject of Goli Otok in my writings. But, as yet, I have not written fully about the tragedy that took place on that evil island in the Adriatic Sea, invisible to free human beings.

Perhaps I shouldn't dwell on the years I spent on Goli Otok. But the death of Tito—the self-proclaimed leader of the Third World—has spurred me to do so now.

The memory of those slaughtered after 1948 has been like a wound on my conscience, compelling me to recount the most terrible tragedy of self-managing Yugoslavia.

The horror that is Goli Otok is intimately associated with Tito's rule. But who in truth is Tito? What dark truth is hidden behind his name? In March 1980 the Austrian paper *Kurrier* hinted that Tito was not really Josip Broz, but a certain Franz Broz. I won't argue whether one hid behind the other, or whether both were invented. Let future historians elucidate the Yugoslav phenomenon—the independent road to socialism.

Perhaps Tito took his alias from the name of the Roman emperor Titus or, as Pero Popivoda insisted, the name Tito came from the way he gave orders to his subordinates "You (*ti*)—that (*to*)." You do this, you do that! This is the more likely explanation, but the whole question is extraneous to my account.

Whether his public identity was a fabrication or not, whether his eyes were blue or brown, whether a finger on his right hand had been nicked by a pig in childhood or not—all these are details that become interesting only after one finds out who in fact was hiding behind that name. What interests us here is that such a person did sign documents

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and issue state decrees as Josip Broz. His voice was heard over the radio and television. Thus, there was an actual person who created enormous chaos in Yugoslavia through so-called self-management.

This Tito fought Stalin bitterly. But Stalin was only an excuse he used in order to continue attacking the Soviet Union, even after Stalin's death.

Tito was a provocateur who worked under different names for Western intelligence services. He spread dissension everywhere and succeeded in separating countries from the Soviet Union and the socialist community. Tito caused profound disarray in the international Communist movement. Concepts were degraded; the doctrine of scientific socialism was turned into a kind of dogma.

Tito opposed the cult of personality but insisted on being worshipped to a degree unknown in history. Throughout Yugoslavia, cities, streets, and squares were named for him; monuments to Tito were erected everywhere; he became synonymous with Yugoslavia.

The dissolution of the Comintern gave Tito his chance to unleash his hatred against the Soviet Union—the bulwark of peace and detente—and against socialism and communism in general. He kept insisting that the Yugoslav party was the only "true" Communist party.

Communists the world over lived in the hope that the Comintern had been dissolved only formally and that somehow, in one way or another, it continued to act, to work, to unite, to admonish, and to give directions; for all Communists believed that Moscow was the center of their movement, and all were convinced that there could be no other center.

But quietly, at first almost imperceptibly and using every available means, Belgrade emerged as the center of the nonaligned countries with Tito as their leaders.

Tito was the first to raise his voice against the progressive initiatives of the Soviet Union. He attacked and slandered the progressive nature of the Soviet Union, and its policies in Korea, Vietnam, Campouchea, and Afghanistan. But he

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kept silent when the United States crushed Chilean freedom, when it murdered Allende, when Pinochet jailed Chilean progressives, when the United States installed new rockets in Europe, and when Angola and Ethiopia were attacked. In all these cases Tito and the United States spoke with a single voice; through Tito, one heard Nixon and Carter. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is the Western politician who most closely resembles Tito in concepts and ideas.

The goal that neither Goebbels nor Hitler's war machine could achieve—to destroy the Communist movement and cause Communists to lose faith in one another—was realized by the revisionist Tito with his tactic of the separate road to socialism, introduced after he rejected the Cominform resolution of 1948.

Tito was the first to sow the seeds of discord within the Communist community. His example was later followed by others—Mao Tsetung, Hua Kuofeng, Carillo—each of whom cloaked his treachery in the banner of communism. Tito always wanted to be the first. To that end he awarded himself spectacular decorations. He was the man who killed Leninists and even Soviet citizens in Yugoslavia, the man who killed Octobrists who had taken part in the great Bolshevik Revolution; but he was also the man who awarded himself the orders of Victory, of Lenin, of the October Revolution.

Tito caused unprecedented chaos in the ranks of the League of Yugoslav Communists, creating a system of rotation which limited the term of office to one year, but at the same time he proclaimed himself Yugoslavia's president for life. In the end, however, he could not cheat death any more than other mortals can. Tito's lieutenants turned his hundred-day agony into a farce. The already unconscious leader kept sending messages of support to Pol Pot and Yend Sary; even after he was actually dead, his ambassadors continued to deliver his messages to the heads of state of the Third World.

In his relations with neighboring Balkan countries, Tito left a dangerous legacy of discord and tension: He incited

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the Bulgarians of Macedonia, whom he called Macedonians, to fight Bulgaria and to advance claims to the Bulgarian Pirin region. He encouraged the extremists of Skopje to claim Aegean Macedonia from Greece. He tried to set the population of Kosovo and Metohia against Albania, so that at an opportune moment he could absorb the People's Republic of Albania into Yugoslavia. This Austro-Hungarian incited the Slovenes to fight against Austria for Korushka, which he wished to annex. He encouraged the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia against Hungary, and the Romanians of Serbia against Romania. He did all of this while proclaiming that whoever attacks one part of Yugoslavia, attacks Yugoslavia's integrity. And to the peoples of Yugoslavia he left a legacy of mass unemployment, emigration, debts, and uncertainty.

The secret lists of Cominform sympathizers oblige me to return to the subject of Goli Otok, to explain in my letters the true nature of that demagogue, a demagogue such as the world had never seen before. I owe a debt to the memory of those who were massacred at the time when hatred raged against the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and other socialist countries, when the treacherous Satan, with all his might, was killing the Communist spirit, its hope, and the faith in the Soviet Union.

I wonder what the coming revolution in Yugoslavia will be like, what will happen when bureaucracy shakes the foundations of Yugoslav self-management? Fighting against bureaucracy, everyone will generate bureaucracy. Everyone will strive to provide himself with wealth. Revolution against bureaucracy will be as cruel as Tito's treatment of the Yugoslav Communists.

Dear reader, I begin my story of Goli Otok.

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LETTER ONE

Freedom had not yet dawned and pan-Serbianism was already knitting its nets for somber times.

On January 10, 1945, Stalin said to Dimitrov: "Yesterday I received a Yugoslav delegation [this is the Yugoslav delegation that included Kardelj, V. Vlahović, and General Terzic]. The Yugoslavs told me that they had suggested to the Bulgarians that they join Yugoslavia on the same basis as the Serbs and the Croats. But the Bulgarians disagree and insist on the creation of a United Bulgarian-Yugoslav state in which Yugoslavia and Bulgaria will be equal nations; something like old Austria-Hungary. Otherwise Bulgaria would simply be annexed to Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavs also want to annex Greek Macedonia; they want Albania, as well, even parts of Hungary and Austria. They are unreasonable." Stalin added, "I don't like their attitude."

When the Serbian chauvinists couldn't serbianize the Bulgarians in Macedonia straight away, they learned through experience to macedonize them instead. It took time before they recognized that the serbianization of the Bulgarians in Macedonia could be carried out through macedonization. 1948 was the watershed. I listened to the Cominform over the radio. I agreed with the accusations leveled by CPSU(b) [Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)] against the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist party.

Yugoslavia became a battlefield between the honest and the dishonest, between Communists and revisionists. The revisionists were in power. They used all means at their disposal to crush their opponents.

Whole organizations pronounced themselves against the YCP leadership and stood by CPSU(b).

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During most of 1948 I was seriously ill and was visited by doctors appointed by the authorities. In the meantime Marko Yotov Temnialov, my old friend from Yeni-köy* and now ambassador of the P.R. of Bulgaria in Belgrade, paid me a visit together with the Bulgarian military attaché. The attaché took the satirical pieces I gave them, but they didn't dare take "Toma Gorin," the novel in verse in which I denounced the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The satires were against the leaders: Tito, Kardelj, Djilas, Dimitar Vlahov, Lazo Kolisevski, Tzvetko Uzunovski, Mihajlo Apostolski, Blaze Konevski, and others. Some of the satires had been published in Bulgaria under a pseudonym.

Almost half a year passed in uneasiness after Yugoslavia was excluded from the ranks of the Communist parties and declared a revisionist state.

Did the Commintern believe that a revolution would immediately break out in Yugoslavia and throw the renegade Tito onto the dunghill of history? Developments showed that Yugoslavia was not yet mature enough for such a revolution. The danger that Yugoslavia would become an example for other socialist countries to imitate continued to produce anxiety, uncertainty, and surprise. Despite its vigilance, Moscow was late in excising the dangerous cancer that the impertinent Tito had brought to Yugoslavia.

Anti-Tito newspapers in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, and elsewhere, edited by the brightest and most resolute sons and daughters of Yugoslavia, recognized that the situation in Yugoslavia was entering a decisive phase. Economic sanctions were imposed. Diplomatic relations were curtailed and were on the verge of being broken altogether at any moment.

By the end of July the crisis reached its climax. UDBA† arrested large numbers of Soviet citizens living in Yugoslavia,

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* Yeni-köy—a fascist concentration camp near Xanthi in Greece.

† UDBA—Department of State Security in Yugoslavia.

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labeling them White Guards. Of course, if that had indeed been the case, why had UDBA not arrested them before the break with the USSR? These same Soviet citizens, these so-called Whites, had also been accused of spying for the Soviet Union, again without supporting evidence. Thus, Soviet citizens found themselves behind bars for crimes they never committed. This Yugoslav action provoked sharp Soviet protest. Bebler, the Yugoslav deputy minister for foreign affairs, told Charles Pick, the British ambassador in Belgrade, that the last sentence of the note, in which the Soviets said they would "resort to other, more efficient means" if the prisoners were not released, had a most sinister ring for the Yugoslav government.

In this tense and heated atmosphere, however, not even the sharpest denunciations could influence the actions of the schismatic Tito or foster conditions for a successful revolt in Yugoslavia. This was in large part because Tito, acting through the secret agents of Interior Minister Aleksandar Ranković, had at the very beginning succeeded in liquidating the Communists and progressive adherents of the Soviet Union. Thus the sacred flag of the Yugoslav Communists was stained with the blood of its worthiest sons and daughters.

On September 8, 1949, I was arrested together with my wife and seventeen close relatives. My mother and the children were interned in Kicevó. The confinement was relatively brief, however. We were released thanks to pressure exerted by Bulgarian and world public opinion, and after the personal protest of Trigve Li, then secretary general of the United Nations.

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LETTER TWO

In one night in 1941 the flames of the war for national liberation turned Yugoslavia into a beacon of hope for the Balkans and all of occupied Europe. Under the red banner of Communism and in the name of Stalin Yugoslavia was marching toward the future. In one night in 1948 that same Yugoslavia was transformed into a gloomy dungeon. If the world was a dungeon, then Yugoslavia was its most terrible cell. Since the fatal Cominform Resolution, Yugoslavia has become synonymous with tortures and outrages of all kinds; it is a sort of Wild West where pistols and knives are used to distribute justice. In the stormy and treacherous year 1948 we see the beginning of the degradation and villainy of the Marshal of the war of national liberation, the sinister Tito. Nobody was able to unmask that sergeant from the Austro-Hungarian army who used various pseudonyms, robbing honest people of their names, while pretending to be honest himself.

Mercilessly Tito subjected even his close aides to torture and suffering. Among them were Nikica Perla who committed suicide to avoid falling into the hands of the savage UDBA; Tito's personal bodyguard, the old party member Bosko Colić, who was sentenced to death because of his devotion to the Soviet Union and had that sentence reduced to life at hard labor only at the last moment; and Colonel Moma Djurić, commander of the security guard of the supreme headquarters during the war and later commander of Tito's bodyguard. Tito's colonels and generals, his lieutenant colonels, majors, and captains, and many other officers also suffered. Among them was Arso Jovanović, chief of the general staff of the Yugoslav army and chief of the supreme headquarters of the national liberation army and of PD* throughout the war, and a widely respected national hero. He was killed in mysterious circumstances on the Romanian border, allegedly while trying to escape to the Soviet Union. Also victimized were Lieutenant General Rade Zigić, a member of the Croatian Party Politburo,

* PD—partisan detachment.

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deputy prime minister of Croatia, and a national hero, and Lieutenant General Mirko Krdjić, chairman of the supreme military tribunal, who refused to try the friends of the USSR as traitors.

Lieutenant Colonel Bozović was cruelly tortured at Goli Otok. "Traitors, murderers!" he shouted at the UDBA agents who were torturing him. Enraged at their inability to crush this hero's spirit, they stabbed him in the back. Before dying, Bozović cried out: "You cannot kill the people. It is a merciless judge. It will make you answer for your crimes!"

Nobody could break this faith in the Soviet Union and in Stalin. The people condemned Tito's treachery openly and, as they did so, the prisons filled up. Foreigners in Yugoslavia had the impression that there were more people inside the prisons than outside them. Everywhere, in every corner of Yugoslavia, Stalin's name was scribbled on the walls. Even on the stones of Goli Otok, the most sinister of prisons, bold convicts carved: "Long live the CPSU(b)! Long live Stalin!"

As resistance to Tito became nationwide in scope, the numbers of the arrested and the missing swelled at an astonishing rate. The many party organizations openly declared their opposition to Tito's policies. By the thousands men and women were excluded from the Party and forced to begin a new life underground. Distinguished people inspired the struggle against the obscurantist; the name of each newly arrested person became a new banner in the hands of the proletariat. The arrested included ministers and deputy ministers, members of the Central Committee of the YCP, members of district and town committees, fellows and chiefs of the UDBA, writers and professors. I will mention the names of a few of them: Ljumović, member of the CC YCP and first secretary of the CP of Montenegro; Nikola Petrović, member of the CC YCP and minister of heavy industry in the federal government; Dusan Brkić, deputy prime minister of Croatia and member of the Politburo of the Croatian

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party; Slavo Zlatić, minister in the federal government; Canica Opacić, deputy prime minister of Croatia and a legendary leader of the Partisan movement, one of the first to be decorated with the order of "People's hero"; Milan Kalafatić, participant in the October Revolution and in the Spanish Civil War; Vojo Srzentić; Obren Blagoević; Caslav Bojović; Maksim Goranović; Branko Petricevic-Kadja; Lieutenant General Vlado Dapcević, head of the army political department; Petar Komnencić, professor and chairman of the National Assembly of Montenegro; Colonel Savo Stanoević, a national hero of Montenegro; Radivoje Vukicević, minister in the government of Montenegro; Mitar Pista, metalworker; Colonel Slobodan Radulović; Branko Aleksić, an UDBA major; Ozrin Dragan, a journalist and writer; Ante Zorić, an UDBA major; Avte Cinoti, deputy minister of Croatia; Nenad Vasić, deputy minister of the interior for Bosnia and Hercegovina; Colonel Jagos Zarić; Trajko Miskovski, Spanish civil war veteran and deputy minister of Macedonia; the Petrovic brothers from Bulgaria; Tzene Logar, a professor at the University of Slovenia; Budo Tomić, chief of UDBA in the Azbukobac district; Vuk Milikić, an UDBA major; Mile Zivković, a major (the last three were sentenced to death); Colonel Dusan Maitzen of Slovenia; Georgi Bikitzki, a division commisar from Vojvodina; Rade Zigić, a national hero and army commissar; Colonel Savo Vukcević, editor of the newspaper "*Narodna armia*" (people's army), later murdered at Goli Otok; Andrija Bubanj, ex-worker from Croatia and deputy minister of the federal ministry; Vladimir Lebedev, physician and colonel, a Soviet citizen; Milovoje Stefanović, a journalist and director of TANJUG, a people's deputy; Colonel Lipan Abramović from Montenegro; Mihajlo Vujkovac, a people's deputy; Professor Ljubo Vucković; Esaf Badnjević, Yugoslav ambassador to Egypt; Djuro Sargin, a chairman of the military tribunal; Moraca, a student; Novica Dejanović, a captain; Milorad Pantelić, a captain; Nikola Bozović, a journalist and people's deputy, subsequently killed; Dr. Labud Kusovac, a press attaché in Poland who had earlier worked

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in the Comintern; Colonel General Branko Poljanac, a military attaché in Moscow and first chief of the supreme staff; Ljuba Radovanović, a deputy in the Statutory Assembly since 1921; D. Cetković, a colonel and Spanish Civil War veteran; Zoran Petrović, a journalist and a writer; Sinisa Jankulov, an ex-secretary of the Sres committee in Vrsec; Major General Veljko Zizić; Stefan Mitrović; Djafer Kodra; Stevo Zecević, a federal minister of the building industry; Atza Dimitrijević; Stole Kovacević, a deputy minister of the Interior for Bosnia and Hercegovina; Vuleta Popović, a deputy of Hercegovina; Djoko Mirasević, holder of the French Legion of Honor; the Dohcević brothers; Dr. Milorad Vujosević, a physician; Jole Stanisić; Vukasin Milić, a lieutenant colonel; Branko Bukelić, a worker from Lika, people's deputy in Croatia, and consul in Canada; Ivan Dojcinov, a member of the International Brigade in Spain; Mino Bogdanov-Largo and his brother Boze, murdered on Goli Otok; Milan Marinković, an UDBA major in Loznica; Pajo Domnanović, a president of the people's team of Loznica; Dr. Savo Zlatić, a federal minister; Colonel Dr. Nikola Nikolić, a participant in the October Revolution; Nikita Kovacević, a participant in the October Revolution; Marko Prlja, a lieutenant colonel; Stevo Drinjak, a major, and regimental commander tortured by "press" and "blanket" (his brother was killed on Goli Otok and another one died in the war; their sister, in desperation, hanged herself); Fikret Mandjuka, an UDBA major; Plesac, an UDBA major; Tutomir Kovacević, an UDBA major, and many others.

Ranković admitted that between 1948 and 1952, 13,600 Communists who expressed support for the Cominform Resolution were sent to concentration camps without trial. On January 10, 1951, Tito told a UPI correspondent that about 4,000 Communists had been arrested. But on September 9, 1953, speaking in his capacity as president of the Yugoslav National Assembly, Moše Pijade stated that 171,731 persons had been arrested during this same period.

In the concentration camps on the Adriatic islands alone, 30,000 Communists, including 5,000 officers, were imprisoned. According to official Yugoslav figures, over 1,000 of these Communists were killed.

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Among those subjected to inhuman tortures in the concentration camps and prisons were more than twenty ex-ministers of republics, one chairman of the National Assembly, two deputy prime ministers, one hundred people's deputies, five generals, thirty colonels, and thousands of officers and NCOs.

The UDBA men showed exceptional cruelty in dealing with the citizens of Gradacac in Croatia. In a single day they arrested 161 persons and sent them to concentration camps on the Adriatic islands.

In 1949 the party committee in Bjelo Pole, led by the national hero Ilia Bulatović, rose in an armed rebellion that had to be put down by tanks and artillery. All the leaders of the uprising, including Bulatović, were killed. In 1952 UDBA burned a number of villages in the districts of Debar, Belic, Djakovica, Prizren, Drenovica, Pristina, Pec, Tetovo, and elsewhere.

Montenegro was most cruelly punished, as if in a fierce storm that sweeps everything in its path. More than 8,000 Communists, including almost the entire Central Committee of the Communist Party of Montenegro, were imprisoned. Twenty-two Montenegrin deputy ministers were sent to Goli Otok alone. Entire county committees from Niksić, Tivat, Danailovgrad, Berane, and Ulcinj were also sent to Goli Otok. In the village of Kostanje the peasant Dragović was killed for protesting to one of the UDBA men: "You eat white bread while we have none." In addition, the entire Sarajevo party committee and the UDBA leadership in Bosnia and Hercegovina were arrested, tortured, and sent under escort to the spectral Adriatic islands. At that time Skender Kulenović was stirring up hatred against Communist parties, in particular against the party of Lenin, in his base lampoon, "Zbor dervisa" (Congregation of Fanatics).

Arrests and trials continued to multiply as innocent people were brought to trial for crimes no one had committed. Many people fled to neighboring countries for safety even as citizens of those same countries living in Yugoslavia—

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Albanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Romanians—were brought to trial, charged with "spying." For example, in Leskovec they tried the Bulgarians Georgi Zahariev, Ljubomir Ivanov, Aleksa Stoiljkovic, Todor Miloslavljevic, and Nasta Marinkovic, who had allegedly betrayed a Partisan soldier during the war. All five were sentenced to death and shot. They were accused of "spreading enemy propaganda" and of "preparing the assassination" of representatives of the people's authority.

With these draconian measures UDBA crushed all potential opposition. Everyone lived in fear, no one knowing when fabricated charges might be brought against him, leading to imprisonment and trial.

Thus, on July 2, 1950, Vlado Dapcević and Branko Petricević were brought to trial in Belgrade on charges that they had planned to escape to Romania on the night of August 11-12, 1948, and had in July 1948 illegally organized a group of military and civilian traitors, which, with foreign help, planned to overthrow the people's state. The indictment also maintained that "they had been connected with the Soviet military attaché in Belgrade, received money for their escape, and spied on behalf of a foreign state. Bozo Ljumović and Arso Jovanović were allegedly guilty of the same crimes. They had allegedly met at Jovanović's house on August 10, 1948, and planned their escape to Romania. The next day they had tried to cross the border but were ambushed and one Vladimir Kovacević had killed Arso Jovanović, while Dapcević and Petricević managed to escape. Later, however, they were captured, tried, and sent to Goli Otok.

How could UDBA have known when, in what way and where they planned to cross the border? Wasn't the entire affair prepared by UDBA itself? And wasn't Vladimir Kovacević specially chosen to liquidate Arso Jovanović?

The case of Andrija Hebrang is perhaps the best illustration of the methods used to crush the genuine Communists. It should be emphasized that Andrija Hebrang and Sreten Zujović were first arrested and then excluded from the

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Party and not the other way around, which clearly demonstrates that the CPSU and the other Communist parties were fully justified in their charges against the Yugoslav revisionists. Later UDBA General Mile Milatović wrote *The Case of Andrija Hebrang* (Belgrade, 1953), in which he writes about the conduct of Andrija Hebrang during the inquest held by Mile Milatović. Hebrang was a YCP Politburo member, president of the Federal Planning Commission, and secretary of the CC YCP. Milatović had expected that Hebrang would repent of the fabricated crimes with which he was charged. Instead he claims Hebrang was "an enemy of the YCP, a traitor during the war of liberation, an Ustasha agent and provateur, etc." "All the time," during the inquest, Milatović continues, "Hebrang treated me as a class enemy" and was adamant in his beliefs. Milatović recounts how Hebrang was kept under constant surveillance day and night, even when he slept. How then could Hebrang have hanged himself with a scarf from a radiator in his cell? Still, UDBA General Milatović shudders as he remembers his last visit to Andrija Hebrang's cell, during which the doomed man said, "You are traitors, you are murderers. The people will avenge us!"

The Yugoslav leadership admitted that UDBA had "mounted the Party" and committed crimes with its knowledge. Thus, trying to reject the accusations, Tito betrayed the whole revolution. He shed the blood of the worthiest sons and daughters of the Yugoslav peoples in order to clothe his own blood-stained hands in white gloves.

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LETTER THREE

Hesitation and embarrassment now beset both the rank and file and the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist party. Some members sought to overcome their errors, but others such as Djilas, Dedijer, Bebler, and Ribnikar—who were in fact agents of Britain and the United States—started to play a treacherous part in Yugoslav political life. On December 22, 1953, at a meeting with Kardelj, Djilas propounded four theses: (1) Tito is a supporter of bureaucracy and would eventually come into conflict with it; (2) Ranković and Kardelj in fact agreee with him (Djilas), but are opportunists who do not wish to confront Tito; (3) willynilly a kind of socialist left-wing is emerging in Yugoslavia; and (4) it is possible that two socialist parties will develop and coexist in Yugoslavia.

Djilas later developed one of the theses in his article "Anatomy of a Morale," in which he accused Tito's ruling elite of drowning in bureaucratism. In particular he denounced Moše Pijade, Peko Dapcevic, and others, claiming they had transformed the LYC (The League of Yugoslav Communists) into an instrument in the service of their own careeristic objectives. This charge in turn provoked Moše Pijade, who made an angry rebuttal at the Plenum of the CC LYC on January 16-17, 1954. He charged that Djilas was like a character in one of his own stories who walks about the streets whistling, ignoring everything around him. He claimed that Djilas had written "Anatomy of a Morale" because he had nothing else to do and characterized the article as "political pornography."

Within the ruling group everyone was afraid for himself and no one dared to criticize Tito openly. In private, they complained about Tito's bureaucratism and his lack of consistency. At the same time, however, they maintained that he was best qualified to resist the coming storm, pointing out that during the war of liberation he had been the leader of the proletariat and of the masses. Tito's close associates thus kept silent about his faults, exalted his vanity, and

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nurtured the passions that were to propel him in the wrong direction. In effect, they stoked the fire that, in a more complicated situation, would swell into an inferno.

On June 28, 1953, the weekly journal *NIN* published an editorial with the daring title "Our Victory" which dealt with relations with the USSR and the prospects for normalization. The editorial maintained:

> The present softening of the Soviet stand reflects the crisis of the whole social system in Eastern Europe, which is based on the Soviet model. We refer to the economic and political crisis of what is almost a slave system, a system in which peoples and entire nations are subjected to a dreadful despotism. We also refer to the dead end of the foreign policy which this system has pursued for years. Within the limits of its potential, Yugoslavia has probably contributed the most to the intensification of that crisis. Strikes and open workers' revolts have recently taken place in Czechoslovakia. According to some announcements, the workers have organized strikes in Hungary as well. Finally, the German proletariat has stood up against Soviet tanks. . . . The time has arrived when the East European peoples will start to consider imitating the *INFECTIOUS YUGOSLAV EXAMPLE*. Yugoslavia resisted. Yugoslavia withstood. Yugoslavia won.

I recall that in 1949 the Yugoslav leader rationalized the establishment of the Atlantic treaty NATO, alleging that it was intended "to defend" Western Europe against "Soviet aggression." Yugoslav leadership subscribed to the arguments of the arch-reactionary slanderers of the USSR. In writing and speaking they alleged that the USSR had degenerated into an imperialistic force that menaced world peace, that state capitalism, not socialism, existed in the Soviet Union, and even more, that it had become a slave system.

All kinds of inventions and phantasmagorias issued from the mouth of Yugoslavia's propaganda apparatus. Every-

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thing that the people held sacred, everything that came from the USSR was slandered, trampled on, questioned. On the occasion of the Nineteenth Congress of the CPSU, the daily *Borba* wrote:

> The Soviet peoples are securing the caste interests of the bureaucracy through slave labor. Moreover, this caste is exploiting all the satellite countries. From Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Albania, Korea, and Mongolia trains are carrying the fruits of the people's exhausting labor to the capital of the bureaucratic caste. So-called Stalinist socialism has created social relations analogous to those that existed in slave-holding Rome, where the slave owners consumed the labor of the entire working world. [*Borba*, November 3, 1952]

Reading these words I recall *Borba* of November 15, 1951, when the most violent persecutions were taking place in Yugoslavia and everyone feared for his life and freedom. *Borba* reported that the armed forces of Yugoslavia would receive enormous quantities of arms from the United States in accordance with a special military assistance treaty Tito had signed the previous day. Article I of this treaty reads: "The assistance of the U. S. will be rendered to Yugoslavia *within the framework and according to the terms and regulations of the mutual security law*." That law provided assistance to the countries of the "free world in their fight against internal Communist subversion and the external Communist threat in the name of preservation of freedom." Article 6 of the treaty reads: "The government of the FPRY reconfirms that, consonant with the maintenance of its political and economic stability it will contribute to the development of its own defensive capacity as well as to the *DEFENSIVE CAPACITY OF THE FREE WORLD*. The government of FPRY assumes the obligation to undertake actions in agreement with the U. S. in order to remove the causes of international tension."

Some time later, in response to an American journalist's question how America benefited from arming Yugoslavia,

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Tito said: "For several years now America has been benefiting. The Yugoslav army is a factor that is useful to America and to all countries that are concerned with peaceful development. America has a friendly Yugoslavia on its side which it can rely on in the event of aggression and if the aggressor tries to enslave other nations" (*Borba*, November 1, 1951).

British Foreign Office documents show that Tito made similar statements to Churchill at their meeting of August 12, 1944, in Caserta near Naples.

The official British protocol notes of this meeting, later published in *NIN*, state: "Prime Minister Churchill suggested that the best alternative for Yugoslavia was a democratic system based on the peasants, and a gradual improvement in agricultural conditions." Marshal Tito responded, as he had many times before, that "*HE HAS NO INTENTION OF INTRODUCING A COMMUNIST SYSTEM IN YUGOSLAVIA*, if only because the majority of Europeans will live in democratic systems after the war and Yugoslavia cannot afford to be different." Later in the meeting, Churchill asked Tito to confirm this statement publicly. The notes continue: "Marshal Tito was not inclined to make such a statement at this moment because it could leave the impression that he had made it under pressure and therefore undermine his position. . . . Marshal Tito agreed to consider the inclusion of such a statement, however, since it was our wish."

Strange indeed are the ties with which Tito bound himself to the British prime minister. Clearly, if Churchill had not had complete confidence in Tito, he would not have sent his son Randolph to serve with Tito's forces. Winston Churchill was well known for his hatred of the Soviet Union. And yet, back from a meeting in his honor in Britain, Tito boasted "Churchill himself told me: 'We are your allies. If our ally Yugoslavia is attacked, we, the British, are going to die together with you.' " Tito continued: "For me and for all of us it was a pledge and it suffices. We don't need written treaties." (*Borba*, April 1, 1953).

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of statements by two men whose ideologies and world views were diametri-

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cally opposed. Churchill, who wished to bury the Soviet Union, and Tito, who slandered the Soviet peoples, shared the same views. The only difference is that while the first insisted on a public avowal that communism won't be built in Yugoslavia, the other, barely hiding his fear, declares that such a pledge would undermine his authority in that same Yugoslavia.

Politics follows a crooked path. Policy is most powerful when it moves in a zig-zag. If a policy is consistent, uncompromising, firm, then it faces an impasse. A policy is powerful when it trims its sails, when it is flexible.

As a politician and statesman serving British interests, Churchill followed a clear, well-defined course toward his objective, Tito, on the contrary, served his own interests rather than those of Yugoslavia and its peoples. Tito's interests coincided with his ideals and conceptions of a new state and society, but these ideals were always strictly subordinated to his will, to his autocracy. He was essentially a new kind of tyrant.

The claim that everything he does and did sought to serve the Yugoslav peoples is mere propaganda. The ideologist of the CPY and later of the LYC had long since broken with true Communist ideology. Ideology is reduced to dust and ashes when the ideologist, its promoter and champion, betrays its most basic tenets. Communism is an organic doctrine. It demands comprehensive knowledge of both the doctrine and the society, and any ignorance of communism is disastrous for those who seek to apply its concepts. The basis of communism is the dictatorship of the proletariat, not the dictatorship of one person. Tito demonstrated a lack of understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This explains why, with bitter hatred, he slandered the Soviet Union, the socialist community, the Warsaw Pact, and the Communists in the CPY itself.

Tito decided to destroy all that was genuinely Communist in Yugoslavia. Whether he succeeded or not, only the future can tell. If his public activities and statements at rallies and meetings are indications of his resolve, then the answer is already clear. He has already liquidated communism in Yugoslavia.

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LETTER FOUR

There is hardly any parallel for the cruelty and brutality with which Tito took revenge on his victims—people whose beliefs he presumably shared. One cannot help but feel that the settling of accounts with comrades who until recently had belonged to the same movement, who had taken part in the same armed struggle, and who had faced terrible dangers and even death extolling Stalin, was strongly motivated by personal ambition. But roots of this revenge struck deeper than ambition. Something had gone wrong in the Yugoslav Communist party from the moment Tito became its leader. He encouraged ideological confusion and deviation in the movement. He wanted to wear white gloves and cover his fingers with diamond rings. He seemed moved by a strong desire to humiliate the Soviet Union and to bring it to its knees.

If Tito had been an honest Communist he would have discussed his differences with Stalin in a closed meeting of leaders of the Communist parties at which achievements and mistakes could have been discussed frankly and the causes of the growing schism objectively analyzed. For Tito must have been aware that the split he was initiating would have serious consequences for the world Communist movement, all the more so since a number of Communist parties had already come into power.

Is it Communist behavior to refuse to explain one's views when invited to do so before a forum such as the Cominform, whether in Bucharest, Moscow or elsewhere, and to refuse to do so by hiding behind all kinds of dubious excuses? Is it worthy of a Communist to insist that he is the only one who is right in a given dispute? Does a Communist attack others without being attacked; does he always insist on having the last word? Who gives a single individual the right to act as the supreme judge in a party dispute? The strength of the party lies in the fact that in the interest of international communism it arrives at a consensus and rejects anything that could harm, damage, or

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split the forces of world communism. Marx and Engels wrote: "Communists differ from the other proletarian parties only by the fact that, on the one hand, in the struggle of the proletariat from the different nations, they advance and defend the common interests of the world proletariat rather than those of only one nation's proletariat and, on the other, during the different stages through which the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie passes, they always defend the interests of the whole movement" (*Communist Manifesto*, 1848).

The leaders of Yugoslavia, and Tito in particular, act in just the opposite manner. Tito wants to impose his concept, a concept that has nothing to do with communism, nothing to do with the cause of the proletarian revolution, nothing to do with the cause of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus he renamed the CPY, calling it the League of the Yugoslav Communists in order to make it different from all other Communist and workers' parties, that is, the parties that are fighting for true Communist ideals. It was appropriate for Marx and Engels to differentiate themselves from the utopian socialists (Weitling), the Prudhonists, and the Blanquists because the union of the Communists was then the only motive force, the inspiring element that was leading, guidng, and directing the working masses. But the term League of Yugoslav Communists (LYC) has introduced confusion and doubt into the ranks of the parties that are fighting against imperialism and capitalism on behalf of the Communist cause. It is clear that the pre-1948 conflict was sharply delineated in the Declaration of the Communist Parties in 1948. That declaration blamed the leaders of the CPY as leaders of the CPY and not as leaders of the LYC, which was formed at a later date. Still, in changing the name of the party they did not change its policies. All sorts of suspicious, shady, and wavering element—in a word, collaborationists of all kinds and all strata—joined the LYC. In this sense, Moscow was correct in insisting that the situation be clarified, that the unhealthy ideological atmosphere be eliminated. In this context Khrushchev did the

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right thing when he read his self-criticism and cast the blame for the break on Beria, giving the floor to the leader of the Yugoslav Communists to condemn Djilas, the slanderer, intriguer, and enemy of communism. But Tito refused to do this, saying that the Soviets should not meddle in what was strictly a Yugoslav matter. Despite all the clashes and obstacles, however, there came a moment when they were able to discuss the matter face to face, to accuse each other, to admit, to deny, to approve, to make precise discriminations. And looking again at the materials that give the full picture of those conversations, one gets the impression that two countries with diametrically opposed positions are discussing a matter that is unfamiliar to both, Khrushchev sought to restore relations with the leadership of the LYC in order to protect the Yugoslav peoples and the Yugoslav Communists from the terrible storm that was brewing in Yugoslavia, a storm that aimed to eliminate all Communists from Yugoslav territory. And Tito, through Khrushchev, wished to condemn not only Stalin and Beria but the entire Soviet system, to portray it as a systematic attempt to resurrect the slave epoch. (Palmiro Togliatti later did much the same thing.) No one knows whether Tito went to the Moscow meeting on his own initiative or in response to dark promptings from Britain and the United States. But who needed this absurd spectacle in the first place? What did the great schismatic gain from it? Let us assume that he was correct, that he was in fact unjustly attacked by both the CPSU(b) and the Cominform. If so, the matter could have been elucidated, substantiated, and confirmed with dignity through the proper channels, with the participation of all the Communist parties. Settled in this manner, the dispute could have taken its place as a mere stage in the development of the progressive struggle against dogmatism. Every issue could have been settled to the edification of all and as an example of good will. But subsequent developments and the attitude of the CPY show that this course of events was doomed in advance; Tito's supporters seized any opportunity to obstruct a genuine restoration of relations between the CPSU(b) and the CPY.

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The CPY used all available means to spread confusion and doubt in the ranks of other Communist parties while convincing its own members that it had been victorious in the struggle with the USSR and that, thanks to Tito, it had achieved a position whose audacity and determination no other Communist party could equal. Such statements were reminiscent of what the CPY had done immediately after the liberation of Yugoslavia, when it claimed that Yugoslavia had liberated itself without Soviet assistance, that the Red Army had behaved bestially, and that the moral quality of British and American forces was much higher than that of the Soviet troops. The Yugoslavs continued to issue statements that denigrated the glory of the victorious Soviet forces, disparaging the Soviet Union's objective contribution to Yugoslavia's war of national liberation. The Yugoslavs went so far as to claim that the Soviet Union was a bureaucratic state and that its army brought enslavement, not liberation. Whereas the CPY said one thing to its members and another to the masses in the wake of the liberation, it now made the same claim over the mass media and at meetings of its rank and file: it had done all it could to improve relations with the Soviet Union, but the Soviets were failing to respond positively. Even its language was a disgrace, filled with worn-out clichés that would not be a credit to even the vilest propaganda. Pero Popivoda was correct when he later claimed that Tito felt a particular hatred for the Bulgarian Communists.

More than once in fits of rage Tito admitted that he was a revisionist, but claimed that his was a "dialectical" revisionism. Tito's ideological vacillations were due in part to his ignorance of terminology, in a word, to his poor understanding of Marxism. All those who knew him when he was in Moscow—where he was known as "Walter"—agree that he was poorly educated, and that what little he knew he used in his future struggle against the Communists. In this sense, he resembled the German student who, having graduated with honors from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow, was asked by his Soviet professors to give his opinion of the institute. He replied:

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> You don't ask the graduates whether their knowledge of Marxism-Leninism amounts to a belief or whether it is merely knowledge. It is not a belief with me; were it, I would remain in the Soviet Union to teach students Marxism-Leninism. For me it is knowledge only and I will use this knowledge against Marxism-Leninism itself. My own belief is in National Socialism—Hitler's theory. And the better we know Marxism-Leninism, the more certain we will be in our attacks against it.

It is not an accident that Tito surrounded himself with people who, in the great majority, were hardly better educated than he was. Pero Popivoda was right when he remarked that "in terms of its members' education, the Yugoslav government ranks at the very bottom in all of Europe." A similar point was made at the Politburo meeting that expelled Sreten Zujović and Hebrang from the party. Zujović remarked: "Don't you see that an ignorant illiterate is leading the party?"

Increased efforts were being devoted to the normalization of relations with the Soviet Union and the other Communist parties. Nevertheless, the seeming normalization was repeatedly interrupted by recurrences of the tense ideological struggle. The intensity of the conflict varied, along with the importance of the issues at stake. But there were always portents that a new storm was about to break. At that time the Chinese Communist party, led by Mao Tse-tung, took the side of the Soviet Union and attacked the CPY. With Stalin's assistance, and particularly as a result of Yudin's efforts, Mao had shaped his vague notions of Marxism-Leninism into a harmonious and convincing Marxist doctrine.

When Khrushchev and Tito met to discuss the normalization of relations, the encounter had all the trappings of a high-level meeting between low-level people. Bulganin hailed Tito as "the great Leninist," but Tito did not credit the sincerity of these words and continued his subversive activities against the CPSU. Veljko Micunović, the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow, later referred to these events in his book *Moscow Years*. He said that the joint Soviet-Yugoslav Belgrade declaration was written by the Yugoslavs, that is, by Tito himself. There is little reason to doubt the truth of his assertion.

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LETTER FIVE

The twentieth century is a century of trials and storms, but also one of upsurges and great accomplishments.

Life does not move according to one individual's will. Life is an unending flux of encounters and partings, of griefs and joys. People are travelers; humanity is the locomotive. But occasionally, this locomotive is momentarily arrested by the death of an individual.

After Lenin's, Georgi Dimitrov's was a death that affected the whole planet. The world grieved at the announcement of this great loss for the proletariat, for Dimitrov was the man who had dealt fascism a hammer blow. Dimitrov was synonymous with Bulgaria and Bulgaria was synonymous with internationalism. The Yugoslav leaders alone took advantage of Dimitrov's death to spread false calumnies. Their insinuations were reckless and shameful.

Four years after the death of Georgi Dimitrov the world proletariat suffered another great loss. Again there was great grief around the world. Stalin was dead. Stalin—the man who in the fierce struggle on the eve of World War II crushed the Trotskyites and all the other enemies of the Communist cause, the enemies of the Soviet Union and the international proletariat. His was the name that struck fear and trepidation in the Communist schismatics, the agents of imperialism, and those sworn enemies of Leninism—the revisionists.

Even as all Communists, workers, and proletarians—fighters for freedom both famous and anonymous—were struggling to overcome their indescribable grief, the leader of the LYC found reason to be joyful.

Those who showed their grief UDBA branded as "Stalinists," and in the dead of night UDBA agents dragged them away to the prisons. There were men and women who openly expressed their anguish with tears and moanings. These people feared no one, for it was as if their lives had lost all sense and delight. The future seemed a void—uncertain, dark, confused. Their silence gave voice to a multilingual sorrow.

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For Tito's agents, however, the dead Stalin was more terrifying than the living one. After all, there was no bullet, no sword, no weapon of any kind which could strike down the dead Stalin and transform him into nothingness. Even in death he struck terror into his enemies; his successor in both party and state, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, was already shivering with cold.

And then, in the dark of night, Stalin's remains were removed from the Mausoleum. The abyss that now gaped at Lenin's side was terrible to behold. For true Communists this was an unparalleled profanation. All around the world men and women had been willing to die in the name of Stalin, to die for a brighter future. The Communists of Kerala state in India asked the Kremlin to give them the mortal remains of Stalin in order that they might preserve them for future generations.

Honest Communists were profoundly shaken by Khrushchev's action. The Cominformists now turned their eyes to China. Those who had fought an unequal struggle in Stalin's name against the Nazis were overcome with sorrow and anguish. They asked themselves: What is the truth? And where is Marxism-Leninism's power in this shaken and uneasy world? Looking to Peking, they saw that the Chinese were constantly unmasking Belgrade's treachery. Mao Tse-tung became a banner for all. But in China itself Mao was being tranformed into a living god. From dawn to dusk the Red Guards chanted the orders of Mao, destroying cultural monuments and repudiating such great artists as Beethoven and Dostoyevsky. Rebelling against the cultural heritage of centuries, they recognized only Mao and Maoism. Thus did the great "Cultural Revolution" begin, implemented in a barbarous way that revealed the lack of culture of the Chinese "revolutionaries." Throughout the world true Communists were again thrown into confusion. The Cominformists on Goli Otok were completely disoriented by the Cultural Revolution. They had hoped their own stance would be affirmed by China, the land of the "Great Helmsman," but they were disappointed. They had deceived

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themselves into believing that China would resurrect Marxist-Leninist theory. After all, throughout China the squares were still adorned with monuments to Stalin, and accounts of the ceremony honoring China's revolution reported that Stalin was still revered as one of the classics of Marxism-Leninism. Beside the portraits of Marx, Engels, and Lenin there was a portrait of Stalin in his famous tunic.

Tito launched a propaganda campaign against China and Mao but, at the same time, he continued to look for ways to mend his relations with Peking, realizing that it was the world's most populous country and believing that it was building socialism.

A paradox emerged: the revolutionaries who rose against the Yugoslav's leadership's betrayal were suddenly accused of treachery; all their actions were denounced as antiparty, anti-Soviet, antistate. The traitor revisionists who brandished the banner of schism were the ones who were breaking the ranks of communism and opening the way to the restoration of capitalism and imperialism. And suddenly they were proclaimed to be true Communists and were pointed out as models for other Communists who sought to build socialism in their own countries. Revisionism thus became international. Tito's revisionism championed a separate Yugoslav road to socialism, and even as this form of revisionism became the ruling ideology in Yugoslavia, Moše Pijade proposed the rehabilitation of Trotsky and Trotskyism.

In Albania and Poland the leaderships declared their opposition to the rude and precipitate actions of Khrushchev. They opposed his distortions of Marxism-Leninism, his adulation of Tito, and his revisionism. To crush this opposition, Khrushchev began attempts to replace the leaderships, but in Albania and Poland he found it difficult to have his own way.

1956 was a year of upheaval. The masses called for the restoration of their rights and sought to revenge the wrongs done in their countries. At the same time, counterrevolution

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was gaining the upper hand in Hungary, where imperialism and the bourgeoisie had created an unprecedentedly favorable situation. Here an offended leader, seeking to settle his personal score, inflicted damage on a worldwide scale. And as Imre Nagy and the counterrevolution was attempting to come to power in Hungary, the satanic fingers of Josip Broz were openly involved.

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LETTER SIX

The complicated events that followed upon the death of Stalin brought to the pinnacle of Soviet power a man who was almost unknown in the international Communist movement—Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev. This wretch of a man precipitated the greatest schism in the history of international communism. He accomplished that which the likes of Hitler, Goebbels, and Goering had only been able to dream of. Among other things he forced other Communist parties to pay homage to Belgrade and apologize to the blood-stained, demonic Tito.

It was when even the staunchest Communists had lost all hope that I again did what I had done on the eve of World War II. In 1940 I had published a poem titled "It Strikes Twelve" and now I wrote "Contemporary Paradoxes." The poem was published illegally in Yugoslavia at the end of August 1955 and distributed in the underground. In this poem, which was signed with the pen name Leopardi, I unmasked the treachery of Tito's Yugoslavia; sadly this one poem was the only protest raised against Tito at that time. But a turncoat Communist, the carpenter Orce Srebrov from Veles, betrayed me to the authorities and I was arrested on January 7, 1956. In mid-March of that same year I was tried by the district court in Skopje and sentenced to five years of penal servitude and two additional years of loss of civil rights. My sentence was appealed, but to no avail. It was duly confirmed by the Supreme Court. Here is a verse from the poem that cost me so much:

The Revolution knows no sin.
The Revolution knows no laughter.
The Revolution even devours its own children.
The Revolution was born in the stomach,
It grew up inside the head.
In the white yard a raven crows.
The Revolution's leader
Rips off its pants.
The law is robbed; robbery becomes the law.

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LETTER SEVEN

Again, I have not been able to sleep a wink tonight. Unutterable loneliness and blind uncertainty are my cellmates. In my suffering I am buffetted alternately by gloomy thoughts and angry questions. This cell has witnessed a great deal of human anguish. Other prisoners withered away here long before I arrived; other feet paced this inhuman room long before mine.

Outside golden leaves fall in the autumnal woods. And in the prison, too, the golden ones are falling.... The whirlwinds rip the golden leaves from the trees and speed them to oblivion. Those who had been bravest are struck down and thrown into mute graves. But after they are gone, their spirits continue to hover about us....

When I was a child I used to sit by the friendly family hearth, listening to tales of the ancient, blood-stained prison whose heroes were butchered in Ottoman times. It is said that this sinister prison has stood here on this miserable hill ever since the days when the sultan ruled. Since that time it has been killing freedom day and night. My comrade in struggle, the stonemason who built this cell, was superhuman. He poured his devilish malice into these ominous walls. For six full months I was interned in this inferno of a dungeon.

The enemy has shackled my bold ambition more than once. The path of struggle is strewn with thorns and flowers; prison cells are the necessary corollaries of truth. My own flower—the flower of my youth—perished in the dark night of forced labor. I had been imprisoned before, but never did I imagine a cell as ghastly as this one in Skopje's capital.

This cell is my whole world. I feel like a beast of prey locked up in a cage. My keepers feed me with fraud, water me with hatred. Even if I were a tercel, I wouldn't be able to escape this accursed place. I am surrounded by stone walls seven spans thick. A vaulted arch, about ten feet high, hangs over me. Near the top of the arch there is a window, but it is blocked by rusty bars—like a vicious omen it broods

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over my gaping grave. I lie on a blood-stained soldier's blanket. My bed is a wooden floor covered with moss and stench. The joyless desert in which I live is nine steps long and scarcely one step wide. I have everything I need in this empty home: a pitcher for water, a bucket for my needs, a sleepless night, an unfathomable silence filled with visions of frenzied dancing.

The sun's rays never penetrate my open grave. Rainbows never arch over it and one can never hear the gay flutter of the birds. From time immemorial the dawn has come late here. Outside the day is a soaring eagle, but down here it is a helpless slave delivered by vicious fists. The day is my brother in misery. Like me it is forlorn and pale, shackled and mute; it is imprisoned in this freezing cell with me.

As I write these lines in the dusk, a storm has suddenly broken and is spreading chaos everywhere. I am terribly cold. Above my head a light flickers like a deadly candle. My hair stands on end. A terrifying calm envelops the clammy walls. It is a sinister moment. Silence and the storm have kindled a fiery alarm in my ears. Oh, ill fortune!

I cannot hear the song of the Vardar River.... But I know that here, beneath the rocky walls of this old dungeon, the Vardar River—that warrior and soldier, that restless martyr, that daring reviver of Bulgaria—flows through Skopje, through my native town. It flows and sings a terrible song, a song that recalls blood-soaked Golgothas. At this very moment that beloved child of Vrutok flows under the Stone Bridge; it waves its snowy mane and sings its terrible song, a song that echoes violently in my soul. . . .

Oh, Vardar, my anguish is woven of the same baleful fires that are your hell. My nature is inseparable from yours, my fate is cradled in your cradle. Oh, river of suffering! River of sobs! Your whispers echo in my blood; in this deserted cell, I am looking for you, listening for your familiar voice.

I cannot hear the strokes of the Sahat kule watchtower. But here, beside me, beside this awful dungeon, his figure

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rises in the Skopje sky. There he stands, this judge of time; he stands and leafs through the book of eternity with his icy hand. For centuries this mute and patient witness has been receiving and bidding farewell to fierce sultans and merciless kings, keeping a register of people and events. He too is a sleepless sentry. Amidst the dumb silence, he still measures time's fast river. He still tolls the hours of births and deaths. That black raven called Sahat kule measures my time too.

This labyrinthine jail has worn away my strength. A fever burns in my worn-out bosom. My head is heavy. Spectral shrouds press upon my shoulders and terrible ordeals smoulder beneath my tired eyelids. I hear chains—justice walks in chains. A light kindles anger in my eyes and my blood calls for revenge. But I am in chains; I am locked in a cage.

The stars are the night's eyes; without stars the skies are blind. People are the joy of the earth; without people the earth is joyless. I want to caress Vardar's turbulent waves, but I have no hands. Black bars have enslaved my hands. I want to meet the sparkling dawn, but I have no eyes. Angry doubts have stolen my eyes. I want to march beneath the banner, to participate in the courageous struggle, but I have no feet. The cell's walls have taken away my feet. Nightmares are building a nest in my soul. I can hear the gravediggers' steps. My heart is overgrown with an icy moss. Butchers dress me in another body and drag me off to a desert from which there can be no return.

Why? Who is it that must insult human beings who believe in their ideals? Who gave the strong of the day the right to kill the faith of the faithful? Arrests prove that the strong of the day are unsure of themselves. Trials prove the weakness of the authorities. Faith maintains the candles that burn on the altar; battle endows the banners with power. These questions, like woodpeckers, peck angrily at my brain and at the running sores of my mind. Suddenly I hear steps; they come to a stop outside my door. I stop thinking and listen closely.

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In the darkness I see an eye peering at me through the peephole in the door. After a long tense moment a key turns in the rusty lock. An uninvited hand opens my private hell. It is the turnkey; he is conceited, middle-aged, thick-set—with broad shoulders, the neck of a bull, and a large, dark head. His face is pockmarked. Beneath his eyebrows two cobralike eyes prowl for innocent prey. For the very first time this uninvited guest crosses my threshold. Squinting, he examines my cell carefully. He is searching for something but says nothing. Vicous wrinkles crease his forehead. Suddenly his eyes are like those of a snake about to strike. He shakes his head.

"Stand up! Pick up your belongings!" he orders.

"Where are you taking me?" I respond.

He does not reply but only shouts, "Get going!"

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LETTER EIGHT

You ask where I am. I am on Goli Otok. Until 1948 no one even knew that such a place existed. It is an island in the Adriatic, an island that is subjected to strange and changeable weather. If there is a storm brewing, even in the heat of summer, it is as cold as winter here. But if it is sunny, even in the midst of a severe winter, it is like the hottest of summers. The island is nothing but rocks, rocks that are enveloped in a spectral silence during our blood-red sunsets. The sinister squawking of the seagulls tears the silence like a knife. The mute sea suddenly falls calm, and for a moment one feels lost in the most terrifying corner of the world's most awful dungeon. One feels as if one has entered the anteroom of a terrestial hell. . . .

Is it possible for such an inhuman jail to be hidden from human eyes in the middle of the twentieth century? Can this have occurred in a country whose leaders fought for a brighter future, for the happiness of their people, for equality among all those people?

What in fact is Goli Otok? What is its history? Did Satan himself come to earth to create it? Is man such a hellish creature that he can create this diabolical inferno?

Shadows—not real human beings—dwell on Goli Otok; shadows of our former freedom fighters. On Goli Otok human beings are reduced to things, to numbers; they are treated as mere quantities; they live in rags and tatters. From dawn to dusk a sorrowful train of people moves back and forth across the desert that is Goli Otok. Their eyes are sunken; their hands have been broken in inhuman toiling. Their legs drag as if bound by heavy chains. Their heads are bent low. They don't talk, they don't even look around. Each of these shadows is a loose page torn from a shattered life.

Who are these people? Where have they come from? What crime did they commit? Are they really criminals? It appears that they have committed the most heinous of crimes. When the Nazi villains invaded their country they

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fought the invader with their bare hands. They robbed the invader of his weapons and took to the paths of the Partisan movement. They have come to Goli Otok from every part of the country. Their crime is that in front of their relatives, before the investigating authorities, and at their trials, they stated openly and clearly that they stand firmly by the Soviet Union, and that the Soviet Union and its peoples have brought light to mankind and saved humanity from the cruel Nazi pestilence. Those sent to Goli Otok are the bravest of the brave, the most resolute; they are the bricklayers of the revolution. And in the dark of night, while they were asleep, the UDBA agents came to seize them, dragged them from their homes, and hurled them pitilessly to the butchers who humiliate them, degrade their most sacred feelings, deprive them of their very humanity. Many of them have already been swallowed up by the sea. Many others lie half-buried under the stones on Grgur Island. Many were clubbed with planks and spades out in the open during the night and then thrown into pits to die. When the sea is calm and the waves drop off to sleep, the cries of those who still cling to life can be heard. . . .

Not even Hitler treated his enemies in this way. Nero did not slaughter the Christians as cruelly. Where did such malice come from? The people who perpetrated these dark deeds fought side by side with their victims against the common enemy. Which hand will bring them together in an anonymous mass grave? Which hand will place the gravestone? Which will engrave their names on a cold marble slab?

As time passes, they begin to fade in my consciousness. . . . They seem apparitions in a frightening dream. . . . Inhabitants of some awful desert. . . . Men who have come to this most terrible corner of the earth to pour out all the anguish and suffering they have experienced.

Goli Otok is populated with ghosts. Here the air is as heavy as cold steel. Everything is ugly and frightening. As if speaking in some mute, fateful language, everything says: we were once alive, but now we are dead; we were happy

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once, but now we are filled with grief; we were once a rushing river, but now we are a stagnant swamp, a mournful desert.

The criminal has stolen everything from these brave men, smothering their brave souls. But he has not been able to rob them of their belief, the belief that they shall yet see the end of the one who has committed this terrible crime against them. He has not managed to crush their hope that they will live to see their Pilate disgraced. This contemporary Pilate wears snow-white gloves to hide his blood-stained hands. He lines the country's roads with virginal flowers, while slowly, cruelly, he kills his weak, shackled victims.

Time is an unforgiving judge. The farther away an event is, the more strongly and strikingly it shakes our memory, pervading the secret corners of our souls. It embraces our life and as if it had happened yesterday. Everything comes alive, everything calls for revenge, everything looks to the day of judgment.

There is no mound big enough to hide the truth. Truth cannot be substituted for a lie. Lies are the ornaments of Pharisees. The lie is the sister of calumny. Many witnesses can be coerced into silence, but not time. What has occurred lives on in the book of memory. The book of the past lives in the blood, and the language of the blood is frightening. Silence echoes loudly; it echoes and grows powerful, becoming a kind of conscience. And this conscience saw the murderer in that evil hour when he stabbed his victim in the back.

Here, at Goli Otok, there are professors and students; young men and broken old men; workers and peasants; generals and soldiers; public figures and former statesmen; exministers and party leaders. . . .

Also at Goli Otok is that peasant who, after selling his wheat at the market, went to a tavern for a drink. A stranger asked him: "Uncle, if you have two glasses, one of which is Russia and full, the other of which is Yugoslavia and empty, from which one would you drink?" "From the full one, of course," he answered.

That man had never been involved in politics.

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Also at Goli Otok is the colonel who said that Jovanka's legs were sexy. And also the general who was betrayed by his own small children for shooting at the portrait of the supreme commander.

A terrible, cruel, and inhuman system reigns at Goli Otok. Only after the individual has been sentenced does the inquest begin. On Goli Otok it was largely the prisoners themselves—those apostates who had submitted utterly to the will of the authorities—who were used to break the others, to destroy the honor and decency they were trying to preserve. At first many of the "trustees" had been honorable people who struggled against the insidious pressure brought to bear on them by the Goli Otok system. At first they would have preferred to have their necks broken on the rocks rather than show even a moment's weakness before the authorities. But gradually, little by little, they were worn down; they submitted and accepted as the truth those things they knew to be false.

After the normalization of relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, it became increasingly difficult for even the most committed of Communists to continue their resistance. Many of them became disheartened and started to "repent." But a minority held fast to their convictions. To help them resist the enormous psychological pressure to which they were subjected, they began to turn toward China. For them this was a time of epic struggle; struggle between truth and fraud. They knew that a deceitful sham was being perpetrated, but could not fully grasp how something of this magnitude had come about. Perhaps they had been deluded from the very beginning. Had the extraordinary victory of the national liberation struggle led them to believe in impossible ideals? They realized that something out of the ordinary was taking place but were unable to grasp its exact nature. But, as time passed and the "normalization" of Yugoslav-Soviet relations did not bring about their release from the "Wire" (this is how the inmates referred to the inside of the Goli Otok jail), they realized that it had all been a fraud.

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Later, when the French Communist party demanded the liberation of political prisoners in Yugoslavia, the prisoners at Goli Otok understood that they had been wrong to waver in their faith in the USSR. Khrushchev had misled not only the Soviet Union, but all the parties that believed in the Bolshevik party, the party of Lenin. When Mao Tse-tung turned against the Soviet Union and looked for support from the LYC, the number of apostates at Goli Otok decreased. Their belief in the Soviet Union grew stronger and they became more united, more tenacious, more committed to their ideals. The number of "bandits" again increased ("bandit" is the name given to a prisoner who from the beginning to the end of his sentence remains intransigently opposed to the authorities).

Darkness cannot hide the deeds of men. Water doesn't wash away the stains.

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LETTER NINE

Guarded by policemen and agents we disembarked at Goli Otok. As we get off the ship we are greeted by a large group of convicts. They kick us and beat us. UDBA agents move about, seemingly prepared to cope with any emergency. Our reception party fills the air with roars and threats, and above it all one hears a howl more terrible than that of a hungry wolf.

Not even the Roman emperors treated their victims in this manner. Even the madman Caligula cannot be accused of having brutalized his subordinates and prisoners of war like this. To encourage the Romans to rise up and destroy the gladiators, Praetor Licinius Cras first plunged his dagger into Roman blood. In order to destroy communism in Yugoslavia, Tito, the secretary of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, destroys and humiliates Yugoslavia's most worthy sons. Among the prisoners on Goli Otok I recognize the leaders of the First Proletarian Brigade, from which the Yugoslav army later emerged. Here are the brave men of Sumadija's battalion. Here are the worthiest members of the Partisan movement.

Even the most shameful and degrading exile in the time of the Roman Empire was lighter and more humane than exile to Goli Otok. The great Roman poet Ovid, author of the *Metamorphosis*, was treated far better during his imprisonment. He was able to write his wonderful *Pontiki* during his exile in Dobrudja, on the Black Sea coast. On Goli Otok every lyre is muted. All inspiration is suffocated. Among the thousands who perished here was Yugoslavia's talented lyricist Veles Perić. Another poet, Marko Vranesević, who had already served time on Goli Otok, killed himself to avoid arrest by UDBA and a return trip to Goli Otok. Many of the prisoners on Goli Otok were utterly emaciated spectres, too weak to lift a stone big enough crush their skulls.

We new convicts were forced to run between two rows of men. As we ran, these crazed and enraged men poured

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buckets of filth on us, threw stones, spit, even whipped us. And all the time they cursed and threatened us: "Bow your heads, you bandits! This is your final home; none of you will leave here alive."

As the blows rain down upon us, our steps become slower and heavier. One of us falls and the rest of us quickly run over him; we are being chased like a herd of wild animals. The tide of running men carries me along. One moment I too am almost trampled underfoot, the next I almost break free of the surging crowd. My thoughts are scattered and I cannot collect them. I am terribly agitated and cannot calm myself. I try to breathe in deeply, but lose my wind. One of the men in the gauntlet prods me in the ribs while another kicks me.

We are being chased along a steep rocky path. The sharp pointed stones pierce our leather soles. Our feet begin to bleed. Now none of us utters a word. Everyone has joined in beating us—convicts, commanders, policemen, UDBA agents. One of those standing in the gauntlet aims a blow at one of us new arrivals but then doesn't hit with all his might. Immediately they start to beat him too, because he showed a momentary weakness, because his blow was less than wholehearted. Why did this one man show mercy? Did he recognize an old Partisan comrade at whose side he had fought? Or did he recognize a friend with whom he had worked, shared his last penny, made plans for a better, happier, more human life?

Suddenly I spotted my old friend Moma Djurić among the convicts. I could not believe my eyes. Sharp questions tore at my brain. Can he really be here as well? But wasn't he the commander of the Marshal's bodyguard? What is happening here? One can hardly know whom one will encounter next.

I felt that time itself had run off the rails. It was as if the earth had suddenly opened up, sky and earth fusing together to avoid seeing this frightful human tragedy.

The silence grows more and more oppressive. Ugly clouds press close against us and furious waves slam against

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the island's shore. The island is dead and mute. I hear only the sound of feet pounding across the sharp rocks.

Everything is forbidden us at Goli Otok. It is forbidden to look around, to listen, and, of course, to speak. Even sighing is forbidden us. A single word can be punished by a whip, a fist, or by brass knuckles. The gauntlet seemed endless. As we ran it seemed to get longer, steeper, harder to traverse. Our hearts beat out an irregular pulse; it was as if icy hands were about to rip them out. Our brains boiled as if they had landed in hell's fiery furnace. My eyes saw nothing, as if a thick fog had suddenly enveloped us.

Suddenly, like a sharp bayonet, a siren pierced the awful loneliness. Everyone was startled; everyone wondered where the noise was coming from. Soon the mystery was solved. Another steamer full of people was coming from Rijeka. The wail of the ship's sirens drowned out the screams of its frenzied cargo. Some of the passengers refused to disembark, their sharp cries piercing the air. "Where are you taking us? We won't go any further!"

Pistol shots rang out, the sea was stained with human blood. I heard desperate shouts: "Have mercy. I can't breathe. My hand is shattered. I am not a criminal. Stop, you murderers!" But nobody replied.

The guards forced the passengers onto the beach; those who refused to move were simply tossed off the ship like sacks of flour. The new prisoners are shaking with terror; brand new wrinkles lace their foreheads; one man's hair has turned white during the trip here. Tormented, driven mad by the tortures they have suffered, they laugh sinisterly and rend their clothing, spitting and cursing.

What have we come to? Torturing our own children as if they were cattle, harnessing them to a heavy yoke and dispersing them to these monstrous islands. Blue sea, open your unplumbed deep and swallow us. Why should the rocks, the sea, the birds mock our fate? Return our conscience! You villains, you stole it at night in the cells, but the cells are more human than you; their dark corners protect us. You robbed our hearts, but our faith will live on

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even in these ravaged hearts. That faith glows and broadens; its flames will burn all this dirt to ashes. The agents and the policemen are shaking; indeed, the stones themselves are shuddering too. For nobody can come near the newcomers. They are as dreadful as erupting lava, as stong as lightning; as violent as the merciless elements. Their anger is the anger of those who have been deceived. Their revenge is the revenge of villages that have been burned down and pillaged. Everything is struck dumb in their presence. Their eyes blaze like fierce bayonets; behind their silent mouths hide broken human traces.... The moaning of their souls echoes cries from time immemorial.

Who will demand just revenge for all their suffering? Who will take them by the hand and lead them back to their burnt and deserted homes, as a mother leads her child? Sinister birds call above their deserted hearths. Even the most evil of curs were struck dumb in front of the scoundrels from UDBA.

Lawlessness reigns from Rijeka to the Dojran Lake and anyone who raises his voice in protest is immediately crushed. The villages remember, remember the burned houses, remember the devastated huts and hovels, the torn shirts of the people, remember the mothers dressed in mourning cursing their fate. Even the plague took pity on children. Even our invaders spared the children when they burned and pillaged our villages. Even the Ottoman yatagan, which fell on the heads of rebellious men and women, made an exception for the children. But these twentieth-century cannibals have long since forgotten family and kin. They are as ready to kill their own families as they are to betray their motherland.

The evening falls, keeping one eye open. Blood-stained, the Adriatic is calm. The moon passes by astounded; fearing the ugly sight, it doesn't look down. Our heroes have fallen without benefit of arms to defend themselves. Sad words echo through the darkness. A sorrowing Yugoslavia mourns and searches for its kidnapped children. The sobs

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are laced with Montenegrin, Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Slovenian curses, curses that recall the conjurations of earlier centuries, when the people rose up against the wild invaders. This long and wordless song in the eerie silence reinvigorates the weak. It restores some light to their smashed faces, and revives the faith that had been prostrated.

Wrapped in a blood-stained cloak, Goli Otok sinks into an uneasy silence. People sleep wide awake. Songs and sad psalms seem to emerge from the depths, as if in Old Testament vigils. Our worn-out souls lose themselves in dreaming, secretly singing and pouring out their sadness. The stars weep with grief, and their tears turn into dew and shine on the cool stones. The night has hardly come and it is already over. The stars have hardly come up when they dim and disappear. The siren has hardly signaled sleep and now it is hooting, roaring, thundering, resounding over rocks and sea and waking the dead-tired eyelids. The new day begains with the tortures that are particular to Goli Otok.

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LETTER TEN

Inhuman was the mind that conceived of Goli Otok. Human history knows jails and concentration camps the mere mention of which makes the human soul shudder. In them millions of people—unknown and innocent—were robbed, burned to ashes in hell's furnaces, and then scattered by storms and winds. Dachau, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Oradour—all these terrible names jolt the memory and chill the blood. But Goli Otok surpassed all of them in its cruelty. The name of the island was appropriate. *Goli* means bare, naked; and *Otok* means island: the bare island. Nothing grows here; there are rocks everywhere, and not a blade of grass. When the first prisoners were brought here there was nothing on the island. The convicts themselves have built the jail with their hands, without picks and shovels, without pickaxes—with only their sweat and blood.

Goli Otok is a so-called open jail.* The "Wire" surrounds Goli Otok. In the "Wire" there are no lock-up rooms, no solitary confinements, no separate dungeons. Nevertheless, Goli Otok doesn't remember that any political convicts have ever escaped. For one thing, the island is surrounded by shark-infested seas. Their ugly spotted bodies glint in the sun. Their roars echo, as if they issue from the deepest vaults of the sea, as if to threaten anything that raises its head for air.

And in this sorrowful desert the brightest sons and daughters of sad Yugoslavia are put to the test. Who is going to record their sighs? Who is going to put their hushed anguish into words? Who is going to clear their pale wrinkled brows? Who? Who? Who?

The stones are silent, the firmament is hollow. Merciless and indifferent nature seems to see nothing, to hear nothing; it seems nothing can move her.

The rocks scattered across the island look like petrified monsters arrived from some phantasmal world to fill us with

*Wordplay—jail in Bulgarian sounds like closed, i.e., open closed= open jail.

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fear and trepidation. Even when silent, Goli Otok roars in its silence. But even when roaring, Goli Otok spreads a hellish silence.

A cougar has stained Goli Otok with human blood. At night when the icy stars begin to flicker and the sea opens its bottomless depths, hectic lightning flashes and crazed feet begin a fiery dance. People say that these are the unburied dead who walk across the rocks and along the cliffs, looking for their bodies, for their violated flesh.

The vaunted "strength" of the oppressors lies shackling the spirit of freedom, enticing the prisoner with false hopes by changing and postponing the date of his death. That is why they expand the scope of their oppression to unknown deserts and borderlands, to corners of the world no one has ever heard of. But the blood that is shed can be removed neither by the sun, nor by rain, nor by storms. The blood remains, the stains grow larger and darker. In time the stains demand revenge, then they become a terrifying menace to the oppressors themselves.

Sahara Faisant and Beaz Kule, Diar Bakir and Siberia and the Siberian taiga have all known martyrs. The exiles walked with a firm step, without bending their heads, neither under the infuriated whips, the rusty chains, nor under the hell's desert heats. Sahara Faisant became a sanctuary. Diar Bakir thundered fiercely. Beaz Kule rent the silence with rebellious cries. Siberia, from a spark, kindled the flame of the October Revolution, which incinerated the tsarist autocracy.

Prisons ultimately are fatal for the oppressors who create them. The nameless, trackless deserts become symbols of bravery; they serve as lodestars for future generations.

Goli Otok, too, is growing into a powerful, radiant, and fateful beacon that penetrates the endless dungeon darkness to warm the men who have been reduced to shades. Here is the legendary champion of freedom, Pavel Satev from Kratovo, who languishes day after day in a sinister cell on rock-strewn Goli Otok. With his granitelike figure, he rends

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the firmament and dashes toward the sun of freedom, singing a rebellious boatsman's song. The waves swell, the seagulls fly overhead, furrowing the thick darkness with their wings. Old age doesn't blunt his courageous spirit. The veins swell up on his temples, the wrinkles on his broad forehead grow deeper. The fire of the domestic hearth kindles in his thoughtful gaze. His eyes search for his companions, for those invincible spirits that fell before him on that pathway of life called Goli Otok.

With him walks the old teacher Panko Brasnarov, the companion of Vassil Glavinov, the revolutionary and internationalist who dedicated his life to the struggle for justice and freedom. He lived in the most extreme conditions, never knowing the passionate caress of a mate. Separated from near and dear, he had not yet been able to enjoy the advent of socialism, had not yet even finished his speech at the creation of ASNOM (Antifascist Assembly of Macedonia),when the saturnine oppressor threw him into the nether world of Goli Otok. Panko Brasnarov also disappeared without a trace. In the cemetery of Veles his family placed a five-pointed Communist star with the inscription: "Here lies Panko Brasnarov." But the whole town knew that he was not buried there. There had been no funeral, no one had taken leave of the old teacher at his grave, no one followed a flower-covered coffin to his final resting place. Who knows where his remains lie? What earth covers his tortured body? Or perhaps his bones lie in some nameless pit, mingled with the bones of other victims? Perhaps he lies on Grgur, the island near Goli Otok.

Also graveless is the modest and shy Boce Bogdanov, the brother of Mino Bogdanov-Largo.

At night while invisible hands decorate the empty grave of Panko Brasnarov with flowers, watering their feeble roots with tears, Tito's insatiable butchers hold a pistol over Rizo Rizov's head and make him write about the years he spent in the Soviet Union. This favorite of Gotze Delchev, that bright and radiant person, this dedicated Bulgarian who left his savings for the erection of a monument to the

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boatsmen, ends his life like a leper. Nobody is at his graveside to recount the tempestuous life of this old revolutionary, a martyr who devoted his entire life to the Communist ideal.

The oppressors with their keys of fear lock up the mouths, the souls, and the hearts of the citizens of allegedly "free" but in fact enslaved Macedonia, but at night, at working-bees and dance parties, these bold spirits tell of the men who have fallen for the freedom of Macedonia. They exchange silent looks in the streets, and with those looks they reaffirm the glorious future, for which the children of the proletariat have sacrificed their lives.

In the shadowy hours of the night the skeletons climb out of their graves and put on their tortured bodies. Their eyes flash under knitted brows and in an unknown place somewhere in the sea they come together in a rebellious Partisan meeting. Here are the rebels of the Sen's revolt. Here is the audacious Matja Gubec with a white-hot crown on his head. Here are the sufferers who have been burnt at the stake alive, torn to pieces alive by the ferocious claws of the cougar. . . .

On Goli Otok every stone is a monument. Every herb is the soul of a murdered man, still growing beneath the silent skies. On Grgur Island the dead stones form a pyramid: a terrifying, fateful, silent pyramid of human skeletons. The sea is calm. The waves are quiet. Sinister and hushed, the coasts lay like scattered guns in the dark night. A terrible battle occurred here, a terrible typhoon swept through.

A great funeral service begins at this hour. The mournful starry float lights flare up. Yellow tapers spring out of the sky and shed mournful tears. A breeze leafs gently through the book of eternity, searching for the names of the fallen, for the luminaries now covered by gloomy darkness, for the selfless children whose images adorn an iconostasis of heroism and of valor which will never dim.

And if you indulge in dreams here in this dark silence, you overhear a mysterious song. . . . The dead are singing. The silence weeps and sobs. Infinity is tormented by shadows

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and visions. Through the stormy, deadly silence a great, radiant light makes its way toward the shore. Sinewy arms with invisible oars dispel the viscous darkness. And with your own eyes you see how a new, noble, and free chronicle of the motherland is born from our hidden suffering.

Tormented blood flows smoothly again. Chests shine with bold lightning. Velebit is as silent as if an oath is being taken. The great rebel retreat begins. Every murdered man hears his own voice and comes back to life. And every living man, horror-stricken, sees his gloomy butcher give an order to an inhuman power. Hollow bells thunder over the icy spaces. Rocks and valleys resound to children's screams and mothers' vows. The cruel sufferings of Tito's Yugoslavia crumble into the fiery darkness.

And just as the released lava rushes through gorges and fields and sweeps away everything in its path, so the sublime insurgent element rushes off in order to sweep away and bury all the human dirt that has accumulated in this country.

The skies thunder, the dungeons groan. Through fire and smoke a new, truly human day begins for man.

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LETTER ELEVEN

Sirens emit a sinister scream. Another shipload of prisoners is arriving. They are singing the "Internationale." The ship drops anchor near the shore and someone shouts: "Don't be stubborn. Bow your heads. No one leaves this place alive. Nobody is going to mourn for you. Nobody is going to intercede for you."

A cruel reality reigns on Goli Otok. The island is populated by the scoprions of the Ministry of the Interior. Ranković is their leader, a man who cares for nothing that is human. This hell is the creation of the Lucifer of Kumrovec. He has dreamed of this sinister place since his days in Austria-Hungary. Ever since then he has been looking for a model for his new jail, and now he has built it here in the Adriatic on the island of Goli Otok.

I cannot forget the horror of those first tortures. I will never forget the crazed eyes of those who beat us, their hair standing on end like the spines of angry porcupines. They shouted wildly: "Hope ends here. Here you will not recognize even your own face. This is the hell on earth."

It was as if we were in the realm of the enraged Chetniks. Perhaps such things could happen under the rule of Draža Mihajlović. But how could they be occurring under a Communist leader—a Communist who was supposedly a champion of human rights!

These same crazed convicts who now chased us through the gauntlet had charged fascist strongholds during the war. With their bare hands they had seized the enemy's arms; they had thrown their bare bodies against tanks, machine guns, and shells—against all the terrible weapons of the savage invader. They had fought and they had won, proudly waving the red banner of communism. They had fought for a new and far better world.

But now they are here, where they have gradually been transformed into the loyal instruments of the authorities. They have been trained by executioners to torture and kill the most devoted sons and daughters of our people. Ranković's men performed their task with great precision. One's

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first impression of these agents of Ranković is that they are utterly inhuman, but that was of course Ranković's aim. He has trained them to be wild beasts ready to ravage all those who oppose Tito's policies.

On arriving at Goli Otok the prisoners—those who had been sentenced and those dispatched by administrative decision—immediately learned a very clear lesson. If one wished to survive, if one wished to leave this hell one day, it was clear that one must submit totally to the will of the authorities, become their blind instrument in all things, model oneself after Ranković's agents. And thus many of the newly arrived did submit to the authorities. As they "reformed" they gradually abandoned their convictions, thereby becoming apostates of communism. Some tried to survive through a kind of hypocrisy. In private among their close friends they continued to defend their beliefs. But if they were betrayed and brought to the authorities, they categorically denied their old beliefs, repudiating their faith in the SovietUnion. Years later when Aleksandar Ranković himself was prosecuted for having installed listening devices in Tito's bedroom, he was not sentenced. Tito forgave Ranković for two reasons: because of his brave service during the national liberation war and because he had purged the party and all state organs of Soviet agents after the Tito-Soviet split. Thus Yugoslavia's Fouché ended his career ignominiously, despised by enemies and former friends alike.

In fact both Ranković and Djilas, Tito's principal lieutenants, came to an ignominious end. The shifting winds of fortune dumped them into the dust bin of history. Did Ranković seriously consider ousting Tito as it was rumored, or had he merely toyed with the idea, realizing it was a task beyond his power? Ranković's determination had failed him more than once in his often vacillating career. And yet he had managed to transform Yugoslavia into a dungeon far more terrible than it had been during the reign of the Karadjordjević dynasty. A leader is strong because he dominates all his associates, crushing any who challenge his primacy. Only one man could be number one; one of the two had to be eliminated.

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The letters of the Central Committee of the CPSU which Stalin and Molotov had signed in 1948 were prophetic statements soon confirmed by events. Djilas was the first of Tito's lieutenants to go, and Ranković fell twelve years later. The Informburo declaration had labeled both men "revisionists." Djilas put himself in the service of Western imperialism, denouncing socialism in general and the Soviet Union in particular in his vile books.

Tito's much-publicized "separate road" to socialism was like a spider that ensnared all the republics, peoples, and minorities of Yugoslavia. That "separate road" transformed Yugoslavia into a land of slaves and chameleons.

Those in power in Macedonia were especially cruel. I know cases in which female agents kicked their victims to death with their spiked heels before the victims could be brought to trial. *OZNA* was notorious, arousing fear and trepidation throughout the land. Anyone who did not hide his Bulgarian identity was persecuted and entered under column "B" in *OZNA*'s files. The authorities were not interested in which social class you belonged to but only in your national affiliation. The Serbs were openly favored at the expense of the Bulgarians. Royal Yugoslav authorities had encouraged Serbs to settle in Macedonia and they had taken land, houses, and other property from the Bulgarians. They now demanded equivalent power from the new regime and, indeed, their request was granted. And thus the Serbian settlers who had served King Aleksandar so loyally were now the fervent supporters of Tito's "separate road" to socialism.

Macedonia was again subordinated to Belgrade, and the same was true of Croatia. The new chameleons walked about freely in the unfortunate Croatian land. They robbed and pillaged wherever they went. They took whatever they wanted and built palaces for themselves. A poor peasant complained to the masters of this new regime: "What are we to do? You throw away white bread while we cannot find even a stale crust of brown bread." For this he was beaten so cruelly that he later died.

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Wearing red stars on their caps, the Croatian obscurantists threatened the populace with warnings about the Ustashi. But in the people's view the UDBA agents were even worse than the Ustashi. The Ustashi had taken their revenge on the Serbs living in Croatia, but the UDBA agents were killing Croatian and Serbian Communists alike. They were utterly merciless and pitiless. The people were persecuted, tortured, and imprisoned, spitting blood in their terrible anguish.

The situation was desperate in Slovenia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Vojvodina, and Serbia, but worst of all were the persecutions carried out in Kosovo and Metohia. In this autonomous region the population was viewed as a group of perpetual troublemakers ready to secede from Yugoslavia and join the People's Republic of Albania. Consequently, the Yugoslav police visited the most awful barbarities on the Albanians, but these descendants of Skanderbeg are an invincible race. Together they have sworn the *bessa*, promising that they will fight to the death for Albania.

No emperor in the whole history of the world enjoyed luxuries equal to that with which the "Red" emperor surrounded himself in his many palatial residences. Even the King of Kings, Haile Selasse, Emperor of Ethiopia, envied Tito's splendor. "I am a king," he is reported to have said after visiting Tito in Belgrade, "but I have never seen such luxury. Emperors, kings, princes, and tsars have to come to Belgrade if they wish to learn how to live."

People were fascinated by all this luxury; they stared enviously at the precious stones that decorated the rings on Tito's fingers. In the old library of his palace the wall was covered not with bookshelves but with wine racks, in which Tito had placed hundreds of famous wines from throughout the world. When prominent guests came on state visits, the Marshal pulled out a bottle whose date corresponded to the visitor's birthday, joking that it was the "book" he was currently reading.

All power was focused in the hands of that supreme chameleon. No one knew when and in what direction he

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would next change his views and policies. He says one thing while seated at the table with his guests and another when walking in the garden with one of them after dinner. His deviousness is his principal attribute. He has small blue eyes, constantly smokes an English cigar, and parades about with a Napoleonic gait, always dressed in an exquisitely tailored marshal's uniform. In public he wears snow-white gloves, as if to remind us of his bourgeois origins. He does not have a secure command of the Croatian language, and thus his thoughts flow with a marked Viennese accent. This man, born and educated in the Habsburg Empire, has brought dissension to the international Communist movement. For this haughty man other people are mere animals; he treats them like the manure one throws on a dunghill. He deceives Moscow in one way, Washington in another; and even deceives the nonaligned nations he claims to lead. His end is always the same, however, to destroy the progressive forces, to sow distrust of Moscow's leadership. Inscrutable and devious are the ways of this man. But one day his intrigues and deceptions will be revealed and he will at last be judged and condemned by all the progressive peoples.

No one can escape the judgment of history. Today Tito is the judge, a judge who shows no pity as he destroys the brave men he has dumped on Goli Otok. But they clench their fists and bite their lips to keep silent: they are preparing to take their bloody revenge for all they have suffered.

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LETTER TWELVE

My dear,

Are you aware that I am listed here as Veniamin Milanov Tosev, prisoner No. 4,832? I don't dare talk to anybody. It is forbidden, and so I remain silent. Old friends who have also been imprisoned here wink to make me understand that they have passed through the same experience that now confronts me.

It is all very strange! I was tried as Venko Markovski and that trial was reported in the Yugoslav press. But here, on Goli Otok, I am serving time as one Veniamin Milanov Tosev. But there is no document in this name either in Macedonia or in all of Yugoslavia. I was christened Velimir; Venko is a nickname given to me by Teodor Trajanov. As a Partisan I was known by the name Venko Markovski, not Veniamin Milanov Tosev. And when I was nominated to the federal assembly and to the Macedonian national assembly, I was listed as Venko Markovski in both cases. Both in Yugoslavia and abroad Venko Markovski is known as a poet who has engaged in literary activities since childhood; the public makes no association with the name Veniamin Milanov Tosev.

But Veniamin Milanov Tosev was indispensable to the authorities for several reasons. One reason is to prove that in Yugoslavia—specifically, in Tito's Yugoslavia—there are no poets in prisons, and if perchance a few have somehow been imprisoned, they are very obscure. I don't know whether Veles Peric is the pen name of that poet, but I do know that he was held in jail under that name. I don't know whether Marko Vranesevic, the famed Serbian lyricist and revolutionary, was held at Goli Otok under his own name or under a pseudonym. Whatever the case, no one at Goli Otok remembered him under any name other than Marko Vranesevic. However he may have been listed in the prison files, everyone, friends and strangers, addressed him as Marko Vranesevic.

Another reason I am being held under a false name is to avoid any contradiction of the notion that Tito's Yugoslavia is the supreme people's democracy, a land where those

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who fought for human rights are most certainly not thrown in prison.

The third reason is that someone named Venko Markovski could not be an inmate in this land where all the republics enjoy equal rights, and where all the nationalities are allowed to use their native tongues. But you see, I, whom the authorities consider the founder of the so-called Macedonian literary language, am forbidden to write my mother in the language in which she once sang me lullabies. And you see, though I created a literary Macedonian in an effort to bring some uniformity to the chaos of local dialects, I am now forbidden to write my mother in that same literary language. The authorities argue that none of the examining magistrates (they censor our mail) can read that language. And thus I am forced to write to you in Serbian. Dear File, I can almost see my mother when you start to read her the lines I have written here. She shakes her head and says, "Well, my son, the Serbs have outwitted you again. Do you recall," she continues, "when you came home with Tempo after the liberation? I met the two of you at the door and asked him, 'Where are you from, my son?' 'From Montenegro,' he answered. I pressed him further, 'But you are a Serb, aren't you?' And I told him that we were alike in this sense: he was a Montenegrin, but a Serb. I am a Macedonian, but a Bulgarian. I told him that Bulgarians have lived in Macedonia for centuries, and concluded that, God willing, there would at last be peace and understanding between different peoples."

And perhaps my mother is right and you, dear File, will find a way to explain to her what has happened to me since my trial.

It is all very strange. I was tried as Venko Markovski, but I am serving Veniamin Milanov Tosev's sentence. Perhaps after Tosev's term has been served and he has been released, the authorities will claim the right to bring me to trial again for failure to serve the term meted out to Venko Markovski!

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Perhaps the authorities have imprisoned me under a fake name because they are afraid that international protests could force them to release me as they had during my previous imprisonment in 1949-50. They wanted to make certain that no one but they knew that the poet Venko Markovski was being held in the "Wire."

All this reminds me of an interesting incident. A UNESCO delegation came to Goli Otok and one of the common criminals, a bright, politically astute young man in his mid-twenties, was present at their conversation with the warden. And this youth heard someone from the UNESCO delegation ask the warden about Venko Markovski, that is, about me!

The warden responded, "No one by that name is being held here; if he were, I would surely know it."

The UNESCO man persisted: "According to our information, he is being held on this island. Perhaps he is listed under another name. Will you, please, check this matter? We want to avoid any misunderstanding; it would be embarrassing for you and for Yugoslavia."

Whether the warden knew that Venko Markovski is listed under a different name is irrelevant. He showed no embarrassment and continued to deny that Markovski was on Goli Otok.

But at that point the young convict spoke up: "It seems to me that the man you mention *is* here. Whom do you have in mind—a writer, a public figure, a former Partisan? The UNESCO man answered that the man he had in mind was indeed a writer, and a well-known one at that.

The warden's sharp glare brought the young man to his senses and he said, "Oh, yes, now I remember—the man we are speaking of, he's not in this prison."

After the evening inspection, the young convict, all out of breath, came up to me and said: "Comrade, it appears that you are going to be released. Important people are interceding on your behalf. I was present at a meeting in the Administration and heard the whole conversation. The warden warned me not to say anything about it. But we all

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share the same fate here; you a political prisoner and I, a common criminal—as time passes it makes no difference. I had to tell you what has happened; my conscience compelled me. But I beg you, let no one else know you have heard this from me.

The rumor soon got about that an important delegation had visited the island and, as a result, many of the political prisoners believed that they would soon be released. But nobody was!

Most of the prison's examining magistrates were highly decorated former Partisans who had fought in the national liberation war. Among the guards were individuals who were taking correspondence courses in an attempt to earn a degree. One of these guards, knowing I was a writer, came up to me one day and said: "I was told you are a writer. You have knowledge of literature. I have a request. . . ."

Then I interrupted him, "I am at work and it is forbidden to talk."

"I am an officer and give you permission. Answer my questions!"

"Please, what do you want to know about literature?"

"Tell me about Macedonian literature."

"Whom are you interested in?"

"Venko Markovski."

"Is it possible that you don't recognize Venko Markovski?"

"I don't know him."

There was an unpleasant pause. I felt sorry for this man who was ordered to guard someone without knowing whom he was guarding. I spoke to him as follows:

"The best way for you to learn about Venko Markovski is to read his poetry in books written in Croatian. In this way you will understand Markovski the poet, the Partisan, the public figure, and you will pass your exam easily. But if you rely on me to tell you about Venko Markovski, you will find yourself—after you fail your exam—in that very place where Markovski now finds himself."

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"What do you mean by that?" the guard asked. "Where is he in fact?"

"Right in front of you, here on Goli Otok."

"Can it be that you are really he?"

"Yes, I am here under another name."

The guard walked away silent and confused.

Some time later I was surprised to receive an order to go to the Administration. There the warden who had pretended that he had never heard that Venko Markovski was in his prison took a different tone as he spoke to me:

"I have summoned you on an important matter which may determine whether your stay in prison will be shortened. There has been a dispute between two scholars in Moscow—a Bulgarian and a Macedonian. The Bulgarian asked the Macedonian how it was possible to speak of improving relations with Yugoslavia while Venko Markovski, the man who developed the Macedonian literary language, is imprisoned on Goli Otok because he wrote a poem."

I responded by asking him what I had to do with this affair. I reminded him that I am a prisoner, without any civil rights. I pointed out that as a prisoner I had no right to have any opinions, and even if I had such a right my opinion would be contrary to his. Rather than give him a statement denying the Bulgarian scholar's charges, I made it clear that I was sympathetic to the Bulgarian point of view.

"But Bulgaria wants to take Macedonia away from us," the warden objected. "It is making territorial claims."

To this I responded that the whole affair was beyond my control. I told him I did not want to pull someone else's chestnuts out of the fire. I had done what I had done, and now I was serving my term.

In prison men are treated like cattle—numbered cattle dressed in prison stripes. But if it will serve its purpose the state is prepared to make use of those same men whose identities it has camouflaged. The warden obviously thought that since he had physical possession of his prisoners he disposed of their minds and souls as well. But he was mistaken;

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the body is one thing and the soul is another. There is no way to bribe the human conscience once it has committed itself to the struggle for the rights of its people.

But, by refusing to cooperate, I lost the chance to secure an early release, lost it irrevocably.

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LETTER THIRTEEN

The red-hot ball of the sun hangs low over Goli Otok, bathing the island in infernal heat. There is neither the slightest breeze nor a hint of cooling shade. The old white-headed professor from Ljubljana University kneels over the burning-hot gravel in silence, sweat pouring from his body, his cheeks and eyes. I hear him sigh and whisper, "Once there was a Yugoslavia, but it is no more." Under the scorching sun, his eyes dim; dizziness overcomes him and he falls down in a faint. Two guards run over and pick him up; holding him by the arms they force him to kneel on the sharp stones in the terrible heat.

"Where am I?" asks Professor Cene Logar, staring blankly at the guards. "Who has brought me to this place?"

The guards sneer at him, "*You* are the one who is responsible for your being here. And it is entirely up to you whether you will ever return to the university. You frittered away the people's trust."

The old man falls silent. But his eyes are brimming with a terrible anger. He grinds his teeth and then, all of a sudden, spits at the guards, "Bloody bastards! Even here you can't let an honest man alone!"

Not far away another prisoner stands, stripped to the waist and with a box full of stones hanging from a rusty wire that has been looped around his neck. He is a Hungarian from Vojvodina who had been accused of serving the Hungarian king when he was a young man and who has now been accused of being a spy for Rakosi. Consumed with a terrible fever, he gasps for air and then utters an inhuman cry: "Stop torturing me! I am burning up with fever. My skull is splitting in half!"

The guards call a doctor, an UDBA doctor, who feels the prisoner's forehead and says, "he has a slight fever."

The doctor then puts a thermometer under the prisoner's arm, waits a minute, and looks at it in shocked surprise. "You must have done something with the thermometer," he says. "It is impossible for it to indicate a temperature of 40.5° C. after only a minute." But the next

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time the thermometer reads 41° C. Clearly the prisoner has sunstroke. The doctor takes an aspirin out of his pocket, gives it to the convict, and makes him swallow it without any water, merely wetting it with saliva.

We are not permitted to have drinking water here. We can take a drink of water only when showering. And for this reason no one pays any attention to how dirty he is; everyone puts his mouth under the shower nozzle to drink himself full, storing up water for the coming week.

By this time Professor Logar was already sprawled unconscious on the blood-stained rocks. The heat is terrific, as if flames dart out of the stones, lick his feet, caress his blood-stained knees. His eyes open from time to time, but otherwise he does not move. He is staring off into the distance, across the hills toward Ljubljana, toward the monument to France Presern. He regains consciousness and asks: "Where are you, Kardelj? Can't you see what kind of Yugoslavia you have forged? Didn't both of us fight for this Yugoslavia? Didn't we tell people that they would be able to speak openly? What has happened? Oh, Kardelj, Kardelj! You would bring even Presern himself to rot on this evilly named island if he were alive."

At that moment a terrible cry slices through the tense atmosphere. A tall, stout, 65-year old Montenegrin is being force-chased* by five people. The convict is carrying a deep box of stones which weighs 80 to 90 kilograms. He holds the heavy box by its handles, but it is also attached around his neck by a wire; he can not rid himself of this terrible burden even by letting go with his hands. Behind him are five strong men, chasing and beating him in an attempt to make him run faster. "You will cough up your mother's milk and confess everything," they yell at him. "We too were stubborn at first; we are Montenegrins, too."

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* Forced-chasing is a torture peculiar to Goli Otok. A convict is forced to run at full speed while carrying a heavy box of stones. Behind him are other convicts who beat him to make him run faster.

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Turning back toward them, the convict answers: "I know nothing. I told all I know in court. I now have only my honor left, and that is what I live for. I'm not like you."

Enraged by these words, the five men now chase him even harder: "We will tear the flesh from your bones and then you will speak. Nobody will come to your aid here. We are your gravediggers. It's up to you and you alone how you pass your days at Goli Otok."

Raising his eyes to the sky, the Montenegrin utters a painful cry: "Do you see this, God? Is there no power that can put an end to my humiliation?"

Sometimes I think that everything that happens here happens according to some prearranged plan. At that very moment the warden of Goli Otok prison emerged from the Administration building, dressed in plain clothes and carrying a whip. Feigning anger, he addresses the five men who are force-chasing the Montenegrin: "Stop! Why are you torturing this man? What has he done to you? What old scores are you trying to settle?"

One of the five answers the warden: "He is the most stubborn enemy of socialist Yugoslavia. His conduct undermines the Montenegrins' faith in Tito. He has done greater damage than the fascists. And if he is not broken he will continue his subversive activities here as well. Warden, with his tricks he could fool the Devil himself!"

"Leave him alone!" the warden responded. "Enough for today. Give him a chance to think it over." And turning to the Montenegrin, who stood there harnessed to his box like an ox, the warden said: "Come with me. We are, after all, fellow men; we will reach an agreement. Furthermore, we were comrades during the war. No reason to pay the bill for someone else's exploits!"

The Montenegrin immediately calmed down, put down the box, and followed the warden into the Administration building.

Here on Goli Otok we run, harnessed to our boxes, just like horses harnessed to a wagon. I too am harnessed; I too am chased. Forced-chasing is the most terrible of all punish-

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ments. The fingers quickly develop deep cuts; their flesh begins to hang down in strips. The wire around my neck cuts into the flesh until the blood begins to gush forth. We fall down, one after the other, but we are still in our accursed harnesses. Nevertheless, our pride does not allow us to beg for mercy. We hide our exhaustion, camouflage the pains that wrack us. We do not want the enemy, who until yesterday was our friend, to comprehend our weakness. And so we run on. The handles of the boxes cut through the bleeding flesh until they strike at bare bone.

The apostates urge us to come clean, to confess everything. They remind us that they too were once put through these same tortures, and insist that whether we want to or not, whether we live or die, we will confess everything to the authorities who rule the sinister island of Goli Otok.

Our fresh wounds hurt, and yet, somehow, they do not hurt. Later on, at night when our flesh has cooled down and when the salt from our sweat has penetrated our wounds—then we will know what terrible teeth these wounds have. A wound will hurt awfully once salt has penetrated it; indeed, salt is the most dreadful torture in the world. It is even worse than the "Jesus" straitjacket, a torture in which the victim is stretched out just as Jesus was on his cross, with only the tips of his toes touching the ground. And torture with salt is even worse than the torture in which the convict is put in a cell filled with water and forced to squat all night on one leg over a bed of spikes. But the human soul is harder than stone. Pain is what hardens it. The soul is the master of the body; it will decide when and how the flesh will be stripped off.

Before the evening inspection the room supervisors come to us with their mock concern. These supervisors are convicts who have proved their absolute loyalty to the warden and the examining magistrates. They know that the shortening of their own sentences depends on a continued display of such abject loyalty. They come to us smoking cigarettes and try to strike up a conversation. Sometimes

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they are hesitant, as if they don't know how to begin, as if they have never had to perform such a task. They are anxious to have us understand them correctly; they want us to know that everything they do is for our own good, for the good of the force-chased. "Comrades," they begin, "you cannot smash a wall by banging your head against it. We all went through this before you; look, we still have the scars on our foreheads. Anything that you confide in the warden or the examining magistrates will be kept in strictest confidence; these men are as tight-lipped as the grave. Trust them; they are our fathers!"

Some of our group, who had been the most brutally tortured, spit right in their faces. "We didn't come here to lose our self-respect," they began. "We entered the struggle out of self-respect, and we are willing to die here in order to preserve it. Better to die an honest death than to live in dishonor. To crawl like a snake between people's boots, to be avoided by young and old, to be crushed like a loathesome being—that is not life."

In the dark of night some of our number are put in a sack that is weighted with a heavy stone; noiselessly they sink into the unplumbed depths of the Adriatic.

Others are sent to Isolation, a building as frightening as the gaping jaws of the vilest dragon. The walls are thick, the floor is wet; dirty water drips from the ceiling day and night. Muffled moans and screams pierce the sinister silence. Many of those who are brought here are broken and emaciated when they leave. Many disappear in the basement cells. Many cough up even their mother's milk.

Sometimes the prisoners held in Isolation must spend the entire night mopping the floors of the long corridors while the guards kick and curse them: "Make it shine like the sun. When we turn the lights off it must shine brightly. You who defamed and shamed our country must now scrub the earth you have soiled. You thought our leader would be afraid of your threats, of the saber-rattling you instigated along our borders. But we have proved that we are valorous; there are cowards among us to be sure—*you* are the cowards!"

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In the morning the first sunbeams sneak furtively through the small, barred windows high up on the walls of our cells. The siren wakes the prisoners in Isolation. Exhausted, reduced to mere shadows, the men prepare for the most dreadful of Goli Otok's tortures—the quarries.

Outside, forced-chasing is already under way. The chasers take turns, some of them stopping to catch their breath and then returning with redoubled fury, pouring out their impotent hatred on the prisoners. They say that more than one convict was found trampled to death along the path of the forced-chasing—they were simply tossed into the ditch, left to rot unburied. Diabolical ravens circle over the exposed bodies in a gloomy burial dance. Their terrible caws shatter the silence; that cawing is as frightening as Goli Otok itself.

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LETTER FOURTEEN

Dear File,

Greek mythology tells us that the gods punished other gods for disobedience. But people have proved to be more terrible than the gods; they punish other people for their steadfastness, their commitment to a cause. Time passes at an unbearably slow pace here; it is as if oxen are dragging a heavy load across the steep rock slopes. The sun scorches us and our lips crack for want of a drop of water. Near the sea there is a fountain from which fresh, cool water gurgles, but the guards' whips do not let us get near it, and so we must quench our unquenchable thirst with seawater. One pays dearly for a drop of water here, not with money, but with one's emotions, one's thoughts, one's will. But sometimes our convictions prove even stronger than our thirst.

We work in groups, dragging ourselves about from morning until night. It is a peculiar and terrible kind of torture. Standing twenty to thirty meters apart, we are ordered to dig sand from the sea with pitchforks. At the same time others are ordered to make sand ropes or to thread the sand through a needle. We are forced to perform this Sisyphean labor until we collapse from exhaustion and hunger. And what for? To fracture the granite of our convictions. To take from us the principal thing that differentiates a man from a beast. But just as the sun kindles the flames of this torrid July, so our beliefs kindle inextinguishable flames in our souls—flames that no one can hope to put out. Nobody can shake such firm belief. We believe in our ideals as we believe that this is the sea, that this is an island named Goli Otok, that these sufferings are visited upon us to tempt our fate. Man is an extraordinary being. He is weak when he is overwhelmed with pleasure, when his life flows smoothly. But when he is wracked with anguish, when misery and suffering take possession of him, then he is capable of great bravery. Then his spirit soars like an eagle; he is as solid as granite. There is no power that can rob a man of these traits. The body will become as solid as

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rock when it is governed by a spirit that has been put to the test. Only when it is beset by doubts and suspicions does the body become hesitant. If Sisyphus lived on earth among men, he would reach the top of the mountain, but he will not succeed as long as he lives among the gods. Prosperity transforms gods into human beings, while pain transforms men into gods.

We on Goli Otok are forced to suffer, seemingly without end. For three days we are ordered to lift sand from the sea with pitchforks and fill wooden litters. We stand knee knee-deep in the water with our backs bent over. Has anyone ever heard of digging sand from the sea with pitchforks?

Time passes slowly as threaded through the eye of a needle. Every convict at Goli Otok is made to suffer indescribable pains and for what—he leaves behind nothing but the prints of his tired, bare feet. The authorities pursue only one aim: to transform the convicts into base reptiles.

Every step, every action here at Goli Otok is carefully thought out beforehand. The authorities treat us worse than beasts. After the completion of the "inquest"—which is accomplished through forced-chasing—these human numbers are sent to perform a particular kind of labor: some to make frames for furniture, some to weave chairs from thick rope, some to cut marble in the quarries, others to crush the stones and fill the carts, and still others to push the carts to the silos, from where others load them on the ships that will take the cargo to Italy.

The most terrible of the brigade leaders in Goli Otok were the Nazarines, who had been arrested on suspicion of spying for a foreign power. Their fathers were generally priests, and their belief in God is unshakable. But when these people are given power over others, they exercise it with exceptional zeal and rudeness. Some of the convicts at Goli Otok remember them as terrible man-eating bears, standing over the convicts and whipping them to work more and more quickly. They carefully noted any violations of the prison rules at the work site, and when they returned

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to the Wire at dusk they told the authorities who had worked well and who had not.

Understandably enough, the convicts hated these brigade leaders and sought revenge; here is how they got rid of the cruelest of them:

This particular brigade leader's father was a priest renowned for his piety and honesty—the inhabitants of the Zagreb district held him in great esteem. When his son the brigade leader began to force the convicts, to work even during rest periods, they discovered his home address and sent a letter to his father, even imitating the son's handwriting. The letter read as follows: "Dear father—I know I haven't written for quite some time, but now I write to say that I live here as I never did at home. Here there is an abundance of fruit, food, money—everything! When they get the opportunity to visit this island, everyone will see that I am telling you the truth. And that's why I beg you not to send any more parcels of lard, sausage, bacon, and cheese—since we receive everything in such abundance that I have to throw away the food you send. But in your next parcel please send me a gun which I can use to kill God—that same God who deceives you and me, who has made both of us tremble in fear of hell. In reality, there have never been any gods. They were created by human anguish; it's this anguish that caused people to make such fools of themselves. When lightning strikes painfully through a man's fertile, naive mind, he utters a plea to God, asking him to help us avoid the temptations Satan sent into the world. . . ."

The convict's father was of course distraught upon receiving this letter. It was as if the earth were opening beneath him. Convinced that Satan had somehow worked his way into his family, he decided he must act to drive him out. With this he went to the office of his church newsletter and wrote an open letter in which he disowned his son.

When his son received a copy of the letter, he tore it open with joy—but what did he read there?

"I am ashamed of my son, who has brought dishonor on me and on my family. Damn you! May you never again know happiness on this earth!"

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The brigade leader was crushed. His behavior changed during the next few days, and although all the convicts saw the change and knew its cause, they acted as if it all had nothing to do with them. Indeed, they were solicitous of him, asking what had provoked such a letter and saying they wanted to help him. As the days passed he became more and more withdrawn, refusing even to open his mouth. He even refused all food and water. A complete change had come over him. There were only a few days left in his sentence, but now he had become an ordinary member of the brigade again, working constantly from morning until night.

A few days before his release a UN delegation suddenly arrived to investigate the conditions under which not only the Communists but also the Nazarines were being held. One of the latter had somehow smuggled out a signed petition which claimed that the authorities at Goli Otok did not respect human rights, that the convicts were tortured mercilessly like beasts, that many of them had been murdered, and that on this accursed island human life is held dirt cheap.

The prison administration had clearly been caught off guard. Suddenly the warden and the examining magistrates were replaced. A special commission arrived from Ljubljana to check the food and general conditions.

But immediately the informers (*tzinkars*) among the convicts came forward to say that life at Goli Otok was just fine, that there were no irregularities of which the convicts could complain, that there was plenty of food, and so on. The informers are in fact the most dangerous of the people in the prison; they served as the Administration's ears. They misrepresent whatever news they intercept, exaggerating it in a manner that ensures they will retain their favored positions. The criminals among the convicts were particularly hostile to the informers, assaulting them with or without cause. In one instance when the guards came to separate them, the criminal shouted: "They are abusing the authorities, both Tito and the state itself! We cannot sit by passively while they utter these absurdities. Is this how you go

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about reforming us? They are more criminal than we are. We have been stealing material goods but they want to steal our souls—and then to slander us in front of you with their lies! That's why we treat them like the leprous curs they are."

Aware of the network that linked the informers together, the criminal prisoners began to sow distrust among them. As a result they began to suspect one another and their group unity was destroyed. After a few weeks criminals who were brought to Goli Otok generally ask to be taken back to the prisons from which they have been transferred. They consider the conditions at Goli Otok to be far worse than anything they have encountered elsewhere. Even the criminals imprisoned at Goli Otok are morally superior to the informers.

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LETTER FIFTEEN

Dear File,

With its Wire Goli Otok reminds me of Yeni-köy, where the camp was also surrounded by a high barbed-wire fence, the difference being that Goli Otok is also surrounded by the Adriatic Sea whereas Yeni-köy was situated in the midst of the Xanthi plain. When I first arrived the other convicts were suspicious and seemed bewildered by my presence among them. At first I didn't understand why, but later I realized that many of them had hoped to be released before their terms expired, and now I, the most stubborn of the Stalinists, had been thrown into prison with them. With my arrival, the others lost all hope for their own release.

There had been several allusions to my fate in the Yugoslav press. The Sarajevo *Sveznadar* had written that I, Venko Markovski, am the greatest Macedonian poet and hinted that I was being held in prison. *Politika* responded on October 23, 1956, criticizing the *Sveznadar* editors for forgetting that Venko Markovski had twice been tried for activities hostile to socialist Yugoslavia.

From my cell in the Skopje prison I was taken to Goli Otok's open-air jail. My bunk was in room number 4; the bunks were like boxes arranged in tiers of four.

The moment I saw Goli Otok I realized that it is as I had described it in "Contemporary Paradoxes." Indeed there was nothing new to add to my poem; it is a concise rendering of Goli Otok's essence, and at the same time a reflection of the whole scope of this terrible island.

At sundown the prison authorities carried out an inspection. They were checking the prisoners who had just arrived from other prisons, from Zabela, Požarevac, Sremska Mitrovica, and Gradiska. These common criminals were mixed in among the politicals here at Goli Otok.

A kind of self-management had been instituted among the convicts at Goli Otok, a cruel mockery in which the most tyrannical oppression is carried out under the banner of self-management.

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The brigade leaders had special privileges. They had the right to vote and were allowed to go to the reading room where they could read books and even newspapers. Some of the other convicts enjoyed these same privileges. These were the prisoners who had behaved in a manner that satisfied the Administration and cooperated in the inquest that each prisoner is subjected to soon after his arrival at Goli Otok. In other words, they had presumably confessed to everything—including the crimes that *no one* had ever committed—and had promised that they would never again involve themselves in antistate activities. The privileged prisoners who served as room supervisors accompanied the other convicts to the examining magistrates for the daily hearings. It was crucial that the testimony given at these hearings be confirmed by deeds. UDBA was certain to check up on them, and God help those who did not give accurate testimony.

All the convicts at Goli Otok knew instances in which prisoners unable to endure the torture of force-chasing any longer were reduced to making confessions about people who had never existed, implicating themselves in the crimes of these invented characters. For example, all the new arrivals soon heard the story of a certain Albanian from Priš-tina who, unable to endure the tortures, took a piece of paper and wrote down the names of all the Priš̌tina district's Party and UDBA chiefs, accusing them of having been in direct contact with him. The examining magistrate and the warden rewarded the Albanian with cigarettes, gave him an easier job, and praised him as a shining example whom all the other convicts should emulate.

And almost immediately the officials whom the Albanian had named were arrested and interrogated. Some admitted that they knew their accuser but all of them denied that they had been involved in his subversive activities. Consequently, the authorities began to torture them, subjecting them to terrible sufferings in order to extract "the truth." But despite the fury of the inquest, no subversive organization was uncovered, for the simple reason that no such organization had ever existed. Thirty-five officials had been

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arrested and of these thirty-five, five died from the beatings they received.

In the end even the officials realized that they had been searching for a nonexistant conspiracy, that the Albanian prisoner had invented the whole story. When the examining magistrate asked him why he had done this, the Albanian answered: "If you had been tortured as I was you too would have implicated everyone you know, and even those you do not know, in order to put an end to the terrible pain Goli Otok inflicts." In response, the authorities subjected the Albanian to gruesome tortures: they beat him with sand bags and struck him in the back of the head, in the kidneys, and in the groin. The Albanian went mad with pain and UDBA, desperate to cover up its own inhumanity, strangled him and threw him into the sea with his hands bound and a rock tied around his neck.

This case became notorious and spread terror throughout the camp. The Albanians and the Montenegrins were the most cruelly tortured of the prisoners at Goli Otok. It appears that the Albanians were tortured because of their habit of swearing the *bessa*, while the Montenegrins were punished for their unshakable faith in the Soviet Union. For, as the Montenegrins used to say, "We plus the Russians number 180 million."

I found four of my old Partisan friends on Goli Otok. I was overjoyed to see them and hoped that we could continue our comradely struggle here as well. To my deep sorrow, one of them, a former minister in the Macedonian government, went mad, though he continued to have occasional lucid moments in which he was again able to recognize me. Another of these old friends, the brother of a deputy prime minister in the Macedonian government who had been killed in Skopje prison, was sentenced to twenty years at hard labor. The third of them was the most interesting: hunchbacked and crippled he had a generously human heart, reminding one of Victor Hugo's Quasimodo. He used to say that the night before he was sentenced he had

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dreamed that Lazo Mojsov, the public prosecutor, had placed a pair of brand-new yellow shoes in his cell. Startled from his dream, he yelled out that the appearance of the shoes meant that he would be sentenced to death. And in fact he was sentenced to death, spent long months in solitary, and then saw his sentence commuted to a long term of imprisonment. The fourth of these old friends was almost blind. He had been accused of being a spy and was severely tortured at Goli Otok. Later the authorities broke him down and bent him to their own purposes, eventually making him a brigade leader. Almost blind, he could not see the ways in which they misled him into believing that if he revealed the existence of a hitherto undetected subversive organization they would take him to Belgrade to have his eyes treated by the famous doctor Cavka. In fact he was eventually taken to Belgrade, but only to be placed in yet another cell. And when he asked why they hadn't taken him to see Cavka, they answered "It all depends on you, not on us." And since he knew of no subversive organization and refused to invent one, this was the end of his sad story.

For the convicts at Goli Otok, having the right to vote (that is, the right to participate in so-called self-management) was perhaps the greatest privilege. But to earn this privilege a man had to pay a high price, not only in sweat and blood but also in humiliation. The most important thing was to submit oneself utterly to the authorities, to surrender one's will to them completely. In short, the eagle had to become a worm. Goli Otok has no place for the man who is determined to preserve his own identity; here even the bravest fighters gradually became unrecognizable.

The so-called remitted comprise another category of prisoners. These are convicts who do not yet have the right to vote, but who have done just about everything that is necessary to win that exalted favor from the authorities. The "remitted" have certain privileges denied to the rank and file convicts. They can sit in on the "self-managing meetings", be told about the news in the newspapers, and

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be the first to respond when the room supervisor wants something done. They have the right to receive parcels of food but can share it only with certain convicts and not consume as much of it as they may want to. Even if you receive a sizable quantity of cigarettes, you can smoke only two or three a day. And, of course, there is no guarantee you will receive the cigarettes at all. This situation takes an especially hard toll on the chain smokers among us; in order to get a cigarette butt they compromise their character and betray their deepest convictions. Dostoyevsky was right when he said that neither torture, nor starvation, nor exile breaks convicts; what breaks them is the need for a cigarette butt.

The arrival of the common criminals altered the political complexion of Goli Otok. The criminal prisoners unanimously rejected any attempt to brainwash them into the spirit of convict self-management. They had no use for the much-sought-after right to vote and cared not a whit about earning "remitted" status. They knew one thing and one thing only: they had been tried and they had to serve their terms according to the laws of the SFRY. They despised the politicals for informing against them, and they worked to undermine whatever group solidarity there was among us. They were more easily transferred to Isolation than the other convicts; it could happen as the result of a quarrel with the guard or a curse directed against the brigade leader. But the common criminals were also released from Isolation more easily than the rest of us. Thinking they had been sent there without cause, they began hunger strikes the moment they arrived. Afraid that their example would spread, the examining magistrate summoned them for a hearing. The criminals always addressed the magistrate boldly, saying that this was not the way reeducation should be implemented and arguing that their fathers and mothers had been Partisans too, that they had been wounded in the struggle for liberty, and that they themselves should thus be treated humanely. As a result, the criminals were sometimes brought back to the Wire without ever crossing the threshold of Isolation.

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The criminals among us helped the politicals locate informers. When an informer was uncovered, the criminals pasted the evidence of his double dealing up on the walls, read it out loud, and in general aroused such indignation against the slanderer that he was thrashed in a way that even UDBA could not equal. The informer had no alternative but to call for a guard, but when the guard came to help the criminals told him that the informer had abused the state, cursed the Marshal, and reviled those who maintain order in the prison. "Why," they demanded, "do you help these scoundrels instead of helping us!"

I myself have seen criminals beat an informer until he bleeds all over, then drag him to the fountain, wash away the blood, give him a cigarette, and say: "Now perhaps you will stop your double dealing with the authorities. We are all convicts here and we must find a common language—a language with which we can present a common front against the Administration as long as we are on this sinister island."

Dear File, with these lines I have taken you away from the free life of the town for a while. In the next letter I'll do my best to reveal the reality at Goli Otok, to describe some of its most typical characteristic features. I'll try to be accurate, objective, and clear. I won't mention people's real names because UDBA is capable of causing them great harm. I have even heard of a case in which they took a dead man out of his grave. Enough for now.

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LETTER SIXTEEN

Dear File,

The prison is shocked. The political prisoners are silent. Radio Belgrade and the press have both announced Tito's message to Imre Nagy. In his message Tito says: "I hail the creation of the new state and political leadership and join in the declaration of the government of the Hungarian People's Republic of October 28, 1956. Essential elements of the political platform of the new Hungarian political and state leadership, for example, the democratization of social life, the introduction of workers' self-management, and the introduction in principle of democratic self-management. . . are evidence that the policy of the present political leadership and the true socialist ambitions of the Hungarian working people have fused into one."

The leader of the SFRY constantly insisted that he didn't wish to interfere in the affairs of other countries, didn't want to impose on others either workers' self-management or the democratization of party life. Nevertheless, he is using all his might to facilitate change where such change—in leadership and in policy—will have harmful consequences for the Soviet Union. As part of this general policy, Tito helped Imre Nagy, the leader of the counterrevolution in Hungary. The remnants of the bourgeoisie rallied around Nagy and his associates, and, assisted and supported by him, they demoralized and liquidated the central authorities and began to remove the local officials, including the state authorities, the local councils, and the organs of the economic self-management. These were replaced with the so-called revolutionary committees, composed mainly of fascist and bourgeois elements. They also created the so-called workers' councils, which were intended to betray the working class.

The events in Hungary quickly got out of hand. The Hungarian people split in two, some of them supporting Nagy and his associates while the true communists stood by the republic. Imre Nagy and his followers organized and

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armed the counterrevolutionary forces of the mutineers. In the so-called national defense they gathered military and antinational criminals who had just been released from prison as well as other enemies of the people's democracy. White Terror seized Budapest and spread throughout the country. During the short rule of Imre Nagy and his group 234 defenseless citizens were killed, more than three thousand progressive persons were thrown into prison where they faced execution, and more than ten thousand persons were liquidated.

Imre Nagy was granted asylum in the Yugoslav Embassy. From there, together with Geza Losonci and the others, he gave instructions to continue the armed resistance and to organize strikes and other subversive activities. Moreover, through Miklos Gimesz and others of his associates he established contact with Radio Free Europe and began to publish the clandestine newspaper *October 23*.

Yugoslavia's participation in the Hungarian counterrevolution was proved during the trial of Nagy and his associates. He openly admitted receiving directives from Tito, encouraging him in the fight against the Hungarian people.

Tito constantly argued that independence was a nation's most sacred right, that noninterference in another nation's internal affairs permitted the nation, on its own initiative and following its own conceptions, to arrange its existence in the manner it thought appropriate. But in fact, whenever Tito had the opportunity he promoted policies directed against the people, against the Soviet Union, and against true democracy. While seeming to defend the principles of noninterference, he destroyed the principles on which one state was erecting its social life. He went so far as to involve the two greatest Yugoslav writers, Ivo Andrić and Miroslav Krleža, in the Hungarian counterrevolution; they issued an appeal to save not the revolutionaries but the counterrevolutionaries who were rising, guns in hand, to oppose the revolution.

Why didn't Ivo Andrić and Miroslav Krleža protest against terror in Yugoslavia, against Goli Otok, against the

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tortures and massacres that took place there? Feeling twinges of guilt, Krleža compromised and gave in to Tito's thinking on revolution and democracy, but Andrić had no reason to do the same. His life and ideology, after all, had been straight, without any zig-zags. In Croatia they remember Krleža's response when Augustincic invited him to join the national liberation fight by citing the example of Vladimir Nazor: "I don't believe in Tito's victory," Krleža said. And what makes this case even more striking is that after the liberation this Pharisee attired in elegant literary forms was frequently visited by the secretary of the LCY, Tito.

The tragicomedy in Hungary, that farce assisted by the evil spirits of the reactionary circles, ended shamefully. Imre Nagy and his associates were sentenced to death and the sentence was immediately carried out.

My dear, I am worried about a conscience, the conscience of the writer Ivo Andrić. Do you remember how we met this giant of Yugoslav literature at home? Do you remember his letter that was seized by UDBA at the time of my arrest, the letter in which he wrote of the wonderful moments he had spent at our home. But what is to be done? A man's literary works are one thing. In them he meets invented characters; here the character meets the author and expects firmness, humaneness, and prudence of him. Do you recall the role played by Emile Zola in the Dreyfus affair? Through his defense of Dreyfus, Zola made himself synonymous with the conscience of mankind; he became eternal. The voices of Ivo Andrić and Miroslav Krleža could have done something similar. But, alas!

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LETTER SEVENTEEN

Dear File,

For some days now I have been at work in the women's workshop. This is one of the wings at Goli Otok where women used to work. Now, as I understood, this workshop is closed.

Such tragedies occurred in this workshop; it is difficult to describe them. Almost every stone is blood-stained. Under every stone lie the tears of many women. Every woman here bemoaned her fate. Some bemoaned their broken marriages, others bemoaned the children left homeless, thrown out of their houses, without shelter, without a crust of bread to eat.

With me is Sčepan, a brigade leader, called the "room-supervisor." Tall and broad-shouldered, he is exhausted by the awful trials to which life has subjected him. Below his eyebrows, dark, deep, thoughtful wells burn with anger. He keeps silent and sighs, not allowing himself to be drawn into conversation. Like flocks of birds swarming to the majestic rocks of Lovcen, his thoughts fly off into the distance. He is looking for a place in the women's workshop, as if he has hidden something and now wants to dig it out. His hands tremble. His step is uncertain. From time to time he begins a sad old Montenegrin song. The melody is monotonous, unvaried, like most Montenegrin songs, but in this loneliness, in this desert of Goli Otok, the song cures the wounds that afflict him. He was wounded in battles—mortal battles against the Chetniks, against those blood-suckers of the people. But he endured them as a man, as a Montenegrin, whose mother had taught him to bear the blows of the enemy. But who will heal the new wounds inflicted by his comrades? Where is this herb, the herb that can heal wounds from a man who yesterday was a brother but today is a ferocious enemy? He sings quietly, shakes his head and looks for an explanation. I am trying to start a conversation with him. I don't know the customs of Goli Otok, particularly those of the Montenegrins who have passed through the exceptional correctional methods

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employed here. In any case, I said to him: "Comrade, what shall we do here? It seems we have been sent to work. But what work shall we do? I am alone and as I can see you are a room supervisor. But how many people do you supervise? I am alone."

He keeps silent. He doesn't say a word. He looks around; it seems to him that the director is eavesdropping on us from somewhere, that the examining magistrate is watching us and will any moment shout, "You, what are you doing? Don't you know why you have been sent there? We want you to make him just like you."

Sčepan gathers his strength and looks around once again. After looking carefully around he begins to speak in a drawling voice: "They say you are a writer. What were you tried for? Do you remember the content of your work? The title?" "I don't understand what you are asking me," I reply.

From many people who had been at Goli Otok, I came to understand the psychology of the convicts there: everyone wanted to know what you had been tried for, whom you had been in contact with, and where these people were. Later they rearranged these facts in their own way, in a way that would suit the examining magistrate in a future trial.

Those were the thoughts that worried me while Sčepan was asking his questions, curious to discover the story of my trial.

"Comrade," Sčepan said, "do understand that we are alone at the work site, and, in addition to working, we must also occupy ourselves with conversations."

I continued to be inaccessible. After all, when he let me in the Wire the examining magistrate told me, "It will be better for you if you avoid any conversations with the convicts."

"But that advice doesn't apply to us, to the room supervisors, " Sčepan said. "We have a particular privilege. We are called to help the convicts serve their terms of imprisonment more easily."

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A gloomy, ominous cloud was gathering behind Velebit. The sun was hidden behind the edge of the cloud and the lapping of the waves had grown sinister.

Sudden Sčepan shouted: "The storm and rain will catch us. Let us carry across at least two or three wooden litters of stones. . . . Let it appear that we have done something. . . .

And quickly, strong as he was, he put a big stone on the wooden litter with his bear paw-like hands. The stone was too big for one man but well within the reach of two. We got it across, and then did several more. The fifth time he shouted: "Break! Do you smoke?"

"Yes, I do."

"Have you got cigarettes?"

"Yes, in the buffet; but I am not allowed to have them."

"But at least you have some. You are fortunate. There is somebody to send them to you. Me, I have neither mother, nor father. And my wife abandoned me after my arrest."

My heart sank as I listened to him. I felt sorry for this man who had been a veritable whirlwind in the fight. For here, he had become a nonentity. His eyes flashed oddly at the answer that I had obtained cigarettes. He would do anything to make friends with me.

"Don't be afraid of me!" he said. "If somebody from the Wire asks what we did at the women's workshop, we'll say that we worked and kept quiet. We didn't talk politics."

This statement seemed very risky to me. Why should we say, "We didn't talk politics?" In fact, of course, we *didn't* talk politics, but the mere fact that we say that suggests that we *did* and are trying to protect ourselves.

"What is that?" I said. "We didn't talk politics? We didn't talk *at all*. To talk politics is to talk on a particular subject, not to talk in general."

And at that moment it seemed to me that Sčepan had another physiognomy, another face, one overgrown with weeds and clouded by fog.

"Are you a Stalinist?" he asked.

"What I am I have already said before the court."

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At that we ended our conversation, but deep in my heart I felt the fang of a snake striking into me; I felt a viper, a cold poisonous snake, tightening around my body.

Sčepan was impatient about something. He was sinking into thoughts known only to him. He was looking for a way to convince me he was not what he was thought to be at the Wire. There, the time when his name could be added to the list of the released drew nearer. Poor Sčepan! He would do anything to set foot on the coast again, to feel free, if only for an instant. He had been one of the most outspoken Stalinists, but he was one of those who had publicly renounced Stalin. But did they believe him? This is the question that worries him. But maybe he wishes to deceive them too. But how? By what means? Deceit is a more complicated phenomenon. It's made of another alloy. Its face is many sided, its appearance can betray it at any moment. The eyes are a mirror of the soul. The eyes betray that which the soul wants to hide. Will he have strength enough for that?

At that moment the siren started up, signalling the time to stop working. We stopped. We got up. We put aside the wooden litter and the pick.

Sčepan said: "It is enough for today. Tomorrow we shall continue the work. And mind, we didn't talk politics."

"Comrade supervisor, why are you worried about that? We are political people. And if we talk it isn't terrible to discuss political matters. That's what we have been tried for. That's what we are in prison for. What we couldn't say outside because the authorities and the laws consider it propaganda and cause for indictment is no longer propaganda here; it can no longer be considered as cause for an indictment."

He interrupted me: "Are you a man of the law?"

"No!"

Suddenly our conversation broke off, leaving something half-spoken. We took the road up the hill toward the Wire.

It started raining. Heavy drops splashed against the fiery stones. The air was heavy and hot. My chest was suffocating, as our steps dragged slowly through the steamy afternoon.

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LETTER EIGHTEEN

My dear,

A storm pounded Goli Otok. We, the convicts coming back from work, were as wet as drowned rats. The trains of people looked like the long Partisan files in the Igman and Kozuh mountains along the endless paths of the hilly Šumadia. Our tired eyes were looking for shelter; our exhausted strength sought a roof. Our steps echoed over the stones like a slow-moving song.

The wet wing of the firmament pressed upon Goli Otok. A steaming darkness flooded down upon us, like lava erupting from an unknown volcano. Only the room supervisors were in dry clothes.

In a slow and calm voice the supervisor was reading out the numbers of the convicts. Everyone answered:

"Here. . . . Me. . . . Here. . . ."

We were all present.

It was late night, but our eyes wouldn't close. In the corridors some were smoking their last cigarette. Some were wrapping the cigarette ends in a piece of newspaper they had picked up. Accursed hardship! There is no song that can bewail it, no tears that can express the pain.

The storm had subsided. As a white dawn rose, the siren roused the convicts who had not yet fallen asleep. Like a nest of ants we came running out of the rooms. Mute, thoughtful, with anger in our eyes and pain in our hearts, we lined up. Our clothes were still soaked. Wet and heavy, they clung to our bodies.

With Sčepan, we set off for the women's workshop. All through the Wire we walked quickly for fear that some of the superiors might stop us and ask questions. We were silent, our heads cast down as if we were looking for something we had lost the day before. Lonely flocks of birds flew over us making strange sounds. The air, washed by the rain, shone clean and bright under the high vault of heaven.

We arrived at the work place on time. I had one cigarette in my pocket, but had decided not to smoke that day. I

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offered it to Sčepan, who snatched it greedily. His eyes brightened, his hand began to shake, and he said, "I haven't got matches but by rubbing the stones we'll make a fire."

At that moment Sčepan looked like Robinson Crusoe. In a century when man was mastering the techniques that could make him master of the universe, the people at Goli Otok looked like the most primitive of savages.

Sčepan made a fire and lit the cigarette. He took a deep drag, enjoying it like a child.

"Will you take a drag?" he asked me. And I had such a desire to smoke today! It was as if he knew why I was so silent. Smoking is a terrible passion. For one cigarette a man will perform miracles. Man is omnipotent, but suddenly he becomes a nonentity for the sake of a cigarette butt.

We started to work. He wasn't in any hurry. He was in a talkative mood. He began in a low voice, hardly recognizable.

"You can't imagine what trials we have endured at Goli Otok! It can't be described by man. If the stones could speak they would tell a story such as the human ear has never heard. If the blue sea could tell the world about the bloody, silent hours when gravediggers dragged still-living bodies and threw them, stones tied about the neck, to the bottom of the sea. Ah, if somebody could tell it. . . . But the human soul is harder than the hardest stone. Human thought and anguish have plumbed deeper depths than the deepest, unfathomed deep. . . . I was tortured, too. You are lucky to have come after the storm has subsided, when the terrible screams from the gauntlet have quieted down. . . . But how can you know what tomorrow bodes? At Goli Otok fortune is changeable. At times it laughs, at times it scowls, at times it lifts high the rubber truncheons and beats the people with whips, at times it puts them to the test in a fiery slaked lime, forcing them to be harder than granite, at times it crushes them for their disobedience and transforms them into disgraceful, miserable reptiles. . . ."

Suddenly, Sčepan's train of thought broke off. He smiled silently, a smile that spread across his face, merging with the sight that came from deep within his soul.

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"It's difficult for you to understand what I am telling you. And no living man from outside, if he hears the story of Goli Otok, will be able to believe that it could happen in the twentieth century. Buchenwald and Auschwitz have been buried long ago. Dachau and Banica have long been covered with earth. The traces of the places where hungry and bristling curs devoured the tender flesh of defenseless babies were erased long ago. And man, who was becoming a beast through these crimes, has long been trying to restore his human face. But here at Goli Otok this same man, pressed by circumstances, loses everything human forever. It's ugly to be a villain. Villainy is pernicious both for the villain who perpetrates the crime and for the victim. But what is most pernicious is when the soul abandons itself to villainy. There is something which allows man to withstand the most hellish pain. Pain torments his soul and flames burn it clean. Everything can collapse, everything can be suffocated; but the ideal will still glow bright, only the idea for which one is ready to stake one's life. I see you are a good man. I don't want some terrible misfortune to befall you. I have told you many things. I was one of those who trod the sharpest stones of Goli Otok. Sockless, in shoes with sharp nails inside, I was force-chased. And the most terrible thing is when the man who chases you today is the same man who fought beside you for a shared ideal. When I recall the day on which the Kremlin announced the death of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, I still shudder and my hair still stands on end, sinister lightning blinds me and I go mad. For here the warden and the examining magistrates passed the night in orgies, all night long they celebrated deliriously. And all night long they vented their base passions on us, the convicts.

"Shall I tell you more? Shall I say the rest? On March 6, 1953, in the carpenter's shop at Goli Otok, they made six coffins, decorated with pentacles, symbolizing the five continents plus Stalin. The coffins were deep and they laid in them six convict-Stalinists, dressed in jackets similar to Stalin's and wearing caps similar to his. All six had moustaches like

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Stalin's. They had been ordered to stay still, to keep silent, not to cough. The most incorrigible Stalinists among us—the most adamant ones—were whipped into rows and driven to this ignominious spectable. We were ordered to shout, 'Down with Stalin!' The moment we reached the coffins those inside started getting up one by one, shouting: 'Shame on you! Tools of Satan! Damn you, Tito's henchmen!" Wild shouts shook the firmament, echoing over the blue sea. A sinister silence fell upon Goli Otok.

"Nobody found out what happened to the six disguised Stalinists. Later, I gathered that darkness had swallowed them."

Suddenly, Ščepan became somber, as if an enormous burden oppressed him, as if a mountain had fallen on his shoulders. He became silent and said nothing more that day.

My dear, you see what people are like? You listen and yet you don't know whether what they say is true. Is that a tall tale or not? Is that an invented story or is it real? You listen and you have no right to reject anything of what you have heard, of what you have seen here at Goli Otok. You have to replace the truth with fictions in order to make it acceptable.

And perhaps what he told me was true. Or perhaps the truth was even more frightening. In fact, what was the truth in his eyes, the eyes of a man serving his sentence at Goli Otok? And was this truth valid for all those serving their terms? Maybe, when he was reviewing it himself, when he was forming his own opinion, maybe then the truth was as he depicted it to me. Maybe I would have had a similar conception of the truth had I met him at Goli Otok at the time when the most terrible hell on earth was being forged, a hell whose follies surpassed all man's other tyrannies put together. But now, to make people believe the truth about Goli Otok, it must be softened, laced with fictions. What took place at Goli Otok is real and convincing enough and doesn't need exaggeration, but in order to accept what actually happened, in order to comprehend that human beings were transformed into beasts, it is necessary to soften the truth.

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Who will believe that sand could be dug out of the sea with a pitchfork, dug out and piled into wooden litters? Such things were contrived by men.

But this was the reality of Goli Otok—a reality that nobody can abolish. Time will erase the traces of Goli Otok, and if future judges are to understand it, we must carefully examine the substance of all the elements that contributed to its ugly reality.

Heroes show weakness when the battle ends and their wounds begin to heal. Then heroes appear not as supermen but as living human beings with all the familiar weaknesses. It is human to show weakness. Heroism is superhuman. Only in the heat of battle does the human transcend itself and become heroic. That's why heroes are legends, whereas human beings are a living reality, a concrete, tangible, palpable reality. When a legend first comes into being, the weak sides of the hero are also considered, but when the legend takes its final form these weaknesses disappear once and for all. The human beings whose heroic acts create the legend lose any palpable reality; they are transformed into the images that men want to see.

Living heroes lack this legendary brilliance; they are mortal. Legendary heroes are mortals dressed in an immortal garment, theirs is an immortal image and their attractiveness grows day by day. Perhaps Sčepan, too, is one of the heroes whom time deprived of immortality because he was allowed to remain alive, because ugly reality denied the heroic element in him. And maybe many like him fell as heroes, but in our world of blood and terror there is nobody to reveal their real value, not even for a moment.

We measure things from a distance; distance is the most accurate and reliable measure.

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LETTER NINETEEN

My dear,

Sčepan was awake all night. He was thinking, hesitating. And, at about daybreak, he made up his mind.

"I can trust him. If he once had the audacity to write a poem, he will have the courage to tell the truth about Goli Otok as it is, and not as the authorities wish it to be represented."

That morning Sčepan was in good spirits, head and shoulders above his mood of the day before. We were alone again. From somewhere around the Administration fierce barking could be overheard. Sčepan took me by the hand and said: "It's far from us. Don't worry. Today I want to tell you something secret. I hope after you hear it, it will become as sacred to you as it is to me. I was eighteen when I became a Partisan. One dream impelled me: to build a glorious new society, a society in which there would be no slaves, no masters. My father didn't hold me back. My mother quickly prepared something that was available at home, wrapped it in a small bundle and said to me, 'Son, God protect you! Keep your honor in this struggle. Let us survive and meet again.'

"As I heard much later, the Chetniks later destroyed the whole village. I was wounded three times. I had read in books that heroes are endowed with a special spirit, and I was eager for my first battle. But when I actually found myself in battle, it turned out to be different. One man fights another in a definite reality, the battle does not occur in some distant, invented realm. The enemy suffered losses and we suffered, too. But we were the victors and this increased our self-confidence. In me, as Faustus says, two souls live. The first was the soul of my dreams—dreams of the heights and the free spaces which were always pulling me forward. The second was the soul that pulled me back to earth, to the concrete reality, to the society that existed independently of me and constantly shaped me. I was ready to sacrifice these two souls for the new one that was being

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born, and indeed I did relinquish them. By that time a deep change had occurred within me. I started evaluating the people around me, appreciating their strengths and weaknesses. I knew that a Partisan was a fighter who had grown up on the basis of his arms, but that his conscience lags behind material conditions even after the liberation; within, the Partisan is divided against himself. He seeks to be rewarded for what he did for the revolution. And there there you are. The man who was a magnificent marksman in battle is willing to be a magnificent creator in the renovation of the earth, but he can't. He lacks the motivation that made him excel in the struggle with the enemy. For that he was rewarded. The military orders shine on his chest but they were earned when his courage revealed itself in a face to face battle against the enemy. Today that kind of courage is no longer needed; today we need heroism in work, another kind of bravery, because the revolution is always developing, looking for new forms, new manifestations, and new directions.

"And here the Partisan hero is inefficient. And he begins to protest. He sees that more capable people have been given posts. He evaluates them, he evaluates himself. He doesn't admit that he was inferior to them and says to himself: 'But they didn't take part in the struggle, they didn't fight as I did, they have no scars on their bodies as I do,' and thus the struggle between the internal and the external 'me' begins. The internal 'me' includes all his hopes, all his notions about the new world, and all his judgments of the old one. Society is the external 'me,' which is engaged in a continuous struggle with the internal 'me.' The nature of the struggle varies, the two 'me's' succeed each other, complement each other, retreat, advance, and form an integral, rich, unknown entity. Humanity lives between the hammer and the anvil and being a part of humanity, the Partisan hero is between the hammer and the anvil, too, and fights constantly.

"And as Georgi Dimitrov says, he who doesn't want to be an anvil should be the hammer. Thus, I was looking for

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ways to cease being an anvil and to become a hammer again. In trying to create the necessary conditions for myself, I hope to create them for others too. You can't be happy if all that surrounds you is unhappy; the happiness of others and your own happiness are indivisible.

"The Partisan had to receive decorations, to be acknowledged and honored, to be again as he had been at the time of the revolution—in short, to be honored by the revolution. But it didn't happen. Just the opposite. The riflemen from the Partisan paths, the martyrs from the prisons, the people with unexecuted death sentences became the driving force not only of the party and the society but of the state too.

"Ideals now came to coincide with personal interests. Each man began to blame everyone else as he saw them seizing public property. And, unwillingly, the man who had seized state power began bureaucratizing himself, reverting to the self of years ago. Everyone wanted to have a garden, a cosy house, to have cattle and so on. And this meant, at least for a while, the restoration of the old, antiquated forces that had been overcome and defeated in the fires of the national liberation war. In other words, the new man was essentially the old one in new clothes. And precisely this situation was creating indignation, leaving the honest man embarrassed and confused. Talking among themselves, close friends expressed contempt toward those in power, who had already become presumptuous. But willing or not, we too were afflicted with arrogance. We couldn't avoid it. And anyone who tried to avoid it was removed, brushed aside.

"At that very moment the YCP-CPSU(b) conflict erupted. People who daily confronted the irregularities that had set in after the liberation now felt a kind of relief. The upper stratum was degenerating into a caste, and this caste was not a small one but controlled all the republics and autonomous regions in Yugoslavia. I was among the first Serbs arrested in Montenegro. My father was shocked, my mother was puzzled: 'But are you going to arrest him

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too? Only yesterday the Chetniks were searching for him. What you are doing is not good. This way you won't go far.'

"And my mother began to weep and to curse in Montenegrin.

"We, the Serbs of Montenegro, are people of extremes, and these extremes shape our character. No Montenegrin can exist in the happy mean. But suddenly we faced a dilemma: either be scoundrels during the inquest and behave as the authorities want, or behave honorably, tenaciously—as only a Montenegrin can behave. In the first battle with the class enemy, I chose irreconcilability, disregarding what could happen to me. Now I have been thrown onto the dumping ground. The authorities consider me to be one of their confidantes. At the Wire people keep their distance from me. But in the Wire there are also people who think like me. I am telling you all this because you have to hear it, you have to know it. That period of time which you didn't have to experience, which you did not see with your own eyes—I am offering that to you through myself, through my own tortures, through the attitude of those who were once as much my equal as I was theirs. The whirl of time wound up the wheel of life so that those who were up went down and those who were down went up. You can understand everything and expose it in a future book, telling the people how blood and sand were mixed up here and trampled by dirty boots; how the bones of living people cracked under the whips; how men became inhuman. And something more: you can tell how the revolution was devoured by counterrevolution."

Scepan's eyes were shining with a radiance seen only when one has climbed and gazes into celestial space. You touch the blue firmament with your forehead. You open your chest, breathe in, and feel relieved. Like a powerful bird you fly off into space and feel that everything around you is one with you, that it is accompanying you to the future you have chosen.

Scepan was like a child. Virginal sunbeams played across his beaming face. His eyes suggested that something half-expressed was welling up from the bottom of his heart in search of space, struggling to reveal the anguish that had hidden somewhere inside him for so long.

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"Do you listen to me? I want to tell you something more. Here where we are now and not so long ago there was a terrible women's camp. Here the women were tortured. Women transformed other women into beasts, into monsters. Now all that has disappeared, just as we and the Wire will disappear one day. But the hand of the villain didn't succeed in erasing all the traces. Dig through the stones there, pick among the rubbish, and you will find pieces of stocking and women's dresses; somewhere you will even find unburied fingers. All those things witness today's tragedy and tomorrow will bring the villains to justice."

And like a man who had hidden something, Scepan yanked at a stone, put his bony hand beneath it, and pulled out a bundle of letters.

"Here is what the villains forgot. Here, in these letters, the fates of many women are recorded. In these letters the tears of their half-articulated sufferings still stream. Here are their sighs for their children and other relatives. Here the children of the future sob with speechless voice. There; leaf through them, read them; don't worry, they are not tossed to you in order to provoke you, to humiliate you. These letters will help you raise your voice in protest against injustice, as Henri Barbusse once did in defending victims against their murderers, nailing the barbarians of the twentieth century to the pillory. I trust you. There is no power that could shake my trust in you. I want you to trust me as well as I trust you. Perhaps this evening, while you are washing your feet, somebody will slink by and say, 'Beware of the room supervisor who accompanies you to work; he is a dangerous person. He is a tool of the authorities.' Do not believe them. They will say the same thing for everybody."

"Supervisor," I replied, "don't worry. I have heard nothing from you. And no suspicion can be aroused, by the talks of the convicts at Goli Otok."

Silence set in. He sat on the stone beside the wooden litter. When the sun was at its zenith I began reading the letters.

My dear, I'll try in the next letter to give you a rough outline of the content of these letters that awkward clumsy hands have written.

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LETTER TWENTY

My dear,

I promised to write you of the letters we found at the women's workshop. But now I hesitate; the urge to keep silent is strong, because the letters evoke a strange inexplicable mood in me; all the same, here they are:

"Maybe this letter won't find you at home. Maybe you are away somewhere, but no matter when it gets into your hands, it won't lose its reality. You write me that my conduct has been indecent and that my morals are degenerating. I don't know where you get your information, since here not even a bird can fly over and no man can appear among us. Maybe you have decided to break off our life together in this mean manner. That is your right. You are free and I am imprisoned. Everything you mention in your application for divorce will be confirmed by the prison authorities. In fact, it isn't necessary to do it; it is enough to say that I am sentenced as a Cominform supporter and the marriage will be dissolved automatically. Have you forgotten everything I did for you? I have suffered many bitter moments in my life and I am still bitterly suffering on this island where one is seen only by the eye of the sun.

"Do you remember the time when we were saving all our pennies to make ends meet. When I was free and had chances to be even more free because I was surrounded with the attention of your friends, it never occurred to me to be unfaithful to you. And now you reproach me; I who am held in a place where there are only women. Your jealousy is inexplicable. Jealousy always sows the seeds of discord and endangers marital relations. Maybe there are other reasons you write me such letters. It's not convenient for you to tell me, perhaps because the real reason will harm your position in the presence of our nearest and dearest. I don't blame you. I wish you all the best! As for me, life ends at Goli Otok. My dreams will remain buried here. It's a good thing that at the end of my life I understand what man is. Man is not what he appears to be when surrounded

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by comfort; one knows man only when one sees him in the midst of want and suffering. The path of life is obstructed by the weeds of hesitation, calumny, and absurdity. Only the strong can cope with these difficult paths and make their way to the end. I don't wish to advise you. Your best adviser is with you—your invented jealousy. I hope when you receive this letter and understand I am writing to you for the last time, you won't need an adviser. The authorities are capable of the most intimate intrigues. They wouldn't exist if the intrigues weren't in their hands. Otherwise, my morale is high. No one can shake it, it is made of granite. For the last time—good-bye!"

My curious eyes fall on another letter. It is deliberately rumpled up, indeed, the writer's fingers could still be felt on it. It is written with ink pencil. Where the humidity has penetrated, the pencil strokes are expressively lilac. It's the handwriting of an intellectual. She addresses her mother:

"Mother, if I could, I would tear off these lips that once so tenderly addressed my beloved. This is what comes of the shortsightedness of youth. Youth is blind, mad, untamable. It doesn't conform to laws, norms, or warnings. It continues on its way, wanting to break the walls that surround it with its head. It is like a river—it flows on, demolishing everything that stands in its way. It doesn't listen to its teachers. It doesn't respect supervisors. It knows only its own rights, of which nobody can deprive it. Now I see what a folly I committed by becoming attached to the man I considered to be my sweetheart. It turns out that I was misled, that I loved somebody's else's feelings, that I loved an abstract, invented, nonexisting face that misled me at the first meeting, that enticed me with his first words. How did it happen? Didn't we love each other constantly, weren't we faithful to each other? Did the fire of true love last such a short time? Didn't he swear that for him there was no other woman but me? Now I ask myself, did he love me just for myself, or did he love our possessions, our house, our position—love them through me? Where is my father so I can beg his forgiveness for being disobedient,

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for not listening to his advice? But he is silent, lying in the earth from where nobody ever returns. If he could get up and hear what I now think of my sweetheart, he would pardon me and say:

'My daughter, that's what people are when they are good and when they are evil. The good become evil when interests get mixed up and ruin love and joy and youth. Your sweetheart became evil. The evil become good when you pay them just a bit of attention. Weaknesses disappear under the power of attention. Attention has a miraculous power. It takes the dirt and the filthy clothes off the man and dresses him in light. You were unlucky to meet such a man. From the first meeting you were doomed.'

"Mother dear, I have grown older than you. There are no words to describe what I look like. As I went from Rijeka to this sinister island, my hair turned white. I couldn't recognize myself when I saw my face reflected in the sea. It was as if I were looking at an old witch from some terrible fairy tale. With hollow eyes and cracked lips, I flinch at every puff of the wind, at every noise, at every lapping of the sea waves. But it is not from fear. Fear in unknown to me. Oh, would that it were from fear! I am already a ruin, a spirit living in a ruin and looking to justify its existence. Don't believe my sweetheart. Behave yourself as you taught me to behave. . . ."

Illegible signature follows.

My hands impatiently leaf through sheets of paper without envelopes, sheets of paper which will never reach their destinations. The following letter caught my eye; it read:

"Dear sister, you are still young, you don't understand but I'll be explicit in my letter and try with each word to reach your heart.

"In one night of the war of national liberation children became adults. From little messengers they were transformed into experienced warriors carrying arms and secret mail. Now the situation in our country is similar. And it calls upon you, the children, to accomplish an important

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task. You, too, must grow up in a single night. The hardships of life make man grow up quickly. There is not and cannot be a more frightful misery than this that has seized the entire country. During the war of national liberation the enemy was devastating our houses, destroying property, reducing our hearths to ashes. But our hearts were full of anger, filled with live coals that smouldered and betokened the wild fire that would avenge all these devastations. But the enemy that is chasing us today is more frightening, more sinister, more cruel. He kills the soul; he murders the human soul. He has no mercy. Even the snake leaves one in peace when one drinks water. This murderer is more terrible than the snake, because at any moment he may mercilessly and pitilessly stab you in the back. I believe you will understand what I am telling you. Reading it, you will penetrate into those dark moments through which my wounded soul has passed. Am I to be blamed for wanting sun and freedom? Am I guilty of wanting more joy for you? Am I to blame that my student years were cut short without reason by the enemy and that I was taken to this sinister island? My crime was that I said that Moscow was the protector of the enslaved, that in this dispute Moscow spoke the truth. Ah, if only you knew how I was tortured for those words! They tied my hands behind my back, burned my flesh with cigarettes, and gagged me with dirty socks, leaving me to suffocate in a dark cell. They beat me all over with fists and whips. The accosted me with threats, telling me the sea would swallow me up as it had many others. But I am still alive, I gather the strength to withstand them. Your existence helps me, even in this most awful hell, to hope that we'll meet again. Sometimes I want to smash my head against the stony wall. But weren't we brought up to believe that suicide is a weakness and that life is something priceless? I embrace you and kiss you and am with you every moment."

After this the words are illegible. Two smears of blood cover them—are they from the hand or from the mouth? I do not know. Perhaps this martyr began to spit blood under the strong blows of her crazed butchers and was absorbed into a sleep from which she never woke.

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Suddenly I shuddered. I had picked up an unusual letter. It was folded in two and it seemed it had been ruby-colored ink. The words were clear and legible; they were addressed to the parents:

"Dear parents, don't be at a loss! I am writing you this last letter in blood. I am not a believer but from the depths of my soul, please, pardon me, I pray the Almighty God to preserve my sanity. To spend even a moment at Goli Otok is a terrible thing, but what about these endless days, endless weeks, endless months—these endless years? The hours at Goli Otok pass slowly, as if they were humpbacked camels being drawn through a needle's eye. A camel would pass through a needle's eye quicker than an hour passes on Goli Otok. You are constantly forced to spy on your close friends, to reveal what you say in private, to tell who has secret thoughts and who wants to mislead the authorities. In a word, they prepare us in a thousand ways to become traitors and spies and finally to become their agents, to serve the scoundrel who defamed our country. For only a moment I yearn to see the majestic Triglav Mountain covered with its snowy mantle and to fly like a bird over Slovenia. But how? My legs are swollen and heavy from beatings. My groin is black and I can't move because of the pain. My teeth have been knocked out. The two golden teeth I had were removed by the guard's fist. The nails of my fingers were pulled out with rusty pincers, and my hair has been torn by blood-covered hands. Though young I look like a broken old woman.

"Dear parents, people age rapidly here. Every night is like a year. Every night is full of uncertainty. All around us cries and threats can be heard all the time. The most unyielding are put in sacks and thrown into the sea so we cannot see how their faces have been smashed, how they foam at the mouth. We are all expecting the same fate at any moment. Those who have died before us were happier. I didn't believe that Tito's villains would take such revenge against our family because of the contribution we made to the victory

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in the liberation war. But authorities are authorities because they have every means of torture at their disposal. And the more they lose ground, the more they will rage. Every authority is a despot and a tyrant. But the authority of that arrogant criminal from Kumrovec is more cruel than any dictatorship because it has combined in itself all the negative features of its predecessors. It's sad, we won't meet again. Human desires are tributaries that feed the big waters. . . ."

I can't read any more. I shudder. Yet my spirit grows stronger when I see the strength of the women on this cruel and blood-stained island.

I put the letters to one side.

Near the place where we worked a dead woman's hand was stretched out under the sharp stones. The nails were blue. The hand stretched toward us as if it wanted to strangle us. Behind the hand—an ugly skull. Two ugly sockets were gaping under the dead eyebrows. It was as if the mouth had opened to swallow everything, to eradicate all traces of the inhuman crimes committed at Goli Otok. Under other stones we could see the legs of dead women. The birds had eaten their flesh long ago.

Oh, time! Do such terrible sights exist in your country? Has hell been moved here? I felt as if the earth were cracking. Time flies into a rage. Sky and earth allegedly fight against each other. It is late. . . . The air is cold, it has been chilled by the ghosts, by the unburied massacred who are uncovered so that birds of prey can violate them with their beaks in the tormented, sinister silence. . . .

Depressed, we returned to the Wire. We walked with our heads bowed. We kept silent. I didn't sleep all night long. I tossed in my bed. I tried to close my eyes but felt as if somebody were forcing them open and dragging me again toward the skeletons, toward those who had been massacred.

Goli Otok was haunted by ghosts, by phantoms whose bony hands were storing wooden litters and spades, picks and mattocks in order to be ready for tomorrow, for work. . . .

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At Goli Otok time itself had been harnessed like an ox to haul burdens, tortures, torments along broken paths, to plow the abyss of the sea.

Oh, who will bewail torn bodies?

Oh, who will dig an ossuary for the living?

Here living and dead cannot be distinguished from each other.

A slow wind turns the pages of the sad women's letters I am holding; again they tell me the story of this rack of hell, of Goli Otok. In my ears echo the suppressed screams forced out in the sinister silence. My eyes see the tears of blood of the victims who are beaten to death for their tenacity, for being unwilling to dishonor themselves. . . .

Oh, man; your essence is helplessness! You see and yet you cannot do anything. You hear and cannot help.

Oh, superhuman helplessness!

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LETTER TWENTY-ONE

My dear,

The ears and the eyes of the Wire were focused on the two of us; the convicts with the right to vote walked along the stony road in their free time and tried to guess what we might have talked about. I was inaccessible to them. At each attempt I turned my head aside and put my finger on my lips indicating that I had been forbidden to talk. In other words, I had locked myself off from the world. The room supervisor had a right to talk but told them he rarely exercised this right; while working at the women's workshop he passed the time by saying that he expected to be set free or at least have his sentence reduced on November 29.

These words were spoken to veil the truth. He didn't let the other convicts see into his soul. He knew them well and thus feared them all. At Goli Otok the other man's lot is not worth a penny; people show interest in the other's situation only insofar as they can use it to alleviate their own situations or help themselves to endure their yoke. Even when they were very close to one another, people at Goli Otok disguised their real faces; they always tended to be in couples so that one could refute the other. But whether you refuted the other or not, it was taken as a given that you had uttered incriminating words.

At Goli Otok there were joke makers (*barangeri*)—people who were indignant at the state and always grumbling against it. They made jokes and invented stories that aimed to cheer up the depressed convicts. The joke makers were frequently tossed into Isolation. They could be certain they wouldn't be let out of prison early, because other convicts had made reports on them. The most awful joke, which spread like lightning through the cells and corridors, was the comparison drawn between Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, and Mary, the mother of Tito. The convicts started to whisper the joke, pointing out the features common to the two Marys. They recalled Zogović's verse about Tito's mother giving him a holy birth. And the old deputy chairman of the Vojvodina Assembly, who had repeatedly

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been released and then returned to Goli Otok, observed with biting irony that Mary was a prostitute and her son no different. It was not easy to understand which Mary he meant. But the old deputy chairman made clear that Mary had nothing to do with holy births; she was an earthly Mary and her son was earthly as well. The old deputy chairman's outlook was unusual. He really believed that on the forthcoming November 29 Goli Otok would be deserted, that the prisoners would be allowed to return home. He spoke so confidentially that it seemed he had helped to make the lists himself.

People started to ridicule him: "Old man, you seem to have forgotten where you are. You have probably forgotten the Goli Otok cells and how Goli Otok came into being. Even the stones on this island are treacherous. Even the seagulls avoid the people of Goli Otok. Even the air is poisonous; it stinks even when it is fresh. You'd better do something else. Be grateful for not being taken out to work."

Jokingly, the old man hinted: "Oh, you are in the fresh open air once outside the Wire. The mountains breathe straight into your mouths, but here, after you have gone out to work, I work with broom and bucket to clean the toilets, all the while breathing the most stifling human stench. Like a crazy man, I talk to the open sewage holes over which national heroes were punished—heroes who had organized revolts against the cruel German hordes, heroes like Radé Zigić and others. . . . I don't want to mention their names because someone among the living, determined to impose his right to existence, might turn this sad story to his advantage, cash in on it just as lies are cashed in for truths. It's like that. There is no use cheating each other."

And suddenly the old man turned as red as a crab. His blood flooded his eyes. Sweat covered his forehead. A terrible anguish threatened to burst his chest.

One day, when I was ill, I was given the broom and the bucket used to clean the dormitory. The local radio station was broadcasting the Yugoslav president's remarks on the

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occasion of some meetings as well as his messages to Khrushchev. I remember that Tito was angry with Khrushchev and accused him of hypocrisy. The voice of the wrathful Jupiter and the whispering of his foreign minister could be heard over the local radio station. At the moment when Tito was attacking Khrushchev most savagely, the foreign minister whispered in his ear. His whispering could be heard by the listeners: Khrushchev had sent the president some coffee cups. Immediately the wrathful Jupiter changed his tone and said: "I know that my good friend Nikita Khrushchev doesn't think so, but. . . ."

At Goli Otok I had the reputation of being able to do a good imitation of Tito's voice. Once, while the old deputy chairman was in the washing room I made a joke. I turned off the voice of the speaker and spoke in his place: "I was duped by Djilas and Ranković and I made up my mind to redeem my fault by granting amnesty to those who are serving their sentences on the Adriatric islands, at Goli Otok in particular. . . ."

Through the window I saw the old deputy chairman throw away his broom and run up to me. Meanwhile, I turned the loudspeaker on as if nothing had happened. Suddenly, he opened the door and asked: "Did you hear it? Didn't I tell you? I am older than you and can put two and two together; it's no accident that I was a deputy chairman of the Vojvodina Assembly. There was no other way out. Moscow has put pressure on them. As you see, this bold Khrushchev, despite the misfortunes he has inflicted on the Communists and despite his friendship with Tito, willy-nilly spoke the truth when he said we were to be released from prison. . . . I tell you confidentially, I've heard that we shall be paid for the time spent in prison, at Goli Otok in particular. This island is sinister, the most awful prison in the world. I have been in the Hungarian prisons; they are also bad, they are awful, you cannot leave them either, but you know, there is no prison from which there is no way out."

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The old man felt like a child who had mustered up his courage under the influence of his strong father. The guard showed up looking pensive and the old man asked:

"Well, how shall it be, guard? Shall we exchange our places?"

"Why should we? On what occasion?" the guard asked.

"Didn't you hear? It was just announced over the local radio station that Tito is granting a sweeping amnesty to the political prisoners on the occasion of November 29."

"How come I haven't heard it?"

"It's the greatest event. For the first time a general amnesty has been granted."

"If it were true, I would be glad for you. And, in the future, be more careful. It's not good to be returned to prison in old age."

"Prisons are made for men. What's the use of prisons without prisoners?"

The guard stopped listening to him and hurried back to the Administration.

The sick prisoners at the premises hadn't heard anything. He found them apathetic.

"How is it possible," the guard wondered. "The most important event was broadcast over the local radio station, and pronounced by the most important person in the country, the president himself, and they haven't heard it!"

How could they have heard it since no one had said any such thing.

The old man was anxiously waiting for the prisoners to come back to the Wire for their rest period to tell them the news. He took from his suitcase all his belongings to distribute them to prisoners convicted of criminal offenses since they would not be included in the imagined amnesty. He was bustling about and thinking out loud when the convicts came back.

"Something must have happened for you to be tidying up your suitcase. You have probably got wind of searches? You never know, in this house it is like that: without warning they rush in and, keeping the doors guarded, say: "Get your belongings out!"

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"After what was broadcast over the local radio station there will be no searches."

"What was broadcast?"

"A general amnesty for offenders."

All of them, though skeptical stood gaping. They absorbed every word and were both alarmed and pleased.

"Why, probably there will be amnesty. We are far from the outside world. What you are told here, that's it. There are no other channels to get messages through."

"Children, I've heard with my own ears the voice of the person who sent us here and we shall have fine days. This time it's for sure."

But the prisoners remained unconvinced and their eyes darkened.

"Well, God bless your words, old man."

All the day long I have been thinking about my talk with Scepan at the women's workshop. I believed him, and did not. I had ambivalent feelings. I wished I hadn't seen anything since this instance was the beginning of my disillusionment with man. How is it possible for man to turn into the meanest, cruelest, and most ferocious beast. How shall we create a new man with people like that? The new man will inherit features of the old but by means of labor he will get rid of all the influences that have accumulated in his soul for centuries. Still, the man of the modern type must be brought up with people like our contemporaries; the modern man must be seen in all his manifestations: when in power and when not in power; when powerful and when powerless. Man's fate is shaped by different forces. Sometimes a single moment has the power to put history on a backward course; this is the result of counterrevolution. At other times a single moment can push history centuries ahead. This is the effect of the revolution. The time between a counterrevolution and a revolution is the period that divides these two eras. Imperceptibly, day by day, hour by hour, the fateful leap gains momentum. Man's nature is complicated. Man's soul is also complicated. Thoughts pierce the brain. Thoughts are actually the brain's arms. Thoughts are

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brain's children. If the brain fails thoughts end. If the body dies, the soul also dies. Without the brain there are no thoughts. Without thoughts the brain is dead. They are inseparable. They are the clearest reflection of twins in nature. For this reason man seeks ways to transcend his own time. Prisons are both an obstacle and an incentive; an obstacle to development and an incentive inspiring people in chains to claim their freedom.

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LETTER TWENTY-TWO

Dear File,

I cannot forget it. How is it possible to subject man to such a humiliation. The highest degree of humiliation is that caused by "railing." There are various humiliations, but undeserved humiliations are the most awful, for they can neither be worthily avenged nor overcome in silence. The most terrible humiliation for a convict is "railing." The person to be abused, dishonored, ridiculed, beaten, slandered, laughed at, and denounced is brought before all the convicts in the cell. His head is bent down; but if someone thinks it could be closer to the floor he pushes it down, beating him on the back with his fists. The victim's arms are twisted behind his back and he doesn't dare to let them down to relax them. All of us have been subjected to "railing." This humiliation only strengthens the feeling that all the convicts are nothing more than numbers. If a number disappears it is immediately replaced by another. Numbers don't have a personality or a soul. All who have suffered humiliation seek to avenge their shame by humiliating others.

I too was railed. It is hard for me to describe my state of mind. No creative power can truly depict what you experience while you are being abused, slandered, and insulted.

A certain Duca Cazim accused me of having been Hitler's personal secretary. At Goli Otok a convict's opinion of another convict, one without the right to vote, is very important, and his statement thus meant I had indeed been Hitler's personal secretary. No one can refute such an opinion. The room supervisor wanted Duca Cazim, a convict with the right to vote, to prove his allegation that Nº 4832 had been Hitler's secretary.

Duca Cazim was confused but his confusion was due not to the absurdity he had uttered but to the fact that in the midst of intellectuals he now had to elucidate what could neither be proved nor shown to have anything to do with me. Duca Cazim, an Albanian, tried in a more or less understandable Serbian to prove his allegation: "You know,

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comrades, I myself have not seen him there; I have never been in Germany but it seems to me he looks like Hitler's secretary."

One of the convicts asked, pointedly: "Why do you say he looks like him? Have you actually seen what you allege? Who told you that? With whom were you in contact? Did you report these contacts at the inquiry?"

Duca Cazim became confused. Frightened, he glanced about, his mouth open wide with fear. "But comrades, understand me, it's true. I swear a *bessa*."

At this moment the examining magistrate of our cell came in. He watched the spectacle. All stood up, but he motioned them to sit down. The supervisor continued to question Duca Cazim.

"We don't need your *bessa* now. Think it over; if it is not true, then say why you said that; if it is true, then prove it."

The examining magistrate asked what this was all about. Drawing himself up the supervisor explained, to which the examining magistrate murmured: "Oh, so! Interesting!"

Duca Cazim pulled himself together and told the examining magistrate: "What I said is true, that convict Nº 4832 was Hitler's secretary."

The examining magistrate suddenly bristled and, clenching his fists, rushed at Duca Cazim and began to beat him.

"You rascal! Convicts, observe that this Duca Cazim is willing to throw mud at our revolution as a whole, at our national liberation struggle, by implying that it was directly connected with the Gestapo. What does it mean to say that this person whose behavior you are discussing had been Hitler's secretary? It means that a writer disguised himself and glorified the national liberation struggle under Goebbel's direction. That is a monstrous slander against the fighters who perished on our battlefields, against you who in one way or another committed crimes in your political life, and against us who are doing our best to help you understand your mistakes."

All the convicts started to shout in one voice: "Uh, uh, uh. . . "

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When they had been quieted the supervisor suggested that Duca Cazim be sent to Isolation. Poor Duca Cazim. What he said about me was invented to help him board the ship to freedom. At Goli Otok such inventiveness is the law. This law is in force only at Goli Otok; it was passed for Goli Otok and is constantly enforced. It will cease to exist only when there is no more Goli Otok.

Branko Petričević stood and took the floor: "What Duca Cazim has said is nonsense. Convict Veniamin Milanov Tosev, known as Venko Markovski, is a poet who has glorified the revolution; it's nonsense to attribute to him what he has neither done nor dreamed of. Does it make any sense to say that since Venko Markovski looks like Hitler's secretary he was Hitler's secretary. What narrow-mindedness! What an absurdity! Venko Markovski is an incorrigible Stalinist. And this Stalinist must be helped to return one day to the Yugoslavia that has always been so generous to all who have committed crimes against it. Venko Markovski is a great poet and it is as a poet that he must rejoin our party."

But now restiveness set in and certain undercurrents began to emerge. Some of them cried out: "He must be severely punished in Isolation for instigating the people, for writing lampoons inciting the Yugoslav nationalities against the Supreme Commander and LYC secretary-general."

All of them sprang at me. They beat me with whatever they could grab. I had no right to answer. I had no right to stand up. And how is it possible to face a furious mob which has decided to show its attitude to the examining magistrate and to the prison manager in this manner?

Covered with blood I fell to the floor. I was stepped upon, trampled.

An ugly scene flashed through my mind: the national hero of Yugoslavia, the legendary Rade Žigić, was trampled to death in a similar way; trampled to death by convicts who had once expressed the same views as Rade Žigić. And my sorrow increases and I feel more miserable because I realize that these Communists "reeducated" by the UDBA have become more cruel than the UDBA agents themselves.

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The examining magistrate was watching the scene indifferently. Wasn't all of this happening on his suggestion? Isn't he the instigator of all of this? What generosity! What love of mankind!

Someone's voice thundered ominously as all present fell silent: "We want to know what he and the room supervisor talked about working at the women's workshop. It is not impossible that Venko Markovski is indifferent to the punishment imposed on him by the courts. He will find a way to express his anger. . . ."

Composed and confident, the room supervisor Ščepan told the examining magistrate and the prisoners: "We did not talk."

Another prisoner insinuated: "Does this mean that you remained silent all the time? Who will believe you? It's impossible to spend fifteen days alone with another man far away from the others and remain silent."

Ščepan confirmed: "You probably want me to do something similar to what Duca Cazim did. I have been on Goli Otok a long time. Beating the man you say is Venko Markovski won't do me any good. On the contrary, I'll suffer for slandering a man I did not talk with."

I don't know whether the convicts believed Scepan or not, but the examining magistrate thought he was telling the truth.

Horror-stricken, the convicts tell of the cruel tortures that the political leaders of Yugoslavia suffered after the Cominform Resolution. It is as if I see Julius Fuczik's close friend Ozrin Dragan on a screen. The convicts' attitude toward him was inhuman. They abused Arso Jovanović and glorified his assassin. All the group members were labeled traitors and spies; Branko Petričević was said to be the most weak-willed, but it was acknowledged that he later realized his mistake. Ozrin Dragan, a son of Zagorje educated in the spirit of the rebel epic poem "Death to Smail aga Cengic," had decided to die in accordance with Mazuranić's legacy: "If you must die, die an honorable death."

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A human body is not as solid as a rock, but its spirit can be like iron. And so, covered with blood, stout Ozrin Dragan rushed to the door where he was stopped by the examining magistrate.

"What's the matter with you, Ozrin?" the magistrate asks. "Why do you incite the people down here as well? You must come to terms with Goli Otok's customs. It will be easier for you."

"Examining magistrate, don't you see what they have done to me? I was sentenced. Why am I tortured after the sentence?"

"Think it over, your comrades know better what you have reported, what you could have reported, and what you haven't reported."

"But, don't you see what they have done to me?..

"Ozrin, Ozrin, they are helping you."

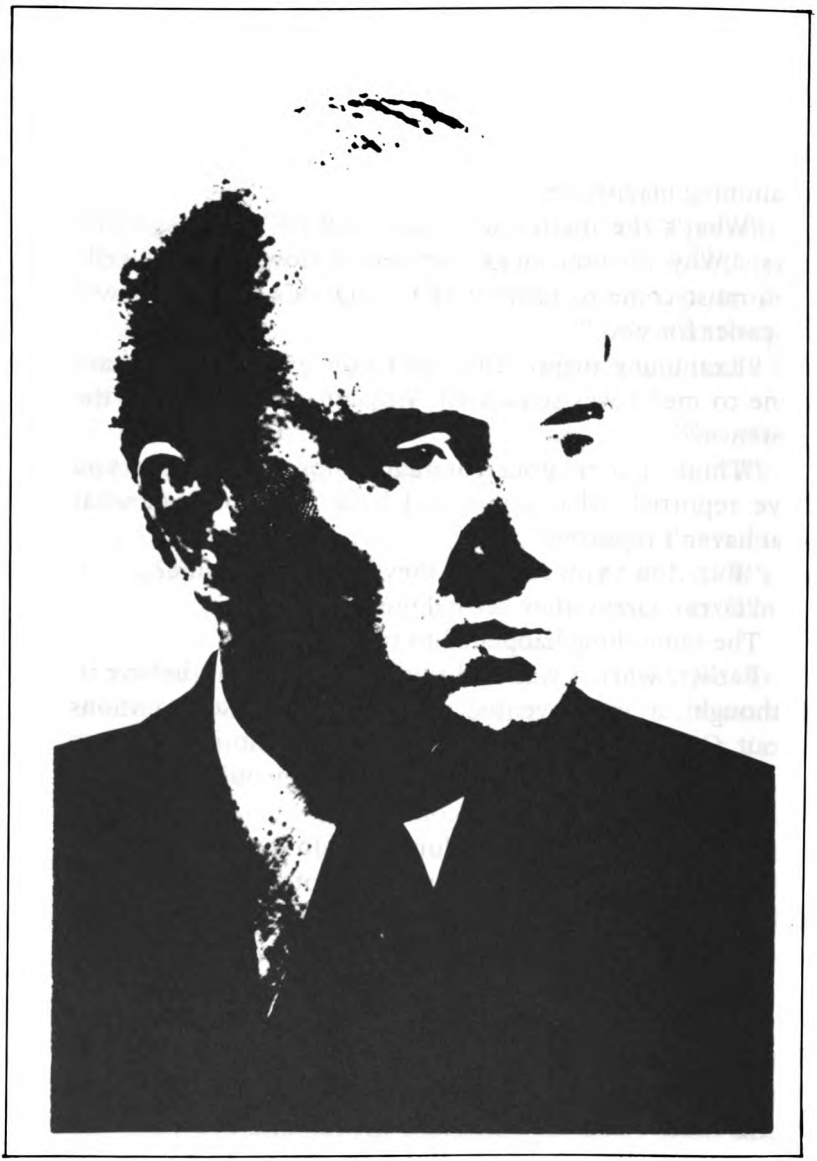
The same thing happened to me.

Earlier, when I was told this story I couldn't believe it. I thought it was invented, one of the ugliest inventions about Goli Otok. But now I know it was no invention at all. On the contrary! And to convince people of this, it must be painted in brighter colors.

I didn't sleep all night long. I didn't suffer from my bodily injuries. They hurt, but were not particularly painful. They would heal. The body will grow stronger as it overcomes them. The sore spots will become tougher, stronger. This is how a human body grows stronger. But how will the soul heal? How can it forget? A healed wound leaves a scar. But in the soul both the wound and the scar remain. And my anger grows, starts to boil and seeks a way to rid itself of its fires. But how? What kind of a work will be required? I don't know. But I am certain that it will be written with blood, watered with vengeance, inspired with hope. It will be my truthful protest against obscurantism, against the most sinister prison in the world—Goli Otok.

I was put back to work in the Wire. As I was constantly ill I was shifted to another job.

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PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR
VENKO MARKOVIC

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LETTER TWENTY-THREE

My dear,

The morning promised a day of scorching heat. The last groups of prisoners walked slowly to their working places. I remained alone with my deep box on which one could read the inscriptions: "I am a Stalinist. I fight against Tito." On my back there was another inscription: "Stalin will gain the victory!" On my chest were the words: "Tito will be overthrown!"

My assignment was to gather litter in the yard with my bare hands. I was not allowed to sit down to rest for even a moment. I was not allowed to drink water. I was not even allowed to eat a morcel of bread during the noon rest. But what was most awful was that I had to pick up human excrement.

Something snapped in me. Blood rushed to my brain. My temples started throbbing terribly, something that had never happened to me before. Everything dimmed before me as if it were not morning but the darkest, blackest night. The darkness crept across my brow. Cold sweat ran down my forehead, across my cheeks, and down onto my chin, my throat. I found it hard to breathe. My shaking body was enveloped in darkness. It was as if the island had sunk into an endless darkness. I could see neither people, nor light. . . .

Suddenly, what seemed like a terrible roll of thunder shook my body. Lightning flashes intersected one another in my mind. I wanted to shout—but could not utter a sound. I had been struck dumb. I wanted to rest but couldn't find a place, I wanted to sit down on a stone, but there was no stone there. I wanted to run, but could not move. Someone had stolen my legs.

I must hurry. I must work. The yard is full of weeds, like a desert choked with grass and thorns. Slithering reptiles crawl up my arms. Slowly, nastily, abominably, they cover my face, depositing a sickening liquid that spreads over my entire body. It is said that people sometimes went

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crazy at such moments. They recognized no one, knew nothing, saw nothing: neither themselves nor the world around them. . . nothing! Such people stuck out like miserable trees in the desert of Goli Otok. Black birds shrieked. Furious winds bent the branches. The sinister lapping of the waves opened the bottomless mouth of the sea. And like an enormous homeless lamia, the sea opened wide its mouth and poured boiling mud over the shuddering, desolate world.

And here am I, with the box in my hand, like the Wandering Jew. Suddenly the small prison yard is transformed into a universe. Towns spring up. I see people with different faces. I have never seen such people. White waterfalls foam and thunder. My lips are cracked from thirst. I hear behind me the lashing of whips. An invisible Pilate walks past me, not letting me take a drop of water.

I smell fresh bread. I see the earth as an enormous round loaf. Invisible hands break it. Everyone but me has the right to take a piece of that bread. I am the only one being punished. Punished because I wanted to enlighten the people; because I wanted freedom for the soul; because I wanted to realize a dream; because I wanted a world without slaves and rulers. A world, filled with heroic deeds, with triumphs and miracles. I dreamed and turned dreams into reality; I am now dreamless. I sink in the unknown that is called solitude.

The winds beat against me. The storms lash at me, as they once lashed the mad king Lear.

I too can now say: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

I have no tears to shed, although I would like to—not because someone beats me but because I am weak and cannot repay with hundredfold fury the enemy that tortures me on this shameful island. I have seen children weep with grief and rage because they cannot overwhelm their rivals with their crying. I have seen young girls tear their hair because they are not strong enough to revenge their rapists, the men who robbed them of their virginity and left behind

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bloody crime that smolders, burns, and is never extinguished. I have seen men, our enemies in battle, who have rejected our hand and thrown themselves into the gaping grave. I have seen much in my life. I can address the world with the words that the prisoner of Chillon uttered: "Oh, look at me, how white-headed I am, although I am not so old in years!"

But what is the prison of Chillon compared with Goli Otok? And what are the pains of the prisoner of Chillon compared with the humiliations inflicted upon the convicts at Goli Otok? What are the hopes enchained in the prison of Chillon compared with the hopeless hopes of Goli Otok?

The sirens start wailing like hideous hyenas searching for a carcass. Oh, where in the world would one find more carcasses than in Yugoslavia? Death is scattered all over the islands. It hides in all the palaces. It feeds the insatiable agents of an inhuman tyranny. The wailing of the sirens reminds us that the working day is finished. But when did that day pass? Who spun the wheel of time so quickly? It wasn't yet morning, and now the evening has come. . . .

The weary convicts come back from work; the day is heavy, sultry. The convicts move around in clothes damp with sweat; their shoes are covered with dust and their hands are soiled and muddy. They are forced to sing, but their voices died long ago and all song fled from their souls. They drag along like the defeated ranks after a violent battle. They are so worn out that they want nothing: neither bread, nor scrubbed plates, nor water with some beans in it. Only noses protrude from their faces. They have nothing left. They are bones dressed in rags and tatters. They enter the Wire. They walk into the rooms. Their faces show contempt and beweilderment. They gaze at me and begin to whisper among themselves: "He, too, has gone crazy. . . ."

Oh, time, where have you hidden your mirrors? Take them out. Misery wants to see itself. The face of suffering wants to put itself at ease.

Time, who smashed your mirror?

The people have been left only their eyes, so that when they feel miserable, they can see their misery there. Are the mirrors of the eyes smashed as well?

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It is stifling. There is not enough air. The soul boils in the stinking body.

Oh, open the windows for some fresh air! The air is suffocating. It smells of deep, desert mud. There is no road here, there is no space. Everything is even, everything is uniform. All seems to flow, even though it never moves, and all seems to stand still, even though it flows.

Comrades who do not dare to speak to me, look at me with sympathy. They are like me. They regret my hopeless fate. My lot died long ago. No, you should not misunderstand me. My lot, that praised you and walked with you and opened gates for you, *that* lot of mine has died.

Don't you hear the cries? The whole country is convulsed with wild orgies. Blasé villains carouse. The country has been turned into an enormous madhouse. Everybody is mad in this country. Who will give them back their minds? Who will give them back their sanity? Everybody robs; everybody takes away; everybody plays the master in this blood-stained and pitiless time. Man's life is hard. But it is hardest when a burden is placed on your shoulder, a burden that your body and spirit cannot bear.

Man is like a horse. He drags on raw-bones, but how will he survive the road up this steep hill? He can barely move on level ground. But whips will restore his strength, and then at the top he will breathe in deeply.

Why do you look at me like that? What have I done to you? Oh, miserable creatures, you are mistaken. The springs that noursh my faith are within me. Go away, my day is not yet finished. It is now that my work begins. Don't trample on the road that I have already cleaned. I clean the prison grounds, where not even a piece of straw should be found. Not even a single hair should be seen here. And no piece of paper should be allowed to blow about. I have picked up everything. Look at the places where I have been with my box.

I feel sad when I see groups of people casting furtive glances and looking at me. I read their thoughts. I hear their words, their whispers.

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Oh, miserable creatures!

Man is man because his words make sense, because when he talks his speech is unique; it isn't parroting. Once upon a time parrots envied men, but now men envy parrots. And what man in this, the parrots' country, can say that his species doesn't look like the parrot's species? The parrots turn toward the people. The parrots shell sunflower seeds, keep silent, and turn their heads toward the sun; but the sun turned cold long ago.

The convicts are busy looking busy. They throw water over themselves at the fountain. They wash their hands. They hurry to their cells because it is dangerous for the commander to see them doing nothing. The chief will always find a reason to harness his obedient human buffaloes. Buffaloes were once hot-tempered, but the yoke and the whip, as well as time, have tamed them. The people over there were also hot-tempered and untamed, but jails and exile have tamed their rebellious spirits. Now they are harnessed like oxen and humbly they pull the bloody tyranny along. Perhaps the last murmur of discontent has long since escaped from their chests, but somewhere in space it gropes for hope.

I look like a spectacle created by the greatest dictator. The gladiator went out into the arena with his sword in order to fight, but here, where I am, the arena is full of people in chains, people whose arms have been broken and whose only right is to be killed, not to kill, to be stabbed, not to stab. But I am hard and my fingers are like sharp swords. They will suffice to wipe at least ten criminals from the face of the earth.

Man is a criminal when those who surround him are criminals. Willy-nilly the cheerful man, the man with the capital M, gradually assumes unprecedented features. Man stands between Satan and God, each of whom tries to entice man to his side. The one who offers honey in abundance, who offers paradise, is the one who will have man. Man's delusions died long ago, because delusions form man.

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Mankind is a constant cancer-wound and only the scalpel can remove it. One or the other: either the scalpel, or man will have to fight while bearing the cancer.

I hear the rumble of underground streams and it elates me. It restores my strength. It gives me back my self-confidence. It reawakens the realization that it is I and not someone else who has been subjected to the wheels of storms that are yet to destroy me. Time is merciful to me. Its mercy comes from the fact that I exist among merciless people. I hear steps, remote but dear to me, worn-out ghosts walk and look for my home.

Storm, blizzard, cold rage outside. They cover up the roads and want to warm their hands. In my fireplace there is still a fire. The ashes have not yet extinguished the flames. The air is warm. The bodies pinched with cold want warmth, not much, but a little. Much warmth burns as severely as does cold. Let me out! I still have a lot to do in the yard.

I walk without looking at anybody. The eyes of the other convicts are like awls that pierce my heart. But maybe I only imagine this? I hear whispers: "Poor fellow, he is being punished by the most awful humiliation. While we are having our rest, he has to gather our excrement in his box."

Thus I began the most horrible day of my humiliation and suffering.

Poor Kafka, you avenge your enemies with your disdain. You teach martyrs not to fight but to despise their enemies when difficult times come. Kafka, Kafka! Disdain is not the way to avenge one's enemies, to avenge evil.

It is sunset. The sun has set long ago, yet it is here, within me. It boils in my blood, it burns and fills my temples with fire. My blood has gone crazy from that sun. There is no place I can find shelter. It burns my brain. Have pity on me, oh time, save my mind! I can still recognize the faces of old friends and comrades. There were moments when they seemed to disappear—as if I had never met them. Now from the depths of my subconscious familiar faces

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come to the surface. I shudder again. I am between birth and death. My calendar has neither begun, nor has it reached its end. From here on the annals of my battle begin. I must survive. I have the strength within me. There are no scissors that can sever my ties with the present or with the future. The future will do away with the hideous present. And that present will be happy and cheerful for me and for all who fight on the battlefield of life.

Thus I began "The Wheel of History": "Misery gnaws at the earth, but the spirit aims at the skies. . . "

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LETTER TWENTY-FOUR

My dear,

I am already accustomed to my work. I don't pay attention to the convicts any more. Contempt is now my counselor, my companion and my comforter in my mute dialogue with the world around me. I speculated a lot whether to begin my work about Goli Otok while still here or to let time decide. Lost in these speculations, I realized that my days were passing almost imperceptibly. I could hardly wait for daybreak so I could take my box and begin my tours in the prison yard. Sometimes I was sorry when sunset came. Sunset meant that I must stop working and take the big piece of sack to clean up the rooms.

The slaves living here have no names; names mean nothing here. The people seem like parched trees shaken down by the storm and scorched by the sun. They move about but their conversations are rambling; they touch their hands as if they are broken branches and then they stammer something. I am lost in reverie in a world that is far removed from the reality that surrounds us, the reality that supports happy and life-loving people. Everyone is desperate here. Until noon they hate themselves; at noon they hate the Administration; in the afternoon they hate the whole world. Once they had thought this was a world that one could change, reorganizing it into a bright, spacious, rich world. Now they have come to realize that this world—the gloomy world, as Schopenhauer would have said—is subject to neither change nor reorganization. They are mired in a world that buries all their ideals, all their sacred dreams—a world that kills even those faint hopes that sustain a man's life. Once upon a time they were filled with an unequalled idealism. They were like wild flocks of birds, soaring in the farthest reaches of the sky. Now they drag behind, withered away, careworn; in short, they are as dry as branches, as deaf as those lonely ones who can hear nothing. And the people they once knew have become like that too; they too passed the fatal divide long ago.

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Time passes. Time's clock is noiseless, invisible, but slowly it measures distances. Distance makes both things and people visible, shows them in their real light. Strange eras of mankind excite my mind. One period is separated from another; one era is separated from another, too. Stormy and changing eras are approaching that demand a high concentration of thought. But I can scarcely take hold of them, for their flight is very swift. I have no paper, no pencil—everything is forbidden to me. Memory is my book. Thought is my pencil. And I begin and then begin again; I look for a form that is innovative and at the same time lasting. The fact that I have no paper is not an obstacle. Many people have written on the walls of their cells. I remember such an inscription: "You, who perish in this cell, don't forget that even from here there is an exit. I, who in fifteen minutes will be hanged, am writing this. The gallows are my birth. The gallows are immortality for the mortal."

It is difficult because often many thoughts come into my mind and I have to register them all at the same time. But how? It is impossible. Memory is not a paper on which you can easily write and then erase, leaving only what is essential. Memory's space is limited and rhythm limits thought. Free verse or the so-called broken verse becomes insatiable when loosed into space. It scatters, spins out, and proliferates, while the stream that carries it rushes and rages, bursting in various rhythmic directions. In order to remember everything that appears in my head and passes through my heart, I concluded that I should cast it in the most formal kind of poetry, the sonnet. But the sonnet is not sufficient either. And so I resort to the most complicated and rigid form in poetry, the sonnet wreath—fourteen sonnets of fourteen verses each. Its rhythmic name in fact is octave or two terza rimas. The last verse of the second terza rima is repeated and becomes the beginning of the second octave, and so on. It is a difficult form but necessary because it can be memorized easily; it is regular and possesses a definite aim. Sometimes I could compose more than one sonnet a day, but I didn't allow myself to do so. And once

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a sonnet was completed I silently repeated it many times at night, fixing its forms and metaphors. I tried to make each metaphor particular, significant, for example:

Misery gnaws at the earth,
While the spirit aims at the skies. . . .

Thus the contours of the sonnet wreath were outlined. Many times while composing "The Wheel of History" I came across stanzas and metaphors that differed diametrically in sound and content from the finished stanzas. It was difficult to erase them, because they existed in my mind regardless. And what was even more difficult, memory itself had to wipe them away so that new verses could come in their place. A difficult job indeed. If we want to forget something, we should not constantly recall it. Recollection is a waking up, oblivion is going to sleep. In the course of my "writing" I got used to this fact too. For the others I was a crank who had written an inscription on his back, a strange man who struggled all alone against the tyranny that envelops Yugoslavia.

My memory lacked one thing—the Goli Otok censorship. Everything written was censored. Ill-defined thoughts were crossed out; smudged letters were thrown into the wastepaper basket. I am sure that if those letters some day come to light, pearls like Pascal's *Pensées* will be found. Investigating mathematics and the supreme laws of the universe, Pascal from time to time jotted down his thoughts on pieces of paper, then he crumpled them up and threw them into the wastepaper basket. Only after his death did France and the rest of the world realize what an extraordinary thinker had lived among them.

I kept a vigilant eye on what I had composed during the day, for I did not want anyone to penetrate my holy of holies, my soul. A lot of people remarked that anxiety and thoughtfulness had vanished from my face, but they didn't dare ask what had happened to me. The prison atmosphere was the only one in which I could write. I had been confused by it at the beginning, but later I became accustomed to its whims, its severity, its immutability. I said to

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myself: "This is the only atmosphere that can help your memory fashion your new artistic creations, which have not yet been put down on paper."

I was like an outcast. I was constantly busy with reading—not reading books from the library, but books I had read as a university and high school student, books I had read during my childhood. I let no day pass without reciting from 500 to 1000 verses by various authors in unison with the book I was writing. Thus, if I needed an epic moment for my poem I recalled Homer and "read" the fragment about Achilles forging his shield. If I needed a lyric moment, I recalled the extraordinary *Faustus*, translated by Balabanov. And for mankind's wisdom I again turned to *Faustus* by the genius Goethe.

My poem abounded in dramatic tragedy, and thus I often recalled the greatest poet in the world, the tragedian Shakespeare, especially his *Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth*, and the "Sonnets."

My memory grew richer with every passing day. I came across Montaigne's aphorism: "To know by heart does not necessarily mean that you know." I have tested that statement on children. If you interrupt a child who is reciting a poem and then let him continue, he will start again from the beginning of the poem.

Knowing things by heart does not limit the memory. Knowledge becomes conscious when it gathers memory's strength to itself. Working in this way made it possible for me to live in the "world's library," even though I had no library as such. And while I struggle, other people sit in the library, surrounded by all those books and paper and pencils and pens, but they do not know where to turn, were to look for the consolation and hopes that will strengthen their faith. They look for some idle pastime, for oblivion, and yet there is no greater intoxication than books. Books if they are good and filled with ideas, are the strongest drink.

While I hid my inner rage and the tamed lightnings of my soul, the room supervisor of the political prisoners was

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sitting on the bench with a convict. He was trembling with fear; for he had dreamed a dream that gave him no peace.

The dream was the following: sometime before dawn, before the sirens had begun to blow reveille, this supervisor, who looks like Mikoyan, dreamed that a lovely girl with a bunch of red roses came up to him. She smiled at him. She held out her hand. Her hands had the scent of spring. She started whispering something in the old Serbian language of Montenegro, her eyes closed, as if she wanted the draw him away from this somber reality, to wipe out the sinister wrinkles on his forehead."Come with me!" she commanded. He stood on his tiptoes and left his bed. He went out of the room and started to run in the prison yard. The commander, taken aback by his swift running, stopped him: "Where are you going? It is still dark!"

And the supervisor woke up, startled by the commander's voice. . . . "I had a dream. A cold chill is spreading over my back; as if I am mossy. No, I cannot stay like that. I must tell the examining magistrate. He will understand. What are those dark, sinister forces that want to take me back to the old road?" And he got up and ran to the administration office as if he had been prodded by a burning stick.

The supervisors could go to see the examining magistrates at any time. Trembling, the supervisor knocked at the examining magistrate's door and entered the room even before being told to come in.

"Excuse me," he said. "I have no closer friend than you. You are a father and a mother to me—everything."

And he told him of his dream.

"Your dream is good. I see no ill omen in it. They say that the red roses mean something is going to happen soon. You will be happy."

"No! No, comrade examining magistrate, I think that this young girl means that an agent provocateur is trying to sneak up to me, to lure me back to my past."

"As far as I know your inquest has been cleared up. You have cleared up everything. You are not to blame for your dreams. In an existence that has been divorced from normal

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life for such a long time, dreams are a normal phenomenon You can go."

The supervisor went out both pleased and displeased. Pleased because he had confessed his dream; displeased because the examining magistrate had not helped him find who was trying to ensnare him.

Strange things happened at Goli Otok. The convicts invented various stories, so as to allay all suspicion. But this dream was not invented. It was a consequence of the prolonged supression of personal emotions.

And that dream made me more determined than ever to dedicate myself even more fervently to the work I had begun.

Dreams are reality; reality is a dream.

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LETTER TWENTY-FIVE

Dear File,

A good deed done to you is soon forgotten; an evil one is long remembered.

I feel as if I am not carrying a box any more, as if I am not suffering such cruel humiliation. I walk on without looking askance. I show no interest in anyone; as if there were no dorms and no prisoners returning from the third shift; as if I were not the man carrying the box because someone else was now doing that degrading job. It seems to me I see the inscriptions I bear being worn by someone else, someone unknown to me, someone who is a bit shy, nervous and empty-eyed—his eyes expecting mercy from those who are approaching him. He appears to hope they will realize that the inscriptions were not written by him, that they were written to dishonor him, to belittle him, to profane him. And then again it seems it's me, somewhat stooped, bending down, standing up—gathering filth, that has been left on purpose in conspicuous places.

The local radio station suddenly breaks the silence. The unfamiliar voice of a convict working on ideological matters starts to say who I am. I don't know him. I've never met him. I start to remember all the people I have spoken with at Goli Otok; I listen to their voices.

I don't know the voice on the radio, but it goes on persistently, energetically and convincingly insisting that I was Djilas's follower, that I was sentenced for Djilas's ideas, that my works were inspired by Djilas himself.

What an irony! What a shame! That which was most disgusting to me, that which I had ruthlessly been fighting against—all that is now depicted as something I agree with. My arguments with Djilas are well known. We had stormy disputes in his office and in Madara's office at the YCP Central Committee building. We argued about the Macedonian alphabet and particularly about my attitude to his articles in *Borba* (such as the one titled "Stalin Goes Round in a Circle"), and my remarks regarding the Yugoslav claim

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that "our land is socialist since it is independent and, it is independent since it is socialist." It is an absolutely Hegelian phrase: "What is real is rational and what is rational is real." Djilas wanted to show off his knowledge. He wanted to be known as a learned man; and, as soon as someone from the field of ideology came across something written by him in *Borba* or elsewhere he would immediately copy it and make the party workers study it and publicize it as a contribution to Marxist-Leninist theory. He wanted to be known as an innovator, and somehow or other he managed to achieve his end. But was he really an innovator? If meddling in everything was an innovation, then Milovan Djilas was an innovator *sui generis*. It was simply impossible to publish anything without his approval. He insisted on having the final say. He made remarks in a way that turned them into axioms. He thought that his views had to be taken into consideration in both fiction and poetry (as a high school and university student he had written some poetry). Whether denouncing or rejecting the party structure as old-fashioned, whether sketching out the notion that the time had come to think about the withering away of the state, he wanted to be in the lead. What had caused this discrepancy between theory and practice in Djilas? That was a question that preoccupied me for a long time. And then, in less than a year in Belgrade I managed to find out something very important about Djilas: He had not read a single published book; he knew them only from summaries prepared by his secretary. And more often than not he didn't spare time to go through even these summaries. He showed contempt for everybody; his face always expressed disdain.

Both Djilas and Kardelj were the ideologists of the new socialist Yugoslavia, and they made such a mess that a British journalist was right to call Yugoslavia "a bourgeois Communist state."

The "great tailor" of Yugoslav citizens, Alexander Ranković, the minister of the interior, played his own part in the insane concepts of Djilas and Kardelj. That is why people say: "If you want to have a suit made to measure

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there is no one but Ranković to sew it for you." Djilas, Kardelj, and Ranković constituted a notorious trio. Everything was decided by them, everything was done by them, everything was sanctioned by them. Djilas's strength was his ignorance; Djilas's frailty was his pomposity. A more or less observant eye could see this easily upon meeting him. He who in meeting Djilas hopes to meet a leader will quickly realize that he has met not a noble man of the people but an arrogant and bombastic phrasemonger.

As early as our first meeting in his office in Belgrade, I realized that Djilas was exactly that kind of a person. He was a habitual intriguer. As a leader of the ideological front he thought it was enough to mention one or two distinguished names in order to convince people that what he said was true.

During our conversation he hinted that Todor Pavlov had rejected certain essential points from the preface to "The Female Eagle." I immediately called Todor Pavlov, who was Bulgaria's regent at that time, and asked him: "Is it true, Uncle Todor, that you told Milovan Djilas you had second thoughts about some points in the preface to "The Female Eagle"?

I could almost see the blood flood Uncle Todor's face, his pale face purple with anger. "It's not true. He came to me and I told him what talent you have as a poet."

I put the receiver to one side and said: "Milovan, Uncle Todor would like to talk to you."

Confused, Milovan Djilas cut the connection and told me: "I have nothing to talk about with you."

I left his office and immediately made for his secretary's office: "Tell him that in my capacity as a people's deputy I want to talk to him and he is supposed to receive me."

I entered his office. He got up and said, "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," I said. "Sit down." And I left.

Later Djilas wanted me to become Tito's secretary. After our unhappy encounter I took the opportunity to talk to Tito and draw his attention to Djilas's character. "I am of

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the opinion that with such manners Djilas will destroy the unity of the cultural front. Not everyone is capable of leading the ideological front. An ideological front leader must match his function and his rights to his post. It is quite possible to squander the great victory of the national liberation struggle through people like Djilas."

Yugoslavia's Marshal answered: "I know that, but what can I do? In many respects he is impossible. But he participated actively in the struggle and for the time being is my right hand."

"Cut it off while it is not too late," I answered. "I have nothing else to tell you."

Time has proved that my warning was correct.

Djilas was brought to trial and sentenced for hostile activities against socialist Yugoslavia, for the article "Two Classes" and for espionage. Djilas was regarded as an exceptional spirit and, accordingly, he has enjoyed unusual privileges while serving his term in the Sremska Mitrovica prison. This strange, improbable, but irrefutable fact caused embarrassment among the other convicts.

There were convicts at Goli Otok who demonstrated unusual courage before the examining magistrates because of their long imprisonment and heavy penalties. Here is what I once heard:

"Comrade examining magistrate, the state shouldn't be like a mother for some people and a stepmother for others. In the name of justice Djilas shouldn't be in Sremska Mitrovica; he must be brought to Goli Otok to enjoy the same rights and obligations we do; he must understand that making a proposal for a prison and giving directions about how to build it are quite different from being in that same prison as a mere number."

For these words the convict was sent to Isolation. Most probably the examining magistrate was insulted by the bitter words of this man who had been heavily penalized for antistate activities.

NIN magazine later wrote: "Djilas has enjoyed more favorable conditions than the rest of the prisoners, particularly

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during the recent past. He has been allowed to have longer visits from his relatives and his demands for newspapers, books, writing materials, etc., have been met with tolerance. At his request, he received expert medical care outside of the prison. Since he suffers from gastritis, a special diet was cooked for him.

"One day he suddenly felt some pain in the region of the appendix. He was quickly taken to a Belgrade hospital to be operated on. The two operating surgeons—university professors—were chosen by Djilas himself. In the hospital he enjoyed more favorable conditions than the rest of the patients. . . . And having returned from the hospital to Sremska Mitrovica prison, Djilas continued to write fiction, to translate books and to read all kinds of literature. He was allowed to watch TV regularly and to read all kinds of literature. He went to the cinema and attended other cultural events. He played chess and went for walks in the prison park."

What a paradox! The leader who must be subjected to the most severe corrective measures and deprived of all the rights of a free man as an example to the party rank and file has had at his disposal things a free citizen could scarcely afford under present-day economic conditions. Instead of suffering retribution for his evil deeds, the very leader who took part in the creation of this notorious prison on Goli Otok has had a good time in prison, even writing books that deserve another prison sentence. Behind prison walls he has accomplished a great feat; he has written forbidden books. But how will these manuscripts and typewritten sheets of paper be taken out of prison? Who will smuggle these works to the West, where they are to be published? Moreover, no sooner had Djilas stepped out of prison than the perfidious broadcasting stations started trumpeting about both his courageous conduct in prison and his fresh ideas. He became more malicious, more hypocritical, more perfidious by the day. A man of doubtful class origins, Djilas has always been a disrupter, a traitor, and a double-faced agent of foreign espionage services.

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But it's always like that. While in prison, Tito, Moše Pijade, and Colakovic translated the works of Marx and Engels. We don't know who was in contact with them and smuggled their manuscripts out of prison, but he wasn't a Communist. And the man who has been smuggling Djilas's works isn't a Communist either.

I am about to end my letter. The radio announcer stopped talking long ago. This mole in my chest—my bad cough—is acting up. I am suffocating; I am short of breath. My hemorrhoids have been swollen for several days now. I can neither move nor sit down nor stand up but the work never ends. If I could only have an aspirin, I think it would do me good.

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LETTER TWENTY-SIX

Dear File,

It's nine o'clock, a morning as hot as hell. The burning rays of the sun pierce my body like red-hot awls. As punishment I am wearing a long soldier's coat. It's all dirty and raggy. The sweat is streaming down my body. Who knows what punishments the examining magistrate will concoct next in order to make me give up my beliefs.

He says: "We are patient. Give up your stubbornness. One of us is going to give in; it won't be us."

The examining magistrate had reminded the dorm supervisor to observe my response to the measures applied to me, but I do not talk to this supervisor. He is supervisor of a cell for political prisoners. The character, the temper, and the views we observed in Sčepan while at the women's workshop have nothing in common with the personality of this supervisor, who does everything to please the examining magistrate. Thus, if the examining magistrate wanted a single hair from me, this supervisor did his best to retrieve a whole head.

No one could make me talk. At Goli Otok talking is an indictment greater than an official indictment for antistate activities. The supervisor approaches, willing to talk to me. I don't respond, I pass by and continue to gather filth.

"Well, you could stop for a while," he says. "We are both human beings, after all. But it's me who makes decisions for you. You can't break through a wall with your head. Goli Otok has witnessed convicts more unyielding than you but in time they became softer than butter."

"Are you saying that to me?" I cut him short. "It sounds like a monologue from a revolutionary play."

"Of course, it's you I'm talking to."

"Oh, I thought you were rehearsing a role from a play because your release depended on your performance."

The supervisor shakes his head and says: "A strange fellow, indeed. One is willing to help him but he draws back and runs away as if stung by some angry wasp. It seems to

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me that there is something wrong with him. He's all in rags and tatters. Who could make him wear such ragged clothes? Yet here he is in these ragged clothes and when you talk to him to take his mind off his trouble, he answers in riddles. A puzzling man!"

Half way through his phrase he turned to go the the cafeteria.

I am relieved. But the sun's cruel needles pierce my boiling body. I lose myself in dreams. My thoughts carry me away to Kožuh Mountain, to the village of Notja where I was brought down from the mountain gravely ill, to the small village house where I was sheltered. I had fallen ill during the march—a long boring Partisan march. Snow was drifting over us, blizzards were pummeling us, and the mountains were howling like wolves, their howls echoing over the gaping valleys and boding no good. I remember how carefully and attentively the doctor injected me against inflammation of the lungs. He was a Partisan doctor, a Greek *yatros*, and his look told me I was gravely ill.

I had been ill before but this time I felt there was no hope for recovery. It took twenty days for me to recuperate. The Greek doctor managed to get me up on my feet and, aided by him, I took a few steps. He asked how I felt, and I said I felt as if I had never been ill.

The doctor smiled, "An odd patient! Have you ever been ill before?"

"Yes, I have," I answered. "I can be ill for a long time and then one day is enough for me to recover and feel as if I had never been ill. I am round-faced and with round-faced people illness is hard to see. The symptoms don't show on their faces. Maybe the eyes sink a little and the cheeks become a bit paler. . . but that's all."

That same day, about four o'clock in the afternoon, disturbing news arrived—German troops had arrived at Fustani. Tempo didn't pay any attention to the news. He did not believe it. After about an hour, or an hour and a half, some of our Partisan units retreating from Fustani arrived and informed the Commander that large German formations

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had reached the village and its environs. Without any panicking the General Staff made the necessary preparations and we left Notja and headed northward to Kožuh Mountain.

It was an awful winter. The snow lay six feet deep in some places. We moved slowly. You and I were creeping toward the mountain. I was moving with difficulty. Like freezing cold iron pincers, the air gripped my throat. Iron arms crept into my chest and plunged into my heart as if to yank it out. I was dizzy. The sparkling white snow dazzled my eyes.

And then, all of a sudden... oh, I still vividly see how I relaxed back into the snow unable to move any farther. I felt I was sinking into white snowy space—a space that contained all a man needs. I saw a long column of Partisans with packs on their backs pass slowly before me, advancing into the unknown. Without talking or turning round they silently passed by me... and I kept sinking... there was no one to give me a life... no one to lend me a helping hand... no one to lift me by the armpits.... Partisans were supposedly passing by but now I saw nothing. Blizzards raged around me but I saw nothing. I felt nothing. It was as if I was falling asleep, but in a way I'd never experienced before. I was dreaming of the house where I was born; it was buried in flowers—blossoming morello trees and lilac and the rustling of the tall poplars. A wonderful dream, wonderful sights took hold of my mind.

This mirage was broken by two bony arms pulling me up and crying: "Get up.... The white death is after you." A broad-shouldered Partisan shook me; he rubbed my forehead, my hand, and my chest with snow and led me by the hand like a little boy.

I reeled. I fell asleep again. I felt the hands of the broad-shouldered Partisan leave me behind as he headed for the mountaintop along an impassable path. His hands were replaced by the hands of a woman, dear and well known to me. Your hands. And then I began to feel again the blood pulsing in my veins, driving out the cold and returning me to life.

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And suddenly these distant memories got interrupted.

At Goli Otok I feel the breath of Kožuh Mountain. Its freshness invigorates me. The sparkling snow is enchanting and I feel the infinite blue sky over the legendary mountain. Proud birds soar in the air, vanishing no one knows where.

Boiling hot drops of sweat trickle down from my forehead. The sun is now even hotter. For one short moment I wish I were dead. But my inner will doesn't allow me to show any weakness or hesitation, not even for a moment. Hesitation is a dangerous phenomenon. A moment of hesitation is the equivalent of destruction. A rock hard man is reduced to a ruin as soon as hesitation overcomes him. Hesitation can destroy anything. . . . So I go on my way with my box, my silent and faithful friend.

The paths change every day, but they always go round in a circle. Circling around I get dizzy and feel that I am caught in a spider's web—a web that has been solidly knit and nailed firmly against an invisible wall. Unknown obstacles embrace me, encircle me, tighten on me like a screw-press. I draw back. I overcome them. My limbs strengthened by mountain freshness and the breath of a fast-running river, I direct myself along this meandering stone-covered path.

Summer days at Goli Otok are awful. You cannot imagine how terribly long they are, year-long days. Luckily these endless days are filled with various events: news coming over the local radio station, for example. News, good or bad, is always refreshing. The human soul needs news.

Man's life is full of paradoxes. When he is most joyful, he is sad; his sadness promises a flash of hope. Here is the local radio station saying that Yugoslavia is the world's most humane country, a land where love of man and the greatest liberty reign. He who wants to see what Yugoslavia is like must come and see it for himself. Yugoslavia *is* unique.

Really, it's a land of "humanism." Every action, every word, every moment exudes "humaneness and nobility." From Rijeka in the north to Gevgeli at the Greek border, this humaneness assumes different forms, different expressions. At Goli Otok it acquires a unique aspect unattained

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by any other civilization; where everything is blood covered, torture is the rule, deadly barbed wire surrounds everything. Spirit is restrained and thought is raped. And the soul, the soul is subjected to an unbelievable disdain. Goli Otok is the torture of tortures.

In the valley of Kožuh Mountain where I was beginning to freeze to death, there were two hands to raise me, to interrupt my dream and lead me to the heights of the lofty mountain, whereas here, in hell, there is no one to give me even two drops of water.

You are probably interested in knowing whether I am still writing "The Wheel of History." The wheel goes on turning, history advances, and my sonnets begin to assume their final shape. Neither the box nor other people spoil my mood. My worst moods are a kind of inspiration for the wreath I am weaving. A bad mood is the counterpoint of a bright mood; it is a motivating force in the struggle for a brighter future.

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LETTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Dear File,

Divorces are rife at Goli Otok. Somehow it has been hinted to everyone that while he is incarcerated in this sinister desert his wife has become a woman of the world who no longer cares about him. These insinuations suggest that she has neglected everything: the children, the house, the property; that there is another man in her bed; that the smile on her face and the kind and loving words in her letters are lies; that she has deceived him with her promises to remain faithful as long as she lives. Other insinuations are aimed at upsetting the mental equilibrium of the unmarried convicts. For example, "You are young. Think a bit. You could achieve a lot. Give up the false beliefs and fall in line with the whole nation."

There are people who refuse to give in. But in some cases words like these reawaken shattered dreams, restore old hopes, and convince these individuals that they can embark along the new road. Anxious to find help, they repent and are given help. But their repentance is not genuine. Realizing that it is all a deceit perpetrated to dishonor them, to slander them, to discredit them, they draw in upon themselves, harboring their anger and protecting their true selves for a cruel and a not too distant struggle.

Outside, outside the Wire, it is said that at Goli Otok divorce has become something normal, that by freeing themselves of all family obligations the convicts have reached the highest level of consciousness. It is also said that unhappily married couples are susceptible to hostile influences, allowing them to penetrate the peaceful family hearth. Practically all of the prisoners are induced to break the most sacred links in their lives—marriage, family, children, property, honor. Some people suffer painfully and try to reorganize their lives; they feel like beasts trapped in a cage, helpless, humiliated, brokenhearted. Moving letters come from outside. Some bewildered wives write: "We cannot imagine why you have so recklessly broken your marriage, the most sacred link in human life. Why have practically all

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of you taken the same path? Who has made you do it? Why have you all simultaneously filed applications for divorce?"

It is clear what motivated so many divorces. The authorities sought to disturb their prisoners' peace of mind, make them hesitant, shatter their souls. Those who were not open to mere suggestions were told deceitful slanders, for example, that after the visits their wives went about the Rijeka nightclubs and pubs to drink and enjoy themselves late into the night.

It is impossible to disprove these allegations. The slanderers are the judges; they hold both the nut and the nutcracker in their hands; they crack the nut at will. And once you are within the embrace of their law you can hardly acquit yourself, you can hardly restore your honor. The days spent in prison, on Goli Otok in particular, are like the links in black chains that cannot be cut off either by teeth or by nails. The Goli Otok cauldron is full of convicts and of people simply sent there for an indefinite term by administrative decision. Their lot is worse than that of the common criminals since the criminals at least have a sentence and after serving their terms the authorities are obliged to set them free. For an "administrative" the only thing that is definite is his two-year term, that is, if after two years he has reformed he will be set free; otherwise, each second year the punishment is extended. The authorities do their best to make those sentenced through administrative decision understand this fact. On the one hand their punishment seems lighter, but on the other hand, the punishment can last a long, even an indefinite time.

The trials and the sentences have confused the citizens, and the "administratives" live in constant fear. For breaking the law you should be brought to trial, but in their case the personal opinion of the local authorities has been enough to send them to one of the Adriatic islands or some other place of internment.

It is logic without any logic.

On the one hand, the authorities try to persuade outsiders related to the Goli Otok convicts that the prisoners

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don't want to leave their confinement and are trying to break all contacts with them; on the other hand, those who are serving their term at Goli Otok or on the other Adriatic islands are told—and even shown faked photos as proof—that their wives (or husbands) have indulged in debauchery and that there is no way of returning them to the quiet recesses of family life. Thus, even as capitalism is being restored, the authorities have given way to outright prostitution. The authorities play a double-faced, dishonest game with the citizens of Yugoslavia while proclaiming that the country is forging its own "separate road to socialism."

We tried to persuade the citizens of Yugoslavia, all of its nationalities, that irregularities accumulated over the centuries because of the absence of equal rights would be consumed in the flames of the struggle for national liberation. The bourgeoisie used all possible means to combat our beliefs, arguing that our goal was impossible since man was naturally susceptible to corruption. Human flesh is a refuge for dark, base passions. And it turned out that what had accumulated for centuries was not reduced to ashes by the flames of the national liberation struggle but instead increased in size; for many leaders this struggle turned out to be a refuge after the shipwreck of numerous dreams and aspirations. In addition, illegitimate children were born along the Partisan paths. Both to avoid shaming the Partisan detachment and to guard their own prestige the leaders ordered some trusted men who would hold their tongues to liquidate the women; thus they managed to keep a balance between duty and law, between duty and obligation. A similar process has been occurring practically everywhere in Yugoslavia, but its fruits have been hidden, covered up. Some famous leaders unexpectedly broke their most intimate relations. To leave the woman's honor unspoiled and the leader's untarnished, a third individual, an absolutely trustworthy man, was introduced into the play.

After the victory both leaders and citizens feared prostitution like a plague. But life became still more difficult and, little by little, beauty began to dress in luxury. And

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luxury is pernicious. A Koran verse says that truth must not be coated with silver. By analogy we could say, beauty must not be clothed in luxurious attire. Luxury is paid back in flesh. But beauty is not durable; wrinkles are beauty's handmaidens. At night shadows torment the forehead furrowing it with worries. And since the country embarked on the "separate road to socialism" is heterogeneous, multinational, prostitution also becomes multinational, from Rijeka to Zagreb, Belgrade, and so on. In the beginning these base passions were satisfied in the houses, stealthily and awkwardly, and then they were satisfied openly, to make it easier for the foreigners who wandered about like ghosts. Once a Negro who had lost patience satisfied his passions by attacking a Yugoslav woman; more fiercely than a beast he tore her to pieces and threw dollars upon her.

Not every beautiful woman sought an easy life. There were women whose faces were not darkened, who did all they could to resist corruption because their mothers and fathers had taught them the laws of honor and work. They had learned that it is better to die than to live dishonestly.

What had been realized through bloodshed and defended with great sacrifice began to shake, to disintegrate and disappear; willingly or unwillingly, passively or actively, everyone was part of it. Heartbreaking stories show how deeply corruption had insinuated itself into society. Among us on Goli Otok there is a certain Barba Frane, a leprous carcass. He was not brought to trial because his offense didn't fall under any provision of the law. He was a funeral director known to his entire town. He maintained close relations with the doctors as well, keeping what they told him about their patients a secret. Barba Frane knew about everyone who had a serious illness; moreover, he knew when the sick person was expected to die; he even knew the hour of death. Barba Frane had a special interest in the diseases of the well-to-do. Thus, only minutes after someone died Barba Frane would arrive to express his condolences: "I have no words to express what a loss this is for our town. Since he was unique in life and a town dignitary he must be seen off

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to his eternal home with appropriate ceremony. Nothing must be spared for his funeral. I think you realize what a loss you have suffered with the death of your loved one."

And Barba Frane would arrange a most worthy funeral, a very expensive one of course. First, he would provide a band to play funeral marches. Then, wreathes would be carried by beautiful schoolgirls dressed in black and arrayed in four rows. The schoolgirls wear silk handkerchiefs on their breasts. He would also hire buses to take the mourners to the cemetery. The deceased must be dressed in a most expensive suit, a suit he had never worn before, one especially made for the occasion. The family members would all wear black silk and the women's faces would be covered with black veils.

After the funeral, together with his aides and in collusion with the gravekeepers, Barba Frane exhumed the corpse, took it home in a car, extracted the gold teeth, cut off the fingers with the gold rings, took off the new suit, and then returned the corpse to the grave. Afterwards, Barba Frane had a nice time with the schoolgirls in nonofficial pubs.

All this was revealed by Barba Frane's child, who shouted, "People, it's awful. The dead man who was buried yesterday, was tonight robbed by my father at our home."

Barba Frane was duly arrested and an inquiry established that he had done the same to all the rich of the town.

Hyenas dig out dead bodies to feed on them. They howl like fiends to spread horror about them. But we find human hyenas only on Goli Otok because there is no law to deal with them; marauders do not fall under the provision of the law in socialist Yugoslavia. That is why they are either released early or their punishment is extended as it is with the "administratives." Though the laws change, these people don't fall under law.

You see, my dear, even funerals can be a subject of corruption. Look at what appears to be sorrow, concern, torment—and you see the fiendish atmosphere behind it. The infection has invaded Yugoslavia's very foundations and they are now badly eroded. After attaining glory empires disintegrate because they indulge in debauchery.

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Divorces are corruption's arms. Free of commitments, a divorcee is easily bent down like a lonely reed by the wind.

Seeing such people our indignation grows into determination: as soon as we get out of Goli Otok we must fight against the causes, which are rooted in the state itself, rather than against the effects that stem from the activities of presumptuous leaders. The state is a despot, but until the day when it becomes a museum exhibit alongside the wooden plow it will be indispensable.

Our marriage has survived because of the hardships we had to overcome. We shall perish since we are Communists but we shall keep our morality high because a genuine classless society is based on sound morality. Families will be a link in the chain of human welfare, while destroying the old kind of state, we shall be building a new one, a people's state, a democratic and a socialist state—a realm of freedom.

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LETTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Dear File,

For several days now the convicts at Goli Otok have been excited. Everybody has been busy; everything has been washed, cleaned, whitewashed. It seems visitors are expected, so whitewashing is ordered to cover the black stains of Goli Otok. It is rumored that more than two-thirds of the convicts will be released and that the lists have already been drawn up. But on Goli Otok one can never be sure. Opinions change by the minute, like March weather. You can hardly trust your eyes and he who thinks he sees something actually sees nothing. Even if you see your own name on the list you can't be certain; you may have misread your own name, you may be wrong; probably it was someone else's name. The convicts work overtime. They are willing to overfulfill the norms, as if entering the lists depended on that. But the lists—if they have actually been sent down—have been discussed in detail, fixed, confirmed, scrutinized—and that's it. If you are already on the list, you're on it; if not, you're not on it. The warden and examining magistrate have no power. Their authority includes reporting and making proposals on someone's release or shortening somebody's term. In practice this amounts to one percent decision-making power, and more often than not even this percentage is illusory, uncertain, doubtful.

The whitewashed walls and roads shine snow-white in the sun. Everything is clean, everything is in order as if it were the eve of some festivity, like a village house before a wedding.

The room supervisors are smiling complacently, smoking cigarettes (almost all supervisors smoke cigarettes), and chatting. They are confident that this time they will have good luck. But some of these supervisors are not so confident about this rumor that a lot of prisoners will be set free: "More than once we have been on the lists but at the last minute, while the lists were being read out, our names were omitted. Until I hear my name read out with my own ears I won't believe anything."

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As an exception, the check was held late at night, probably due to the excess work load of the supervisors, brigadiers, and examining magistrates. A queer logic; on the one hand, they hint that a lot of prisoners will be released, and on the other hand, the newly arrested continue to arrive. Since some of them had escaped to neighboring countries, they were sentenced in absentia. They were misled into believing that they wouldn't be brought to trial again if they returned of their own free will and that their files would be destroyed, i.e., charges of antistate activities would be dropped. But at their first encounter with the authorities they realized that they had been deceived, that it was all a deception and that hardships lay ahead of them. They are all frightened when they see the other prisoners at Goli Otok. These same people had been their friends, they had been Partisans together, but now they no longer look like human beings. Hunger and torture have deprived them of their human aspect. They are sallow, hollow-cheeked, haggard people with protruding bones, and that's what the new arrivals see first.

And then they remember the warnings against returning home. "Don't believe what they write; their actions have nothing in common with their writings; you will curse your mother's milk if you go back; you should never trust the UDBA."

But many of them wouldn't listen: "Will there be lies now as well? We are going back, whatever happens there; we are going back to our homes. We'll join our families. Life in emigration is hard. Though you share the same ideas, there is always something to separate you from the natives. They are the hosts and you are their guest; you must ask permission for everything; you can never be sure whether they will give permission or not."

Such thoughts obsessed most of them. Some of them, particularly those who were in Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, had to struggle to overcome black moods. They could stay there until the situation in Yugoslavia was fully normalized, and no one would force them to dishonor or

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curse themselves, or to cover their heads with ashes. They imagined they would peacefully and quietly join the process of so-called normalization. But normalization was merely a phrase; its cruel reality was experienced by those Yugoslav emigrants who had been in the Soviet Union and Bulgaria in particular.

Most of the newly arrived convicts were lodged with the political prisoners; but since there were so many of them, some were squeezed in with the common criminals.

They wouldn't speak, as if their tongues had been pulled out of their mouths. What lay ahead for them? Here is Goli Otok, the Goli Otok of which so much had been written all around the world. Now they felt as if their hearts had been pulled out and their chests stood agape; the void within was cold and they trembled with uncertainty. The Gobi desert swallows you up and there is no way back.

On the morning of November 28 all the convicts were assembled and marched to the commandant's office. The tension was beyond description, for each convict had his own idea of what this fateful moment would mean. They had brought together all the convicts: those with the right to vote and those without, those with extended terms and those in Isolation. In order to control their emotion some of them started talking about anything but the lists and their immediate futures.

Accompanied by the examining magistrates the prison warden slowly and seriously made his way toward the platform that had been built for the occasion. Everything was spotlessly clean. The convicts suddenly fell silent and drew up to meet the chiefs. In a few minutes, after the pharisaical opening words, it was announced that the supreme commander had decided to shorten the term of many convicts who since they had reformed could join social life again. The word "reformed" disturbed many convicts. Each one knew the extent to which he had "reformed" and whether the change was genuine. At the same time, the supreme commander knew that a year ago these same "reformeds" had shouted slogans in favor of the Soviet Union and that

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the most daring of them had written a graffiti on a stone: "Long live the great Stalin."

Everyone's soul was weighed down with frustration, particularly those who were well known from the Partisan movement and who enjoyed the love and respect of the people. Their frustration was due to such thoughts as: How would they be received? How open could they be? After all, some of them had probably uttered one or two dishonest words. No one knows anything of the inquests, for inquests do not leave marks on a man's forehead. But though unknown to the outside world, inquests are vividly remembered by the victim. And, like a hidden witness, their eyes always reveal what has happened. Other convicts were oppressed by the knowledge that the ideals they had fought for had collapsed. They knew that the authorities would seem to rejoice at their release while in fact harboring the poisonous feelings that had emerged while the convicts had been interned at Goli Otok. They will be enemies, they will deceive each other. They will exchange ideas but do so formally and politely. And the man who has been at Goli Otok will always be on the wrong side; he can be taken back again at any time.

Suddenly the silence was broken abruptly. The authorities began reading the names of the convicts who were to be released. Those who heard their names read cried: "me" or "here." A convict who had been sentenced to life ran forward, delirious, and cried out, "It's me, it's me. . . . I'm not crazy. I've heard my name," and burst into tears. Many of the convicts with a right to vote were on the list. But I remember a lot of convicts without a right to vote who at the last minute had the courage to cry out, "I'll. . . ." Some of them had been at Goli Otok ever since it was set up. Such was the case with Dusan Brkic.

It was clear that a selection had been made in this huge mass of political prisoners. Some recently arrived prisoners had been pardoned.

Though it was late November, the sun was a white-hot disc, seemingly eager to burn the filth to ashes. An angry

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rebel seemed to be dashing through the sun making it angry; its fiery hair shed its flames on us.

Moma Djurić was standing quietly beside me. His thoughts reached back along the Partisan paths. He saw himself smartly dressed in a neat Partisan uniform with leather shoulder straps, a pistol on his belt. A battalion commander accompanying the Supreme Headquarters, he is somewhere near Mlinisté—the town of Kupres before the passage to the island of Vis, together with Djilas, Ranković, Zujović. They are in front of the tent waiting for orders about where they are marching next. No voice, no noise comes from inside the tent; everything lies low. While enemy airplaces race above this quiet place, the comrades look at each other and share their thoughts. "How long shall we put up with this? How long will he take advantage of our patience? How long will he abuse the confidence of the nationalities?"

A voice interrupts them. They are as startled as if they had been caught in flagrante delicto. As they look around the supreme commander, embarrassed and disturbed, emerges from a cave and says, "We've lost the most important thing—a bag of documents. Someone must retrace our steps. Something very important has been lost—documents."

Moma Djurić and a group of men go back along our route.

After silently retracing our every step, the devoted Partisan returns with the bag. "That's what I've found," he says. "Is it the thing you wanted? I haven't come across anything else."

Tito's small blue vacant eyes suddenly shone like those of Father Grandé; "Yes, it's the thing," he cried out in an inhuman voice. Davorjanka, who was lying by his side, half-naked, jumped to the bag like a tigress.

"Yes, that's it, Momo," she said, and as she opened the bag, gems, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, watches, and all kinds of jewels shone like the sun.

Moma was stunned. He got dizzy. For the first time this stout man from Sumadia realized that the battalion was

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guarding not the supreme commander of the Partisan forces but a usurer and a lecher.

Moma went out.

"We are to blame. What a rascal, what a loathsome creature! I could kill him but instead I have saved his life three times."

He came to his senses as if someone had yanked him out of his reminiscing, returning to the unbearable, awful reality of the present. He asked me:

"Venko, did I say anything?"

"Momo, you didn't say anything; I didn't hear you say anything."

Lost in memories Moma hadn't even heard his own name when it was called out. The examining magistrate had to repeat his name.

"Yes, yes, he is here," the others replied for him.

Some were surprised not to hear their names, others wondered why they had been released, given their real opinions.

Some thought that after boarding the ship they would be taken to Grgur to be liquidated like those who lay in the deep pits on that island.

Mixed feelings overwhelmed the prisoners; no feeling seemed entirely right, yet each contained a grain of truth.

Yet, the truth is that more than one thousand convicts will now return to the people, the contamination will be great, for they are from the leprous island of Goli Otok. As the released convicts began moving about and packing their soldiers' cases, the old deputy chairman of the Serbian Assembly told those who had been released, "they have proved again that they are liars. The supreme commander has never been anything but a liar."

A queer sight, and queerer still was the behavior of the hardened old fighters. To my mind two factors explain their behavior: first, mixed feelings have suddenly overtaken them as they realize that they are now free of any obligations they had to fulfill, willingly or not, merely because they were at Goli Otok; second, each had withdrawn into

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himself shaking off his own soul. What has been accumulating for years cannot be destroyed in a moment. Destruction needs time and time is a process; a process that demands both fire and ore. To turn ore into metal one needs fire. And there is no fire more terrible than the fire on Goli Otok. Whether they will succeed in using the metal they have tempered at Goli Otok for the right purpose doesn't depend on them alone. Some of them will return to their old Partisan roads. They won't let the authorities take them back to Goli Otok. Only the hesitant, those who vacillate between the island and the shore in the interest of some fictitious freedom, will be caught with the pajamas on, that is, in their beds.

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LETTER TWENTY-NINE

Dear File,

Whitewashing couldn't cover up the blood that spurted from broken chests. After the list's thousand-odd names had been read, Goli Otok seemed less oppressive, but in fact life didn't change. The convicts made various comments. Some of them were pleased with the change in their rigorous regimen, let's say from isolation to quarrying; others were pleased to have their punishment reduced by six months, that is, from ten years to nine years and a half. Of course, even one minute less on Goli Otok meant a great deal. Those who had been sentenced to death for entering Yugoslavia with arms, from Albania, for example, had their punishment reduced to life at hard labor. But for the sake of their peace of mind and to avoid eventual mental derangement as a result of the hot Goli Otok atmosphere some of them were made room supervisors; and thus received certain privileges. Most important, they were exempt from any kind of labor; their duty was to help dehumanize men.

Sometimes their comments became quite pointed. Indeed, many of them became particularly courageous and daring; they were not afraid of anything. The common criminals also contributed to this daring, but to purge the common criminals of the influence of the politicals before they left the prison, they were unexpectedly subjected to a peculiar kind of torture, shortly before the end of their term. Dump wagons were loaded with stones and then driven at breakneck speed to the silo. As the time for leaving the prison drew nearer they were forced to drive the dump wagons faster. When the wagons were going very fast, the brakes were suddenly applied and the load of sharp stones fell on the driver. Many legs and arms were shattered in this way.

The case of convict Tumara is stamped on my memory. He was in prison for going into restaurants and trying to establish who the UDBA men were. He went into the restaur-

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ants and checked everyone. The patrons became alarmed and showed their documents. The authorities were disturbed by these public checkups because they revealed who worked for UDBA. At first, they thought Tumara was dealing with some urgent matter that they weren't supposed to involve themselves in. But after Tumara left the restaurant a suspicious officer from the Ministry of the Interior called, but in vain. Tumara, who had been doing this for several months, left no trace behind him. But one day he was caught. This brawny man with muscular arms and fists like steel hammers was sent to Goli Otok after being tortured at the militia station where he was sentenced. They did everything to break him, although he did everything not to give them a pretext for such treatment. But they were determined that he suffer some injury that would remind him of Gol Otok and make sure he would never again do what had led to his imprisonment. In return for double portions, several cigarettes, and occasional permission to be let out of the Wire, the corrupted informers smashed his arm in the dark tunnel with the tip-wagon. It all seemed merely an accident: the tip-wagon had stopped suddenly and the driver had stumbled down and shattered his arm. This common criminal showed many politicals how to behave in prison. On leaving he said: "Convicts, why did you deprive me of my arm? I am leaving now but the Administration doesn't have the power to set you free for what you've done to me. I spit on the clothes they've given me to leave with. I'll go barefoot and in rags but with dignity. Regardless of the reasons that brought us to prison it was necessary that we help one another. Had we been strong inside the Administration wouldn't have been able to crush us from the outside."

The political prisoners thought about these words for a long time. Some of them frowned and fell silent, realizing that it was the political prisoners, not the common criminals, who fanned the fires of discord, inciting hostilities between brothers, between numbers.

Not all the common criminals were riff-raff; among them were those who would do anything for another. They

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didn't receive parcels since there was no one to send them any. But if somebody got some sugar, a piece of lard, or some cigarettes, he would share them with the others condemned to the same lot. He would distribute the bread, cut the lard into portions, and even break a single cigarette into three or four pieces and give them to others. In one case a political prisoner was allowed to receive a parcel after a long period of torture and starvation. When he received the parcel he snatched it greedily, rushed back into the room, hid himself in his bunk, and didn't come out until he had eaten everything. He spent the night at the infirmary. The other prisoners worked to save his life, the common criminals being the most helpful. After that, having thoroughly analyzed this personality, the intellectual changed radically. He became more altruistic, more humane, more social. He subsequently received many parcels but took barely one-tenth of their contents for himself, sharing the rest. He was a doctor who administered medicines to the sick convicts.

Among the convicts there was a group of unusual thieves. Some of them were children, sons of highly decorated Partisans, prominent officials, and other leading figures in the country's social and political life. A criminal from Bosnia, a child named Munera, was especially notable. If man's development began with Protistas in Munera the human species marked the end of its development. Munera was gaunt and short with a narrow forehead and only three fingers on one hand. He did everything to make the surgeons cut his third finger off. He begged, "Please cut my third finger off, it's quite an embarrassment to me."

Some of the surgeons believed him, and one of the youngest was ready to amputate the finger. His finger was not sore nor was it at all infected. Everything was normal. And had one of the common criminals from his group not explained the real reason Munera wanted to lose his third finger, his right hand would now have only two fingers. Munera was one of the leaders of the group of pickpockets, able to demonstrate his "art" anywhere.

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Here is the story of how he was caught and sent to prison. The members of Munera's group got on a train, each taking a seat in a different compartment. Munera was wearing a militia uniform, and as the train neared a tunnel he went from compartment to compartment to warn the passengers: "Be careful, a dangerous group of pickpockets is in the train; they're after your money."

Each passenger felt his wallet. The train entered the tunnel and a sinister voice cried out: "Attention, attention, a dangerous group of pickpockets. . . ."

He put the light out and the group did its job.

They were not to be caught for a long time, but the passengers' descriptions, which pointed to the fact that the pickpocket's hand had only three fingers, led to the arrest of the whole group. All of them admitted their guilt.

Pickpockets like Munera were sent to Goli Otok to be reformed. They were allowed more freedom than other prisoners. Many examining magistrates couldn't believe that this or that young convict could perpetrate such thefts. Once, while the examining magistrate was talking with some political prisoners, Munera stole his wallet without being noticed. Unaware of what had happened, the examining magistrate said kindly to Munera: "Oh, Munera, you can find careless people everywhere. You have been able to do this where people weren't alert. There may be careless people among us as well. . . ."

When the examining magistrate was about to leave, Munera gave a childlike but sly laugh: "Mr. Magistrate, why are you in a hurry? You've forgotten your wallet. Take it, please, I have it." And he handed over the wallet. The examining magistrate was dumbfounded.

I remember another case, one in which a common criminal who was in Isolation with the political prisoners performed a miracle. The warden, who wanted to establish the reason for the stubbornness of the common criminals, guessed that the politicals were responsible. One day, looking through the peephole, the warden saw the common criminals playing cards and burst in on them. The quickest

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of them immediately gathered up the cards.

"Hands up," yelled the warden.

As quick as lightning, the criminal slipped the cards into the warden's pocket.

Everyone was searched; their pockets were turned inside out and their pants were even removed.

"Where did you put the cards? Put on your pants. Tell me where you hid the cards."

"We haven't been playing cards. What cards are you talking about?"

"I saw you playing cards."

"They were talking about something but we haven't seen them play cards," the political prisoners said.

As he was leaving, the warden threatened, "Just let me catch you at it, and I'll teach you a good lesson."

Hurrying to open the door for the warden, the quick-fingered one took the cards from the warden's pocket and put them into his own.

Sonja's case horrified everybody. Sonja was one of the most dangerous murderers. Playing the fool he had cut off a foreigner's hand in order to steal her rings and a bracelet. When he was caught and brought to trial he did nothing but sing, "Beautiful eyes, beautiful hair, beautiful lips."

He didn't answer any questions. The court was of the opinion that he was mad. They sent a man to observe him from a concealed place, but Sonja craftily played the fool and refused to give any sign of being a normal human being. He sang constantly and his singing was infectious. But one day the most cunning intriguer and murderer succeeded in making him tell the truth. Sonja turned to him and said: "Since I have confidence in you, I'll tell you the truth. I am not a fool but playing the fool will ease my life here in prison."

Later on, realizing that he had been misled, Sonja killed this same man with an iron bucket.

And now this irresponsible murderer is at Goli Otok sowing the seeds of discord and urging the convicts to stop working: "If there were any use working the sun would be working too," he used to say, "It would also get a day's pay like the prisoners at Goli Otok."

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My moving about the Wire with a box in my hand had now begun to make the authorities uncomfortable.

At first my labor had caused surprise among the political prisoners, sowing the seed of hatred and stirring up the fire of resentment against the Administration. Then, my labors came to be accepted as one of the reforming measures and no longer elicited compassion. But my contempt restored the faith of many political prisoners who realized that even the humiliation that was imposed on me by the box could be used as a tacit rebellion against the authorities;

The authorities began to fear my presence in the Wire. Every evening I was on duty from the checkup until late at night. My job was to wash the floor with heavy pieces of sackcloth.

Thus the days passed one after another. I arranged the shoes and made the beds after the convicts went to work, folding each of them in the strict, military style. Even the sick prisoners were forbidden to lend me a hand. I was supposed to do everything alone.

The orders that force me to perform this humiliating work were reversed by Radé Koncar's brother when he became an examining magistrate of the political prisoners.

Instead, I was sent back to Isolation for indefinite term.

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LETTER THIRTY

Dear File,

I want to tell you that I am now in Isolation. The Isolation building has thick solid walls that sunshine never penetrates. They say that at the far end of Isolation there was a medieval prison in which those who disobeyed the pope and the clergy were strangled by the Inquisition in dark, sinister, blood-stained cells. At night it seemed that the moans of the strangled still haunted the place, making the silence more sinister, more sorrowful, more deafening. The horrible echo of past centuries resounds in the sorrowful wilderness like a roll of thunder, reminding one of battles that know no end.

The Isolation building has been newly rebuilt. The cement floor is as clean as a mirror, for from morning till night the prisoners are forced to scrub its ice-cold surfaces. Beatings that occur right next door are never overheard because thick walls insulate the cells from each other.

All sorts of people are crowded into Isolation, for anyone not to the liking of the Administration is sent there. The commanders are the cruelest of men—men who stop at nothing. They can betray their mothers or cut their fathers' throats; they are the dregs of society, of this particular Yugoslav society. They beat the prisoners without any pretext; they are not required to explain their motives or render account to anyone. Their eyes are bloodshot, their souls overgrown with weeds; their consciences have become mouldy. They seem to be holdovers from the times when barbarians and cannibals were the masters of the world. Yet they are afraid of knives. Indeed, this is their weakness; while searching the newcomers they threaten and warn: "God help him who has a knife on him. He will be the first one to feel the edge of his own knife."

That is what I saw with my own eyes on the way back from the quarry to Isolation. The common criminals had managed to smuggle in a knife so large it could be used to slaughter cattle. No one knew how the knife had gotten into

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the pocket of a political prisoner who was in Isolation for the last stage of his inquest. When the guard discovered the knife he became so furious he would have cut the prisoner's throat had the other convicts not come to his rescue. The political prisoner swore by the *bessa*, the sacred Albanian oath, that he knew nothing about the knife, that someone else had put it in his pocket, that he had never used a knife. The guard beat him pitilessly, kicking and stepping on him. The common criminals thought this Albanian was an informer who had been sent into Isolation to spy on the political prisoners. Claiming to have a stomach ache he would pretend to go to the toilet while actually going to report to the guard. The common criminals, who were ubiquitous, were not wrong in thier assessment, and later, on our way to work, they made this Albanian pay dearly. They beat him severely, poured water on him, and warned him to stop reporting on the other prisoners—or else face death. The Albanian had no choice but to ask to be removed from Isolation. But the guards tore his application to pieces, leaving him between Scylla and Charybdis.

They kept alternating the prisoners in Isolation, particularly the common criminals; the politicals stayed longer. Their release from Isolation depended on the inquest—it didn't matter whether the charge was right or wrong, the resoluton of the inquest would last as long as the examining magistrate found appropriate.

In late December, on the occasion of the Day of the Yugoslav Army, the Isolation cells were almost entirely emptied out. Both common and political prisoners were taken back to the Wire. I was left alone. It was bitterly cold. The wind was breaking the windows behind the bars and the snow was drifting into the cells. I was given one additional blanket.

I was moved into the room near the canteen. My room was three meters long and one and a half meters wide; it normally held four prisoners but I was alone. At about midnight on December 23 they brought in a common criminal—a slovenly, dreadful-looking, whiskered little man.

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I could not get a wink of sleep that night. Though his face was unknown to me it was horrifying. Still, one could detect a residue of human feeling in his eyes. The room supervisor who had just come from the Wire (room supervisors sleep at the Wire and go to work according to schedule; otherwise they are not supposed to work—they pass the time reading books) called me out in alarm: "I don't you. I was a resistance fighter; I was decorated. I've heard who you are. I've read some of your books. Be careful: this common criminal was put into your cell to do you harm. Be careful; stay in the corner. You have received a parcel, take it. There are some cigarettes plus honey and lard in it. The cigarettes will probably help you out of this dangerous and difficult situation."

He unlocked the cell, let me back in, and then locked it again.

We kept silent for a long time. That day I was not sent to work, for whatever reason. The common criminal glanced about fearfully as if on his guard against something. I wanted to break the silence, and said, "Comrade, do you smoke? Here are some matches."

As if he feared some leprous object, he refused to touch either the cigarette or the matches.

"Here is some lard, honey, rusk," I said. "We are alone. The parcel is mine. It was sent to me from home."

The common criminal seemed to relax, and his eyes became strangely warm.

"Aren't you a writer?" he asked.

"Why do you ask?"

"So. I was told that a writer would be with me and that I must guard myself against him because he is a very dangerrous and evil man."

I don't know what happened to him but he took a cigarette, lit it with the matches, inhaled the smoke, then exhaled it in rings, and started to knock at the door with his fists and yell: "Guard, I want the warden. Let the warden come here."

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Bristling with fear at hearing the common criminal's voice, the supervisor immediately unlocked the door.

"Why are you shouting?" the supervisor asked. "The warden is not your servant."

He said to the supervisor: "Old man, don't meddle in these matters. He sent me down here to perpetrate a bloody crime—to do away with a dangerous person, but this 'dangerous' person has offered me cigarettes, honey, and lard, even though he has never met me before and has no idea what I'm about."

After a while the warden arrived. The common criminal started to curse him: "How shameful! You've sent me down here to kill a mild-tempered and kind-hearted man such as one rarely encounters in prison."

"Do you realize what you are saying? Who told you to do this?"

"You did. Before I came here, you summoned me. It's very easy for you to use common criminals as tools. In this case I was the most convenient one—you could get rid of both of us easily."

The warden asked me, "Do you believe this?"

"Why shouldn't I believe it?" I answered. "What would make me doubt it? Am I not being held here under the name of Veniamin Milanov Tosev, even though I am Venko Markovski?"

The common criminal was immediately removed from the cell. The Isolation supervisor later told me that he was cruelly beaten and sent to another prison to avoid telling the prisoners in the Wire about the incident.

After the failure of this plan I was constantly on guard. Every time the door opened I was suspicious. I took note of who opened the door, what his expression was like, and what news he brought. I mistrusted everybody—known and unknown alike. After that incident I expected a blow might fall from any direction. Any one of the prisoners could be the assailant, for in return he'd be promised freedom, a job, and a new life.

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I have long wondered: Why did they assign that particular supervisor to Isolation? And why did he warn me against the common criminal? It's strange. Evidently he was unwilling to get involved in such an absurdity. He is probably angry with the authorities for releasing so many but continuing to hold him. He is serving his term for having said that the Soviet Union is just and that Moscow is right. Are these two phrases weightier than the crime committed by the prisoners who were set free? And they were even brought to trial! They were sentenced as traitors and spies. A strange affair! Cominformists with more serious crimes, men who had attempted to introduce justice by force of arms, were set free as if they hadn't done anything wrong. But this man is neither trusted nor released from prison though he had agreed to be reeducated, that is, to be reformed. Petitions were of no use at Goli Otok. A decree wouldn't help him either. Such a decree had to have a political motivation, had to coincide with some political anniversary or national day. And there was no one to intercede with the Marshal's office for him.

Times have changed. People have become muddled. A man can hardly believe his senses any longer. Dreams and reality have become utterly confused.

The supervisor began to languish; it seemed he had withdrawn within himself. Several times the warden warned him that what the common criminal had said was pure invention.

"I know who the prisoner is. It is not my fault that I was ordered to enter him under another name."

The supervisor interpreted his calling the warden's office as an excuse, not as a right since only the examining magistrate and the warden enjoyed rights. The supervisor was willing to tell everybody what was going on at Goli Otok; to tell everybody that mean killers and fiendish villains concealed themselves behind the smiles of the authorities. Every word they utter is a lie. Even though they look you in the eye while talking to you, you should never trust them; they always lie. Lies keep them at their posts; lies keep them in

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Power is treacherous. Tito's power in particular is the worst on earth.

My dear, I am still apprehensive, not because of forebodings but because of the thought that I won't live to witness their end, that I won't live to avenge my suffering at Goli Otok but instead will die like a dog on the rubbish heap that is Goli Otok and self-managing Yugoslavia.

It's a shame to have fought for a better future as a Partisan only to be stabbed in the back by a villain. Up in the heavens and down here on earth, in the prisons and out of them—everywhere in the inhuman tyranny of Tito's Yugoslavia—one finds only sullen and miserable criminals! Not since the pharaohs has the world witnessed a more sinister person, a more sinister ruler, than he who presides over self-managing Yugoslavia!

I'll write more next time.

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LETTER THIRTY-ONE

My dear,

While I was expecting to be called to the examining magistrate's office, the most dangerous and disgusting person was moved most unexpectedly from cell N° 4 into ours. I don't know why he was sent to Isolation. I couldn't find out what crime he had committed. He had made malicious reports and fabricated stories against people in hope that he would relieve his own situation, that somehow, in the mass chaos, his name would be entered on the lists and he would be pardoned by the minister of the interior. Given the court procedure and the kind of witnesses used against him, he knew that he would never get out of prison, that he couldn't even dream of getting out.

But prison is prison and people's worth is based on their inner strength.

And here he is, in Isolation with me, suffering just as I do. He is taller than me, his shoulders are broader, he is stout with a broad forehead and greasy hair the color of olive oil. His black eyes are like those of a cat; he looks as if he's constantly prowling for prey.

He has come here on some mission. That's for sure. But can he fulfil it or not? Is it the same mean mission often assigned to common criminals? Probably the Administration is after something else. They are probably trying to find out how, when, on what occasion, and where I wrote the poem "Contemporary Paradoxes."

His appearance betrayed him to be an intellectual, a knowledgeable, clever, capable man—a well-read man with an inclination to the arts and the political and social sciences. Little by little, before I even realized it, the silence was broken and he was speaking—pitifully, in a sad tone with well-chosen words—telling me that he regretted my humiliation.

"I don't understand them," he said, "the Goli Otok authorities in particular. What do they want from you? Who benefits from this humiliation? Do they understand

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the potential consequences? They are probably riding the wave of arrogance to even greater outrages. They know for sure who you are. I know them, the people from the Ministry of the Interior. Despite their rigidity they rule by words, by skill and tact. And what is most important is that they have the authority to reassess their attitude toward each individual. What would your sudden death mean to them? Who would justify them? At Goli Otok you can die either of contagion or of dubious circumstances. But in both cases a death is a death and any explanation is open to doubt. Isn't it better for both sides to seek an acceptable solution? I remember that a politician said, "All means are justified when fighting an enemy." Maybe he was right. Every means must be used here.

So, little by little, he advanced the theory that the lowest price is high and the highest price is low where human life is concerned, that you live only once. Every possibility must be measured fully. A single false step can be fatal. And it may be disastrous not to accept proferred help in time.

"I want you, Venko," he continued, "to realize that my bones will be buried here. There is no hope for me. I am worse than Satan because I said openly that Stalin was right in the dispute with Tito, that the national liberation struggle in Yugoslavia would have been impossible without the Soviet Union. Liberty has been realized where the Soviet army has marched in. You see, those who were released yesterday had committed worse crimes and I am at a loss to explain how they have managed to crawl out of this sinister cave. This abyss called Goli Otok can swallow any poor fellow sent down here to serve his term. They are really the luckiest of men for they have managed to get out of this hell. Those imprisoned in Dante's Inferno were better off than the prisoners on Goli Otok."

All of a sudden he stopped talking. He untied his shoe, took it off, then took off his sock and pointed at his foot: "Look here, look! I was tortured as no one else was. They rasped my bones but man can endure anything. But why?

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Why? I had been decorated. Very few of us have been awarded medals. It would be better if I had not won this medal. It was because of this medal that I was not liquidated in a meanest way."

He got angry. Lightning flashed in his eyes. He was foaming at the mouth, but every now and then his tongue dried out, his voice became hoarse. Listening to him, I saw that his performance was not convincing. Doesn't he know that I am aware why he is in prison? Is it possible he has come to mislead me as he misled the UDBA and Ranković himself? Man is an awful species. In power, he doesn't conform to any rules or to proper manners; out of power, he does his best to return himself to power. Power is a bewitching drink; those who cannot sip it are trod under. But here is the story of this "martyr," a high-ranking official from the Ministry of the Interior:

He had a liking for young ladies. He felt like making love to all of them. And he began showing an interest in the husbands of these beauties, in their beliefs, their backgrounds, their party affiliations. He spread fear about him. The mere fact that he showed interest in them meant that the UDBA was looking for evidence that they were undermining the foundations of the state. One after another the husbands of these beautiful women were arrested and indicted. Some of those detained were even not involved in politics, nor were their wives. They had their own mentality, the mentality of people who didn't care how much they got. He was very rude to these men during the inquest; he warned them that the spirit of the times was such that they could lose their heads, that he had uncovered damaging data about them. He took bribes and warned them against saying anything about it. He said that if they did he would learn about it immediately and send his men to liquidate them. He took an entirely different approach in dealing with their wives, speaking to them politely and smoothly, showing kindness and concern, polishing his intentions.

"I've called you up," he told them, "on a very important and serious matter. Only you can help yourself and

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the state. You have a nice family, I know that, but what is to be done? People must not go astray. It is awful once you have taken the wrong path. Only your nearest and dearest can help. You are lucky to have me to help you. You know that beauty will waste away unless you realize its value."

Some of the women immediately understood what he was driving at. They thought that cooperation might be a way of helping their husbands. Power is omnipotent; when it is determined to promote someone it takes him to the top. And when power is determined to depose him, he is thrown into the mud and destroyed. Each of these women was warned against saying anything. Neither seriously nor in jest should she tell her husband that she intended to help his cause. This is the manner in which time passed.

Highly placed officials envied him for having discovered a network of organizations that had conspired to overthrow the people's authority. But there were other officials who saw his efforts as an attempt to "uncover" nonexistant organizations. They kept silent, unwilling to do any harm, unwilling to turn a friend into an enemy. And the beautiful women reasoned that there was nothing wrong with the fact that these men had beautiful wives. Beauty cannot be defined in ideological terms. Beauty is an external feature; ideology is an inner phenomenon. The bourgeois women were the most beautiful because they were well cared for. In the wake of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie they jilted their husbands and started hunting for happiness. Happiness is changeable; you have to make use of it while you have it, while you can enjoy it. Otherwise, happiness is like a bird, it alights on your shoulder and then flies away.

It is hard to satiate the human eye. Thus the "martyr" with the medal who is now in the cell with me fixed his eye on an exceptionally beautiful woman. He arrested her husband. And the the trouble began. She asked him, "What is his offense?" "You'll find out later," he replied. And in a few days she understood what her husband's offense was.

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His offense was that he had a beautiful wife who was proud and moral. Her behavior served as a model. She was a courageous woman; some called her a "daring woman." She acted in cold blood, unafraid of anybody. She was happily married. She had no children. For several days she waited to see what turn things would take. She knew perfectly well who her husband was; he had never engaged in politics; he was an engineer and devoted to his work. Determined, she asked for an appointment with Ranković and went to the meeting without interference. Ranković was very kind to her. She tried hard to hide her alarm.

"What can I do for you?" Ranković asked.

"My husband is under arrest," she answered. "He was brought to account for political beliefs, but he has never been involved in politics."

"Why, then, was he arrested?"

"I do not know. But you should know. If the reason was a political one, why did the examining magistrate invite me to see him alone. He told me that I was the only one who could help my husband."

Ranković thought for a while and then decided to check up on his subordinate. They agreed that she would receive the man who had arrested her husband in her house and pretend that she had been waiting impatiently for the rendezvous. She would speak kindly, revealing her passion and her love for him, and in the meantime Ranković's men would eavesdrop and hold themselves in readiness. They would install devices to tape record the entire conversation.

Unaware of the trap that had been set for him, Nikita began to try to seduce the woman. He spoke in a trembling, sensual voice. . . . And thus he was caught, arrested, and taken to the central UDBA.

This is the true story of the high ranking official from the Ministry of the Interior. And now he showed this same mock concern for me, saying he wanted to help me out of this monstrous place called Goli Otok. This is Nikita, the man who would talk to you kindly for hours, with his

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profound knowledge of literature, music, and the arts. And in 1941 this man had been awarded a medal. He would have been liquidated during the inquiry had he not been one of the first to join the national liberation struggle. That medal saved his life during the inquest. And later, in the Wire, it kept him from extreme measures while his inquest was being cleared up. In all of Goli Otok there was hardly a more sordid inquest than his. His misfortune was that he was unaware of the fact that his case was well known to me.

That's enough for the time being.

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LETTER THIRTY-TWO

My dear,

At Goli Otok, one's sense of time is fractured; the earth itself revolves unsteadily on its axis.

The broken, interrupted paths of our lives probably have disturbed our very nature. No one knows what measures will be introduced during the day, or what standard will be applied at night.

At Goli Otok our imprisoned human energies are squeezed out like lemon juice, sqeezed to the very last.

They will do anything to break a man's spirit and turn him into a reptile.

In Isolation the cell for the Goli Otok political prisoners is already full of victims convicted under the new espionage law. Any power, even the strongest, suspects that under its wing—in its very bosom—lurk alien eyes and ears that see and hear everything. It is only because of carelessness that these ears and the eyes are discovered.

Over there in the first plank bed is the Serb Radé who took refuge in the Soviet Union after the Cominform Resolution. He is tall, lean, clever-eyed, and he speaks Serbian with a Russian accent. He did not live in Moscow nor did he work on the radio station staff where he could broadcast the truth about the YCP-CPSU(b) conflict. Instead, since he was suspected of being a Yugoslav agent, he was sent to Kamchatka. While there he was treated as a spy. At first unable to understand such treatment, he said to the examining magistrate: "I am a Communist. I am indignant with the treacherous YCP leaders. I am of the opinion that Tito, Kardelj, Djilas, Ranković, Tempo, and the like are agents of imperialism. They were recruited and trained by foreign intelligence services, by American intelligence and by other foreign espionage centers, in order to split the Communist and workers' movements. It is this hostile attitude toward me that I find surprising."

"Comrade, it's not my fault; you are under suspicion."

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"How can I prove my innocence?"

"Time will prove it."

The inquiry lasted nearly a year. Finally he was found to be innocent and his rank as an officer in the national liberation struggle was reinstated. He also held the rank of major in the Soviet Army.

He had no doubts that the improvement in relations between Moscow and Belgrade was genuine, and thus, like many others who were similarly misled, he was arrested and taken to Belgrade as soon as he crossed the border. There he was tried and sentenced to eighteen years in prison for spying for the Soviet Union.

His wife was from the town of Ohrid; his son was doing his military service. Suddenly his face betrays uncertainty and anxiety. He has received a letter from his wife whose wording gives him to understand that his son has been shot dead on the Albanian border.

"It is pretty clear who killed him," Radé says. "He was killed instead of me. The Albanians are more humane, even snakes are more humane: they don't try to take the life of an innocent being. My son had nothing to do with politics; he was not involved in politics at all."

He speaks and we listen quietly, trying to find an explanation for the calamity that has befallen him. God knows! Perhps something similar awaits all of us as well. Who knows? We have grown-up children; to avenge our sufferings they join various organizations dedicated to the overthrow of the shameful LYC leadership.

Over there, by Radé's side is Milutin, called Mitcha, from Vojvodina, who is accused of maintaining contacts with the terrorist Ustasha organization in the West. When the resolution was issued he was among the first to voice his approval. Suspecting that he would soon be arrested he fled to Czechoslovakia. Milutin had no contacts with the Ustashas. He was a fighter in the Vojvodina shock-brigades during the war and afterward championed the renovation of the country. In Czechoslovakia he wrote articles denouncing the double-faced game played by Bakarić, Kardelj, and

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Djilas. Here's what he said about Djilas over the radio: "How come that in the course of several months only an intellectual like Djilas changes his line from 'My meetings with Stalin' to 'Stalin goes round in circles'." He denounced Kardelj in particular, arguing that his Jesuitical attitude toward the party led to the greatest split in its ranks; Kardelj misled Tito from the heights down to the precipice.

Certain that the improvement in relations between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia was genuine, Milutin came back legally. He was arrested as soon as he crossed the border and extensively tortured. His odyssey is a tragic one. As a result of his privations he developed angina pectoris. And now he is suffocating, turning blue, gasping for breath. He rushes to the window bars to inhale air that stinks of rotten bones. He has no one on earth to show interest in his fate. His mother and his father have died. He is single. In his life he has had but one love, an eternal, unbreakable, invulnerable love, a love for the Soviet Union and Vojvodina. Though in poor health he believes that he will get out of this prison. He knows foreign languages and because of his knowledge of German, Czech, and Hungarian he was accused of spying for Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Unlike the others in the cell, who for the most part keep silent, he tries to start a conversation. But he is not really successful. Each one guards himself against the others; each one is suspected of being an UDBA agent, a stool pigeon.

Nikita, who had previous tried to mislead me, made an attempt to establish a contact with Radé. But Radé didn't respond; he was lost in thought about the fate of his son.

Two new political prisoners arrived—swarthy-faced, with frightened black eyes that were wary of us. After the Cominform Resolution they crossed into Bulgaria at Dragoman. For a long time they had been on the editorial staff of *Napred* ("Forward"), working among other Yugoslav exiles who had escaped to the People's Republic of Bulgaria for similar reasons. They were received with understanding by the authorities. But as soon as these exiles learned about

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the improvement of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations, they decided to return to their native land. They went to the Yugoslav legation in Sofia and repented. Yugoslav diplomats received them and promised that Yugoslavia would do nothing to prevent their return. The exiles believed what they were told. But as soon as they crossed the border at Dimitrovgrad they were arrested and taken under escort to Niš. Their joint inquest took place under the most difficult conditions, for they were encouraged to incriminate each other. They began to reveal nonexisting organizational networks because they could no longer endure the beatings to which they were subjected. They were charged with establishing espionage contacts and serving the Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior. They spoke extensively about other exiles who wanted to return but who had always expressed doubts and hesitation. One of these exiles had told them: "Say anything about me, even the worst, but I don't trust them. UDBA is UDBA, brother. Even when smiling it thinks bad thoughts, while singing it is doing something evil. It strangles you with songs and throws you out into the street like junk."

They had both married in Bulgaria but didn't tell their wives about their decision to return home. Their wives learned about their fates only when they were brought to trial in Yugoslavia on charges of "espionage."

Otherwise, they look like people who have worked in underground organizations. Their faces bear the imprint of underground life. Their foreheads are tense, their faces are drawn, and at each creak of the door they are on the alert.

Here, as I am writing to you, my dear, the examining magistrate of our cell has come in. We all stand up; for this is how we are required to greet authority. The examining magistrate is scrutinizing us, staring at each of us. Then, laughing maliciously, he says:

"A wonderful group. You have the chance to tell each other everything. Here you can speak freely, you are not under the law. Look at each other. It's only over the radio that you have heard about each other, though the names were different. But your voices could not find an alias;

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they sounded as they are. Well, some voices have become hoarse, others rough. But it is not our fault; complain to the environment you have chosen for yourself. There is a poet among you. Be careful. He notices everything. He is unhappy because he hasn't got paper and pencil. I censor his letters. It is hard to get into the swing of his style. Allegories and half-expressed ideas abound in what he writes. And, if I don't understand the meaning I am not supposed to return it but rather to tear it to pieces. That's what I do. This letter will probably share the same fate."

He left as suddenly as he had come in. All of us felt uneasy. We were all wondering what the purpose of his visit might have been. Perhaps he was telling us that new prisoners would soon arrive. Usually, when new prisoners were coming the warden and the examining magistrate told us about it in a roundabout way. Similarly, they let us know that prisoners in Isolation were to be released.

Prisons make a man mistrustful and tense, in short, unrecognizable even by himself. He often cannot recognize his own voice and wonders if it isn't the voice of someone else, someone willing to provoke him and stab him in the back.

The dead silence was broken by Radé. "Both here and over there one is a villain. In the Soviet Union one is treated as Tito's spy, here, in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, one is treated as Stalin's spy."

At these words Nikita interjected, "I understand your situation, brother. The first ones intern you as a spy for the others, while the others hold you as a spy for the first ones. In both cases you are treated as a spy. But what shall I say? I have fought for the flag of the Soviet Union; I have taken the field in the name of Stalin. I gave my all for Tito and then, all of a sudden, I was cruelly imprisoned. I didn't emigrate anywhere. I have never said anything that meant the opposite of what I was supposed to say; I have never uttered slanderous fictions simply because I didn't believe that such things had occurred. To say that UDBA is the bloodiest authority, that men were hanged from poles for being on the side of the Soviet Union—that's impossible

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for me. Those who emigrated made similar accusations against the UDBA. But they were not true."

One of the two Serbs interrupted, "What are you charged with?"

Nikita answered, "It's a long story, like *The Forsythe Saga*."

The other Montenegrin broke into the conversation:

"What Forsythe saga? Over there, a Georgian stirred up the whole state, the whole world; and here, an Austro-Hungarian officer is stirring up the whole country. He aspires to become the leader of the "specific road to socialism" movement throughout the world. A road that is neither specific nor socialist."

Suddenly it was silent. Silence pressed like a sinister cloud. Any moment lightning would flash and the unknown would thunder forth.

Actually, the ears hidden in the walls of Isolation soon reported to the Administration about the talk just held. We didn't know one another and when they confronted us we denied having heard any such conversation. Naturally Nikita, whose legs were rasped, was left behind and he told them what they wanted to hear. After this Nikita was returned to the Wire and Radé, together with the other two Serbs, was forced to undergo an especially terrible forced-chasing.

I am stopping here; I am not certain this letter will reach you.

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LETTER THIRTY-THREE

My dear,

For several days now prisoners who have been at Goli Otok before have been coming back, causing a commotion among the political prisoners, many of whom saw in this the end of their own hopes. The returned prisoners had revealed some things about Goli Otok to their relatives, swearing them to secrecy. And thus, little by little, the politically-minded citizens of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia have begun to learn the truth about Goli Otok.

There were two newcomers from Veles, one of whom had gone crazy on the way back to Goli Otok. When he was brought to the Wire, he was bristling with fear, afraid he would reencounter the Goli Otok of the period immediately after the Cominform Resolution. Unable to believe his eyes, he exclaimed: "Has really Goli Otok changed so much? Probably it isn't Goli Otok at all. They've probably taken me to another island. It's impossible. But here are the premises. Here is the sentry box. Here is the Administration building."

He wasn't the only one in such a situation.

They were about to end forced-chasing at Goli Otok. Only convicts from Isolation were to be force-chased, and to prevent the convicts from the Wire from seeing this shameful sight, the Administration sent those who were to be force-chased into Isolation from where they were taken to a rocky place with a 300 to 500 square meters strip covered with sharp stones. You could yell at the top of your lungs and no one would hear you. God is high up in heaven, the king is far away, and the earth beneath you is hard. Forced-chasing there was pitiless. No one cared about anyone. If there was an order it would be fulfilled even if the tortured man fell dead. The purpose was to complete the inquiry and extort information about the returned prisoner's connections, to make him confess why he had lied that people at Goli Otok were tortured; to make him confess why he had told people on the outside that prisoners at

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Goli Otok were fed water and brown bread; to make him confess that what he had been saying was not true, that it was said under the influence of the enemy propaganda that was trying to wreck the unity of Yugoslavia's self-managing community. God save him who fell under such an indictment for a second time.

Beside me is a man from Kicevo, Macedonia. He was sent here the first time because he had said: "It was only natural that the mess reigning in Yugoslavia end like that. The Soviet Union is right; Tito and the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist party are guilty of betrayal." A soldier, he had said these words in front of the Niš garrison. Instead of jeering at him, both the soldiers and their officers had bowed their heads and kept silent. He went on: "You know it yourself, having seen how the top brass live. You eat what their dogs and pigs are fed on."

Some thought it was a rebellion; others said, this man is right. Keeping silent won't remedy matters. What this man says is correct.

That same night an official arrived from Belgrade and launched an inquiry complete with beating. Covered with blood, the soldier was revived with dirty water. He was sentenced and now he is by my side. He had heard that the French Communist party had protested against the arrest and subsequent torture of those who had returned to Yugoslavia. Other Communist parties took up the French party's protest. The Cominformists who had been released from Goli Otok in 1956 were now seized by an indescribable alarm: in the streets and even at home they felt like caged animals. They were afraid of meeting people lest they be accused of some conspiracy. Articles blaming the Yugoslav government for the insincerity with which it responded to the normalization of relations with the other Communist and workers' parties were published in many newspapers and magazines.

Peking's indignation, expressed in a number of articles in *People's Daily*, was especially loud. Yugoslavia was accused of propagating a most dangerous revisionism in an

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attempt to mislead other Communist and workers' parties. None of the other attacks on the Yugoslav leadership could match Peking's rhetoric, and Belgrade answered in kind. Meanwhile, the LYC leaders used the mass media to strike back against all attacks, wherever they came from.

Anyone in authority, or even an individual officer, could at any time start proceedings against those who had been at Goli Otok simply by saying that he had overheard them passing slanderous stories on to others. Life was very tense in Yugoslavia. It was hard to tell who was a Cominformist, to tell who'd come from Goli Otok and who would be sent there. Every citizen found himself obsessed with horrifying premonitions. And every day someone returned to Goli Otok.

Yugoslavia—the leadership in particular—seemed blind and deaf; they saw and heard no protests nor did they rally to the aid of those who suffered. They could rationalize such behavior because, in their opinion, those who had been at Goli Otok were worse than the most dangerous class enemies. Indeed, the Cominformists at Goli Otok were considered to be the most outspoken of all class enemies.

At that time Goli Otok was divided in two: on the one hand there was the Wire and the workshops and, on the other, Isolation with the quarry, the cart-wagons, and the silos. At the Goli Otok Wire forced chasing was stopped, but at Isolation, its frequency was in fact increased to an unbelievable level in an attempt to complete the inquest of those who had been returned. Here, opposite our cell, a man from the Pančevo district has just come back from this savage torture; his fingers are bleeding and shreds of skin hang from him. When the Cominform Resolution was issued he said that it was correct in every respect and that in order to keep Marxist theory intact and unspoiled, the Communist party of Yugoslavia, in particular its leadership, must resign and openly admit its faults. He was one of the Partisan commanders who had fought in the Partisan offensives, particularly in the liberation of Belgrade. When he was told that Tito insisted that Yugoslav borders be defended

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by all available means, he replied: "What ditches do you dig against the Soviet Union? It's nonsense. We are a handful of ashes compared to the Soviet army."

He was immediately arrested, taken to Glavnjaca, the sinister dungeon so well known to many revolutionaries and heroes who had left their health, their bones, their very lives in the maze of that ominous jail. After the interrogation and the completion of the inquest, he was sentenced to five years and sent to Goli Otok again.

Now they want him to confess what he has never even considered: How and with whom did he intend to make an attempt on the life of the supreme commander? Who are his accomplices? How large is the organization? Moreover, they want him to say that this organization included prominent officials who have been hiding in different jobs ever since the Cominform Resolution was issued. They even want him to say that already in the period of the national liberation struggle these people were enemies whom no one was able to detect. In short, they want him to indict himself by saying that he knew about their activities, concealed them, and then recommended them as men who supported the authorities, as men who were fighting for a new Yugoslavia.

Overcome with wrath and sorrow, this man told us: "Comrades, if I don't come back one night, you'll know something has happened to me. The pain is hard to bear. My reason still resists. Otherwise, as you see, though I'm still alive, my body is decaying."

There is no loudspeaker in Isolation. The people interned there are deprived of everything. It was a mistake on the part of the Administration to send political prisoners from the Wire to Isolation every now and then. Through them, we learned the news that had been heard over the radio station at the Wire.

On Fridays press conferences were held in Belgrade; a senior Foreign Ministry official answered the questions of the foreign correspondents and explained Yugoslavia's foreign and domestic policies. Broadcasts of these press con-

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ferences were heard in the Wire and we heard about them in Isolation; thus did we learn what was going on throughout the world.

There was a man named Petrović who had been accused of espionage, tried, sentenced, and brought to Goli Otok. Tall, swarthy, fat, with large heavy hands, he was always so serious that when you saw him for the first time you got the impression that he was inaccessible. He had not uttered a word during the inquest and in court he denied all the accusations against him, showing courage and winning the respect of the judges. Nevertheless, there was an order that he be sentenced for having said, "It isn't true that in Bulgaria there are starving people wearing patched clothes."

He was arrested after the Resolution; the indictment stated that he was the mouthpiece of a foreign agency that sought to slander Yugoslav reality. Petrović stood firm at Goli Otok as well. He pretended to be indifferent to politics, he didn't take sides, he wasn't rude to the other convicts.

One of those assigned to find out what kind of person Petrović was attempted to provoke him. "You are right in saying that everything is in rags and tatters at home. We starve but should not say so. We, as patriots, are supposed to say that our neighbors lack what we in fact lack, to say that what is in fact bad here is bad with them."

Man experiences moments of unexpected softening and gradually begins to raise the curtain of his own soul. He pricks up his ears, focuses his eyes, forgets where he is, and becomes susceptible to various suggestions. But he is mistaken to think that no one watches him and that his talk is private. He forgets that the person he speaks with absorbs everything, memorizes everything, and distorts everything, reinforcing and rearranging it. And as a result, after this conversation—though he had said nothing—he was forced to undergo a terrible punishment on the very eve of the large-scale release from Goli Otok. Almost all day long he was subjected to forced-chasing. When he finally felt that his strength was giving way he stopped, threw away

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the box, and asked to be taken to the examining magistrate where he began to reveal the existence of a spy network.

"Oh, Petrović, we had thought to let you out because you were on the list but we had doubts about you even though you kept repeating one and the same thing despite all the measures. This last forced-chasing proved that we were right to have such doubts. I don't know whether you will be set free. It's in your interest to ask for another inquest."

Petrović was startled. "I don't understand you. What inquest are you talking about? I haven't said anything. My lips could not utter such a thing."

After saying that he stopped.

Nevertheless, Petrović's name was on the list.

My dear, unknown nether worlds are hidden away on this island. No other prison knows such human tragedies. To the very last moment you don't know what may befall you.

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LETTER THIRTY-FOUR

Dear File,

The face of Goli Otok changed rapidly after November 29, 1956. Political and criminal prisoners poured in from various jails. The political prisoners included Ustashas, Chetniks, and followers of Djilas. It was reasoned that the other political prisoners, the Informburo supporters at Goli Otok, should help in reeducating new arrivals and in particular the common criminals.

The indignation was great. The political prisoners declared: "We are here, we were brought to trial because of our politics, because of our beliefs, because we do not agree with the regime in Tito's Yugoslavia. We have nothing in common with the Chetniks of Draža Mihajlović or with the Ustashas of Ante Pavelić; we have nothing to do with the CIA and other intelligence service agents led by Milovan Djilas.

The newcomers won the upper hand over the prisoners. They opposed eavesdropping and all informing on others to the administration. They hated the regime no less than we, but their hatred essentially was nationalistic. The Ustashas wanted the restoration of the ISC (Independent State of Croatia) and found common ground with all those convicts who had nationalistic views.

The thrust of our hatred was international. We hated the schismatics of the international Communist movement and unmasked those who betrayed it. We fought to return Yugoslavia to the camp of the socialist community. Tito and his collaborators, the leaders of LYC, were the spoke that kept our wheel from turning.

But time was not working to our advantage.

Khrushchev shattered people's hopes. The Partisan struggle was squashed underfoot; the ideals of socialism were shattered, defeated, routed, annihilated. Yugoslavia walked its "specific road" with beggar's rag-bag in hand and knocked at the doors of the West.

A migration from the villages and towns was taking place. The villages became deserted, the towns thinly

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populated. A joyless train of people went abroad to make a living, leaving unemployment in its wake.

Strikes occurred ever more frequently but were described as "work stoppages," not as a revolt against unemployment. Student riots were suppressed in blood, and Veljiko Vlahovic, foaming with rage, used deceitful means to force the students to return to the universities.

Yugoslavia found itself between two fires. On one side, all the ideals of the Yugoslav peoples, ideals epitomized by the national liberation struggle, burned brightly. On the other side were greed, corruption, prostitution, and overt thefts from the socialized state property. Millionaires grew up over night. At one meeting a Croatian party leader boasted that Yugoslavia already had multimillionaires, men who owned private ships and enormous hotels. They even had private airplanes in which they could fly in the Yugoslav self-managed sky whenever they pleased.

The slogan "The factories to the workers; the land to the peasants" has vanished like a bubble. The disparity in wages stands at one to one hundred. The workers produce commodities but die of hunger. The peasants reap gold but do not see even a crust of black bread. The wooden plow and sickle are still the sovereigns of the fields of Yugoslavia.

Hard times set in at Goli Otok too. Many asked themselves why we were still there. But theirs were voices crying in the wilderness. Time's caravan dragged along slowly, as if passing through a needle's eye, as if crossing a vast desert plain.

In order to brighten the oppressive atmosphere in Yugoslavia, the traitor Tito from time to time met world leaders on the island of Brioni. He met the leaders of the Labour party, of the social democrats, of the West Germans. The only one he didn't meet was Franco, but perhaps he would have met him too if Franco hadn't died. Thus Tito would have been able to unite all the Soviet Union's enemies to fight against Moscow.

As the ties between China and Albania grew closer, they unleashed all sorts of dirty tricks against the great land of

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the Soviets, against all those Communist and workers' parties which defended justice, the justice of the socialist community headed by the Soviet Union. China's attacks on the Soviet state were malicious. But still more malicious were Albania's attacks against the country which had brought liberty to Albania. And the more the Communist and workers' parties united around the CPSU, the more China and Albania united in their slanders against the always steadfast Soviet Union.

At that time in the prison of Goli Otok the opinion was established and somehow prevailed that we should not consider the common criminals to be enemies. The political prisoners sentenced because of nationalistic beliefs should not be pushed aside. It was decided to unite all that could be united in a force to oppose both the measures of the Administration and the arbitrariness of the federal authorities.

Little by little, by various names and in various ways we began to unite the common criminals and to explain what led them to their present predicament; we pointed out the evil that inhabited the various seats of power. In short we explained why Yugoslavia finds itself at this turning point. At the time of the Partisan struggle Yugoslavia had served as an example but now that same Yugoslavia has embarked on its self-managing road. Following a makeshift, confusing, absurd theory, it has smashed to pieces the cheerful present that we built up with our own hands. It has thrown away the bright ideal into the mud, squandered it in wastefulness, in lavishness, in the mess called Tito's self-management. The actions of the traitors were clear to us. When they decided to raise their voice against the leadership of the CPSU, Tito and his colleagues betrayed all honest people; they struck the meanest possible blow in the proletariat's back. In effect, they knifed communism itself in the back.

At Goli Otok we saw what Yugoslavia had come to as a result of this policy. We saw it and looked for ways to die like honest men in battle. Our indignation was particularly great when we learned that when meeting Eden in Brioni, Tito made him coffee in a Turkish coffee pot that cost

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three and a half million dollars. At Goli Otok we were given a piece of meat only once a month; almost every day our ration was in the form of tea or coffee and mold-covered bread.

In jail the worst days are those at the beginning and those at the end. At the beginning they simply do not pass; they seem not to move at all. Every line drawn on the cell wall marks a day passed in the unknown. Then the days become gray, the day's rosary gets longer, the beads multiply. Toward the end of the term the days cheer the faces lined with suffering, a hidden hope brightening their sunken eyes. But the grayness around expands, then contracts, enveloping thoughts, emotions and the spirit which beat against the walls like a caged bird. Rarely do we receive parcels. We lack money but even if we had it there is nothing to buy at the Wire. The dinar is constantly being devalued—a consequence and a reflection of the devaluation of ideas. Yugoslavia accumulated a huge debt and every village was forced to sell its oxen and cattle dirt cheap. In some villages the new tax collectors themselves drove away herds of livestock for unpaid taxes.

We, the sentenced, received money from home. But what could we buy with it? Nothing.... Everything was arranged to prevent any contact with the outside world. As a result, money was not the key that would unlock these heaviest of gates; money could neither shatter illusions nor create new ones.

In the days of the Ottoman Empire, Stephen Gelah wrote in his *Diary of a Journey to the Osman Porte in Istanbul*:

> In 1577... Hans Flataher told me that in the jails of the sultan and Mehmed Pasha they sold wine and all the other things a man needs. He who had money could eat and drink, enjoy himself and do what he liked. In the sultan's jail there were sometimes seven hundred to one thousand or more prisoners; they had their own barbers and other services, which they distributed among themselves....
>
> The prisoners of Admiral Uluc Ali practiced various trades. He didn't pay them, but gave them only meals, drinks, and clothes. Nevertheless,

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> they led a good life. Many of them ran away, some of them doing so when they received money and could thus settle the matter with the warden, who then helped them escape. The prisoners had a big building at the arsenal, their own church where a priest sometimes said mass.

Gramsci, the great revolutionary and Communist whom Mussolini imprisoned in the most dreadful jails, could write and buy wine, food, and everything. Gramsci was considered a political prisoner, not a common criminal, and at the time of Mussolini's bloody fascist dictatorship at that.

Tito's biographers, when describing the "bomb trial" at which Tito was sentenced to three to five years, describe his decision to go on a strike in order to force the authorities to cancel the measures against him. It is unclear how he managed to send a letter to the Comintern about his situation, saying that he had not eaten for several days, and his strength was failing. He weakened and appealed to the Comintern for help, asking it to raise a voice for his release.

What an awful reality! The man who has seized power tortures his ideological opponents in the most inhuman way. The bloodiest sultan blanches in comparison with this Yugoslav hangman. His smile is grim and malicious. He intercedes with Willy Brandt about the Yugoslav workers (who are doing the dirtiest jobs in West Germany), trying to find a way to have them stay there longer because he cannot offer them jobs in Yugoslavia, cannot guarantee them bread and a peaceful life. And he does all this only in order to squeeze more hard currency from them. He needs that currency for his personal expenses, which sometimes exceed the budget of a whole republic. But he forgets that when he imports hard currency he imports also foreign ideologies. The rage of the masses increases. Returning from abroad, the workers find that their deserted homes are ruined, plundered—that the land has been devastated. Walking across the threshold of their own houses, they

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confront strangers, brought there from various republics. Consequently, they prefer to return to their foreign jobs, even though they have to clean the toilets of Europe, because they prefer this to watching the disgrace of socialist, nonaligned self-managing Yugoslavia. How shameful it is—forced to be the servant of those same fascists against whom you fought on the battlefield!

Enough for now. I feels pains in my right hand and the right side of my face—pains from the beating they gave me. Though the pain is terrible, a cure can be found; it's the humiliation that is worst of all and there is no cure for it. My heart is being crucified by such humiliations from those in authority.

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LETTER THIRTY-FIVE

My dear,

A mysterious disease is undermining my health. I am pining away without understanding why. The men I know here advise me to ask for a medical examination in the hospital in Rijeka. I am not strong enough to travel, and am especially prone to seasickness. But if I have to, I shall do that too in order to reassure myself. If the disease lasts too long, then I will not travel at all. They hint that the continuous bleeding may indicate cancer. Yet though I am gravely ill, I am in high spirits. Two things help me to be cheerful: composing "The Wheel of History" in my imagination every day, and the patience with which you wait for me. Patience, in my opinion, is the most potent force and the greatest healer at Goli Otok. Waiting is the bridge between reality and dreams. No one will blame the authorities if they continue to hold me in Isolation without reason.

In Isolation we also work. The work is not easier than what they are doing in the Wire; on the contrary, it is harder. There is nothing for us to do in the carpentry workshop. It is true that we are not experts, but one can learn the craft; nobody was born with a given skill. But we weren't sent to Goli Otok to learn a trade. We have been sent here because of our beliefs. According to the Administration our beliefs are terribly dangerous. And here they are right, for our beliefs can open a man's eyes and make him face reality as it is.

I ask you to do me a favor, because I am not allowed to do it myself. Would you ask, on your behalf, for my transfer to the prison in Idrizovo, near Skopje, where I can serve my sentence to the last day. Otherwise, because of the rapid development of my disease, my term will be interrupted and I will inflict harm upon the state for those two or three years I fail to serve. When a sentence is not served to its conclusion, one lies quite uncomfortably in the grave.

If I were a common criminal I don't doubt that the examining magistrate's "humane feeling" would move him to propose my transfer, if not my release.

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I know the nature of my disease. Two opposed diseases have begun a struggle and my body is their battlefield. Will my body be able to bear it? That is the question!

If it depends on the will, then mine is the strongest; if it depends on desire, I doubt anyone can match mine.

I knew a man in Skopje who was one of the best two-hundred meter runners. He fell ill and it was discovered that he had cancer. He wanted to live and did everything possible, even going to Stockholm. He came back elated and wrote a book, *I Defeated Cancer*. When letters began coming from abroad, he died of cancer. I believe he was convinced that his illness was incurable. But a man who tries to conquer nature, to alter nature's laws, to change the substance of life—such a man cannot accept the thought that "a certain disease"—cancer—cannot be defeated.

Man is able to do anything and he will in the end triumph over everything. The only thing he cannot defeat is death, the death that lives within him, that has walked beside him since his birth. But he tries to overcome death, and if it remains impossible today it may well become possible tomorrow. For what is the purpose of science? It is to help make the human race immortal.

The problem of death has long fascinated me. You know, my dear, that after my first arrest I wrote the book *Over the Abyss in Flames*, in which I deal with life and death. Will death die with life's disappearance? Will human civilization vanish with the last inhabitant of the planet? Will matter again exist only as motion and space? If that is so, if we are moving slowly or quickly toward our sunset, toward the eternal dying, then what is the use of our whole human civilization? And will the various forms of life appear again on some other, as yet unknown planet, there repeating the course of events on earth until in the end there is an absolute and final sunset? How long is this eternal play, this cruel game played out with thinking creatures to last? Lastingness, the ability to preserve itself over time, is what gives man's life its meaning. What exists today did not exist yesterday. Today is wiser than yesterday and it tries to

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transfer its wisdom to tomorrow, which is as yet only a potential, an idea in a man's mind. We shall truly understand tomorrow only when it becomes today. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow are the constants of human life. Without yesterday there can be no today, without today there can be no tomorrow. Without tomorrow today is dead, without today yesterday can live no longer. Future, present, and past—those are the engines of human culture. The present is strong because its roots extend deep into the past. And the past lives on in the present because the present is moving toward the future, toward the light, toward horizons that have neither beginning nor end.

Each summit that is conquered is no longer a summit. Human thought moves toward the summits; there is no summit from which other, higher summits cannot be seen. Mountains are beautiful because of their summits, mere deserts without them. Every human life has a summit. Whether it will be reached or not depends on man, on the society in which he lives, on the time in which he lives.

At Goli Otok each prisoner represents a separate destiny. but those destinies have a common summit. That summit is both attainable and unattainable. In one sense it is attained when one is set free; at the same time it is unattainable because such an achievement is beyond human power. In any case, both personal factors and the things they share in common move the men at Goli Otok toward the realization of man's sacred aim, an aim still cherished somewhere in the soul.

We went to Grgur. Only those sentenced to Isolation are sent to Grgur. Otherwise, travel to that island is strictly forbidden, as if the most precious jewels are buried there. The authorities do not allow people even a glance; they do everything to envelop it in mystery.

We were sent there to dig potatoes. It was said the island's soil was ideal, that even uncooked the potatoes from Grgur tasted boiled or baked. Of course, we are not given potatoes at Goli Otok and up till now we have not tried these magic underground apples.

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They sent the people from Isolation because they knew that, having been intimidated by torture, we will keep our mouths shut and not say what we have seen. Indeed, there is nothing on earth that can make us say what we have seen.

A cold wind beat across our faces, flailing us like an icy whip. Mist clouded our vision and a subterranean roar deafened our ears. Our cheeks were inflamed with invisible ice. We felt that our fingers were getting thicker, turning blue and numb. If someone had told us that we would be released from the jail if only we picked a needle off the ground, we wouldn't have been able to do it.

The commander of Isolation didn't care what we saw. He walked along the island with the collar of his greatcoat turned up. It seemed he was surveying where the limits of the island began and ended.

One of the prisoners who was at Goli Otok for a second time whispered to me: "Look at this pit! Pretend that you don't see anything, that you are looking for potatoes, that the potatoes have led you to this pit. I have said nothing to you. You have heard nothing from me and nobody has said a word to you about the pit."

I shuddered. My hair stood on end. An icy silence overwhelmed me. I felt insects crawl down my back and fall asleep, as if scorpions were sucking my blood. What did I see? Skulls, an entire pit of skulls, of broken hands and legs. Questions flooded my startled mind: "Whose are they? Why have they been dumped here? Who has thrown them into this pit? Was there a war here? What terrible cruelty has done this? But who can say? What voice would speak up to tell the story of these wretches?"

Oh, time! At least you say it, you know it, you have seen it. And that would not be the case without you. This pit was born and lives under your wing.

Suddenly the air in the pit became heavier. The darkness grew colder and thicker. The silence was cut by a scream that seemed to emerge from beneath the earth, as if it were looking for a way out. In that voice I could hear the unnumbered voices of those who had been murdered with clubs, murdered because they had disobeyed today's authorities:

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"Listen to me, you, who peer into the darkness and want to know who we are, where we have come from, and how we happen to be in this pit; listen to our awful fate! We have been buried alive, the blood still runs in our veins, groans still fill our chests, we still hear truncheons and clubs raining down upon us. No one can help us. We are in the most dreadful cave of this hell on earth. Remember this and tell future generations, contemporaries, and all the people who want to know the truth about Goli Otok. We were killed at Goli Otok and hastily brought to Grgur while night spread its blackest cloak over the earth. Covered with blood, we were thrown into this pit. No one can discover us. At night, this pit is locked with three hundred keys; no gravediggers keep watch over this tomb. The moon pours its silver blood over this ossuary and the widowed stars shed their sorrowful tears. Every dead person has a star to weep for him. It is late at night; the inferno pours forth ghostly fires and the burning earth spreads an infection that no one can escape. Do you hear how they thunder, how they moan, how they curse and call for a terrible last vengeance, for a bloody sacrificial spell? Avenge us! Preserve our memory! Don't let it be overgrown by weeds and oblivion! Smash the stony silence! Every silence is awful but the silence that reigns here is worse than the awful silence that follows after death. We have been killed because we wanted to live, because we unmasked the murderer who has killed us, who has made our children slaves to serve him as long as the world survives. He killed us and then he placed our small children on his knee, his blood-stained knee. And when they turned and asked him about us, he wiped their tears away and said, "Dear children, don't be afraid; from now on I shall be your father." Such a villain robs this land of everything."

And the voice sank back into the earth. Vanished. Disappeared. After that the skeletons began to stir and then stood up. Their eyes shone like coals in hell. Their tongues hissed like vipers as they marched forward looking for their murderers.

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The heavens were heavy. It was cold. A stormy wind lashed us and the stones themselves seemed to be breaking apart. I felt a lump in my throat. No, this is not a dream! This is the real face of Tito's self-managing Yugoslavia. I have seen it in the pit.

The voice of the commander roared from behind: "Stop lingering! Let's go. We must go back."

His face was grim; it was as if he had also heard the voices of the murdered. That pit had been filled with half-dead people when they murdered the political prisoners who had built Tito's residence on Brioni. Who knows what other terrible sights are hidden in the bowels of the earth? Will human mind be able to grasp the horror of the twentieth century?

In "The Wheel of History" I will try to give an account of what I have seen.

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LETTER THIRTY-SIX

My dearest,

It is autumn. The silence sings and bewitches. The proud waves play on the stony shore like unruly children.

It is autumn. Time's merciless hand removes the purple mantle from the trees.

It is autumn. It is gloomy and dim, but deep in my soul—I don't know why—I feel that some mysterious celebration is taking place.

Maybe the sacred past is waking up. Noiseless steps sound in the unfathomable silence. Memories, sacred Partisan memories, are coming to warm my hands, shriveled with cold, on the fire of love.

It is strange.... With my own eyes, here under autumn's mantle, I see the advent of our family's spring. Whispers and tears and sighs—everything is woven together under the wonderful wing of happiness—as if we have never been parted.

My dear File, absence makes love more sacred. Crooked are the paths of life: the heights are tiresome, the plains exhauxting; our periods of rest come in between them. All knowledge consists of finding the indefinite in the definite, the eternal in the transient. Separation is inherent in love from the start; and in the face of separation love grows warmer and warmer....

My health is very poor. I am trying to get transferred from Goli Otok to Idrizovo. Concerning the diagnosis of my disease, the authorities of PR Macedonia should appeal officially to the administration of the punishment reformatory at Rab Island, or to the Secretariat of the F.P.R.Y.

I feel wonderfully thrilled when reading your beautiful sentences, as if we had never parted, as if we had never been away from each other. Whether some magic feeling or the fire of the holy fireplace warms up my bosom—I do not know. But I know that all my soul thrills when I take up your dear letters. Indeed, what a strange short story

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man's life makes. Every touch wakes some sleeping memory. Like small birds that flew off in childhood, no one knows where, and that have now come back, flapping their cheerful wings and caressing my homesick heart with their songs. They say that reason is the measure of human values. But, watching the transiency of all things, I would say that fantasy is the spiritual factor that can ennoble man's restless path. Think what a poor creature man would be if deprived of fantasy. Life would be a monotonous desert and man—a weed disturbing the void between heaven and earth. . . . Perhaps at this very moment I sense most fully the beneficial power of fantasy, glad that I can share in your hopes, even though I do so mutely.

Yesterday I handed in my plea to the People's Assembly. To tell you the truth, I hardly believe anything can come of it. But I would like to be mistaken. We shall see. . . .

I lack words to express the joy that bursts from my heart when I read your wonderful lines. In this, our distressing atomic century, we should face everything calmly and cooly, even letters that could be exceptionally significant. I hope that my reply to your telegram has calmed you down. Distance, uncertainty, my disease—all work to create a nervous psychosis when we view them through a prism of fear. But I shall write about all this later on.

Concerning your noble suggestion that I write a clemency appeal, I must ask you to recognize an important fact. I think your anxiety about my disease has led you to forget that all who have been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment have the right to write a clemency appeal only once a year.

Strange is nature's game! Monotonous autumn still murmurs during the spring, and youthful spring sends up shoots in the autumn. The play will last forever; only the acts change on the stage. Some people are born to joylessness and this is their lot from early childhood to late old age. Some are born to feel the thrills of the starry skies, others to make May sunrises ring, still others to mourn the lot of those who live under the wing of loneliness.

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Strange is nature's game! And in this game some, like actors, start to shine in the mirror of life, while others are merely supernumerary actors. One generation replaces another. The years' white frost conquers a head of black hair, and wrinkles foretell the day when old age will kindle its quiet candles. Ceaselessly the train of progress tames the stubborn. People are traveling, the world is traveling, matter itself is traveling. Some get off, others get on. And in that ceaseless procession each birth and each death creates a bright sparkling path to shed light across the centuries. Mothers would like to give beauty and innocence to their daughters; fathers would like to give pride and determination to their sons.

Here in the dawn of spring on the shores of the majestic Adriatic Sea, these meditations liven my soul. My paternal feeling is drunk with joy. I am happy our daughter is making such wonderful progress. If music did not exist, it would have to be invented to celebrate the beauty of the female. I am happy that our son is making such sound progress. If literature did not exist, it would have to be invented to memorialize the courage of our male descendants.

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LETTER THIRTY-SEVEN

My dearest File, happy birthday!

The hands of time mark the beginning of the fourth year of my punishment and cover this crooked path with the shadow of oblivion. On the one hand life reminds us that it is unpleasant to look back to the past, for every memory burns like an open wound, robbing the soul of its peace. But on the other hand memories are the links in the chain of man's existence. Poor is he who has no memories. Even the gloomiest memories warm us with their light; they are dear to us because, in a sense, they supply the illusion that reality is not what it in fact is. And that is why a man's life should be measured not by the calendar but by significant moments that stand out from the oppressive gray of the passing years.

A strange paradox indeed.

If we gather all those significant moments and measure them by the calendar, they would hardly fill a year. But not even this knowledge prevents us from enjoying the transient beauty of man's life. When I return home, I will try to make of every moment a bright memory. I fervently hope that happiness will again cross our threshold, but do not deceive yourself with the hope that I may be home soon.

My dear son Mile,

I have read your touching lines and I do not know whether I can answer you in the same manner. Sometimes words are like changeable luck, as Bergson would have said. You want to grasp the thought, but you feel that when you express it it is no longer what it was; somehow it grew old even before it was born.

You write that you are expecting me. Indeed, that is a splendid hope. But for now, that hope is the only means by which we can overcome the distance.

I know you all feel miserable, you in particular, because you need me most. Never forget that I feel no better than you. Try to realize my situation, because in the prime of

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my artistic strength (my age is the best one for writing and it is passing away in fruitlessness) I am far away not only from you, but from my poetic creations as well. Literary work, like any work, demands perseverance. When it is neglected the author himself suffers. Talent's true face can best be seen in the process of working.

I am glad you are so self-critical toward your own literary works. But let me warn you about one thing: be careful that your self-criticism does not turn into a kind of skepticism. Such skepticism can smother all the imagination in a work. It is dangerous for one's artistic evolution to be too self-critical, particularly at your age. Perhaps you want your works to be appreciated by everybody; that is the wrong idea. There is no such thing as an opinion for literary work that can please everyone. I want you to work at developing your own particular talent until I return. An artistic work is a significant one when its creation is a process marked by both success and failure.

My dear son, I love you and kiss you; I love you forever.

Your father

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LETTER THIRTY-EIGHT

My dearest daughter Sute,

I know you have felt my absence most. You were deprived of all joy as a child. While still a child you had to think for yourself, prepare yourself for life. Sorrow lined your forehead early, and your look became pensive, your face gloomy. Nevertheless, I am convinced that your dear mother and your dear brother fill the gap created by my absence.

When I read the touching lines about your concerts I felt transported into a magical dream.

It is wonderful to present the tender caresses of the great Mendelssohn to an attentive audience. It is wonderful to be a fiery interpreter of his immortal music. But most wonderful of all is to train your own artistic attitude according to the lofty compositions of that musical giant. In so doing you nurture your own innate spark into flame, while ensuring that yours will always wear a most expressive aspect, free of the stiffness of habit.

Artistic values are great because they are ever-lasting, and they are ever-lasting because they are always tested by the creative forces of their time. That is why the great compositions of Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Chopin, Smetana, and so on, are and always will be springs from which proud new generations of artists will spring.

Music, as a separate branch of human activity, has a similar social function to that of literature. In their best achievements both music and literature reflect the complicated ferment of their time, the only difference being that music is expressively universal, whereas literature is given a national characteristic by its language. Music's language is mysterious, but at the same time it is inexpressibly comprehensive. It speaks directly to the heart, awakening sleeping melodies, toppling barriers, building bridges. At times it tames wild storms, at other times it shakes the silence of the dead; sometimes it is a mighty trumpet, sometimes a tender lyre, but always it is sublimely emotional, both in joyful sorrow and in sorrowful joy.

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To master to perfection the magic of music and to add an originality of your own—that is what I want from you, my beautiful daughter.

Your father loves you with all his heart and with all his soul.

Dear mother,

My heart is full of cheerful sorrow, I would like to embrace you, but being so far away, I do it with this mute letter.

I am sorry that in your old age you have to wither away out of grief for your only son. Let your heart be unyielding; Mile, Sute, and File are with you, they replace me.

It is not for the first time that you are without a son, is it? It was you who consoled all unhappy mothers, wasn't it? And now you are the one who needs consolation? You were not crushed by grief for your lost daughters; can despair conquer you so utterly? Don't give up! This short period of time will pass too. I will be with you again. We will all be together and our home will resound with joyous laughter again.

I believe that we shall see each other. I see the time when you will take me in your arms and throw away everything that is ugly and absurd. The fate of all poets, dear mother, is cheerless. Few are they who can boast of happiness. Crooked is the poet's path, quite crooked. It is well that you have hope. Hope for you is the only joy. Hope is the life-saving hand that lifts up our soul and makes it harder than stone. Have patience, more prudent hope; everything will be all right.

Your son loves you and embraces you, wishing that deep faith give wings to your suffering soul.

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LETTER THIRTY-NINE

Dear File,

I am proud, my self-confidence is strengthened, for—as I foresaw—it was not only the Skopje district court but also the office of the Marshal that took this stand on your appeals. When a man is put in prison the men who keep him there under tight control know that when he gets out he will again embark on the path along which he once fought. They have no illusions about this, and thus they are severe, sometimes even savage and pitiless. The measure of humanity in such moments does not have the necessary effect any more.

Once again, so that my mother can understand, that is, understand what the chief of the Marshal's office has written on her appeal, I shall try to translate his letter for her. Although she has lived under Serbian rule for many years, she, being a Bulgarian, has consented to the language of the conqueror with great difficulty. At home and in the streets she has continued to hear and speak Bulgarian, not Serbian. Mother, listen to what they answer from Belgrade:

"In connection with your letter concerning the transfer of convict Tosev Veniamin to another penal reformatory, we inform you that we have considered your request. Upon inquiry, we have found that the convict does not satisfy the terms for removal, and there is no ground for a favorable decision in response to your appeal for his release on probation."

Referring to your letter to the Chairman of the Republic, dear File, this same chief of Tito's Office, one Vucković, writes:

"In reply to your letter we inform you that the Chairman of the Republic cannot receive you because of time constraints. In relation to the aforementioned, you may write a letter to the comrade Chairman and make a written statement of the case about which you wished to see him."

Such appeals are worthwhile only if those who keep you in prison are of the opinion that you have reformed

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during the appropriate period of time or sooner. In such cases they write on the appeal: "The convict fulfills the conditions not only for removal, but for being released on probation." But if after he has entered prison, the convict holds fast in his attitude toward the authorities, then the appeals have no value, whatever the grounds on which they are argued.

You can be released only as a special case, no matter how much of your term you have served. The political moment is decisive. Such was the case of the large-scale amnesty on the eve of November 29 which affected even people who had spent only two months of a ten-year sentence on Goli Otok. But even such an amnesty does not mean that the authorities won't send people to follow the released prisoners constantly, because for the authorities an interrupted term of punishment does not mean the termination of the investigation that follows one's trial.

From here I can tell you only this—don't bother to send any pleas for my transfer or release, no matter in whose name. The chief of the Marshal's Office has stated clearly and unequivocally that I have grounds neither for transfer nor for release.

According to law, if the convict serves more than half his term without sending any appeals, the authorities can release him entirely or let him out on probation. But as you see the authorities have another criterion for me. I suppose that responsible personalities from Macedonia are exerting pressure on the central authorities in my case. Deep inside I am happy that it has happened in this way: that I was born in Macedonia, that I am known as a "founder of the so-called Macedonian literature," written in "the so-called Macedonian language." And now on the order of the central authorities of Yugoslavia I have been sent to serve my sentence at Goli Otok, where I am forbidden even to write in dialect.

It is loudly proclaimed that nations and nationalities can and must use their mother tongue, but what a chasm between words and deeds. As you can see I am writing in

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Serbo-Croatian and not in my mother tongue. You, dear mother, cannot understand me, but File will translate each letter for you so you too can talk with me and understand what my situation is, how my illness is progressing, and what thoughts worry me. You should not worry! Your patience will enable me to withstand even the worst conditions that Goli Otok can offer. Circumstances either toughen or corrupt man. At one time he becomes like a stone, at another, as soft as cotton. It depends on the man, on his spirit.

I nearly forgot to say that the plea sent to the Chairman of the Skopje district court has also been rejected; on June 4, 1959, it was signed by Boro Dogandjijsk.

It is no accident that pleas are not reviewed in the order in which they are sent. And it is no accident that I bring up this most recent plea that has been rejected by the disttrict court in Skopje. I think it had to be brought up first because the people who sent me to the most dangerous jail in all of Yugoslavia are the leaders of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. Knowing everything they have done and continue to do to me, to my health, and to my publications, I have reason to believe they wish just such a jail as Goli Otok for me. They are convinced my illness will prevent me from surviving this place.

Now I understand why the Administration at Goli Otok is hinting that I have cancer of the pancreas. Strange how they have made this diagnosis, for no medical board has examined me at Goli Otok, nor have I been sent to Rijeka as an emergency patient. It is clear they would like to remove me from our political and cultural life, and do so in a painless manner. But they bring their pigs to the wrong market. I have been ill more than once, and my constitution has always found the strength to recover. Now, though I am wrestling with the most insidious disease of our century, I am optimistic that my constitution will find the necessary strength again.

I ask only one thing of you—don't listen to rumors. Rumors can upset us both. Rumor is the most dangerous

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of underground languages; its mouth belongs to the authorities. They don't like those who have seen hell on earth to leave Goli Otok. The authorities' biggest mistake, in my opinion, is that they have sent me to Goli Otok in the first place.

Punishment is punishment. It can be administered in various places. But a punishment endured, let us say at Idrizovo is quite different from the punishment we undergo at Goli Otok. You could have come to visit me every month at Idrizovo, whereas here, at Goli Otok, you cannot be sure of even one visit a year. There is nothing more to say. Everything has been calculated and weighed on UDBA's scale.

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LETTER FORTY

Dear File,

"The Wheel of History" is a chronicle of the human race, of man's aspirations to free himself from the world of classes and to build up a society—a kingdom of freedom and equality on earth. What is complicated in "The Wheel of History" is the quatrain iambus. This iambus can sound a minor key, as in Lermontov's *Demon*, for example, or it can be playful, as in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. The iambus' complexity stems from the strict form of the sonnet: an octave and two terza rimas—two quatrains and two tercets. It is either stormy or calm, depending on the era of human history being depicted. "The Wheel of History" is cast in a harmonious musical form; even the dedications in the acrostics are rhymed. Each acrostic is in accord with the idea that I am developing in those lines. Even if the acrostics are excerpted from "The Wheel," the reader will be able to understand the work's contents, its aim, and its meaning.

The sonnet wreaths weave the work's most important stages: life and struggle. The links between the sonnet wreaths are links from the chain of the sonnet wreaths, making the work harmonious in every direction. Even the acrostics are regularly rhymed.

The dedications, such as "To the world proletariat," "To the banners," "The stakes," "To Marx and Engels," "To the proud man," "To Vladimir Ilich," "To the USSR—this wreath," "To communism," "Gyrfalcon of struggle," "To the young"—all are in strict accord with the larger work. The rhythm—quatrain iambus—merges with that of the "Internationale." In the fullest sense "The Wheel of History" is a reflection of the aspirations, the thrills, the struggles, and the battles of the world proletariat. The ideas of Marx and Engels occupy the central place in the work. The Paris Commune and the October Revolution generalize and confirm these ideas. And in the person of Lenin and the mere fact of the Soviet Union, these ideas are developed further.

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The *Communist Manifesto* occupies a special place in the work, for it is a lodestar of the world proletariat, united in its vanguard, the Communist party. And scientific socialism emerges as a unique theory for guiding all proletarian forces in their fight to change the world. It is not just an abstract theory used to prove that social classes really exist.

Until now the acrostics in the lines of sonnet wreaths were always dedicated to women. But here the acrostics break with the old form; in harmony with the poem's contents, they are dedicated to the leaders of the proletarian revolution. This practice imposes an absolute symmetry in the elaboration of the work's main theme.

Struggle and victory—that is the basic theme of the work.

The philosophic explanation of scientific socialism is in "Path Majestic," a sonnet wreath that differs from the others in the manner in which thoughts are expressed.

The development of the human race in all its phases—from the primitive protistans to the noblest and most impressive creation of nature—man—is summarized in the wreath dedicated to the leader of the October Revolution, Vladimir Ilich.

It should be stressed that the dedications of the sonnet wreaths refer to actual historical individuals who have attained considerable stature in the ideological life of Marxism-Leninism. *The Eighteenth of Brumaire* does not acknowledge the role of the individual. Even Marx and Engels, who are important historical individuals, do not accord the individual a definite role. The individual is in one case tragedy, in another, farce. But Plekhanov's discussion of the "role of the individual" in history is clear and definite.

The names of individuals of the highest stature introduce a supplement to "The Wheel of History." Throughout, the lyrical form of the sonnets as well as their personal content give the work a primitive, intimate quality, and gradually the lyrics accumulate into an epic. Thus "The Wheel of History" becomes a lyrical epic or an epic lyric, because the very essence of the poem is epic in nature.

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While writing it I found that the poem's contents imposed an epic interpretation of events, as well. And even moments which should be minor, come out as stormy, major, impressive, majestic. Even the proletariat, that gravedigger of classes, is depicted in heroic march, with trumpet fanfares and a boldness that foretells the dawn of the kingdom of freedom.

It is interesting to note that the great Marx always promised his daughters he would write a tragedy about Spartacus, whom he considered to be the most tragic personality of ancient times. He could not complete it, however, and Marx's biographer Franz Mehring says that the muses had given Marx everything but a gift for poetry. But of course Marx's grandeur, his titanic genius, was manifested in all fields of science and represents one of the highest achievements of the human mind. What defines Marx as a scientist, a strategist, and a theoretician of scientific socialism is reflected in "The Wheel of History." Marx's spirit, his struggle, and his resonant harmony are all in "The Wheel of History." Thus, with its richly elaborated sonnet wreaths, "The Wheel of History," represents the most complex poetic work that has yet been written from memory, and it was written in Goli Otok prison at that.

1,414 days—and it is an equal number of iambic verses that I repeat each night, in order that they can be imprinted in the book of memory once and for all.

Memorizing this work is a great struggle for me, because these are not separate sonnets (like the ones Jean Cassou wrote in prison), and I am of course deprived of any chance of creating my work in tranquillity, in creative solitude. I go on creating my poem without paying attention to the environment, after strenuous physical work, after being moved from one place to another from early morning until late at night. And no matter whether it is day or night outside, our quarters are always dark.

I don't know what the other convicts who work with me think about me, because I am always preoccupied with myself. I examine my work from every point of view. In

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both form and content I want it to be a continuation of "The Female Eagle". "The Female Eagle" contains a variety of rhymes and describes the history of the Bulgarian Communist party and its heroes, in particular the worker Dimo, who is sentenced to death and shot in a shooting gallery located in the dark tunnel. "The Wheel of History" is essentially a work about the revolutionary proletariat, about the world proletariat, about the party of the world proletariat. It is written in a single rhythm, but in its final sections it sounds like a polyphony, a kaleidoscope of sounds, chords, colors and ideas. Each of these ideas is subordinated to the common idea, communism, and each of them serves to complete and explain the intention of "The Wheel of History." The poem seems to be addressed to each individual Communist party, but at the same time it recognizes that each of these parties includes all the Communist parties.

In "The Wheel of History" all progressive forces from before and after the Paris Commune, from before and after the October Revolution, and from before and after World War II find their place. The basic aim is victory, the basic means for victory is struggle.

It was difficult to memorize the entire work. There were moments when it seemed that the poem had vanished into the oblivion of my subconscious. But then it would suddenly come to the surface, filling my soul. But it remained only an instant. At times I am seized with fear—shall I really be able to memorize it, or is that only a wish, an unattainable dream? It was difficult to compose it but even more difficult to memorize it.

Several months more and I shall be out of here, but how do I know that some criminal tough won't be bribed to fulfill the prison manager's dark order, delivering a blunt blow that will put an end to my dreams and deprive me of the one thing that has kept my patience and my hope alive, giving me the strength to believe that what I wait for is not far away? There were days when I was in such a bad condition that it seemed I'd written nothing of "The Wheel of History." Even the title was strange to me, as if I were hearing

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it for the first time. And then there were days when the work was so familiar that I imagined someone else had written it and I had read it before I was put in jail.

I evaluated "The Wheel of History" as if I were not its author. When I felt miserable I repeated verses from it again and again. The serenity of the verses brightened my soul and the justice of its cause sent me winging swiftly toward the future triumphs. I let no one look inside me to ascertain the condition of my "ego," because few would understand—and even those who would did not know Bulgarian.

In the midst of Goli Otok's terrible reality, I inhabited a completely separate world. My world was well defined, clear, built upon a Communist basis. The entire world was mine, and at the same time my world was a part of the universe. In such moments of intimate happiness I wanted to shout: "If you want to see what the world must look like, look into my soul, which now creates a world without frontiers, without barbed wires, without base passions, without egoism, without chauvinism, without nationalism."

Deep in my exultation, I suddenly come to my senses and ask: don't you really see what a hell you're in?

But thanks to "The Wheel" I persist. You see, my dear, how the artistic creation helps its creator survive.

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LETTER FORTY-ONE

Dear File,

It is Sunday. One of the deaf Sundays typical of Goli Otok. No one dares to go out of the rooms. An order has come from the department. The political section of the Secretariat of the Ministry of the Interior will inspect the political room and perhaps search us too—who knows? Everyone is standing in front of the chest at the foot of his bed. From time to time the steps of the brigadiers moving through the room break the silence. Nobody can make out anything of what is being said.

Our hearts turn cold. Our pulses and temples throb so strongly they can almost be heard in the quiet. Our eyebrows are tense. Such tension seems to know no limits. Perhaps a single word could calm our thoughts, which have scattered in nervous agitation.

Here they come. Slowly, with measured step, they start for our room.

The room supervisor meets them at the door.

The commander shouts: "Attention!"

Our sinister guests go round the room. They look us over carefully, questioningly. They stop at each bed, as if they want to see whether it is made up as it should be; they shake their heads and ask all kinds of questions.

They begin with old Ramadan, who has been sentenced to death because of his ties with the supporters of the underground members of the Informburo. He has been accused of giving them food and sheltering them from the bloodhounds of UDBA.

Quiet and peaceful, short of stature, but with a noble face, Ramadan knows only a few words and they suffice for his communication with the world around him. He knows almost nothing of politics. Moreover, he doesn't even know the name of the president of the SFRY. He harbors the illusion that this island belongs to Albania and that Enver Hoxha is its president. Wishing to alleviate Ramadan's worries, a man from Kosovo and Metohia, a member of the

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Secretariat of the Ministry of the Interior, once told him: "Well, Ramadan, I think that now you will be wise and sensible, and when they let you out you will not get involved with things that will bring you back to prison."

"I swear to Allah," Ramadan answered, "I will not come here again! This place is not for me. There are no sheep, no flocks, no tambourine. The mountains are what I prefer, not this wilderness. Here there are only poisonous snakes and black ravens."

His tongue stumbles. With difficulty his mind searches for the words he needs to explain that he is innocent, that it was the barking of the dog that led them to him. Thus he was caught, arrested, and sentenced to death.

Then they pass on to the one who has come home from Bulgaria, where he had emigrated after the Revolution: "You expected freedom to be served to you in a baking dish. You expected us to meet you with music and trumpets. And why? Because you have "helped" our land, committing the meanest treachery. We want just one thing from you—to tell us honestly, sincerely, without lies, without beating about the bush: Whom were your contacts there? How and when did you send diversionists to us? What kind of connections have those people established and with whom? If you tell us the truth, we know how to show appreciation for your repentance. You are incorrect if you think you can tell us lies. In the beginning we were united, during the national liberation struggle we remained united, and in the conflict with the Soviet Union we were united again. Here you see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears that it is we, not you, who are right."

The man keeps silent, his head bent down. He knows how to answer, but this is not the place for that. And why should he answer? The punishment will go on while the sentence lasts and after the sentence the penal servitude of the Administration's continuation of punishment will begin.

The law in Yugoslavia is no law. What they promise by the law is exactly what they don't do, all the while referring to the same law. They have proposed jobs and ranks and

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everything to many people, as if nothing had happened, as if 1948, when the citizens of Yugoslavia were divided into two camps had never occurred. Yet the same two camps, "for" and "against," have been fighting each other ever since.

The man they are approaching now has a sharp intellect; he is a good writer and a real speaker—he can talk about any trifle for hours. He was brought here after coming back from Hungary. He believed that things were going to be the way they had promised him, but realized how mistaken he had been when here, at Goli Otok, he was forced to run the gauntlet. His hair turned white in a night. He felt the agonies of hell bearing down on his own shoulders. He had seen the counterrevolution in Hungary, when the ranks of the reactionaries swelled and Communists were hanged by their feet. He had also seen the shooting coming from the Yugoslav Embassy, but he decided to come back once he learned that relations between Yugoslavia and Hungary had improved.

A tall man, with bright blue eyes and a deep voice, he called upon the sane forces in Yugoslavia to rise in revolt. The Embassy promised him that he would be permitted to study for the Ph.D., that he would even be allowed to speak over the radio in Belgrade, to tell the world the truth about Yugoslavia. Poor man, he believed everything!

And now the UDBA man from Belgrade who is visiting Goli Otok greets him with the words: "Why are you staring at the ground? Look up! Let us meet face to face! Probably you are going to say that you fought for your ideas, but if you have fought for ideas as an idealist, then why did you let foreign currency pay for your idealism? Such currency destroys the unity of the Yugoslav peoples. We want you to tell us everything, including those things for which we cannot rely on our ambassador in Budapest. The job of the ambassador is one thing, whereas ours, as an arm of the state authority, is quite another. Our job is to learn everything in connection with your intrigues and the intrigues around you. We know who left our country in 1941 and started making alliances with the worst reactionaries. We

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want you to name all the traitors who are still shuffling about in the nightclubs in Budapest waiting for a counter-revolution in this country to give them the opportunity to do away with our system. It is no game. It is up to you to decide whether you will again enjoy your friends and relatives."

At this point the man from Belgrade stopped and threw a glance at me. As if he knew me, he looked steadily and asked: "Don't we know each other? But from where? I cannot remember."

"I have never seen you before. I think there is a misunderstanding."

"Have you ever been in Belgrade? Let us say in the Assembly?"

"At one time—yes, I was a deputy. . . ."

"A-a-ah! Now I understand. We have met there. . . ."

And he began to hint at many meetings that I didn't remember. He looked at the chest and asked: "May we open this chest and see what you have in it?"

"Of course! It is not locked. In this room chests are never locked."

"Don't say that! The chests of political prisoners should always be locked."

I opened the chest. There were clothes, underwear.

"Does your chest, by any chance, have a double bottom, so you can hide your manuscripts? What you write during the day, don't you put it there at night?"

"The chest is at your disposal; look, you can even break it. I am not allowed to keep either paper or pencil—and you are looking for manuscripts!"

"You should not get angry. We are the authority, you know. . . . This is our job. We can make mistakes too."

The way he stopped in front of my bed made me realize that this group, and in particular the man who had asked me the questions, had come with one main purpose—to find my manuscripts. The manuscript of *Contemporary Paradoxes*, published illegally in Yugoslavia, not abroad, had not been discovered, nor had the publishing house that printed it. They couldn't forgive me this.

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But that doesn't trouble me now. The thing that bothers me, pecking at my heart like a sharp beak, is the conversation we had in Isolation with Nikita, whose feet they tortured with electric prods. He had told the Administration the whole conversation and proposed that my bed be searched, because I was nearing the end of my punishment. He had forgotten only one thing: this was not the first time I had been put in prison for writing and publishing things illegally.

My poem "It Strikes 12" was published and distributed illegally in Sofia on the eve of World War II, and, as a result, I was arrested, tortured by the police, and sent to the concentration camps of Gonda voda and Yeni-köy. I still remember Geshev's words: "We shall find out later whether it was you or someone else who wrote 'It Strikes 12,' hiding behind the pen-name of Ilindenski. But I want to be on the safe side, and that is why I am sending you to the concentration camp."

Nikita was sure that I was writing. And nothing could dissuade him. But he couldn't get into my workshop for it was deep inside my conscience, in the farthest reaches of my memory. And even if he discovered it he would not be able to understand it, because he didn't know Bulgarian.

My examining magistrate too often spoke to me, trying to persuade me to unlock my mind so he could see what was being created and hidden there. My stubbornness convinced him I was relying on protests about my case outside Yugoslavia, thinking those protests would help speed my release from prison.

This "innocent" search made me review my actions and the verses I had written in "The Wheel of History'." This was Goli Otok, after all, where anything might happen, particularly at night. A man's mind, used to speaking and disclosing his secrets, might betray him when he was asleep. Isn't it true that when tortured by the police writers stand the test and don't say a word. They don't betray anyone and when they've served their terms and are released from prison, they make their personal confessions and tell

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why and how they have been tortured. But they put what they have experienced in the form of a short story or a poem. And nobody blames them; quite the opposite—they are hailed as sincere authors, opening their souls and depicting the agony they have experienced.

Thus the author, a social being, is a double man. As a social man he suffers punishment because of his beliefs and as an author he dresses his agonies in an artistic form. On the one hand he openly depicts what is hidden within him, but on the other hand this social being translates his beliefs into artistic works.

This tense Sunday at last drew to an end. The search did not discover anything; they did not find anything. No one knows how many more searches await me before I leave Goli Otok. But no matter what the authorities do and no matter whom they use as cat's-paw, they will not be able to penetrate my soul or my memory.

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LETTER FORTY-TWO

My dear,

I have not been in a situation like this before. I am faced with unconditional alternatives and I don't know what to do. There is no one I can consult. I am in close confinement; the Isolation is unbearable. If only I could be with you, to exchange some words, before making my decision. But this is just the situation the authorities have wanted to create—forcing me to make the decision entirely on my own. They have tried to persuade me that it is a matter of saving my life, and that I should neither hesitate nor doubt the outcome of the operation. The best doctors, doctors who have performed surgical miracles, would operate on me. But I refused. Not because I doubted the doctors and their goodwill, but because the doctors, at the suggestion of the authorities, could suffer a lapse in their surgical skill. Such a lapse would prove only that these surgeons are also human beings and, as such, can also make mistakes. The bleeding of my hemorrhoids grows worse and worse.

I am now in the quarry. There is no water here though I need it badly. The fountain is far away, and I can go there only if a brigadier accompanies me. But brigadiers are people who care for no one but themselves; an ailment like hemorrhoids is unknown to them.

I can neither sit, nor stand, nor move because of the pains. Any movement makes the pains worse, and sitting makes the hemorrhoids bleed more. It is awful.

I have just remembered a man I knew at Yeni-köy concentration camp. He had acute appendicitis. When the pains became unbearable he had to go the commandant to ask for a surgical intervention. The commandant agreed and sent him, accompanied by a sentinel, to Xanthi on the next train. I don't know what the order from Sofia was, but I know that he was a Communist, a lawyer, and one whom the authorities considered dangerous. His name was Kosta Vesselinov. Before leaving for Xanthi he said good-bye to everyone, smiling cheerfully.

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As if it were happening this very moment, I see Uncle Pavel Shatev shaking his head and saying: "Kosta, is it really necessary for you to be operated on now? No matter how much it hurts, I think that you can bear it. . . ."

"Uncle Pavel, the pain is unbearable. It is best to take care of this appendicitis now; tomorrow we have work to do."

"You know best, Kosta. It's your business. You are the one who is in pain. But here, in the concentration camp, we are all together and we must listen to one another. I repeat—it is for you to decide, but listen to our advice. They welcome it, when a man asks for help."

Hendcuffed, Kosta left for Xanthi under escort. He never came back. He died on the operating table.

This case reminds me of the authorities' cruelty. Authorities are authorities, and their cruelty is the same everywhere. They are most dangerous when they are resisted, but they are pitiless when asked for help.

I don't remember how I got back to Isolation. Those who saw me say that I looked like death. My face was as yellow as wax, my eyes were on fire, and I had bitten my cracked lips. Nevertheless, I found the strength to reject the proposed operation as dangeous and malevolent.

I argued my case as follows:

> I have suffered from hemorrhoids for a long time. In the past, whenever there was a flare-up, I got medical attention. Here I have received none; at no time since I arrived at Goli Otok have I been given the medical attention my case merits. The doctors see that my condition is critical, but they can do no more than prescribe a day of rest. When I ask them why they never give me even a day more, they say: 'That does not depend on your condition but instead on the opinion of the Administration. This is Goli Otok, not a field hospital.'
>
> I realize that every one of your proposals has a purpose and, aware that the operation is a complicated one, I have decided to risk refusing any help from the doctors. If the Administration really wants to help me, it can recognize that there are only a few days left to my sentence and release

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me on early probation. This would enable me to choose a doctor and a hospital for my operation. But since I am deprived of such an opportunity, I categorically reject the assistance of the prison doctors. I underline, I don't believe that their intervention is motivated by good will."

I sent this letter through the commander of Isolation to the examining magistrate of our room. Barely three hours had passed when the chief and the examining magistrate came to Isolation. They had not expected such ingratitude on the part of a political prisoner, one who was under Isolation's most severe regime at that.

"We are doing the best we can to alleviate your pain," they said, "to remove the source of these sufferings, which can develop into a malignant carcinoma. We, too, are human beings. Your political conviction is one thing, but we are concerned about the health of our political prisoners. There are countries—the USA for example—where even those sentenced to death are not sent to the electric chair if they become ill. It is our duty to warn you of the danger facing you if your disease is not cured in time. You must decide. We cannot release you. That's beyond our power. However, we shall send our opinion of your situation on to Ranković and let him decide."

And in fact the examining magistrate named Tara, who had fought bravely in the national liberation struggle, spoke to Ranković, delivering his own opinion of me. I don't know how he formed his opinion; probably from the reports of various informers or from contacts with political prisoners whom he trusts. Nevertheless, he managed to form his own opinion and one day, when they were inspecting the room, Tara turned to me and said: "They have a very poor opinion of you in Belgrade. I lack words to convey how Ranković responded to me. He said these exact words: 'He misled you too, didn't he? He is most dangerous when he is silent. During and even after the trial no one knew for sure whether he was the author of *Contemporary Paradoxes*.'

"In short, he gave me the brush-off and I did not continue to speak up for you. But here, in Isolation, I will give orders to alleviate things while you are bleeding."

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I don't know how he is going to alleviate things here in Isolation. And how long will this bleeding last? It turns out that the alleviation is that there is now water here and I can use it: use it to wash the floor from one end of Isolation to the other, use it to clean the toilets and scrub the tiles. It has been ordered that no one should help me. Thus the examining magistrate's views were not fulfilled by the commander of Isolation. After doing such work from morning till night, one longs to be taken out, even to be forced to do more strenuous work, for at least one will then be out in the open.

I can't sleep at night, not even for a few minutes. Various thoughts torment me, tearing at my soul. It is obvious that I will not go out of here; at least that is what they have decided. From time to time they hint that my disease is very dangerous and that if measures are not taken soon, the malignant cancer will begin to spread. I don't believe they really think I have cancer. But it suits them to have me undergo an operation for cancer rather than to have me cured of these insidious hemorrhoids.

Still, the suggestion that I have cancer is not to be ignored. After their categorical statements about my predisposition to such a disease, I reviewed my family's medical history for any incidences that might suggest I am susceptible. I remembered that my father had some small wound on the end of his nose which he burned with a blue stone at the end of every month. It is said that when a wound is irritated the metastasis of the disease is accelerated, but my father did not die of cancer but of heart failure. He died in 1942 while I was being held at Yeni-köy. In 1948, my sister Vera died after an operation for a tumor in her uterus; her death resulted from an embolism. Before that my sister Doka was operated on, but her tumor was removed in time. My oldest sister, Paraskeva, also developed a tumor. In the gynecologist's opinion, earlier surgical intervention would have prevented the metastasis of the tumor, which eventually killed her. All this made me worry about my symptoms all the time, wondering if the Administration's claims might be correct.

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But soon the agonizing thought that had troubled me day and night became less intense. I was tranquil, as tranquil as a man in prison can be, particularly when he is beset with the suspicion that he may have cancer. Suspicion has a destructive power. It is strong even when there are no grounds for fear, but it is even stronger if there are victims of cancer in the family. Nevertheless, I was also mindful of the various ways the authorities might use to exploit me. Clearly, the authorities had been frightened when, utterly silent, my head bent low, I gathered excrement with my naked hands. My silence made them nervous; in their view I was no longer a silent political prisoner with a box in my hands but a noisy rebel. My very silence sowed the seeds of stubbornness, of steadfastness, and even of hope among the other political prisoners. It gave them courage, showed them how to find a similar strength within themselves. And insofar as they survive, insofar as they do not lose their spirit and hope, there will be people from this prison who will live to leave it and to tell the world what a monstrous place, created by twisted human brains, Goli Otok was. If fascism was the darkest creation of the bourgeoisie, Goli Otok was the most ominous cell in the dungeon of Tito's Yugoslavia.

Bent over the lines of this letter, I didn't know the door had opened or that a man had come in. Suddenly, he struck me a hard blow with some blunt object, and then he disappeared. Perhaps he thought I was dead. The letter is splashed with blood. The blow fell just above the right eyebrow; its scar will always remind me—every time I shave—that something even worse could have happened on Goli Otok.

If you don't get this letter I shall try to remember it, committing to memory this terrible moment when my life was threatened, when I faced the ultimate danger.

You should not be troubled. I live as one with your spirit, and you should live with mine; there is no force that can destroy our spiritual unity.

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LETTER FORTY-THREE

My dear,

Every prisoner who has been on Goli Otok and been subjected to its severe regime has something special to remember: one will remember that his hand was cut off; another, that his leg was broke; a third, that his eye was gouged; and a fourth remembers that his golden teeth were knocked out with a fist. Some left their bones behind; others, their health; still others—the graveless—have left shadows that wander about at night, breaking the silence and kindling mournful gravelamps in the dark void.

The story of Goli Otok is dark and terrible. It is a story written in blood, watered with sighs, strung with curses—a story so terrible that its telling can wake even the dead.

Little by little, time sweeps all things into oblivion. The murderers depend on time to cover their tracks, to help them escape the pillory.

Goli Otok lacked a lot of things: from food to rest, from the mere right to meet with others to the possibility of engaging in sincere conversation. Although it was an open prison, it was secured by three hundred padlocks and surrounded by three hundred chains. A sinister pair of UDBA eyes was stationed at each corner; a carefully concealed officer stood at alert on each road and crossroad. No one had any illusion of escaping. Anyone could kill you without being held responsible; anyone could stab you in the back; anyone could rob you and you had no one to complain to. The authorities and the informers ("the ears") carried out the orders of Belgrade: "If anyone refuses to accept our way, we shall make him do so. Our law rules here and any violation will be punished; every incidence of stubbornness is disastrous and any hesitation is fatal."

The silence is deeper than the silence of the dead.

In the years since the prison was constructed, no one is known to have escaped, in part because the sea around Goli Otok is infested with sharks, which are far more dangerous than mines. The only known escape was that engineered

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by Branko Mileusnić, a man from Prilep who had worked as an assistant to the examining magistrates for a long time. They became so accustomed to him that they took it for granted that his "reeducation" was complete. One year on May 1, while everyone was celebrating, Branko Mileusnić boarded the steamer to Rijeka, allegedly on a business trip. He was helped by the fact that those who work for the Administration wear clothes much like those worn by civilians. From Rijeka he managed to take the train to Gevgeli. The Administration did not realize he had run away until the next day, at which point they dispatched telegrams saying that he was a dangerous criminal. Mileusnić was able to reach Salonika Bay and was about to board a steamer for Africa when the Greek authorities apprehended him and sent him back to Yugoslavia, delivering him to the Yugoslav frontier authorities.

This case of Branko Mileusnić was cited as proof that even the most perfidious criminal could not escape from Goli Otok. The authorities needed to have Mileusnić back not because they would miss one prisoner more or less, but because they needed to prove that anyone who ran away would be caught immediately and returned to Goli Otok.

Despite the presence of so many prominent political, military, and social personalities, Goli Otok was poorly organized. But this was what the authorities wanted. Nobody trusts anybody else, everyone keeps everything to himself. Those who had been organized in party organizations on the outside are crushed by chaos here at Goli Otok. Beset by doubts, insinuations, false reports, internal spying, and disntegrating marriages, they have been reduced from complete personalities to mere shadows.

But even in this chaos there were forces that planned for the organization of an underground Central Committee.

In Yugoslavia party congresses were being held. The old threats against Cominform members were heard again. Political prisoners who had been released, Cominform supporters, lived in constant fear. They could not rid themselves of the thought that they were about to be arrested, sentenced, and returned to Goli Otok. The more strong-willed

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left the country: Vlado Dapcević, Moma Djurić, Milan Kalafatić, Mileta Perović, and many others were among them. In their new countries, they raised their voices in protest on behalf of those still imprisoned at Goli Otok.

But this made the authorities take even more severe measures against us. Now we were not allowed to read any newspapers. No news was broadcast over our radio loudspeaker. We were being kept in total ignorance. What news we got had to be squeezed through the eye of a needle; letters were generally our only source of political information. Sometimes, however, the common criminals, reeducated by us and working in the Administration, were able to supply us with newspapers, where we could read about attacks against Yugoslavia.

There is one extraordinary story about a common criminal who, determined to get some newspapers, slapped the doctor in the face and thus distracted the attention of the Administration officer. The criminal said: "Chief, is that the way to reform us? I am sick and burning with fever (he had artificially inflated his temperature with a raw potato) and he doesn't want to examine me." And while the chief and the doctor argued, the convict managed to take the newspapers from the table and hide them under his shirt.

Thus the carpentry workshop, where people from Isolation worked, was informed about the recent events in the world. No one suspected that the common criminal might supply the political prisoners with newspapers.

The experience one gets behind a prison's walls is a constant testing process; in time certain stable values emerge from the constant trial and error. Life, sorrow and joy, having and not having—they all go hand in hand, they are all a vital part of our experience. I lack words to describe how our eyes shine when we receive news.

My dear, only a few more weeks and, if our luck holds, we shall see each other. It is up to the authorities, you know. You cannot trust them, cannot know what they think about your being released. Perhaps the public prosecutor will pass a new sentence, sending me to some other

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island, imprisoning me in a room for three. But I don't believe it will happen. They are afraid of me. But another corpus delicti will be needed, and they may well consider me. If my silence means I'm disseminating propaganda against the foundations of the SFRY, then it is possible I will be sentenced again. But if keeping silent only means keeping your mouth shut and holding your tongue behind your teeth, then it is not in vain. Let's hope that time will soon end our hesitations, our endless speculating and our exhausting guesswork.

Send a telegram before you come. Thus I shall know that you are on your way to Goli Otok. If I am not given the telegram, you should not worry; that would mean only that they don't want to let you come to Goli Otok, that they prefer to torture me with doubts to the last moment.

Bring clothes and an overcoat for me. It is winter, you know, and if the forecasts are correct it will be a severe one. They say various omens portend a bad winter: a great ground swell has made the sea bulge, and birds are breaking their wings.

I will see you soon.

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LETTER FORTY-FOUR

My dear,

I have had a strange dream.

It is sometime after June 22, 1941. With armored cars, tanks, and other motor vehicles, the green uniforms, emblazoned with swastikas flood into the Soviet Union. Fascist Italy has occupied Albania and a part of Yugoslavia. The entire territory of Yugoslavia groans under the brutal boot of Hitler's hordes. The Bulgarians of Vardar county are greeting their brothers from old Bulgaria with bread and salt.

A black cab races at full speed through the streets of Belgrade. The driver wears a German military coat. Death rides everywhere. The blockade grows tighter and tighter. Manhunts sweep through the land. The cab driver has dressed himself like Death. He is from Koruska. Death's bloody fingers, now hidden in clean white gloves, hold a whip. The darkness grows thicker and thicker; the silence is becoming more sinister. The driver rides through Yugoslavia; women giggle at his side.

The first Partisan gunshots resound in Bela Crkva on July 7th.

Death, with trumpet in hand, summons the brave sons and daughters of occupied Yugoslavia.

Who is the trumpeter? Everybody asks. There is no answer. Nobody knows where he is from. Nobody knows his name.

My dream conquers space. Voices, angry voices, say that during the First World War this trumpeter shot Serbian soldiers, killed them bloodthirstily, and then passed over to the Eastern front where he was taken as a prisoner of war. There he was asked on which side he would like to fight: the side of the Revolution, or that of the Whites. Instead, he asked to be taken into captivity and then sent back to his native place. But which is his native place? Kumrovec or Koruska? The elegant Austro-Hungarian officer hides behind some Pelagia. And thus he saves his skin.

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Squadrons of bombers fly across the sky, sowing death in the vast Russian land.

Death's trumpet reverberates all across Yugoslavia. In the beginning, the men are five, then twenty, then a hundred, then two hundred, then they are thousands. But nobody knows who their leader is. Who is the trumpeter?

It is 1943. Death's trumpeter gathers his subordinates in the town of Jajce and forces them to proclaim him marshal—the first marshal of Yugoslavia. He puts on a marshal's uniform. The uniform suits this Austro-Hungarian; he was born to change uniforms. A meeting is taking place in Jajce. The delegation of Vardar Macedonia is not there. Their way has been blocked somewhere in Albania at Piskopeja. The delegates go back home. I am a member of this delegation. The delegates of the Bulgarian Communist party, Boyan Bulgaranov—Uncle Ivan, and Svetozar Vukmanovic-Tempo, delegate from Headquarters, are also with us.

In my dream Tempo fusses about looking for the delegates from Albania and Greece. He wants to form a Balkan headquarters. A representative of the British mission whispers something into his ear. Joy lights Tempo's face. His cunning eyes shine, and his hand clenches into a fist. He is impatient to tell us his plan for the creation of a Balkan headquarters. He frowns at something. When he makes his announcement a sharp voice is heard: "Your stand isn't right, you are making a mistake."

He is embarrassed. He bows his head and disappears somewhere in the dark.

My dream becomes horrible.

Chetniks and Ustashas are fighting constantly. The leader of the Independent State of Croatia, Ante Pavelić, puts to the sword peaceful Serbian peasants who had been living in peace with the Croats.

Rivers of blood are flowing. The rivers carry the corpses of butchered Serbs. The blood is fresh. The knives still steam in the backs of the injured and the dead. The eyes of the dead have been gouged out.

The cab of Death has been replaced by a tank; Death is a tankman.

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The Chetniks rise up. Draza Mihajlović murders the Croats who live in peace with the Serbs. Serbs and Croats fight each other.

The darkness gets deeper and deeper, the wound becomes still more bloody. The fascists walk about as if they are at home here. Their dupes are Nedić and Draža Mihajlović on one side and Ante Pavelić on the other. Commanded by Rupnik, the Slovenians also take part in the slaughter. Rupnik is pitiless.

At some point in my dream fires explode. Airplanes are flying and circling. They open their white umbrellas. The Germans land at Drvar. In the cave the murderer in the marshal's uniform is caught up in the ecstasy of love. The marshal is taken by force from the arms of Davorianka. He is saved.

Columns of troops flood past. The fascist machine guns continue to sow death. But even here the black villain passes through blockades. He sends envoys to German headquarters. He wants negotiations. He makes promises; he lies to both the Germans and the English. And at exactly the same time he lies to the Partisans and to Moscow. He covers the path he made to the Germans.

The silence is broken.

Moscow reports that the Comintern has been dissolved. Communists are confused. Nobody understands anything. Everybody is surprised at the news from Moscow.

Death's trumpeter puffs himself up and proclaims the birth of the new Yugoslavia.

With the dissolution of the Comintern, the hands of Death's trumpeter are untied. He travels everywhere: by tank, by cab, by airplane, and on horseback. He is the absolute master of the state.

Everywhere one looks, the same slogans glare forth: "nationalization," "the factories—to the workers!", "the land—to the peasants." But no one forbids the peasants to die of starvation; for their indignation they are slaughtered like dogs. No one forbids the workers to work for the benefit

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of others; for their strikes they are killed, they are crushed in blood.

Yugoslavia becomes a roadway to emigration. The workers who fought against the Germans during the war now do the most menial work for the West Germans. Unemployment is rife in Yugoslavia, the number of criminals is increasing, taxes rise higher and higher. Private shopkeepers and farmers appear again and multistoried private hotels are being constructed. While these capitalist entrepreneurs buy their own yachts and the number of millionaires increases, Yugoslavia is falling ever more deeply into debt. Some say that even after two centuries our descendants will be paying the bills.

Everywhere, our people have become intoxicated with themselves.

And black Death, now in the uniform of the absolute ruler, reigns in Yugoslavia because only He has the right, only He can punish. We have yet to see anything of the freedom we fought for; the marshal is busy running errands for foreign intelligence services.

The conflict between the LYC and Yugoslavia on one side and the CPSU(b), the Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist community on the other now explodes. The ruler of Yugoslavia wields a deadly black scythe. And even as he mows down the Partisan elite—the bravest, the worthiest, the most militant among us—horrible, lamia-like prisons are springing up all across the country. And Goli Otok is the most horrible of all of them.

But at this point the fall of the butcher—the fall of one Josip Broz Tito—has begun.

This mole in a marshal's uniform split our world apart. Nasser and Nehru were among his followers, but there would be many others in the years to come. In the heat of this struggle, a struggle into which the schismatics poured money and every other means they possess—the question of the center emerged. Without a single center, there cannot be a single will, a single objective, a single ideal. The Yugoslav leadership constitutes itself as this center and imposes its

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diabolic concept; it asserts that self-management is the quickest route to communism.

Edvard Kardelj has fathered this concept. This Jesuit is to blame for breaking Yugoslavia away from the socialist community. He is Tito's evil spirit. He and Moše Pijade undermined the morale of the party. He and Milovan Djilas concocted a plan for the withering away of the state and of the party even as the world was buffeted by the storms of imperialism. Tito, Kardelj, and the butcher Ranković laid the foundations of Goli Otok and the other prisons on the Adriatic islands and throughout the country. Tito, assisted by Veljko Vlahović and Vladimir Bakarić, subdued rebellious students and drowned strikes in blood.

The infection that emanates from Tito and his followers now spreads like wildfire across our unstable world. When words won't suffice, Tito spends American dollars. When moderate means fail, Tito foments riots, resorting even to the murder of party secretaries. Everywhere he sows the seeds of unrest while simultaneously preaching of a world without military blocs. In denouncing the blocs, he shows that he prefers American imperialism over the socialist community. And when he finds himself unable to make headway, he resorts to the argument that there is no difference between the Soviet Union and the United States.

He creates centers in the nonaligned world so that on some future day this "Third World" can emerge as a major power, a power united around nonaligned, socialist Yugoslavia—in short, a power led by Tito.

The evil that issues from Yugoslavia takes root in many places, one of them being crowded, multinational China. Nothing could stop Tito from establishing a common language with the yellow race. And when the Sino-Soviet conflict was sharpest and the whole world thought it was on the brink of disaster, China and Yugoslavia established diplomatic relations, in secret at first, but later quite openly.

Tito's face is chameleonlike. One moment it is a dragon, devouring all of Yugoslavia, but then it is a bottomless, burning hell in which Yugoslavia vanishes, then a greedy monster that swallows the entire country.

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Djilas and Kardelj and Ranković and Bakarić and V. Vlahović and Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo stand at his side in the dark. From all sides questions are showering upon them. Tempo's mouth opens and begins to speak: "Take the case of Goli Otok. The situation at Goli Otok was awful. Not everybody believes us when we say that we learned about the existence of Goli Otok only after it had been wiped out. It is unbelievable, but it is the truth. . . . We do not defend ourselves, for we are responsible; but no revolution is humane, no revolution wears gloves, and in 1948 there was a revolution, a very particular revolution, one of the most difficult of all revolutions."

From the depths of space, as if on a cinema screen, the Nuremberg trial appears. Hitler, Goebbels, Göring, and all the German marshals speak through a single mouth: "We knew about Buchenwald, Dachau and Oswiencym but these were labor camps. We did not send the inmates to be burned in the furnaces, to be reduced to ashes; we sent them to be reformed through labor."

Suddenly Tito takes Hitler's place and Kardelj stands where Göring had been. Ranković puts on Göring's field-marshal's coat, Vladimir Bakarić stand in the corner, rubbing his bloody palms and waiting for the hour of the nemesis. Djilas smiles maliciously, contented that he has upset Yugoslavia's "particular path" to socialism; he awaits the day when he can seize power anew.

Suddenly my dream is interrupted. Fires rumble in my ears. Desolate fireplaces glow before my eyes. Someone with dirty hands rips out my heart. I am short of breath. I suffocate. And in the east the sun dawns over Goli Otok.

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EPILOGUE

Although I was now going to be free again, I was sad at parting. Every parting is sad in some ways, for parting involves memories; memories and people. And people reveal both the durability and the fragility of our world. Many of them vanished into oblivion, and who knows whether they will be remembered again. Parting is sad, in particular parting with Goli Otok.

The hangmen banished me to the most terrible of jails. At the very apex of my poetic vigor I had to undergo suffering and torture because of my beliefs, because of my faith in the Soviet Union. But no force could crush my spirit. Man becomes stronger when confronted with hardship, hardship steels his spirit.

A brave spirit dwells in man's bosom, and because of that spirit man yearns for sunlight. The wings of his spirit die without access to free and sunny spaces. Light constantly fights against the threatening darkness. And when a people is deprived of its faith, when its hopes are killed, it wastes all its days.

Prison is at once anvil and burial mound. On the one hand, the weakest spirits often blaze up into a powerful fire when placed behind prison bars. But on the other hand, the strongest spirits are extinguished and reduced to miserable gray ashes. The world of prison is a severe one. I remember many men who fought bravely for the revolution in the stormy struggle against fascism, only to die here, disgracefully betrayed and left to lie among these stony rocks, wrapped in wilderness and mist. The sea is silent; at the bottom of blood-stained Jadran, proud ranks of Yugoslav Partisans lie covered with algae.

My people, my soul grieves for those soldiers of justice, for those faithful pupils of conscience, for those martyrs of freedom. At night, when the silver candles come out above somber Velebit and the mournful moon begins to weep over blood-stained Jadran, I see the eyes of the murdered lamenting the anguish that has overwhelmed our earth.

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Even after I had left Goli Otok its pathetic, inhuman story tormented my soul at night, forcing me to hear once more the moans of the people who had been buried alive. Death reigned there and on every hill an owl with enormous malevolent eyes stood watching in order to keep the light from revealing the hell that was Goli Otok.

In my poem "Contemporary Paradoxes" I sketched the thrills, the sufferings, and the torments of my people as they fought for justice and freedom—things that vanished long ago. In "Contemporary Paradoxes" Goli Otok was described accurately and clearly, but it remained a general outline. I depicted the nature of the revolution, whose traits were those common to every revolution that has embarked on the road to destruction. And I also depicted the retribution that will be visited upon the revolution in the future. The truth of my poem embarrassed the regime and it struck angrily against the author and those who disseminated the work. I had outlined Goli Otok in the poem, but when I went there myself I found that every corner, already familiar to me in my subconscious, revealed new details to me.

The political prisoners became concrete, clearly defined characters. They were no longer men in general but men characteristic of their people, of their environment, of their nation. Their sufferings fused the nations of Goli Otok into a genuine international community, though the laws of "self-management" kept them under a severe regime. The tortures which I had described in "Contemporary Paradoxes" were no longer general, but concrete. The gauntlet and forced-chasing in particular became all too real to me, revealing the essence of the diabolical system UDBA had imposed on the worthiest sons and daughters of Yugoslavia. These obscurantist measures now oppressed me too, and I realized that it was one thing to write from what one has heard and quite another to write the story of one's own sufferings. When I was serving my term at Goli Otok, every word constituted a very particular reality. Fantasy took little part in the story because reality went beyond every kind of fantasy. One had no need of fiction.

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The story is in the letters. Every letter is a new chapter in the story of Goli Otok. The letters allow thought to grow apace while conserving its energy and thus becoming more forceful, more convincing.

Literature knows many famous diaries and letters. For me the form of the diary is only a link with this genre of literature.

Each letter constitutes a different story not because it tells of different people and different moments in the distressing life of Goli Otok, but because it in itself partakes of the very structure of Goli Otok. And if by chance any of these letters fall into the hands of someone who has served his punishment as a political prisoner at Goli Otok, then the breath, the mood, the images and the expressions of the letters will make him realize that the author has not merely heard a story about Goli Otok, but has himself suffered the many-sided and unique reality that is Goli Otok.

Here and there the diary takes on the character of a tragedy—the letters are rich in events and in personalities that, though anonymous, are clearly depicted. In this sense the individual letters seem to be complete tragedies. Or more precisely, strokes of tragedy in which personality struggles against violence, against tyrants, against those who usurp human personality and human rights. The individuals and their faith are clearly drawn because they are based not upon abstractions but have grown up in the fire of terrible sufferings. This is why you believe a particular personality, regardless of whether you can acquit it or not; you accompany it along its bright, brave, and bloody path.

I give very few of the real names of the political prisoners; for many of them are still alive and can thus be arrested anew and returned to a prison.

Goli Otok as a hell has served its purpose in "reforming" people long ago even by its prisoners' self-management. Recently, *Politika* published a critical article about inaccurate uses of the term "self-management," which often is not clear either to readers or to the journalists themselves.

This article was occasioned by an announcement in the SFRY mass media which pointed out that in the

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Yugoslav system even a convict remains part of the self-managing mechanism. *Politika* wrote: "Convicts in the role of self-managers?! Does this mean that convicts will elect the wardens of the prison? And what will happen if they vote against him? Imagine a meeting where the prisoners pass a resolution to eliminate any further serving of the term of punishment because, in the opinion of the convicts, the punishment has already served its purpose."

After pointing out further that "prisoners' self-management," a term often heard lately (probably derived from "workers' self-management"), consists of two words whose meanings are directly opposed, the newspaper writes: "Inertness is doing its job. In a society where the system of relations is based upon self-management, it is only natural that there would be a demand for its implementation in the prisons too. But things have gone so far that now in fact we have begun to introduce it in the prisons. It's too much! We have no need whatsoever for this kind of popularization of self-management!"

Goli Otok, this shameful stain on our era, was invented by the leaders of the LYC at the very moment when the Communist party of Yugoslavia was renamed and transformed into the League. This prison and its tortures are unique in the world. Just as the separate road to socialism is specifically Yugoslav, so too are its prisons—Goli Otok in particular.

Three hours before I was released I was taken from Isolation and led to the release area. I was searched thoroughly This surprised me. After all, I was leaving prison, not entering, so why were they worried about my hiding a cipher or a weapon? By the clothes that had been sent to me I knew that my wife had been on the island. I understood that the Administration had immediately sent her back to Rijeka by steamer, not allowing us to see each other. My examining magistrate traveled with me from Goli Otok to Rijeka, probably because he was afraid I would meet some members of the underground who had been on Goli Otok and who could help me escape to another country. There were

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moments when I thought that the steamer would turn around and I would be seized and brought to trial again.

While traveling from Rijeka to Skopje, we decided that I should leave Yugoslavia legally, as soon as possible. My illness would provide grounds, because my health was utterly undermined and I had to undergo a treatment that could not be obtained in Yugoslavia. I could not realize this plan immediately because I was disenfranchised for two more years.

Two years had passed since I had left Goli Otok. Shortly after the big earthquake in Skopje, I noticed a deterioration of my right eye. This gave me reason enough to ask for a passport to the Soviet Union. I knew the USSR had the best eye specialists and, what is more important, I trust the Soviet physicians.

Instead of going to the Soviet Union, I found myself in my Bulgaria again.

I don't doubt that some day, not so very far in the future, Goli Otok will be liquidated as a prison and transformed into a kindergarten, or perhaps into a resort for foreigners, of which it has all the makings. But when the stars begin to shine in the blue and the moon begins to wander across the sky, shadows will walk to and fro and fill the emptiness with fear. The curses of the people who lie on the bottom of the sea with their hands tied and with stones on their necks will come to the surface. The night will grow darker, the air will cut like a knife, the sea will rage, and Velebit will be more somber. . . . Who among the living can be calm on such a night? The traces of the murdered bleed like bloody wounds and conjure the contemporaries, the posterity, the citizens of tormented, martyred Yugoslavia.

Perhaps there will also be films that show living heroes who recreate life on Goli Otok, but the tortures of Goli Otok will neither be chronicled nor pictured by the camera. And thus, this Goli Otok of the future will be anything but Goli Otok.

Reader, with this I bring to an end my story of Goli Otok, the island of death.

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