

Paolo Rumiz

They Will Come by Night

The Specter of Barbarism in Europe

Des loups sont entrés dans Paris
L'un par Issy, l'autre par Ivry.

"Les Loups", di Vidalie-Bessières

March-April 2024

Midnight

The Idiots

So who's sleeping tonight.
A wind of ill omen is blowing
it stinks of burnt meat, kerosene and exhaust fumes
my nose is an anemometer, it never fails
it smells an unmistakable stench
like when an anti-tank rocket blows up an armored vehicle with men inside
I hope that's something you'll never smell
it's the same stench of the savage powers that are crushing us
it reeks of the censorship of free thought
my eyes see people who shut up and toe the line
my ears hear "nation" said with suspicious frequency
"security," worse yet, makes me nauseous
the language is changing
the word "freedom" is heard less and less
even "peace" is frowned on, a synonym for cowardice
in my Italy and elsewhere the boys who carry the rainbow flag are billy-clubbed
young people kept on file as criminals
kids, almost children really
they had to admit them to the pediatric ward
children hated as such in a Europe of the elderly
impudent brats who dare to ask for a future of brotherhood rather than war
and they don't know that the change for the worse has already started,
with the lexicon, read Victor Klemperer, who showed it with Nazism
by now, the word "identity" has swelled to the point of meaninglessness
it's no longer used to say who you are and where you come from
but to look for a fight and unleash your weapons
when I hear "identity" I reach for the revolver, says Claudio Magris
"identity" same root as "idiotes"

which in Greek means “those who are turned in on themselves”
or better yet: “those who live out their lives in navel-gazing”
as an old man on an island in the Aegean explained to me, showing me his belly
the idiots, the ones who are afraid of the world’s complexity
and don’t allow themselves to be suffused by the encounter with the Other.

Sleepwalkers

Iranian missiles are flying over Israel in a state siege, the hostage of the worst government in its history.

A river of people, imprisoned in the ghetto of Gaza, tried to reach the northern part of the strip, but they were stopped by the Israeli army that killed five of them.

Europe can’t sleep. Maybe it has slept too much before now.

I know how it works. It starts with economic war, then there’s the war economy; asymmetrical war, and finally real war.

Even where there is no fighting going on, people’s behavior is changing for the worse.

Teachers beaten up by the parents of their students, insults for those who point out that you don’t put the soles of your shoes on the seats in trains or that it’s bad manners to speak in a loud voice on your cell phone in public.

Generations nourished on TikTok, their brains turned to pulp.

Society is falling apart. The red line’s been crossed.

It’s said during the day by the dull color of the sky. It’s confirmed by the exhausted Earth, and that damned smell.

The poor noticed it long ago, the rich still haven’t. Old Europe deludes itself that it is safely out of it, and instead it is wading in up to its neck, sliding down the inclined plane, a somnambulist, as in 1914.

And meanwhile Orwell has come to Brussels.

The founding principles of the European Constitution are in ruins.

Defending them has become subversive.

The Union, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, imports millions of grenades, rounds them up from everywhere, at any price.

Europa with the enemy at the gates, the ideal cow to milk for its military industrial complex and the investment funds that finance it.

A Europe that looks like Germany before the Great War: debt, military spending, disinformation, opacity with no responsibility.

Big Food, Big Chem, Big Pharma and the arms markets dominate, they do in Europe what they can't in America.

They set the agenda.

We are no longer governed by politics but by the voracity of the economy, the predatory bulimia of the GDP.

Privatization, delegation, contracting and subcontracting, and the public edifice cracks, personnel reduced to a minimum, the hospitals are falling apart, nobody gives a shit about the schools, the trains are breaking down from Germany to Greece.

A crucial moment for the Continent, at the crossroads between self-destruction and a renewal of its ideals.

And in the meantime, we are already lost in a pandemonium of simultaneous wars, endless wars that no one will win; neither Israel nor Gaza, neither Moscow nor Kiev, neither Russia nor Europe

war of nations against Europe and of nations against themselves

economic war between America and China

Civil War within America itself

wire fences are back, borders are closing, everyone is digging his own trench, now it's a war of all against all

war against the poor, against the human lives that are migrating

against democratic institutions

against the sacredness of the Earth, against nature that is fed up with us

war even against God, at times even priests get into it, with imams and rabbis

The word "against" is rampant, "for" has disappeared from our vocabulary

and there is a new triumphant fascism: the fascism of the Internet, that stupefies us, dominates, and divides us.

Trigger

I stoke up the fire, the cat stretches out next to the stove.

Beneath the floor I hear an imperceptible gnawing sound. Like a mouse. It's the railroad tunnel that they're digging a hundred and fifty feet under the village. It's as though an army of grave robbers were working on a network of rabbit holes to undermine the foundations of the mountain. You hear it especially when it's dark and tonight is as black as lava.

History is full of fateful nights. Kristallnacht, St. Bartholomew's, the Night of the Grand Council of Fascism. The Night of the Long Knives.

Who knows if those too were announced by some omen.

I know war – from the Balkans to Afghanistan – and I’ve learned that it is treacherous. It tricks you, because right up to the last, it seems impossible.

For the centenary of 1914 I returned to the front, from the snow in Ukraine to the trenches of Flanders, to understand what was left of that event.

Then, all of a sudden, in the inferno of the Somme, something went awry. Before me was an enviable and magnificently structured memory. Guided tours of battlefields, memorials, military cemeteries, and exemplarily managed museums.

But something wasn’t right. And that something was that the war was like a relic under glass, locked up inside a bulletin board.

It gave the perilous illusion of being something of the past, something unrepeatable. Therefore, impossible.

Then, to get to know the Eastern Front, the most forgotten, in Ukraine and Poland, I took an old rail line that runs through the woods less than half a mile from my house, toward the east.

It’s a track for slow trains. So slow that, when I go out to walk, where the path runs along the tracks, I manage to greet the driver, and he has time to answer me by blowing the engine whistle.

Right from the start it was a journey full of memories and presentiments. The east felt like war was still possible. The snow was enough, the indelible memory of totalitarianism.

Tonight too, it seems I can hear the dull sound of switches. The bora wind carries the clattering sound of trains heading for the front, with men and horses.

Perceptions. Nothing more than perceptions. But I trust them more than I do the analyses of the analysts.

Now it’s as though I can hear the derailment of an entire continent. An earthquake. The movement of the entire European electorate detouring onto the track on the right,

Anti-Europe populists are ahead in the polls in nine countries: Austria, Belgium. Czech Republic, France, Italy, Holland, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary

No surprise in this.

In 2008, I traveled on public transport from Murmansk to the Black Sea, becoming aware of things that no ambassador would have been able to perceive.

The stiffening back of the Russian bear, deluded by the West.

The widespread corruption in the former Communist countries converted to democracy.

The discrimination in the new members of the EU against their ex-Soviet minorities.

The terrible memory of the Poles, the Baltics, and the other ex-Soviets, who had lived under the heel of two tyrants.

I had heard, fourteen years in advance, the fear of the Ukrainians about a war between Russia and NATO.

To understand all this, all you had to do was get on a train and listen to the people. It was 2008 but the future was already in the air. Only the diplomats didn't know it.

Castrati

Once it was the poor who robbed the rich.

Today it's the opposite.

The rich have destroyed the middle class and now they are robbing the poor, only the poor don't realize it

the masters of the Web have sedated them with Tweets and Facebook and the Web has already handed itself over to the ethno-nationalist right

the carnival of technocracy is rehabilitating the post-Fascists

exhuming the zombie called Nation

two world wars were not enough for it

Once again history is moving backwards.

This Europe is so sad.

A ragtag bunch of sovereigntisms bound to implode, in the absence of a burst of pride

The land that gave birth to law, philosophy, and democracy, has let itself be contaminated by individualist anarchy,

by the need to satisfy every desire raised to the level of right, in collision with the rights of others.

It is Europe in regression to oral fixation

the undoing of community

the sunset of duties

the negation of every possible civil religion.

There was more Europe in my grandmother's time

today the French know the Maldives better than Germany

the Italians go on cruises to the Canaries but can't find Romania

Politically, we're finished.

Morally, we have been dead since the time of the war in Bosnia.

Diplomatically, we have castrated ourselves.

When the Christian Alliance confronted the Ottomans at Lepanto, contact with the enemy was never broken.

We, instead, have agreed to cut all ties with those who threaten us, starting with the Kremlin. We now count for less than Turkey.

Our support for Ukraine and Israel is so acritical that it is counterproductive and unpopular.

Militarily, we don't even exist, and that is the most serious problem.

We are not able to make peace, much less make war, which we disavow.

Die Katastrophe

At the beginning of 1914, only a few people sensed the impending catastrophe. War, who remembered it...

I rummage through my folders, and a photocopy of a manifesto from that year pops out. It calls for the foundation of a union between states and empires in Europe. Title: *Europäischer Staatenbund*.

I'd come across that proclamation by chance, years before, while I was searching through old paperwork from the historical archive of *Assicurazioni Generali*, in the vault of their first headquarters in Trieste.

Sometimes documents, a bit like books, do everything they can to be found.

The signature at the top of the poster is that of Edmund Richetti von Terralba, former CEO of the company and a leading exponent of the Trieste Jewish community. The date: May 1914. A month before the Sarajevo attack.

Premise: in the first months of 1914, Trieste is an emporium overflowing with traffic. The company's business has never been so good, and for this reason Richetti has been made a count by Emperor Franz Joseph.

The economy is booming, yet the big insurer is troubled. Indeed, terrified. Branch offices in half of Europe are sending bad signals. The continent's debts and military expenditures have reached levels of no return. In the document, the data are presented on tables, with Habsburgian precision.

The risk is what von Terralba calls "*eine entsetzliche Katastrophe*", a frightening catastrophe, which only a few can foresee.

The only way out, he writes, is an immediate alliance among countries, which the Emperor of Austria should promote. But the emperor is the same one who, two months later, will declare war on Serbia, unleashing the catastrophe that he should have averted.

Who knows if today, in the minds of finance capitalists, there exists a capacity for vision that is so lucid and at the same time so autonomous. Or if, on the other hand, there is only perverse interest in the worst. The economy of catastrophes.

The Buffer

I've got a bone to pick with nations. A personal score to settle.

Bear with me, I'm from Trieste.

Nations undid my empire, which was a Europe in miniature.

No, more Europe than all the other empires, because it had no colonies and was self-sufficient.

It wasn't the best of all possible worlds, but everyone went to school and the bureaucracy was honest.

From the port of my hometown, we sailed to three continents. Plus, there were banks, insurance companies, theaters, churches of all confessions and religions.

Old Franz did not address the people, but his *peoples*.

The waterfront palaces of Trieste still bear the signs of that golden age.

The Most High had placed Austria-Hungary right in the middle, acting as a buffer between the Europe of the steppes and the Europe of the seas.

There is a place in the heart of the Balkan powder keg that shows that imperial Europe was more serious than it is today: the Chapel of Peace in Sremski Karlovci on the Danube, in Serbian territory.

When in 1699 the Habsburgs chose to end the war with the Turks as victors, they built a wooden building on a hill with a round table inside, intended to put all the parties to the negotiations on equal footing. And it was the Treaty of Karlowitz, which established between the two countries one of the longest-lasting borders in the history of Europe. The same one that separates Bosnia from Croatia today.

Two centuries later, Austria decided to transform the building into an equally round chapel with four equally spaced entrances: one for Catholics, one for Orthodox, one for Muslims, and one for Jews. A vain hope of pacifying the Balkan hornet's nest. And a moving attention to symbols, which we have lost today.

The same is true of the Austro-Hungarian military cemeteries of the Great War on the Eastern Front, where the Russian enemy was welcomed with equal dignity, in a fraternal embrace that it was hoped would lead to peace.

I understand why they broke my grandparents' empire into pieces. That gathering of united peoples got on the nerves of the nations. They especially detested Austria-Hungary's claim to act as a buffer between two worlds, so as to avoid conflicts.

Today, in the absence of empires, everyone dreams of enlargement. They shout: "It's mine, it's mine!", they dream of a Greater Serbia, a Greater Albania, a Greater Hungary, a Greater Bulgaria. Meanwhile, Greece hates Macedonia, and Croatia thinks of itself as the bulwark of Catholic Christianity.

Now that the buffer is gone and NATO has pushed eastwards into contact with the other Europe, the effects can be seen. Russia and the West are snarling at each other to the delight of the arms dealers and the worldwide mafia. With the risk of a domino effect like that of 1914.

A great achievement.

Old rails

The old rail line runs through the woods less than a kilometer from the house, in an easterly direction. When the Bora is blowing, the passage of the trains seems very close.

It's a track for slow trains.

A century ago, Europe's rail network was much denser than it is today, the economy has imposed a shrinkage to fewer and fewer lines. The idea of a continental union was born from that grandiose integrated system, and from the need to unify timetables by overcoming the differences between nations. Then, in a tremendous retaliation, it was that same network, filled with troop trains, that put the world to the sword.

Tonight, I can hear a dull, clicking sound of switches. A rattle of trains going to the front, with men and horses.

My train line is full of memories and omens. Years ago, I took it to go to Ukraine via Budapest, to tell the story of the Eastern Front of the Great War. The most forgotten one, "*die vergessene Front*".

It was a journey through time by wagon, as in 1914. "*Acht Pfaerde oder zwei und vierzich Manner*" (Eight Horses or Two and Forty Men).

Perceptions. Nothing but perceptions. But I trust those more than the analyses of the analysts.

Away from the pounding of the news, in a place like this where nothing happens, you have much more time to imagine, and get the full picture.

Now it's as though you can hear the derailment of an entire continent. A telluric tremor.

The rumble of the entire European electorate deviating onto the right-wing track. With the exception of the last few weeks, the election forecasts confirm this.

Anti-European populists would have the advantage in nine countries. Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Holland, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary.

In nine other states, they are expected to be second or third.

During the first refugee crisis, which saw Germany indiscriminately open its doors to asylum seekers, Merkel and Orbán were seen as political opponents. Today, the magnetism of the “Orbanians” is likely to attract conservative centrists to the right.

On the horizon, a contradiction in terms: a Europe run by anti-Europeans.

A sovereigntist jumble destined to implode and sink the Union.

Meanwhile, the train rolls on in the rain, with its syncopated beat into the night. I imagine it winding along alone under the moonlight, between puffs of fog and steam, like *Downtown train* by Tom Waits.

The Antidote

Europeans, you won't get to know your land by plane.

You'll need the train, the bus, or the bicycle to get into the truth of the countries.

Slow travel is the greatest antidote to national prejudices.

It is the most direct confrontation with the Other, an invaluable tool of knowledge.

One day in Brussels, I told bewildered officials that the strength of the European myth was felt more outside the EU than within its borders.

I said that, before taking up their duties, the Brussels bureaucrats should spend a sabbatical year in the most derelict peripheries of the Union, moving around by public transport.

A murmur swept over the wall-to-wall carpeting of the building.

With Monika, a fantastic photo reporter who knows the forgotten peripheries of Europe like no one else, I had traveled from Murmansk to the Black Sea, noticing things that no ambassador would have been able to perceive.

The stiffening posture of the Russian bear, deluded by the West.

The rampant corruption in former communist countries converted to democracy.

Discrimination by new EU entrants against their ex-Soviet minorities.

The terrible memory of the Poles, the Baltics, and other former Soviets, who had lived under the heel of two totalitarianisms.

We had felt, fourteen years in advance, the fear of the Ukrainians of a war between Russia and NATO.

To understand this, all we had to do was get on public transport and listen to the people.

It was 2008, but the future was already in the air.

Maps

Fortunately, there is irony.

Maurizio, from Romagna, builds globes and sells maps. He is a caustic and cultured man, with deadly one liners.

His profession is old-fashioned, but it allows him to read the idiocy of nations, which tear each other apart for shreds of territory. This inspires him with stories that make you die laughing.

Map makers, he explained, are under pressure. When closing contracts with international trade fairs, the cartographer receives constant requests for modifications. Only the suggestions don't come directly from wholesalers, as it seemed at first. They come from state officials or embassies.

Until recently he managed to fight off these demands, but for some time now the nation states have been intervening directly, threatening to blow up the agreements for even a minimal detail. Which is why, Maurizio laughs, we are all churning out "personalized worlds, with different names, borders and colors, depending on the patriotic tastes of the buyers".

Just imagine what's it's like now, with all the wars going on.

To understand in advance the appetites of nations, it doesn't help to hang around ministries, study centers, or embassies. Just look at the maps. It works better than a game of Risk. Listening to Maurizio, it is as if wars started on the maps before they start on the ground, and sometimes it really seems that you're seeing volleys of cannon fire, for example, between the inscriptions "Poltava" and "Kirovograd", on either side of the pale green strip of the Dnieper.

The diplomatic pressure on geographers is so tragicomic that Maurizio wrote a story about it, where the globe builder goes crazy because the Russian wholesaler wants new borders with Ukraine, closer to the Dnieper, otherwise he will cancel the purchase order, or because the British government presses to have the Falkland Islands repainted pink.

The Turks are particularly picky: they demand that the word KURDISTAN be removed and that an accent be placed above the "I" of Istanbul. And then be careful: the colors of Greece and Turkey are too similar, and that's not good, because the two hate each other.

I laugh just recalling it. But, in reality, Maurizio shows me one of the best terrains on which to confront the growing hubris of nations: parody. A lethal weapon against the stupidity of the arms race.

As long as irony is still of this world.

The Fault Line

Robert Kaplan! How did I forget the visit you made to Trieste a few years ago? Kaplan, the author of *The Revenge of Geography*, a book I had read over and over again,

and that explained how events were brought about more by geography than by peoples and ideas.

The world is physical, he writes, and we have forgotten about it by dint of working on a flat screen that does not allow us to perceive either the differences in height or the millenary scars that nature and man have inflicted on the earth's crust.

With geography abolished in schools across Europe, meeting that man meant for me consummating my personal revenge against a suicidal educational choice. If you don't deal with geopolitics, said that dangerous fox Henry Kissinger, then geopolitics will deal with you. And it might not be a pleasant experience.

But why in the world did a man who had worked with U.S. presidents and the world's major periodicals have to speak to me?

I got the answer when we found ourselves in a small room at the Ai Duchi hotel. Kaplan had to write a book about the Adriatic and was looking for someone who could feel the vibrations of the fault line represented by my border. And fault lines are pretty damn interesting because they "sense" events in advance.

What was the reasoning behind Kaplan's choice? Trieste was no longer a den of secret services on the frontier of the West with the world of the big chill. The journalists at the local newspaper (for which I worked) no longer included someone trusted by the CIA. But the American must have had some reason to monitor my sea.

Only later did I realize that it involved China, which was aiming to make Trieste the terminus of a new Silk Road to let it penetrate Europe. And Trieste was actually the fastest channel on the Suez route.

The U.S., of course, was not happy about it. And in fact, shortly thereafter, the management of the port was warned against proceeding further, while the local Freemasonry of Atlanticist faith raised a fuss against the "yellow peril".

The American had a discerning eye. Today, with Ukraine in flames, the Red Sea less accessible due to the Gaza war, and the Balkans having become the rearguard of NATO's eastern flank, the importance of the Adriatic choice is there for everyone to see.

Yesterday's World

It is not advisable to listen to Colonel Markus Reisner, military historian and member emeritus of the Austrian General Staff. It can cause depressive breakdowns. At the end of his briefings, I sometimes have to go outside to smoke a cigarette in silence, to shake off my anxiety.

Reisner doesn't sugarcoat words. His army does not belong to NATO, so he is freer to tell the truth, even if his government's pro-Ukrainian position is clear.

The colonel's unvarnished truth is that the West does not see things as they are and dramatically underestimates Russia, whose military machine is in full swing with higher than expected production of heavy vehicles. This raises fears that Moscow could go as far as Kiev's gates, and perhaps beyond.

Another idea of his is that Europe is going through a "post-heroic" phase, in the sense that no western European wants to fight anymore, even to defend his homeland. Let alone for the freedom of other people's homelands. All things that Putin is knows quite well.

But the most inconvenient truth is that Europe, if it wants to insist on sending weapons against the Russians, must prepare itself for a war economy. As if to say: gentlemen, the party is over, now we tighten our belts. You listen to the colonel, who has monitored many of the world's crisis points, look at his anxiety-provoking charts, and understand that the good life might have its days numbered: no more vacations in exotic lands, nightly aperitifs, designer clothes.

In his videos, Reisner can occasionally be seen casting a wry glance at those present. It is as if he were saying: we must be aware that we live in a heated greenhouse, and if we are forced out of it, we will come into contact with the brutality of the world, the world that the migrants you reject are fleeing from. And then for us, as for the Austrians with the Anschluss of 1938, in a flash the world of today will become the world of yesterday, see the novel by Stefan Zweig. And then, when it is too late, we'll be saying: how beautiful Europe was.

À la guerre

The world is so out of its head that even Marine Le Pen, with whom I share almost nothing, sometimes seems like a sensible person. I reread some of her pronouncements on the war between Moscow and Kiev.

"They want me to say at all costs," I heard her say on TV to aggressive journalists, "that if I'm for peace, then I'm for Russia. It makes no sense. Is it pro-Putin to seek negotiations? It is necessary to maintain contact with everyone, to be able to dialogue, even if there is a war going on. Instead, Brussels has prevented its nations from undertaking any diplomatic action. With the result that it is now conducted by non-European countries such as Turkey."

The leading woman of the *Rassemblement National* of France manages to say things that are shared by many; recalls that the war in Ukraine has so far cost six hundred thousand dead and wounded, and that without NATO Kiev will never win. "I find it incredible," she argues with a Napoleonic gesture, "that a country is being kept

in a state of permanent war, with the prospect that the conflict will last up to five or ten years. What do we want? A new Hundred Years' War? Or to put Ukraine in a strong position to negotiate an end to the conflict? That's what I would do, and yet it seems that no one wants this second solution. The risk is that the country will lose even in the presence of NATO aid."

Madame Le Pen defends herself well, she is authoritative. She already seems to be the President of the Republic. "If NATO, I mean to say NATO with the soldiers of European countries, wants to go to war on the ground, if I am elected I will prevent it from happening. This does not change the fact that we must increase our defenses, especially in the event that NATO were to retreat or dissolve. Not only Trump," she recalls, "but Obama had already confronted us with our military responsibilities. To renounce defending ourselves is to renounce our sovereignty. We cannot encourage Americans to be the guardians of the world and to exercise to their advantage the extraterritoriality of American law."

She plays the part of the moderate beautifully. But listening to her one is always left unconvinced. One wonders whether, once in government, the *Rassemblement National* will be taken to less extreme positions by the realities of power management or will it be sucked in by its old colonialist ghosts.

Marine's idea is acrobatic: to pull Russia into NATO, which would mean security and convenience in one fell swoop. Beautiful, even too much so. To the point that a piratical thought occurs to me. Could it be that it is up to the chauvinists to put an end to war?

Then, I think that it will be precisely the followers of Monsieur Chauvin who will put us in danger, blocking the birth of a common homeland, and therefore of a European army, which Macron seems to be betting on. A common army, without which we will be at the mercy of everyone.

The Strip

I can't manage being rational about Gaza. It awakens forces that, unbeknownst to me, set traps, harbor grudges, germinate feelings of guilt, get pissed off, ignite passions and sometimes even love, but then, for lack of an outlet, implode to the point of causing pain.

I don't have certainties, and I envy those who do: I would have to be there on the spot to understand that piece of land so laden with history. A place where, whatever you say, it always seems like you're walking on broken glass.

I write a letter to Mordechai, a rabbi born in Trieste who has lived in Jerusalem for fifty years and has eight children and an impressive bevy of grandchildren scattered

around the world. I write down a list of doubts and questions that I know may never be answered, but it is still a therapeutic act, getting them off my chest.

One. How is it possible that the conflict has lasted for so long? It is unreal that one of the most professional armies in the world took so long to “reclaim” a strip forty kilometers long and ten kilometers wide.

Two. It is incomprehensible to have a war of such ridiculous dimensions, almost a “condominium clash”, where for Israel the enemy is locked in a kind of ghetto.

Three. Is the purpose really to cleanse Gaza of terrorism, or is there more to it? In the Gaza Strip, terrorism is bound to reproduce itself forever.

Four. It is inconceivable that none of the Arab countries offer to take in these unfortunate people, just as it is inconceivable that people should find themselves refugees in their own homes.

Five. I ask myself every day how the rulers of a people persecuted for millennia can become persecutors and adopt a colonialist policy.

Six. If there’s one thing I’ve learned from the Jews, it’s that the Earth doesn’t belong to us. It is therefore unacceptable to me that it is precisely that people who declare themselves to be ‘chosen’ and claim exclusivity over a land.

Seven. Perhaps I am deluded, but I believe that responding to crime with unlimited retaliation plays into the hands of crime, lowers institutions to its level.

Eight. I fear that this tragedy will cause a domino effect to the benefit of the arms dealers and trigger an endless spiral of hatred between two peoples who lived together for centuries in the territories of the Ottoman Empire.

My diagram shows a world split in two, and the deepest rift is in Germany, squeezed between three million Muslims at home and the guilt of exterminating the Jews.

Gaza is the paradigm of a Europe that has lost all moral authority and has adopted two different narratives for Israelis and Palestinians: the former are “killed”, the latter, more trivially, “dead”. First and second-class victims. As if some were people and others “collateral damage”.

I wonder if Mordechai will answer me, immersed as he is more and more in his prayers, far from the things of the world.

In reality, one has to give his own answers. The only way not to go crazy is to always remind ourselves that Hamas and the Palestinians, as well as Netanyahu and the Israelis, are not the same thing. And that behind it all there is humankind.

Distinguish, always. Don’t give in to generalizations. True courage is confronting ourselves and our mental schemes.

The line

I go out for a walk on the path that runs along the edge of the woods.

Puddles, motionless frogs, hypnotized by my flashlight. The cat follows me, climbing up the trees like lightning to show off her skill.

The border is less than a half a mile away and this proximity allows me to live every day the luxury of having my home, not on a territory or even on a “strip”, like Gaza, but on a line. Something, that is, that ridicules any claim to national property.

It was the border’s demarcation, and the wild desire to go beyond it, that left a mark inside me when I was a boy and imbued my body with the desire to travel.

A bastard like me, with roots scattered among Poland, Dalmatia, Turkey and Argentina, of what land can he call himself a son if not of this border, right next to which he was born, one night in December?

It’s that Line, not a territory, that makes me feel European. No national identity will ever be able to define me, here, at the intersection of the Mediterranean, Slavic, and German worlds.

It is impossible to color a line. That’s what I love about borders, and about mine in particular. Walking along it and through the woods, I’ve learned to experience it not as a separation or barrier but as a place of encounter and acquaintance.

For me, this frontier is a tightrope, to be walked in equilibrium, to mock the nations that have fought to divvy up a rock pile.

It’s wonderful to walk through a no-man’s land, and become a No one yourself, like Odysseus who has just blinded the Cyclops.

I’m old and I can say what I want, and so, on the edge of this line, I have the luxury of saying uncomfortable things. For example, that Italy sacrificed 600,000 men to take Trieste, with the result that today, in its small region, my city counts for less than it did in the largest empire in Central Europe.

And then, isn’t it extraordinary that this troubled line, trampled by so many armies, ends up giving me security? It trains me to be alert, to think that war is a virus that never dies and can infect us anywhere. Like those who live on the San Andreas fault, I have learned how to build anti-seismically... in the mind.

In September 2022 – with the tragedy in Ukraine already exploding – part of this border was devastated by forest fires such that the unexploded grenades of the First World War began to blow up a century later, and that repeated and distant rumble, especially at night, reminded us border crossers that the worst is always lurking.

It is an awareness that accompanies me constantly and makes me keep my eyes open.

Here, shoulder to shoulder with the Balkans, I have discovered that nationalisms are beasts diseased with antagonism, who will never make a common front and who end up eating each other.

Here I verify every day that a “muscular” identity is a germ that fatally generates metastases and reproduces, in the form of local identities, the exact same distortions as centralism. Look at my region of just over a million inhabitants, which has more public employees than the entire Swiss federal administration.

On this border of mine I have learned that identity wars, even in the case of victory, often end with the self-destruction of identity itself, and the triumph of McDonald’s. Stateless capital, whether it be Arab, Russian, Chinese, American or Turkish.

That is why I fear that a disunited Europe, and moreover without children, will be reduced to an old age home, a hellish geronto-asylum, a ghost ship gone adrift, which the powers that be will swallow in a single bite.

In the absence of active federalism, we will become, if we are lucky, an amusement park for foreigners, where our children will be the butlers of the rich and our wonderful diversity will be torn to shreds.

It’s almost one o’clock. My journey into the night begins.

One a.m.

The Dream

An instantaneous omen.

The certainty that, in the middle of the night, they will come to take you away.

I'm talking about you, asylum seeker. One met who knows where, here in the woods, or in the city near the train station. Or nowhere.

Maybe I have this vision because my grandfather Domenico emigrated alone, at the age of eight, to Argentina.

You look like him. Same sharp nose, same skinniness. You have your delivery rider's cubic backpack next to the bed. You already speak a little Italian.

Mine is an anomalous vision, a dream for the future. A shared imminence. Something that is yet to happen.

I know those who will come for you armed and with their faces uncovered. They will rap their fists on the door. Crisp orders, but in a low voice, almost courteous. No one will have to see or hear. I know how they do it.

Raus. Dépêche-toi. Hurry up.

A quarter of an hour to gather your things. More than enough time, your things are so few.

You'll wonder why the dealers stay and you don't. You, who gave it everything you had.

The police don't weigh these differences. They execute orders. They'll load you into a van with tinted windows.

Inside, you'll find others like you. Mute.

Rain. You will pass for the last time through the city where you hoped to stay.

In the dark, like the Jews, pushed onto trains on the hidden platform in the Milan station.

They will inject you with a sedative. You'll walk past sleepy passengers waiting for more flights. Some will pretend they haven't seen you.

They'll load you onto a charter and you'll fly over the Europe of the rich dotted with lights.

They won't tell you the destination. And the hatch will open at dawn, in an unknown esplanade illuminated by floodlights.

You'll be the last to get off. You will smell citrus and gasoline.

Men in other uniforms will be waiting for you smoking at the foot of the ladder, with dogs on leashes.

Then they will escort you out of the airport and leave you on your own.

"Go," they'll tell you. Just a vague nod in the direction.

There you will disappear into thin air.

Green Border

Reality is worse than my dream.

The reality is the flesh of women and children feeding the fish at the bottom of the sea. The festering feet of the survivors of the horrors on the Balkan route.

The backs of migrants who arrived in Italy after being tortured by the border police, paid lavishly by the European Union and too often flanked by fascist paramilitary gangs.

Reality is that unimaginable geography of scars and burns, which the victims do not talk about out of modesty.

I know the prison camps (I can't think of any other words to describe them) in the Aegean islands, where hope dies. Hundreds of thousands of souls lost in tent cities under the whip lashes of the Greek Meltemi summer winds or the north wind in winter. I know of Greek guards who have committed suicide, such was their shame in the face of that hell on earth populated by men, women, old people, and children.

I crossed the Polish forests near Bialystok on the Belarusian border, dotted with now forgotten mass graves, where the armies of two world wars passed.

It is there, on the EU's eastern borders, that the blue star-spangled flag becomes an object of ridicule. It is there, in those tall and thin pine forests, that the European turns into a beast.

Green Border is a film that shows the truth of the bestial mistreatment inflicted on the fugitives by the two border police forces. Women giving birth in the snow, bodies thrown back over the fences, children swallowed up by the mud of the swamps, corpses becoming manure. Phones searching for each other in the dark, unanswered calls, wolf dogs barking.

For making that film, director Agnieszka Holland, an elderly student of the great Andrzej Wajda, was threatened with death by fanatics.

"Only pigs go to the cinema," commented President Duda, a phrase that sounds even worse in Polish: "*Tylko świnie siedzą w kinie*". A way of saying that Holland is a Nazi, the word of a head of state.

During the Second World War, under the German occupation, this was what was said of the collaborators, the only ones who could afford the cinema.

Charter flights

Light rain. An uninterrupted volley of rumbling thunder, as though above the clouds there was a move in progress of enormous dressers and wardrobes.

The smell of damp grass. By now the frogs are coming into my garden. Spring is just around the corner.

I think back to the dream of the rejected asylum seeker and wonder why I set it in the future. It makes no sense to push back in time something that happens now, or rather is happening.

It is now that people are drowning in the Mediterranean, now that migrants are being tortured at the borders of Europe, now that the flight to nowhere of the new *desaparecidos* is taking place.

While in Poland, Hungary and Croatia people are being pushed back with violence, in Germany, France, Italy and England expulsions are multiplying at an increasing rate.

Fifty, sixty at a time. Charter flights at a cost of twelve thousand euros, usually in the middle of the week. Anything, as long as they leave.

I don't even know why I say, "they'll come and get you".

One night, perhaps, they will burst into my house too, because I have given you a bed and fed you, or because I have helped those who help you, or who treat your feet ulcerated by walking.

My phone is tapped, I know that by now. Too much contact with the poor, which is unbecoming these days.

Helping the poor has become a crime. Soon being poor will be too.

Wannsee

Borders feel the world. And here, on this border, I feel that my Western Europe is beginning to resemble the Balkans, presenting itself in random order to the rendezvous with history. Nations are coming back, allowing ethnic hatred to grow, while those in Brussels remain silent and let it go on.

In a spa resort in distant Thuringia, where Arminius massacred the legions, it happens that industrialists and right-wing politicians, between a Turkish bath and a banquet, secretly plan the expulsion of thirteen million foreigners, and then – once discovered – promise it in parliament, with a straight face, as the key plank of their platform. It is their Final Solution, their Wannsee Conference.

It happens that in Paris the president of the *Rassemblement National*, Jordan Bardella, declares that he is working against the now-in-progress “federalist coup d’état” and to restore “the voice of France in Europe” in the name of a “battle of civilizations”. It happens that in Rome, comrades in black on black, in formation, salute their “martyrs” with outstretched arms and thunder “Present!”, and that the police fail to intervene, while a passer-by murmurs “boyish mischief”.

Even Greece, cradle of Western democracy, philosophy and thought, is passing repressive laws, and seeing the rise of far-right anti-European parties in parliament. Hungary ushers in “illiberal democracy” allows Nazi rallies to celebrate the Wehrmacht’s resistance against the Russians in 1944 and lets people in the streets call for the hanging of a young Italian woman, jailed simply for confronting the men dressed in black.

In the Netherlands, the country with the oldest democratic tradition in the world, the leader of the xenophobic party, Geert Wilders, following an election triumph, says he is ready for a referendum on the Netherlands’ exit from the European Union. But the nations themselves are fragmented: in Belgium, the Flemish far-right party proposes a consultation in favor of Flemish independence and the splitting up of the country.

It is a contagion of centrifugal tendencies. Spain has never been so riven; the struggle is now between those for and against Catalonia’s independence. The EU countries of the former Warsaw Pact are following the trend, with Romanian ultranationalists rising to twenty percent of the vote and Bulgarian socialists intent on building a coalition with nationalist and pro-Russian parties.

And while Putin, the post-communist, feeds and blesses the sovereigntists of Europe from the Kremlin, the return of Trump is in the air, the great unpredictable, the man capable of closing the border with Mexico in one day, of signing an amnesty for the cowboys who in his name raided the Congress, and perhaps of immediately phoning Putin to close the “matter” in Ukraine.

Telepathy

I go down to the kitchen, turn on the kettle, then put wood on the fire.

At times like this, I need Hans.

Chances are, he isn't sleeping either. There is telepathy between us.

He knows how to soothe my anxiety. He knows how to restore my hope.

A few days ago, he sent me wonderful pictures. Huge anti-fascist crowds marching for democracy.

I look at them again. They swell my heart. Three hundred thousand people in Munich, two hundred and fifty thousand in Berlin, two hundred thousand in Hamburg.

The stakes are momentous.

Torchlight processions, concerts, slogans. "*Nie wieder ist jetzt*", the never again is now, to say that the "never again" of the Holocaust must be relaunched today, with urgency. Because the danger is today.

Hans is my German brother of choice.

Sometimes he calls me, before eight o'clock in the morning, as he is walking to work. He walks that road every day, come rain, snow, or shine. It's his way of emptying his mind.

He knows all my secrets, as I know his. He updates me on a lot of things and, as he speaks, I hear his step on the gravel in the background.

... (cut) ...

I look and look again at those amazing images. There is also a complete map of the demonstrations, with an incredible density of circles. For the first time, protests were also held in small towns. Landau, Hildesheim, Bad Segeberg.

Something big is happening. People never seen before are coming out of hibernation to get involved in politics.

Even the misty German countryside is waking up.

The Unbelievers

Pitter patter on the shingles. Drops in increasing frequency, beat out an uneven rhythm in the chimney of the wood stove.

How happy Hans is to tell me about the uprising of his people! I am happy, too. But there was an immediate difference between his happiness and mine. Actually, two.

The first, humiliating for me, is that in Europe, apart from Germany, almost no one is marching "for" democracy anymore.

The second is that Hans didn't experience the Balkan war, and I did.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia is a paradigm that I cannot ignore. Those who have been there know that the Balkans are our belly, the beginning and the end of everything that happens in Europe. And I was there, on April 5, 1992 in Sarajevo.

Shooting was already going on here and there in Bosnia when, on April 5, an uncontrollable flood of crowds filled the streets of the city center to ask for peace.

One hundred thousand people. A tide that seemed capable of overwhelming everything.

At that moment I rejoiced and told myself that there could be no war if the opposition of civil society was so massive and conscious.

Instead, snipers on the roof of the Holiday Inn were all it took to kill six people, sow panic, disperse the crowds and begin the longest siege in the contemporary era.

I'm wearing Bosnian socks made of raw wool to keep warm. They are a gift from Rezak Hukanović, a Bosniak who miraculously escaped alive from the Serbian torture camp of Omarska, and the author of a chilling diary that recounts that experience. I often wonder how there is no trace of resentment in this man, whose body still bears the marks of his ordeal.

Bosnia helped me to understand essential things about the world. For example, how the irrational machine of hatred is constructed rationally by manipulators in the service of unnamed powers, and how manipulated men can return to caves. There I realized that wars can break out even where it seems impossible, and that the clash between nations always leads to their mutual defeat and the triumph of foreign capital.

That's another reason why I know I won't be able to sleep tonight.

By April 1992, in Sarajevo, the enemy had already dug a cordon of trenches around the city. Tanks were coming from everywhere. But the city didn't see. She was incredulous, she persisted in thinking it wouldn't happen. She believed in the neutrality of the federal army.

"The imbecility of goodness" I had called that fatal candor in the face of danger. The same that distinguishes us today.

Just eight years earlier, Sarajevo had hosted one of the most beautiful Winter Olympics in history. Thousands of young people had volunteered to make them successful in the name of brotherhood among peoples. Dazed by so much warmth and the magic of a city where churches, mosques and synagogues coexisted, the president of the International Olympic Committee said: "This is the first Olympics organized by an entire people".

Three years later, at the Universiade in Zagreb, I also saw a triumph of youth, life, and joy. The final image is indelible: a race of a thousand girls in large colored dresses billowing in the wind.

I did not know that, during those same hours, men who had come out of the darkness were planning the dismemberment of Yugoslavia.

This to you, this to me. This, we'll go halves on.

The rival gangs were already arming themselves, in agreement with each other, unbeknownst to the people.

There had to be blood, all the parties involved knew that. And blood there would be, to ennoble a division that, in reality, had as its sole purpose robbery.

Since then, I have known that evil finds its best hiding place among people of goodwill.

The Shadows

(I add some wood to the fire.) Outside, the forest is agitated, and the house seems besieged by shadows. The night is endless.

I throw myself on the couch and try to doze off, but just at that moment, poised between wakefulness and sleep, the visions return.

They invade me without logical sequence, but with the regularity of a geyser.

An eruptive manifestation, a reddish palpitation, slow, regular, much more physiological than geological, like a volcano in the middle of the sea.

I know well that constant switching on and off the bedside light, between the hasty writing of a note and the useless attempt to sleep.

I've been accumulating notes about Europe for years, and I know that there are things that can only be perceived and written in the dark.

At night, the stowaways pass through the forest above my house. Sometimes their faces appear in the window like the icon of a shroud.

At night you can hear the creaking of the Union doors closing.

At night, military convoys of heavy vehicles pass towards the Dnieper front.

At night, gun collectors secretly meet in a restaurant on the outskirts of Vienna and exchange tools and symbols of death hidden in the trunks of their cars.

At night, the runes of ill omen return.

At night, large and ferocious rats enter the dilapidated warehouses of the Habsburg train station in my city, Trieste, and bite the feet, ears and fingers of the migrants waiting there.

At night, the police arrive, forced to make blatant and useless raids on their dens. Blitzes, the newspapers call them.

At night, in a small town, unknown assailants set fire to a shelter for asylum seekers, and it doesn't make the news.

At night, bleeding hearts sleep in the warmth of their homes, far from all this, as Primo Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz, recounts.

At night, millions of insomniac humans are swallowed up by the net.

At night, you can hear a regular swirl of an undertow. It is the dead sea of indifference.

Parasites

“Paolo, in times like these, perceptions are more important than the events that make the news.”

Mirjana, a friend for forty years, organizes international conferences in Vienna on the most hotly debated political issues of the moment and tells us that in the vast Germanic-speaking world, from Austria to Norway, and in its Baltic satellites, people are fed up with seeing veiled women.

She explains that the traditional parties don't acknowledge this distress for fear of being accused of racism, thus allowing the right to have a monopoly on the problem.

Mirjana says that her *Hannovermarkt*, where she goes shopping, a stone's throw from the center, is no longer Vienna, no longer Austria even, but Kabul, Afghanistan.

The streets of her house are trodden by gangs of Chechens, sometimes violent, or by idle Arabs who have lots of children for whom they receive subsidies from the state. Men who don't work, shut themselves up in ghettos, confine their wives to their homes and, thanks to the web, stay in their ethnic bubble without learning German. Which in itself is not a language that easily assimilates and integrates the newcomer.

Even the old immigrants – those who have learned the language and have settled in – are tired of it and describe these people as parasites who take everything from the welfare state without giving anything back.

The Germans are worried because Turkish males shut themselves in their hookah bars to ruminate on who knows what, creating extraterritorial spaces where the Western female is better off not sticking her nose.

There must be something wrong if Erdogan gets more votes in Munich or Berlin than in Istanbul, and if in Frankfurt not only the suburbs but also the old streets near the station, *Münchenerstraße* and *Kaiserstraße*, are no longer Germany.

In Sweden, the overly generous culture of welfare and reception encourages many immigrants not to work and becomes a boomerang. Violence, especially among children, has reached unprecedented levels and too many newcomers are living on subsidies without working.

Meek Finland may be a shy and taciturn country, but what words of hatred spread at night in blogs, in the privacy of homes! Only the xenophobic right seems to have understood that elections are won on the parallel world of TikTok. The Romanian government, which has the same problem, is debating whether to regulate the platform, judging it a dangerous “vehicle of anti-system messages”.

In Italy, among the cooperatives that take care of the newcomers and manage state subsidies, there are some that scandalously enrich well-connected program

administrators, who, to increase the number of their clients, take anyone, turn a blind eye to everything, and fail to distinguish between “economic” immigrants and war refugees, who are the ones who are really entitled to asylum, to the delight of the mafias looking for drug dealers or cheap labor.

How can we not take all this into account?

How can we fail to respond to it?

Why leave the issue of immigration to the right?

Why allow these perceptions and feelings, unheeded, to degenerate into racism? What stands in the way of a better regulation of the system for receiving migrants?

Bleeding hearts need to stop chatting over café crème and be in the world, to understand how this lopsided reality is perceived by the ordinary taxpaying citizen, and how all this flows into a cauldron that boils, ferments, vents, and overflows, especially at night. It is, as always, a matter of taking lessons in listening.

Marco Schild, the German son of Italian parents, who left the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) after seven years because the party had become too harsh, admonishes the left.

“Don’t distance yourself from people,” he says. “Spend precious time with them, experience the things that connect you. The personal relationship, the emotional level, is the best way [to achieve the goal]. It’s much stronger than any argument, because at some point people are immune to rational arguments, but not to feelings.”

The Higher Ups

Unquiet night. The rain is letting up, it seems to be imitating the background murmur of restless peoples.

A mumbling sound that becomes audible in waiting rooms, in bank lines, or at the butcher’s counter.

It’s in those places that, in Austria and Germany, you can feel the growing anger not only against foreigners, but also against the supposed privileges of the elites, “*die Da Oben*”, the higher ups, as the Germans call them.

Today, even in Germany, anyone who presents himself as a politician is pelted with insults. They call him incompetent even if he is absolutely right and if the facts he cites are incontrovertible.

Facts don’t count for anything anymore.

Maybe those who are crying out against the elites are also privileged, but what does that matter? What matters is perception.

A part of Germany is fed up with bearing the weight of other people’s debts, the weight of its own embarrassing memory, the weight of the bulk of immigration.

Germans are tired of always being portrayed in films as ruthless.

And you can hear the grumbling in the suburbs, in rural areas, on the trains.

In the Balkans, in the late 1980s, I did not perceive the impending disaster in the palaces of power, but in the taverns, in the most remote countryside.

Hans knows this too. He also hears the murmuring spreading among the middle class, the aching belly of fat Germany, the anxiety of those who are afraid of losing the little or the much that they have.

The Germans, I was told by a collaborator of Jacques Delors, one of the fathers of the star-bangled union, are democrats as long as their bellies are full. But if an economic crisis arrives, they change sides.

If the German locomotive starts to slow down, there is something to fear.

The figures say that the locomotive is slowing down. The connecting rods and pistons are panting with fatigue.

The Opportunists

Luiza is also awake, eight time zones away from me. She has American relatives and for a few days she has been on vacation in Colorado, in a cabin at an altitude of 11,000 feet in the middle of meters of snow.

She's Polish, she teaches political geography, she lives between Europe and the United States, and she's distressed for the same reason I am. She feels the world rolling down a fatal inclined plane.

I call her and tell her that throughout Europe the institutions already seem to be adjusting to the new wind, in their language, in their choice of candidates, and in their administrative choices. The European Commission takes back its most courageous choices, to appease the sovereigntist right, and what's worse, without even waiting to see the electoral results. It's the first time we've ever seen such a spectacular retreat on proposals like the Green Deal.

She agrees. Already many are adapting, out of opportunism or conviction. "I'm worried," she says, "and being here in America the distance from Europe makes the situation even more anxiety-provoking."

We compare the latest data. The atmosphere is heavy. Fabrice Leggeri, the Frenchman who led Frontex, the agency that manages the EU's external borders, has announced that he has joined Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National*. His is a tremendously uncomfortable name for the establishment.

In Germany, the former head of the secret service, Hans-Georg Maaßen, who was fired by the government for not sufficiently investigating the threat of the far right, has

founded a new party, also on the far right, and now finds himself being investigated by the same services he headed.

There is also an air of a political reversal in Germany in local governments, where pressure from the AfD is felt on decisions that affect the weaker members of society: women and immigrants. Administrators are already preparing for the idea of mayors with greater, if not absolute, discretionary powers. Little Gauleiters, bosses of the regime. If the right comes to power, it will not need to enter the state machine, because it will already be firmly established there.

Some universities in the Netherlands have already issued circulars requiring lectures to be given only in Dutch, which will cause a large proportion of foreign teachers to leave. Until yesterday, many classes had been held in English. In the Land of Lower Austria, laws have been passed prohibiting the speaking of languages other than German at school and the use of the female gender in official correspondence.

The pressure on those who go against the current is deadly. Luiza is a fighter, she's not afraid of anything. But she admits: "My colleagues in Holland and I are already thinking about how to protect ourselves. Too many threats".

Bleeding hearts

"How did we ever get to this point?" Here we are, asking ourselves the same question, on one side and the other of the Atlantic, as though recognizing that America and Europe are facing the same, dramatic, political vacuum. The vacuum is the one created by a left in a state of hypnosis, a prisoner of its own critical consciousness. A left that is very adept at deconstructing, at generating refined analyses. But when it comes to proposing alternatives: zero.

The rain starts to let up, the night seems to be populated by shadows, as if evoking a night still more vast, the night of the western world.

Why this paralysis of the left? It would take so little to say: folks, immigration is troublesome, but we need it, what we have to do is regulate it better.

Years ago, the mayor of Vienna, Michale Höepl, a social democrat, told me that the solution lay in reconciling "*Humanität und Ordnung*", humanity and order, because one without the other would lead to disaster.

That synthesis of the two qualities has never been accomplished.

And what can we say about training centers in the countries of origin that would cost us much less than police surveillance and a myriad of refugee camps?

Nothing has been done about this either. Too much fear of losing votes.

Luiza highlights another weak point of the left. Its presumption of its own moral superiority that becomes a “suffocating moralism”. “How long can Atlanticist social democracy,” she says, “convince Europeans to shell out money for Ukraine by saying that it is right or that Zelensky is good and Putin is bad?”

How long will governments be able to ask citizens to support Jerusalem in the Gaza war even when Israel crosses the line?

The same for the Green Deal. It is not enough to say that we must not pollute because we must be good.

That is not how you convince Frauline Gertrude or Senora Dolores. You need to explain that Gertrude and Dolores, in their own small way, can also help protect nature for the sake of their children and grandchildren.

This pedagogical effort is not being made, and a certain maximalism of the Greens means that the green economy is perceived by the people as a radical chic luxury.

The difference between morality and moralism is that the latter is an immoral copy of the former and serves to disguise political aims or economic demands. Today’s geopolitics sucks precisely for this reason: because it hypocritically points to “bad guys” to justify hegemonic ambitions.

Ciao Luiza. Together we were unable to do anything but feed our shared anxieties. And it’s as though I can hear my friend’s voice getting lost in the Colorado blizzard.

The Muckraking Machine

There is a terrible story that helps us enter the European night. The story of Alexandra, who threw herself into the river.

Alexandra Förderl-Schmid, one of Austria’s leading journalists and deputy editor-in-chief of the “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, who jumped into the Inn River in the middle of winter, after a violent smear campaign against her by the right.

They found her the next day, still alive, in a state of hypothermia.

Her body had floated onto the riverbank in Braunau am Inn, on the border with Germany.

Braunau, Hitler’s hometown. Almost the final scene of a Shakespeare tragedy.

A desperate act, but also a warning sign, like the epidemic of suicides among German Jews in the 1930s.

Alexandra is said to have left a letter inside her car that read: “*The hunt is over*”.

A few days earlier, she had resigned (or perhaps been pressured to resign) from the newspaper, to allow colleagues to verify the allegations against her.

I have worked forty years in the press, and I know that for a long time, even in Italy, journalists have been detested, sometimes beaten by fanatics of the right or left, because they are “spreaders of lies.”

Yet I had never witnessed such a systematic demolition.

In Alexandra’s case, the mud-slinging machine was set in motion by the right-wing populist “Nius” portal, generously financed by billionaire Frank Gotthardt, a member not of the AfD but of the CDU, essentially the German Christian Democrats.

“Nius” identified the famous journalist as a politically ideal target and entrusted a “plagiarism hunter”, a certain Stefan Weber, with the task of sifting through her articles.

Weber discovered small shortcomings and “Nius” spread them, raising pandemonium.

The blow was a cowardly cheap shot. A career woman. Perfect target for the right-wing male chauvinist “Taliban”.

But Alexandra must have felt abandoned by many of her colleagues as well. The most malevolent, or the most envious.

The pressure on her must have been inhumane.

The Spider

This story reveals a deadly mechanism: the scientific diffusion of right-wing thought through the web.

The model is American: the same one that amplifies Trump’s screams of victimhood. The style, that of Fox News.

You look for an important target, finance someone who has an ax to grind with the target, then investigate the target’s biography, cherry-picking their shortcomings.

Nothing could be easier. Everyone makes mistakes. Especially those who work hard. I could spontaneously make a list of my own; There is no need to hire an investigator.

The key word is “isolate”, to take the detail out of context.

Search, in a sea of news items including the most minimal, for those capable of outraging as many people as possible, then interview a good number of people on the subject, just to select the most vulgar answers.

At that point, the job is done.

The thinking of a few is passed off as the thought of the majority. That’s how you create public opinion.

Millions of “navigators” gallop through the prairies of the net in the certainty of being free, and it is precisely there that the Spider captures them and makes them willing

slaves of a system that rides and amplifies the grumbling, instead of building coexistence.

It's the same infernal machine that's bringing America to the brink of civil war. A subversive media hurricane that, in the absence of any alternative counter-communication, threatens to wipe out even what remains of European democracy.

My suspicion

Who finances the European sovereigntists? I hazard a basic diagram on a sheet of squared paper.

First. In their proclamations, the right always attacks the representatives of the open society and the supporters of renewable energy in parallel.

Second. The strategy of attacking the green economy is identical to the one used against Alexandra. Since denial of the current climate disaster is no longer credible, one can only question the effectiveness of the fight against pollution. And so, you choose a target, if possible, the most qualified, you study it, you identify a vulnerable point, even a minor one, you isolate it with a magnifying glass, then you start the demolition.

Third. It has been amply proven, even scientifically, – see the authoritative journals *Lancet* and *Nature* – that oil companies recruit willing supporters of non-renewable energy, so that they will accuse the green economy of incompetence and elitism. In other words, a scam to the harm of ordinary people.

In the cone of light of the table lamp, the three elements delineate a scheme where Europe counts for nothing. The geography of the Big Game.

I mark the fourth and last point with a circle. "It is at least plausible that the oilmen are also financing right-wing parties, recruiting them to their crusade."

That is to say, the same very rich oilmen who sponsor football teams, host the world climate summit in the Emirates, and pressure with irrefutable arguments the EU government palace in Brussels...

There is not much the young protesters of "Fridays for Future" or the "Extinction Rebellion" can do against these powers with unlimited economic resources, capable of corrupting anyone.

Followers

In one of his dispatches from the front, Hans has urged me to explore a German site called *Hoss und Hopf*. It hosts a podcast that spreads radical right-wing messages.

In the charts on platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts, it seems to occupy the top spots continually. Hundreds of thousands of people listen to it. Especially young people.

And so, again on the net, there emerges the anxiety of German parents, who from one day to the next discover they have a radicalized child.

In a February 11 online message, a mother named Katharina talks about her 14-year-old son.

The whole thing begins innocuously, she says, when, passing by the kitchen, her son blurts out that “our politicians should take better care of us Germans”, and then adds that he would like to become rich and famous with cryptocurrency.

At first, the mother thinks that the delusion of grandeur is normal at that age. But a short time later, while driving the car, she hears her son tell her that it is not acceptable that the taxes of German citizens are being used to pay for the ships that rescue refugees on the African coast to bring them to Italy.

“I turn to the back seat,” Katharina continues, “and ask my son where he got that phrase. He answers, ‘from the podcast that everyone listens to.’” The kids, she says, are gurus, they are “very knowledgeable”, and the podcast is called *Hoss und Hopf*, which is now very popular in Germany.

Mom and Dad turn on and listen.

“Stuttgart was the safest city in Germany [...]. Now these statistics are no longer collected because the situation has become so bad that people no longer talk about it; it is not reported that women are sometimes raped on *Königstraße* during the day and sometimes at night.”

The truth is that Stuttgart is still one of the safest cities in Germany and that the Federal Criminal Police Office regularly publishes police crime statistics. In *Königstraße* there was a complaint of an alleged rape, but then the woman admitted that she had made it all up.

So German parents discover that a small army of TikTok kids distribute the content of *Hoss und Hopf* for free and that the most successful popularizer has more than one hundred and sixty thousand followers.

It is a formidable, organized scam that deceives children with false promises of wealth. I read about a mother who found out that her son distributes *Hoss und Hopf* advertising content in the hope of making a lot of money.

In the meantime, the fragile teenager becomes a spreader of hurtful and often racist words, which receive a lot of likes and consequently convince him of the truth of what he has spread. It is thanks to those likes that a total absurdity is perceived as right and good in the mind of a fourteen-year-old, whose civic conscience is still to be shaped.

It happens in America too. Parents in New York have sued Mark Zuckerberg because Meta is corrupting their children.

Social media have insinuated themselves into everything, just like the rats of Hamelin. The pied piper capable of leading them away is still to be found.

The Persuaders

By now the genie is out of the bottle and is circulating freely. In years of undercover work, it has harnessed an entire generation, unbeknownst to their families.

Here are some episodes that re-emerge from memory. Initially underestimated, they suddenly acquire meaning.

Like the story of Alessandro, the Emilian director with whom I traveled half of Europe, invited a few years ago to talk about his experience in one of the most renowned high schools in Rome.

Before confronting the students in the lecture hall, a teacher makes a point of taking Alex aside and advises him not to reveal too much about his views on Europe, because “it’s a somewhat controversial subject” at school.

Rereading that warning today, it seems clear that the virus of racist and anti-federalist nationalism was already polluting Italian civil society, starting with its weakest members, and entering homes through digital natives. And it was only the beginning of a plan to contaminate consciences.

When the director began to talk about the advantages of the free movement of people, a young man interrupted him impatiently, saying: “Well, what are these borders going to be? Just show a document and you’re good to go?”. Then he added defiantly: “And anyway, what do we have to do with the French?”.

The cultural abyss into which the young people had fallen opened wide before the astonished director, but the timidity of the teachers, intimidated by the political pressure of the students, was also clear.

In the schools, the occult persuaders had already turned to their advantage the most democratic of information channels, the internet and the radio.

Sensors

Nothing gets by unnoticed at borders. They are foolproof sensors.

Thirty miles away from me, military convoys rattle eastbound. Everyone in the village knows that. But tonight, I hear something different. And perhaps even more disturbing.

The ticking of keyboards.

A perception that couldn't be clearer. In Germany, while millions of feet are marching for democracy during the day, at night millions of fingertips are typing words of resentment in the underground of the web.

The net. A machine that bewilders, divides, exploits the worst in us and kills reasoning with the virus of Manichean bipolar thinking, born of Chinese or American algorithms.

The whole of Europe is split in two: Spain, Italy, Poland, Greece, Belgium, the Baltic States. Let's not even talk about America.

Dramatizing the clash is a media system allied to the worst, which gives us the image of a rotten world, made up of thieves, murderers, and rapists.

I heard a senior member of the Bavarian Christian Democratic Center complaining: "If I try to voice an argument, I don't get covered in the press. If I let fly an insult, I immediately make the headlines."

Negative narrative reigns. Crime is decreasing, yet it is being made to appear to be increasing. And if the crime is committed by a foreigner, its importance is magnified.

Goodness doesn't sell, doesn't make the news. But it exists. It is an endless archipelago of individuals who feel alone and who do not achieve critical mass. Shouldn't we be talking about them? For example, the Poles who, risking conviction, welcome terrified immigrants in rural houses on the border with Belarus, or the small organic farmers who fight against the destruction of the environment? Or people like Monika who, single-handedly, helped save 200 Afghans after the shameful flight of NATO troops from Kabul? Maybe she doesn't want it to be known either. Goodness excludes protagonism.

And what can we say about Paris, where we saw moments of common prayer between Arabs and Jews in the most difficult of times, during the massacre in Gaza, without any mention of it in the newspapers? Hans pointed me to German women teaching other women, mostly refugees, the right words to say in defense of their dignity, or a community of Syrians working to dismantle the encroachment of patriarchy in their world.

Riccardo Laterza, the young leader of the only effective opposition party in my hometown of Trieste, governed by a bunch of sovereigntists, argues for the need to be aware of the "weak signals" that anticipate changes in trend. Which is a lot like taking an X-ray of the real needs of the territory, neglected by a right more attentive to the demands of capital than to those of citizens. An exercise in listening, rather than sterile amplification of discontent.

Splendid examples of resistance also come from the lands of the Camorra, such as Caserta, where a group of citizens have taken over an abandoned park and given it back its original orange grove face, later recognized by the public administration as a common good to be co-managed. The initiative has given back to the public a patch of green that has changed the lives especially of children and the elderly in the area, reactivating neighborhood relationships and showing what it means to possess and maintain a common good.

Two a.m.

Insomnia

The Liturgy of the Hours begins.

I'm still awake, brooding in the kitchen, while my wife sleeps upstairs.

The night shift, someone has to do it, the night shift.

A night that offers no points of light.

It's as though the forest were pressing up against the windows to enter

I think about how often I let the soup burn because my head was in Europe. How I have tired myself out talking about her in schools, theatres, concert halls, urban suburbs or rural areas, when even in Brussels there was no interest.

I often wonder why I have to ruin my health for these things.

Let the young people lead the way.

Sometimes I feel like a pathetic histrionic grump, doomed by his pride to spend the last few pennies of energy to keep up a senseless fight.

But at other times I feel full of energy. A positive energy, which comes not only from people's emotional responses, but also from the healthy anger triggered by events such as the attack on Alexandra.

I search the net for videos about her. Public meetings and interviews from her office as correspondent in Israel. Alexandra is soberly dressed in black, with a calm look, framed by simple earrings and a necklace.

Images of a committed, authoritative woman not seeking the spotlight.

Today, after her jump into the river, I see her pale body, lying on a bed in the hospital of that city that is crucial for the fate of the world.

I hear the pulsing of cardiograms, the dripping of the IV.

Alexandra's window also looks out on the spring night, a night of a thousand spying eyes.

I imagine a crowd of ghosts wailing in the wind and pressing to break into her room and suck more blood out of her.

The Combatant

I'm listening to Prokofiev, *Violin Concerto Number One, Op. 19*. I need some air, and in dark moments Prokofiev helps me take to the skies.

I'm thinking of Alexei Navalny who was assassinated in prison.

A terrible signal, not of overwhelming power but of fear, from the Kremlin.

Putin had to be insanely afraid of that man, to have him killed. It is likely that Vladimir, the former poor child condemned to rule Russia forever or to disappear because of a palace conspiracy, is well acquainted with the ruthless tradition of Eastern Christianity that passed to the Slavic world and to Muscovite communism.

A world, the Byzantine one, where emperors do not depose, but disembowel or defenestrate, and where for centuries it was normal to castrate heirs to the throne, blind or amputate the nose and tongue of disgraced rulers.

Navalny knew all about the Kremlin's paranoia, and in a 2022 documentary he spoke prophetic words: "You do have permission to surrender, and if they decide to kill me, it means that we are incredibly strong".

A lesson in courage, in the face of the wavering attitude of a West that until yesterday condemned everything Russian for conformism and now competes to mourn the great opposer, erects him as a democratic symbol, organizes torchlight processions for him and elbows its way into the front row of the processions. From one excess to another.

On the other hand, Navalny was one who could be admired and challenged at the same time. Admired for his mettle as a fighter, contested for his questionable past. Alexei had been a hardline ethnonationalist, with strong anti-immigrant racist overtones. In recent years he had cleaned up his biography and had declared himself regretful of certain attitudes, but the web is still full of his utterances to that effect.

This brings us to face with one of the great differences between the two Europes. In the West, being racist is right-wing. In the East, being racist is right-wing and left-wing as well. A constant across the political spectrum of the world that was behind the Iron Curtain.

I've traveled far enough to know that being African in Warsaw is worse than being African in Madrid, or that having frizzy black hair in Moscow provokes hostility or mistrust unimaginable in Lyon or Milan.

Behind it, there are centuries of history, and there is that cursed idea of "Narod", the people, which from Slovenia to the Pacific Ocean means blood, ancestors, ancestral right to the land and scores to settle that last for centuries.

The Villains

Who knows if Europe will now realize that there is also another Russia.

With the war in Ukraine, up until Navalny's death, we made life impossible for expatriate Russian civil society, the best Russia, the one closest to us, the one fleeing from Moscow's censorship. Since March 2022, Italy has suspended the granting of visas to Russian technicians and scholarship holders. With rare exceptions, even the most critical of intellectuals are banned from public debate.

It doesn't seem that Navalny's current fans have ever denounced this.

Russian minorities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are under unprecedented pressure and continued restrictions on personal freedom. To this day, in the Baltic Republics, the police tear up without having the right to do so the entry visas to Europe granted by Western universities to intellectuals of the Russian opposition.

Half a million have fled Russia, but we have frozen their bank accounts. Journalists who have fled to Latvia in order to report freely are living a hellish life. Denmark has stopped aid to Russian dissidents and has gone so far as to rewrite the biographies of Ukrainian-born figures of Russian culture.

Today I feel faced with the tragedy of an entire people crushed between two violations of the law. Ours and Moscow's.

Because the Russians are bad guys. Or rather, villains par excellence. And to be forgiven, they have to apologize for being Russian.

The megaphone of the Atlantic Alliance has bombarded us with this childish nonsense, and we have made it our own, accusing anyone who disagrees with it of complicity with Putin. On television, anyone who dares to try to understand the Russians has to premise that they were not Putinians.

And so, out of servility, we have banned Dostoevsky and half of his country's literature, let the statue of Pushkin in Kiev be torn down, and removed Russian authors from Ukrainian school anthologies. Woe betide anyone who lets people know that there are good Russians. It is better that their voice not be heard.

And so, I think that perhaps we Europeans have assassinated Navalny too, by signing on to a simplifying vision that is not our own.

We have forgotten that our culture comes from the Mediterranean, a world that knows how to distinguish and understand complexity. And that the Greeks, in tragic representations, knew how to put themselves in the shoes of the enemy and avoid easy triumphalism.

Now, many of us must take lessons in courage from the very people who were reviled until yesterday. From the conscientious objectors, the pacifists, the environmentalists, the deserters of whom nothing is known, imprisoned there toward the Urals and beyond.

Surprising signs of resistance are filtering through the grids of Moscow censorship. Girls wearing T-shirts with FOREIGN AGENT written on them. Or a re-edition of Tolstoy's masterpiece, *War and Peace*, with, on the cover, instead of "war", "special military operation", *special'naja voennaja operacija*, an expression imposed by Putin to hide the reality of the invasion of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, America is not sure how to react to Navalny's death and is showing clumsy incoherence. After all, the powers that seek to dominate us with the arrogance of capital are the same, in Moscow as in the West. Power in Russia is our mirror. Like us, it is ruthlessly neoliberal.

And so, Trump waffles, contradicts himself, fires off enormities: first he invites Russia to invade Europe, then he avoids naming Putin in connection with the death of the great dissident, and finally, he declares himself a victim, like Navalny.

At the same time, the vapid Biden calls Putin a "son of a bitch", but in the meantime he forces a man of courage like Julian Assange into exile under surveillance in England, promising him ten life sentences in the event of extradition.

And then I think back to the eternal Russia, the resistant Russia of women, the Russia of Anna Politkovskaya, killed for exposing the crimes of the Chief in Chechnya.

The immortal Russia of Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva or Nadezhda Mandelstam, who preserved, by learning them by heart, the forbidden poems of her husband sent to die in Siberia. Or the Russia of Marija Judina, the pianist who dared to reprimand Stalin for his mistakes.

A country that in the most atrocious misfortunes has always clung to literature. A people who gather at the tombs of poets to recite verses, while we lose our roots by feeding on made-for-TV movies.

Russia where, not surprisingly, Stalin sent writers to their deaths.

Crabgrass

Since the fighting started in Ukraine, the number of books on Russia and its surroundings in my library has tripled. At least six feet of shelves.

Tolstoy, Bulgakov, Blok, Babel, Brodsky, Svetlana Alexievich. Having read and re-read them was the natural reaction to the platitudes spouted by the media. My desire to understand is too strong, to face the angels and demons of that world without peace.

In war, knowing the Other is essential, at the very least in order to try preempt his moves. And it doesn't matter if they put you on a list of Putin supporters.

The dehumanization of the enemy may work for those on the frontlines, but it is nonsense for those who seek a vision of the geopolitical chessboard. Yet, for twenty-four months now, that is, since the beginning of the war, complete strangers have

been sneaking into my emails with demented ruminations on the innate evil of the Russians.

Reporting that mail as spam is useless. It reappears continuously, like a weed. It is a metastasis, the sign of the times. "The triumph of the mindless," I hear, "has been going on since the first day of the invasion."

I often wonder where these useful idiots come from. Who recruits them?

What is the point of fighting anti-Western stereotypes with anti-Slavic stereotypes that provide confirmation to the Russians for the idea that the West is against them?

What is the point of putting ourselves on the same level as Putin and responding to his suffocating censorship with our own self-censorship?

Olga is a friend of Hans' who studies literature at Moscow University, and he has a hard time of it trying to explain to her that many Europeans do not hate Russians at all.

How can one not understand that this war of demonic absolutes strengthens Putin and plays into the hands of the Kremlin?

News

Outside, the night is black. A metaphysical night. The world has no memory and goes undaunted on its merry way.

The tragedy of the great dissident, after the first wave of emotion, has already fallen back into the quagmire of oblivion and is lost in the din of the news, where you are no longer able to distinguish the real from the imaginary.

Bombs are falling on ships in the Red Sea, freight shipping rates are rising by thirty percent, and shipowners are toasting with champagne.

The height of British children continues to decline due to malnutrition.

An algorithm cuts the salaries of delivery riders in Warsaw, Madrid and Bratislava by twenty percent.

In Naples, a pizza chef cuts to pieces with a cleaver a Bengali chef who has gone over to the competition.

An iceberg the size of Iceland breaks off from the Pole and heads for Svalbard.

Before dawn, two lovers in Portugal see a train illuminated by Elon Musk's fifteen satellites coming up from the sea.

In Rostov, at four o'clock in the morning, the police raid the house where Leonid, a draft dodger who escaped from the Donbass, is hiding out.

Everything is as usual: the rich get rich, in Davos they discuss the fate of the world, and who cares about everyone else.

In Boston, General Electric wins a five-billion-dollar contract for arms supplies to Ukraine.

The Singapore Stock Exchange records an increase of five million passengers in the large cruise market.

The Israeli army discovers a new Hamas tunnel in the Gaza ghetto and intensifies the bombing.

The Emirates secretly allocate twenty billion euros to sabotage the green economy and lend a hand under the table to the European right.

Today we live only in the present, glued to consumption.

Or maybe we're not even living in the present, sucked in as we are by a network that makes us always be elsewhere.

That's how it goes in 2024, a year whose end will find us completely changed. For the worse.

Catch 22

The pandemic, which was supposed to make us all better and a little greener, has angered millions of individuals. It has made them slaves of the web, abandoned them to the grip of nightmares.

I see a world that buys weapons, buys self-defense drones and dives into a video wargame, brooding on conspiracy theories, denial, victimhood.

A unique opportunity for influencers, ready to fan the flames of discontent and restlessness.

The sovereigntists have seized on the opportunity.

They amplified the distress that politics has not listened to, then they worked on the credulity of the people to point out enemies and propose, as in Germany, the deportation of millions of foreigners.

The right-wingers know the miraculous self-absolving effect of the guilt of others, the type that exempts you from any examination of conscience.

They have already plumbed the passivity of democracies in the face of violence, the timidity of those who turn the other cheek and of those who, foolishly, also fight for the rights of those who want to destroy them.

In Germany they are not yet occupying beer halls to sing *Die Fahne hoch*. But they are ready to do it. The web has made them bolder and bolder.

It's a situation like the movie *Catch-22*.

"It's not yet time to take power," they say, flaunting confidence. They are not in a hurry; time is on their side. And they proclaim: "The great street demonstrations are just the swan song of democracy".

And in the meantime, they spread the word that the democrats' oceanic parades are a media scam, a photoshopped hoax.

That's the line on the net, and it often works. Today, no one checks the sources anymore.

Not even in Goebbels' time was society so permeable to lies.

Twenty-seven

Let's say that Turkey takes back a piece of the Greek Aegean with weapons, a NATO country attacking another NATO country.

Europe would do nothing, lulled into lethargy by US tutelage, and capable of fighting only by proxy. And America would look on.

Ankara can do whatever it wants with us. She is armed to the teeth, she counts diplomatically, and in addition she has the migration faucet in hand.

And here we are, inert in the face of the blackmail and contempt of all the Mediterranean autarchies, from Tunisia to Egypt.

A continent paralyzed by a *fait accompli*.

Putin wants to destroy us? Don't worry, we'll do it all by ourselves, like the Greece narrated by Thucydides in *The Peloponnesian War*, which, after defeating the Persian Empire destroyed itself in a miserable war between city-states.

How sad Europe is. A concert of nations out of key. A sideshow. A pack of wolves ready to bite each other. Paralysis.

When the Christian Alliance confronted the Ottomans at Lepanto, contact with the enemy was never broken. Venice kept its diplomatic channels open, at least on the commercial level.

We, on the other hand, have agreed to eliminate all relations with the Kremlin.

Diplomatically, we don't count anymore.

Politically, we are finished.

Morally, we have been dead since the time of the war in Bosnia.

Militarily we do not exist, and that is the most serious thing.

We have twenty-seven general staffs, twenty-seven logistical and armament systems. Our presence in Ukraine is a mockery.

The EU sells arms to everyone, but it does not have a unified European army, which, by the way, would cost it less than twenty-seven separate armies. And if it decided to do so now, it would need ten years to build a truly integrated defense system.

The Professor

Not even Romano Prodi reassures me anymore, the man of proverbial, seraphic tranquility.

I talk to him from time to time. I know he knows who's who in Brussels. Who if not him, who led the EU Commission for five years?

On our last phone call, his voice was darker than usual. As if he were brooding on words chewed over for a long time.

"In recent years, when I go to give lectures at Chinese or American universities, no one asks me about Europe anymore. It is a sign that we no longer exist, in the face of the global crisis."

I reread my notes. "Europe may end up in pieces because its democracy is losing strength. The balance of power has been upset. Lobbies rule and antitrust enforcement, unlike in the United States, no longer exists."

"The paradox is that, if we are weak, it is not because our loaf of bread is bad, but because it is half-baked. And so, when we write the menu, America and China sit at the table."

I told him about the anti-European poisons that were contaminating the web.

Him: "I'm an old man, and I don't know these things. I only know that, if I speak to young people, talk of peace and democracy no longer works. I can no longer play on values, but on fear. I have to tell them that disuniting is madness. Germany, too, would go into crisis. Let alone Italy. And then we would be dominated by others".

Organize a "counter-web", he said. Democracy must be strengthened.

Agreed, I thought, when the phone call was over. But how do you convince the people that democracy is useful if, when faced with great crises, the masses have always looked for a Duce with unlimited powers?

Easy to do with advanced level students.

But with the ones in thrall to the web?

What can we say to these souls in the current, who do not even have the grammar to read the meaning of events?

Memoir

Several years ago, with enormous effort, Arab and Jewish historians put together a common history of the events that marked the birth of the state of Israel, but the text of that historic composition was never adopted. For politicians on both sides, it was convenient to leave the wounds open.

That's exactly what is happening on my border. For some time now, a joint Italian-Slovenian commission has agreed on a reconstruction of what happened in the hot years between the two countries, but this study has never been adopted either, and to

this day, the two memories remain divided, for reasons identical to those of the Middle East.

With the exception of France and Germany, divided memories are a tremendous problem for the whole of Europe, and Brussels has not taken steps to solve it. The commemoration of the tragedy of the Great War would have been the perfect opportunity, but the EU leaders did nothing. And so, winners and losers have continued to tell their stories, cultivating victimhood or triumphalism, as the case may be.

Why does one of the most beautiful lands in the world give up on telling its own history? Why is it that Europe does not even know whether to be a community of values or a community of interests? Why has it been reduced to defining itself through the confrontation with an enemy, see Putin, the bogey man at the border?

In their schools, the Twenty-Seven continue to narrate their federal essence in twenty-seven different ways. But since, I would say, wars are born in minds, it is in minds that the ramparts of peace must be erected. As long as our schools are in ruins, there will never really be peace in this part of the world.

And I'm here like a jerk worrying about it, while Brussels only wakes up every five years, on the eve of the European elections. Every five years the fear of the extreme right returns, and then debates are hurriedly organized, idealists are recruited to inflame the peoples with Adenauer, Spinelli, Delors and the bright founding ideals of the Union. After that, goodbye.

Few people know the loneliness of those who narrate Europe today. Those who truly love the star-spangled flag are not loved by the Palace, because they dare to show the abyss that separates the gray reality from the great values it strives to represent.

And so, the majority don't realize how lucky they are to live in this community, they don't even appreciate the advantages of living there, and consequently they don't understand that to split up would be a disaster.

Europe is a land that no longer sings or laughs, but that clads itself in armor in fear of the Other.

Complicity

Who knows what Sasha will think of the way the world is going, with Putin showing signs of madness, the Argentine Milei bursting onto the scene with chainsaws, and Trump calling for an assault on the institutions.

Sasha is the affectionate diminutive by which Austrians call their president, Alexander Van der Bellen; a man who has played an important role in my federalist passion.

I met him in the spring of 2018, in Trieste. He had arrived incognito, to take a vacation with a gang of friends.

He had brought them to Italy by driving a van himself. Absolute informality, no escort, and all at his own expense. Some time before, I had seen Wolfgang Schüssel, then chancellor, lining up with his shopping basket at the checkout counter in a supermarket in Vienna. This is unthinkable in Italy, the country of too many official limousines, where ministers stop trains at will to get off wherever they want.

Sasha had read one of my books and invited me to lunch on a terrace overlooking the sea. I took the opportunity to tell him what was close to my heart: Europe did not know how to tell its story, it urgently needed a new narrative.

He immediately understood the message and that same year, at the end of November, he organized a meeting with my publisher at the Hofburg, the royal palace that had belonged to Franz Joseph, on the theme "*Europa erzählen*", telling the story of Europe. Writers came from Spain, Germany, England, etc., to give their formulas.

My narrative was aimed at children. A fairy tale, almost; the story of a train journey from the sea stacks of the Portuguese Atlantic to the boundless Sarmatian plain and the Urals.

I described in simple words the beauty of a continent and the good fortune of living there. It was like a liberation.

A lasting relationship was born. We exchanged a few letters, then met in his office at the Hofburg for the last Vienna Book Fair.

I had in my presence a man of the institutions capable of seducing with modesty and common sense.

I told him that, after our first meeting, the commitment to telling the story of the foundations of Europe had become all-encompassing for me.

Thanks also to his encouragement, I had written a book on the Benedictines and the Judeo-Christian roots of the Continent, and then a poem on the rape of Europa.

We talked about Austria's increasingly suffering neutrality amid Putin's threats and American pressure.

Outside, it was drizzling in Heldenplatz, and Alexander opened the window to smoke his last cigarette. I felt the complicity of this meek man. From a huge oil portrait behind his desk, Empress Maria Theresa seemed to be sealing an alliance.

Latin

I've received a letter from Diego, who knows the building in Brussels well and is aware of my passion for Europe.

“There is only one way,” he writes, “to build a common sense of belonging. The schools. But no one wants to ‘federalize’ education. The Union does not decide this matter. If even the German Länder have their own school systems, it’s hard to imagine a federal school system.”

However, he says, we should at least think of school curricula with common subjects and courses. We could “reintroduce classical culture and the study of Latin, because if everyone studies Ovid, Parmenides and Aeschylus, everyone will have the same cultural references. The important thing is to make people perceive that classical culture is not only Italian, Latin or Greek, but is a common heritage”.

On this subject I have some dazzling testimony. An interview with the writer Patrick Leigh Fermor on his ninetieth birthday, in his home immersed in the English countryside.

Fermor was a man of action. In 1941, with the rank of major in the British Army, he had parachuted into Crete to organize resistance against the Germans.

In a legendary surprise attack, on which a film would be based, the Englishman had captured the German commander-in-chief, General Heinrich Kreipe, and hid him in a cave on Mount Ida.

A choice laden with myth, because it is said that Zeus spent his early childhood on Ida.

One day Patrick noticed that the German prisoner, sitting at the mouth of the cave, was murmuring Latin verses as he looked at the snows of the highest mountain on the island.

“Vides ut alta stet nive candidum / Soracte...”

It was an ode by the poet Horace, that spoke of the winter landscape of Mount Soratte, near Rome.

As a boy, Fermor had had a tutor who made him love the classical world, and that day, instinctively, he recited the rest of the verse to the general.

“... Soracte, nec iam sustineant onus / silvae laborantes geluque / flumina constiterint acuto.”

The German turned to the Englishman in amazement and said, “Ach so...” Which meant, Patrick wrote, “I see we drank from the same fountains.”

Latin had brought them together.

A few years later, Patrick and Heinrich, winner and loser, embraced again on live TV and sang an old Greek song together.

Half a century later, we sang too, at the end of the interview. Fermor stood up with a glass of sherry in his hand and sang a Bulgarian patriotic anthem. I replied with a Bosnian *sevdalinka*.

We were two madmen. Our hearts were possessed by the Balkans.

Termites

I met Bernard Guetta, a former great Moscow correspondent for the French press, at a meeting in Brussels dedicated to the relaunch of the Union. Accustomed to triumphant lectures at the forefront, he was not the type to listen much. He came to doubt my Europeanism, and this irritated me not a little.

But his story fascinated me. A Jew born in North Africa, he was on the eternal run from nationalism, and had a Great Mother like the one of another French Jewish immigrant author, Romain Gary. I liked his way of calling himself European by subtraction, because no nation defined him. I admired, and still admire in him, the unquenchable thirst to bear witness and travel, despite his age.

I open his latest book, *The Sovereignists*, published in Italy by Add, and I read in it his discouragement: "In a handful of years everything [...] has turned to dust, like beams eroded by invisible termites, and everywhere, from the United States to China, from Russia to the heart of this bastion of freedoms that is the European Union, there has been a return to the politics of the *fait accompli*, of the right of the strongest, of the rejection of the other, and of the rule of every man for himself, behind borders fortified by walls and fences".

And then: "Behind the nostalgia for the communist period that is perceived in Hungary, I found that intense longing for past certainties that is felt in France, the United States, or Great Britain, because today the fear of the unknown is the most widespread thing in the world".

Deprived of the means to impose rules, laws, and social compromises on a capital "that has become king again thanks to the reduction of distances and the free movement of capital that allows the relocation of the company headquarters and production plants, according to their interests," explains Guetta, democracy is in regression.

And then we say "no" to everything, always "no", like the silk weavers of the nineteenth century who broke the looms that took away their work. Ever-larger entire sectors of more and more countries are opposed to any change for fear of Brussels and Islam, European decadence, Latin American immigration, or the lowering of living standards.

"There have been some evenings," Bernard writes, "when I have wondered where to take my loved ones before the walls prevent me from doing so, but, in the face of danger, duty dictates not to flee but to fight, to fight, if necessary, against this deluge of lies and idiocies that feed fear. They feed obscurantism, comfort the far right, and push for the worst."

And so, Guetta also understands where the problem lies, and invites Europe to invest in storytelling to make it clear that nowhere else in the world is there so much investment in education and health. And to explain that democracy in the EU is real

“because in political life and in electoral campaigns money is far less decisive than in the United States”.

The Dark Hour

There are times when I need the old Winston, of that 1940 “We shall never surrender” speech in parliament, declaimed in the face of the Nazi masters of Europe with a sense of rhythm stronger than the *Panzerdivisionen*.

Like Shakespeare, Churchill scanned his speeches in verse. He mastered rhythm and pauses, he mastered repetitions. He didn’t inflate the words with decibels, like Hitler, but he broke up and marked each sentence with a very British understatement and an unmistakable tonal curve with a calming effect. He used to say that rhetorical skill – an art today submerged in a deafening universal blah blah – makes you master of the world.

I know it by heart, that historic call to resistance in the darkest hour.

“And... if all do their duty... we shall prove ourselves once more able to defend our... Island home, whatever the cost may be...”, and then, with a pounding rhythm: “We shall fight on the beaches... we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills”.

I do not know of any politician capable of delivering such an oration today, in equally clear words, to head off the race to suicide of today’s Europe. No one in the establishment who knows how to launch like Churchill a call to struggle to prevent a continent from being swallowed up by the “precipice of a new dark season” of humanity.

Sorry, but for me it’s magnificent.

The Metamorphosis

What else can a man of my age contribute to a good fight, if not poor words?

That’s what I was thinking, with my heart pounding, alone in the dark, at the back of the stage of La Scala in Milan, waiting to make my entrance.

The cellos were already in place, and it was about to be my turn.

I had never entered the temple of Italian music, not even as a spectator, and that entrance seemed to me a reckless leap into the void.

I had to tell the epic story of the landings in Lampedusa, and I had chosen to do so through the story of a tree that becomes a fishing boat, then a migrant ferry, and finally a string instrument in an orchestra.

A triple metamorphosis, a magic spell, cast as a surprise by the hands of in-mate-luthiers.

I thought that if men had lost their memory, wood had not. Wood carries the soundtrack of its life imprinted in its fibers.

You can immediately feel if a violin has been loved, and the woodwinds that would be playing that night were reborn thanks to love.

Even the tears and salt they were impregnated with, I was sure, would make the sound softer.

When I finally began to speak in front of a packed audience and a row of boxes that seemed to reach the sky, I wondered if this performance, aimed at a select and certainly favorable audience, was enough.

Without a doubt, it was magnificent: two masterful cellos accompanied my words. Instruments that still bore the colors of the boats from which they had been made.

But we had to do more. We had to speak to the people. To deep Europe.

I said that we could not be satisfied with a “furtive tear”, as in Donizetti’s *Elisir d’amore*, we had to break the chains of indifference.

Respond with the heart, rather than with the mind, to the claims of the gut. With the heart, not with reasoning or facts, which today are no longer of any use.

The Knife

Two days ago, in the sheepfolds above the village, they came to take the lambs.

Easter is near and requires this rite, made even more cruel by the market, which eliminates any intimate sacredness from sacrifice.

They tore them away from their mothers’ nipples and for an hour the village was invaded by a general wail. The ewes, their udders full, were crying, and their lambs, being loaded onto the van, were crying, too.

As a child, I remember, lambs lived with cows and had a lot of fun jumping on them. They did spectacular stunts from cow back-to-cow back.

Then, before Easter, all the lambs disappeared. I couldn’t understand where they had gone, and why the mothers were crying, and then my grandmother replied that they had broken their legs when they fell from the cows.

It seemed strange to me that this was repeated every year, and that at Easter we ate lambs that had killed themselves.

Then I learned about the knife. Those were the same years in which I discovered the Shoah.

The kitchen clock strikes three o’clock.

I write down the word “Messer”, knife, on an A4 sheet of paper, in capital letters, on a full page and with three exclamation marks.

I write it in German because of Mackie Messer, a character in Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* in 1928, five years before the rise of Nazism in Germany.

It is no coincidence that Brecht comes looking for me right now, in the current climate.

A famous tune is dedicated to Mackie. I heard it sung years ago by Lotte Lenya, on an old vinyl. It tells the story of a rapist and murderer who tricks his victims by hiding the fatal knife.

Nazism, the knife, the lambs. I can't say if the song woke the thought, or the thought the song. Everything is happening in too short a time.

The meaning, however, is very clear. The new right is looking for votes among the weak, knowing full well that the weak will be its first sacrificial victims and that they will go meekly to the slaughterhouse because the butcher will be hiding the knife.

Hans, my German ally, told me that in Rhineland-Westphalia the AfD has taken a census of its non-German membership, putting them all together in a special group. He explains to me that, in doing so, the party has achieved two objectives in one move: to gain credibility by showing a non-xenophobic face, and at the same time to have the list of "aliens" to keep an eye on once it has reached power.

It was the same with the Jews before the persecution began. Many of them, in order to feel more secure, professed patriotism or pointed out that they had fought valiantly in the Great War.

That did not spare them.

Arrogance

In Benedictine abbeys, the day begins at three o'clock. What for us is night, in that world is already morning. The monks look at the night as a long run-up to the light.

When I'm in the throes of writing a book I wake up at three o'clock too, spontaneously. At that hour, my thoughts seek me out and link together at such a fast pace that my pen can't keep up with them. Something like a state of grace, which lets you see the world from on high.

In a moment of creativity, my life spontaneously follows Benedictine rhythms. 3.00 a.m. wake-up call, 3.30 a.m. fire lighting and breakfast, 4.30 a.m. writing, and so on. Reflection and action, *ora et labora* in the right alternating doses.

After "Messer" I write down another keyword, another perception to develop: "Weimar." This one, too, with exclamation marks.

In the Bavarian parliament, since the rise of the AfD, a heavy climate, saturated with arrogance, has inhibited democratic dialogue.

The newcomers mock the assembly, interrupt its work, and hurl heavy personal insults at their adversaries.

In the past, when the Landtag legislative session ended, it was customary for the members to go out for a beer together. Not today, they go home in a hurry.

Some legislators have received so many anonymous threats that, out of fear, they have resigned themselves to living between home and office. As a result, they spend less time among their constituents and, in doing so, leave the field open to the enemy.

“We’re back in 1928,” Claudio, a great friend from Munich who is an astrophysicist, wrote to me a few days ago.

Claudio is a special man, who builds bridges between people. He says of himself that he has a feminine side that makes him hypersensitive to the Other.

His passion is to integrate foreigners. An exhausting effort, which sometimes swallows him up and makes him disappear for days.

We are in 1928 because that year marks the beginning of the fall of the Weimar Republic.

Teachers are also restless, he says. Especially those who work in the *Mittelschule*, which is full of foreign children.

Journalists, teachers and cultural mediators are in the crosshairs and the Gaza crisis has made the situation worse.

German-born Turks are planning to return to Turkey. Jews are considering moving to a new country.

People of color, especially women, are anxiously wondering about the future.

Qualified Germans have begun to emigrate.

There is violence in the air. All over Europe.

Violence

I think of Paris, as I saw it on my last trip. Paris, reduced to a police state after the great Islamist attacks. Camouflage everywhere, grim men with bullets in their barrels. The “douceur de vivre” vanished.

In the subway, due to an unintentional bump in the crowd, I risked being beaten by a young Algerian. “They hate us more than we can hate them,” said Manault, a dear woman friend. From the provinces came reports of assaults, rumors of “anti-white racism” and stories of young Muslims armed with knives.

In the Luxembourg area, I saw an army of turbo-Catholics kneeling before the Senate to chant against abortion laws. And then swastikas in places of Jewish memory, and a crescendo of threats, after the beginning of the tragedy between Gaza and Tel Aviv.

Paris confronted me with the spectacle of a polarized society in a nervous breakdown. It told me that across Europe, people’s vocabulary and behavior were changing alarmingly.

Widespread violence. The red line had been crossed.

Azzurra, a colleague from the newspaper “la Repubblica”, kindly sent me a dossier on the subject. Tough stuff, hard to swallow.

In Spain, Franco-nostalgics have vandalized more than 200 local offices of the ruling Socialist Party, guilty of having succumbed to the demands of Catalan separatists.

In Madrid, the climate is so bad that the head of government, Pedro Sánchez, lives locked up in the government palace and does not dare to walk down the street. “God forbid they shoot him in the face,” a Spanish conservative in the European Parliament dared to say, with a warning that sounded like a wish.

Every evening, in front of the central building of the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, the PSOE, a phalanx of activists recites the rosary for half an hour, then all together they thunder “*hijo de puta!*” and leave. Goal: to outlaw the left, environmentalism, feminism, and gay rights.

In democratic Holland, where the xenophobic party is already in charge, Professor Sarah de Lange of the University of Amsterdam, Europe’s leading expert on the extreme right, has to travel with an escort, she has received so many threats.

Almost the story of Alexandra Förderl-Schmid.

In Vienna, the ÖVP, the Österreichische Volkspartei, a cousin of the German AfD, managed to get its hands on the “map of Islam”, which identifies mosques, associations and people linked to that world, and to use it to plaster the cities with yellow signs with the ferocious face of an imam and the inscription: “Attention, political Islam nearby”. An incitement to erect walls of self-defense, as in Orbán’s Hungary.

One of Greece’s best brains, Yanis Varoufakis, was beaten bloody by a commando of extremists in front of the Athens restaurant where he was eating. Yet he was one of the few who in 2008 defended indebted Greece from the attack of the “troika” of the financial world.

Not to mention the former Minister of Finance, Giorgos Papakonstantinou, who for having denounced the collusion of the establishment today does not dare walk down the street and lives as though he were under house arrest.

Athens confronts me with the paradox of a xenophobic country that is at the same time hospitable like no other. Greece, which has enshrined more than anyone the sacredness of the foreigner but also the concept of the scapegoat. A concept that today it applies to those same foreigners, contradicting itself.

We need to listen much more before we can understand.

Language

I read in the newspapers that in Germany some of Angela Merkel's Christian Democrat heirs, to shield themselves, are playing tough and imitating the rhetoric of the right.

"You have to throw them out," they thunder about foreigners, hoping to shift the xenophobic vote to the center. They order raids and expulsions, but they are only clumsy attempts to grab voters.

But people will always choose the original. Not its imitation.

History as old as politics.

The French case is illuminating. In January 2024, Macron approves a crackdown on immigration and the reception system with the decisive votes of the entire right, a measure vaunted by Marine Le Pen as an "ideological victory" for her party.

And there I was, hoping in De Gaulle's *képi*, in the memory of the *Résistance*, the *Poilus*, the *maquisards*, the *Marseillaise*...

I remembered the France of Victor Hugo, who as early as 1849 had solemnly proclaimed before the Assemblée Nationale: "*Un jour viendra... [que nous aurons] les États-Unis d'Europe*" ...

What need could France possibly have of a government of the right, I deluded myself, when it was already so full of nation already in its name and puffed up with grandeur in an almost irritating way?

I had hoped for a young president in his second term, who could ignore the polls and make bold decisions.

But nothing. Here he is leapfrogging the *Front National* to the right and calling for European soldiers to be sent to the Ukrainian front, with the nice result of crediting Marine Le Pen as a moderate.

If that is the way things stand, the right will win in Europe even if it does not win, if the centrists continue to imitate its language and politics on the issues of identity, the green economy, immigration and Islam.

The tragedy is that even the left is pushing for a drift in this direction. "When we were in government, fewer illegal immigrants passed through," boasted Stefano Bonaccini, head of what was once the red region of Italy par excellence.

In Slovenia, the new government may be progressive, but it imposes a commission on radio and TV with the right to censor any cultural broadcast, worse than in Tito's Yugoslavia, to the point that there are already those who are shouting against "left-wing fascism".

On the other hand, why be indignant? Today in Europe, the right and the left are daughters of the same... videogame.

The Putsch

I remember well the years when I traveled between Salzburg, Munich and Grenoble to study the nascent Alpine populisms.

Back then, the right had a face that, if you look at it today, was still presentable and seemed to have renounced old-fashioned racism.

There was no longer any talk of "*Blut und Boden*", blood and soil.

In Austria, Jörg Haider had thought it up. The good Haider, so demonized also because he had a surname that began with "H". I myself had covered him with contumely, when I did not yet know that those after him would be worse.

With Haider, the defense of the race was camouflaged. It became "protection of differences", protection of anthropogenic biodiversity. An almost left-wing concept.

After all, it's done for the good of all, isn't it? Even blacks, reds and yellows.

Today the mask has fallen.

If in Germany the Christian Democrats are hostage to the Alternative für Deutschland, the AfD itself has become hostage to its most extreme fringes, who have taken control of the party through a Putsch orchestrated with the decisive contribution of the Russian-Germans and the young lions of the former East Germany, obviously observed with interest by the Kremlin.

The old leadership was swept away, if not disavowed, in a matter of hours, and now Björn Höcke reigns, with a cold, watery eye and a feminine mouth, straight out of the forests of Thuringia.

The mentor and ideologue of the party is a South Tyrolean born in Merano, therefore in Italy, and his name is Marc Jongen. A man and a transalpine "link", and very pan-German, still a mystery.

The acceleration of events is impressive. It's like rereading Shakespeare, Macbeth who kills his king in his sleep.

As always, the reversal begins with the lexicon. Cursed words such as "Lebensraum", living space, or "*Überfremdung*", too many foreigners, re-emerge from the catacombs.

In the speeches of Höcke and Jongen, the adjective "*nationalsozialistisch*" changes its guise and becomes "*sozialpatriotisch*".

Anti-Semitism is set aside for now. The new enemy is Islam.

For a few months now, the party seems to have returned to a pre-Haider state, to the idea of the ethnic, cultural and economic superiority of the Germans, especially among the very young, hypnotized by the aesthetics of runes.

But it's not just the very young who are looking for a strong father in the party. There's much more. Even foreigners. Therein lies the surprise. The AfD is not a party of only... Aryans.

The pattern is the one described by Hannah Arendt. *Alternative für Deutschland* fishes in the vast sea of the lonely, the frustrated, the digital natives, the disoriented

in need of a leader. And it finds useful megaphones among intellectuals not recognized by the establishment.

It gathers members where you'd never have expected it.

Muslim mothers who fear for the bodily integrity of their daughters and go looking for a security party.

Polish immigrants, anti-communists and Turks who want to be more German than Germans.

They are also sincere pro-Europeanists, who feel betrayed by the selfishness of other nations.

And, of course, those who would like to throw the Mediterranean and Eastern peripheries out of the EU, to reduce the Federal Alliance to a core with an elegant name: *Kerneuropa*.

The Drift

If a European has lived in places like South Sudan or the heart of Amazonian Brazil, he becomes much more attentive to the signs of drift on his continent. German filmmaker Werner Herzog and Polish reporter Ryszard Kapuściński have spent most of their lives in the worst of the Third World, often in extreme, life-threatening situations. For this reason, they have felt like brothers in the perception of a possible catastrophe of Europe. In his recent autobiography, *Everyone for Himself and God Against All* (published in Italy by Feltrinelli), Herzog recounts how, together, they tried to imagine that future.

Here it is: elevators that stop working, traffic jams that last for days, cash that becomes waste paper; no one reads anymore, unless it's bizarre conspiracy theories, and when some water leaks out of the pipes everyone rushes to stock up, because the service is in the hands of the tanker-truck mafia. And then empty gas stations, anarchy and drunken soldiers, unable even to shoot their ministers, arrested in a coup d'état.

"A world," Herzog concludes, "that didn't have to be invented, because it had already been approaching for a long time. All you had to do was look around."

I had perceived the first signs of this involution towards the inhuman when, in Italy, it had become fashionable to saw park benches in half to prevent ordinary people from enjoying the sun without paying a fee or buying food and drink at a bar. With those benches went the very idea of the common good. And in fact, soon after, waiting rooms in many train stations were removed or reduced to a minimum. As a result, the railway landscape has been transformed into a inferno of poor souls.

The Bomb

My high school Greek teacher, who was also a fascist, rightly maintained that identity, that is, ethnicity, is a serious matter, infinitely more complex than the DNA of lineage. He said that it is an impalpable essence that also contains scents, voices, temper tantrums, landscapes, songs, tastes, fears, encounters, contaminations and immigration.

When we didn't understand the concept, he would throw the Rocci at us, a five-pound dictionary. And we could hear it flying from his desk with ballistic precision, it would hit us in the back of the head and nobody said a word, not even our parents, because knowledge, after all, has to be hammered home.

In recounting the rise of the Lega Nord in Italy, I warned readers: "Be careful, this is a journey into ethnicity: into the belly, that is, of that unmentionable thing that the left rejects. In the face of it, progressives flee precipitously. They see Hitler, the Balkans, concentration camps, deportations".

I said to myself, "How strange! Applied to Tibet, the Indians or old folk music, ethnos is a 'leftist' thing, synonymous with people. Applied to the West, to modernity, it becomes for some reason 'right-wing', the regressive equivalent of 'race'. In short, an unspeakable word".

When I think about it, I can't say which is worse: the identity of the sovereigntists, which is reduced to pure racial descent and claims that the Earth should belong only to those who occupied it first, or the repression of the identity problem by the "politically correct" parties.

I don't know what scares me more: the screams that amplify the distress of the people without giving them an answer, or the failure to listen to that widespread distress.

In both cases, the idea of the people is lost, goes back to the tribe, to self-defense gangs. And looks for the enemy, whether external or internal.

Whichever way you look at it, politics lets the bad mood ferment in a pressure cooker.

Poor identity. Abuse of a term that can become a time bomb.

Black Memory

I'm in that moment of the night when you feel alone, a bit like Christ in the Garden of Olives.

I am reminded of when he says, "Abba Father, take this cup away from me", or something similar, and then he abandons himself to God, renouncing all human consolation.

Everything comes together. It all adds up. Seemingly unrelated fragments of travel are short-circuiting tonight.

On the outskirts of Brussels, in Tervuren, there is a very special museum. Dedicated to Central Africa. They had built it in the early twentieth century to celebrate the colonial greatness of Belgium, one of the smallest states in Europe that had subjugated an immensely larger territory, the Congo.

In Tervuren, a gigantic, dreamlike stuffed elephant in the center of the main hall takes aim at you to charge you and smash the bulletin boards full of other jungle animals.

That museum is an ark, and that ark contains a world. One hundred and eighty thousand items identified only as “ethnographic objects” and a huge number of musical instruments that seem to take you to the primordial source of rhythmic energy.

Perhaps only Winfried G. Sebald, the author of *Austerlitz*, could have narrated that place. In his new book *King Kasai. A Colonial Night in the Heart of Europe*, published in Italy by Add, the French writer Christophe Boltanski calls the museum “an empire compressed into a box, a three-dimensional encyclopedia”.

Tervuren is not a *Wunderkammer* or Cabinet of Curiosities. The place exudes a dark disquiet, and Giulio, a friend from Brussels, explained to me why.

For decades, the most valuable “ethnographic objects” remained confined to the museum’s underground storage, as displaying them would have proved an artistic ability incompatible with the ape-like image of the savage.

The fact that the Congo had had a civilization had to be hidden.

The Africans who inhabited it were to be seen as animals. And in fact, until the end of the 1950s, “human zoos” continued, not only in Belgium, displaying “savages”, alive in public, to justify colonization.

An innumerable host of wonders remained buried and were only rediscovered in the nineties. Genuine treasures came to light. Spectacular African masks were cleaned of mold and put on display with enormous success.

The museum was renovated, and in 2021 a mega-exhibition on the colonial period was organized that sounded like an act of self-criticism, albeit a bit late compared to the similar operation in Paris in 2011 with the *Musée du Quai Branly*.

A world was rehabilitated.

But Europe still finds it extremely difficult to admit its colonial sins. It was not until 2002 that the Belgian Government acknowledged responsibility for the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, Congo’s first democratically elected president, and apologized to the Congolese family and people.

Lumumba’s remains had been cut into pieces and dissolved in acid. Some of the bones were found years later, including a tooth that Belgium returned to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2022.

The Last Europeans

Also in 2022, in Munich, I had the opportunity to read the real, chilling data on crimes committed in Africa by the continent that considered itself the fulcrum of world civilization.

The local Jewish community had created the exhibition “The Last Europeans”, a spine-tingling title, which seemed to classify me as a rare specimen of an endangered breed.

On the first floor was a collection of documents on the history of European violence in the twentieth century. It was a shocking visit, which showed me how the murderous fury of the most civilized Europe had known an atrocious African trigger.

Belgium alone had caused ten million deaths in the Congo. France was not far behind. And then Spain, Italy, Germany. A misunderstood Darwin had justified the idea of the racial superiority of whites and given a free hand to slave traders.

Hitler’s own syndrome of omnipotence was the offspring of the scandalous certainty of impunity of European colonialism.

Who remembered, in the 1930s, the Congolese slaughtered by the Belgians or the Armenians massacred by the Turks less than twenty years earlier?

Nobody. And no one would remember, the former house painter thought, the extermination of the Jews.

On a wall of the exhibition building was written: THE IDEA OF EUROPE IS FALLING APART BEFORE OUR EYES.

And I stood there in silence contemplating that lapidary, biblical, truthful, and terrible phrase.

It said that one of the reasons for the dissolution of the idea of Europe was that nations defined themselves through a falsification of history.

Today it seems clear that behind the return of the right there are also the orphans of a colonial supremacy, ready to cover up the misdeeds of their predecessors and to re-establish the idea of racial superiority over the immigrant. And of all the immigrants, the African is the most fearsome, because he represents our guilty memory.

European sovereigntists will never admit that they owe a huge debt to the rest of humanity. Nations often build their ideal identity on repressions. In Barcelona, for example, the monument to Columbus has been blacked out (perhaps it will be torn down), so that Catalonia can erase its complicity with Hispanic colonialism.

Even schoolbooks are silent on this. The Catalan autonomist establishment finds it hard to admit that theirs was also a bourgeoisie of slave traders (even the former president of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, Artur Mas, has some among his ancestors) enriched by human trafficking, and bases its detachment from Madrid also on the falsification of that piece of history.

Antibodies

Germany has been apologizing for eighty years.

Italy no, its accounts have not been reckoned. When it comes to memory, Italy is shrewd, dedicating not one but two days to it annually, a European record, only it doesn't apologize for a damn thing, quite the contrary, Italy asks others to excuse themselves

the Slavs for post-war vendettas
and the Germans for the death camps
because Italians, it is not said enough, are good people
and they didn't invade Russia,
they didn't attack Greece,
they didn't assassinate Yugoslavs
they didn't defeat Ethiopia with poison gas
they didn't have concentration camps
they did not collaborate with the Nazis to send Jews to Bergen-Belsen.

The current head of the Italian government, Meloni, participates in the ritual in memory of the dead in the Yugoslav "Foibe", but she also goes there to gloss over the Italo-fascist ferocity that triggered those atrocious vendettas.

Shortly afterward, the prime minister reiterates the concept at Trieste's Central Station, inaugurating the Train of Remembrance dedicated to the tragedy of Italian exiles from Yugoslavia.

But in doing so, she glosses over the reality of today's exiles, whom her government forces to languish in that same station, just a few meters away.

Cross-eyed memory, then. Or rather, willful blindness, if it is true that the Train of Remembrance was transferred to a more secluded track, so that the shame would be less visible.

In this, Italy is unbeatable. She casually pretends not to have lost the war and lives with her forgiven fascists, mobilized en masse against the evil Empire with America's blessing.

An infectious disease specialist would say that Italy no longer has antibodies. Maybe it never had them. And in fact it has few people in the streets in support of democracy.

If Germany is Europe's bastion of memory and the Balkans its eternal detonator, Italy remains its soft underbelly.

Repressions

In the shops of the ghetto of Trieste, I see mountains of antique books that no one wants piling up on the shelves.

I lean out as if from a balustrade over a roaring river of paper memory that is disappearing from the homes of the old Austro-Hungarian bourgeoisie, swallowed up by the abyss of the digital age.

I witness something terrible, like the burning of books in Nazi Germany. A loss perhaps more serious than that of the fire at the library of Alexandria.

Well, the sovereigntists are living it up in this world in a state of growing amnesia. They fill their mouths with the word “memory”, but in reality they fear History, because History would give them the lie.

History would say that Orbán is a matriculated chameleon, who has become a nationalist while remaining *Homo Sovieticus*; it would remind him of having taken lavish scholarships from that George Soros whom he now accuses of every nefariousness.

It would tell France that it conquered Algeria and its part of the Congo in blood, as well as having looted works of art in half of Europe at the time of Napoleon.

History would tell Romania that in 1989 its revolution was not a revolution, but a perfidious chameleonism.

It would remind Poland and the Baltic countries of the pogroms carried out in the past against Jews.

It would demolish the lie that Austrians were “victims” and not co-protagonists of Nazism.

It would remind Ukrainians that the Donbass was given to them by the communist enemy Moscow.

Woe betide you if you say these things. They accuse you of being unpatriotic and dishonoring your country.

Imagine remembering that this Europe, so afraid of migration, has theorized for five centuries the universal right of peoples to emigrate.

In the ghetto I came across the volume *De Indis* from 1532, *magnum opus* of the Spanish Dominican Francisco de Vitoria, which grants anyone the right to settle in new lands, and not only. It authorizes war to be waged against anyone who opposes such a settlement. A principle that the colonialists obviously enthusiastically espoused to exterminate the natives in Africa and the Americas.

Now that the flow of migrants has reversed in the direction of Europe, that solemn universal right has become a crime. And Francisco de Vitoria, mentioned for centuries in works on maritime law, has fallen into oblivion. So much for consistency.

Marketing

I tried to ask one of the “muscular patriots” what it means to be a patriot.

They answered: to be against Islam, against the Kremlin, against America.

I understood that, if you take away the enemy, those patriots go into apnea.

Italy has collected enemies maniacally. The Austrian, the Slav, the Englishman, the Jew, the Communist, the Russian, the “Negro”, the migrant. And that’s not all.

Better not ask that kind of patriot, “Who are you, where do you come from, who are your ancestors, and what is the destiny of your land?”

He doesn’t know these things or represses them. He would never spit into a DNA test tube for fear of finding traces of Africa or Asia in it.

A century ago, the homeland, for the son of nations, was an androgynous and marble woman, as you see in so many shrines from the Alps to Flanders. Not today: the patriot builds myths on fantasy books; stays glued to the opinion of influencers. Believes he is part of a nation and instead he is other-directed, not a free man, but an unwitting transmission belt of resource predators.

For me, my homeland is a sweet scent that fills my nostrils and lungs as soon as I see my mountains. For him, I’m afraid, it’s just a trademark that contains nothing; Electoral marketing, a caricature that leads us straight into war and exposes everyone to the risk that the idea of nation will be reduced to a mere military insignia.

I will never forget when, during the conflict in Bosnia, a Serb armed to the teeth told me: “I have finally understood who I am”. He was a beast with pumped up muscles and tattoos, but his was a resounding admission of weakness.

God forbid that, in order to understand who they are, Europeans have to go back to slaughtering each other.

Surveys

In the village they see the lamplight in my window even at impossible hours. They must think I never sleep.

It’s almost four o’clock, and today four o’clock is my hour of anger. Anger is the daughter of weariness, for a black chanting that fails to rise and become a prayer.

Nausea of biblical visions, of incendiary horizons of Armageddon.

And then, precisely at that predawn hour, my body reacts.

It feels a sudden hunger, worthy of a dock worker, a cabbie waking up for the night shift, or an after-theater midnight repast.

I heat the water, sauté a clove of garlic, and get rolling on the preparation of a solitary plate of spaghetti. To hell with the healthy diet and, along with it, the medicines lined up on the kitchen counter. The brazen ones that dare remind me of my age.

I bite into the spaghetti, keeping an eye on the latest news from Germany, and I am reminded of when I met Helmut Kohl almost by chance, ten years before his death.

One of the greats.

I asked him point-blank how the hell he had managed to convince the Germans to give up the Deutschmark, the strongest currency after the dollar, and switch to the euro.

In Berlin they called him "*der Dicke*", the ingrates. The fat man, as if body mass were the only thing left to the man who had united the Germanies.

But old Helmut was nobody's fool.

He replied, "Simple, I ignored the polls. I knew that the majority of my compatriots were against it, but I forced my hand."

"With what conviction?" I asked.

"I didn't want young people to have to suffer what my father and grandfather had suffered, because of the wars."

I knew the adage: a politician is one who thinks of today, a statesman is one who thinks of tomorrow. That day "*der Dicke*" spoke to me as a European statesman.

Four a.m.

Fin de règne

The late night meal gave me energy.

I taste a glass of *Piedirosso irpino* that tastes of cherry, black pepper and almond. With a hint of ashes.

The forest is agitated, it's feeling the arrival of the Bora, and it is as if this northerly wind and the wine were merging into a single current, which also forces my thinking to change pace.

And maybe that current is nothing more than a double of mine, another me that is observing me from the window and trying to tell me something.

Maybe he's laughing at me, because I've allowed myself to be contaminated by pessimism, by a fatalistic breeze that cozies us into lucubration, and dissuades us from action.

The wine and the wind exhort me to react, urging me to dig down to my last healthy reserves of anger so that I can dip my pen in them with ferocious joy.

It's a good thing we have Ursula in charge, the Bora says with a grin at the window. And it reminds me that the Europe of the peoples, the parliament in Strasbourg, is fed up with that woman, who in Brussels "now embodies an opportunist and changing alliance", ready to shift "from the fight against nationalisms to the attempt to absorb them into the system".

Frankenstein is holed up in the Berlaymont Building, they say in Brussels.

The European Commission, meant to be an instrument of democratic consensus, has become a bunker governed by blind obedience.

Lobbyists have imported to the summit of the Union a brutality that runs roughshod over international law, administrative principles, and international treaties.

It's four o'clock and everything suddenly seems clear. I write as if under dictation.

But who is this Ursula, so closely tied to the agro-industrial corporations already swollen with EU contributions, who begins her mandate with the exaltation of the Green Deal and ends with its demolition and does not seem very sensitive to the doubts of the ... organic producers.

Enigmatic Ursula, who meets behind closed doors with pesticide producers; who listens less and less to the workers and more and more to the big businessmen, as if their lobbies did not already have enormous power in Brussels.

Ursula, who does not promote the re-activation of Antitrust enforcement, frozen during the recent pandemic: who refuses to show the magistrates of Liege her conversations via SMS with the drug company Pfizer on the choice of vaccines; who learns from Berlusconi how to use power and who, indeed, when Silvio dies, allows flags to be flown at half-mast in front of the Berlaymont building of the European Commission.

All this, they say again in Strasbourg, “in a *fin de règne*’ climate in which prebends are distributed left and right, with blatant favoritism, so long as it is functional to her re-election”.

And here is von der Leyen announcing, by personal choice, that the EU will break with China. Here she is making an unbalanced visit to Tel Aviv to the point of implicitly, disavowing her foreign minister’s attempts at mediation in the Gaza war.

In Brussels, they call her “the American president”, implicitly objecting that the United States is no longer the one of the Normandy landings, because it exports more chaos than democracy, and then leaves the consequences of that chaos to us. Refugees, inflation and all that goes with it.

Icy Ursula, not loved even by the Germans, whose name is accented on its first syllable like Angela, but who isn’t like Angela at all

who shows no emotion in the face of the ethnic cleansing of Armenians, driven out of Nagorno-Karabakh by the army of Azerbaijan (an oil-producing country, unlike Armenia) with the declared support of Turkey;

and who, when seven hundred migrants are shipwrecked off the Peloponnese, tweets a nice “I’m sorry” or the like, and then blesses the clampdown on pushbacks and the right to asylum, to the applause of the right.

In this invertebrate Union, reduced to an electoral bargaining chip, strong with the weak and yielding to the powerful, she will certainly not be the one to put a political and moral brake on the centrifugal tendencies of the nations that, including the supposedly pro-Europeanist Macron, are increasingly emptying out the EU from within.

The Pantsuit

An ice sphinx.

I met her in a theatre in Rome, at the commemoration of David Sassoli, former President of the European Parliament, who had died a year earlier.

Dear David, who believed in Europe and insisted on telling me that freedom is defended every day and that “there can be no Next Generation Plan if there is not first a European Dream”.

Sassoli who called for “more politics and less technocracy” and opened up the parliament even to the poorest among us.

When Ursula entered the room, the temperature dropped a few degrees.

I spoke from the podium after Romano Prodi, her predecessor. I said that Europe needed a dream, but the dream was dead.

She was sitting on my left; I kept an eye on her to study her reactions. She was still, composed, expressionless.

About the war in Ukraine, I asked the audience if Europe could afford to exist without Russia.

She didn't bat an eyelash.

I explained that we could not expand to the east without asking the new entrants to respect rights and minorities, because there was racism and anti-Semitism there.

No comment.

I said we needed to put "more Europe into our Atlanticism".

She didn't change her expression even then.

Instinctively, that bouffant blonde in a suit, so Christian Democrat in appearance, seemed to me more dangerous than the most entrenched right-wingers.

It occurred to me that she would sell out the Europe of the founding fathers in order to increase her power.

And when, that same day, I saw her leave, smiling, arm in arm with Giorgia Meloni, our recently elected Prime Minister, my suspicion was confirmed.

Shortly afterwards she took the post-fascist Roman she-wolf with her to the Mediterranean and, in order to get her vote, agreed that Italy could put the brakes on the approval of the Stability Pact.

It seemed that Ursula needed Giorgia, not the other way around. Perhaps, I dared to think, a Melonization of Europe is in the offing.

I was right. Within a few months, Brussels gave the green light to the worst. Pesticides, diesel, rearmament, suspension of the Schengen Treaty and the return of borders.

The She-Wolf

Giorgia Meloni doesn't fool anyone. She is a born leader, that's all you can say.

I see her, in the midst of her wolf cubs in the cabinet, who are hungry, terribly hungry

for too long they were forced to fast

and here is the Roman she-wolf suckling them, sometimes emanating a mythical Virgilian aura

they tug at her nipples, impatiently

and she feeds them ministries, presidencies, then the state

Initially one piece at a time, just to probe the opposition

but since the adversary screams without doing anything, paralyzed as in 1922, in the days of the march on Rome, she runs rampant, offering schools, hospitals, railways as gifts to the Children of the She-Wolf.

It's not a march on Rome, oh no, it's just a "conservative revolution".

TV is invaded, it becomes a state *kombinat*, like in the old GDR

the news still travels in Trabants, but who cares

Don't believe, my French friends, that it's so different from 1940, when the wolves entered Paris like in the song sung by Serge Reggiani, and "*personne n'osait plus le soir / affronter la neige des boulevards*"

no, it's no different, as the song goes, they take the ministries and after the ministries they also take the museums

because our museums have too many foreigners in charge, it doesn't matter that they're competent

and after the museums they devour the natural parks, because the Earth is only an obstacle to Doing, and Greta is just radical chic.

And she gives her relatives and friends room to command, thanks to a turnover engineered by a homemade McCarthyism.

It bewitches with a light language, that speaks to the belly but avoids the brain

so let's get rid of the last intellectual pains in the ass who push us to think

it's no longer time to think, it's only action for action's sake that counts

long live tradition, they say, long live obedience to the great patriarchs

and it doesn't matter if Father Dante put the popes in hell and had a homosexual as his teacher, or if Voltaire told the priests to go to hell.

They move ahead, one step at a time, discovering there's no opposition, for them it is a unique opportunity

They're cool and calm, sure that Italy will take it lying down

And then they fill even the last vacuums of power, they call to the banquet those even hungrier than themselves

they rejoice, they feel innocent,

and the popess imparts plenary absolution to all

because evil is always someone else's doing

especially of the poor who come from Elsewhere.

The megaphone

And now this Italian right is leading the way in Europe, as it did a century ago.

It has learned to offer an amplifier to victimhood and whining.

It is again complementary to the German right, as it was in 1938. They are the two faces of the past come again, a two-faced Janus with the wolf on one side and the wolf in sheep's clothing on the other. The fascism of the North and the fascism of the Mediterranean.

The Italian right has learned better than any other to be on the "inside", speaking in the language of those who are "outside". To be in power, but to rail against power.

To call the taxes that it imposes "*pizzo*", i.e. "protection money". Delegitimize institutions while being part of them.

A shameless mental somersault made possible only by taking for granted that the people are dumb as oxen and by placing all the blame on an even greater power.

So here it is, the Federal Union, the ideal scapegoat.

Attack Europe, therefore, and at the same time give voice to victimism and complaints without resolving anything. A double electoral gambit that has by now become a lesson for the right all over Europe, thanks to Italian sovereigntism. Once again, the Italian government is complementary to the German right, just like in 1938. Germany and Italy, two sides of the same comeback, a two-faced Janus, with on one side the wolf and on the other the wolf in sheep's clothing. The post-fascism of the North and the Mediterranean variant.

A complementarity that is also esthetic. The Latin rascal, handsome and arrogant, flanks the icy, efficient, blond, just a bit misogynist. On the distaff side, the busty woman of the South is the counterpart of the managerial androgynous woman of the North in trousers.

But almost all the European right parties have learned the Italian lesson, just look at what happened with the roaring protest of the farmers, manipulated by the European right against Brussels as if the Agriculture Commission had not been in the hands of the right for the last twenty years.

In fact, it is the right marching against itself, but few point that out and the trick works.

Indeed, Brussels immediately succumbs to the tractor drama and, while it's at it, dismantles the cornerstones of its Green Deal. Reneges on the commitment to cut the use of pesticides by half, puts obstacles in the path of a more ecological agriculture, goes back on the promise to ban the use of toxic chemicals, the containment of bio-gas emissions, and the re-naturalization of twenty percent of European land and seas. Victory across the board for the Lords of Grievance.

At that point, the sovereigntists proclaim to the world that they have saved farmers from the claims of the left, without saying that what's strangling them is not the constraints of the Union, which, on the contrary, has flooded them with billions in subsidies, but the wholesalers in cahoots with the agriculture commission chaired by the right wing as per the above.

The gynaeceum

And then there is an eternal fascism that sleeps in us. In all of us.

An instinct that harbors necrophilia, see Tolkien, which has the cult of defeat and knows that the memory of the vanquished is more tenacious than that of the victors.

A fascism that sanctifies Geronimo and the Apaches after exterminating them, that hates blacks out of envy and so sports badass billy clubs

that transfers to sex the will to domination and is potentially femicidal
Who will never be able to admit that Europa is a woman from the sea
Who is obsessed with gays and afraid of becoming gay
and reminds me so much of *The Blues Brothers*, when, falling from a viaduct, the
driver confesses to his Nazi boss: "I've always loved you".

And so here is the great Italian idea: machismo legitimized by a woman. The idea
of a Great Mother who guarantees her rebellious offspring. A mother who slaps you
around, but covers up the hijinks of her most wayward children because, as the Pino
Daniele song goes "every cockroach is beautiful to his mamma".

Ideal group photo: the blonde Giorgia, bouffant blonde Ursula's girlfriend, smiling
next to the blonde Marion Maréchal of the French super-right Reconquête and the
other blonde of the *Rassemblement National*, Marine Le Pen.

Pro-Russian and pro-American at the same time: a crazy, unmanageable thing. But
the remedy is macho amalgamation. That's what counts.

Machismo has always been legitimized by mothers.

The male chauvinist gynaeceum has always existed. On the outside, men flex their
muscles. On the inside, females rule.

The vegetable garden

I write to Hans that in the Italian right "there is a scandalous abyss between saying
and doing", and I attached a series of off the cuff annotations.

They claim to be Christians, but at the border they would reject even Jesus.

They pontificate about Romanness, but they don't know Latin and they don't know
that Rome had African, Arab, Spanish, and Balkan emperors.

They blather about the Mediterranean, but they look to the Atlantic and mimic English.

They speak on behalf of the people, but take away their fundamental rights, even
the right to get sick and demonstrate.

They exalt the nation, but they govern an anthill of selfishness, the "just us folks"
Italy that entrenches itself in its own garden.

All they talk about is the family, but they abolish family counseling centers and slide
towards familism.

They would, like Caligula, make a horse a senator just to impose their power.

They asphyxiate you with slogans about security, and at the same time promote
shopping malls to the detriment of small shops and the network of social control.

But it is everywhere in Europe that the right produces the very insecurity on which
it then speculates electorally. That's its advantage. It generates the toxins that feed it.

Its message does not require coherent thought. It just fills in other people's blanks.
Pure tactics, like Mussolini in the 1920s.

Prigs

It's the coldest hour of the night. I go out to the woodshed to get some good wood, hornbeam and beech. The fire is going now, it's crackling. The entire night is laughing at me and my illusions, doing everything it can to amplify my anger.

I sit by the stove and decide to delete the message for Hans.

I ask myself why waste my breath criticizing the right; why say that "those guys" are the bumbling Captain Fracasses who shoot into the air (and sometimes even lower) at parties with friends, block trains to get off wherever they want, or go to the cinema disguised as soldiers of the Reich. Pointless blowing off.

What political value does it have to point out that black men have the cult of martyrdom just like their worst adversaries, the Shiite Iranians who scourge themselves to death or the detested Balkans who still weep for battles lost centuries ago?

It makes no sense wasting time making fun of the neo-fascists of *Forza Nuova* for singing the praises of Italianness by parading to the sound of Germanic music, without noticing the contradiction.

The far right is simply doing its job. It is filling a void left by others. It intelligently appropriates words disowned by the left and, in some cases, even expresses a savage, childlike innocence.

It is even right about some things, such as the excessively generous welfare programs of the countries of the North or the degeneration of many migrant-reception cooperatives in the Mediterranean countries, which cloak themselves in humanitarianism but subcontract everything, sometimes in agreement with the mafia, and end up creating well-heated greenhouses of drug dealing and illegal work.

My anger is not against them, it is against the torpor of the leaders of the so-called left.

What am I supposed to do, I feel like screaming, with your priggish moralism, if there is nothing ethical about you?

What good are your feminist marches against patriarchy if you don't understand that the monster is the market, the commodification of everything, including women?

It's you that I should be targeting with a barrage of questions. I should be asking you why you focus on gender issues and don't see that the problem is infinitely larger and more serious; why you don't make the system for integrating migrants more effective before it implodes; why you stand idly by and watch the dissolution of the federalist project without reacting.

But above all, I would like to ask you: what have you done to build a European patriotism capable of keeping the return of nationalisms at bay?

The Cardinals

Those on the right know what they want and say it openly.

The left no, the parties on the left don't know what they want.

They don't speak to the needs of working-class neighborhoods, of rural communities, to people in waiting rooms, on trains. They don't go to bars and beer halls like the failed painter named Adolf.

They often do not distinguish between center-right patriotism and extreme right-wing racism, favoring a lethal bond between the two blocs.

Fascism – I would like to say to them – is the child of your abandonment of voiceless places, of your nose always in the air; of the arrogance of you icy, fearful, passionless politicians and prisoners of the politically correct.

A world of clerics with sparrowhawk moustaches and Voltaire's mocking smile who have reduced the Resistance to a museum and abdicated all internationalism at the very moment when everything, including the mafia, has become international.

A coven of smart alecks who look at you with commiseration if you don't like Wim Wenders.

A curial left, full of cardinals busy tearing each other apart.

This was already the case fifty years ago, my professor of Modern History, Salvatore Francesco Romano, who left the Communist Party after the repression in Hungary in 1956, warned me.

Imagine today, when the left, without a pope of its own, deifies the GDP and brandishes the recipes of the great chefs.

A party that denies its roots, hides its flag, slavishly follows the opinion polls, walks close to walls and espouses a line that evaporates in minutes

A left that is ungrateful and indifferent to the loyalists who fought for its ideals

A know-it-all left, the repository of revealed truth, which proclaims high humanitarian principles but never wants a refugee in its own home.

Lefties are often obnoxious. I don't know why. Just as there are "right-wing types", so it seems there is an anthropology of the left.

And here, in this void, the new fascism proliferates in the snubbed metropolitan peripheries, where the poor see more poor people arriving, followed by the mafia, drugs, and violence.

And then there are the Chinese who "are buying up everything", and the rancor against the rancorous Islamists, and the ancient roots that are rotting.

If only the European left had, I think to myself, someone like Yanis Varoufakis, who speaks his mind, explains that capitalism has mutated and killed the real world of production to hide out in a cloud, from where it comes to us, bypassing traditional markets, destroying our privacy and determining our behavior through the air waves or by a web of optical fibers millions of kilometers long.

It is a system that is getting richer at speeds that were unthinkable as recently as yesterday, all the while spreading deadly germs. It is both toxic and stupid, a virus that kills its host.

And then here we go with deflation, the return of fascism, directed by sinister characters like Steve Bannon. Europe under attack, which, instead of carrying out radical reforms, imposes by diktat austerity measures on its poorest members.

Two Ghosts

The wind drops in intensity, the forest calms down. It was just a passing squall. But it was enough to clear my mind.

I'm starting to put these notes into final form. I write quickly. For a few years now, I have felt I have to hurry. The speed with which my yearly schedule stratifies forces me to reckon with the time I have left and work harder. Writing – as I learned – is also a trick for living more intensely, by emptying my bag and lowering my level of anxiety.

“Let the wind pass between the lines,” recommends the young Syrian woman named Europa in my book on the founding myth of the continent. This time the wind is thundering, upsetting the words, making the lines tremble. It forces me to grab onto solid, short sentences.

I'm starting to see more clearly. To find firm footholds in the storm of events and link together facts overlooked by the news.

At the last Frankfurt Book Fair I discovered, almost by chance, that Erasmus of Rotterdam, the great European intellectual of the sixteenth century, had become the hero of the anti-European right.

A dexterous strike, executed without our illustrious intellectuals realizing it.

That day there were sixty thousand people among the stands of the *Buchmesse* and, struggling with the crowd, I went to hear the presentation of a book, translated into German, by the Florentine historian Lucia Felici. Theme: Erasmus' Europe. The title, *Without Borders*, didn't seem to promise any surprises.

And instead, what a story!

It is well known that the author of *In Praise of Folly*, a book banned by the popes, climbs the entire social ladder and becomes very rich.

On the other hand, it is not widely known that this immense man, the illegitimate son of a priest, left much of his wealth to a foundation with his name. Purpose: to help the needy, and in particular, those persecuted by the religious wars that were devastating the continent.

The message is: help everyone, without distinction of faith or affiliation. The aim is to provide training, which in German is called “Bildung”, the construction of man. A great European manifesto, charged with the compelling force of utopia.

When Professor Felici goes to Basel to visit the archive of the foundation, which in the meantime has ceased to operate, she discovers that those old papers that have been ignored for so long contain fascinating and frighteningly current stories.

But she also discovers, with amazement, that for some years now the creation of the great Dutchman has been reborn elsewhere, on the initiative of *Alternative für Deutschland*.

As if to say that the man who symbolizes continental unity, for whom the network of exchanges between students in the Union is named, has today become the banner of the return of nations and of a supremacy of the Germanic languages in Europe.

There is the ghost of a false Erasmus wandering among us, but few people notice it. And those few still don't know that that ghost has already stabbed the authentic Erasmus and his memory.

The Torch

How easy it is to steal emblems and words from the left. It's been happening for at least a century.

The story begins with the term "socialism", weakened by the spin-off of the communists in 1921, which, by way of the former socialist Mussolini emigrates to Germany, where the fatal painter makes it his own. Who then, in order to gain the workers' consensus, coins the name "National Socialism" and, before moving on to the swastika, harangues the people waving a red flag, with a white disc.

An even more brazen kidnapping is that of the torch, symbol of the largest partisan youth organization in Italy, the Youth Front for National Independence and Freedom, founded in Milan in January 1944 by socialist, communist and Christian Democrat representatives, united in the liberation struggle.

The flag of the Front is a disc that encloses a torch in the wind held by a hand that leans to the left. Well, after less than thirty years, a fascist youth organization was born in Italy, known for its violent raids, which in one fell swoop stole the name and even the banner of the young partisans. The only difference: the flame is white, red and green, the Italian flag.

Pure reversal.

Sinister Walls

It's time to learn the lesson and do the inverse maneuver: appropriate their symbols.

I know a free man who did it, with a genuine partisan operation of retaliation. His name is Mario, he plays the cello beautifully and he has bought a House of Fascism in the Veneto region to fill it with cultural initiatives.

I don't know whether those sinister walls have suffered from the invasion of the enemy or have breathed a sigh of relief. I only know that both of these things give me an almost indecent feeling of satisfaction.

In Upper Bavaria, something similar happens at Aspenstein Castle on Lake Kochel, which was owned by Baldur von Schirach, the charismatic leader of the Hitler-Jugend, the Nazi-era youth scouts.

Seduced by the Führer, Count von Schirach in turn seduced the children by repeating "you are the people to come" and organized huge summer camps for them at the foot of the Mount Rauchberg, overlooking the Alpine snows. For seventy-six years, the Bavarian Socialists have been organizing their training courses in Aspenstein.

Certain places must be reclaimed, so that their evil spirits do not return. And since fascism – if it is true that they have burned millions of books – is terrified of words, it is with words that the ceremony of exorcism must be carried out to free their dens from the spell. The wind of words that bring light and freedom.

Evil creeps in with words, and it is with words that it is fought.

Bene-dire, to speak goodness or to bless, to give thanks. If "in the beginning was the Word", it means that nothing is stronger than the spoken word.

The Carolingians

"Charlemagne, Charlemagne / Qui a eu cette idée folle / d'inventer l'école? / Sacré Charlemagne, sacré Charlemagne."

If even France is fed up with this barbaric warrior and dedicates derisive lullabies to him, I wonder why the European Union has not had enough of King Charles and does not leave him to go moldy in a basement of the Brussels palace.

If it does not, I believe, it is because it suffers from a birth defect: the Carolingian identity of the Union, dating from the time of the first post-war rapprochement between Germany and Paris. Since then, despite the enlargement of the EU, it has not been able to free itself from the Rhine.

It has not found other symbols. Perhaps, as far as symbols are concerned, European politics has a dark repulsion, if it is true that it does not know how to value,

and perhaps not even read, its founding myth, that of the princess kidnapped by the bull, which seems to me to be so full of ever-current significance.

Charlemagne says nothing to either the Poles or the Greeks. He is one who does not distinguish between Church and State, ignores the classical world, and has no idea of Eastern Christianity, which is nevertheless the true heir of the empire of Constantine, of whom he declares himself the successor. In addition, he is a pragmatic warmonger, who likes to settle disputes with the sword.

By adopting Charlemagne as its symbol, Europe has given up other myths that are much better suited to represent its spirit. Frederick II of Swabia, for example, the emperor who reconquered Jerusalem without shedding a drop of blood, the monarch enlightened by the itinerant court, who also had Arab, Greek and Jewish advisors in tow.

Frederick, the best of the kings of Italy, the German who brought the feudal lords into line, united the North and South of the continent and separated State from Church. "The more I read about him, the more I realize that he represents the pinnacle of today's most forgotten values," I heard it said by Lucia, a cultured and passionate tour guide in Puglia.

So then, instead of putting anonymous bridges or buildings on paper money, why not depict Petrarch, Thucydides, Voltaire, Tesla, Bach, Copernicus, Liszt? Or Alfonso X the Wise, who in the school for translators in Toledo brought Arabic and Hebrew into communication with Greek, Latin and Spanish? Or that of Antonello da Messina, who traveled all over Europe and fused North and South in his painting?

The Lamp

The moon has set.

A candle on a windowsill would be enough to relight it. A glimmer of faith, the murmured prayer of a hermit, would be enough to save this paranoid humanity.

Men who do not wait for God to save us, but who try to save God from our barbarism.

Points of light, which the darkness makes even brighter.

I remember one afternoon in Paris. I walked from the Left Bank to the Right Bank via the Debilly Footbridge. I had to reach the Avenue d'Eylau bypassing the Trocadéro too full of tourists and on the way, at the base of a staircase, I came across a solitary alley.

Since I am an avid fan of topography, I looked up its name and, when I read "Rue Fresnel", my Triestan heart leaped. All seafarers know Augustin-Jean Fresnel, the inventor of the lens that projects the sword of light from lighthouses into the distance. In other words, the one who brought light to the night of the seas and made navigation safer after centuries of shipwrecks.

In Jules Michelet's book *La Mer*, it is said that France, endowed by Fresnel with a ray that multiplied four thousand times the light of a lamp, had given herself "a belt of flames capable of penetrating the darkness for twelve leagues", and that then the whole world followed suit, illuminating the oceans.

I knew that brilliant crystal prism. I had spent nights in its company in a lonely lighthouse in the Mediterranean, discovering that the source of such a light was a light bulb of a few watts, no stronger than the one on my bedside table. In the darkness, I had heard the solitary dialogue of that light with the stars, feeling myself a nullity and at the same time at the center of the universe.

Why, I wondered, had such a great man been dedicated such a negligible street, and one certainly unknown to the majority of Parisians? Was not he who had lit up the nights of the Earth also part of the grandeur of France?

In a fit of anger. I thought of the enormous number of places in that city named after generals and battles: Avenue Foch, Rue du Maréchal Leclerc, with the streets of the Napoleonic generals, Berthier, Lannes, Jourdan and countless others.

There were streets named after battles won: Wagram, Austerlitz, Eylau, and the Champs de Mars, the Place des Invalides, the bridges of Bir-Hakeim, Alma, Alexander III of Russia. There was no shortage of colonial nostalgia: boulevard d'Indochine, place de Mexico. It was as if the whole of France was resounding with fanfares and drums. And there, as the sun began to gild the iron frames of the Eiffel Tower, Paris told me that not only France, but also the nations of Europe were prisoners of a military past that overshadowed the bearers of light.

Five a.m.

Trees

There is a tree at the end of the path, which is always waiting for me.

It is a maple of rare beauty. When you approach it, you feel like tiptoeing and taking off your hat.

To me it's sacred, maybe it's the tree of life.

There are silences in which you seem to feel its patient roots sinking into the ground and its branches stretching out, as happens to the tree depicted in mosaic on the floor of the Cathedral of Otranto. That too is a frontier, uniting East and West, Jerusalem and Europe.

There are times when I feel it growing, rising to the stars.

March. The power of new shoots that push their way open everywhere, in the prairies, in the woods, around ponds, in vegetable gardens.

Sometimes, out of gratitude to nature, I feel like kissing every piece of wood I put in the stove.

I miss my grandchildren; I miss telling a beautiful fairy tale to break the nefarious spell of this night. The chance to tell them that Europe is a wonderful garden, that makes everyone's mouth water, and that it is even more beautiful to come back to after being far away.

If they were here, I would put them to sleep by telling them about borders crossed and voyages from island to island. I would tell them about Jean-Auguste, the man who invented the magic lamp of lighthouses. I would fly them over oceans, rivers, plains, and mountains, and talk about the ogres who threaten their land.

I would tell of Hannibal crossing the snow-covered Alps with elephants in train, of Bach walking four hundred kilometers just to listen to a great organist in Lübeck, and of the ancient Romans crossing the Rhine with a bridge that leaves the barbarians incredulous.

And then there is the Greek archipelago, the temple of the god of medicine on the island of great healers, where the health of the body is celebrated because it is known that if bodies are healthy, society is too. And then the sails, the wind, the whiteness of the temples against the blue of the sea.

The balustrade

I open the map of the world – the map of Europe is no longer enough – and immediately everything becomes clearer. It is the vision of the Great Game, something that pushes you along what seems an unsteady balustrade, shaken by icy winds.

The mind connects seemingly unrelated signals and makes them interact. Years of notes and torments converge on that map. They show that the unspeakable can become reality. It's Orwell redux.

I write down in a notebook an imaginary dialogue between the American president Joe Biden and his great overseas ally, Giorgia Meloni. A dialogue forcedly imaginary because the Italian cancelled the planned joint press conference after the meeting.

We're in Washington. He and she stroll through the gardens of the White House with interpreters at their side and, behind them, two tense diplomatic advisers.

"Honey," he says, "everything is changing here, Europe is no longer a priority for us, do you understand? I want to be frank with you. The war that matters is the war over the world's resources. Petroleum, nickel, diamonds, semiconductor minerals. Stuff that today is concentrated in two quadrants: the Pacific Ocean and the Arctic Sea. Our industry is pressing. ExxonMobil, Rockwell Automation, Lockheed Martin. We must prevent Russia and China from getting there before we do."

He is unsteady on his legs, yet he gesticulates briskly. He doesn't realize that he's revealed a little too much about the game. The president's diplomatic adviser is listening intently and is worried.

She shows no emotion, but she listens; and she understands that she is out there, that she too is leaning over that windy balustrade. Something that is taking her where she has never dared: beyond the dead at sea, beyond the Italians, beyond the poisons and the crazy climate, beyond religion and all the terms of endearment.

"The Svalbard Islands, Giorgia. Do you know where the Svalbard Islands are?" the president asks suddenly.

Giorgia nods. And in the meantime, she tries to remember exactly where that blessed archipelago is.

"Well, those islands to the north today matter more to us than mainland Europe. The melting of the ice is opening up a huge market. This is also why they explained to me that for a while it is better to ease up on the green economy. At least as long as the deposits are ours."

The president takes off his dark Ray-Bans, looks at the petite, strong-willed woman with sweet eyes, then says: "You are crucial for us, Giorgina. You are our guarantee in Europe. We don't trust Le Pen, she will certainly win, but she is pro-Russian and can't stand us, she can't wait to give up the American-led NATO. You are the only sovereigntist in power who is loyal to us and will not turn your back on us".

At that point he lets himself be carried away by a wave of filial affection and kisses the Italian on the head. The meaning is obvious. If you do your part, we won't stick our noses into your domestic politics. You'll have a free hand. And if there are a few fascist salutes we'll make nothing of it.

It's an investiture with *carte blanche*, and Giorgia smiles like a little girl.

Long silence. The president would like to say that the melting of the ice is opening up an access to the seas for Russia that it has never had and offers Putin unlimited strategic resources. He would also like to say that if Putin gets there, so will China, which is the only real adversary of the US in the race for world hegemony, and that for this reason the US, while it is working in the Arctic and the Pacific, needs a diversion in Ukraine.

But the diplomatic adviser clears his throat. It's the sign. And the president simply says: "We have to keep that madman busy in Europe, even if American pressure eases. We can't allow that son of a bitch to get to Kiev, and maybe Berlin".

Giorgia remains silent and listens. The meeting is getting to the point.

"You Europeans must take your destiny into your own hands. You will give the signal, and Ursula will move with you. Ursula is ours. We will be there, quietly, with our drones and Elon's satellites. The U.S. secret services have been working in Ukraine for ten years and will give you full cover. You won't lack the means: our military industry has a volume of production ten times higher than the Russians."

Hearing the word "destiny", the little Italian woman feels her heart beating fast. She understands that she is indispensable to the greatest world power, that she can go down in history, or rather legend. And then she remembers the Italians in the snow on the Don front, Mussolini's war against the Bolsheviks. She would like to, who knows, avenge the defeat of the Armir.

"Of course," the President continues after putting his Ray-Bans back on, "we don't like a European army, because it would be a French-led army, and France doesn't like us. Or it would be German-led, but the Germans have given us too many worries in the past for us to trust them yet. We are counting on Poland, the Baltic States and, of course, England. And above all, on you. Yes, you can, Georgia."

Now the little Italian woman is thinking big, as only big companies and the general staff of world powers can do. She understands that the game is big. Nickel, diamonds, gas. Kiev must be supported, at all costs. And in any case, the Ukrainians will go to the front, not the Europeans. Certainly, Europe's little wolf cubs won't go there, they're too intent on enjoying power. So onward and upward, even if the war lasts a long time. The important thing is to exhaust Russia.

"It's much better," concludes the president, after picking up a solitary daisy in the lawn to offer it to the little Italian woman, "that you do business with us, so that..." Here he pauses for effect, "... Because, if that demented Trump were to return to the White House, it would be worse. He's be capable of dumping you without warning. And then Putin would really do what he wants. That's it, my dear".

It's already half past five. I realize that I've filled about ten sheets, and that those sheets are the script of a goddamn plausible movie. And so, as they do in film credits, I

add at the end that the events described are imaginary and the resemblance to real events purely coincidental.

But the imaginary still gets out of hand, and this time it slips into reality.

On the Airbus that's flying her home over the Atlantic, the little Italian woman also dives into the map. She doesn't look at Ukraine, but at places like Severnaya Zemlya and the other Russian archipelagos, which give Putin quite an advantage in the race for the Pole.

She understands that America will not stand in the way of her policies and that she'll be able to cut back on schools, the environment, culture, welfare, hospitals, keep the judiciary under pressure and truncheon young pacifists, to buy tanks. At that point she telephones Rome and orders the purchase of 132 Leopard 2s to arm two regiments and 140 platforms for the heavy brigades.

She knows that, in the event of Trump's victory, Biden's kiss will cost her dearly and could jeopardize her relations with the White House.

But she gambles all the same. She wants to excel. She swears allegiance to Kiev not for one but for ten years. She removes the obligation of transparency for arms exporters and the banks that finance them. And of course she is tightening up on immigration, because people need to be told that this is the true emergency.

Better not to mention the rush for oil, nickel, and diamonds. And not even the war that's knocking on the door of home.

Victimism

Barcelona, January 2024. Mass in the church of Santa Maria de la Mercede, one of the patron saints of Catalonia. There is something Polish about the scenography: powerful chorus, candle distribution, Catalan national flag next to the altar.

Then I discover that many Catalans call themselves "Poles", to say that the Castilians are the "Russians", that is, the oppressors. And I learn that on the local TV network 3 there has long been an independence program called *Poland* and built on this divisive stereotype.

Catalans are a welcoming people; you can already see it on the street. I don't know what need they have for this industry of clichés, useful in justifying the separation from Madrid. In television interviews, the less professional, more primitive and foggy-brained Spaniards are selected, while the Catalan appears poised, competent, orderly.

Then, when you take the train and arrive in Madrid, you already see at the Atocha station that none of it is true. In the waiting lines, people are just as orderly as in Catalonia, if not as in Germany.

Behind the anti-Castilian cliché there is the memory of Franco's oppression, of course. But that's not enough to explain it. After all, Andalusia also suffered under the

fascist dictatorship, yet the Andalusians don't seem to need enemies to know who they are. The Spain that was once Arab does not have it against anyone and spontaneously absorbs those who come.

Federico, my oldest grandson, has been to both Catalonia and Andalusia and has felt this difference. "I felt at home in Seville," he told me, "in Barcelona I was a tourist." Although, he added, "they're both beautiful".

And in fact, in this city I have always loved, I feel the wonderful spiritual energy that I had perceived after Franco's death starting to fade. Who knows, maybe it's the ephemeral fate of all liberations. Because it always ends in the same way: multinationals, mass tourism and official culture financed by the palace.

It is hard to find anymore the atmosphere, simply crazy, that surrounded the concert of Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé to the cry of "Barcelona!", or that was represented in the scenography set up for the opening of the 1992 Olympics, with the entrance of Hercules, founder of the city, dragged by a ship into the stadium.

I have lunch at a Basque restaurant with Carlus Padrissa, the man who designed and directed that opening ceremony. He is a federalist like me, and he is still possessed by a perpetually boiling creative force. So, after Hercules, why not talk about Europe?

On the paper tablecloth I draw for him with captions in Spanish the scene of a landing of the Great Mother on the Catalan coast. "*La virgen que viene del Este sin paz*", the bull, "*arquetipo de fuerza y fertilidad*".

And while wine tinged with anchovies from the Cantabrian Sea arrives, I draw the boat, "*puede que ser la iglesia*", which is pulled ashore with ropes by an army of bare-chested young men, and then a female choir that marks the rhythm of the operation.

With men like Carlus, you can rediscover the old flavor of Catalonia.

Escape from the Balkans

Mirjana was born in Belgrade and speaks a lot of languages. Her work as a political analyst, but also her biography, sees her immersed in a web of global instability.

She studied in Mexico and the United States, then fought for a long time for a European passport, "out of faith in the values of the Union", only to realize, once she got the document, that those values no longer counted for anything and could be crushed at any moment.

In the 1990s, as a correspondent for El País, she lived with me during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, her own country. Since then, the chronicle of her life is that of a flight from the Balkans. But it's as if the Balkans have been following her everywhere she goes.

She moved to Spain just in time for the Islamist attack on March 11, 2004 in the Madrid train station, which left 192 dead and 2057 injured, and also for the hottest period of Catalan separatism.

She then moved to Vienna, a city described as the most livable in Europe, only to discover an archipelago of submerged ethnic tensions.

On a trip to Nice, France, she stumbled upon the July 14, 2016 massacre on the Promenade des Anglais, claimed by extremist Muslims, where 87 died, including the attacker.

One day she confessed to me, exhausted: “Paolo, I dream of living in a country where nothing happens”, and I did not immediately understand the deep meaning of that thirst for tranquility, which seemed to me like a surrender.

Then someone happened to remind me what the worst curse for a Chinese was: “May you live in interesting times”.

It was like a key to the centuries-old dimension of weariness of the peoples of Central Europe and their state of endemic turbulence.

Points of light

Ianni, Fabienne, Minia, Ustym, Sava, Lizaveta, Krzystof, Mia, Mihajlo. Blessed are my children. When I hear Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Shahrazad*, I think of them, the young people of the European Spirit of Youth Orchestra, with whom I have spent five summers. It’s one of their strong points, and every time I listen to it, I see again their lively faces. The faces of the world I would like to have.

Kilian, wild Spanish trombonist. Little Aksinija, a shy Russian flutist from Kaliningrad. Sweet Flora, English horn player and cellist. Alessandro, an ambitious Italian violinist with a mad desire to travel. The Polish Kamil, bassoonist, full of humor and good cheer. That the plague of war, I have often thought looking at them, may never touch you.

Instead, it has touched them. In March 2022, one of them wrote to us that “God” had asked him to leave the clarinet and switch to “another musical instrument”. He was Ukrainian, and an attached photo showed an anti-tank rocket launcher with his hand on the trigger. I don’t know how things have gone for him.

All the more so then, thinking of the war, I cling to those faces. The symphony they express tells me that Europe manifests itself best in terms of vibration, sound, timbre, frequency, and that its music is born from contamination. The presence of the Arabs in Spain or the Jews in the Eastern countries.

They are my points of light, but not in the sense of glimpses of hope. I hate hope: too often it is a scam to keep the oppressed happy. It fuels inaction.

Max Mannheimer, a Jew from Munich, who died at the age of ninety-six, one of the oldest survivors of Auschwitz, preferred optimism to hope and, observing the drift of the world, serenely stood before the worst possible picture only to look it in the face, often with caustic irony, as if he knew in advance that “they” would break their horns again. He didn’t care about judging, only about laying the foundations for a joyful battle.

The woodworm

Some time ago I was admitted to the public hospital in my city after a bicycle accident.

In a bulge of waiting stretchers, I witnessed the spectacle of an army of doctors, nurses and health personnel, exhausted by shifts and overwhelmed by a perennial emergency, who, despite everything, did not make me feel like a number, worried about me, called me by name without knowing me, and took excellent care of me.

I landed in a protected haven that never went on vacation, operated around the clock, 365 days a year, and couldn’t turn anyone away. The monument to a system of solidarity, universalistic, which made no distinction of income, race, or origin. The negation of the throwaway culture. A trench of resistance to the liquidation of the welfare state, as well as to the commodification of life.

In those same hours, from my hospital bed, I learned that politics had decreed spending increases in favor of the private health care system which had failed spectacularly during the Covid emergency and blocked new hires of public social-health personnel as well as the turnover of dozens of administrative staff in the sector.

I had just come back from Germany with a very bad feeling. Hours of train delays, missed connections, airports in chaos; in the short stretch between Mannheim and Ulm I had experienced the collapse of a myth, that of a model system in the heart of the continent. On one route, my carriage was so full that I couldn’t reach the reserved seat, which was of course occupied by another passenger.

In the meantime, French friends complained to me about how their railways were broken down from centralization, favored high-speed trains and canceled minor lines, to the point of forcing passengers to always pass through Paris, at the cost of lengthening the journey. They explained to me that there was a hiring freeze on railway workers, while SNCF info tech personnel had mushroomed to twenty thousand strong, but were still unable to prevent the system from breaking down.

“In France, it’s better not to get sick,” my friend Manault told me from Paris, lamenting the collapse of a dehumanized public health system. Meanwhile, disconsolate e-mails from Madrid and Barcelona described schools in tatters, with teachers assaulted by parents or pupils who had lost their heads. The Thatcher

system, which had brought Britain to ruin, was triumphing and doing damage everywhere.

Pushed by an orderly, my bed was wheeled through neon-lit corridors and rooms, following a zigzag line of ceilings instead of floors, and all the while gowns of different colors appeared in my field of vision as if from the edge of a well. And yet, how much more lucidly did I see from that disadvantaged position. I felt that Europe, distracted by events in Russia and Ukraine, was under attack in its most sacred achievements, while people no longer voted or, worse, voted for the very dismantlers of welfare.

In the insomnia of the hospital, I felt the gnawing of a woodworm that was corroding the foundations of my world. To understand, it was enough to stay away for a moment from a media bombardment governed by likes and not by the real weight of the facts, where everything took on the contours of tragicomedy and where the mobilization of rescue efforts to save five rich tourists sucked into the depths of the Atlantic during the search for the wreck of the *Titanic* scandalously outclassed that of seven hundred castaways in the Aegean.

That is what was left of the old Europe of the welfare state. Hero doctors forced to fill out forms, delegitimized teachers, and railway workers with nervous breakdowns.

The Curtain

I wonder if any Afghans or Syrians are passing through the woods, right now.

The borders that the shades are about to cross were the Iron Curtain for more than forty years, and now there are those who are pushing to build an anti-migrant wall.

When the infamous barrier of Europe fell, the celebrations weren't even over yet before some were already growing nostalgic for the old separation.

I was there, on May 2, 1989, when Hungary invited the press to witness the first dismantling of the wall.

I haven't forgotten the name of the place: Hegyeshalom. It was drizzling, and the wind was combing the great alfalfa meadows around the Danube.

Gulasch Communism had not yet collapsed, nor had the Berlin Wall. The whole of Europe was experiencing an unreal moment of waiting. It seemed impossible that communism could fall apart like this, overnight.

A colonel, tall and elegant, summoned the press into a barrack to illustrate how and where the army removed the fences and booby traps between the two Europes.

An aseptic explanation. But when an English journalist asked who would be guarding that border from now on, Colonel Balázs Novák's face broke into a grin of mocking sarcasm.

Wire Fences

In my house on the edge of the woods, here on the eastern frontier, I'm sitting here looking at the last dying embers and I can't decide to go to bed.

And in fact here we are asking for it again, the Iron Curtain. To replace the Vopos of East Germany with the Croatian, Polish, Greek and Hungarian police. Let them do the dirty work. Just beyond Hungary, six hundred miles of front swallow up thousands of lives without a name. And everywhere trains, refugees, unspeakable trafficking, military convoys. And drones, all you hear about are those fucking drones.

Here we are, pontificating about morality in the absence of ethics, armoring even our internal borders and filling the territory with fences, alarms and video cameras.

Bleeding hearts hurl anathemas against the ferocity of the times and argue with full bellies about the hunger of others, but in the meantime the phobia of the Other and the new returns.

The Schengen Treaty is suspended temporarily, and that "temporarily" seems to be a prelude to an endless extension.

The shame of the emigrant we used to be returns, the schizophrenic rejection of ourselves.

Petty-bourgeois resentment returns, stirred up by the hornet's nest of the social media.

Nostalgia for the strong father we never had returns.

Contempt for the weak and, why not, for the subaltern, who is always a hopeless jerk, returns.

What emerges is a fascism that is nearly bereft of the social and very neoliberal, strong with the meek and very meek with the strong.

A fascism that must not "disturb business", in the sense of not taxing them too much.

A new fascism, without ideology but hungry for power.

A fascism headed not by the State, but by the Great Predator, who must fuck the Other *nunc et semper*, because life is permanent war.

The mise-en-scène

Original fascism needs borders to defend, or it goes into an identity crisis. After the cruel attack by Hamas and the interminable, ruthless Israeli retaliation, it seemed too good to be true to fascist believers that European countries were cancelling the open

borders of Schengen with the excuse of Islamic terrorism, but in reality to exhibit greater surveillance of migrants.

Then, when you go and see them, those borders, you laugh. “Theater,” they would say in Naples, a staging to create a siege psychosis. Theater in France, Austria, Spain, Italy.

Often, fifty yards away, anyone who wants to crosses over freely in the woods. But the psychological effect on Europeans is devastating. The very meaning of the Union is erased.

As if that were not enough, checks are made of those who enter, but not of those who leave. As if to say: what do I care if a terrorist goes and plants bombs around the rest of Europe? A noble example of federal solidarity.

That one-way screening authorizes every EU country to delude itself that the danger comes only from the outside. And so, thanks to the “invasion-emergency”, everyone covers up their national vices. Things like the overwhelming power of monopolies, collapsing hospitals and transport, corruption, tax evasion, the destruction of the environment. Plenary self-absolution.

And so, among the countries of the Union, with the interested assent of Ursula in Brussels, we witness a show of camouflage, blinding East Berlin-style lights, sideways trucks and machine guns over our shoulders. The shadow of the Wall returning.

A pure stage production, so much so that it focuses on a single direction: that of the Balkans and the Arabic-speaking world. A Southeast syndrome that authorizes every country to feel like it is the bulwark against a danger that invariably comes from that part of the world.

So, when it comes to border controls, Austria keeps an eye on Italy, Italy on Slovenia, Slovenia on Croatia, etc., as far as Turkey and the Middle East. Very rarely does it happen the other way around.

It’s an old syndrome. When I trod the troubled lands beyond the Isonzo, the pride of the Slovenes for being the last frontier of the Habsburg order was palpable, as was the pride of the Croats for being the military outpost of Catholicism.

In the same way, the Serbs saw themselves as a heroic barrier against the Turk: their border guards, when I cycled to Sofia, went so far as to tell me with the utmost seriousness: “Beware of Bulgarian dogs”, which then, of course, proved to be identical to any other stray.

A curious, almost comical, reverberation of prejudices that resonates out beyond the Balkans and seems to say: that’s where the barbarians come from. And it is, coincidentally, the same direction from which, over the millennia, most of the European peoples have immigrated.

It is a bit like denying our origins. Believing that men do not have legs but roots, like trees.

For this reason, I think, those like me who have legs take special pleasure in crossing that border as an illegal immigrant, making a mockery of the controls.

The Barbarians

Poor soldiers, I see them every day on my frontier, fed up and cold, reluctantly playing the part of the tough guy.

They are the first to know that it is useless. They know that the economy has an insatiable hunger for slaves who have survived hellish journeys and who, as their wage, are almost ready to content themselves with being alive.

The reality is impious and simple: controls lower labor costs. They offer labor to the mafias in the tomato fields and in the slaughterhouses.

For centuries, Europeans have seen the growth of a bourgeoisie of slavers. And now that the slaves come spontaneously, and even pay to come, do we want to drive them away?

By now, profit has polluted even the most human of gestures: hospitality. "Follow the money," the Americans say. There is a cry of "ethnic substitution", but – look at the combination – it does not apply to the rich, even if they are brigands or mafiosi. As long as they bring money, let them come quietly. Pure hypocrisy.

Meanwhile, the poor come anyway, stealthily, with border guards who often look the other way. Why rid ourselves of outcasts to expose to public ridicule? Why do without this magnificent electoral bonus?

The sovereigntists in my neck of the woods wring their hands before the anti-migrant wall. Then they go to eat pizza at the Bengali or kebab at the Egyptian, pretending not to see that the sign "NOW HIRING" is posted everywhere, not to know that Italians no longer want to do menial jobs, or that industrialists in difficulty are asking urgently for laborers.

We do not want to admit that Europe is a demography at the end of its rope, a land of the elderly and the assisted that has lost the use of its hands.

Poor Europeans. They look like the Roman citizens of the third century, who entrusted the barbarians with the labors of the land and even with military service.

And thank goodness there were barbarians then.

Migrating mice

Dawn is near. It's the time when all the accordions of the night start playing.

Fantastic country nights, with the radio on at a minimum, and books as travel companions.

At night, a library can become a den of sedition. Books talk, they confabulate with each other, they send signals. Sometimes they come looking for you, rather than the other way around.

And here I am in front of Virgil's *Aeneid*, an old Einaudi volume with the same translation by Rosa Calzecchi Onesti that I studied in high school.

There is a passage that I remember almost by heart: "But what kind of people is this? What barbarous homeland / allows such a custom? The asylum of the sand they deny us; / They make war, forbid us to set foot on the shore". It is the voice of Aeneas, a refugee from war, who complains to the Carthaginians about how he was treated when he landed in their African land.

The shelves also yield up *Wassermarken*, a collection of poems by Heinz Piontek, Germanist and poet. One of them, *The Missing*, later translated by Giorgio Caproni, tells of the mass flight of Germans from East Prussia attacked by Soviet troops, and in particular a moving scene that recalls the departure of Aeneas with his father on his shoulders and his son by the hand.

"We stuffed bread and silver into the sacks / unlocked the door. / When the night began to flash / we ran unarmed to the stables / and off we went, on the streets of migrating rats. / Gutted and cold sheet metal: the land of the vanquished."

I read softly, slowly, spelling out the syllables.

"We were going at a walking pace. / A girl gave birth amid the wheels of a chariot. / A blind man stumbled after good-hearted people / Clinging to a rope, and shouting in the air, 'Where are we?' [...] / But there came to us one / who was leading a boy by the hand / He was a stout man, with his uniform streaked by the summer suns, / and he carried on his shoulders an old man, his weak father."

Really nothing new in the world of those who migrate. The same fear, the same anger as two thousand years ago. The myth is meant to be reread.

Piontek ends like this: "Then it was day before our eyes, with the light of rose leaves", and there is a rosy glow spreading here in the countryside as well.

It looks like the light of Genesis.

The journey to the end of the night is coming to an end.

The Indomitables

Hans is awake, I knew it! He's awake and writing me good news.

There are projections on the vote, which for the first time show the German sovereigntist right in decline. The demonstrations against the AfD have had an effect.

He says that grannies have also taken it to the streets against the shaved heads in black. Indomitable *Omas gegen Rechts*, who have not forgotten the horror of Nazism.

Old ladies like my German teacher thirty years ago, who was expelled from the Sudetenland at the end of the war but did not dream of accusing the Czechoslovaks of this.

And then there is the fact that Alexandra Förderl-Schmid, the journalist that jumped into the river, was discharged after two weeks. She said she just needed to clear her mind.

And there is that in Hungary the scandals of the regime come to light and the squares are once again filled with citizens demanding the resignation of the government.

Even my son Michele implores me: Dad, enough whining, beware of fostering inaction. It's time to fight for democracy.

It is all too easy to profess European patriotism when things are going well. The courage of testimony shows itself when the scenario is dark.

This is the lesson of the Benedictines, who put the continent back on its feet at a time when no one believed in Europe anymore.

I have learned that my beloved monks of Sankt Ottilien, in Bavaria, have also taken the field against the intention of the German sovereigntists to send home thirteen million foreigners. Good news, very good news.

But that's not all. Hans announces that he is coming with his wife to visit me in the country, to celebrate with a barrel of Franconian beer. For the occasion, he's going to bring his accordion and wear leather breeches. Magnificent.

By now my house has become a meeting place for originals, madmen, utopians, and adventurous travelers. And if there's one thing I love, it's cooking for all these people.

Six a.m.

Stutterers

There are those who have an old wise man on the mountain. I have an old wise woman, a humble farm woman from my village, who with a few words can lead me back to the essence of life.

One day, when she came back from the fields, after listening to one of my stories, she looked at me with clear eyes and said: "Signor Paulo, everyone has a task on Earth. I cultivate my field. You cultivate your books".

As she said it, I saw myself hoeing my little garden of words, and at once I felt ennobled. That simple creature was a philosopher and gave meaning to my work. She, with her hands marked by fatigue, did not dream of filing me away as an intellectual who abstracts himself from the world, but as someone who produces things useful to people.

Tonight, thinking of the illiteracy that is rampant in the digital age, I realize even more the value of that lapidary definition. For two years I toiled day and night on the verses of my *Canto per Europa* without understanding that I was fulfilling a task: bringing to light the deep core of the word.

So, just as the farm woman defends the land from the weeds, so my task at the twilight of my life is to defend words from the aggression of barbarism, to turn over the clods made sterile by the senseless universal blah-blah.

I realize in an instant that the word "fascism", on which I have reasoned so far, is not correct, misleading, it is even ennobling as a definition of what surrounds us. It makes us believe in the re-emergence of something old, while here we are faced with a totally new phenomenon that is alien to any ideology: the erasure of memory, of listening, and of the very meaning of discourse.

I understand then that I too must hoe better to find the right word, turn the soil better. And here comes to light a new word, but as old as civilization.

Definitive, all-encompassing of the savagery that is besieging us.

"Barbarism."

In Greek, *bárbaros* means “stutterer”. So what else is barbarism, if not stammering, loss of the wonderful complexity inherent in vocabulary and syntax? And if barbarism is rampant, how much more important is it to cultivate small gardens in which words are saved from destruction?

If today the world is covered with hotbeds of war like the skin of a leper, it is also because words are in the hands of ill-intentioned people, often governed by invisible powers, who are making inroads with the naïve and the ignorant.

If Russia and Ukraine are risking self-destruction in an endless conflict, it is because Europe lacks the dialectical, or verbal, capacity to conduct a mediation process. For the terrible problem of Gaza, the situation is the same. If I were to send the peasant woman from my village there to parley, she would do better than many diplomats.

As for the Balkans, if they have fallen apart, it is also because of a deadly media bombardment, of words, which has prepared the ground for real cannonades; and if Great Britain committed suicide by separating itself from Europe, it is above all because in the Brexit referendum the word “identity” was manipulated by irresponsible people.

Now that London is facing its own bankruptcy, I heard one of its ironic citizens say: “We Brits are suspicious of everything that comes from abroad, but we drink Belgian beer, we drive German cars, watch American films on Japanese TV sets, eat Italian take-away and sleep on Swedish mattresses.”

This is the precipice we are led to by the idea of nation reinterpreted by illiterates.

Eyes in the dark

The cat is cold and asking to come back in; she’s flattened herself against the glass to make herself understood.

She looks at me from the semi-darkness with marauder eyes and hang-glider ears. She seems to represent the enigma of the wild Elsewhere that surrounds me.

She comes in, jumps on my shoulders, and sits there purring, clinging to my sweatshirt, while I search the pantry for something for her.

Maybe I’m the one who’s clinging to that animal. There is something salvific about the relationship between her and me.

Tonight, I felt their presence, the animals all around. The horse grazing in the prairie to the east, the dogs on the lookout, the call of the owl, the warm breath of the cows in the stables.

Anima. Animals. Rustling in the night, a thousand eyes looking at you from the dark.

Pep is a born storyteller and runs Europe’s largest travel bookshop, Altaïr, in Barcelona. For him, animals are the best reading friends imaginable. Even scorpions.

“When I was a child, I would give them ground almonds and milk and they would come, without ever stinging me.”

“In South America, I even slept with a python,” he told me, “and when I wrote, he lay next to me. One day I had to go away, and I missed him. If you look at an animal, and it looks at you, a strong bond is established. I’ve experienced it with camels, on my desert trips.”

This time the cat, Mili, with its feline presence, awakens in me the partisan desire to become a forest.

To be part of the night, to wait for the enemy at the opening, to observe him from the dark.

Be untraceable, unregistered, unseen, not subject to rules.

Nomadic, in the bush, like a guerilla fighter in the French underground, protected by the lynx, the bear, the marten, and the spirits of the springs.

I have never been afraid of the shadows. I’ve always felt them to be a hiding place. I’ve learned to turn them to my advantage.

I like to be the one who observes, rather than the one who is observed.

I open the door. The earth breathing, it is alive. It is my friend.

It’s time for battle in Europe. Never before has the motto “*Nie wieder ist jetzt*” (Never again is now) been so true.

Nations shall not pass. What sense would they have at a time when every problem is worldwide?

How can Europeans forget that, because of nations, the continent has already committed suicide twice?

The Sowers

Antonio is a history and philosophy teacher in a high school in the Veneto region and every year he asks his students to address a major topic of the moment.

This year they chose the most painful and complex issue, the Palestinian question, and worked on it for forty hours, dissecting the topic from every point of view, economics, history, geography and so on.

They did so by using the parliamentary system. They gathered around a single table, clashed, argued, sought compromises, and finally accepted the majority’s version. The result was a forty-page report, which they then presented to the whole school with representatives elected by them.

For all of them it was such an experience of democracy and self-esteem that now you see those young people spontaneously activating themselves on the big topics of politics, even before they reach voting age.

“Ours,” says Antonio, “is a battle against the sense of powerlessness that seems to pervade everything. A way to get out of our torpor and show that the struggle for a better world is by no means useless.”

The students listen to their teacher, because he is one of the shining examples of hospitality in Europe. One who took into his own home and adopted six young Africans, now fully independent and integrated into society.

“We haven’t changed the world, of course, but we have changed ourselves. We have become sowers, and those who sow do not presume to see the results immediately. In this general climate of indifference, that’s already a great achievement.”

The Investigation

For a few days now, I have had a large book on the table not yet been opened. Claudio sent it to me from Bavaria, together with a short, enthusiastic note of encouragement to read it.

Headline on blue cover: *Der AfD Komplex*, the AfD complex. A ponderous investigation of Alternative für Deutschland, which no newspaper seems to have done so far.

I have never heard of the publisher, *Recherchen vom Correctiv*, but just judging from the table of contents, the work appears formidable. Something unprecedented about a right-wing party in Europe.

Of yeah, newspapers don’t do investigations anymore. They no longer have the readers, nor the staff, the means, the advertising, often not even the independence and the authoritativeness, necessary for the task.

Here, however, I discover that a group of journalists, unassociated with newspapers or magazines, and above all without sponsors, have been working on the subject uninterrupted for eight years, with the obstinacy of Scotland Yard.

I read, as the morning light sweeps over the countryside, and I am speechless. Before me is a team of investigators who have organized one of the most fantastic investigative reports in post-war Germany.

They are the ones who snuck their way into the famous secret meeting of the AfD that launched the idea of the expulsion of thirteen million foreigners from the country. They made it public, triggering a popular reaction throughout the entire federation.

They also found illegal donations to the party to the tune of millions of euros; discovered how the AfD was strengthened through a front organization based in Switzerland; and figured out how Alternative für Deutschland entered the Moscow orbit to become, in fact, an “Alternative for Russia”.

And it was still they who investigated how Maximilian Krah, the AfD’s “*Spitzkandidat*” in the European elections, is implicated in an international network

aimed at the abolition of human rights, and who have analyzed the consequences for Germany of abandoning relations with the West.

No German newspaper today would have been capable of such an investigation, of incalculable political value. But how did they, the guys from Korrektiv, do it? With what resources?

I'm overwhelmed with emotion. The investigation tells me that it is possible, that the language and the system to oppose barbarism exist, and how.

Publisher David Schraven's introduction explains this, and his words could be the foundation of an entirely new approach to journalism in a host of countries.

Now is the time is the title of that dazzling introduction, which uncovers the cards of the financing system that made all this possible. The root of it all is a simple idea. A "non-profit" journalism, something akin to the work of ethical banks.

"We needed something new," Schraven says, "to make something old survive: investigative journalism." Not a trick to rake in money from foundations, but an open way to get funding from readers.

I summarize the words of the publisher: we give away the news, and if the community believes that what we do is useful and right, they will compensate us with what they deem appropriate. Some give us one euro, some ten, some four hundred. We now have thousands of donors.

"This gave us unprecedented freedom and allowed us to carry out investigations that none of the mainstream media would have been able to carry out."

Schraven concludes: "We will continue to carry out important work for our democracy and serve the citizens of our country".

Their finest hour

Great. And now let them even come at night, to break my windows or set fire to the woodshed.

In 1944 they burned down entire villages like this in reprisal. If it happens, I will always have the forest on my side, and I will go in the night too.

And it doesn't matter if at the beginning there are only a few of us and we are alone.

England was also alone in June 1940, when old Winston in the midst of disaster told the people: "This was their finest hour".

People like me have nothing but words to offer. But words are not a small thing in this disheartening silence.

It is then that we, the so-called intellectuals, do our job: to be shamans, to find lost words, to bring out their hidden meaning, to awaken the “daemon”, that omnipotent force capable of breaking the mold and reversing the course of history in an instant.

Of all our tasks, one of the most important is to denounce that the web can be circumvented with intelligence. Because the web is an idiot, in the strict sense of the term. All I had to do was use a search engine to look for examples of Nazi rhetoric for the web to believe I was a Nazi sympathizer and inundate me with Nazi content. It still happens to me.

It is therefore time that you young people prepare for battle, you who still thirst for freedom and march against war, you who have in your eyes the light of this unique Earth in the universe and belong to her, without claiming that she belongs to you. Don't be fooled by those who are digging your grave.

Prepare to send them on their way, those gangs of necrophiliac slave traders who are leading us to disaster. And if necessary, get rid of me too, because I'm just an old owl named Cassandra who can only predict the worst. An old-fashioned messianic heresiarch.

I feel that you are getting tired – it was about time – of all this weightlessness, of all this mobility, of all this ephemerality that the system throws at you to keep you away from life and get inured to an insecurity that makes it normal to be fired on the spot with an SMS.

Know that the slave traders of yesterday have become the slave traders of today, and that they are experimenting on immigrants what they are about to do with you. At that point you will understand that the ultimate enemy is not fascism but those who use it, it is the theology of profit as dogma, which makes work not a value but a cost to be reduced.

If the night is long, think that authentic courage is not born of arrogance but of dejection. It arises from the lucid perception of danger and the admission of one's own fragility.

This is what happens to Henry V, who spends the night before the battle of Agincourt entrusting himself to the Creator, so overwhelming is the superiority of the adversary. Henry, who then, in the morning, regains strength, presses his bewildered men to him and makes them a single family.

I, who have the “disease” of metrics, go crazy at the idea that the English king should have won thanks to an iambic pentameter: “The fewer men, the greater share of honour”. Which would be, “The fewer we are, the greater will be our share of glory”.

Yes, we too will go beyond insomnia and fear. And if there are only a few of us, so be it.

But we won't be, because “they” will destroy themselves. The demagogues will be swept out of history.

The people are beginning to see through the deception, they see public health care on its knees, schools in pieces, pensions threatened, children being beaten with truncheons. They feel the pressure of a robbery economy and an air of war that infects everything. They are tired of this dehumanization, of the web that narcotizes, tells you what to buy and what to vote for; nauseated by the invasiveness of access codes and procedures, and nostalgic for the human.

It is the same fetid deception narrated in a lapidary poem by Rudyard Kipling, after the death in battle of his nineteen-year-old son whom he himself had encouraged to enlist as a volunteer in the Great War.

It's about a mass manipulator who in the afterlife (the title is *A Dead Statesman*) must confront the consequences of his lies, confronting those he sent to die.

In front of them, the barker can no longer find words, he has run out of lies. He says: "What fairy tale shall I invent in the midst of this defrauded and furious [with me] youth of mine?"

Who knows what the barbarians will be able to come up with when the Europe of nations, with its twenty-seven tax systems, its twenty-seven general staffs, and its absurd veto system, is overwhelmed by events.

The Spell

How did I forget Poland? Poland that seemed lost to democracy, and instead it was from there that the most unexpected signal was sent, with the overthrow of the most sinister right-wing populism in power.

In October 2023, this country experienced one of those sudden awakenings that leave you breathless. It is as if an entire people had come out of the spell, tired of cultural stagnation and the eternal, funereal martyrology of the hardcore sovereigntists.

Monika, the Pole, the great explorer of frontiers, rejoices because the indifference has been broken, the young people have woken up, they have stopped letting themselves be told that "it's useless anyway" and that "whatever you do will not affect the world".

She says: "We saw beautiful scenes: citizens queuing at polling stations until dawn, hours and hours after the theoretical end of voting, and other citizens bringing them hot food as encouragement. And then the ballot counters, who did not have the courage to close the polls at 10:00 p.m., in the face of the participatory force of democracy. Isn't it extraordinary that this force has managed to break the rules?"

The victory was played out in the icy hours of darkness. Poland proves that if "they" like all grave robbers, go on the move at night, it is at night that they can be beaten. That's the thought that came to me, listening to that victory bulletin.

Young people, he added, are “fed up with running away elsewhere, and now they are reclaiming their own spaces of imagination”.

And then there is Germany, which filled the squares with two million anti-fascist citizens, mostly young people. An exhilarating spectacle. “*Wir, wir, wir sind die Brandmauer!*” they shouted in concert in Berlin. We are the fire barrier! We will prevent the fire. We will beat them with words, that will show those who believe that words are useless.

On March 8, Women’s Day, a new flood of people confirmed the desire of an entire country to be there, to participate, to do politics.

Great, grandiose Germany. It is wonderful to discover that precisely where the danger is greatest, resistance blows its trumpets loudest.

It will not be easy at all, but now it might just be Poland, the Poland that has emerged from the great communist cold, the Poland that seemed to be a prisoner of the darkest prohibitionist sovereigntism, that has upset, thanks to the entry into the fray of its young people, the European balance in favor of federalism, with the blessing from above of men such as Jean Monnet, Altiero Spinelli, Konrad Adenauer and the other great founding fathers.

The Dew

Priceless minutes before sunrise
the shadows of the night are afraid, they hide in the forest
the cat goes out again, because the world is too interesting
at five o’clock there was like a turnabout in the sky
and now you can hear the creaking approach of day
the stench of burnt meat clears away
the morning dew vaporizes
the rooster crows, other roosters reply
Europe emerges from the darkness
its first time zone pales with light
a hint of sunshine illuminates the peaks of the Carpathians
sweeps across the Pannonian Plain
it has already dyed the heights of the Balkans purple
now it’s gilding the lakes of Karelia
glides with the wind over the Baltic Sea
lights up the Apennines
flies over the Eastern Alps
touches the spire of St. Stephen’s in Vienna
flows up the Danube and paints it pink

get ready to comb the French countryside
in an hour it will be beyond the Rhône and the Pyrenees
piercing the Greenwich Meridian
to fall into the ocean.

Primroses

Cheer up, Sun, sun, sun, here it comes.

I go out to the pasture, among the grazing horses.

My body rejoices; step, breathing, and heartbeat synchronize.

Smell of manure and moles at work in the meadows; Mine fields are poison-free.

A huge flock of cranes passes at low altitude, making a beastly din, and points
northeast.

They fill the sky in an instant, it sounds like the opening of Mendelssohn's *Italiana*,
directed by Guido Cantelli, as I heard it as a boy.

They head towards the Danube and the Carpathians. I would like to ride them, like
Nils Holgersson on his goose.

The light explodes beyond the last Alps of the East, and for a moment every slight
convexity casts very long shadows.

Light in the undulating glades full of crocuses and snowdrops.

Soon it will be the time of the primroses.

On one side the strong colors of the Mediterranean, on the other the pastel colors
of continental Europe.

I await the swallows; their nests already prepared in the wine cellar.

Des loups sont sortis de Paris
Soit par Issy, soit par Ivry.

DALLA CANZONE DI VIDALIE-BESSIÈRES

Thanks

For the ideas they gave me before and during the frenetic writing of this screed, I want to thank:

Alida Ares, Hispanic

Alexander van der Bellen, President of the Republic of Austria

Maurizio Benvenuti, geographer

Pep Bernadas, anthropologist and travel bookseller

Luiza Białasiewicz, scholar of political geography

Mario Brunello, cellist

Monika Bułaj, writer, photographer and reporter

Antonio Calò, teacher of history and philosophy

Claudio Cumani, astrophysicist

Lucia Dambrosio, tour guide

Francesca Debenedetti, journalist

Manault Deva, actress and writer

Azzurra Giorgi, journalist

Giulio Groppi, former EU official

Sara Hoffmann, trade unionist

Hanspeter Kowalski, retired

Riccardo Laterza, politician and sociologist

Bruno Luvera', journalist

Diego Marani, writer

Arnoldo Mosca Mondadori, writer

Carlus Padrissa, director and production designer

Romano Prodi, former President of the EU Commission

Francesco Ronchi, official of the EU Parliament

Alessandro Scillitani, director and producer

Mirjana Tomić, Director of International Seminars

... Norberto Villa, abbot of the monastery of Praglia.

But above all, I would like to thank my wife Irene and the indefatigable Giovanna Salvia for the attention with which they supervised the writing.

And finally, for the inspiration I drew from them:

Luciano Canfora

Javier Cercas

Régis Debray

Mathias Enard

Orlando Figes

Laurent Gaudé

Bernard Guetta

Thomas Gunzig

Stéphane Hessel

Ivan Krastev

Claudio Magris

Max Mannheimer

Ezio Mauro

Czeslaw Milosz

David Sassoli

George Steiner

Yanis Varoufakis

Eric Vuillard