

'If Only the Russians Could Open their Archives' Of Vetro-Marxist Ogresses, Historiographic Myths, and the Perennial Remoteness of Russia — An Afterword to the New Russian Edition of *Conjuring Hitler*

~Guido Giacomo Preparata

Moreover, Russia is too big a tangle for us to unravel alone without the Germans, and without hard work.
Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed* (L_i)

—L'imagination assemble et compare; elle ne crée jamais, répliqua sèchement sainte Catherine.
Anatole France, *L'Ile des Pingouins*

...The interests of a class most directly refer to standing and rank, to status and security [...]; they are primarily not economic but social.
Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*¹

Introductory: the Failure of the Fathers

In the preface of Anatole France's now forgotten 1908 parody of France's Third Republic, *L'Ile des Pingouins* ("The Isle of the Penguins"), the novelist indulges, briefly, in a consuetudinary tirade against the painstaking compulsion to re-write history; do not try to surprise the reader, admonishes France, for the latter "*ne cherche jamais dans une histoire que les sottises qu'il sait déjà*": because he only looks for the stupidities he already knows, the reader is likely to take anything novel —i.e., not suffering from the precut biases of the discursive game— as an intolerable insult to "his beliefs."²

In this essay, much as I have done in the German Afterword versus the academic custodians of Liberal imperialism ("Four Years Since," 2009), I would like to address another set of formidable *sottises* directly pertaining to our topic that have held sway in the West for over half a century. These imbecilities, and the purported sediment of "beliefs" accrued to them, did, at some point, gain wide currency in that they were in strict compliance with the game of (specious) polarization which the Cold War had foisted on the world. Thus, the topic touches Russia, and her history, directly, or as directly as it may, through the faltering argumentation of a West-European such as myself, who was born in the median stages of that Cold Game, and who —in the looming shadow of this grand,

alluring mystery that Russia is to us— is trying to compose a veracious reconstruction of these fundamental past events in view of the (as I now sense them, sinister) transformations that await the world at large.

The stupidities in question are those of Western Marxism, or more to the point, of that presently threadbare fringe of diehards Marxists, and their scattered epigones, who survive sparsely on both sides of the Atlantic. Like the overwhelming majority of Europeans, despite some (literary and historiographic) reading and the occasional trip (to Moscow and St. Petersburg), I am, alas, profoundly ignorant of Russia. Under these premises, since I cannot anticipate the reaction of a Russian reader to these few introductory lines, I am in no position to calibrate the nuances of my meaning. For, clearly, Marxism, for good or ill, has meant "something" to Russia's recent past; and that "something" was, for a half a century, sold to us westerners as one of the only two (political) totems —the other being U.S. Liberalism— round which we were politically allowed to cluster. So, in principle, it would seem incongruous that I should address a Russian audience by telling it about a "current" that we, at one point of *our* history, were being, de facto, lectured upon by the Russians themselves. But, being "politics" the deceit that it is, my telling the Russians my side of the "Russian story" is not as incongruous as it may sound; and this is so because of two central hindrances —discursive the one, geopolitical the other—that have hitherto impeached a fluid exchange between our "blocs," and more crucially, a common imaginarium wherein to frame our discussion.

The first is the spuriousness of Marxism-Leninism as the new-fangled liturgical Esperanto of Soviet Russia. It is as though we were speaking in tongues to one another when referring to "those days," the westerners having to vocalize every sentence in terms of a nondescript notion of "freedom," and the Russians having to reply with soundbites of an idiom issued from a narrative made of

Hegelian pseudo-spiritualism and Ricardian economics that was utterly alien to their cultural substrate. For one, so-called Soviet socialism was but a profoundly inefficient form of State-capitalism, period. If we concur, then, that our lines of communication have been systematically undercut and disabled by and through the forcible diffusion of sterile and sterilizing speech, which development has predictably led to a gigantic misconception of our social phenomenology, we may then move ahead, and re-establish contact, by excorticating these crippling verbalizing prosthetics from our minds and mouths. Inauthentic as it might have been, however, the Marxist-Leninist pretense was sustained in Soviet Russia effectively and long enough, all the more so as excoriated societies which find themselves re-engineered under the duress of geopolitical exigencies *ne peuvent parler qu'avec la langue de bois*. Despite the monstrous transmogrifications of such surgeries, the malleability of all things human, for good or ill, consents these artificialities and mimicries to succeed—the recent “theocratic” constructions of “Islamism,” starting with Khomeini’s “revolution” of 1978-79, are but another instance of this “re-suture” of decapitated bodies assisted by the re-wiring of the body social’s speechifying faculties with a variety of Newspeak (in the case of Islamism, a mishmash of modernizing pandects more or less freely elaborated from the Koran, the Sayings of the Prophet, and the Shar’ia). The strength of Marxism resided in its being a discursive apparatus of a *totalizing* character; it was a *system*—doubtless the work of extraordinary talent—the first of its kind in which, evidently, *everything*—sociological, political & cultural (as superstructure), historical, and, above all, *economic*—could be fitted. The disciple needed to look no further: ‘twas *all* in there (in *das Kapital*, the *Grundrisse*—Marx’s complete oeuvre...and in the apostles’ commentaries). Political *mouvances* of all kinds, if they are to succeed and eventually acquire momentum, need at the very minimum an authoritative “book”—or, in the case of Liberalism, keen as it is on its “pluralistic” looks, a variegated yet homogeneous bibliographic compendium (by the “Founding Fathers,” or “the classics”)—and a pro-active, pharaonic prophet; the latter is generally the choice of seasoned casting directors; he is the revolutionist with the *physique du rôle*; as for the “book,” the procedure requires one to identify a “tradition,” retain the style, and simply update it: viz. make it Marxism-*Leninism* (and onto Neo-Marxism and so forth), to cover whatever went on after the Messiah’s death in 1883. Considerations of this sort are, clearly, nothing new; they relay, for instance,

broodings such as those of Ortega y Gasset in *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930):

Russia is Marxist more or less as the Germans of the Holy Roman Empire were Romans. New peoples have no ideas; [...] they disguise themselves in the ideas of [older civilizations]. Here is the camouflage and the reason for it [...]. The only thing one can assert is that Russia will require centuries before she can aspire to command. Because she is still lacking in commandments she has been obliged to feign adherence to the European principles of Marx [...]. Something very similar is happening with New York.³

We know it: politically, what came to pass in Russia after the czarism was snuffed out in 1917-1918 was not the bloody harvest of unfulfilled market reforms, neither was it a “Marxist” *golpe*, nor the inexorable outcome of “dialectic materialism,” but rather the contingent fruit of “Shigalovism,” to cite Dostoyevsky’s visionary evocation in *The Possessed* (1872) of the nihilist drift within the tornado that would wholly disfigure an already emaciated nation: i.e., the chiliastic promise of perfect equality wrought through pure violence by an intelligentsia comprising ten percent of the population lording it over the remaining, beastly, bottom-feeding ninety percent. And it was historically and practically sealed via the strictures of an inefficient apparatus of State (capitalist)-enterprise.

Dismally, the whole shebang was already outmoded even before it came into being:

So, too, the poor old Russians, always behindhand, always holding the world back. First they “afterbirthed” the Economic Industrial Revolution, when for a generation it had already miscarried in the Economic-industrialized countries, and then had to make their Lenin into a mummied Pharaoh and, finally, call back the Greek Orthodox Church. Slow movement and coda [...].⁴

If the first obstacle to unfettered communication is, then, the feat of linguistic sabotage that has structurally forced us all to misconstrue entirely our theorizing of the socio-political realm, the second one, instead, is the perennial constraint, or rather the impediment that has become a durable fixture of the westerner’s mental and cogitative space ever since the Anglo-American Commonwealth has conceived of the so-called “Eurasian