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O'kei: An American Novel

Boris Pilnyak

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Boris Pilnyak

O'kei: An American Novel

Translated by

Ronald D. LeBlanc



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Note on Translation & Transliteration

As a scholar of Russian literature, I turned to translation only near the very end of my academic career, at which point in time I had become deeply interested in two putative novels that Boris Pilnyak had written during the 1930s: *O'kei: An American Novel* (*O'kei. Amerikanskii roman*) (1933) and *Meat: A Novel* (*Myaso: Roman*) (1936). Last year, I completed a translation of the latter novel and deposited it into the Scholars Repository at the University of New Hampshire: https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1649&context=faculty_pubs

At the time, I maintained that Pilnyak's slaughterhouse novel deserved to be translated into English for the sake of those potential readers who – whether they harbor an interest in slaughterhouses, animal rights, and/or human nutrition or they are mainly curious about how Soviet writers sought to depict contemporary social reality in Socialist Realist novels produced during the Stalinist 1930s – are not able to read Russian. There is an even stronger case to be made, I believe, for translating Pilnyak's travelogue-novel *O'kei* into English. For one thing, the travel the author undertook was to the United States, and the travel sketches he provided as a result of that trip focus exclusively upon American mores and manners. American readers who are unable to read Russian will clearly benefit from finding out what it is that this Soviet visitor had to say about their homeland.

As far as annotation is concerned, I decided to provide extensive annotation, mainly because I anticipate that the audience that is likely to be attracted to reading this text will not be an exclusively scholarly one. Indeed, I hope that *O'kei: An American Novel* will be read not only by academics, but also by a good number of lay readers who are curious about the impressions our country made upon a Soviet visitor in 1931. I would like their reading experience to have been enriched by annotation that explains briefly, for instance, what the Fish Committee was or who Aimée Semple McPherson was. In any event, the reader of my translation of Pilnyak's

travelogue-novel can expect to find extensive annotation in the form of mini-encyclopedia entries on various people, places, and things mentioned in the text. However, for those readers who would rather avoid the possible distraction that footnotes and/or endnotes can cause, I have included this second version of the translation, which contains no annotation at all.

As far as the transliteration of Russian names is concerned, the names of well-known historical figures are given in their English equivalent: for example, Peter the Great, Tsar Nicholas II, Joseph Stalin. All other Russian personal names are transliterated. In transliterating Russian personal and place names from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet, I have largely followed the advice provided by J. Thomas Shaw, who maintained that for English-speaking readers who are not familiar with the Russian language, “a transliteration system should suggest something about the pronunciation of that language” and that “the less the reader knows of Russian, the closer the transliteration needs to be to something representing fairly accurately the pronunciation of the words.” As a result, I have followed System I (the system designed for non-specialists and members of the general public) outlined by Shaw in *The Transliteration of Modern Russian for English-Language Publications* (1967). I have made some exceptions, however, in those cases where certain spellings (spellings that do not follow Shaw’s System I religiously) would look more familiar or sound less confusing to readers.

Pilnyak Discovers America: The Making of *O'kei: An American Novel*¹

On January 4, 1931, the beleaguered Russian writer, Boris Pilnyak (1894-1938), wrote a letter to Joseph Stalin, pleading with the Soviet leader for permission to travel to the United States in order to conduct research for an ambitious book project he was planning to undertake, one that would compare communist Russia favorably to capitalist America. Pilnyak in recent years had become the target of virulent attacks in the Soviet press (especially by fervent advocates of proletarian literature) for having published, through the Berlin publishing house Petropolis, a novella titled *Mahogany (Krasnoe derevo)* (1929), which painted a less than flattering picture of life in Soviet Russia. In his letter to Stalin, Pilnyak openly acknowledges that publishing *Mahogany* abroad had been a serious mistake on his part, but he points out that he immediately sought to make amends for that error in judgment by revising the novella and incorporating parts of it into a Socialist Realist production novel, *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea (Volga vpadaet v Kaspiiskoe more)* (1930), where the action takes place during the construction of the Moscow-Volga Canal. “I consider myself a revolutionary writer,” Pilnyak insists in his letter, “the revolution created me, and my bricks are being used in our construction of socialism. I do not see my fate outside of the revolution.”² Pilnyak also reminds Stalin that he had just recently traveled to Central Asia to witness first hand how socialism was being constructed in Tadzhikistan and had published travel sketches that describe the wonders of socialist construction that he witnessed in that far-off, primitive land. To strengthen his case for being allowed to travel to America, Pilnyak reminds Stalin that the bourgeois press in the West has been portraying him of late as a “martyred” writer who is being unfairly persecuted by the Soviet regime on account of his purported lack of stylistic and ideological orthodoxy. “It seems to me,” Pilnyak notes, “that it would make for quite a nice political effect if a ‘martyred’ writer such as myself, being of sound mind and body, nicely attired, and no less learned than European writers, were to appear on the streets of Europe and the U.S.A. . . . and if this writer were to declare that he takes great pride in the recent history of his homeland and that he is convinced that the laws of that recent history will rebuild – and is even now already rebuilding – the world. This would be politically significant.”³ Stalin, who was apparently won over by Pilnyak’s charm offensive, replied in a letter three days later that the writer’s proposed trip had received official approval.⁴

It was Ivan Gronsky, the editor of the newspaper *Izvestia* (the official publication of the Soviet government), who had convinced the persecuted writer to pursue this course of action: that is, to try to make amends by converting his ill-fated novella *Mahogany* into the production novel *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea*, by travelling to Central Asia to witness first-hand how socialist construction was taking place there (and then to write about it in his Tadzhikistan sketches), and finally by appealing directly to Stalin himself to grant him permission to travel to the United States. Gronsky, who was born into a peasant family, took an active part in both the October Revolution and the Civil War, and then received a formal education by attending the newly founded Institute of Red Professors, would eventually be appointed editor of the influential journal *Novy mir* and chair of the Organizing Committee of the First Congress of Soviet Writers. More importantly, during the early 1930s he was becoming Stalin’s right-hand man in matters involving literature and the arts. Gronsky appears to have viewed Pilnyak as a challenging reformation project and hoped that by extending his patronage and protection to him he could get this talented but misguided writer to mend his errant ways. In assessing Pilnyak as an artist and

as a person, Gronsky once wrote that this promising young writer and “fellow traveler” (the name given to someone who sympathized with the aims and policies of the Bolsheviks, but was not a card-carrying member of the Communist Party), had become entangled in the late 1920s with some Trotskyites (primarily the literary critics Vyacheslav Polonsky and Aleksandr Voronsky) and that it was under their baneful influence that he had written the disgustingly anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary novella *Mahogany*. “But we Bolsheviks,” Gronsky explained, “decided to try to give him a chance to reform: we sent him to Central Asia and then to America. Afterwards, he wrote a travelogue that truthfully described the situation in capitalist countries, mainly America.”⁵ One year later, in a private conversation he had with Gronsky, Pilnyak reportedly confessed to his patron that he had finally come to realize that he must “go with the Bolsheviks” – that if a writer wishes to remain a writer in the Soviet Union, he must join, “along with the Bolsheviks,” in the common battle for the victory of socialism over capitalism.⁶

Pilnyak set off for America in late January 1931, travelling initially by train from Moscow to Leningrad, and then continuing on, at a leisurely pace, through Poland, Germany (where he applied for a visa at the American Consulate in Berlin), and France, before sailing on the S.S. Bremen for his transatlantic crossing on March 7, 1931. Upon his arrival in New York City five days later, Pilnyak was taken to the luxurious Hotel St. Moritz, where Ray Long, the editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan* monthly magazine, had arranged for a room to be provided gratis for the visiting Soviet writer. Long, who was in the process of getting his magazine into the book publishing business, had travelled to Moscow just six months earlier, seeking to get acquainted with some of Soviet Russia’s most popular writers and to find fictional material of theirs that would appeal to the reading public in the United States. Soon after his arrival in Soviet Russia, Long made the acquaintance of Eugene Lyons, an American reporter who was serving in Moscow as the news correspondent for United Press, and of Charles Malamuth, a former language instructor in the Slavic Department at the University of California-Berkeley, who was serving as Lyons’s interpreter and translator in Moscow. Lyons and Malamuth agreed to assist Long, introducing him to several well-known writers, including Pilnyak, who seemed to offer the greatest possibilities for having their works translated into English and then published in the U.S. As Long explains in his account of this brief business trip to Moscow, “We met the writers in their homes, made our deals, and at the end of three weeks I had accomplished all I had come to do.”⁷ One of Long’s fears, he admits, was that “all of the literature which had been produced since the Revolution would be so full of propaganda that it might be unpalatable in the United States.”⁸ This fear, as it turned out, proved to be groundless. Indeed, he found many of their literary works to be extremely critical of conditions under the Soviet regime. As such, they seemed likely to help American readers better understand the new Russia. This was especially true, he pointed out, in the case of Pilnyak’s recent novel, *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*, which provided, in his words, “a true picture of modern Russia and the Russians of today. Parts of it are almost drastic in their criticism.”⁹ It seems no accident, therefore, that the March 1931 issue of *Cosmopolitan*, which was appearing at news stands right as Pilnyak was arriving in America, featured on one of its opening pages a photo of Pilnyak accompanying Long’s introduction to the main article, titled “I Would Like to Take You to Russia With Me,” which summarized the editor’s recent trip to the Soviet Union. Nor is it surprising that almost immediately upon Pilnyak’s arrival in New York he collaborated briefly with Charles Malamuth, who was completing his translation of *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea*, readying it for publication in the U.S. by Long’s newly formed Cosmopolitan Book Corporation.¹⁰

Another event that Ray Long arranged for his Soviet guest soon after his arrival in New York was a reception banquet that was held in his honor at the Metropolitan Club on March 19, 1931. This was a formal dinner that was attended by a number of the leading lights of American literature. As the literary guests were finishing up their meal, Ray Long stepped forward to introduce Pilnyak, who had spent three days preparing his speech: he himself did not speak English, but several of his Russian friends in the New York area had assisted him in throwing something together and had helped him rehearse it. “I spoke about the fences that enclose national cultures,” Pilnyak would later write when summarizing his brief remarks. “I spoke about the U.S.S.R., about the whole wide world, about how the great honor that was being bestowed upon me by this dinner is not a distinction for me personally, but for that magnificent literature, magnificent and youthful, that the dawning of socialism and the thunderstorm of revolution have created.”¹¹ The banquet is famous, however, not for anything Pilnyak said or did that evening, but rather for the slap that Theodore Dreiser delivered to the face of Sinclair Lewis following the latter’s after-dinner speech. When Pilnyak had concluded his brief remarks, it was Lewis’s turn to speak. The recent recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature began by telling the audience that he was not going to speak about the Soviet Union or about Pilnyak. “I am not able to say anything about the Soviet Union and about Pilnyak,” Lewis explained, “because one of the guests who are present here this evening stole three thousand words from my wife.”¹² He was referring here to the charge of plagiarism that Dorothy Thompson (Lewis’s wife) had lodged a couple of years earlier against Dreiser for “borrowing quite liberally” from the newspaper articles she had written during her tour of Russia (she later combined these articles together and published them as a book, *The New Russia*, 1928) when he was in the process of writing his own travel account, *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (1928).¹³ What seems especially to have raised Lewis’s ire toward Dreiser, however, was the widely shared opinion, circulating among many American writers and literary critics, that it was Dreiser who truly deserved to receive the Nobel Prize, not Lewis. In any event, it was the altercation between Dreiser and Lewis (“the slap heard ‘round the world”) that took place at the Metropolitan Club that evening that became the hot news item in the world press the next day, not the reception that Pilnyak experienced as a Soviet writer launching his first ever visit to the United States.¹⁴

Yet another development that occurred soon after Pilnyak’s arrival in New York was his decision to check out of his room at the luxurious Hotel St. Moritz on March 12, 1931 and move into the nearby apartment of Joseph Freeman, the American journalist, radical social activist, and editor of *New Masses* (a literary journal closely associated with the Communist Party USA). A few years later, in 1934, Freeman would become the founding editor of *Partisan Review*, a left-wing magazine associated with the John Reed Club of New York, another Communist Party organization. Although Freeman was born and initially raised in Ukraine (he lived there for several years before his Jewish family emigrated to the U.S. and settled in Brooklyn) and had spent more than a year working in Moscow as a foreign news correspondent, his command of spoken Russian, as he himself readily admitted, was by this time rather rusty. But the large amount of time that he would spend together with Pilnyak during the writer’s five-month stay in the U.S. helped him enormously in regaining his fluency. Some people have suspected that Freeman had been assigned to chaperone Pilnyak at the request of the Soviet leadership back in Moscow (in order to keep an eye on the behavior of this unreliable “fellow traveler”),¹⁵ but the two men – both of them natural charmers and notorious womanizers – quickly became fast

friends who seemed genuinely to enjoy each other's company and confided in each other.¹⁶ Freeman introduced Pilnyak to many of his leftist friends – contemporary journalists, writers, critics, and fellow staff members at *New Masses* – people such as Michael Gold, Floyd Dell, Louis Fischer, Isaac Don Levine, Dava Mendelsson, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, Margaret Bourke-White, and Regina Andrews, among others. One scholar has opined that during his stay in New York Pilnyak might well have derived “the whole ethos of his travelogue” from his lively discussions with Michael Gold, who was a zealous communist, and from Gold's writings in *New Masses* and *Daily Worker*.¹⁷ Pilnyak even got to meet Max Eastman, the writer, critic, and journalist who just a few years later would publish an article in *Modern Monthly*, titled “The Humiliation of Boris Pilnyak,” that would excoriate Pilnyak mercilessly for “selling his pen to the bureaucracy” and becoming, in Eastman's words, “Russia's leading expert in recantation, abjection, self-repudiation, sighs of repentance and prayers of apology for the sin of having had thoughts, impulses, fancies, emotions, reactions, reflexes, tropisms, or any perceptible knee-jerks or eye-winks that he could call his own.” “The literary journals,” Eastman would intone sarcastically, “are soggy with his unctuous promises and tears of contrition.”¹⁸

During Pilnyak's stay in the United States, Joe Freeman accompanied the Soviet writer not only around New York City and its environs, but also on a cross-country trip to Hollywood, taken during the spring of 1931. Pilnyak had been invited by MGM Studios to co-author, along with the established screenwriter Frances Marion, the scenario for a purportedly pro-Soviet film, to be produced by Irving Thalberg and directed by Frank Capra, about a young American engineer who goes to live and work in the Soviet Union. Its cast would include such movie stars as Wallace Berry, Marie Dressler, Joan Crawford, and Clark Gable.¹⁹ Pilnyak was also hired to serve as a consultant on this film, tentatively titled *Soviet*, for which Thalberg agreed to pay him a salary of \$500 a week.²⁰ The MGM invitation had been sent to Pilnyak via telegram while he was making his transatlantic crossing on the *Bremen*. Ray Long had agreed to sponsor the trip, even paying Freeman a weekly honorarium of \$100 for accompanying the Soviet writer to Hollywood and assisting him there as an interpreter. On April 5, 1931, Pilnyak and Freeman set off for Hollywood aboard the Twentieth-Century Limited, an express passenger train that left the LaSalle Street Station in NYC and stopped overnight in Chicago. The pair continued on to Los Angeles the following day aboard the *Chief* train, whose route took them through parts of the Great Plains and the Desert Southwest. Upon their arrival in California, Pilnyak signed a ten-week contract with MGM, but he and Freeman stayed in Hollywood for only four weeks, realizing early on that Pilnyak had been invited there, “in his capacity as a Bolshevik,” in order to, as he put it, “Sovietize an American film.”²¹ The artificiality of the MGM movie sets and props (their “fakeness”), the deplorable conditions under which script writers operated (they were essentially “stabled” workers), the trite and formulaic “happy endings” of the various film genres (gangster films, films of cowboys and Indians, action films with thrilling chase scenes, etc.), and the compulsory distortion of reality to fit the audience's desires and preconceptions – all of this led Pilnyak to decide to tear up his contract with MGM and head back to New York with Freeman. The two of them had come to the realization that the bosses at the studio wanted them to adapt reality to fit the scenario that the producer had in mind, rather than to work the other way around. They were being asked, as Pilnyak put it, “to make lemons ripen in Greenland.”²² Their stay in California had not been entirely a waste of time, however. After all, both of them were lodged at the Miramar Hotel, one of Santa Monica's premier guest residences,

so they were able to enjoy the scenic and exotic surroundings during their time there: palm trees, ocean bluffs, wharfs, boardwalks, fruit orchards, and so on. They were also able to visit Upton Sinclair at his home in nearby Pasadena and to tour some of the Spanish missions in the local area. They even got to observe a religious service of Russian “Jumpers” (ecstatic sectarians belonging to a Russian emigré denomination of spiritual Christians). Pilnyak, who had developed a fondness for American automobiles, decided to purchase a Ford in Los Angeles, to teach himself how to operate it, and then to drive it back to New York along a scenic route. Pilnyak and Freeman were accompanied on this cross-country journey by an unemployed screen actor referred to as Isidor K., whom Pilnyak characterized as “a rolling stone, a man who had despaired of ever finding work in Hollywood, so he was helping us drive the car cross-country in exchange for free food and lodging. He was headed to New York, but he was prepared to go anywhere we wanted. He was a U.S. citizen. Isidor sang American hymns the whole way.”²³

The drive back to New York City took this trio of travelers through a number of different states, including, among others, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Tennessee, Michigan, and New York. Along the way, they managed to attend a rodeo, to observe people prospecting for gold, to watch crowds of people flocking to oil boom towns such as Gladewater, TX, and Lakeview, LA, to marvel at such natural wonders as the cactus desert at the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, the Grand Canyon, and Niagara Falls, and to tour a cotton plantation in the deep South as well as the Ford automotive plant in Detroit. By the end of his five-month stay in the United States, Pilnyak had thus managed to see quite a bit of this broad and geographically diverse country. The several farewell-to-America interviews that he gave on the eve of his departure for Moscow in early August, along with the press releases that his publisher distributed to local news outlets, indicate that, at one time or another during his stay here, the Soviet writer had also managed to visit such cities as Boston, MA, Washington, DC, New Orleans, LA, Birmingham, AL, Charleston, WV, Akron, OH, Santa Fe, NM, and Santa Barbara, CA. Those pre-departure interviews and press releases also allowed Pilnyak to reveal to American readers some of the impressions that their country had made upon him during his five-month stay here, impressions that he would later expand upon and then incorporate into the lengthy travelogue-novel, *O'kei: An American Novel* (1933), which he would begin writing almost immediately upon his return home to Moscow. For the most part, he reiterated how capitalism would soon collapse in the U.S. and be replaced by socialism, how art is stunted (if not entirely absent) in Hollywood, and how gangsterism, which is widespread in the U.S., is essentially a perverse expression of American individualism. None of his impressions of America, in short, seemed the least bit favorable.

On August 3, 1931, Pilnyak departed New York, again aboard the Bremen, to return to Moscow. Several days earlier, at a Brooklyn dock, his Ford roadster had been loaded onto a freighter that was departing soon for Leningrad: Pilnyak, it turns out, had decided to keep the American automobile he had purchased and to have it shipped back home ahead of him. On the day of his departure, he was introduced to Irving De Witt Talmadge, a young American journalist who was likewise sailing on the Bremen that day, headed for the first time to Soviet Russia with his wife on a tourist visa, hoping to find a job in Moscow that would make it possible for them to live there for a while.²⁴ By the time they reached Leningrad five days later, the young couple had become such good friends with Pilnyak that he invited them to stay at his Moscow house with him and his family indefinitely, at least until Talmadge (who had studied Russian and was

reportedly fluent in the language) could find gainful employment in the capital. Almost as soon as the young couple got settled at the Pilnyak house, however, Talmadge was already being given segments of the writer's American impressions to translate into English.²⁵ He appears to have been the first (and, to the best of my knowledge, the only) person who attempted to translate Pilnyak's travelogue-novel into English.²⁶ As for the Ford roadster that Pilnyak had shipped in advance to Leningrad, the writer drove it home to Moscow a short time later, accompanied on the trip by another of his Moscow friends, the aforementioned Eugene Lyons, who writes that Pilnyak initially drove the car through the streets of Leningrad "tooting the American-accent horn, like a little boy with a kiddy-car."²⁷ On the highway from Leningrad to Moscow, Pilnyak, whom Lyons characterizes as a "cumbersome and lovable blond bear," blew his horn continuously, "as though we were traveling on horn-power alone. Wherever we paused in our three days of leisurely driving, the entire village population soon gathered to marvel and to interrogate."²⁸ Indeed, in one village, Pilnyak reportedly took nearly every local man, woman, and child on their first ride in an automobile. As Lyons points out, the American car was a status symbol, "a sign and proof of the affluence of popular writers in the U.S.S.R.," setting Pilnyak off from "the common run of man even more than his talent and temperament."²⁹ Interestingly enough, Lyons would soon purchase a Ford himself and even hire a chauffeur to drive it. Not to be outdone, Pilnyak eventually purchased a second car for himself, this one not a Ford, but instead a Soviet model.

As we learn from the exchange of letters between Pilnyak and Joe Freeman from August 1931 to February 1932,³⁰ the Soviet writer was busily at work during this time recording his impressions from his recent stay in the U.S. In a letter he sent to Freeman on November 3, 1931, for instance, Pilnyak promises shortly to send off the first packet of his American impressions. Freeman, for his part, alerts Pilnyak to the fact that he will soon be sending some clippings from U.S. newspapers his way. In addition, the September 1931 issue of *New Masses* included a short piece by Pilnyak, titled "Farewell to America," to which an "Editor's Note" was attached, explaining that before leaving the United States, "Pilnyak left behind him the following paper containing some impressions of his stay here."³¹ Those impressions were mainly the ones that pertained to the time he had spent in Hollywood. It is not clear exactly who it was that translated these impressions into English, but it was quite likely Joe Freeman, who was still serving on the journal's editorial board at this time. Back in Moscow, meanwhile, as evidence that Pilnyak was making progress on the draft version of his travelogue-novel, we learn that the writer hosted a small literary evening at his home on Yamskoe Pole Street soon after he returned from the U.S. This intimate get-together was attended by Ivan Gronsky, the writer's long-time patron, Karl Radek, a close friend and former member of the Left Opposition who now held a prominent place within the Communist Party as the head of the International Information Bureau of the Central Committee, Aleksandr Voronsky, the Trotskyite editor and critic, Valerian Osinsky, an economist and agricultural expert, and Walter Duranty, the Moscow bureau chief for the *New York Times*. Gronsky describes the evening this way:

Pilnyak read to us from his latest novel: *A Country Where Gangsters Have Managed to Prosper* (*Strana, v kotoroi bandity uslovilis' khorosho zhit'*). After the reading, everyone there started to heap praise upon it. I stepped forward and said that inaccuracies had been allowed to creep into this new work, beginning with the title. The people who live in America are highly cultured folk.

(Incidentally, gangsterism did make a lasting impression upon Pilnyak). All of my further remarks were along the same line. When I was done, others started to express themselves critically as well and to talk about the work's shortcomings.³²

“Pilnyak reworked his novel twice and changed its title,” Gronskey adds. “It saw the light of day under the title *O'kei*. It was a weak work of literature.”³³ Nevertheless, early in 1932 the work was accepted for publication in serialized form in the journal *Novy mir*, whose recently appointed editor-in-chief was none other than Gronskey himself. It was published in the March through June 1932 issues (Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6) of Gronskey's journal. It was also accepted for publication by two publishing houses, appearing in print in 1933 in print runs of 10,000 copies each. Thus, Gronskey, through his public statements and his editorial endorsements, was seeking to advance Pilnyak's literary career at the same time that he was disparaging his latest work in private. A particularly salient example of this public-versus-private dichotomy is provided in Gronskey's Concluding Speech at the Second Plenum of the Organizing Committee of the Congress of Soviet Writers in February 1933, where the editor singles out Pilnyak's recently published travelogue-novel as an example of the kind of high-quality literary works Soviet writers should be writing these days, immortal works that “will live on for centuries to come.”³⁴

Even before his travelogue-novel was completed in February 1932, Pilnyak had already begun delivering public talks about his recent trip to the United States. One of these talks took place at the beginning of November 1931 at the Press House (Dom Pechati) in Moscow, where Pilnyak was scheduled to speak about contemporary American journalistic and literary practices. We learn from a newspaper report, filed by David Kal'm shortly following this talk, that Pilnyak had just recently spoken about his impressions of American cinema to members of AARK, the Association of Workers in Revolutionary Cinematography (Assotsiatsiia rabotnikov revoliutsionnoi kinematografii). We also learn that at both talks some people had to be turned away because all the seats were already taken. So Pilnyak, it seems, was not having any difficulty arousing interest in his forthcoming book by delivering these public talks.³⁵ Kal'm notes in his report that Pilnyak had some amusing things to say during his talk: about how American journalists loaf about, how American writers brawl, how they dine, etc. He also spoke about how they drank alcohol – in the midst of prohibition's dry law – during their first meeting with Pilnyak, how they drank alcohol when they were seeing him off at the conclusion of his U.S. visit, and how they drank alcohol in the interim. Frequently employing the expression “American philistine,” Pilnyak spoke about his impressions, Kal'm notes, as if it was a Russian philistine who had visited America. The disappointed audience of journalists and writers, Kal'm continues, did not hear a single word coming out of Pilnyak's mouth about the financial crisis in the U.S. that had shaken the country's economy, about the widespread unemployment that had resulted in masses of starving proletarians being thrown out on the street by the thousands, about labor strikes, “about that American reality that any Moscow schoolboy knows.” The audience knows this American reality from newspaper accounts, Kal'm points out, but it had every right to expect to hear fresh ideas about it from a prominent Soviet writer who was a living witness to this reality. Thus Pilnyak's public talk at the Press House, if Kal'm's report is to be believed, was very poorly received. To make matters even worse, Pilnyak was briefly followed on stage by a person, identified as Comrade Clark, associate editor of *Worker's News*, the newly created English-language newspaper in Moscow, who proceeded to express his total disgust with Pilnyak's presentation.³⁶ Indeed, a month following this public talk, the newspaper *Pravda*

reprimanded the management of the Press House for having displayed its “rotten liberalism” and for having committed an egregious “political mistake” by scheduling Pilnyak’s public talk about America at this venue, a talk that it characterized as “politically illiterate.”³⁷

Pilnyak apparently never did find a foolproof way to improve the quality of the series of public talks he gave in Moscow in 1931-1932 about his impressions of America, although it does sound as if he did try his best, at least, to paint the United States in as lurid and sensational a manner as possible. His American friend in Moscow, Eugene Lyons, who attended some of Pilnyak’s talks during this period, writes that the speaker recounted “strange and fantastic tales of that distant realm” to an audience of “round-mouthed but withal incredulous” Muscovites:

Men who, returning from a visit to the country of Soviets, tell tales of curious manners and shuddering horrors have nothing on Boris Andreyevich after his sojourn in America. But there are few to believe him . . . Muscovites may be naïve and believing folk, but not naïve enough to believe such inventions . . . On and on went the tales, growing stranger and less credible as he proceeded. He implied that in leaving the American shores he escaped from a mad house. And he did bless his stars that he is back in a safe and sane and reasonable place like the Union of Soviets.³⁸

When Pilnyak’s impressions of America were published in book form two years later, a few of the reviews were equally lukewarm in their praise. David Zaslavsky’s review of *O’kei* in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, for example, suggests, by its very title, “A Bird’s-Eye View” (“S ptich’ego duazo”), that Pilnyak’s travelogue-novel fails to provide Soviet readers with the kind of first-hand observations of the United States from the perspective of an informed eyewitness that David Kal’m had found lacking in Pilnyak’s public talk at the Press House.³⁹ What the reader gets instead, according to Zaslavsky, are superficial observations from someone who is not at all familiar with the economics, industry, and agriculture of this advanced capitalist country. Moreover, Zaslavsky points out, even when Pilnyak does occasionally provide the reader with some observations that prove to be accurate and true, they “are not, of course, at all new.”⁴⁰ Another less than glowing review of *O’kei* was provided by Valentin Serebriakov, whose main complaint, it appears, is a linguistic one. Pilnyak, he writes, “for no good reason, except perhaps bad taste, subscribes to the practice, deliberate and ostentatious in nature, of using English words with Russian endings.” “Pilnyak’s Americans,” Serebriakov explains, “*lonchat* (from ‘lunch’), *dineriat* (which means ‘eat dinner’), *bitchuiutsia* (‘lie on the beach’) and *baluiut* together (from the word ‘ball’).”⁴¹

For the most part, however, as Gary Browning has observed, *O’kei* “enjoyed considerable popularity in the Soviet Union.”⁴² Indeed, Pilnyak’s *O’kei* was received relatively favorably both when it was serialized in *Novyi mir* during the spring of 1932 and then again when it was published in book form in 1933 and 1935. The bitter public campaign against Pilnyak (due to the publication abroad of *Mahogany*) had come to an end by 1931, and the lingering animus toward him and his works on the part of Party writers and advocates for proletarian literature diminished considerably as a result of Stalin’s disbanding of RAPP, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei) in April 1932. Pilnyak, as a result, seems to have returned to his place atop the hierarchy of Soviet prose writers.⁴³ Indeed,

Stalin himself seems personally to have enjoyed reading Pilnyak's travelogue-novel. In his memoirs, Ivan Gronsky writes that one day, when he went to the leader's dacha outside Moscow, he found Stalin, Molotov, and Ezhov there, all three of them reading *O'kei* and "reacting approvingly to what they were reading."⁴⁴ Those scholars who have written about Soviet travelers visiting the United States during the early part of the twentieth century have, with few exceptions, had largely positive things to say about Pilnyak's travelogue-novel. For instance, in a study that examines Soviet-American literary connections during the 1920s and 1930s, Valentina Sushkova, a Soviet Americanist, has argued that Pilnyak, when compared with other Soviet travelers to America in the early twentieth century, such as Sergei Esenin (in 1922) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (in 1925) before him and Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov (in 1936) after him, provides "a more expressive emotional impact" in his comparison of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. than do these fellow Soviet authors.⁴⁵ Indeed, she claims that Pilnyak, as the author of the travel sketches included in *O'kei*, serves not only as an eyewitness to the events he records, but also as a documentarian who often underscores his own personal attitude toward those events.⁴⁶ A similarly favorable assessment of Pilnyak's *O'kei* can be found in Aleksandr Etkind's more recent study, *The Interpretation of Journeys: Russia and America in Travelogues and Intertexts (Tolkovanie puteshestvii. Rossiia i Amerika v travelogakh i intertekstakh)* (2001), where the author claims that out of the many travelogues written by Soviet travelers to the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, Pilnyak wrote the most serious of them all, fashioning a "best seller" that became a rare example within Soviet literature of a large-scale intellectual essay that had been turned into an aesthetic work of belles lettres, one that is "detailed, argumentative, and critical."⁴⁷

Perhaps the most favorable and easily the most detailed scholarly study devoted to Pilnyak's travelogue-novel thus far, however, is Milla Fedorova's ambitious *Yankees in Petrograd, Bolsheviks in New York: America and Americans in Russian Literary Perception* (2013). Unlike other American travelogues in the genre, Fedorova observes, "Pilnyak's narration ignores his actual trajectory and follows, instead, unfolding recurrent motifs and the development of the narrator's thoughts."⁴⁸ And although readers of Pilnyak's travelogue-novel will find traditional descriptions of such iconic American landmarks as Coney Island, the Ford factory in Detroit, the Grand Canyon, and Niagara Falls, they will also be struck by the "absence of a traditional, cohesive narrative."

Striving for a universal scale of social and historical analysis, its author chooses instead an impressionistic, fragmentary form. A modernist writer with a superimposed ideological task, Pilnyak tries to convey the essence of America by scattering personal observations, reports of seemingly random meetings and conversations, statistical data, newspaper articles, and surveys of historical events throughout the text.⁴⁹

As a result of this non-traditional narrative structure, Fedorova points out, Pilnyak's *O'kei* has been "praised for its detailed, critical overview of American life as well as criticized for the haste, superficiality, and anecdotal nature of its approach."⁵⁰ Another departure that Pilnyak makes from the genre of American travelogues written by Soviet writers is the way the author employs poetic means to achieve his rhetorical purpose of showing how the global financial crisis foretells the impending collapse of capitalism in the United States. "It is impossible to

grasp the peculiarity of the travelogue if we leave aside its poetic nature,” Fedorova insists. “As with a poem, the succession of the travelogue’s elements is based on phonetic similarities, subtle semantic shifts, and associations of memory. Repetitions of lengthy passages, so unusual in a novel, become understandable as the mark of a poetic work.”⁵¹ These poetic features in Pilnyak’s text often violate speech norms, however, and take the form of lexical, grammatical, and even compositional neologisms, features that can be not only off-putting, but also confusing, for many readers, leading them to view the text as simply a motley mosaic of disparate fragments. “On closer reading,” Fedorova explains, “we recognize the recurrent patterns and threads that disappear from the surface to be picked up again later. The author eventually returns to and finishes the sentences and stories broached in the beginning of the novel.”⁵² As Fedorova’s insightful analysis of *O’kei* makes clear, Pilnyak has written a travelogue-novel whose linguistic features and narrative structure impose some very heavy demands upon readers as they seek to understand the author’s impressions of America.

Whether or not readers of Pilnyak’s *O’kei* will rise to meet the hermeneutic challenge that Fedorova details in her study, they should be able to identify fairly readily the long list of topics and themes that the author addresses in his travelogue-novel as he dissects the character of Americans: nationalism, patriotism, puritanism, gangsterism, materialism, philistinism, individualism, consumerism, racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and so on. They should also be able to identify most, if not all, of the institutions, organizations, locales, personalities, practices, artifacts, etc. that Pilnyak sees as having figured prominently in reflecting (as well as helping to shape) the values that Americans live by: the Statue of Liberty, the Declaration of Independence, the Great Depression, the Salvation Army, the Ku Klux Klan, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the White House, Wall Street, Park Avenue, the Bowery, the Tombs, Coney Island, Ellis Island, Greenwich Village, Broadway, Hollywood, labor unions, industry, commerce, commercialization, mechanization, motels, Gideons Bibles, bribery, organized crime, Al Capone, Charles Lindberg, flags, rodeos, publicity, advertisements, Negroes (African-Americans), Jim Crow, Indians (Native Americans), unemployment offices, cotton fields, stock markets, political parties, workers’ strikes, skyscrapers, organized religion, political parties, immigration, deportation, prohibition (dry law), advertising, publicity, popular entertainment, newspapers, electricity, urban noise, drugstores, cafeterias, automats, dairy farms, Eskimo Pies, Coca-Cola, Apple Annies, assembly lines, conveyor belts, traffic, automobiles, slaughterhouses, bootlegging, air pollution, film studios, highways, soup kitchens, bread lines, homeless shelters, the foxtrot, dance marathons, and so on. The reader should be forewarned, however, that Pilnyak, in the Soviet role he accepts as an advocate of socialism who must denounce capitalism and prophesize its imminent collapse, sounds highly negative and staunchly anti-American throughout his narrative. Indeed, he quotes repeatedly from contemporary works by left-wing American social scientists – primarily, political theorist Frank Kent (*Political Behavior: The Heretofore Unwritten Laws, Customs and Principles of Politics as Practiced in the United States*, 1928) and economist Stuart Chase (*Prosperity: Fact or Myth?* 1929) – in an effort to support his sharp criticism of American capitalism. As a result, Pilnyak’s travelogue-novel has been characterized by one critic as “a one-sided and biased denunciation of capitalist America.”⁵³

Potential readers of *O’kei* should also be forewarned that the modernist Pilnyak, who was a highly word-conscious verbal artist throughout his literary career, seems to have loved the sound of the English language, a language that he himself did not understand, and that he never seemed

sufficiently motivated to attempt to learn.⁵⁴ In his travelogue-novel, which was written, of course, for native Russian readers not for English-speaking American ones, Pilnyak tends frequently to provide the Russian transliteration of English words rather than their Russian translation. For example, the word “breakfast” is rendered as *brekfest*, rather than *zavtrak*. And the word that serves as the travelogue-novel’s title, “okay,” is rendered as *o’kei*, rather than *khorosho* or *ladno*. The native Russian reader is thus provided with how an English word sounds rather than what it means.⁵⁵ There are also instances in the text where Pilnyak puns playfully with Russian words that are close in sound but distant in meaning: for example, *grob* (“coffin”) and *gorb* (“hump”), *standart* (“norm,” “cliché”) and *shtandart* (“banner,” “flag”), *sobstvennyi* (“private,” “in-house”) and *sobstvennik* (“owner,” “proprietor”). Word play of a sort also occurs when Pilnyak uses Russian wording that is hopelessly awkward (and unfortunate) for those readers who know both Russian and English, such as saying *kovboiskie zhenshchiny* (“cowboy women”) when he refers to the female equestrians who are riding at the rodeo he attended in Arizona. A humorously fractured, macaronic brand of Russian mixed with English is on display when Pilnyak relays bits of the conversations that occur at the religious gathering of Russian “Jumpers” (members of a sect of spiritual Christians) that he and some friends of his attend in Los Angeles.⁵⁶ It is important for readers of *O’kei* to bear in mind that Pilnyak’s “American novel” was not merely a travelogue-novel, but also a highly “modernist” text, one that is similar in a number of respects to E. E. Cummings’s *EIMI: A Journey Through Soviet Russia* (1933), where the style is, in the words of one critic, deliberately “obscure and convoluted,”⁵⁷ and where there are numerous passages that “cannot be easily grasped in the more conventional way.”⁵⁸ Both of these modernist texts are, in short, intentionally designed to be challenging to the reader. As far as their respective modernist texts (considered as travelogue-novels) are concerned, Cummings and Pilnyak seemed to be travelling in strangely intersecting orbits: both of them travelled in the late spring of 1931, neither of them was fluent in the native tongue spoken in the country they were visiting, hence both of them were unable to navigate very far on their own, requiring the assistance of a native speaker who was fluent in both Russian and English (Joe Freeman in Pilnyak’s case, mainly Charles Malamuth in Cummings’s case) to help them learn the ropes, and both of them had few, if any, positive things to say about the country they had visited: Cummings’s account of his trip to the Soviet Union is deliberately structured as a Dantean “tour of Hell,” while Pilnyak, as we saw earlier in Eugene Lyons’s account of the public talks he attended, is said to have regarded his return to Moscow following his five-month stay in the United States as an “escape from a mad house.”⁵⁹ Even more serendipitous is the fact that one of Cummings’s Moscow guides, Charles Malamuth, had only recently returned to the Soviet Union from New York, where he and the recently arrived Pilnyak had met to discuss his translation of *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea* into English. Near the end of Cummings’s stay in Moscow (on May 29, 1931) he was introduced at a social event to Lev Tolstoy’s granddaughter (Sophia Andreyevna Tolstaya), whose companion that evening was Olga Sergeevna Shcherbinovskaia, the actress at the Maly Theatre who was Pilnyak’s second wife. She is identified not by name, however, but instead as “the spouse of Soviet Russia’s foremost prose writer,” a writer whose “intricately cinematographic portrait of socialism” (most likely *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea*), Cummings tells us, was currently being translated into English by one of his guides, Charles Malamuth!⁶⁰

Two additional words of warning should be given to the reader preparing to read *O’kei*. The first warning is that the clever verbal trickery in which Pilnyak frequently engages while narrating the

story of his visit to America can prove to be highly annoying, if not downright aggravating, to some readers. This is certainly the case, for instance, with Boris Paramonov, the renowned Russian essayist, who openly vents his irritation with Pilnyak and his frequent verbal tricks in a podcast devoted to Pilnyak's *O'kei*, part of a five-part series on Radio Liberty (Radio Svoboda) called "Soviet Writers on the USA" ("Sovetskie pisateli o SShA"). In this podcast, which originally aired in September 2015, Paramonov castigates the Soviet writer for, among other things, deforming several words that have long been familiar to the Russian reading public (and coining many unnecessary new ones), refusing to develop "an intelligibly articulated story," failing to describe some phenomenon and instead enumerating numerous instances of it (in the case of "electricity," providing an inventory of applications – stretching from subways to sewing machines – that runs for over a page and a half), filling whole pages with statistics rather than with words (to the point where the prose becomes nearly unreadable), and providing an image of America that is, in Paramonov's opinion, not very profound or lasting. "Pilnyak's so-called American novel," the award-winning essayist concludes, "says more about Pilnyak as a writer – and about his stylistics, and, what is much sadder, about his fate – than it does about America."⁶¹ The second word of warning to the reader concerns Pilnyak's chronic practice of borrowing (often without attribution) from the works of other writers. In *O'kei*, Pilnyak does openly acknowledge the influence of the work of Pavel Svinin, an early nineteenth-century Russian visitor to the United States, but he remains quiet about a number of more recent travel sketches of America, such as those written by Maksim Gorky, Sergei Esenin, and Vladimir Mayakovsky earlier in the twentieth century, sketches that clearly influenced Pilnyak in the way he depicted New York City (with its polluted air and noisy streets), Coney Island (with its philistinism and materialism), and other American landmarks.⁶² It is entirely possible that Pilnyak was likewise indebted to Egon Kisch, an Austrian-Czech writer and journalist who wrote a series of American travel sketches in German, titled *Paradise America* (*Paradies Amerika*, 1928), in which he discussed the presidential election of 1928, the New York City jail known as "the Tombs," digging for gold in California, Sutter's Fort, the Ford auto plant in Detroit, Hollywood as the capital of American cinema, Upton Sinclair, etc., all of them people, places, and events that Pilnyak (who, as the son of Volga German colonists, could read German) would himself write about just a few years later.⁶³

Since this accompanying essay is intended mainly to provide the reader of my translation of *O'kei* with some background information on Pilnyak's travelogue-novel, let us consider briefly why the author chose to scrap the work's original title, *A Country Where Gangsters Have Managed to Prosper*, and replaced it with *O'kei: An American Novel* instead. The new subtitle greatly disturbed Valentin Kiparsky, who took the word *roman* quite literally. "This book was really not a novel at all," he writes, "but rather a semi-fictional account of facts, impressions, and inventions."⁶⁴ It seems quite clear, however, that Pilnyak meant for the subtitle to be taken figuratively, not literally. By calling *O'kei* an "American novel," Pilnyak was likely alerting readers to the fact that this work seeks to extend well beyond the bounds of the genre of a conventional travelogue, whether it does this in the sense that Aleksandr Etkind has in mind when he characterizes *O'kei* as an "intellectual essay" or that Milla Fedorova has in mind when she speaks of the "poetic" nature of *O'kei*.⁶⁵ As for the new title, Pilnyak near the very opening of *O'kei* directs the reader's attention to the etymological origins of this word in the United States:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, presidents in the United States were preferably generals, military men, and not scholars. General Andrew Jackson was a president. In the English language there are two words, “all correct,” that mean: everything is correct, everything is exactly right. They brought President Jackson some bills to sign into law. He signed his approval of them by writing the two letters “o” and “k” (“o.k.”). President Jackson, whose literacy was restricted to the aural and who thus understood speech only by ear, thought that he was writing the initial letters of the words “all” and “correct,” because “all correct” is pronounced *oll korrekt*. These two letters – “o.k.” – are pronounced in English *o’kei*. Thus, it was as a result of the illiteracy of the general-president that this *o’kei* began to be disseminated and legitimated in America.

Pilnyak then proceeds to illustrate how widely used (overused, actually) this word had now become in the United States: “An American loses everything in the stock market and goes broke – *o’kei*. An American totally wrecks his automobile – *o’kei*. An American has his cheekbone broken while playing football – *o’kei*. An American is robbed by bandits – *o’kei*. Presidents now sign *o’kei* on bills passed into laws out of solidarity with the presidential ignorance that preceded them.”⁶⁶ The exclamation *o’kei*, Fedorova explains, “conveys the essence of the American character,” its etymology demonstrating “an officially acknowledged respect for ignorance.”⁶⁷ It seems entirely appropriate, therefore, that this exclamation should become the title of Pilnyak’s “American novel.” And, in light of the author’s love for the sound of English words – as well as his preference for sound over meaning, for transliteration over translation – it seems entirely appropriate that throughout my translation the Russian transliteration *o’kei* should be used, rather than the English translation *okay* (or *O.K.*). My hope is that it will serve to remind English-speaking readers that Pilnyak’s travelogue-novel was written primarily for a Russian-speaking audience of his fellow countrymen in the Soviet Union.

Let me conclude this introductory essay with one final speculation about *O’kei* as a word-conscious modernist text. In Chapter 23 of his travelogue-novel, where Pilnyak is describing his stay in Hollywood, he talks about the clichéd nature of American films (especially films about cowboys and Indians,) and he includes the genre of films about students, which he claims are “as conventional as films about cowboys.” “A student falls in love with a flighty girl,” he explains, “she scorns him, he suffers. A sporting event takes place: he wins the contest, although no one expected this. The girl’s hand is in his hand, everything is *o’kei!*”⁶⁸ Next he says, “Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko spent time in Hollywood, just like Eisenstein and me. He proposed making a movie about the Pugachev rebellion: a motion picture from the history of the insurrection of Volga Russians against the empire, a revolt headed by Emelyan Pugachev.”⁶⁹ At first glance, this would appear to be an instance where Pilnyak is shifting thematically from one topic (how trite and clichéd Hollywood films about students are) to a related topic: namely, how Soviet theater directors and cinematographers – such as Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Sergei Eisenstein – are, by contrast, serious artists, who find Hollywood stifling for its lack of support for true artistry in both theater and cinema. But it is possible that there might be yet another context lurking here just below the surface. Nemirovich-Danchenko, who visited Hollywood in 1926-1927 at the invitation of producer Joseph Schenck, was accompanied during his lengthy stay there by Sergei Bertensson, who had worked for him at the Moscow Art Theater for several years and would now serve as his personal secretary and

interpreter. In his memoirs, Bertensson would later report how disappointed Nemirovich-Danchenko had been to find “all the vulgar, routine, senseless, and tasteless things taking place in the world of cinema” during his stay in Hollywood.⁷⁰ Bertensson uses a Russian idiom – *kliukva* (“a branchy cranberry tree”) – to characterize the Hollywood film scripts where there are “lots of unrealistic details, ridiculous historical mistakes, and other nonsense” when it comes to describing Soviet Russia, a Russian idiom that Pilnyak will himself invoke when characterizing the ridiculous artistic demands that were made upon him during his brief stay in Hollywood.⁷¹ Bertensson especially deplors the lightweight operettas and musicals that were being adapted for the screen in Hollywood. One such work, he points out, is a silly musical, with music by George Gershwin and lyrics by Ira Gershwin, whose plot revolves around the misadventures of two British bootleggers, the Duke of Durham and his sister, Lady Kay, set in prohibition-era America and filled with such comic clichés as mistaken identities and farcical plot twists.⁷² The play, titled *Oh, Kay!*, which had its premiere on Broadway in November 1926, was being made into a silent film by Mervyn LeRoy during the same time period when Nemirovich-Danchenko and Bertensson were staying in Hollywood. The musical version is remembered today (if at all) for its enduring song, “Someone to Watch Over Me.” For our purposes, however, the more important tune from that work is, no doubt, “Oh, Kay, You’re O.K. with Me.” Bertensson emigrated to the U.S. in August 1928, accepting an offer that Joseph Schenck, the president of United Artists, had made to him to serve as his personal secretary, and he remained in Hollywood for the remainder of his life, mainly writing screenplays. Thus he was living and working in Hollywood when Pilnyak and Joe Freeman came there in the spring of 1931, and most likely he is the person who told them about the difficulties that Nemirovich-Danchenko had encountered when trying to make a serious film about the Pugachev rebellion. That attempt in 1927 to make a serious film about a historical event in Russia, just like Pilnyak’s subsequent attempt to do the same in 1931, failed because Hollywood is not interested in art. Instead it’s interested in *Oh, Kay*. But that’s *o’kei*. After all, everything in America, as Pilnyak would sadly observe, is *o’kei*.

NOTES

¹ A few words should be said at the very outset about the title of this accompanying essay. The choice of the verb “discover” here can be understood in a straightforward, non-ironic way: Pilnyak’s stay in the United States in 1931 was the first (and only) time that he visited America. So it was indeed a discovery for him. But the title can also be understood as referring to another trip to the United States undertaken by a well-known Soviet writer, Vladimir Mayakovsky, who visited the country in 1925 and then wrote about his impressions in a work titled *My Discovery of America* (*Moe otkrytie Ameriki*) (1926). Mayakovsky, the so-called poet of the October Revolution, and Pilnyak, the paradigmatic “fellow traveler,” did not appear to get along very well, at least not in public, where they sometimes exchanged nasty insults (Mayakovsky once called Pilnyak a “bourgeois tribune hiding beneath the mask of a Soviet writer”), so this choice of verb would most likely displease the author of *O’kei*. And, finally, there is the well-known Russian idiomatic expression, “to discover America” (*otkryt’ Ameriku*), which is used when someone says something quite obvious or very well known as if it were something brand new or original. This, too, would not have pleased the author of *O’kei*, but, as we have seen, there are some critics who felt that Pilnyak’s impressions of America had little to offer that was entirely new or original.

² Boris Pil'niak, *A Bitter Glory Has Befallen Me . . . Letters 1915-1937 (Mne vypala gor'kaia slava . . . Pis'ma 1915-1937)*, ed. Boris Borisovich Andronikashvili-Pil'niak (Moscow: Agraf, 2002), p. 345.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 346. "I am able to travel abroad only in my capacity as a revolutionary writer," Pilnyak added, promising that he would come back and write what was needed (literally, the "requisite thing" (*nuzhnaia veshch'*). The "requisite thing," as far as Stalin was concerned, would be an American travelogue that foretold the collapse of capitalism in the United States and the victory of Soviet communism worldwide.

⁴ In an interview he conducted with Gleb Glinka in New York City on November 24, 1973, while conducting research for his Harvard dissertation (later to become his acclaimed book on Pilnyak), Gary Browning reports that his interviewee told him: "Pilniak displayed Stalin's one-page letter to his friends. The ceremony was performed in an atmosphere of blasphemy: Pilniak required all present to fall on their knees while he showed the letter encased in an icon frame and lighted by an icon lamp." See *Boris Pilniak: Scythian at a Typewriter* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis 1985), p. 203, fn. 13.

⁵ Lazar Fleishman quotes this part of Gronsky's speech in his excellent study, *Boris Pasternak and the Literary Movement of the 1930s (Boris Pasternak i literaturnoe dvizhenie 1930-kh godov)* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2005): p. 157.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.157.

⁷ Ray Long, *An Editor Looks at Russia: One Unprejudiced View of the Land of the Soviets* (New York: Ray Long & Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931), p. 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁰ See Gary Browning, *Boris Pilniak: Scythian at a Typewriter*, p. 55.

¹¹ Boris Pil'niak, *O'kei. Amerikanskii roman* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1933), p. 110.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹³ "The reasons for the striking verbal similarities between the two books," one critic explains, "were accounted for by the fact that both Thompson and Dreiser relied heavily on the same source, both transcribing material with which the Soviet government had provided them." See Brian D. Harvey, "Whose Artists in Uniform? Boris Pil'njak and American Writers in the Early 1930s," *Russian Literature*, vol. 62, no. 3 (2007): 307.

¹⁴ Another dinner reception was held in Pilnyak's honor a few weeks later (some time in April). This one, sponsored by Alexander Gumberg, an influential Soviet-American businessman, was

held not at the elegant Metropolitan Club, however, but at a New York City speakeasy. The rowdy underground party was attended by the entire staff of the *Nation*, as well as by numerous liberal writers, who, according to James K. Libbey, spent the evening engaged in “a free wheeling debate on the freedom of artists under capitalism and communism.” See *Alexander Gumberg and Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1933* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1977), pp. 159-160.

¹⁵ This is the view held, for instance, by Albert Halper, an American novelist and playwright, who writes that “Freeman was the interpreter, agent, and Party watchdog for the unwary, doomed Soviet writer, staying at the talented Pilnyak’s hotels, accompanying him to Hollywood, guiding and subtly directing his every move.” See *Good-Bye, Union Square: A Writer’s Memoir of the Thirties* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1970), p. 269.

¹⁶ As a measure of Freeman’s widespread reputation as a womanizer, Alan M. Wald titles the section of his book on American leftists that deals with Freeman (and his reputed “Don Juanism”) “The Red Valentino.” See *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth-Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 178-185.

¹⁷ See Brian D. Harvey, “Whose Artists in Uniform? Boris Pil’njak and American Writers in the Early 1930s,” p. 304. As Harvey points out, there are numerous themes – the American Revolution, the Civil War, Shirley Temple, automobile accidents, Fordism, etc. – in Gold’s regular articles in *New Masses* that find an echo in Pilnyak’s travelogue-novel. See pp. 304-305.

¹⁸ Max Eastman, “The Humiliation of Boris Pilnyak,” *Modern Monthly*, vol. 8, no. 1 (February 1934): 43. This article was later reworked slightly and then included, as Chapter XI: “The Humiliation of Boris Pilnyak,” in Eastman’s book, *Artists in Uniform: A Study of Literature and Bureaucracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1934), pp. 104-125.

¹⁹ See Harlow Robinson, *Russians in Hollywood, Hollywood’s Russians: Biography of an Image* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), p. 53.

²⁰ Frank Capra summarizes the original film script (“Soviet”), which he characterizes as “a strong melodrama about an American engineer hired to build a super dam in Russia,” in *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), p. 161. Brian D. Harvey discusses the draft of Pilnyak’s version of that script (retitled “The Russian Story”) in his article, “Soviet-American ‘Cinematic Diplomacy’ in the 1930s: Could the Russians Really Have Infiltrated Hollywood?” *Screen*, vol. 46, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 489-490.

²¹ Pil’niak, *O’kei*, p. 145.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁴ In his unpublished memoirs, Albert Parry reveals that he is the one who drove Pilnyak to that Brooklyn dock to arrange for the shipment of his Ford roadster back to Soviet Russia. He is also the one who would introduce Pilnyak to his friend, Irving De Witt Talmadge, one week later when they were boarding the Bremen for their trans-Atlantic crossing to Europe. See Chapter 16, “Sundry Other Talents,” of *Ask That Your Way Be long: An Autobiography*, p. 375-377.

²⁵ Irving Talmadge found employment as a staff writer for the newspaper *Workers News*, a short-lived Moscow newspaper for English-speaking workers and specialists living in the Soviet Union. He was also kept busy, especially during the spring of 1932, by the challenge of translating Pilnyak’s travelogue-novel into English, a project that was under contract with the Farrar and Rinehart publishing house in the U.S. Although Pilnyak kept reassuring Joe Freeman that a completed manuscript for the translation was either already in the mail or soon to be in the mail, the translation project was, in the end, never realized. Some of their correspondence during this period is provided in Boris Pil’niak, “Letters from the East: Toward B. Pil’niak’s Stay in Japan in 1932” (“Pis’mo s vostoka: K prebyvaniu B. Pil’niaka v Iaponii v 1932 godu”), ed. N. Iu. Griakalova, *Russkaia literatura*, No. 3 (2002): 170-184. Lazar Fleishman has suggested that the poor quality of Talmadge’s translation may have been the reason for the project being aborted. See his magisterial study, *Toward the History of Russian and Soviet Culture: Documents from the Hoover Institution (Materialy po istorii russkoi i sovetskoi kul’tury: Iz Arkhiva Guverovskogo Instituta)*, *Stanford Slavic Studies*, Volume 5 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 92-93. English translations of four of Fleishman’s essays in this volume are available at:

[https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1793&context=faculty_pubs]

²⁶ The fragments from *O’kei* that Talmadge translated into English were published in Boris Pilnyak, “O.K.: From a Book of American Impressions,” translated by I. D. W. Talmadge, *International Literature*, No. 1 (1933): 5-20. Many of the fragments come from the early chapters (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 18, 19, 21), where Pilnyak describes his transatlantic crossing and his initial impressions of New York. Nearly half of the article, however, consists of Pilnyak’s account of his stay in Hollywood (Chapter 23), where he worked for a month as a screen writer and a consultant for MGM Studios.

²⁷ Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), p. 440. Here is how Lyons describes Pilnyak after he first met the writer back in 1929: “A big, blond, unwieldy fellow, with a huge smile and a huge appetite for wine, women, and life. Though he had Volga German blood in his veins, he was Russian in a salty elemental way – one of those who could scarcely breathe, let alone write, except on and about his native soil . . . Pilnyak, talented and naïve, with a zest for living joined to a disdain for life, seemed to me a personification of Russia. It may explain why he was kept hopping by the powers-that-be between extravagant adulation and no less extravagant denunciation, sometimes the two simultaneously” (pp. 246-247).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 440-441.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 443-444. In his memoirs, the critic Viacheslav Polonsky notes that other Soviet writers felt spite and envy toward Pilnyak for bringing his Ford roadster back home with him to

Moscow. See “My Battle on the Literary Front” (“Moia bor’ba na literaturnom fronte”), *Novyi mir*, 5 (2008).

³⁰ Lazar Fleishman reproduces this exchange of letters between Pilnyak and Freeman (letters that are archived in the Hoover Institution at Stanford University) and discusses their significance in his article, “Joseph Freeman and Boris Pilnyak” (“Dzhozef Frimen i Boris Pil’niak”) *From the History of Russian and Soviet Culture: Documents from the Hoover Institution (Materialy po istorii russkoi i sovetskoi kul’tury: Iz Arkhiva Guverovskogo Instituta)*, *Stanford Slavic Studies*, Volume 5, (Stanford: Stanford University, 1992), pp. 158-190.

³¹ *New Masses* (September 1931): 14.

³² See Viacheslav Nechaev’s series of interviews with Gronsky in “Unwritten Memoirs” (“Nenapisannye vospominaniia”), *Minushee. Istoricheskii almanakh*, No. 16 (1994): 107.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁴ Cited by Lazar Fleishman in *Boris Pasternak and the Literary Movement of the 1930s*, p. 156.

³⁵ Kal’ m’s brief report, titled “Impressions of Boris Pilnyak’s Impressions of America (An Evening at the Press House)” (“Vpechatleniia ot vpechatlenii Borisa Pil’niaka ot Ameriki (Na vechere v Dome pečati)”), appeared in the November 22, 1931 issue of *Literaturnaia gazeta*.

³⁶ “Comrade Clark” is most likely Robert Clark, the Party name for Walter Snow (1905-1973), an American reporter who was actively involved with the Communist Party USA and the John Reed Club during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

³⁷ In the January 23, 1931 letter he sent to Lazar Kaganovich, one of Stalin’s closest associates in the Politburo during the early 1930s, Pilnyak complained about this resolution for its unfair treatment of him and his public talk at Press House. See Boris Pil’niak, *A Bitter Glory Has Befallen Me . . . Letters 1915-1937*, pp. 352-353.

³⁸ Eugene Lyons, *Moscow Carousel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1935), pp. 49-50.

³⁹ See David Zaslavsky, “A Bird’s-Eye View: A Review of Boris Pilnyak’s ‘American novel,’ *O’kei*” (“S ptich’ego duazo. Retsenziia na ‘amerikanskii roman’ *O’kei* B. Pil’niaka”), *Literaturnaia gazeta*, No. 3 (1933).

⁴⁰ Zaslavsky is not an entirely impartial reviewer, however, since he had just recently published a book of his own about America (a country that he himself had never visited), titled *Sketches of the History of the United States of North America During the 18th and 19th Centuries (Ocherki istorii Severo-Amerikanskikh Soedinennykh Shtatov XVIII i XIX v.v.)* (Moscow: Ogonek, 1931).

⁴¹ Valentin Serebriakov, “A Review of *O’kei*, Boris Pilnyak’s ‘American novel’” (“Retsenziia na ‘amerikanskii roman’ *O’kei* B. Pil’niaka”), *Literaturnyi sovremennik*, No. 5 (May 1933). Maksim Gorky voices a similar complaint in his essay, “Literary Amusements” (“Literaturnye

zabavy”), accusing Pilnyak of committing “verbal hooliganism” through his unorthodox phrasings and of failing to show any “feeling of respect toward the reader.” See Maksim Gor’kii, *Collected Works in 30 Volumes (Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh)* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1953), vol. 27, p. 268.

⁴² Browning, *Boris Pilniak: Scythian at a Typewriter*, p. 56.

⁴³ As Lazar Fleishman points out, the autumn of 1932 was the highpoint of liberalization in cultural life inside Stalin’s Russia. It was also a point in time, Fleishman notes, when Ivan Gronskey seems to have had Stalin’s ear as his main advisor on literary, artistic, and cultural matters. Needless to say, developments of this sort could only work in Pilnyak’s favor. See Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak and the Literary Movement of the 1930s*, pp. 112, 155.

⁴⁴ See Boris Borisovich Andronikashvili-Pilnyak, “Pil’niak, 1937,” Afterword to the collection, Boris Pil’niak, *Spilled Time (Rasplesnutoe vremia)* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), p. 586. Kornei Chukovsky, the celebrated poet, writer, and literary critic, who clearly possessed more astute literary tastes than did Stalin, Molotov, and Ezhov combined together, lavished praise on Pilnyak’s *O’kei*, which he claimed was on a par with Dostoevsky’s European travelogue, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863). See Vera T. Reck, trans. and ed., “Excerpts from the Diaries of Korney Chukovsky Relating to Boris Pilnyak,” *California Slavic Studies*, Vol. XI (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 196.

⁴⁵ Valentina Sushkova, *Soviet-American Literary Connections (1920s and 1930s) (Sovetsko-amerikanskii literaturnye sviazi (20-30-e gody))*, (Vladivostok: Izd. Dal’nevostochnogo universiteta, 1986), p. 35.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39. According to Vitalii Orlov, Pilnyak was “an acknowledged master of the documentary genre,” a writer whose observations about America in *O’kei* demonstrated “in full force his mastery as a writer of travel sketches.” See “Boris Pilnyak’s Extinguished Star” (“Pogashennaia zvezda Borisa Pil’niaka”), *Spectrum: Classics of Russian Literature (Spektr: Klassiki russkoi literatury)*, No. 17 (017) (December 13, 1999).

⁴⁷ Aleksandr Etkind, *The Interpretation of Journeys: Russia and America in Travelogues and Intertexts (Tolkovanie puteshestvii. Rossiia i Amerika v travelogakh i intertekstakh)* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), pp.159-160.

⁴⁸ Milla Fedorova, *Yankees in Petrograd, Bolsheviks in New York: America and Americans in Russian Literary Perception* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), p. 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵² Ibid., p. 83. At the back of her book, Fedorova attaches a very useful appendix (Appendix I: “Lexical and Grammatical Neologisms in Pilniak’s *OK*”) that illustrates and explains a number of the various neologisms, as well as non-standard word combinations, that the author creates in *O’kei*. See pp. 227-232.

⁵³ Valentin Kiparsky, *English and American Characters in Russian Fiction* (Berlin: Otto Harrassowitz, 1934), p. 113. Indeed, the Russian émigré writer Vasily Aksyonov once quipped that “Pilnyak’s anti-Americanism must have been the envy of many an Agitprop hack. At every crossroads he would beat his breast and proclaim with the utmost vulgarity, ‘I am a Soviet man!’” See *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, translated by Michael Henry Heim and Antonia W. Bouis (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 10. In a similar vein, Mark Hale Teeter notes sarcastically that Pilnyak’s responses to America and Americans “have all the spontaneity and originality of a party leaflet.” See his dissertation, “The Early Soviet de Tocquevilles: Method, Voices and Social Commentary in the First Generation of Soviet Travel *Publitsistika* from America (1925-1936),” (Georgetown University, 1987), p. 244.

⁵⁴ According to Evelyn Bristol, English was Pilnyak’s “favourite among modern languages.” See “Boris Pilnyak,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. XLI, no. 97 (June 1963): 509.

⁵⁵ Vitalii Orlov asserts that Pilnyak, who modeled much of his early prose after the stylistic experiments of such early Russian modernists as Andrei Bely and Aleksei Remizov, composed his prose works according to the principle of a “dramatic symphony,” seeking to produce, for rhetorical effect, words derived from sounds of nature (onomatopoeia). See “Boris Pilnyak’s Extinguished Star” (“Pogashennaia zvezda Borisa Pil’niaka”).

⁵⁶ During this scene, one of the church elders says to the group’s leader: “And so, look here, my dear Ivan Karpovich, light of my life, I had a dream today. I am driving along in my car, then I park my car for a short while near my plantation, in compliance with all the rules. And suddenly I see that my Marfa is walking along with a colored man, they are speaking with each other, and the Negro is holding a torch in his hand, and the Negro is looking rigorously at how I have parked my car.” Pilnyak, as narrator, intervenes at this point to explain that the old man here is speaking a fractured brand of Russian, mixing English words with Russian ones (and/or substituting English words for Russian ones). “To translate this sentence into Russian,” Pilnyak explains, “one needs to make the following corrections: *kar* [car] means an automobile; *parkovat’sia* [to park] means to leave one’s car in a designated place, in compliance with the law; *plantatsiia* [plantation] means a field; *kolernyi* [colored] means a Negro; *spikaiut* [speak] means that they are talking with each other.” See *O’kei*, p. 77.

⁵⁷ See David G. Farley, *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad* (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 2010), p. 74.

⁵⁸ Madison Smartt Bell, “Preface,” in E. E. Cummings, *EIMI: A Journey Through Soviet Russia* (New York: Liveright, 2007), p. x.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. xii; Eugene Lyons, *Moscow Carousel*, p. 50.

⁶⁰ See *EIMI*, p. 238. Two days later, on May 31, 1931, while he is travelling by train from Moscow to Kiev, Cummings makes the acquaintance of a kindly old man – he characterizes him as a “very gentle Jew” – who is going to visit his ailing mother one last time before she dies. “Gentle,” as Cummings nicknames this passenger, had come to Moscow to collect the two thousand rubles he had earned as royalties for a “well-known opus,” a three-act Yiddish play of his, titled *On the Other Side of the River* (1906), that had been staged in the capital. The unnamed author of that play, Peretz Hirshbein (1880-1948), was acquainted with Boris Pilnyak, whom he had met in Japan in 1926, when the two men, along with their wives, spent a weekend together as tourists visiting the “deer city” of Nara and quickly struck up a warm friendship. As readers of *O’kei* learn in Chapter 16 of Pilnyak’s American travelogue-novel, the author would meet up with Peretz Hirshbein yet again in June 1931 (shortly after Cummings had met this “very gentle Jew” on the train from Moscow to Kiev) while strolling the boardwalk in Santa Monica, California. Pilnyak and Joe Freeman would bring Peretz Hirshbein along with them that evening when they attended an event hosted by the young members of a new American generation of spiritual “Jumpers.” Later that evening, back at Pilnyak’s hotel, Joe Freeman and Peretz Hirshbein would engage in a spirited discussion about Jewish culture, debating whether the younger generation of Jews in the United States retain their Jewishness or become full-fledged Americans instead. One wonders whether they might not have discussed as well E. E. Cummings, the interesting young American writer whom Peretz Hirshbein had encountered just a few weeks earlier while traveling by train from Moscow to Kiev?

⁶¹ See “Soviet Writers on the U.S.A.: Pilnyak” (“Sovetskie pisateli o SShA. Pil’niak”) *Radio Liberty (Radio Svoboda)* (September 21, 2015) [svoboda.org/a/27261044.html]. Equally off-putting, to Mark Hale Teeter’s mind, is what he considers the key tonal element of Pilnyak’s travelogue-novel: “a kind of measured, disdainful irony that seems designed to ridicule things American while it fosters between narrator and (Soviet) reader a common bond of self-congratulatory superiority . . . the Soviet reader is, in effect, invited to join Pilnyak in assessing America and Americans from above, with a sort of moral authority, colored by irony, that only members of a new society may enjoy.” See “The Early Soviet de Tocquevilles,” pp. 255-256.

⁶² Gorky’s travel sketches, including “The City of the Yellow Devil” (“Gorod zheltogo d’iavola”) and “The Kingdom of Boredom” (“Tsarstvo skuki”), were published in a 1906 collection of articles titled *In America (V Amerike)*, Esenin’s *Iron Mirgorod (Zheleznyi Mirgorod)* appeared in 1923, while Mayakovsky’s *My Discovery of America (Moe otkrytie Ameriki)* appeared in 1926.

⁶³ At the opening of his newspaper report on Pilnyak’s public talk at the Moscow Press House, “Impressions of Boris Pilnyak’s Impressions of America (An Evening at the Press House),” Kal’m makes reference to Kisch’s *Paradise America (Paradies Ameriki)*. “In his time,” Kal’m writes, “Eton Erwin Kisch ‘had the honor of introducing us to the American paradise.’ Recently, Boris Pilnyak returned from the ‘American paradise’ after spending several months there. Most likely he will introduce the Soviet reader to it, in his own fashion, in his forthcoming book.” Otto Moog, another German-speaking traveler who visited the United States during the late 1920s (one whom Pilnyak mentions, and even quotes, in *O’kei*), pursued what seems to have been a standard itinerary, visiting such popular American sights as Niagara Falls, Times Square,

and the Ford auto plant at Highland Park. See Otto Moog, *Drüben steht Amerika: Gedanken nach einer Ingenieurreise durch die Vereinigten Staten* (Braunschweig, Berlin, and Hamburg: Georg Westermann, 1927).

⁶⁴ See Valentin Kiparsky, *English and American Characters in Russian Fiction*, p. 113. Alayne P. Reilly voices a similar complaint: “The work is not a novel as the title might imply, but a long rambling, publicist travel memoir that is unworthy of Pilnyak’s talents as a writer.” Reilly finds *O’kei* to be “weakly written,” to reflect a “lack of inspiration,” and to repeat “a few propagandist terms.” “Pilnyak’s heart apparently was not in his task,” she concludes sadly. See *America in Contemporary Soviet Literature* (New York: NYU Press, 1971), pp. 24, 27. Mark Hale Teeter is likewise very dismissive of Pilnyak’s travelogue-novel. “This is a lengthy, humorless and repetitive collection of rather banal observations,” he writes. In the end, *O’kei* remains remarkable, Teeter claims, “only because its mediocrity is so unexpected.” See “The Early Soviet de Tocquevilles,” p. 237.

⁶⁵ Etkind puns on a different meaning of *roman*, the Russian word for “novel,” when he quips, “The word *roman* in the subtitle is being used ironically. Pilnyak’s relationship to America does not at all resemble a love affair (*liubovnyi roman*).” See *The Interpretation of Journeys: Russia and America in Travelogues and Intertexts*, p. 159.

⁶⁶ Pil’niak, *O’kei*, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁷ Milla Fedorova, *Yankees in Petrograd, Bolsheviks in New York*, p. 177.

⁶⁸ Pil’niak, *O’kei*, p. 130.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁷⁰ Sergei Bertensson, *In Hollywood with Nemirovich-Danchenko, 1926-1927. The Memoirs of Sergei Bertensson*, translated by Anna Shoulgat, edited by Paul Freyer (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), p. 44.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55. For Pilnyak’s use of the Russian term “kliukva,” see Chapter 23 of *O’kei*.

⁷² Sergei Bertensson, *In Hollywood with Nemirovich-Danchenko, 1926-1927*, p. 148.

O'kei: An American Novel

1

On the 4th of July 1776, on the day of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, on the day of the birth of the United States, in Philadelphia, an American woman named Betsy Ross gave the first American flag as a gift to George Washington, the first American president. This occurred over a hundred and fifty years ago. On the 7th of November 1931, on the anniversary of the October Revolution, in Detroit, an American woman named Betsy Ross, the great-great-granddaughter of the first Betsy Ross, gave a red communist banner to the Detroit chapter of the Communist Party.

2

In January 1931, for the first time in the past twenty years, I took half a pledge to believe in God and not to be a gangster nor an anarchist. The taking of this pledge occurred at the American consulate in Berlin, Germany. I was asked to read some paragraphs that were written in an ungrammatical fashion in Russian, as a literal translation from the English, where the subjunctive mood was made to mean:

- if you do not believe in God
- if you are travelling to the U.S. with the intention of getting involved in gangsterism
- if you are travelling to the U.S. with the intention of murdering government representatives and diplomats from friendly nations
- if you are travelling to the U.S. to violate laws

I asked if I could keep this sheet as a memento. They turned down my request. When I had finished reading this cardboard sheet, the consular lady, who had squinted her eyes to express heartfelt concern, said to me: “If there are any points in this form that apply to you, you should tell us ahead of time . . . Have you read it carefully? If there are points that apply to you . . .”

The consul, who stood there facing me, eye to eye, repeated the question: “Have you read the points?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Are there any points that apply to you?” the consul asked.

When people are at a loss for words, they start talking nonsense. I was about to launch into a historical excursus on American objective reality, discussing how the American population, they say, has actually been shaped by gangsters who believe in God, and pointing out that there actually are, they say, to this day, many gangsters in America. So is it normal that gangsters would candidly – like those who believe in God – acknowledge their intentions, as is apparent from this form? . . .

“But, after all, you’re a Bolshevik!” said the consul.

At that point, having fallen silent, I extended my red passport forward to him. The consul and I looked at the passport attentively and silently, leaving the dilemma of holding a red passport unresolved by words.

“Do you have any dollars?” asked the consul.

“Yes,” I replied.

I was convinced that I would be denied a visa. But they gave me a visa, surmising, most likely, that I do believe in God, just like I do not engage in gangsterism, and obliging me not to engage in gangsterism and to believe in God. It’s impossible to imagine any other reason why they decided to issue me a visa. Having immediately become a religious believer upon receiving my visa, I, for the first time in my life, became conscious of what exactly hypocrisy is, allowing my thoughts to plunge into deep meditation upon religious belief and gangsters.

The consul, handing my passport over to the consular lady for further formalities, said: “*O’kei*” [okay]. If I had known at the time what on earth *o’kei* means, I would, of course, have repeated the word right back to the consul as an echo. So let me provide an explanation of this word right here and now. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, presidents in the United States were preferably generals, military men, and not scholars. General Andrew Jackson was a president. In the English language there are two words, “all correct,” that mean: everything is correct, everything is exactly right. They brought President Jackson some bills to sign into law. He signed his approval of them by writing the two letters “o” and “k” [“o.k.”]. President Jackson, whose literacy was restricted to the aural and thus understood speech only by ear, thought that he was writing the initial letters of the words “all” and “correct,” because “all correct” is pronounced *oll korrekt*. These two letters – “o.k.” – are pronounced in English *o’kei*. Thus, it was as a result of the illiteracy of the general-president that this *o’kei* began to be disseminated and legitimated in America, just like *oll-rai* [all right] in England and *mamandi* in China.

And it is used more than *oll-rai*.

An American loses everything in the stock market and goes broke – “*o’kei*.” An American totally wrecks his automobile – “*o’kei*.” An American has his cheekbone broken while playing football – “*o’kei*.” An American is robbed by bandits – “*o’kei*.” Presidents now sign “*o’kei*” on bills passed into laws out of solidarity with the presidential ignorance that preceded them. So I, too, took to saying “*o’kei*” so that it wouldn’t be anything surprising to anybody.

In olden days, the pioneers, following the lead of Columbus, spent months sailing to America.

Nowadays the steamer Bremen goes from Cherbourg to New York in four and a half days. The description of these oceanic leviathans provided by Ivan Bunin in his story, *The Gentleman from San Francisco*, which seemed classic several years ago, has now become outdated in almost the same way that steamboats have. A steamer like the Bremen can't be compared with the principal town of a district – it's already the principal town of a province. The *parterre* of the Bolshoi Theatre is smaller than a first-class passenger compartment in the Bremen. The Hagia Sophia cathedral in Istanbul was constructed with less luxury than the Bremen was. And so on.

A newspaper is issued every day on the steamer, and a radio broadcast from the American stock exchange on Wall Street – the *tiker* [ticker] – marks the temperature of dollars of capitalist swindlings on a paper tape every second.

Steamers have been constructed for passengers.

The Soviet passenger is an especial person, so we will speak about him especially.

The average first-class passenger on the steamer Bremen could count on being offered various bananas, meats, jams, pastries, cheeses, and pâtés made from dairy, crab, fish, vegetables and even mineral ingredients, to eat five times a day. He could also count on being offered a wide assortment of cognacs, wines, liqueurs, and whiskeys of all possible combinations, called cocktails, to drink. In the gymnasium, he could count on hanging out for a half hour to forty minutes on an electric baba in order to shake off some fat, and racing along on a bicycle suspended from the ceiling to work up his appetite. He could count on running along the decks, relaxing on chaise lounges, and taking photos of various people coming and going. Twice a day he could count on taking a bath and changing his clothes. After lunch at two o'clock, he could watch movies. After tea at five thirty, he could play the horse race game, where wooden horses move forward according to the numbers on the roll of the dice thrown by the lady in hospitality services whose turn it was to roll them. Everyone totally understands, of course, that these wooden horses are, by virtue of their woodenness, insensate. And this wooden quality of theirs – whether it be their wooden horsiness or else their wooden insensateness – is conveyed to those who operate the tote board for the para-mutual betting, both donating dollars and winning dollars.

After dinner, beginning around nine o'clock in the evening and ending at midnight, the average first-class passenger on the steamer could count on indulging himself [literally, "having a ball"] by dancing the foxtrot and imbibing an amount of alcohol that makes one's heart grow as soft as one's legs. The impediments of traditions and genders are cast away, and the naughtiness and mischief that ensue conclude in the semi-extinguished light of narrow passageways between the staterooms, when in the gentlemen's corridor a woman's

dressing gown will suddenly whisk away and a whisper will squeak behind a partition, while in the lady's corridor the bed slippers of a gentleman, who out of caution has moved his legs apart, so that they look like those of a horse that has been given too much to drink, will suddenly begin to creak traitorously.

All of these things were offered up to the average first-class passenger amidst the majesty and grandeur of the ocean and to the accompaniment of the white ribbon of Morse code over the radio that reports every minute on the heat of the dollar, the nobility of frauds, and also the cablegrams for those who are traveling cordially.

Mornings on the steamer are slow and stiff, like the oceanic fog that the steamer tears through. Trumpeters roar with their trumpets throughout the corridors of the passenger compartments. But the passengers do not go to *brekfest* [breakfast], requesting instead that *orandzh-dzhius* [orange juice] be brought to them in their cabin, or *greip-frut* [grapefruit], a fruit that originated just a few years ago, thought up by the American botanist of genius, Burbank, as a hybrid between a lemon and an orange. Burbank, by the way, who created this fruit, one that is now eaten by three quarters of the earth's population, had the imprudence to say once that he did not believe in God. And he died, a man badgered by American clerics, as was written about in the newspapers.

There are various sorts of balls that are held on board (in the official section of the ship). There is, without fail, a Bavarian evening, when all the passengers are supplied with frankfurters and mugs of beer and when everyone is wearing a paper hat on their head. Empty spaces are filled with balloons and paper streamers. Sticking out of each passenger's mouth, besides a cigar, is a whistle, and the party-goers give caterwauling concerts, howling and wailing like felines to the popular tune, "Oh, Meine Liebchen, Lizabett, Lizabett!" [Oh, My Darling, Lisabeth, Lisabeth]. By that time, the members of the orchestra have changed their clothes to look like Bavarians. In a drunken state characteristic of Heidelberg students, the passengers have exchanged their clownish paper hats for clownish student caps – the types of peaked caps worn by "Burschen" and "Korporants," fraternity brothers who are members of youth associations at German universities.

And there is always, without fail, a so-called American evening. This takes place on the night before the passengers disembark in America, when Americans recall that in their homeland there is *prokhibishen* [prohibition], that is, a dry law, and thus they fall upon the legal alcohol with all the gusto characteristic of Americans. The scale of their consumption of alcohol is truly grandiose. They drink grandiosely not only in their cabins, but also on all the stairways and decks, sometimes – for poetic effect – even crawling under the lifeboats. They drink without regard to gender or age. Things that usually occur inside the privacy of a passenger compartment now crawl out not only onto the decks but also into the lounges. In the narrow passageways between the staterooms, time comes to a standstill, stretching out to eternity by means of pouring whiskey straight out of the bottle right into one's mouth. The gusto and the grandiose scale of this American drinking – taking place on all the ship's decks – can be compared to Russian boozing only loosely. It's like

comparing a thoroughbred to a dray horse. The Russians can't compete with the Americans!

To the Soviet citizen and passenger – I must say this straight out – all of this behavior, independent of its broad scale, seems like so much swinishness. The Soviet citizen, having left behind the arduous, steely grandeur of his home country (and, truly, beyond the borders of the U.S.S.R., and now beyond the Polish “cordon sanitaire,” the star of the U.S.S.R. is beginning to shine in an unusual and majestic way, it's now a time when one is proud to be a citizen of the U.S.S.R., when it's majestic to be a citizen of the U.S.S.R.!), the Soviet person understands, of course, that the ticker tape, which is the actual master of the ship and of the people on board the ship, is only understandable, unfortunately, for the few. He also understands that there is no American who could possibly consume all the things that are offered to him, but that in the passenger compartments located below deck there are those who aren't offered anything – that many Americans, feeling gouty and sad, go to bed well before the foxtrot begins. He also understand that the first class accommodations (even first class deluxe and ritz, where billionaires obstinately insist upon paying an excess fare so that they don't have to dine with the rest of the passengers), the ticker tape, the vodka, the wooden horse races, the gymnastics and tennis on the upper deck, and the *monkei bizness* [monkey business] (*obez'ian'e delo*) – the whisking away of women's dressing gowns in the gentlemen's hallways and the shuffling of shoes of those who have been given too much to drink in the lady's hallways – all of these things are American ideals.

The Soviet citizen stands off to the side, a bit dumbfounded. He would like to be able to allow the crowdedness experienced by third-class passengers, who along with their basic necessities are crammed into the crowded compartments down below, like sardines in a tin can, a condition that the Soviet citizen well understands, to invade the spaciousness of the upper deck and its vistas.

The Soviet citizen, the author of these lines of *O'kei*, of this American novel, was traveling on the steamer in his capacity as a writer. He knew that he needed to travel to America, but he also knew that, for his country, American harvesting combines and hydraulic stamping presses that weigh thousands of tons were needed much more than his trip to America. Therefore, he did not bring any Soviet gold with him, and he departed from the Soviet border without a single cent.

In Warsaw, he received some *zlotys*, which lasted him until Berlin. In Berlin, he received some *marks*, which lasted him until Paris. On the Bremen, this aforementioned writer, standing at the forecastle and looking out at the great oceanic expanses on the horizons and the luminous, phosphorescent mollusks clinging beneath the nose of the ship, pondered:

“from Warsaw to Berlin, from Berlin to Paris, from Paris to New York, – well, things will somehow work themselves out for me over there, inasmuch as, so they say, a single man's life is not as full of problems and troubles as that of a man with a wife and child in tow. So when misfortune strikes, it's better to be traveling alone.”

But this writer was a writer, and a list of the passengers had been printed in the steamship's newspaper. And so on the day that this issue of the newspaper came out, first a lean, aloof lady and then a drowsy-looking mister who deals in furs in the U.S.S.R., inquired: so-and-so is not, by any chance, so-and-so, is he? The young lady became interested in my skill in dancing the foxtrot. The mister dragged me over to the manicurist, asking my opinion of the whiskeys *blek-end-uait* [Black and White] and *skotch* [Scotch].

And on that same day a number of radiograms arrived from across the ocean. "Welcome," one of them said. "We are meeting you. Everything is *o'kei*." But one telegram read: "A room has been booked for you at the hotel *Sent-Moritts* [Saint Moritz]."

I asked the drowsy-looking mister who deals in furs what kind of hotel the Saint Moritz is. The mister read the elegant piece of paper – like a candy wrapper – that the cablegram was printed on, and he perked up. He said that this is one of the most expensive hotels in New York, that it's fifty stories high, and that it's located between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, right across from *Sentral-park* [Central Park].

The only cablegram that I sent from the ship was to my editor: "Don't," I said, "make a reservation for me at the Saint Moritz!"

That evening I was handed a new cablegram: "It's imperative that you stay at the Saint Moritz." Stop. "The room is free."

I marveled at the publisher's kindness, though I accepted this room the way one accepts a set of false teeth.

4

The ocean was majestic. Beyond the poop deck was Europe. The forecastle of the ship was moving toward America. This is the vision that a Russian has:

"... it is spring, there is a *zavalinka*, a grandfather in felt boots is sitting on this small mound of earth along the outer walls of a peasant's house and luxuriating in all this earthly beatitude, chickens are swarming in the dust, it is warm, young female tractor operators have driven their tractors from the tillage to the garage, swifts in their flight are scratching the sunset – the grandfather has never felt such bliss – and the grandfather says: 'Grace, oh, what grace it is! ...' And he falls silent lyrically. Then he adds: 'My teeth, for some reason, have not ached for a long time, but Sidor Merinov's teeth have been aching badly for over a week now ...'"

That's it exactly ... it can't be otherwise! A Russian can't feel bliss when Sidor Merinov has had a toothache for over a week. And every Russian, without fail, has his own tooth. Amidst the majesty and grandeur of the Atlantic Ocean, traveling along passageways from the Old World to the New World, passageways that were discovered when the history of humankind was feeling about for the thresholds of capitalism and was trying to crawl in

through the gateways of those newly opened gates, already overgrown with elderberry, of the Middle Ages, this Russian writer mused:

“Across the ages, across enormous spans of time, in Atlantis, perhaps, in lands that no longer exist, the first human being emerged. Somewhere upon the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean, upon the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, there emerged the first tidings about man that are known to humankind. Out of nothingness, out of the darkness of times, out of a state of obscurities and unknowns, there emerged on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea the streamlet of the history of humankind that later determined the fates of the earth’s civilizations. This streamlet – by way of Mesopotamia, Palestine, Egypt, and Assyria – carried forth tidings about humankind to the Greeks and Romans, engendering the history of Europe. From the Greeks and Romans, history was halfway recorded. How many peoples, how many civilizations, how many of humankind’s religious and philosophical systems, how many of its state structures emerged, lived, blossomed, and perished! From the Romans, the rickety old rattletrap of history is well known. We know how this history flowed – it truly flowed – how it occurred, how it took place – how it spilled over with the blood of Germans, Huns, and Gauls – how it ossified by means of the Middle Ages, – how steam and the loom overhauled and rebuilt it – how revolutions, with their thunderstorms, followed upon it. But old age is not antiquity. And if Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon perished from the Greco-Hunnish-Aryan peoples, then it was only in the last century that the Hunnish-European peoples reached their brethren, who are still living to this very day in India, China, and Japan. These peoples trace their history back to the time of Artaxerxes. Moreover, Japan intertwined its history with Europe by means of the imperialistic mutuality of plunder and robbery. All this was taking place. And the first history that has its own date of origin – the history of America – is a history not of the native Indians, of course, but of the European colonizers. The history of America is a young history. The mother of American history is old lady Europe. What did the children take from their mother? Did the children vanquish their mother? Is young America more western than the West? Is it truly a much larger West than Western Europe? The great ocean is an enormous seam of the earth where on one side the antiquity of the East ends off at the ocean and on the other side – the youth of the West. It is not for nothing that there is a boundary in the Pacific Ocean where ships either stop time for a twenty-four-hour period or else they discard a twenty-four-hour period from their measurement of time. But the earth is round. And, therefore, at that hour when in the East the antiquity of the night is lording it over the romantics (remember – “the hoary East slumbers!”), in the West the day at that moment is waning, and, consequently, it is morning somewhere. It is morning in the Union of Socialist Republics, whose history has a date of origin: October 25, 1917 (old style), and whose history is not simply taking place, but rather is being *constructed*, is being *made*, is being *engineered*.”

This writer has been to Japan, China, and Mongolia to see the antiquity of the East. This writer set off for America in order to see the most western West. This writer wanted to determine how to sew the seam that is formed by the Pacific, for this writer knew that the seams of national cultures burst one after another, just like the hoops on rotted barrels.

And this writer thought all of this incorrectly, because to think this way is romanticism, which is characteristic of writers, but which is not obligatory for them. Everything is much simpler. Human history is growing. From the sheepskins inflated with air that people in antiquity employed to get across rivers, humankind has grown to the point of employing sixty-thousand-ton ships that furrow the oceans. In keeping with the principle of sheepskins inflated with air, humankind built zeppelins, while on cloudy days New York skyscrapers, where people are living, extend with their peaks beyond the clouds, which resemble sheepskins. From the Stone Age and primordial communism, man has proceeded to travel the roads of the Middle Ages, feudalism, absolute monarchs, bourgeois revolutions, and capitalist democracies. Each of these resulting epochs believed that it would bring the achievements of humankind to their completion, that it was eternal, – and each one of these epochs died. On the highways of the history of humankind, this was always the first order. That is precisely why, even until now, the Bronze Age of Central Africa and of the Samoyedic peoples as well as the feudalism of Northern India have fallen behind the times in humanity's lanes and alleys. And in some places in Europe, even up until now, the monarchy smells bad, stinking of dog odor. Humankind is now living through an epoch when socialism is supplanting capitalism. Whoever wanted or did not want this to happen – and however they wanted or did not want this to happen – the fact remains that socialism is not resulting from anything, but is instead being constructed. The bacteria of typhus, plague, and cholera are not encountered in an isolated form in nature. One can only find them in bacteriological institutes. They are completely clean there, placed into an infusion broth, poured into flasks, and are called “cultures” – typhus, plague, cholera. Capitalism in Europe is, in essence, very difficult to see in its totally pure form. Some times your vision becomes obscured by the excavations of the ancients. At other times, the “politesse” of the last Bourbon kings played mischief with your ideas. Some times you sank into the antiquated easy chair of your English grandfather, the coeval peer of English conservatism, parliament, Westminster Abbey, and witches, who at one time were burnt at the stake near Westminster and who are burnt there even now by the speeches of conservatives in parliament. At other times, you see in the royal Château de Chambord the shadow of Molière, whose plays are performed even now and who even now sounds European. America began its history of independence based on the principles of the French *encyclopédistes*. It began right away with bourgeois democracy. In the person of its pioneers, America had people, mainly sectarians, adventurers, and criminals, who did not fit in, who were outside the European sclerosis of the Middle Ages. And is not America today – the United States – a culture of capitalism in its pure form, like a Petri dish, in which pestilent cells are being cultured at a bacteriological institute? What a laboratory flask for the hundred and twenty million free-capitalistic American citizens!?”

Of course, America lies on the high road of the development of humankind.

This high road paves new routes – to socialism.

These routes to socialism are being constructed in the Union of Socialist Republics.

Nowadays the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. are playing the chess match of today's humankind.

But the ocean, of course, is majestic, a cosmos of water and sky!

On the steamer, a certain American millionaire, Mister Kotofson, who made his millions on intestines, wanted to make my acquaintance, and he did make my acquaintance. This was a real American: he set the American tone on our decks. He was returning from Europe with his daughter, one of whose eyes was bandaged. She was lying down all the time, on the decks and in the cabins, with American magazines in her hands. He was energetic, this American. He squeezed my hand firmly, extending his hand out to me in a broad American gesture, with the palm facing up. We exchanged *khellos* [hellos]. The drowsy-looking mister who deals in furs, who was very respectful toward the intestines millionaire, tried to translate the first few phrases for us. At about the tenth phrase, the American said:

“Well, all right, we'll go ahead and speak Russian. I've come to you for advice. I have, you see, two daughters. By the way, you wouldn't mind a glass of scotch and soda, now would you? And so, I have two daughters. It's for their sake that I'm living on this earth. One of them has stayed behind in England. All the same, it's the most respectable country in the world. The other one is returning home with me; I'll introduce you to her. She's a Doctor of Philosophy. A sty appeared on her eyelid as a result of reading so much, and so I took her to Germany so that they could remove her sty. All the same, German medicine is the most respectable medicine in the world. They charged me five hundred dollars for the doctor's visit. My daughter writes such abstracts that professors gasp from surprise and exclaim, 'Ah!' Providing one's children with an education – now that costs a pretty penny. And so I want to speak with you about my second daughter. In America, our art is hobbling around lamely. My daughter developed a burning desire to become a writer. They say that English literature is currently stagnating. I'm no expert in that area, but all the same English literature is the most respectable literature in the world. I was given a list of the very best English writers alive today. I focused my attention mainly on the female ones. This, you see, seemed to me to be the more convenient and respectable way to proceed. I visited some of these female writers in London, and proposed that they give my daughter lessons so that she could become a writer, too. She's a very talented girl. And so, what would you say in this regard? In America, we have so little true art!”

“But how did you come to know Russian?” I asked.

“Ha! – if only you knew my life story! I was a complete orphan: I had no father or mother. My uncle in Oryol owned his own slaughterhouse. While still a boy of about age ten, I was already independent, and so I went with my uncle to Siberia to visit some Kirgiz people in Semirechye, to buy up

intestines. You know that Russian intestines, those of pigs and sheep, especially intestines from Zavolozhye, from western Siberia, and from Semirechye, do not compare with any others in the world. Incomparable intestines! Scientists believe that this is due to the continental climate and to the poor quality of the food that you give to your sheep – such incomparable intestines. The Soviet government does not know what gold it has in them. I gave your government, through Amtorg, quite a few million dollars in an offer that would give me exclusive rights – a monopoly – on Russian intestines. After all, you already have a monopoly on trade, and for this business deal I myself would be reviving the good old days of the past! And so, at age sixteen, I wound up on a maritime steamship in Odessa, and at age sixteen and a half, I set foot on land in the New World. Since that time I have been living in America. You don't know my life story! – No one in America knows the intestines business better than I do! – By the way, will you allow me to pour us both another scotch and soda? – And so, what would you say in regard to the English female writers and my younger daughter? In Russia, I had a surname: Kotov. Now I'm – Kotofson. So, *uell* [well]?"

The drowsy-looking mister who deals in furs, when we were left alone, respectfully told me that Mister Kotofson remains to this day illiterate: he cannot read either Russian or English. He can only sign his name on a check. His secretary, however, reads all his business matters to him. In the evening, during the period of mischief-making and naughtiness, when people were "having a ball," the majority of the society types on our decks were sitting at Kotofson's table, and Kotofson was plying them all with cocktails to drink.

"The philosophy of history!"

5

The first thing that struck me in America were the national flags.

As we were steaming up to dock in New York, I didn't manage to see the Statue of Liberty, which any travel account of America invariably begins with. The hubbub on board the steamer and the skyscrapers of *Uoll-strit* [Wall Street] knocked me off balance and didn't allow me to see things clearly. Neither did I see the Statue of Liberty at any subsequent time. So as not to confuse future travelers to America about her, I must report that it's possible to fit an entire apartment inside the head of this Liberty and that for a long time an entire casemate of prison dungeons was placed inside the rear part of her skirt beneath the upper pleats. This is a fact no less edifying than the history of the word *o'kei*.

I have preserved the letters that I wrote home during my first few days in America. The refrain in these letters were the interjections: "oh, America!" "ah, America!" "ooh, America!" "well, America!"

Let the reader be aware that ninety-nine percent of Soviet citizens, despite their visas, do not alight immediately on American soil upon reaching the shore, but are instead arrested

and sent to *Ellis-ailend* [Ellis Island], which is called, colloquially, the Island of Tears. They are put into a prison there near the customs office, where some Americans adjudicate whether they, these detained people, have the right to be designated Soviet citizens. I didn't have any grounds for falling outside of that percentage, but prison operations all over the world are never pleasant, and when the steamer was entering the port, the aforementioned charms of the Statue of Liberty were of less interest to me than my own personal liberty. I was not arrested, but two of my fellow Russian countrymen, both of whom were engineers (one of them was travelling with his wife and child) were sent to experience the thresholds to American liberty at the Island of Tears. This left me thinking about natural human solidarity.

In America, there is *prokhibishen* [prohibition], the dry law. In its honor, the entire population aboard the steamer drank away the whole night prior to our disembarkation in America. And in the morning, they walked woozily through the buffet lines, searching for something to ease their hangover. The buffets sparkled with the seals of bottles instead of the bottles themselves.

The reporters who were assigned to cover the steamer arrived at the ship together with the police. I was traveling "with *publisiti* [publicity]," so when the steamer had moored at the dock, the reporters grabbed me firmly by the arm and led me to the nursery in the first-class section of the ship. On the walls of this room there were drawings of laughing and crying children done in the style of Russian handmade toys. There were small-sized tables and chairs for children there. Children's toys were scattered about the room. On the children's tables, there were bottles of whiskey and pints of beer. The reporters, who were husky fellows, dispersed to the children's chairs, lifting their feet up to where they shouldn't have been placed. These were burly guys: they were poorly dressed, wearing shoes that were down at the heels, yet for all that each of their shoes weighed a lot. These were active and energetic fellows. These guys started quickly drinking whiskey and beer, asking me questions and feeling me out. In the two o'clock editions of their newspapers, it was reported that so-and-so had arrived on such-and-such steamer. He was wearing such-and-such a tie and such-and-such shoes, and he was staying at such-and-such hotel. And nothing more than that. Really, couldn't they at least provide a description of his hair and his hairstyle? My hair, as it turns out, is sandy-colored.

The port, the Hudson River, and the *Ist-river* [East River] are all crushed by the skyscrapers of Manhattan and Brooklyn. These skyscrapers are grandiose: they cannot be compared with anything, not with any dream vision – not even with some Tatlinesque fantasy.

The city's streets, on which there are fewer pedestrians than automobiles, frightened me with their American flags, just as if I had arrived on a holiday, although it was only an ordinary weekday. Air entered straight away into my lungs, air that conveyed the unbelievabilities of this city, where hundred-story buildings protrude up into the sky and there is not a single leaf, not a single blade of grass, on the city's concrete.

The Hotel Saint Moritz repeated the luxury of the Bremen. My suitcases arrived ahead of me. In my room, besides the suitcases, there were boxes filled with bottles of whiskey and

gin. I already knew the price of American alcohol, which had increased due to the tariff imposed by the dry law. There was not enough money in my wallet for me to pay for these boxes. Footmen were serving tea to about forty people. People I did not know were uncorking bottles of whiskey and gin. I was supposed to give an interview.

Journalists, both male and female alike, started arriving, already sluggish and haughty. They shook hands with me and gave me not their own names, but the names of the newspapers they represented. Some people, it was not clear to me exactly who they were, were distributing to the journalists a *steitment* [statement] about me – what a Khlestokovskian scrap of paper this was! – that told people how old I was and who my parents were, what kind of an old so-and-so I was, and who had said what about me. I was not me, a person, but merely some material for *publisiti*. Those who were gathered there started drinking whiskey seriously and interrogating me. I spoke about the rickety rattletrap of history. They asked me questions:

“How do you like America?”

“How much does it cost to get married and divorced at the civil registry office?”

“How much of a salary does Comrade Stalin receive?”

“How do you like American women and New York?”

When they asked how much of a salary Comrade Stalin receives, I replied that I would have to think that he earns the Party maximum: around one hundred and fifty dollars a month. The crowd was all aflutter, astonished at such a meager paycheck. Is it even worth Stalin’s while, they asked, to work for such small change!?

They asked me: “In that case, how much of a salary does someone earn? And are there people who earn more money than Comrade Stalin does?”

Having astonished these journalists by telling them that we no longer have any millionaires in the Soviet Union, since they have all been expelled from our country (there are still some people in America, even among journalists, who know little about this), I said that skilled workers, engineers, and people in liberal professions and freelancers, such as writers and performing artists, can earn more than one hundred and fifty dollars a month.

They asked me: “Well, and what about you? How much do you earn?”

I replied that I earn about three times more a month than one hundred and fifty dollars. The next morning it was printed in *The New York Times*:

“Pilnyak Predicts Fall of Capitalism!”

“Pilnyak is Wealthiest Man in U.S.S.R.!”

That’s the way it was reported in *The New York Times*. Other newspapers made me into a Rockefeller. Many months later, when I was already back in Moscow, one of my buddies, an American journalist, told me about how he had received an inquiry from his agent in

New York, soon after my interview there, asking why and how it is that Pilnyak is not a Pilnyak, but a Rockefeller?!

Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. I have referred to the Hotel Saint Moritz four times already (the American flag waved over this Moritz). I am continuing an American tradition: I pay not with money but with gratitude. The room free of charge in this hotel and the alcohol free of charge were provided for me not by the publishing house, but by the hotel itself. The *publisiti-men* [publicity man] at this hotel calculated correctly: if they were to write about me in the newspaper and indicate what hotel I was staying at, then a room provided free of charge would be less expensive than a paid-for advertisement. Moreover, an advertisement of this kind would be less likely to look like an advertisement. Was it not, perhaps, from such psychological maneuvers that the stock market can trace its history? The stock market is, of course, a psychological institution, one that trades, besides valuables, the psychological emptiness of various warm, sympathetic words that are valued in terms of dollars!?! Dear Saint Moritz – *tenk iu* [thank you]!

A tailor offered to make me a suit free of charge so that I could be photographed in it and then, he says, I could write that there is no finer suit than the one made by the so-and-so company!

On my second or third evening in New York, I don't remember exactly which, I was taken to the theater. There were six of us in all. We sat in a private box and watched how Negroes visualize what heaven looks like, how the host of heaven – the Lord God of Sabaoth – struts around, just like a Yankee, in checkered trousers and a frock-coat, with a beard that looks like some sort of dog collar. And in our private box we drank whiskey out of paper cups. After the theater performance, we were taken to some *klob* [club], some cabaret. Americans do things on a large scale, based on quantity. If in Paris five naked women were to be displayed in a cabaret like this one, then in New York there would be a hundred of them. The *klob* we were in was a famous one. I will omit its name here so as not to give it any bad *publisiti*. The hundred naked women displayed in it were refined and sophisticated. People danced the foxtrot and drank champagne, cocktails, and liqueurs. Jazz was played and various singers performed. Everything was terribly luxurious, just as it had been at Mister Kotofson's. Some people would come up to me, introduce themselves, and then leave. And suddenly I came to the realization that they were asking me to come forward and say at least one word in Russian – “Hello” or “Thank you.” It turned out that the program at the club that evening was being broadcast over the radio. It turned out that they had brought me and my entourage to the theater and then to this club, they had plied us with food and drink so that I would speak in public as part of the program of this club that was being broadcast over the radio! They evidently thought that it would be nice to have a Soviet writer, who had just gotten off the ship and landed at a naked-navel ball, rejoicing over the radio! I left this club without any attempt at politeness, right in the middle of eating some dishes. And when I got home, I drank iced water for a long time, in an effort to drive away the vexation – vexation to the point where my hands were shaking – the spite, and the insomnia that I felt. *Publisiti*, advertising – to hell with them!

Publisiti! advertising! – Honest to goodness, it often seemed to me that people in America exist not in order to be people, but for the sake of *publisiti* and advertising. That’s the way it seemed to me. But I know full well that all Americans are essentially the victims of advertising, for advertising over there is more important than people, more valuable than people, more important than things, and more valuable than things.

You’re being catapulted up to the sixtieth floor of a skyscraper by a pneumatic lift – this is what advertising, and the reading of advertisements, is like, only without the rapid ascent. You’re riding in the back seat of a taxi, on the other side of the glass, near the meter, there’s a filmstrip with the most alluring information crawling right in front of your nose – this is advertising. You’re climbing up to the elevated train (up to the second floors of New York streets), you’re descending down to the underground of *sobvei* [subways]. In both instances, you’re being followed by Coca-Cola, Chevrolet, and the young ladies of Lucky Strike and Chesterfield – this is advertising. You’re driving out of town, and you don’t see anything to your right and to your left due to the fences displaying exceptional young people of both genders glorifying cigarettes, automobiles, soap, enemas, frying pans, and nature itself, like the *Grend-ken’on* [Grand Canyon], – this is advertising, just as is the *Grend-ken’on* itself. You avert your eyes and gaze into the sky, but there are advertisements up there as well, emblazoned by airplanes and searchlights. You crawl into the bathtub, and on the mat beneath your feet you read advertising beauties. You snuggle down in bed, you turn off the light in the room, and on the wall near the plug – so that you can find it easily in the dark – the words of an advertisement are phosphorescing. You bury your head in your pillow, but into your ears – through the howling sound of the factories and the grinding sound of the city – there crawl the words of an advertisement on the radio.

These advertisements, they bawl and purr, they croon arias, they shock and frighten your eyes as well as soothe them, they knock you off your feet, they keep watch over you at intersections, at gateways, in lavatories, in alcoves. These advertisements crawl into your nose, into your eyes, into your ears, into your food, into your blood, into your heart, and – into your pocket, your pocket, your pocket! For they all exist in order to bawl:

“Buy more (and damage) automobiles, cigarette lighters, *refrizheratory* [refrigerators], if you’ve damaged your fine automobile, we’ll repair it within twenty-four hours, and it’ll be even finer, because we’ll attach to it two new headlights, a spare engine hood made out of nickel, a radio, a cigarette lighter, a clock, an ashtray, and a first aid kit!”

“A radio in your automobile will delight your ear while you’re driving through the fields of Texas and the deserts of Arizona!”

“Buy more trousers, boots, dishes, furniture, neckties, cigarettes, cough drops, and acne cream!”

“Eat more meat, ham, and lobster!”

“Eat more bread and butter!”

“Drink more Coca-Cola, coffee, and tea!”

“More! more! more!”

“It’s the very best! No one but you will have it! And it’s the most inexpensive! You have no right not to eat, not to drink, not to own an automobile!”

(We will have occasion to speak about this “more! more! more!” later on, when we discuss the financial crisis. This “more” shouts out at a time when there are slightly more than ten million unemployed people in the country).

Everything is patented. Everything is overlaid with a secret obscurity.

On a walnut there is the trademark of the company that sells it. The machines that brand the walnuts with this trademark – the purchase of this equipment, as well as their service and maintenance – cost more than the walnuts do. The shopper pays more for the trademark than for the walnut itself. Everything is patented. The Patent and Trademark Office conceals the secrets of patents.

As is well known, in drugstores in America, one can eat dinner, buy ice cream, tomato juice, sporting goods, books, and cigarettes, everything but medicine (and each drugstore is, in addition, a tavern). Pharmacists and apothecaries don’t at all need to weigh ounces and grams on their scales. Everything is patented, and it’s impossible to buy an herbal powder made from natural cinchona bark. Instead one must buy patented cinchona bark, not bitter, but sweet, that has been inserted into a small tube. All of this packaging, by the way – the glass tube, the added sweetness and the added beauty of the final product – costs ten times more than the cinchona bark itself.

But this – the cinchona bark – is still not the trouble. This merely points to the fact that it’s not the quality of merchandise, but the ability to sell it, that determines the fate of an enterprise.

Half the trouble is not that a customer goes to shop for a commodity, but that a sales person assaults the customer, trying to ensnare him any way he pleases, from offering him credit and free shipping to his home to threatening legal proceedings. Half the trouble is that a customer has to run away from a sales person and has to live in a state of constant envy, because of this “please, please!” “more, more!” “it’s so inexpensive and it’s embarrassing for any American not to have one!” There are ten million people who are out of work, and the customer no longer has any dollars left to cover the cost of even the most basic necessities, because they have foisted upon him a radio for his automobile, when he doesn’t

even own an automobile, and a cigar lighter, when he doesn't even smoke. And he has bought some women's toiletries, with their secret patents, but he has not yet managed to get married. Trade, just like industry, is free according to the sacred rights of capitalism. And half the trouble is that every week it suddenly comes to light that it was a certain iron water that an illustrious boxer was drinking (there is his photograph right after his signature), it was the water given to this illustrious boxer – and nothing other than this water – that enabled this boxer to smash the mug of another illustrious boxer. So this water, which has a horribly ferrous taste to it, costs two dollars when sold in the packaging of a certain company, but its actual cost is just two cents, – and there is no kind of miracle-working property, no ferrous thaumaturgy, to be found in this water. The Gillette razor, from whose dull blades Russians suffer, was patented during the first years of its existence and used to cost ten dollars. The patent rights have now expired, and the Gillette razor is now given away for free – as a supplement to the purchase of a dozen razor blades produced by Gillette. How many millions of dollars have been paid through the nose by the American consumer who loves to shave with a Gillette razor?! That is to say, half the trouble consists in the deception and fraud that lie beyond one's strength to check because every test for verification rests upon the "sacred" rights – the freedom to own private property and engage in commerce – that are enjoyed by the capitalist "whales" – the captains of American industry.

The trouble (or half the trouble?) is that the consumer's largest expenditure is directed toward *amiuzment* [amusement], toward having a good time, toward enjoying pleasures – when, in actuality, the average American is awash with embossed cuff links, but he doesn't have any extra (and needed) boots. And yet he always has a radio and always knows the latest motion picture made by M.G.M.

The trouble is . . . a group of companies that deal with wooden building materials enters into a competitive struggle with a group of companies that deal with stone (or iron-reinforced concrete, or asbestos) building materials (or butchers want to make people eat meat at the expense of milk, or petroleum companies decide to gain a victory over coal companies, or a syndicate that produces artificial silk decides to destroy cocoon silk). This is done in secret. This is empowered by economists, engineers, and millions of dollars. This hinges upon Wall Street, the White House, the Republican Party, and gangster trusts. The poor dreamer who wishes to build himself a little summer home on the banks of the Hudson River or to buy for himself and his *uumen* [woman], his *uaif* [wife] or his *siuit-khart* [sweetheart] some real silk, and not some "chemical" linen, is out of luck: not only are there advertisements involved here, but there are also orders and behests. It's entirely clear here that both people and things are cheaper than these advertisements, orders, and behests themselves. And from statistical computations we know that it's not millions but billions of dollars that have been taken away from Americans in this manner and in these ways.

And on top of all this – everywhere and everyplace: at homes, at factories, at crosswalks, at churches, even at cemeteries – American national flags, flags, flags are waving, just as if it's one big, continuous holiday.

In New York, I used to know a man from Wall Street. I can't convey the feelings that I have toward him because I lack the words that would convey such feelings accurately. This man is about forty years old; he's a millionaire, lean and simplified in his movements, like a good penknife. He doesn't follow the American style of dressing up in all the colors of the rainbow. He adheres to the traditions of the end of the last century in the way he dresses, wearing suits that symbolize a steam pipe. In his study, right next to the ticker tape that connects him every second with Wall Street, there are telephones with direct lines to London and to Geneva (to his informant from a session of the League of Nations). He doesn't own any business enterprise. His *métier* is giving advice to people who went from being fools to being American billionaires, telling them where and how to invest their millions so as to earn the largest profit. He doesn't deal with investment sums less than a million dollars. He's very much nobody's fool. He's also very cynical, as is to be expected of people in the profession he's in. He knows that if he were to give unsound advice, his brainless clients would find in themselves the brains needed to dismiss him. I saw this man at the moment when he had just hung up the phone on his direct line to Geneva. Laying down the penknife he held in his right hand, he greeted me and a companion of mine with these words:

“Crisis, crisis, and still more crisis! I tell my clients that it's impossible to think up anything for them to do right now. Sometimes I tell them that the very best and most surefire way to use their dollars wisely would be to invest them in you guys, the Bolsheviks. At least that way the money would remain intact until such time as you yourself show up in our country! . . . Or else I tell them that it wouldn't be a bad idea to organize a syndicate whose aim is to destroy Soviet power. Not to destroy Soviet power, strictly speaking, but to create a joint-stock corporation that provides evidence that the current financial crisis is occurring thanks to the Soviet government's predatory pricing policy of 'dumping' and to the Bolsheviks' political agitation and conspiracies. I'd love to see the pair of conspirators – the Soviet government and the Bolsheviks – exposed! . . . I'd give some of my own personal millions to one and the other *bizness* [business] to help expose this pair. I guarantee you that there would be high profitability for the first six months! Do you remember the Florida swamps in 1926!? And we mustn't forget that our most recent period of *prosperiti* [prosperity] was created by the automobile, which has become penal servitude for Americans, and by prohibition . . . Once we have a syndicate that is opposed to the Bolsheviks, think what *publisiti* [publicity], what *khokum* [hokum], and what *amiuzment* [amusement] there would be!”

For my part, I, as opposed to the Romanian Queen Marie (these were regal matters – that is a fact!), did not sign my name to the tailor's offer to make me a free suit in return for endorsing his company. I did pay for the suit, just as I did move out of the Saint Moritz,

after I found out about its generosity, and did move into an apartment where I could pay my own way. And some time during the first ten days of my stay in America, I received a telegram: "Work in Hollywood at the M.G.M. studio." Stop. "Contract for ten weeks." Stop. "So-many dollars a week."

I sent an inquiry telegram back: "Work in what capacity? Doing what?" While waiting for a reply, I showed this telegram to some friends and acquaintances of mine. My friends and acquaintances assessed the telegram differently.

One of them:

"The 'so-many dollars a week' they are offering is low."

"But what will I be doing there!?"

"It makes no difference. It would be awkward for you to take less than a thousand."

A second one:

"Well, it serves you right: you should have suggested some amount."

"How much exactly!? I've never worked in film and don't know what to do there!"

"It makes no difference. And what if you were suddenly to write something for Fox or Paramount!? It's better for M.G.M. to pay you, even in the event that you write nothing for them, than to have you write something for Fox."

Publisiti! . . . Advertising!

9

I went to Hollywood. I will be writing about that later.

Cinema is the third leading industry in the U.S.A. And this industry is in the entertainment field, providing *amiuzment* [amusement] to people. *Amiuzment* is the main expenditure of the American consumer: movies, a radio, an automobile, and so on. In the environs of New York City, beyond Brooklyn, there is an establishment of mass *amiuzment* that entertains millions of people.

It's Coney Island.

During the summer months and on holidays, up to a million and a half New Yorkers congregate there for a *gud taim* [good time], (*khoroshee vremia*), and for *amiuzment*. Rich

people don't go there. A million people: these are the populations of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia combined. A million people: these are the masses.

Besides the fact that it is massive, this establishment, called both an island and a city, which is able to gather together so many people in one place, is a crowd favorite. It's not merely a pimple on the small of one's back, that is to say, there is a good reason for its popularity. People go there to enjoy themselves, to have fun no matter what!

The following things stretch out for a dozen kilometers along the ocean's shore (and, in fact, under different names, they stretch out for a hundred kilometers): carnival booths, carousels, circuses, taverns, houses of horrors, shooting galleries, lotteries, and so on, and so on, and so forth. All of this is suffused with electricity beneath American flags. It's impossible to view all of this electric pleasure in one, two, or three days. The Moscow Park of Culture and Rest is in no way comparable, if only because on Coney Island there is not a single blade of grass. There are several *sazhens* of *bitch* [beach], sand awash with electricity and mixed with orange peels and banana peels as well as with corks from Coca-Cola bottles, pages from newspapers, and other trash left behind by people. Next there is a sea wall and then iron-reinforced concrete, which is specked, as if flyblown, by automobiles, tens of thousands of automobiles, and which is awash with people, in the same way that the beach is awash with orange peels. From the electricity in the sky, the electricity on the ground, and the electricity under the ground, it's just as bright there at night as it is during the day.

The ocean isn't visible from there, and it doesn't smell of the ocean there, but smells instead of gasoline, paint, and boiling hot frankfurters (called *khatdogs* [hot dogs], *goriachie sobaki*, a name that matches the truth). Approximately fifty percent of the people there, after changing their clothes in their automobiles, loll about on the beaches – they *bitchuiutsia* [go beaching] – and they also walk along the embankment in their bathing suits and bathing pajamas of the most insufferable colors and states of undress. The rest of the people amuse themselves by observing the spectacles, seeing the sights, and watching the shows.

These spectacles wail, whistle, and bellow; they make the sounds of a martyr as well as the sounds of a mosquito, overflowing with warbling sounds, from accordions to jazz saxophones, all in ecstatic delight. These spectacles burn with their searchlights, rockets, and fireworks, with all their electric colors and tempos. Live clowns and electric clowns howl. American flags flutter with their festoons, establishing fraternity with the electricity. A million people press forward, laughing, whistling, and dancing while on the move, as on a steamer, with penny whistles and mother-in-law's tongues, all dressed up in unusual outfits. A million people eat *khatdogs* [hot dogs] while on the go, hugging and kissing each other. Supernatural fun! Making merry no matter what it costs! Merriment wings its way through the air, flying off every face, flying off every hand placed on the hip, on the waist, on the shoulder or on the chest of the male or female neighbor standing next to them! Every leg rejoices! The men's neckties are untied. The women are half-clad, and a very large percentage of them are dressed in white or colored pants, preferably striped, that are as wide as those of a sailor. American traditions of dress, which were Old Testament in

nature, have now disappeared. Where suits are concerned, they used to follow the model of the smokestack; where checkered trousers are concerned, they used to follow the model of the American flag. They used to prefer fur collars over beards. Now Americans are dressed in all sorts of insufferable colors, men and women alike: in lilac, green, maroon, and yellow trousers, skirts, and shirts. And the most fashionable color is – electric blue! . . .

Couples and groups of friends are going to the “Steeplechase,” let’s call it the “Forty-One Delights.” It’s filled with electricity and decorated with American flags. Couples pay half a dollar per person, and a “Forty-One Delights” badge is pinned on each person’s chest.

The delights begin right away. To the accompaniment of electric music, one has to go through a tunnel that revolves by means of electricity. Inside the spinning tunnel, people fall down, laugh, and squeal. The spinning tunnel does not allow people to stand up, so incredible poses occur, and women’s skirts, if they are wearing any, ride up on them. Some fine young fellows are specially assigned to drag the holiday makers out of the tunnel by their feet. Farther down, some keen sensations begin. Couples race over to electric bumper cars. The spotter punches one delight on their Forty-One Delights token. The tires on these cars are placed not on the wheels but around the car. The cars in the pavilion for this ride are placed into motion by electricity. The cars fly at each other, bumping them with their tires; they bounce back from each other, like balls; and then each flies off to bump yet a third car. Supernatural fun! When they are done with the bumper cars, people climb the stairs up to the top of a giant slide. The spotter punches the next ride on their token. The slide, which is carefully polished, has all sorts of dips and bumps on it. People race down the slide each on their bottoms, either in pairs or in tandem, holding hands. The dips and bumps scatter people all over, so that it is unclear where their hands are and where their feet. The spectators who surround this slide, standing at the parapet, witness some fantastic flights. Some of them lean up against the parapet. Suddenly an electric current is emitted through the parapet. The current stings the spectators: some of them are stunned and utter a shriek, while everyone laughs. Next there is a disk the size of a circus hippodrome (America is famous for its broad scope: so that in the New York circus there are three such hippodromes right in a row, and circus acts are occurring in all three of them at once). People climb onto this carefully polished disk, piling onto it at its very center. The spotter punches yet another delight on the token. The disk starts to spin, rotating, of course, by means of electricity. One after another, people start flying off from the center of the disk, hanging on to the disk at its edges. The person who can outwit centrifugal force and remain seated at the center of the disk has the right to repeat this delight without having his token punched.

There are swings of all sorts!

There are carousels of all sorts!

There are American mountains (which in America are called Russian Mountains)!

There are pleasures! There are delights!!

Alongside the Forty-One Delights, there is a museum where they display the fattest woman in the world, the smallest midgets, the most frightful monsters, and a woman and a man who are both fish.

Alongside the Forty-One Delights, there is the sale of American flags, beneath which Salvation Army soldiers scream, howling into their bullhorns.

Alongside the Forty-One Delights, there is a museum of skin diseases and the conception of children (children are not allowed admission there).

Alongside the Forty-One Delights, there is a museum, a house of horrors (children are allowed admission there). Here they display those schemes that the police either caught or reopened during their investigation of sensational murders. Gangsters slit a woman's throat while she was in bed, the bed and the woman are covered in blood, and the gangsters are bent over her body. A wife killed her husband in the bathtub, the bathtub is filled with blood, and there is a knife in the hand of the half-unclad woman. A husband stabbed his wife to death in the woods. Sacco and Vanzetti in the electric chair, their faces distorted by the convulsive force of the electricity. All of this is made out of wax with a frightful abundance of hideous facial expressions and blood.

Alongside the Forty-One Delights, there is the skeleton of a whale that is displayed for viewing for one cent.

Once again, there is the Salvation Army.

Alongside the fortune-telling establishment, which fortune-tellers entice people to enter by their ability to foretell one's fate, there stands a fortune-teller machine that is like the self-service ticket machines found at suburban train stations: you have to insert a *nikel'* (five cents) and your fate will be foretold.

Alongside the Forty-One Delights, people fire guns at a shooting gallery, throw balls and toss rings at a carnival booth in hopes of winning a mother-in-law's tongue, a whistle, a cap, a teddy bear, or an ashtray for their automobile.

And there is, in the Forty-One Delights, one delight that tops them all. Among a million people, there can always be found a hundred (or a thousand) who are fools (or who have been fooled). Amidst the Forty-One Delights, an auditorium and a stage have been built, both of them adorned with American flags. The auditorium is always filled to capacity with people of all ages, predominantly of the male gender. On the stage, there are invariably two clowns: a freak-midget, who is as fat as a spider, and a freak-giant, who is as thin as a rail. The people who are walking past these electric frights and keen sensations, strolling past them on their own in search of further pleasures beneath the American flag, suddenly end up in some labyrinth from which there is no exit, no way to go back. They must keep going forward. Some of them realize what kind of trap they have fallen into. Others do not realize that it is a trap. And this doesn't matter, for there actually is no retreat from this trap. The people who had landed in the labyrinth come out upon a stage. The auditorium

laughs with delight. People come out of the darkness of the labyrinth into the blinding glare of spotlights. The people exiting the labyrinth, these men and women, quite naturally get a kick out of this. Moreover, a certain percentage of the women, naturally enough, are wearing skirts; moreover, the women are both young and old, both thin and full-bodied. At the sight of the women in their skirts, the people in the auditorium laugh in an especially lustful manner. In a clownish, affable manner, the freak-spider and the freak-beanpole rush at the people who have just appeared on the stage and throw themselves at them. Both of these freaks are equipped with sticks affixed to a wire, electric wands; when a person comes in contact with these electric wands, a spark flashes and an electric shock stings the person painfully. The freak-spider invites people to follow him. And suddenly compressed air begins to blow from a floor vent under the feet of the people who have just come out of the labyrinth. The music is choking, making various farting sounds. The women's skirts fly upward, laying bare what had been – and what had not been – calculated to be exposed by the burst of compressed air. The women spasmodically grab at their flying skirts, trying to gather them up and keep hold of them against their knees. But the freak-beanpole at this point pokes them in their backside with his electric wand. The women shriek from the unexpectedness and pain of the electric shock, and clutch at their backside, letting go of their skirts. Once again the skirts fly upward. Or the women run off to wherever they can. At this point the floor beneath them begins to hop up and down like a goat that has gone mad. The women lose their balance and grab for the handrails. There is, however, an electric current running through the handrails. But the compressed air blowing from beneath them does not throw them off! And nobody, nowhere – unless he has been to Coney Island – has ever seen such facial expressions as those on the faces of the spectators who are sitting in the auditorium of this delight! The auditorium snorts, laughs, squeals, kicks and stomps its feet – it is enjoying itself! For an evening of such visual delights, no fewer than a hundred people will pass through the hall entrance. And how many women's tights and garters – or even the bottoms of those women who are completely without any undergarments – are being watched by these American spectators that number into the millions! With the men, things proceed differently than with the women. At the moment when the wind strips away a man's hat and he grabs for it, he is poked from behind by an electric shock. And due to a sleight of hand on the part of the freak-beanpole, instead of a *canotier* or a hat that has been slightly wind-blown and stretched, on the man's head there now sits some kind of clownish headgear that makes him look like a fool. The man who has been wind-blown and given an electric shock notices this only when he manages to get out of the torture of stupefaction he has been through. He paid hard-earned dollars for that hat. He examines for a second the tomfoolery that has appeared on his head, which he only learned about when he heard the laughter of the bystanders. He tosses this tomfoolery at the two freaks and demands his hat back. His hat is sitting on a throne in the middle of the stage. They say to him: "Go and get it!"

The sorrow he feels for the dollars he has spent and the sorrow he feels for the dignity he has lost wage a battle inside him, and the man goes to get his hat back. At the moment when he stretches out his hand to retrieve it, the hat flies off to the side, and instead of his hat an electric freak jumps out from behind the throne, a freak that is screeching horribly and frightening the owner of the hat.

Incredible fun!

Supernatural fun!

The auditorium laughs, and the music chokes, making farting noises.

The auditorium is decorated with American flags.

But the most remarkable thing – this is in regard to the few seconds of reflection on the part of the man about the cost of his hat and the loss of his dignity – consists in the fact that those people who were visibly made to look like fools rushed from the stage looking cheerful and happy, laughing and feeling in no way insulted or offended. It was clear that this was not the first time that a series of people who were visibly made to look like fools walked around the stage, which was decorated with American flags. They did everything that they were counted upon to do with knowledge and with pleasure. They were happy to do it. It was one of the Forty-One Delights!

On Coney Island, there are several establishments like the Forty-One Delights. And what is more, not only on Coney Island. They can be found everywhere, all over America.

By about four o'clock in the morning, on the eve of a holiday or on the day of a holiday itself, Coney Island empties out. Thousands of people trudge their way to the mechanical civility of the *sobvei* [subways]. In the name of American rationalization, there are no people at the controls in the subways. In order to pass through to the platform and get to the subway cars, one must drop a *nikel'* into an x-shaped automatic machine that resembles those cruciform gates that have been installed on country roads in the Russian provinces so that cattle do not wander out onto the roads. When the *nikel'* has been dropped, this automatic machine growls, revolves a quarter of a turn, speedily allowing a person to pass and nudging him slightly for the sake of stimulation. The person is supposed to hop forward, escaping and saving himself from the automatic machine. These thousands of people ride home in subway cars that are so crowded that they produce odd seating arrangements. Our streetcars would not dream of being like these subway cars, if only because women in our country do not sit on the laps of their male friends while riding in streetcars. But an even larger number of people return home from Coney Island by automobile, traveling with people that they are acquainted with, that they are half-acquainted with, or that they have only become acquainted with on that day. And the way that they ride home by car is likewise different from our way of riding, for some kind of water nymph, wearing shorn hair and dressed in an inexplicable bathing suit, is lying on the front fender of the car, spreading her arms out toward the wind. Or else there is a couple, two people who instantly fell in love, that have ensconced themselves on the roof of the car.

Coney Island blazes with glowing lights, with fantasy, with phantasmagoria, with a craze for electricity. A million very happy clerks, male and female workers, domestic servants, salesmen, and tailors crawl home along their floors at the apartment building, delivered there by electric elevators.

On Sundays, while a million people – or even a million and a half people – are enjoying themselves at Coney Island, New York newspapers are coming out in editions of a hundred and fifty to two hundred pages. The majority of these pages in the newspapers are occupied with announcements about American wonders. But in the Sunday edition there is something for every American. In it, there are reports about the sailings of merchant ships and about the price of stocks on Wall Street. In it, there are dispatches from Chicago about the prices for wheat and dispatches from New Orleans about cotton as well as about the very small foot of a very large beauty. In the Sunday issue, they print events that are only of interest for the Irish. In the Sunday issue, there is a page exclusively for men. In the Sunday issue, there is a page exclusively for children. In the Sunday issue, there is a page exclusively for the miss and the missus, with fashion photos and interviews with famous beauties. Literary supplements. A chronicle of news items in theater and mathematics. A chronicle of current events in boxing. Illustrated supplements.

And – a page of satire and humor. There is likewise an illustrated page on which, without fail, someone flies out of a window and lands in a barrel filled with water. Or he sits down on some flypaper. Or he sticks the lighted end of a cigar into his mouth. Or a husband hides from his wife under the bed. Or a wife ties her husband to the bed with a chain. This must make an American roll on the floor with laughter. And, without fail, there are anecdotes like the following:

HE TURNED OVER

“For a whole month now my husband hasn’t been abandoning me in the evenings!”

“Has he turned over a new page in the conduct book he has been reading?”

“No, he turned over the car and now he’s lying in bed all bandaged up!”

A WISE ANSWER

“How old are you, my dear boy?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t know. When I was born, my Mom would say that she was twenty-six years old, but now she’s twenty-four.”

AFTER THE FOOTBALL GAME

“Today’s game was really uninteresting.”

“Yes, I know, not a single amusing drunk!”

HE VALUES APPETITE

“Doctor, I’m eating my dinner without any kind of satisfaction.”

“Why is that?”

“Because the food is ruining my appetite!”

BOXERS

“When I hit my opponent with a punch, he feels it right away.”

“When I hit my opponent with a punch, he feels it only a week later!”

A CLEVER WIDOW

“Madam, you can’t get married. In your deceased spouse’s will, it says that if you were to remarry, the entire inheritance would be transferred over to your deceased spouse’s cousin.”

“Yes, but it’s that cousin of his that I’m getting married to!”

A WEAPONS SYSTEM

“I would like to buy a revolver for my husband.”

“What type of revolver does your husband prefer?”

“Oh, he doesn’t care. He doesn’t know yet that I’m planning to shoot him!”

IN A STORE

“I’ve noticed that your last customer didn’t buy anything, but left here completely happy. What did he want to see?”

Saleswoman: “Me at eight o’clock this evening!”

AN OLD FEMALE ACQUAINTANCE

He (thoughtfully): “It seems to me that I know you. There’s something about you that seems very, very familiar to me . . .”

She: “Perhaps it’s my panties? I borrowed them from Miss Morgan for tonight.”

SINCERE LAUGHTER

“My suspenders broke in the middle of dancing . . .”

“I can imagine your embarrassment.”

“No, I laughed heartily along with the others. My suspenders were being worn by my friend Lawrence!”

From these satiric and humorous pieces, one is expected to laugh one’s head off, just like one does at Coney Island at the sight of women’s skirts flying up from bursts of compressed air from below.

11

There’s an awful lot of electricity here!

There’s electricity along the second story of the streets of New York, and under the ground it transports people off into space. Electricity carries people away to their floors in apartment buildings. Electricity opens and closes the doors of apartments and houses. Some houses, in their entrance way, on the wall next to the front door, on a board opposite the apartment numbers, have buttons and next to them there is some sort of aperture. You press the button you need and out of this sort of aperture you hear a voice that asks, “Who is calling and whom do you need to speak with?” This is the owner of the apartment inquiring by telephone from his floor. You speak into the aperture. The owner says, “*O’kei*,” and the front door, which up until this time has been locked, opens in front of you. This is because the owner of the apartment is pressing the corresponding button on his floor. While the front door is opening, a light is turned on in the hallway. You get on the elevator. The little lamps inside the elevator start flashing, and the hallway disappears into the darkness. And so it goes on in this manner, right up to the door of the apartment on the floor that you need. Electricity prepares and refrigerates meals in those apartments where there is an electric stove and where there is a refrigerator, a sort of white electric box that produces ice. Electric gadgets include such things as: an electric iron, an electric hair curler, an electric tea kettle, and even an electric appliance for browning (and spoiling – to a Russian’s taste) the bread used for sandwiches. Sewing machines and typewriters are set in motion, activated by electricity. Laundry is washed by means of electricity. In some apartments, you press a certain button and your bed is flipped over in the air and climbs inside the wall, closing the wall behind it. In every automobile, there is, quite naturally, a battery; many of them, however, have a radio as well. The Hotel Saint Moritz was constructed according to the latest word in electrical engineering, to such an extent that I was a bit afraid to touch the door knobs or door handles there: when you touch them, an electric spark jolts you, just like at Coney Island. For a long time, I tried to figure out why this is so. But I couldn’t make any sense out of it. As they explained it to me, it’s due to some feature of the carpets. I don’t know about that. But in regard to carpets and floors generally, I must say that they are likewise cleaned by means of electricity.

Besides electricity, there is also an awful lot of noise here.

And there is nowhere else in the world where you have the sort of noise that there is in New York. Hemmed in on one side by the Hudson River and the East River and planted upon the island's granite – that is, upon a very strong foundation – on the other side, New York climbed upward, dozens of stories high, setting a record with the one-hundred-and-two-stories-high Empire State Building. The one hundred and two stories of the Empire State – this is the highest point in the world that is constructed by man. It is higher than the Eiffel Tower and all the antenna-mast structures and cathedrals in the world. Down below, beneath these *bidings* [buildings], streets have remained, streets that, like accordions, have pulled together all the noises of the structures. In Manhattan, there are ten *aveniu* [avenues] (*aveniu*, translated into Russian, is *alleia!*), which run the length of the city, and a little less than three hundred *strit* [streets] (in Russian, *ulitsa*) that traverse the city. Out of these ten avenues, four of them have second floors, which elevated electric trains speed along every minute; as they speed along, they shake the streets and one's brain with their howling and their grinding. And there is no *aveniu* in New York where this grinding sound cannot not be heard.

All of the subterranean level of New York is dug up with depots, *sobvei* [subways], entrances to the underground tracks for trains, and tubes for the city's pneumatic postal system, whence postal dispatches are delivered all over the districts of New York from the central post office, not by human mail carriers, but by an underground tubular conveyor system operated by means of compressed air. The New York railway stations – the most enormous in the world – were dug into the ground. A person in New York, if he takes it into his head to do so (and there are such types whom fate incites to do such things), this person could live for weeks in New York, traveling around the city – from one end to the other – and residing in a multitude of hotels, for weeks he could go without seeing any streets, let alone any daylight, while residing under the ground. And the subterranean level of New York does not for a second cease to hum, howl, and moan, belching out noise onto the streets of the city by means of this, its truly subterranean belly.

There are more automobiles in New York City alone than in all of Germany. We now know that it's faster to walk the distance across New York City – down three *aveniu* and across ten *strit* – than to drive across it in an automobile. There are more automobiles than pedestrians on the streets of this city, a city whose streets are impassable-by-means-of-an-automobile. Automobiles here travel in columns at a distance of a meter away from each other and at a distance of half a meter to the right and to the left. Automobiles spend more time standing still at a traffic light than they do actually moving forward. But automobiles, as we know, make noise, even if they are of Rolls Royce quality. And every second these noises crawl into the floors of buildings and into the nerves of people. Automobiles make noise twenty-four hours a day, more at night than during the day, for at night trucks are delivering all the things that this city of a million people needs.

New York is the largest port in the world. The hum and buzz of thousands of ocean liners and tens of thousands of port steamers, steamboats, and motor boats pour in from both the Hudson River and the East River.

The howl of the city is cut through every minute by the incomparable sound of sirens from

police cars, fire trucks, and ambulances. Their sirens are specially made to drown out all other sounds and render everyone numb and dumb. And they do indeed deafen people.

After vacating the Hotel Saint Moritz, I took up residence in the apartment of my friend Joe Freeman on the sixteenth floor of a building on Second Avenue, almost on the banks of the East River. And just as had been the case at the Hotel Saint Moritz earlier, I could not fall asleep here either. I would wake up at night and hear a radio wailing, a refrigerator on the other side of the wall sniffling as it was making ice, a service *elevator* (elevator) whistling past the floors of our building as it delivered all the necessary delivery items on various floors at night, as if our building was the chief town of a district. The building was shuddering from the elevated trains that went flying by. The sounds of the underground, which had been built under our building, swept over my brain like a wave of hysteria. Just outside my window, at almost the same level as my sixteenth-floor apartment, there were pipes from the New York electric power station – they say it’s the largest one in the world – and just a little bit lower than my floor, loads of bituminous coal were crashing down – with the rumbling and grinding sound made by hoisting cranes – into the maw of this electric power station. On cloudy days, the pipes of the electric power station and the tops of the skyscrapers would retire beyond the clouds, and the clouds would descend to the same level as the roof of our building, evicting everything from the realm of reality and banishing it to the delirium of howls.

Together with Joe Freeman, a pure-blooded New Yorker, I traveled by automobile across all of America, from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic. Joe speaks Russian, but he speaks it poorly. Of all the languages in the world, I prefer to speak only Russian. And I began to notice that every day during our trip across America we would find ourselves toward evening in the largest possible city among those on our itinerary. And we would get settled in there for the night – this was obligatory with us – in such a way that if not beneath us or above us, then right next to us on one side there would be either trains or factories howling. Although this was not New York, it was still difficult to get a good night’s sleep. Then I started to handle matters my own way. Toward evening, we would drive a little farther away from the railroad tracks and if I were to see a motel, I would shout – “Stop! We’re spending the night here. I’m not going any farther!” We spent one night this way, then another night this way, and I slept great. But on the third morning, Joe fell very ill. So I asked him. “What’s wrong with you!?” He replied in a forlorn and reluctant way:

“I can’t sleep. For three nights now, I haven’t slept at all. The birds are keeping me awake.”

“What birds?”

“Those over there, the ones outside in the yard. I don’t know what they’re called.”

Owing to the poor quality of our verbal communications, I didn’t manage to catch the names of these birds. We drove farther. We saw a flock of chickens in a field. Joe’s face suddenly turned angry. “There – those are the birds I mean. The male version of those

ladies!” Joe said, pointing at a rooster.

As we were approaching New York, after we had finished travelling all the way across America, – it was subtropical June so we were driving with our noses, smeared thoroughly with glycerin cream as a skin protectant, peeling from the sun and heat – Joe was exulting over the possibility of living a normal life again.

I remember very clearly the sensation that I felt as I was watching that twilight, when there arose in front of us the smoke and the humps of the skyscrapers in the New York profile, when the noises and gasses of the city had come to meet us upon our return. I sensed physically that I was driving into some sort of worldwide kerosene stove. After all, if there is no ocean at Coney Island, even if it is located nearby, then on the streets of New York one must breathe not air, but burned out gas, the smoke and soot of cars and locomotives.

Ah, this unusual, mechanical, lonely dirt of New York’s streets, this trash consisting of old newspapers and cigarette butts on the concrete, this suffocating smell of gasoline mixed with sweat! This dirt has been theorized by a certain American writer. During a stroll together one night, he told me, in regard to my surprise at all this dirt and trash, that Americans are, it is said, individualists, that each of them lives his own life and answers for himself alone. Therefore, if you’ve been paying attention, you’ve seen that the apartments of Americans are clean, but the streets outside do not concern them! – Ah, this American individualism!

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But: Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. Truisms very often turn out to be true, and the truism of a truth – that a dollar is only a dollar – is the master, the overlord, the dream, the delight of American morality. This truism of a truth is true. And those who have climbed over the fence of dollars, the person who has a *dzhab* [job] or a *bizness* [business], for them there are standards and norms, despite American individualism.

This is for those who have climbed over the fence of the dollar.

The European standard is not comparable with the American standard.

For those who have climbed over the fence to get dollars and who have hidden those dollars away in the beneficence of their check book, propped up against the stock market ticker – for all of them, it is obligatory that in their apartments they dream about a radio, which is a source of misery and in no way a positive thing, about an electric kitchen, and about a *refrizherator* [refrigerator]. Men and women who have climbed for the dollar must sleep in pajamas, each of them must go to their bathroom in the morning and take a shower or a bath, changing their nighttime undergarments for daytime ones. After they have washed themselves up, these people leave for work, returning home after five o’clock. The men must change their daytime gray (or crimson or yellow) suit and their colored shoes for an evening outfit that is darker in color; they must shave, take another bath, eat dinner, amuse themselves, and then go to bed, taking a bath and putting on pajamas before falling

asleep. This is how it must be. Only a very few people, even among those who strive to amass dollars, have a domestic servant, and they only eat *brekfest* [breakfast], a morning meal, at home, *loncha* [eating lunch] near work and *dinneria* [eating dinner] as part of a sequence of evening *amiuzment*. Both men and women work, of course. Thus, in the morning, before taking a bath, the individualist must telephone a nearby shop to order what he needs for *brekfest*, which is delivered to him by a delivery boy. He must leave for work. On several of the floors in his building, there is a Black scrubwoman, a Negress, who sweeps the rooms by means of electricity. The individualist *lonchit* [eats lunch] and *dinnerit* [eats dinner] in town, as everyday life determines it should be done. And the variety of dining halls and restaurants is unbelievable. There are two reasons for this: an alcoholic one and a national one.

The variety of eateries begins with the *drog-stori* [drugstores], in other words, the apothecary-restaurants, in which one can undergo medical treatment while having a bite to eat and one can feed oneself while making a full recovery. Located on every *aveniu* are the small bandboxes of so-called cafeterias, mechanized dining halls, where hot and cold food items – soups, salads, meats, fish, crabs, hors d'oeuvres, sweets, fruits, Coca-Colas, both cold dishes and hot dishes – are displayed behind glass along the walls. A hungry person who wishes to eat something walks along these walls, sees what is being offered to him, and decides what he needs. Each separate dish that he sees is sitting there in the automatic vending machine. The customer who has change drops his coins in the slot (the coin changers and the cash registers, which are likewise automated, are located here), and the automatic vending machine serves him up the same plate that he had seen behind glass. The hungry diner has at his disposal a small marble table, from which the serving personnel assigned to attend to the customers remove only the dirty dishes. In addition, in the majority of cases, part of the tableware – the glasses, the plates, the spoons – are thrown right away into the trash because these plates, spoons, and glasses are manufactured out of paper and cardboard. And since we have just described the cafeteria in its essence – that it's clean and always white, and that people can dine there to satiety, eating tasty food until they are full, for only forty to fifty cents – let us now talk about press tools and manufacturing dies. The plates, spoons, and glasses, not to mention the paper napkins, are manufactured out of paper. They are used only once, and this is hygienic. Ford manufactures his automobiles. But in the sequence from manufactured Fords to manufactured plates, there are manufactured doors, frames, beds, tables, chairs, and book cases; there are also knives, spoons, and forks made out of iron and bronze as well as out of paper pulp and various mastics. These are all manufactured items in the sequence of mass production. And this mass production through press tools and manufacturing dies throws these things out into the market cheaply and in quantities numbering millions. And this mass production through press tools and manufacturing dies – not only doors, chairs, and fence grills, but also paper knives for slitting the uncut pages of books, and lamps, and picture frames, and automobiles – these manufactured items are done excellently, gracefully, and conveniently. And it was precisely this mass production through press tools and manufacturing dies that made it possible for Woolworth to start up his ten-cent and twenty-cent stores. There's no point in yelping and telling lies about these stores.

Every American, judging by the assurances that are given to us by advertising, ought to own his own automobile. In actuality, this is not the case. But, nonetheless, not to mention wealthy people, almost every petit bourgeois, many workers, and four and a half million farm workers (there are six million of them in all) own their own automobile. The automobile of the standard American who has climbed over the fence for the dollar is driven by that American himself, whether that person be a gentleman or a lady. And this automobile is kept around the corner in a public parking garage. Moreover, there are several parking garages – in New York, in Chicago, and in Detroit – that are up to ten floors high, where cars are removed from the floors by means of elevators. Moreover, we can assume that the carwashes that have been built in these parking garages are of no lesser refinement than the restrooms that have been built for people.

The highways in America look more like conveyor belts in a factory than like actual roads. Automobiles travel down them as if they are on a conveyor belt. And motorists, after driving, feel as if they have been working on a conveyor belt. The highways are filled with *trafik* [traffic] signs that indicate traffic rules and regulations. Federal highways in some places have six or eight lanes: that is to say, six to eight vehicles are traveling along them at one time, four in one direction and four in the other. *Trafik* signs – “STOP,” “SLOW,” “MAXIMUM SPEED 60,” “MINIMUM SPEED 40,” “SCHOOL ZONE,” “HOSPITAL ZONE,” “BRIDGE 300 FEET,” “RAVINE 300 FEET,” “HILL 300 FEET,” “CURVE 300 FEET,” “RAILROAD CROSSING” – are not located on the roadside nor are they posted on a pole. They’re written in white paint on the asphalt itself. And in addition to these inscriptions, if the highway has, let’s say, four lanes, then these four lanes have white stripes drawn lengthwise along the road to keep motorists from dozing off at the wheel. The asphalt and tar used in constructing roads are calibrated with a levelling instrument. Curves, which in English are inscribed as “CURVE,” are constructed the way banked turns are constructed: for a turn to the left, the right side of the road is elevated, for a turn to the right, the left side of the road is elevated. When it isn’t necessary to change the position of the steering wheel on a curve, there is no reason why a vehicle should fly off the road at high speed. By the way, it does happen, nonetheless, that vehicles do fly off the road. America has the highest percentage of traffic fatalities in the world, and these injuries occur not because cars run over pedestrians, but because cars collide with each other or they veer off the road. Cars that fly off the road and crash are not cleared away. Instead they lie about in roadside ditches, where they serve, over and above the inscriptions written on the tar, as monuments to the traffic accidents. In 1930, more Americans were killed in automobile accidents, than American soldiers died in battle during one year of the World War. There are Shell Oil, General Motors Company, and Ford Motor Company gas stations, fuel pumps, and vehicle repair garages located every ten to fifteen kilometers on all American highways – in some locales it’s every half kilometer, and it’s only in the deserts of the state of Arizona that they are fifty kilometers apart from each other. Highways are adorned with advertising posters, and behind these posters motels are hidden. The American who drives a car doesn’t know the engine in his car. Indeed, besides the steering wheel and the brake, he generally doesn’t know anything about his car. It’s good if he knows how to listen to the engine and feel the shock absorbers. The typical American is not encouraged to know anything about his car. Every time he fills his car up with gas, the car is inspected: this service is included in the cost of the gas. And preventive

maintenance, as we know, is very beneficial, not only against malaria, but also against battery leakage. When I changed the oil in the engine, – this happened twice, – they wrote down my address. And about a week and a half later, I received a postcard from the filling station, reminding me that on my odometer there were such-and-such number of miles since the last time I had changed the oil. They were sending me this card so that I wouldn't forget to change the oil on time. An American must know how to do only one thing – drive a car. This is something that Americans ought to be able to do, and the current generation, apparently, was outright born with this ability: it's not a rarity to see ten-year-old boys and girls sitting behind the wheel of a car. Besides knowing how to drive a car, an American must know the rules of the road and accurate signaling, because he's not simply driving down the road, but participating in a conveyor belt of driving. For every failure to follow these conveyor rules, there is a fine to pay. But if you happen to have an automobile accident out in the country, a repair vehicle will drive out to get you. A Russian cab driver, if he were to drive around New York for an hour, following Moscow's rules of the road, would be showered with *tikety* [tickets], receipts with fines, like being showered with snow in a blizzard. And the only reason why this would not have happened is because they would have killed him, together with wrecking his car, during the first five minutes of him driving on New York's streets. However, I once managed to break a woman's arm and shoulder with a car in New York. When the police investigated this *eksident* [accident], they told me:

“Mister Pilnyak ran over the lady while following all the traffic regulations. The lady is the guilty party in this *eksident*. And, therefore, Mister Pilnyak can demand from the lady restitution for the cost for repair of the headlight that was shattered when it struck against her head.”

The roads are decorated with traffic signs and adorned with monuments of wrecked automobiles. The roads are fenced in by advertising posters, filling stations, the motels of automobile clubs, as well as tourist and sports societies, and motels with various names, such as *Chicken dinner* [chicken dinner]. All of this is flooded with electricity and entangled with telephone lines. The roads are illuminated at night for hundreds of *versts* away from any cities. Cars drive in a procession, one after another, at a distance of one meter away from each other; in some places, they drive at a speed no less than eighty kilometers per hour. On the back of some automobiles hang placards, such as the following: “Go ahead and bump into me, little guy. Really, don't you know that there's still a place left in hell!” Not only the inscriptions written on the asphalt, but also the red and green traffic lights, as well as the glove of a *polismen* [policeman], provide signals to automobiles, and they do this not only in cities, but also out in the country and up in the mountains. With acrobatic agility, the motorcycles of the highway police buzz like bumblebees around automobiles. And the American motorist drives along his remarkable highways truly as if on a conveyor belt. He doesn't see anything, except the body of the car traveling ahead of him and the fenders of the cars traveling to his right and to his left. He must watch his every gesture so that he drives his car correctly, so that his car goes correctly; otherwise, there could be an accident, a death – there are more deaths on the highways than in a world war. He must watch for every signal on the road. He must signal his every move: for example, “I'm reducing my speed and I want to switch over to the

shoulder,” because he has a flat tire. Otherwise, the cars behind him and to either side of him will crash into him. Cars and highways – they suffocate us with their gas exhaust. And the individualist who has climbed off the conveyor belt of highways, having seen on occasion an advertisement rather than nature, went out of his mind with joy, blissfully wiping from his brow the sweat of conveyor belt stress and strain. Highways, these conveyor belts, have traversed all of America, along its length and its breadth – criss-crossing and cross-crissing it from one end to the other. By means of iron, iron-reinforced concrete, and overhanging bridges, they have leapt across rivers – across the Colorado River, the Missouri River, the Potomac River, the Hudson River. By means of dams, they have gone across swamps and lakes. By means of tunnels, they have dug into mountains. And the highways there do not have names, but they do have numbers: Route 66 goes from New York, via Chicago, to California; Route 11 goes from Boston, via Washington, to New Orleans. Highway maps are distributed free of charge at every filling station and at every roadside motel. In his poems, Mayakovsky expressed astonishment at the Brooklyn Bridge over the East River. Now tunnels have been constructed under the East River and under the Hudson River in order to relieve some of the automobile traffic. By the autumn of 1931, a bridge was opened over the Hudson River, connecting the state of New York with the state of New Jersey. On the first day that this new bridge went into operation, around thirty thousand automobiles drove across it, seven people walked across it, and one horse pulled a carriage across it.

If automobiles in America were socialized, then every American would get to sit in an automobile, and one extraordinary morning the entire American population would be able to ride in an automobile. The notion conveyed by the words “turn” and “angle” is represented in American parlance by the letters “c-u-r-v-e.” In Russian, one reads it as *kurve*. In English, it’s pronounced *kerv*. A worker from the U.S.S.R., who was gaining practical experience working at a Ford plant, naturally got himself an automobile, learned how to drive it, and described his successes and his failures as a motorist in his letters home to his wife, a Moscow worker. He described to her how on one occasion he committed a blunder and fell into the hands of a policeman for veering off where he should not have on some curve. In describing this incident to his wife, he wrote: “. . . once again I have had an *eksidant* [accident]: I went too wide on a *kurve* [curve] and received a *tiket* [ticket] from the policeman with a three-dollar fine . . .” A stern reply followed from his wife in Moscow: “Ugh, you old ne’er-do-well . . . I swear I’m going to divorce you!”

Once I was riding with some friends (in an automobile, of course) in California, up in the mountains, and my friends started an argument over whether the state authorities acted rightly or wrongly when they created some work for those people who were unemployed: specifically, the construction of a new road in the mountains. I asked them where the road work was taking place. They pointed to a road on the right that was heading off into the mountains. I asked our woman driver (a female motorist, the owner of the car, and the wife of a writer) to turn in the direction of this new road work so that we could take a look at these unemployed people working. There were automobiles parked to our right and to our left all along this stretch of newly poured asphalt for up to a kilometer. I asked them, “What’s the deal with all these cars?” “Oh, those are the cars that belong to the unemployed people who came to work here,” they answered me.

Just think, that's the kind of standard they have in America: people who are unemployed are driving around in automobiles! But the fact of the matter is that the automobile in America has ceased to be a luxury item and has become instead a necessity of the first order. Old models of cars cost twenty-five to thirty dollars there. For a worker, they replace his legs. And the last thing an unemployed person wants to do is to part with his car, because this cuts off for him the possibility of getting around.

Up until two years ago, gold-mining factories were operating, beneath the crags, in the mountains of Arizona – in places immortalized by Mayne Reid and Fenimore Cooper – but now they are silent due to the financial crisis. Workers from the mountains and desert of Arizona – from places in the “wild” West, places of Indian traditions – are now departing in their little twenty-five-dollar Fords. A wagon is hitched to the back of their automobiles. And the automobiles, as well as the attached wagons, are packed with pillows, frying pans, radios, little kids, and poverty. There are plenty of such wagons crawling along the roads. We descended from the mountains of Arizona to the state of New Mexico. We were running late, so we hurried; it was about ten o'clock at night (this was during the time of our cross-country road trip from one ocean to the other). On the highway, the headlights of our automobile illuminated a parked vehicle, a man rummaging around under the hood, a woman lying beside the car on the asphalt, and the curly-haired little heads of three young kids behind the glass windows of the car. We stopped our car to find out what was the matter and, perhaps, to help out. The man rummaging around under the hood said about himself:

“I'm unemployed. I'm going to the Midwest. I don't know what happened to the engine. There's gas . . . but my wife . . . my wife has had three epileptic attacks today. All of our money has run out, and my wife and kids have had nothing to eat.”

The man looked like an academic. Despite the late hour – it was time when they should have been in bed sleeping – the young kids were chatting merrily, babbling all sorts of childish nonsense about their mommy. Embarrassed, I sheepishly gave the worker two dollars. Joe reproached me for being so stingy. We promised them that at the first auto repair garage we came to, we would have a mechanic sent out to help them.

We arrived at a small town, and as the first order of business we drove to a garage. The man at the garage did not give us time to finish our account about the misfortune that we had just encountered on the highway.

“Near the bridge? About seven miles from here?” he asked. “So that's our John, our beggar. Oh, what a comedian he is! Twice a week he works this scam. You're already the eighth person today who has asked for help on his behalf. Oh, what a funny guy he is! He's working this scam again today, so that means they won't let me go to bed until two o'clock in the morning!”

America is a country of records and technology. Once I was visiting farms in the Midwest. I was visiting a dairy farm. In the cow barns on dairy farms like this one, they have a radio playing for the cows so that they will give more milk as a result of their nerves being calmed by the soothing sound of the music. Each cow is provided with her own water conduit so that the cows are not drinking out of a common trough. The cows are milked on a conveyor belt by means of electricity. Each cow – the cows come out onto some carousel the size of a good-sized race track – each cow stands in a stall. The carousel turns clockwise with the sun. The cow, along with the stall she is standing in, moves to the left a distance equal to the width of a stall. A second cow enters the neighboring stall. During this time, a shower pours soapy water under the tail and stomach of the first cow, as well as on her udder. The carousel moves on to another stall, pouring clean water on that first cow, washing off the soap. The carousel moves on to yet another stall, using warm air to dry that first cow under her tail and around her udder. Then an electric milking machine is attached to the cow's teat. By the time the carousel has brought the cow back to its original spot, she has been milked. She has been milked without human hands touching her. The electric milking machine drives the milk along intricate tubes that show the chemical composition of the milk: its wateriness, the amount of casein protein in it, and its fat content. These clever tubes also sterilize the milk and pour it out, hermetically sealing it into bottles and then placing the bottles into crates.

These crates are transported in refrigerated vehicles and trains to cities, where the milk – taken straight from the cow's udder without being touched by human hands, but nonetheless sterilized – lands directly in the mouth of a person who wishes to take a little drink of milk.

This is a record. But in that same Midwest, I also visited farms where the cows are simply milked by human farmers with the help of their own five fingers, cows that are no cleaner than our Ryazan cows. I visited farms where the cows live in black sheds under a tile roof in the tradition of our privately-owned Ryazan cows. And in that same Midwest, there are farms that have been abandoned by farmers thanks to the financial crisis and to starvation.

The city of Chicago is located in that same Midwest. And slaughterhouses are located in that city. Much has been written about the Chicago slaughterhouses. Without digressing from this theme, I should mention here that the only thing that has not been mechanized at the Chicago slaughterhouses is betrayal. At these slaughterhouses, there are non-mechanized betrayers: the betrayer-goat, the betrayer-hog, the betrayer-bull. The slaughterhouses are dug deep into the ground, which smells of the blood of the millions of animals that have been killed there. Doves of sheep, pigs, and cows by the train-full have been tossed underground so that several hours later – in the form of filets, choice cuts, beef briskets, sausage, and canned meats – they can be sent across the country in refrigerated vehicles. The doves of animals beneath the ground are filled with deathly horror. Then the calm hog (or goat, or bull) approaches the enervated animals in their mortal anguish; the calm hog affectionately nudges the pigs, calms them down, and leads the reassured animals behind him. The pigs follow him. The calm hog leads them into the narrow

labyrinth of a corridor. In a dark spot in the corridor, where the pigs walk single file one after another, the calm hog suddenly jumps off to the side and disappears. Nooses then spring upon the pigs that have been following him, and the pigs fly up on metal cables to a conveyor belt, to their death. And the calm hog in his calmness proceeds to a new railway car to calm down a new drove of animals!

This is no longer an American theme – or is it an American one!? – but if we return to the theme of American milk, then we can say that such milk landed in the mouth of the person who wishes to drink a little milk taken straight from a cow’s udder.

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All of this – the milk, and the pigs, and the radio equipment – all of this is for the benefit of those who have climbed over the fences of the dollar.

Ah, the dollar! . . . oh, American individualism! Eh, these millions of people upon whom the jets of compressed air blow from below at Coney Island! Well, it’s New York!

By the way, New York is actually one floor lower than is indicated by the numbers: there isn’t a thirteenth floor in a single New York building, nor is there an apartment or room numbered thirteen. From the roof of a semi-skyscraper, I saw the Woolworth skyscraper, the fifth highest building in New York. This is the very same Woolworth who set up ten-cent and twenty-cent stores all across the country. In these stores, any item costs ten cents or twenty cents; this is the standard of American individualism. Ten cents for a spoon, a notebook, a handkerchief, a pair of socks, a pen, a cup, a glass, a toothbrush, and so on, and so on, and so forth. And a mechanical fortune-telling device – one that predicts the future, constructed after the fashion of a vending machine on the passenger platform at a railway station – it, too, costs ten cents! Vending machines such as these sell cigarettes, matches, postage stamps, chocolate, peppermint candies, *chuing-gom* [chewing gum] (Americans chew so much of this *chuing-gom* – that is to say, chewing rubber – in the underground subways and at factories run by the non-smoking Ford), and so on, and so on, and so forth, mass consumer items on the order of American individualism. The mechanical fortune-teller that predicts the future, supported by the absence of thirteenth floors, repeated to me what had been predicted by my American girl friend, a semi-famous actress, who every two weeks used to go eat breakfast at a Gypsy restaurant on Fifth Avenue, where a Gypsy fortune-telling session about the future was included in the price of *lonch* [lunch]! . . .

And all of this – the mechanical and the Gypsy fortune-telling, the absence of thirteenth floors – all of this rests upon:

“Eat more! Drink more! More! more! more! Go blind from reading advertisements! Suffocate from inhaling the gas! Go deaf from hearing the roar of the city! Choke on automobiles and radios! . . .”

All the while one can lyrically reason that the city, together with the people who inhabit it, has gone crazy, has reared up on its hind legs, in order to crawl away to nowhere and to inhumanity after having muddled all sorts of perspectives.

15

And everything for Americans is a sports competition. Moreover, such concepts – a sports competition, a record, *o'kei* – have various meanings. The garments that Americans wear – they are a sports competition (and a record, and *o'kei*!). The automobiles that Americans drive – they are *o'kei*, they are a sports competition. In every vacant lot, in New York and all over America – a golf course the size of a ping-pong table is a sports competition, just as is true of boxing, and tennis, and football, they are all *o'kei*, they are all records. In Chicago, on top of a skyscraper, a man hung on a pole for an entire month: he ate, drank, slept, and lived on the pole – this was a sports competition, this was a record. In Chicago, at some dance hall, from the day of its opening, some people danced for two thousand hours without a break – this was a sports competition, this was a record (and *publisiti*, of course), this was *o'kei*. Two young guys dragged an automobile ten paces away from their home, without any gas, and then they drove in it for two thousand miles, without buying even a single drop of gas, by begging for a liter of gas from the people they encountered along the way – this is a sports competition, this is a record. This was written about in the newspapers. Lindbergh got into an airplane, without telling anyone, and flew it across the ocean – this is a sports competition. One of Lindbergh's colleagues, who envied Lindbergh, climbed into an airplane and dangled above New York inside it for three weeks: he ate and drank there, and they poured gas and oil from another plane into his, while in flight, to refill his tank – this is a sports competition and this is a record, even a world record; this is *o'kei*, the newspapers were going crazy over it. Footwear is a sports competition. Being blasted from below by jets of compressed air at Coney Island – this is a sports competition. What a remarkably sporting country this is! Everything here is a sports competition, even gangsterism.

And there are so very many American flags being displayed! In California, in New York, in Santa Fe, in New Orleans, in Buffalo – on trains, on steamers, on the streets, on the wrapping paper used in restaurants, in store windows, in clubs, in the middle of fields, on mountain peaks – there are flags, flags, and more flags! Flags are continuously being displayed, just as if it were one long, continuous holiday, a self-perpetuating celebration of the galloping *shtandart* [banner] and *standart* [standard]. There are even flags being displayed in cemeteries!

There are so many American flags being displayed that an afterthought is beginning to creep in: has the American nation perhaps been replaced by American flags? After all, one could construct a paradox and maintain that in America there are no Americans. We would do well to consider the Indians to be native Americans. But they were either massacred by the Saxons or assimilated by the Spaniards. And those Indians who are currently residing in the U.S.A. are not considered American citizens! The American Indians are not even citizens of the American republic of the United States! The British are the progenitors of America, but in America they dislike England above all other countries, they have disliked

it ever since the days of the War of Independence. When a man like this arrives in Paris or Moscow, it's obvious from five meters away that he's an American: he's a clumsy man, a man who is ill at ease and a bit embarrassed because of his awkwardness, a good-natured man, and one who smells not only of French cologne, but also of dollars. Go ahead and get into a conversation with him: is he not a Kotofson?! The city of New Orleans is an easy-going French city, its streets are named after generals of the French Revolution, and on these streets one hears French being spoken. There are more Italians in New York than in Rome, and the largest Italian newspaper in the world is published not in Rome, but in New York. The state of New Mexico, by its very name, tells us that it's a Mexican state. Catholics, Mexicans, and Indians live in this state, and they speak Spanish there. The writer, Theodore Dreiser, an American classic, used to tell me that he considers himself a German. During my very first few days here in America, I was for several hours a son of Saint Patrick. The Irish have an apostle by that name, and the Irish consider themselves his children. On his feast day, the Irish *petite bourgeoisie* walked down Fifth Avenue with flags and songs. In the evening, the Irish *grosse bourgeoisie* – Patrick's children, capitalists, lawyers, engineers, Roman Catholic priests, judges, prosecutors – held a celebratory dinner together. I accidentally turned up there at the end of the dinner. One millionaire, I forget his name, shook me by the shoulders, at the same time holding onto them for support. Try as he might, he could not focus the pupils of his eyes on my glasses and he said: "They tell me that you're Pilnyak . . . You have a head on your shoulders! . . . You have a head on your shoulders, and I have millions of dollars. Let's get the two of them together!"

The dual citizenship of Americans has a series of consequences. In New York, and all across America, you will find French, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, British, German, Italian, Polish, and Russian restaurants. But you won't find any American restaurants. For an American restaurant, you have to go to Tokyo, to Shanghai, to Paris (to the Ritz Hotel there), to London (to the Ritz Hotel there), and to other capitals in the world that have a Ritz Hotel, even to the raunchy, tasteless Grand Hotel, the former Bolshaia Moskovskaia Hotel, in Moscow. After all, cafeterias and mechanical politeness – these are the only American culinary inventions. But Americans do eat *greip-frut* [grapefruit] in the English manner. Americans invented the ice cream bar, *eskimopai* [Eskimo Pie]. But New Yorkers decide before dinner that they should eat some French asparagus today, and that tomorrow they should pickle themselves with Spanish spices and tequila, a Mexican vodka made out of the sap from either the cactus or else the agave plant, the most bitter vodka in the world. Dual citizenship helps, of course, to promote American Nietzscheanism. At the Ford automotive plants, they place workers of various nationalities right next to each other on the assembly line so that they will talk less to each other while working. "Since I'm Irish, to hell with an Italian! I couldn't care less about him!" One must always bear American dual citizenship in mind when it's a question about everyday life. And by no means is it worthwhile to give preference to the English. American nationalism arises when people start talking about the dollar, because – it's the American flag!

Everything is the dollar! And everything is in the dollar! You have one person who has graduated from college and another person who reads in the newspapers only about murders. The first person – the college graduate – earns only a dollar an hour, while at the

same time the second person earns five dollars an hour. The person who earns five dollars an hour is the one who is held in esteem. The first person graduated from college, whereas the second person is a gangster. The second person makes more money and is more highly respected than the first person. Educated people, people who are engaged in the humanities, even civil servants, are people of second class quality. If you can't become a *mei-moneishchik* [money-maker], well, then, you should go become a student at the university. A good golfer – what is a good scholar compared to him! College students need to be asked not what department they're enrolled in, but what sports team – football, basketball, or hockey – they're playing on. Studying theories is nonsense, if one can't convert them right away into dollars.

And patriots! They are in ecstasy over themselves, in ecstasy over their country (even if the fathers of half of all Americans were not even born in America)! America is the pinnacle of humankind and of civilization, it's the crown of creation! And Americans are in no way cosmopolitans. "What the heck is Europe or Asia? Athens, where is that located? . . . in Mexico? Moscow, oh, yes, that, it seems, is in the state of Kentucky, right? Ulysses Voltaire – that's the name of the cooper from over on Second Avenue, isn't it?" But, in general, this isn't important: America has not been outdone or surpassed by anybody or anything, anywhere! And it cannot be outdone or surpassed! By the way, if Europeans over there invent anything new, then it's only for the sake of America! All the rest is nonsense! Our American flag is being displayed – even in cemeteries!

By the way, if you listen to some American citizens, it turns out that everything that has been written above bears no relation to America. Even New York, it turns out, bears no relation to America. One must search for America, it turns out, in the Midwest. It turns out that America – just as was true a hundred years ago, so it is true today – lives in a democracy, in Puritanism, in freedom of speech, of conscience, and of religious worship, in fearsome virtue, diligence, and chastity. On holidays, people attend church; moreover, several churches are built in such a universal way, in the name of freedom of worship, that religious subdivisions are installed within them – Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, Jewish, and so on. On Mondays, it is said, America washes its linen. It lives according to a fearsome sexual morality and protects this morality by means of such laws as, for example, one whereby people who are not related to each other and people who are not husband and wife cannot cross together (in an automobile, a carriage, a boat) from the state of New York into the state of New Jersey: that is, they cannot cross the Hudson River, otherwise they will be arrested for adultery. And a husband and wife have a strict timetable to follow in establishing the status of their conjugal obligations, which must be registered a year in advance. America, they say, is inhabited by democrats, when the worker at a Ford automotive plant can tap Ford on the shoulder and say: "*Khello* [Hello], Henry!" (as regards Ford, he is the most inaccessible person in America, living in a fortress and receiving almost no visitors, but once a year, it's true, he does appear among his workers, when his co-workers must shout out to him: "*Khello*, Henry!"). It doesn't matter, they'll say, how you earn your money. When people in the evening are sitting on a bench near their home or are at a club or a restaurant – everyone is equal. Everyone greets one another. And out in the country, the wife of the cooper knows what kind of chicken they're having today for dinner at the home of the sheriff's wife.

And, truly, I can testify to it, all of this is justified up to the present time, not only for the Midwest, but even for New York. Now here, now there, the past century of American Puritanism suddenly crawls out of the slumber of times, and leads to bewilderment, because from the automobile of contemporary American velocities you suddenly find yourself immersed in the slowness – forged in iron – of the wagons of the pioneers. This is what confuses a great many people and muddles a great number of the nodes of their brain. This is what lights candles and consigns intellectuals to build cottages in the style of the peasant huts of woodcutters. This is what ships peasant dresses from the cities to the countryside, and not the other way around. This is what brought me into contact with a certain woman in a Bronx park, in the rain . . .

16

This is what brought me into contact with some of my fellow Russian countrymen, who are now Americans, and with Aimée McPherson in Los Angeles, California.

I had read this song:

Song 91

“The adulteress in Sodom,
She lives in Babylon;
She sits on a throne;
She holds a cup in her hands;
Full of abomination from her lips.
She sits, reproaches, and
Wishes to beat them all unmercifully,
Holy God, our Sacred One,
Take revenge upon her in our presence,
So that our eyes can see
What we were waiting for:
Pour Your cup of anger upon her,
Extirpate her from the face of the earth;
Lead her off to the precipice . . .”

And so on.

“Glory to God and His dominion.
For ever and ever. Amen!”

I read this song in a book titled *A Zionist Songbook of the Centennial Period of the Christian Religion of the “Milk-Drinkers” and the Spiritual “Jumpers” in America*. First Edition in Los Angeles 1930. This little book was published in a very nice edition bound with a leather cover. In the section titled “From the Publisher,” I learned the following:

“Having embarked upon the first edition of the *Zionist Songbook*, let us explain. The songs and tunes contained here are divided into the categories of mournful, triumphant, and intermediate. They are to be sung in a way that corresponds to the circumstances of one’s life: in the presence of suffering, of a sorrowful condition, they should be sung with bended knee, uplifted arms, and tearful lamentation; while in the presence of well-being, of a joyful mood, triumphant songs should be sung with a spiritual dance, put simply, with formless jumping. Such chants provide reinforcement to those who are weeping and consolation to those who are exulting. When the people in a congregation weep, pray, give thanks to their Lord, and praise Him, the chants, with their glorification of the saints, the extreme degree of rapturous exaltation, reaching the point of ecstasy, of self-abandonment, calls forth a spiritual dance.”

I was visiting the home of these fellow Russian countrymen of mine, who are now Americans.

Twilight in subtropical locales changes over to night precipitously. We had to drive through the center of Los Angeles, drive across railroad overpasses, and lose our way on side streets. And – Holy Mother Russia! – beyond the palisades there were white peasant huts of the type constructed in Caucasian and Caucasian-Russian communities. At the crossroad there was a Russian Orthodox – forgive me, Lord! – puddle, as in the Gogol story, but above the puddle there was an American street light. Two women were standing beneath the street light, two very stout women who were wearing white dresses that looked like night shirts and white kerchiefs. We asked them in Russian: “Where is the devotional meeting house?” Both of them answered right away, in an affable manner and in the melodious voices of Russian peasants. They explained where it was located. A high-axle Model-T Ford drew level with us and stopped. A man, with a beard as thick as a forest, dressed in a white Russian shirt, asked: “And who, brothers, might you happen to be?”

We explained, telling him that one of us had just recently arrived from Moscow and wanted to attend the prayer service. The Ford drove off ahead of us and showed us the way there. Riding behind the Ford, I reflected on the fact that we had to come halfway around the world to meet with fellow Russian countrymen and to see firsthand a worship service of the religious sectarians known as the “Jumpers!” But I remembered that in Berlin, at the American consulate, they had suggested to me that I should believe in God. And I wanted to see the “Jumpers” not only because they were Russians, but also because they were – Americans. We drove up to the building, which resembled a village schoolhouse in Russia, climbed up to the terrace, and went inside a large room. There were about a hundred and fifty people inside this room, which was lit up by electric lights. To our left, there was a table standing in the corner, covered with a white tablecloth, on which lay a Bible. Rows of benches, perpendicular to each other, radiated out from that table. On the benches that ran from the table to the far end of the room sat the women; on the benches that ran from the table to the door sat the men. Both the men and the women were dressed in white. The women wore their hair bound with a white kerchief. The men wore very bushy beards. The sight of beards in today’s America is a wondrous and marvelous thing. There were no

men nor women there who were younger than thirty-five years of age. The women, without exception, looked as if they had been handpicked for their stoutness. Alexander Brailovsky, who had brought us there, taught us how to bow in greeting them. We greeted them, and they responded in kind. I was scrutinizing the electricity with the greatest attention: the “Jumpers,” as is well known, satisfy the divine requirements in America, and the American authorities have placed upon the “Jumpers” just one divine condition: not to extinguish the lights during their ecstatic ritual, when they are working themselves up into a religious frenzy. They need to do that with the full electricity on.

Around the table, beyond where the tablecloth ended, sat the elders – thick-set, solidly-built old-timers – and they were carrying on a spiritual conversation, turning to the moderator with questions or for a word from him to add:

“And so, look here, my dear Ivan Karpovich, light of my life, I had a dream today. I am driving along in my car, then I park my car for a short while near my plantation, in compliance with all the rules. And suddenly I see that my Marfa is walking along with a colored man, they are speaking with each other, and the Negro is holding a torch in his hand, and the Negro is looking rigorously at how I have parked my car.”

To translate this sentence into Russian, one needs to make the following corrections: *kar* [car] means an automobile; *parkovat'sia* [to park] means to leave one's car in a designated place, in compliance with the law; *plantatsiia* [plantation] means a field; *kolernyi* [colored] means a Negro; *spikaiut* [speak] means that they are talking with each other. The old man spoke unctuously, mumbling melodiously.

Ivan Karpovich smoothed out his beard and then uttered with heart-felt pathos:

“Mm, yes, this, of course, is a dream . . . In the Holy Scripture, it is said . . . Mm, yes, the colored man, this, of course, is the devil Beelzebub . . . And the torch in his hand . . . Mm, yes . . .”

One of the old women, who was sitting on the women's bench, propped her cheek on her hand and, in a grief-stricken voice, inserted her word:

“And the dorch, please notice, is burning with a red flyme, as if it were an oil-petroleum dorch, and what I would like to say, and what I do say is . . . I don't remember . . .”

Ivan Karpovich uttered with heart-felt pathos:

“You do not remember, sister, what you were talking about? Mm, yes, but I will make it known to you. This Beelzebub, he carried this torch to darken the eyes of spiritual Christians. You need to jump a little, Marfa, as one should jump . . . Mm, yes . . .”

Another old man started up another spiritual conversation:

“And I wanted to have a little chat with you – one of my neighbors borrowed ten dollars from me on credit. I won’t reveal his name in view of the fact that he’s a member of our spiritual brotherhood. He needs to buy some silage. He promised to pay me back at this prayer service, but up to this time he still hasn’t given it back . . . Did he act spiritually or not?”

Ivan Karpovich, again after smoothing out his beard, uttered with heart-felt pathos as before: “Mm, yes, this is, of course . . . in the Holy Scripture it is said . . . Mm, yes . . .”

They chatted spiritually in this manner on five more topics. A crowd of people had formed. Each new arrival greeted the other people with a bow from the waist. When the spiritual topics had run dry and a crowd of people had gathered near the elders, Ivan Karpovich read a page from the Holy Scripture in Old Church Slavonic. This was a page of such utter nonsense, wrenched from out of the Middle Ages and revived in the American contentions that America exists today, just as it did a hundred years ago, as a Puritan country, washing its linen on Mondays, believing in any God one wishes, and dwelling in chastity. It’s still a country where it’s forbidden to drive from the state of New York to the state of New Jersey with a woman who is not one’s wife. Ivan Karpovich was reading the page rhythmically, at times gasping for some reason, at times getting agitated for some reason. And when he had finished reading, I saw that those who had gathered here had already been brought to a state of exaltation. “Let us sing a little, brothers,” Ivan Karpovich shouted out.

The table and the benches were moved aside, the people stood up, and the men and the women, after lining up in two groups that were at right angles to each other, started to sing:

“Peace onto you, brothers and sisters,
Why have you come here?
Spirit, spirit, spirit,
Why have you come here! . . .

Why have you come here?
You have endured much suffering.
Spirit, spirit, spirit,
You have endured much suffering! . . .

You have endured much suffering.
What troubles have you borne.
Spirit, spirit, spirit,
What troubles have you borne! . . .

What troubles have you borne.
Did you trouble yourself about
Whether you avow the spirit to our fathers?”

The song was very lengthy. I am omitting three quarters of it here and giving you the ending in abbreviated form to illustrate just how stupid it was:

“We do not know what we should do,
On what ship we should sail,
But we will take a seat on the boat,
Each of us will become a servant to God,
And Our Lord is one,
We will render glory onto Him.
Glory and dominion onto God,
Forever and ever. Amen.”

I have to give them credit: they sang ecstatically, rapturously, fanatically. The “Jumpers” sang a cacophony of completely senseless verbal compositions. They began with slow rhythms and then after that they kept speeding up the rhythms continuously. By the end of the song, it was no longer a song, but a hysterical, hypnotic vicious circle of rhythms and howls. It had reached the point where it was incomprehensible to me how these people had enough breath left inside them to sing these words, words that were closing up, retreating into hysteria and hypnosis, all the while speeding up, all the while growing in ecstasy.

The first person to start jumping was the same one who had been expounding about the ten dollars that had not been given back to him on time by his neighbor. This jumping was simply terrible, and it was falling out of the rhythm, and this . . .

. . . a bearded man who was about fifty years old, a broad-shouldered peasant, with a black beard and dark eyes, wearing hobnailed jackboots, distorted his face to the point of absurdity and suddenly started to jump. He was jumping up very high and, it seemed, was jumping in order to make a hole in the floor, since he was making such a tremendous effort to batter it with his hobnailed jackboots. He was squatting down on his haunches, throwing back his arms, flying up into the air and wildly banging his heels against the floor. He was doing all of this faster and faster. He started jumping while facing one of the elders. He cried out, interweaving his experience of the revelation of the Holy Spirit, which had descended upon him, with the words of the song:

“Spirit, spirit, spirit! . . . and who was it that took those ten dollars? . . . I won’t tell you! I won’t tell you! . . . But we will take a seat on the boat! . . . Spirit, spirit, spirit! . . . I won’t tell you! . . .”

He fell to the floor for a minute, rolled around feebly there, and then lifted himself up, looking pale and not comprehending anything. Then he went back to where he had been standing and continued to sing. By this time, two other men and a woman were jumping. The woman’s kerchief had slipped off her head, her hair had become disheveled, and her white shirt-and-skirt outfit had fluffed up above her knees.

Truly, linen is washed on Mondays! Did I really need to travel halfway around the globe, when I was upside down facing Moscow, in order to witness such delirium, which was blessed by American Puritanism?! To see these jumping people was simply shameful.

The Middle Ages had gone on a rampage, and it was shameful to see it because it was human beings that were jumping, distorting their faces and their bodies. When I was leaving the prayer service, one of the people who had been praying there exited behind me. He asked me in a simple, home-spun way, “Would you happen to be the one from Moscow who wanted to visit our prayer service?” I answered in the affirmative. My interlocutor said:

“I read about you in the newspapers. So how are things back in our homeland? . . . Allow me to invite you to come over to my place after the prayer service to drink some tea. Please don’t refuse. Please tell me about the U.S.S.R. We sent some peasant messengers to Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin in Moscow. We’re planning to return. Only there’s one thing – jumping – that we will refuse to give up.”

I went to this man’s home to drink tea with him. He was a canonic Russian peasant with a canonic kulak lifestyle. The only difference was that along with the cow in the backyard there stood a Ford, instead of a horse, and instead of the Russian *nyet* [no] he used the English *nou* [no]. The “Jumpers” came to America about twenty or twenty-five years ago and took up residence in places that were not yet settled. Los Angeles at that time was itself only slightly larger than the village that they – the “Milk-Drinkers” – had lived in. They took up farming. Farming now is on their back burner; their main source of income now comes from dealing in old clothes as ragmen, as well as collecting trash in Los Angeles. This is a business where the “Milk-Drinkers” enjoy a monopoly. The “Milk-Drinkers” now – quite naturally – are Americans, citizens of the country of Puritans.

It was likewise in Los Angeles – the City of Angels – that I first saw Aimée McPherson. I needed to go to the train station to meet Al Lewin, my supervisor. When I arrived at the station, I saw that there was a throng of people, filmmakers, waiting at the fences, there was a lot of commotion, and there were American flags. There were flowers, automobiles, a very well-dressed crowd, and, primarily, young people, people under the age of thirty. Aimée McPherson was arriving.

“Who is this Aimée McPherson?” I asked. “A movie star?”

“No,” they answered angrily. “A saint!”

A California saint was arriving. I ensconced myself with some of the filmmakers on the roof of an automobile so that I could get a good view. The saint had gone on a trip, travelling across Europe. In America, billionaires can order separate railway cars for themselves, and thus on the threshold of just such a railway car there appeared a woman, attired in the most fashionable dress, whose age – due to the presence of so many available colors on hand – it was impossible to determine, either seventeen or thirty-seven, and who

was very beautiful. They started to shower her with flowers. The filmmakers started to work. Out from behind her, and out from behind the flowers, a man thrust himself forward. One could see right away that he was her *souteneur* and her lover. The woman uttered something, and the crowd repeated her words so that they could be heard from my perch on the roof of the car: “Stay eternally young, my Christians!”

Behind this woman and behind her *souteneur*, suitcases and round bandboxes for hats were coming out of the railway car. The woman and her *souteneur* seated themselves in a Rolls-Royce, where they found peace and quiet. I scrutinized her from close up: she was a beautiful woman, already a bit worn, painted with make-up, like actors in grease paint. The crowd was going wild, everyone was happy, and everyone was glad. The banner is galloping off.

I was trying to make some sense out of all this – what was going on!? – and I couldn’t make any sense out of it. I had gone to a prayer service in honor of the arrival of Aimée McPherson. So let us say that a temple had been constructed in the style of Hellenic temples – Hellenism of the kind that accords with American ideas of it! Everything was covered with flowers. I don’t know how best to express this: was it an altar or a stage? Onto the stage stepped this selfsame Aimée McPherson, smartly attired in a new outfit, and she enjoined her audience, first of all, to kiss one another. After that, she sang a little. After that, Aimée began to talk to them about her trip to Europe, about God, about Parisian fashions, and about the divine – à la Ritz – mores and manners there. So let us say that the temple was packed with people aged twenty-five to thirty-five years old: clerks, store salesmen and saleswomen, domestic servants. What’s this!? Igor Severianin in a skirt, I suppose!? This woman, who had once hidden herself away at her lover’s home and then later announced to the world that she had been kidnapped – she said that she spent three days in the desert, as it was reported in the newspapers – and that she managed to escape and save herself only by the will of Christ. This woman argues that the most important moral good in life consists in beauty, which Jesus Christ categorically demanded of people. Therefore, men should comb their hair in the right way, wear the most fashionable suits and ties, while women cannot in any way lag behind in fashions and without fail – for the sake of Christ – must wear make-up, powder themselves, and shorten or lengthen the hems on their skirts to the extent that fashion and their strength allow. This woman argues that – in the name of Christ – everyone ought to hug and kiss one another as often as possible, inasmuch as this is beautiful. Does this woman have a legalized lover, in imitation of Christ, or something? And everyone ought to do this! Above the temple, an American flag is flying!

I have spoken about Miss McPherson in addition to the “Milk-Drinkers,” the spiritual “Jumpers.”

During the same time period, I was walking once along the embankment at Santa Monica beneath the palm trees. “Boris Andreyevich!” I look all around: it’s Peretz Hirshbein.

I first met this wonderful man, a Jewish writer, in Japan. I once wrote a story about him that is called “Deer City Nara.” When I first met him, what astounded me most about this

man was the fact that he was traveling all the time. He had traveled around the globe, going to Africa, Australia, Asia, America. Just before I met him in Japan, he had been traveling for an entire year already, and we agreed that we would meet again in Moscow in two years. He was supposed to go from Japan to China, to India, to Palestine, and then on to Moscow. I asked him at that time why he traveled so much, why he had such a burning desire to see things? He answered that he travels not because he wants to see things, but because he does not want to see what he has already seen. We greeted each other and then we went over to the place where I was staying. We both were surprised at the extraordinary serendipity of our encounters. That evening we went to visit some of the young members of the new American generation of spiritual “Jumpers.”

And this was a truly excellent spectacle, because I got to see how the people were jumping. This was not taking place in a devotional meeting house but in a school. Young lads and young ladies were sitting on benches, dressed and coiffed like Americans. They were mainly speaking English. Their bearded fathers, sitting on the rear benches, were peeking out with looks on their faces that indicated incomprehension. A young man in gym gear gave a talk in English, occasionally inserting citations from Slavonic-Evangelical texts into it. An elder delivered some homilies of the kind that we have already spoken about – the spiritual conversations among the old men at the meeting house. So his speech to the young people prompted some giggles and snickering from the audience, especially in those places in the speech that were particularly stupid. A girl spoke, again in English, reading from a sheet of paper and getting terribly nervous. It was a classroom composition about the God of the “Jumpers.” There was no mention of any dance. So this was the kind of public debate they could have in college when the parents are in attendance. Thus we sat for an hour and a half, and then the kids streamed out of the classroom in droves, ready for some relaxation. The second generation of “Jumpers” – they are already Americans who speak Russian poorly, they are athletes, and they are young people who attend high school and college.

What is being written down here destroys my contention that in America there are no Americans. It turns out that there are indeed Americans: they are those young people who were gathered together beneath American flags. I took what I had seen among those young “Jumpers” as evidence of this – Joe rejoiced at this discovery of mine – and suddenly Joe and I saw that Peretz Hirshbein was very saddened by what we had observed, saddened to a greater extent than were the “Jumper” elders.

We had a conversation on the drive home and once we arrived back at the hotel, where we arrived after midnight. Our conversation was about the following. Joe was claiming that the second generation of Jews in America are no longer Jews, but Americans, that Jewish newspapers are dying with every passing day, and that Jewish writers in America – in this, the wealthiest of countries – are compelled to publish their works in Poland. Joe and Peretz are writers, both of them Jews. Joe considers it right and proper that he write in English. Joe contends that the Jewish question only exists in those places where the persecution of Jews exists. Where this persecution doesn't exist, Jews cease to be Jews, becoming Americans instead. And this is no accident. Therefore, Jewish publishing houses that publish the works of Jewish writers, and of Peretz in particular, are located in Poland, one

of the most backward countries in the West. Joe considers the assimilation of the Jews to be not only a natural development, but also a positive one, and he maintains that it's not important to him whether a person is a Hellene or a Hebrew: what is important is that this person is a laborer. Joe also maintains that the Jewish question is a remnant of the Middle Ages that should disappear in the future, and that there is nothing terrible about that. Look, he says, here is Pilnyak: he's a person of German descent who is a Russian writer, he belongs to that group. And it's a very good thing that the children of spiritual "Jumpers" don't jump and that they feel themselves to be Americans, that they're interested in the Komsomol. Peretz could not deny these facts. Peretz became very nervous. He spoke about the glorious history of the Jewish people and could not fathom why one should preserve the history of the English or the Russian people. He also could not fathom why one should preserve the history of the English or the Russian language, and he claimed that the Jewish language should be destroyed. Both Joe and Peretz looked through the fates of the Jewish colonies in the world. Suddenly Peretz's image lit up in front of me, the image of this tragic person and writer. I recalled my conversation with him in Kyoto, when he told me that he travels around the world not in order to see things, but in order not to see what has already been seen. This man, who has placed an American passport in his pocket, travels the world to find a Jewish ghetto – a Jewry – that is passing away, to preserve his reader and his people, who are leaving him. The Jewish ghetto – Jewry – in America is dying with this second generation, just as the religious practices of the spiritual "Jumpers" are dying with their second generation.

I am wrong, of course: capitalist America gives precedence to throwing off those medieval hoops of nationality and social class that restrict people (I will have more to say in this regard later, when I speak about Indians and Negroes). America befores and masks the recasting of people into social classes, when there are no Hellenes and no Hebrews and no Russian "Jumpers," but there are laborers and there are those lazy do-nothings who lounge about at the expense of those who do the toiling. This is at the threshold. But meanwhile we have the American flag instead of the American nation, and the banner, the *shtandart* (or standard), is galloping off! . . .

Aimée McPherson, it turns out, is a Baptist.

And, thus, the American flag!

In New York City, on the corner of Second Avenue and Tenth Street, there is an Anglican church, where once a week, following the priest's sermon, half-naked women perform various spiritual dances. This is done in God's name, as the local clergyman who thought up these dances assured us. Others believe that these dances were produced in order to increase attendance at this temple of God, since church attendance on this earth is generally falling off. In any event, the police did not protest at all against these instances of nude dancing, since God requires them. The only ones who were outraged were the clergymen at the neighboring churches. The dance temple attracted no fewer visitors than did any burlesque show, the public disrobing of women in America that also goes by the name of "revue" or "follies."

I have recounted how religious faith is permitted. And I have recounted how dual citizenship is disappearing: first of all, in nations where people were oppressed in their semi-medieval homelands. The people in these nations were gathered up under the American flag, under the jubilation of American democracy, under the dollar.

17

By the way, if you listen to some Americans, even New York, along with its dance temples, has nothing to do with America, neither do “Jumpers” and Aimée McPherson. They will tell you that America, the U.S.A., is a puritanical, orthodox, law-abiding country, where laws come first. To confirm this truth, I can recount for you, as an example, an episode that took place in Detroit. The American city of Detroit is separated from the Canadian city of Windsor by a bridge. The automobile I was riding in crossed the bridge from Canada into the U.S.A. and drove farther, abiding by all the American traffic regulations. A policeman suspected that our driver was a *butleger* [bootlegger], a dealer in contraband alcohol. The policeman on his motorcycle followed us behind our vehicle. Our automobile was traveling in compliance with all the traffic rules. The policeman finally lost his patience and stopped our car; he conducted a search of the vehicle and found several cases of whiskey inside it. And – in keeping with the court’s verdict – the alcohol was returned to the driver. The righteous American judge ruled that since the automobile was being driven in compliance with all the traffic rules, the policeman, consequently, had no right to arrest the driver. And since the policeman had no right to arrest the driver, then the court would not know anything at all about the whiskey. And the court ruled especially that everything that had been found inside the automobile should be put back into the automobile. It goes without saying that the law prevailed. As was already mentioned above, when a couple is crossing the Hudson River from the state of New Jersey in a vehicle, it’s required that a non-husband and a non-wife be arrested. This law exists, just like in the state of Utah there exists a law about polygamy. But Americans go to the state of Nevada – to the city of Reno – to get divorced. Divorce is not allowed at all in the state of South Carolina, not for any reason. In the state of New York, one must provide bedroom evidence of adultery on the part of a spouse for a divorce to be granted. And in the state of Nevada, nothing has to be provided for a divorce to be granted, aside from the desire to be divorced and proof of citizenship. New Yorkers and people from other states travel to Reno, the capital of the state of Nevada, to get divorced. Formerly, one had to live there for three months and one day in order for that to happen. But now, on the strength of the rapid pace of life, only three weeks and one day are required. Those people who live in the state for three continuous weeks, without leaving, automatically become citizens of the state. On the day after they acquire the rights of citizenship, they can be granted a divorce. The period of residency has been reduced to three weeks due to the competition they face from another divorce-granting state, I forget what the name of that state is, where the innkeepers campaigned for and secured liberal divorce laws. What casinos and hotels they have in Reno! Members of the bourgeoisie, while waiting for a divorce, get to rest and relax on a vacation! The law, as you see, is in force.

All the time that I was in America, I would keep dreaming the same dream: all the time, I wanted – with my imagination and my knowledge – to stop those ships that were carrying

the pioneers to America, to stop a sailing vessel with people on board like those who had grown beards and were sitting at table in saloons in the light of smoky oil lamps. For they were coming to America with one single desire – to live well, to live well in every way possible, each according to his own understanding of what that entailed – and they were coming to America from all corners of the globe, fleeing from the oppression of the European authorities of that time, fleeing from hunger and the lack of civil rights. These people were sectarians, brigands, adventurers, dreamers. One can gauge the negative aspects of European history by the waves of immigrants entering into the American population. Time has incarnated the good life in dollars.

18

Ah, oh, ooh, eh, America!

We must return to New York to put things in their right place. Just now I used the interjections “ah, oh, ooh” – just as I had in my first few letters home from America. And just as I had in the first few pages I wrote of this novel to convey how America has gone crazy.

In one of my novels, I once had an image that I filled with my new sense impressions in New York. These sense impressions that I have of New York are indispensable for me in describing all of America, all of the U.S.A.

In that novel, I wrote:

“ . . . at the burial mounds in our country, they sometimes dig up the stone images of old women – for an archeologist, this old woman is a thing of magnificent beauty. But for a very tiny insect that crawls across the cheek of this beauty, the only things it will see are clods of dirt, stone, and dust. One needs to stand to the full height of that beauty in order to see her.”

Indeed, we admire some beautiful lady, we see how everything about her is beautiful, how everything is in its right place. But the infusorium that at this very moment is crawling across the cheek of this lady – from her mouth to her eye – this infusorium fell into the crater of her nostril, dangled above the red sands of the Arizona desert, which is called the cheek, and saw the palmaceous plantings of the eyelashes. The emotional line of these stone images of the old woman and of the beautiful, cosmetically painted lady do not coincide with the emotional line of my sense impressions of New York. Nevertheless . . .

From the sixtieth floor, the hundredth floor of New York, we see an astonishing, indescribable, unusual, sinister, ominously beautiful city, a city that signifies the triumph of industry, the amplitude of human ability. Neither Tatlin alone, nor a single European urbanist poet, ever dreamed of something so extraordinary, so majestic, so grandiose; they never dreamed of such constructions, such lines; they never dreamed of something so inimitable, so singular in the entire world. For a European, New York, seen from the height of its skyscrapers, is more like a dream than a reality. And it's a dream that cannot

be compared with anything else. After all, from childhood there remains the memory of a fantasy, the Biblical recollection of the city of Babylon, which none of us has ever seen. And it is precisely this feature of never having been seen that makes New York resemble Babylon. New York is a grandiose city that lacks humanity: it is an inhuman, sinister, astonishing construction. From the top of the Empire State Building (or from the gargoyles of the Chrysler Building), one can see the ocean, the Hudson River, the mountains of New Jersey – they are your brothers. New York from the tenth to the sixteenth story (and, on average, it is a ten-story city, having a wide array of three-story districts) – this New York lies at your feet, in the smoke, the fog, and the hum of the streets below; it lies far beneath you. And standing next to you in the clouds – and sometimes above the clouds – are your skyscraper-brothers, who are equal to you in rights. In the distance, the skyscrapers celebrate the majesty of Wall Street, an inhuman beauty, as an equal brother and a lord.

A person standing on the roof of the Empire State Building, a person buttressed by the Empire State Building, is a person standing at the level of the – inhuman! – beauty and singularity of New York.

But if a person is walking along the streets of New York (walking or riding in an auto, along the second [elevated] level of streets, or in the subways), New York is a horrible city, the most horrible city in the world, it doesn't matter whether you're going down Park Avenue or through the Bowery. This city is deafened by an awful din. This city breathes not air, but gas. This city has been deceived by the seductive, prostitute-like beauty of electric advertisements. The streets of this city, which are without a single leaf, are flooded with trash. This city has been transformed into some kind of enormous kerosene stove of soot and suffocation. This city has been driven mad as it climbed ever higher, piling iron, concrete, stone, and steel upon itself, crushing itself. This is a city in which it's impossible for a person to live, just as it's impossible in this city for a person to ride in an automobile, since automobiles are forced to drive not along the streets, but on top of one another, despite the fact that in this city the largest number of automobiles and the widest assortment of makes and models of automobiles in the world have been collected together.

Individualism! People walking and riding along the streets of New York, people enjoying themselves by listening to the radio, going to movies, burlesque shows, Coney Island. These people are the tiny creatures that crawl across the magnificent beauty of the stone statue of an old woman, dug up out of an excavation of very, very ancient and very primitive burial mounds!

To this city belongs the disgrace of the Bowery, the only street in the world filled with members of the *lumpenproletariat*, with *tremps* [tramps] who have come tumbling down with the collapse of the dollar (and there are more of these *lumpens* – the type portrayed so memorably in Gorky's works – in America, of course, than in China). In shops on the Bowery, they sell the shoes that have been removed from the corpses of homeless derelicts in the morgues. On the Bowery, there are flophouses, but people there sleep out on the asphalt sidewalks, placing trash under themselves – newspapers that they have picked up off these selfsame asphalt sidewalks – because these flophouses work in four shifts. Every six hours, a flophouse empties itself out of people in order to allow in a new batch of

people – namely, those who had been waiting in line out on the asphalt sidewalks. If in America there is not an eight-hour workday, then for the people from the Bowery there is a roof over their head at the flophouse for only six hours each day. The people on this street, the entire population of people who are wearing shoes removed from the feet of dead people and who are suffering under the collapse of the dollar, go at night to the corner of Broadway and 42nd Street, they go to the most central location of theatres and of the insane billboards advertising luxury items. They go there to stand in lines so that they can get a cup of bouillon and a sandwich from the Salvation Army at one place and to get a nickel, five cents, as a reward for listening to the divine delirium of the Salvation Army, at another place. They also go there to see how waves of people, reinvigorated by visiting Coney Island, enter into and exit out of movie houses, experiencing American joy! The scene on the Bowery is repeated on Mott Street, where homeless people sleep in an “all-night church” to the accompaniment of the howling of religious clergymen. This city, like all of America, bears the shame of the Negro question, which has come to rest upon Harlem. This city suffers persistent, unremitting poverty and persistent, unremitting congestion, as well as a persistent, unremitting will not to starve to death and to live in a human way. This city wages a filthy – even though it is attired in a white collar – as well as a most incommensurable and a most desperate battle for survival on the East Side. Individualism! No sort of bustling farmer’s market, like Odessa’s famous Privoz Market in olden times, can compare with the vendor’s stalls and hawker’s stands one finds on the side streets of the East Side, where to the thundering sounds of the city are added the cries of young kids, who have been growing up on the concrete of the streets near the wheels of automobiles, and the bawling of small-scale peddlers, who shout out their wares in all the different languages of the world:

“Milk!”

“Bananas!”

“Fish!”

“Oranges!”

“Electric irons!”

Once I was standing with a certain poor millionaire on the roof of a semi-skyscraper that belonged to this poor millionaire. This took place on the thirtieth floor. The city was laid out below us. We were sitting on settee swings beneath umbrellas. Palm trees were planted on the roof, making it look like a garden. Above the roof streamed an American flag. In America, people who are only millionaires, but not billionaires, like some swine kings, steel kings, or intestines kings there, are called “poor” millionaires. The poor millionaire I was with was pointing at the skyscrapers that surrounded his semi-skyscraper in the dark blue of the sky and explaining that this skyscraper over here, he said, belongs to billionaire so-and-so, while that skyscraper over there belongs to billionaire so-and-so, and a third one over there belongs to . . . he could have counted up to about fifty skyscrapers in this way.

I walked over to the parapet at the edge of the roof and started looking down below. Alongside the semi-skyscraper of my poor millionaire, one could see the roofs of some neighboring seven-story to ten-story buildings down below. Their roofs were turning

black from the soot. On the clotheslines strung across the roofs hung the poverty of laundered bed sheets, shirts, and so forth. Beneath the clotheslines hung with linen, children were running and playing. On one of the roofs, a pair of lovebirds, lying on a mattress, were kissing each other. On another roof, several workers had spread out some newspapers and were sleeping on them. On the cement of roofs, just like on the asphalt of streets, the garbage from orange peels was scattered about.

Interrupting the poor millionaire's story about the buildings belonging to billionaires, I asked him: to whom did the building standing next to his semi-skyscraper belong?

My poor millionaire answered that he didn't know.

The sunset was very beautiful.

Everything became clear to me.

In New York, there are forty to fifty people who are buttressed by the skyscrapers that have led to the rise of New York. For these people, New York is beautiful. These people are called billionaires, that is to say, capitalists. They possess visible and invisible offices on Wall Street.

The sunset was beautiful. On the roof of the neighboring building, orange peels were strewn about, thrown there, one would think, from the roof of the semi-skyscraper owned by my poor millionaire, for the legend about manna from heaven, just like the legend about heavenly oranges, cannot be explained by the laws of physics. Oh, how sinister and inhuman New York appears when seen from the top of its skyscrapers! Oh, America! Ah, the America of American flags, which are waving even in cemeteries!

The poor millionaire's mustache, which was trimmed in the same style that Friedrich Nietzsche and James Ramsay MacDonald trimmed theirs, was turning gray. The lilac-colored suit and the red low-cut shoes he was wearing made him look chipper. His shirt, necktie, the handkerchief in his jacket pocket, and his stockings were made in one and the same design, pattern, and color. The poor millionaire's eyes and his movements were lyrical and softened. Ah, American-Nietzschean individualism!

I recounted above about *publisiti* [publicity]. On October 11, 1931, a notice appeared in the *New York Times* that Harry Reichenbach, a certain well-known American publicity man, had died. He died and left behind his memoirs, in which he maintained that there were no more than about fifty people – and he was one of them – who possessed, managed, and determined the taste of the entire American population of a hundred and ten million white-skinned people. These fifty men were the ones who put clothes and shoes on Americans, dressing and undressing them. They were the ones who shortened and lengthened women's skirts, who selected the Indian colors for men's suits, who seated people in various makes and models of automobiles, who gave them Coca-Cola to drink, who deafened them with radios, who shaved them with Gillette razor blades, and so on, and so on, and so forth.

By the way, all of these noble-minded acts of generosity are for the benefit of those who chase after the dollar. New York, with all of the “Ahs!” and “Ohs!” it prompts, consists in national banners and standards. It exists for those who have a check book in their pocket. And the more dollars they write their checks out for, the more “Ahs!” they prompt. While those who collapsed while trying to climb over the fences of the dollar . . .

This is precisely American-Nietzschean individualism, this is what it actually turns out to be. It’s the almighty dollar that is the main American follower of Nietzsche. And it’s precisely this American Nietzschean who talks about individualism and who lives according to such legends as the one about Abraham Lincoln, the president whose face is stamped on one-dollar bills, that his existence began in the small log cabin of a wood-cutter, and the ones about Herbert Hoover, that he was a farmer’s son: namely, the legend that every American can – that every American is given the opportunity to – break away from the crowd and escape into an expansive individualism of wide-open vistas. An American can do this in the same way that skyscrapers have broken through the clouds (and when an American has reached that point, he can then send for his favorite barber to come to London from New York to shave him, in view of the fact that native Londoners give such a poor shave!). Historical monographs are written about the skyscraperesque life stories of Lincoln and *Empaier* [Empire]-Hoover, about things and people, about how young *bois’y* [boys] up and went one day and suddenly, quick as a whistle, skyrocketed up to the hundredth floor! But life stories about those who collapse and fall down beneath the dollar are seldom ever written, yet they are a product of this self-same American “individualism.” These scrap heaps and rubbish dumps are more natural than skyscrapers, and there are a million more of them than there are of Lincoln’s log cabin.

The law of American – “free!” and “individualistic!” – labor relations states that if today, at twelve fifteen, a boss were to say to a worker (or a worker were to say to his boss, for, in accordance with the law, it makes no difference who says it to whom, although workers seldom invoke this “right” of theirs): “You can go to hell!” then, starting at twelve fifteen, there would have been no relations existing between the factory and this worker. On Saturday, this worker would have received an envelope with a paycheck inside; this is how the office settles matters with this worker, paying him off for today’s hours worked, up until twelve fifteen.

A buddy of mine, worker X, a Russian by birth, told me about his work at a factory. He came on board at the workplace, where they gave him a *dzhab* [job]. He worked on an assembly line. Only two of my buddy’s muscles were used in his assembly line work along a conveyor belt, only two muscles. All the rest of the organism of this healthy person was inactive. These two muscles turned blue from being overworked. My buddy showed his boss the two overworked muscles that had turned blue and asked whether he could be assigned to a different work bench so that his other muscles could turn blue, while these two got some rest. His boss (he was an overseer) said, “*O’kei*,” tomorrow he would be transferred to a new machine. My buddy arrived at work the next day. His boss gave him a note to hand over to a different boss. This second boss pointed to some doors, and told him that some people would be waiting for him there. My buddy went through these doors and wound up outside the factory gates. In the office, they had

calculated what they owed him for that work day when he had shown the boss his muscles that had turned blue. They had held on to him until the end of the workday so that they wouldn't have to disrupt the conveyor belt. They had sent him to the second boss so that there wouldn't be any extraneous noise on the assembly line that might affect production. The boss was right: the "reason" for the two muscles turning blue lay in the muscles themselves and, therefore, the initiative lay with my buddy, therefore: free, individual relations! And this is even more so when there are currently millions of people out of work in the U.S.A. And, in general, the older the worker, the more he is worn out, the greater his chances of collapsing and falling down beneath the gates of the factory and of the dollar.

In the U.S.A., there's a freedom-of-the-individual law: it states that if you bought on credit some item that costs, let's say, a dollar, and you paid ninety-nine cents, but you didn't pay the final one cent on time, then that item is taken away from you. But the ninety-nine cents remain to the advantage of the party that was wronged by the failure to receive payment for that one cent.

Neither of the Misters Ford, neither Henry nor Edsel, have anything to do with this law. They are Puritans. They don't even smoke; they only invent and improve things. Henry Ford, as we know, doesn't even trade or sell. He can't even know about my second buddy, worker Y, a Ukrainian by birth. I and this buddy of mine – we were in the habit of sitting together in the open air in Detroit, at his apartment, having a smoke. And this buddy of mine would shake his head perplexedly, in the spirit of complacency, placidity, and mildness of temper that is a national trait of Ukrainians. All Ford employees had to own Ford automobiles. Henry Ford argued in favor of this policy, reasoning that his employees live comfortably and they should know the car that they're working to produce. When my buddy went to work for Ford, he owned a Chevrolet. His boss told Y that he must sell the Chevrolet and buy a Ford. Henry Ford doesn't trade or sell. My buddy's boss directed him to a dealer he knew, a car salesman, who let my buddy purchase a Ford on an installment plan, taking his Chevrolet as a down payment. A second boss told my buddy that it's preferable to have a Ford worker live in certain districts of town and in certain homes that have been built especially for Ford employees. Henry Ford has nothing to do with this; it's not his fault. My buddy, who has a wife and two kids, got himself a three-room apartment on the grounds of the Ford auto plant. He took the apartment on an installment plan, of course, with the understanding that when he pays off the entire amount of the debt, he will become the owner. All of this took place at the end of 1929. In January 1931, Ford released a new model. In January 1931, my buddy's first boss said that he had heard that my buddy was designated for a layoff (a financial crisis! a financial crisis!), but that he could stay on at the auto plant, they would petition on his behalf, if he were to get himself a new 1931 Ford. After scratching his head in the manner of a Ukrainian, my buddy took the new model, giving the car dealer his 1929 Ford as a down payment. I was in Detroit at the end of June. It was at the end of May that my buddy had been laid off.

In the middle of June, they took his 1931 Ford away from him (he couldn't sell the automobile because it wasn't completely paid off). They took it away from him for failing to make his next monthly loan payment. And at the end of June, I helped my buddy drag his household goods out of his cottage, for they had evicted him, again for failing to make his next monthly rent payment. Shaking his head in the manner of a Ukrainian, sitting outside, under a small bush, in the quarters provided by our Lord God, my buddy was perplexed. He used to have three automobiles at his

disposal, and now he didn't have even a single one; he used to have an apartment, and now he had only the blue sky above. And why weren't they taking away the radio, located near the bush, which had likewise been bought on an installment plan!? All that was left to him was his wife and their two young kids! . . .

My dear American individualists! On the Bowery, people walk around in shoes that have been taken off the feet of dead people! My dear American liberty! Is there really no possibility of building not only an emotional, but also a logical bridge between the empyreal-tonsorial "liberty" of skyscrapers that soar up beyond the clouds and the subterranean-tranquil work of hogs trained in betrayal in Chicago!?

My dear Nietzschean-dollar! What difference is there, in the grand scheme of things, between the millions of dollars that belong to the Chicago chairman of gangster trusts, the king of gangsters, Al Capone, and the skyscraperisms of the *Empair* [Empire]?! After all, isn't Al . . . *o'kei!*?

When they discovered oil in California, the following episode occurred. Once upon a time there lived an Indian family. People came from beyond the mountains and offered to buy their desert lands from them. The father of this Indian family refused to leave the lands of his forefathers. Several days later, the family members were found with their throats slit. Only one girl remained alive. A month later, a cowboy appeared on the horizon. He rode up on his horse. He was a Spaniard, a handsome man. He asked for a drink of water, and then he rode off beyond the horizon. Three days later, he returned and again he asked for a drink of water, and again he rode off beyond the horizon. A month later, the Indian girl fell in love with the Spaniard, and the Spaniard fell in love with the Indian girl. They set off for town, in the direction of the sea, so that they could be married. They arrived at a certain office. The girl was illiterate. They told her to place Xs right here and right there, and then they signed the document for her. And at that moment, after all the Xs had been placed, they kicked the girl out of this certain office, using the gesture characteristic of an American sportsman – a boot to her back. What the girl had signed was not a marriage contract, but a deed of purchase for the sale of the oil-bearing lands. Who was it that slit the throats of the members of the Indian family? And who was it that kicked the girl in the back with the toecap of his boot as a sign of his love and affection for her? It wasn't petroleum, by any chance now, was it . . . *Oil'!*

Above the desert lands of this Indian girl there now waves – an American flag!

20

It is entirely natural in all countries that people occasionally lose their minds, particularly in America. Russians who suffer from the malady of delusions of grandeur [*mania-grandiosa*] begin to introduce themselves as Peter the Great or Budenny, Frenchmen as Pope Pius or Napoleon, Germans as Beethoven, and Englishmen as Shakespeare, about whom no one knows anything. Americans who lose their mind introduce themselves as billionaires, as Rockefellers, as moneybags.

In Europe, and in our country, the U.S.S.R., the concerts of all sorts of famous baritones, tenors, narrators, violinists, and pianists are always overcrowded. These concerts are broadcast over the radio; people fall in love with the performers: every music lover has his own favorites. In Europe, they write about these performers in the newspapers: how is their health doing? what work are they preparing to perform anew? Well, then, in America, one must assign mathematicians, physicists, designers, and engineers to this category of people. Their lectures are received as if they were concerts. They are beloved the way that tenors are beloved. Their speeches and formulae are broadcast over the radio. Every day on the schedule of radio broadcasts there is a program on mathematics. Mathematical formulae provide the material for sensational newspaper scoops. People draw the portraits of European mathematicians who are celebrities, just as we draw the portrait of Egon Petri. Einstein came to America as if he were a famous singer. He came here not as if he was simply travelling to a certain country. For he had truly flung his name to the masses in this way, when it became known that Einstein prefers sandals over firm shoes.

No matter how long the logical bridge is from mathematical concerts to the hunger of the unemployed, it is my mathematical cognition that led me to an awareness of so-called “technological” unemployment. Despite the *prosperiti* (financial flourishing, the opposite of a financial crisis), there were from three to three and a half million unemployed workers in America during the very best years of the most recent period of *prosperiti*. And this percentage grew with each successive year. These jobless workers were not jobless as a result of the financial crisis; they were instead jobless in a “technological” sense!

According to statistical calculations, during the very best years in America, for every twelve workers who were working, a thirteenth worker was not. And he was not working not because Americans are afraid of the number thirteen, no, not at all. Americans surprised the whole world by translating even mathematics and mechanics into a plan for emotional, aesthetic enjoyments. Americans have perfected the machines that replace people, that organize labor, and that reduce the number of jobs. Let us use some of our Soviet examples: *Syas'*, the paper giant, is constructed according to American principles – it produces veritable mountains of paper, but only a hundred people – people of the semi-engineering type – work there. At the Dnieper Dam project, by the time it will have been completed, about a hundred and twenty people will be working there, no more than that. They will be keeping watch over the correct operation of the machinery and performance of the water. Americans invent things. They have invented the mechanical milking of cows. How many human hands have been cast aside and now have to find work elsewhere? They have invented, truly invented, the “brain of a business man.” This is a little machine that works absolutely unerringly right after an accountant, the girls who do the calculations, and a cashier have all done their work. How many hundreds of thousands of people have been cast aside and now have to find work elsewhere!? They have invented the teletypewriter (it’s a typewriter that sits on a table; on one side, there is a dial, like what they have at a pay telephone; a person spins the dial, dialing the number he needs and, after that, he writes that number down on his own typewriter; that same number will be printed as well on the other typewriter, which is standing behind the number that he has dialed; the teletypewriter is already replacing the telephone and the telegraph, but it does not crackle the way a telephone does, and it does not disturb the conversations). They have invented the same kind of giant paper and pulp mill like the *Syas'* mill that we have in the Soviet Union. On the threshold of the

twentieth century, ninety-five percent of American machines ran on steam and by hand, and only five percent were run by electric motors. In 1919, electricity ran fifty-five percent of machines. In 1917, seventy-eight percent. In 1931, we must assume that an entire hundred percent of machines are now being run by electricity (although out of this hundred percent, many of them keep silent, for in 1931 factories and plants in America have stopped operating due to the financial crisis, but we will not talk about that right now). How many stokers and coal-heavers have had to search for new professions? How many people have been cast aside? Ask every tenth American worker, and he will tell you about the dozen professions he has tried: he was planning to begin his career in New York as a dress cutter, but he wound up working as a cab driver; he traded goods in a junk shop; he worked as a collier and a train conductor; he trafficked in contraband. Currently, he's an elevator operator. He has been everything, but the main thing that he has done is search for work, in the certainty that tomorrow he will again be jobless.

The unemployment that has arisen on account of the improvement of machines and the invention of new machines, the invention of new techniques in the mass production of objects (using a die tool, for example, in lieu of a forge), the organization of labor anew, and the reduction of the manufacturing cost – at the expense of turning business enterprises into trusts – this kind of unemployment is called “technological.”

From the beginning of the century until 1925, the output from one worker in the automobile industry rose by one thousand two hundred and seventy percent. Americans were choked with automobiles.

The percent of “technological” unemployment currently depends upon the slightly more than ten million jobless workers who are considered unemployed not because of “technology,” but because of the financial crisis. In my opinion, whether a worker is unemployed due to technology or to the financial crisis, he equally wants something to eat; and, generally speaking, the invention of the term “technological unemployment” is an instance of phrase-mongering. Under a socialist system of government, there cannot be any unemployment. Under a capitalist system of government, even “technological” unemployment (what a term they have come up with!) drives people to the Bowery and dresses them in boots ripped off the feet of dead people.

Among the American commandments (on a par with the one that holds that every person can rise up, just like Abraham Lincoln did, from the modest hut of a wood-cutter to become a Rockefeller or a president), there is a commandment that says: “. . . the person who really wants to find work for himself will find it in America.”

Well, but what about “technological” unemployment? Is this, as well, an instance of American individualism? Is this not the same kind of reasoning that built a bridge, one that is much more grandiose than the Brooklyn Bridge, a bridge that crosses into American gangsterism on a supra-American scale?! After all, every American meets up every day with some gangsters he knows and he interacts with them. When the question of gangsterism is posed in this way, then it's the reader – and not just me – who is invited to decide, whether it's the White House or gangsters who are governing America?!

An understanding of the concerts of “technological” unemployment has let me know where the growth of technology is heading. Currently, there are six times as many millionaires in America as there were in 1914; in the course of two years – from 1927 to 1929 (before the crisis) – they nearly doubled. The population of America stands at a hundred and twenty million people. Income tax in America is collected from married people when they earn more than two and a half thousand dollars a year, and from single people when they earn more than one thousand five hundred dollars a year. So that out of a population of one hundred and twenty million people, in 1927, the very best year of all-American *prosperiti* [prosperity], income tax was paid by only two and a half million people in all. About ninety-five percent of these people earned up to ten thousand dollars a year, and only two hundred eighty-three people earned more than a million. In 1929, the final year of *prosperiti* for American capitalists (this year, moreover, became the year of the financial crisis), five hundred and eleven people were “earning” more than a million dollars a year; New York accounted for two hundred and eighty-one of these new millionaires; eleven of them were “earning” more than five million dollars. This was in 1929, a year of economic *prosperiti* and of the financial crisis: five hundred and eleven of these millionaires accounted for ten million jobless workers. As we know, in the capitalist mode of life, it’s ownership of private property, not labor, that serves as the sources of well-being, considered in terms of dollars. Thus, in this *prosperiti*-filled year, a fraction of the property owners, stockholders, and bond holders accounted for a fourth of America’s national revenue – eighteen and a half billion dollars.

It turns out that the “technology” of hunger, which is being called “technological” unemployment, has its opposite end in the pockets of millionaires – what a remarkable concert! Stuart Chase, an American economist, who by our standards would be considered a Cadet, writes in a poetic way:

“Above all else, the owners have entrenched themselves as the dictators of American life and habit. They have ousted the philosopher, teacher, statesman, editor and preacher, as the spiritual leaders of the mass of men. They dominate government, press, university, church, the arts. They sit secure on the apex of a pecuniary economy. To them men’s eyes turn as once they turned to high altars, the man on horseback, and the porticoes of the Academy. The gods have taken up their quarters in the market place, an abode magnificent in gilt and marble, but hitherto untried . . .”

The *shtandart* – and the *standart* – they are galloping away!

21

Dear reader, when you come to New York, your friend will tell you that he has “constructed” a party for you. You are a Soviet citizen, so you prepare yourself for listening to what other people will say and you prepare some things to say yourself, diligently thinking up how best to observe courtesy and how to include in your remarks two things that cannot be placed side by side – your homeland and America, for you, as a Soviet citizen, are thinking, of course, about socialism, but you must remember about “religious belief” in God, as the American consul in Berlin had prescribed. So there is no use trying to prepare the remarks you will make. When

they “construct” a party for you, this means that guests will arrive at nine thirty, and that you will be invited to come by at six. Depending on your host’s income, you and he will have something to drink, and the two of you will decide which restaurant you’ll be going to for dinner – to a Mexican one or a Japanese one. Your friend will pay for your meal. You will return to your friend’s home after dinner. The remaining guests will begin to arrive. Several of them will greet you by shaking your hand. If the event is taking place during the summer, the men, after saying, *Khello!* (Hello), will remove their jackets and immediately get down to the more pressing business at hand – dancing the foxtrot until three o’clock in the morning to the accompaniment of the music playing on a gramophone or over the radio. No conversations of any kind will be expected. Depending on your friend’s income, people will be drinking alcohol. If there is no alcohol, then one doesn’t throw a party. By about three thirty in the morning, people will begin kicking up a storm as they head home to their respective homes and their respective eternities. If your friend’s home is a little more affluent, then the cocktailing and the foxtrotting will take place not under electric lighting but under the light of stearin candles of various colors and sizes. It’s only natural that the Soviet citizen either doesn’t dance the foxtrot at all or, if he does dance it, then what you wind up getting is not a *fokstrot* [foxtrot] – a lupine step – but a *bertrot* [beartrot] – an ursine step. Assiduously prepared speeches come apart at the seams and turn into a jumble as a result of the assiduousness of the merry floor-polishers who were invited to this party in honor of a Soviet citizen.

I attended few parties where there were speeches, but there were some nonetheless. Ray Long arranged a dinner in my honor at the Metropolitan Club. While I was browsing through the guest list, I noticed that after the name of each person there was a biography and a list of multi-volume collections of their works. These were the names of the leading American writers, names that were famous not only in America, but throughout the world. Women are not admitted into the Metropolitan Club. We arrived wearing tuxedos. The walls and portières of the Metropolitan Club muffled the noise of the city. Candles were burning inside the Metropolitan Club, where an ambiance of peace and quiet moldered in the leather armchairs covered by pigskin. There were about forty of us in attendance at the dinner: the most famous American writers and those friends of mine who had accompanied me there. The guests gathered together over cocktails. The guests then were seated for the sacred rite of this dinner, a solemn ceremony complete with butlers stationed behind the backs of the chairs. The candles were honoring the majesty of this occasion. Ray Long delivered a speech, one that was solemn, like the Metropolitan Club itself. I spoke next. I had spent three days preparing my speech, with the same care and diligence that are applied when lancing a gum boil inside your mouth. I spoke about the fences that enclose national cultures, about the U.S.S.R., about the globe, about how the great honor that was being bestowed upon me by this dinner is not a distinction for me personally, but for that magnificent literature, magnificent and youthful, that the dawning of socialism and the thunderstorms of revolution have created. I spoke with particular enjoyment about youthfulness, for, in actuality, Louis Fischer, Mendelsohn, Joe and I were the only ones at this dinner who could be considered young, although only relatively speaking, of course. The remaining guests were in their fifties and sixties or older. Following me, it was Sinclair Lewis’s turn to speak. Lewis, the Nobel Prize laureate, is a tall, narrow-shouldered, grey-eyed, and ruddy-complexioned man. He looked around the room and found me with his gaze. Staring at me, he said: “I am not going to speak about the Soviet Union and about Pilnyak.” Then he fell silent.

The pause was majestic, just like the Metropolitan Club itself. Searching with his eyes, Sinclair Lewis found Theodore Dreiser.

“I am not able to say anything about the Soviet Union and about Pilnyak,” Lewis’s eyes, which were fastened upon Dreiser, became frightful, “because one of the guests who are present here this evening stole three thousand words from my wife,” said Lewis, and then he fell silent again.

This pause did not resemble the Metropolitan Club. Lewis’s eyes wandered down along the table. “Because a second person said that the Nobel Prize should have been given not to me, but instead to Dreiser, and this statement was printed in the newspapers,” Lewis said, and then he fell silent again.

Lewis’s eyes wandered toward a third person. The Metropolitan Club in no way resembled this pause. “Because a third person printed in a newspaper that I am simply a fool.”

Sinclair Lewis solemnly sat back down at his place at the table. The pause following his speech was much lengthier than the pauses during his conveying of information. That evening, after the dinner was over, in a private tête-à-tête, Dreiser gave Lewis a slap (or two) in the face. The slap in the face must have made a loud sound, because they wrote about it the next day in all the newspapers, they telegraphed about it to Europe and Japan, they reported it over the radio, and they provided commentary upon it at lectures. I was not present during the delivery of the slap, having left the club before this incident took place. The next day, I had to hide from reporters, consciously distancing myself from the *publisiti* surrounding the slap. But the benefit I derived from this slap was not negligible: in the states of Texas and Arizona, where, of course, no one knew anything not only about my writings, but even about the U.S.S.R., I explained about myself that I was the one at the dinner whom . . . and everyone understood everything sympathetically.

The day before I left for California, fate brought me into contact with the billionaire Mister Z.

I am consciously hiding his surname because it is as familiar as the names of Rockefeller or Morgan. This man, his family, and his banks belong to the top ten names of American billionaires. If we take into consideration the fact that America now commands the capitalist world (and this is, in reality, the case), and that the dollar is in command in America, exulting with its national *shtandart* [banner], then this unnamed man is one of the top ten leaders in America, wealthier and more powerful than the King of England or the President of France. This man is old, dry, and feeble. I started talking with him about how I was leaving for California the next day and how on the way there I would be stopping off for a day in Chicago. Right away the mention of Chicago, as was always the case, launched a conversation about Al Capone, the Chicago king of gangsters. Being a bit mischievous, I said: “I would love to meet Capone.” And Mister Z, a man who was more powerful than the King of England, uttered obligingly, “I’ll arrange for you to meet him.”

Mister Z buzzed his secretary. In walked an incorporeal secretary, who understood Mister Z astrally, without any words being spoken. A half hour later, the secretary reported that he had telephoned to Chicago and Mister Capone will be busy on Monday (that was the day when I was going to be in Chicago). He will be busy with the election for the mayor of the city and, as a result, unfortunately, he cannot receive Mister Pilnyak on that day. If Mister Pilnyak could stay in Chicago for a day longer, however, Mister Capone would be at his disposal.

I didn't get to see Capone, but this conversation about him is much more meaningful than any meeting with him would have been: the gangster wasn't able to receive me because he was busy with the election, and the man who wanted me to meet him was – a legitimate billionaire!

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22

Some Americans will tell you that everything I've written above doesn't bear any relation to America. You need to search for America, they say, neither here nor there. So now, together with the reader, I intend to embark upon a search for America – onto untraveled expanses, onto obscure roads – in order to find America at last. I signed a contract with Hollywood, with M.G.M. So Joe and I set out for those untraveled expanses, leaving New York on the "Twentieth Century." In this sense, the "Twentieth Century" serves as an introduction to Hollywood, an introduction that has been given to us by Hollywood.

The "Twentieth Century" is what they call the train we took, the same kind of conveyor belt as the highways filled with automobiles. Only the train is much dustier, since it has only two stops between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean: one in Chicago, the other in Santa Fe. From New York to Chicago, the train runs on rails supported by four track beds. The train is fast-moving to the point of tiresomeness, tossing off a hundred and twenty kilometers an hour. The train runs through the dust and smoke caused by trains traveling in the opposite direction and by trains traveling in the same direction that overtake ours. The train takes on water while it is moving: at designated spots along the route, a trough has been built between the rails. It is half a kilometer in length and filled with water. The locomotive dips a metal bucket into the water, and the water by its own pressure flows into filter reservoirs. Passengers are paid a dollar for every minute that this train runs late. Each passenger in my railway car was given a separate compartment, equipped with a small sofa, an arm chair, a desk, a double-berth bed for sleeping at night, a closet, and a sink. In the train there were three railway cars that provide passengers with services: a *vagon-observeishen* [observation car] (made entirely of glass with a small terrace, where it was impossible to sit because of the dust), a restaurant car, and a parlor car. This last car was equipped with a knitting room for old women to knit jumpers, a smoking room, a telegraph-radio office, from which one can communicate with the outside world and to which telegrams arrive from the outside world, and a steam bath, where one can wash up and get one's face shaved, one's hair styled, and one's shoes shined. This train was intended for high-caliber people. I was riding on this train at Hollywood's expense. There are all the usual sounds in this train, except those of human speech: the Negroes who serve as attendants speak in whispers. The train is half empty. When traveling through cities, the train is roasting as it moves slowly along the streets. In the U.S.S.R., no matter where you are, when you are looking up at the sky, even in a blizzard, you can always see the Polar Star. But here, beyond

the windows of the train, even in a blizzard, advertisements with images of various girls and young people stare you in the face from all sides. These advertisements have been lined up above the sleeping berths, like the clowns on the roofs of our provincial fairs, with their Punch-and-Judy shows. I felt like changing my shirt collar every three hours, and rinsing the dust and ash from my mouth every minute.

We traveled in this manner from one ocean to the other, preserving the traditions and the ash of New York. We left New York for a snowstorm and the mountains of Pennsylvania. The snowstorm was like the kind we have back home in our country. The mountains in Pennsylvania – the Allegheny Mountains – are like our Valdai Hills. By the time one's eye had dug its way through all the advertisements, terrain that resembles the land around Tver had started to settle comfortably beyond the cross ties. Besides advertisements and Tver-like terrain, our route from New York to Chicago was filled with massive heaps of factory housing, with the towers of coal mines, the charred ruins of buildings, and the undersized tiny houses inside the palisades surrounding them, tiny houses with pointed tile roofs. Chicago confirmed for me that Chicago and New York are one and the same thing, that they share the beautiful details of the same face: New York is the capitalist-financial center of the country, while Chicago is its capitalist-financial-industrial center. Chicago is likewise broken into two halves: into poverty – which is much greater than the poverty of the Bowery, with rags soiled in the dung of human waste products and with the unsanitary conditions of lice on the streets, roads, and canals, and in the naked mud of half-naked people, as in Shanghai, – and into luxury – the luxury of the embankments of Lake Michigan, which resembles a sea, clogged with yachts and hydroplanes, the luxury of the squares of universities and museums, of colossal places that are just as astonishing in their luxury as the other half is in its poverty. The non-mechanized aspect of the Chicago slaughterhouses – the hogs trained in betrayal – serves to trigger ruminations about capitalist culture, about plague broths. In the series of American bankruptcies and bank collapses that occurred in 1931, Chicago did not relinquish its decisive role: the municipality of Chicago declared bankruptcy. Word of this will be given to Al Capone, the Chicago gangster.

After Chicago, the train set off for the prairies, which had stuck fast in my memory from works of juvenile fiction and geographies. In terms of landscapes in the U.S.S.R., the prairies are Ukraine. We traveled across Missouri. We went by way of the state of Kansas. During the day, we had to remove our jackets and unbutton our vests American-style from the suffocating heat. About fifty years ago, Indians were still living in the state of Kansas, and a national war was being waged against them. Americans call it a war, but it should be called the extermination of the Indians. During the intervening fifty years, much water has flowed under the bridge. In February 1931, about five hundred farmers, both White men and Negroes together, armed with rifles, came to the state capital and demanded that they be given food, because they were starving. What makes this still more remarkable is the fact that this state is the country's breadbasket for wheat. Even this year some farmers in this state have been heating their homes with wheat.

Beyond the prairies arose the Far West (the Wild West), the states of New Mexico and Arizona. The prairies, with their wind-powered water pump-houses and their towers of silage storage situated near tiny white houses, were tossed back, discarded by the one-hundred-and-

twenty-kilometers-per-hour swiftness of the “Twentieth Century” train. The train scaled the mountains that are called either the Rocky Mountains or the Sierra Nevada Mountains. In any case, the train traversed both the one and the other. And the landscape visible outside the window became exactly the same as that in Central Asia, especially in the desert of the state of Arizona: sand, lichens, sweltering heat, the absence of people. Occasionally, there are oases. And near the oases, there are tiny houses made of clay, with flat roofs and windows inside the yard. What is this? Turkey? Central Asia?! These tiny houses are houses of Mexican architecture. It’s no accident that in the morning of that same day we were in the state of New Mexico. Mexicans – Spaniards – Moors – Arabs – Turks – Central Asia. It all makes sense now! Or, perhaps, there are Indians, too? After all, in Siberia they have found a tribe that, in anthropological terms, resembles exactly the American Indians. Moreover, the roots of the language of this Siberian tribe turned out to be the roots of the languages of several Indian tribes. In any event, for an entire day we raced past Asiatic landscapes. Just before evening, there arose on the horizon at that point in time a steep mountain pass in the snow. The train quieted down and started to groan. Outside the windows, poles near the tracks measured the height of the snow. It turned cold. The area all around us was overgrown with pine trees and fir trees, which in the U.S.S.R. are called American pines and American firs. In places, it looked primeval. Even on the roadway that ran alongside the railway bed, the automobile conveyor belt was interrupted. Automobiles for a while crawled along in single file. Two times or more, we saw some Indians; they live – they still live – in these states. Toward evening, it turned very cold on the mountain pass and you could feel a ringing in your ears. And on the mountain pass we saw some cowboys. It turns out that this is very prosaic: a *kov-boi* – a “cow boy” (*korovii mal’chik*) – is a boy who works as a cowherd. In olden times, a cowherd, who watches over and protects cows while riding on horseback, used to catch cattle that were running wild and, with the help of a *lasso* and by shooting at his Indian neighbors, he would get the feral cattle away from wild mustangs. But now all that he has left from the past are his very broad trousers, his umbrella-shaped hat, and his double-barreled shotgun for killing rabbits. I saw beneath one of the mountain crags in the forest of firs a wooden home: it was exactly like the ones we have in the Archangelsk area. At night, we were freezing.

But in the morning, by dawn, we had descended from the mountains and were headed toward the ocean in California. We were traveling past orange groves and avenues lined with palm trees, lilac pepper trees, cactuses, and eucalyptus trees. The cactuses – which grow to the height of three men – are unpleasant, they look like crocodiles. The bark of the eucalyptus trees peels off, so that they look pathetic, evoking pity, like camels do. Beneath the palm trees are located immaculately white, tiny houses – and tiny automobiles that have spent the night parked opposite the entrances to these houses. Everything was in blossom. By the way, they say that everything here blossoms all year round, the plants as well as the trees, both the ones that I am familiar with and the ones that I had never seen before. This does not resemble New York at all. One had to conclude that things had turned out well for the local population, the sons of bitches. They had found all the good places and then taken them away for themselves: first, the Spaniards stole them from the Indians, then the Americans stole them from the Mexicans. We arrived in Los Angeles – in Archangelsk, if we were to translate the name of this city into Russian. There were many Mexicans among the crowd of people on the streets. People dressed in white and wearing sombreros were walking about. Outdoors, it smelled of flowers, of the ocean, and of the indolence of southern lounging around. Except for the several

skyscrapers around the Biltmore Hotel, this is a large village that lies beneath palm and eucalyptus trees. A little later, I learned that Los Angeles is not a city, but actually twenty cities. From Los Angeles to Pasadena – where Upton Sinclair lives – is forty kilometers. To Hollywood, it is thirty kilometers. To where the “Jumpers” live, it is twenty. To Long Beach (the Coney Island of Los Angeles), it is forty-five. To Santa Monica, it is fifty.

I took up residence in Santa Monica. Outside the window of my room at the Miramar Hotel, there were, consequently, palm trees, a bluff, and the ocean. The palm trees were traced against the blue of the ocean. The birds in the garden were singing in such a way that I could anticipate the same suffering that Joe had experienced in connection with the rooster, the monsieur of the poultry ladies. At the ocean, near the wharfs, some of my namesakes – pelicans – were swimming around. They were three times the size of geese, with suitcases for food beneath their beaks. I call them my namesakes because once in Berlin, when I was in a dither at a bookstore and asked: “Where can I get a book by Pilnyak?” the saleswoman asked me to repeat my question: “A book by whom? By Pelikan?” It smelled of eucalyptus and roses in my hotel room.

Protected from the north by mountains, the cities of California were arranged to the right and to the left of me, lengthwise along the ocean. California – this is the land of oil, fruit orchards, the philistine, and Hollywood. The chasing-after-the-dollar philistine came here from the four corners of America. He built himself a cottage and a garage beneath the palms, and then embellished his abode with monuments in the form of an orange, in the form of a teapot, in the form of the bare feet of a movie star. And he lives beneath eternal sunshine, digesting food and visiting various divine prayer services, such as those of the “Jumpers,” of the Methodists, and of Aimée McPherson. The sun shines here three hundred and sixty days a year, and one can swim in the sea year round. The orange groves smell of oranges. The eucalyptus groves smell of eucalyptus oil. Besides the monument to the orange and the teapot, there is a monument on which was depicted a cow being milked. Oil – it was living on in those American traditions that were recounted in the story of the cowboy who kicked an Indian girl in the back with the toecap of his boot as a sign of his love and affection for her. Upton Sinclair recounts very many similar stories of this kind. California – the Wild West – got started, as we know, thanks to gold.

23

Hollywood – it differs completely from all the rest of California – is a two-storied town, just the same as Pasadena and Santa Monica are. But the architecture there is the kind that only Hollywood could think up. It is one continuous American flag!

Once in New York, in a park in the Bronx, during a torrential rain storm, yet nonetheless with smoke and soot in the air, we encountered a woman. I was driving with the journalist P, who speaks Russian. We were driving in a car. Near a bus stop, a woman, who seemed to be indifferent to the world around her, was standing in the rain without an umbrella. Her face was soaking wet. We invited the woman to get into our car, so that she could get some shelter from the rain. She got in. At that point, we saw that this woman’s face was wet not only because the rain had soaked her. The woman was crying. It was evident that her tears were of long

standing. This woman had forgotten about the tears. This woman, a purebred Yankee, was no more than about thirty years old. We started to talk openly and intimately, the way people talk who are meeting each other for the first and last time in their life. She started to talk hysterically. She told us all that she could tell. Her husband, a purebred Puritan just like her, had left her. They ran their own business. They weren't very rich, but, thank God, they always had enough money to put a chicken on the table for dinner. And the makes and models of their automobiles never dropped lower than those of a Buick. They owned their own home. Her parents had given them money for the business in the form of a dowry. The husband was an honest man – he left her without taking a single cent of their money and without taking a single household item from their home. They had lived together splendidly for eight years. He would come home at five o'clock. At seven, they would eat dinner. In the evening, they would go to the movies. On Sundays, they would rest and relax. On Sundays, they would go to church. On Sundays, during the hour between breakfast and tea, they would go to bed together, sometimes once, sometimes twice, so this woman told us. For eight years, the days of their lives were happy, as if they were one person. And all of their days were identical, just like all of their Sundays. They did not miss a single talked-about motion picture. Neither the husband nor the wife ever once fell ill. She provided the family comfort by tending to their hearth and home. She knitted cardigan sweaters for her husband.

“And he left me. He left me, rejecting everything that we had together. He left me for another woman, one who smokes tobacco and drinks wine. Why did he leave me? Why did he leave me! He left me a week ago, and since that time my life has stopped. I can't drive a car, because tears fill my eyes and obscure my vision. This entire week, I haven't been to the movies a single time. I don't drink or smoke, of course, for I'm a true Christian. I was an absolutely faithful wife to my husband. Why did he leave me?”

This woman then showed us the place where we should drop her off. It still had not stopped raining yet. The woman set off in the opposite direction from the one that she had indicated to us. And that was it. And there was nothing more. Kingman, Boston – the American traditions of Puritanism. My grandmother, who lived on the left bank of the Volga River!

As I said earlier, I had received a telegram: “Work in Hollywood at the M.G.M. studio.” Stop. “Contract for ten weeks.” Stop. “So-many dollars a week” . . .

A buddy of mine explained it to me: “And what if suddenly you were to write something for Fox or Paramount?! It's better for them to pay you even in the event that you don't write anything for them, than to have you write something for Fox.”

And so I came to Hollywood.

With very few exceptions, there are only two categories of people who live in Hollywood: either they are famous beauties, both male and female, or they are freaks of all kinds and types. They are either future, present-day, or past actors. I witnessed all this.

Hollywood is like gold mines. I also witnessed instances of this. For example, a film director was traveling by train from New York to Los Angeles, thinking about a new motion picture. The train was going past a small way station. A girl carrying a shopping bag from a store crossed the tracks. The film director got off the train at the next station and returned to that small way station. The film director didn't know the name of the girl; he didn't know where she lived. But a movie mogul is a movie mogul. He roused everyone at the small way station, creating quite a commotion. He found the girl: she was working as the maid for a lawyer. The movie mogul offered the girl an acting role in one of his pictures; he would pay her a thousand dollars a week on a ten-week contract. The girl acted in the picture; they handled *publisiti* for her; the girl was happy. But there were no more pictures that would have fit her type and be right for her. So she never acted in another motion picture again. A second example – out of hundreds of them. A girl, after watching her fill of motion pictures, ran away from home to go to Hollywood and become an actress there. She ran away from the most depressing philistinism, prosaicness, and regularity to go find happiness.

Once, at the film studio where I was working, I watched a director carefully, following his actions closely. He was sitting in his office, smoking a cigar and intently examining a pile of photo albums, stacked up from the floor to the ceiling. These albums were filled with photographs of so-called *ekstra* [extras], that is, actors they had in stock, actors who were registered in Hollywood, but who weren't working on a full-time basis. These were the same actors whose happiness had come and gone swiftly after acting in just one motion picture or else had just arrived in Hollywood in search of happiness. The film director was examining these photographs, which were marked with numbers, and he was writing down the numbers so that tomorrow the office could call these numbers for an audition and a final screening for the motion picture that the film director needed to finish casting. Then the office would hire the actors for a week, perhaps two. These numbers would be earning five dollars a day. I witnessed all of this.

I witnessed Hollywood celebrities, movie stars, who were earning five thousand dollars a week.

I did not witness the following, which is being shown in one of the theaters in New York, in a play dealing with Hollywood. One scene shows very dissolute, very intoxicated people at a public dance that appears informal and homey. Written above the stage is the inscription: "Hollywood, as it is presented to Americans." The curtain comes down. The inscription above the stage changes; it now reads: "Hollywood, as it is in reality." The curtain is raised and the scene on the stage is the same as it was in the first picture, only now in much larger dimensions. This I did not witness personally.

A certain American screen personality in Hollywood sent a letter to the editors of *Moscow News*. She wrote that there is a crisis in the American film industry, that she is sympathetic to the idea of a Five-Year Plan, and that she would like to go work in the U.S.S.R. And, therefore, she reports that her height is such-and-such, her weight is such-and-such, the color of her eyes and hair is such-and-such, her chest size is such-and-such, her hip size is such-and-such. And so on about her measurements. And nothing more than that. These facts about the color of an actor's hair and eyes as well as their physical measurements were always written

down next to the photographs that were in the albums stacked up from the floor to the ceiling. The numbers written down on these photographs were arranged according to certain rubrics: brown-haired actors, blondes, brunettes; giants, midgets, freaks (by nationality types); acrobats, cowboys, chimney sweeps; those who are blind, those who are ill with lupus, those who are tattooed; specialists in football; specialists in Jewish, Catholic, Quaker, Methodist, or Orthodox liturgy; specialists in the naval affairs of England, the U.S.S.R., or Japan; understudies who resemble famous artists and great people; understudies for the Russian Tsar Nicholas or the English King George. There were several actors who could double for this last pair.

In the contracts that actors sign with Hollywood film studios, facts about their measurements and the color of their hair are written down, and if any actress or actor gains a quarter of a kilogram of weight, this quarter of a kilogram increase provides grounds for termination of the contract. As a result, film celebrities, it would seem, have to live a life of fasting and prayer. That's the way it is! . . . I knew an actress, a movie star, who constantly had a doctor by her side, who ate according to a strict schedule, who was bathed, massaged, and toweled off according to a set routine. She was the mistress of a billionaire.

Hollywood people begin to be people when they earn five hundred dollars or more a week.

Up to a dozen of the largest American film factories – the major *studio* [studios], as they call them there – are concentrated together in Hollywood. The largest studios are M.G.M. (Metro-Goldwin-Mayer), Fox, and Paramount. And behind the fences of these studios, beneath a subtropical sky, one can walk past winters in Canadian and arctic villages, past French, English, German and even Russian villages, past oceans and ships, past fresh snowstorms in winter and past sandstorms in the desert, past enormous film sets, complete with scenery and props, where they are filming the epochs of the Crusades and the covenants of Christ, Chicago gangsters, the World War, automobile races, Mexican idylls, American Puritanism – everything that you wish. Past these places walk medieval knights, Chicago gangsters, American Puritans, Roman Catholic popes, pirates, Indians, Frenchmen, American pioneers, Laplanders – anyone you'd like.

Historical epochs, climatic and geographical particularities – all of this is gathered together behind the fences of the cinematic miracles and in the open air. And all of this streams out past the fences, making Hollywood a fantastic place, for an artistic anarchism provides an opportunity for the famous and glorious to drive around in their Rolls-Royces, dressed in their bathing suits, while an extra is wearing out the costumes used in motion pictures set in the Middle Ages.

They say that Paris has passed on to Hollywood its primacy and superiority in legislating fashions. This is hardly the case. In any event, the one who legislates fashions in Hollywood, the tailor for all the film companies, is the artistic-tailoring firm of Burns. This Burns experienced a fate that is truly Hollywoodian. In 1905, at the World's Fair in St. Louis, he, Burns, exhibited ten Indians in outfits that he himself had designed, but that did not match closely those outfits that Indians were actually wearing in America. But his own outfits seemed to Burns to be the most Indian-looking, even more so than the actual ones. Burns took these ten savage, "most Indian-looking" outfits with him to Hollywood so that they could be

rented out, the same way that actors in Hollywood are rented out. From these ten Indian outfits began the millions of dollars that Burns would earn as a costume designer. If Burns, even to this day, sticks to these “most Indian-looking” principles, that only shows that he is a Hollywoodian and a full-blooded American. But they say that he can now get for you the overcoat of Wilhelm II, not merely an exact replica, but the real one taken directly off Wilhelm’s shoulders. If that is indeed the case, then he is both a Parisian and a supra-American.

I used to go visit these miracles behind the studio fences. In some studio facilities and storehouses, things would suddenly change their proportions. Toy ships and toy trains would be lying on shelves. On tables there would be tubs with oceans and mountain ridges in primeval forests, glaciers, and snow-covered peaks. On other tables there would be Verdun, and cannons with smoke would be peeking out from trenches. Standing on the floor in the corner would be the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, right next to Westminster Abbey. Hanging by wires from the ceiling would be squadrons of airplanes. These were all sets and scenery, behind which live actors were filmed, using the laws of perspective and confounding the viewer with them. The mountain ridges will confound the viewer with its snowy peaks and the vast expanses of its precipices. Storms will take place inside tubs of water, and dreadnoughts, to the trepidation of the trembling viewer, will sink and perish.

During the summer of 1930, I saw in the Pamir Mountains how a certain Russian movie actress was being filmed in the role of a Tadzhik Komsomol member. She had to learn how to ride a horse Tadzhik-style, using a Tadzhik saddle. She trained for three weeks, injuring both of her legs as a result of being knocked off the horse. According to the script, she was supposed to gallop between mountain crags and above precipices with a child in her arms. She learned how to do it. She had fallen off the horse several times. At rodeo races in America, I saw how cowgirls galloped. And I also saw how a certain famous female movie star galloped behind a studio fence. Her horse was not a horse, but an electric toy the size of a horse. The horse did not move from the spot. The actress brandished her whip and rushed forward with her entire body while staying in place. It turns out that shooting the scene this way is much simpler than having a Russian movie actress galloping across the Pamir Mountains. The lens is open, let us assume, for only one fifth of the sequence that films the actress galloping in place. The next time, on the sequence that filmed the actress galloping in place, this one fifth part will be closed for the lens. So the lens for the remaining four fifths of the film will record only those terrifying mountains and precipices that are standing on the shelves and tables of the aforementioned studio facilities. A cinematographic instrument is standing there: a meter in front of it stands the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris and a meter behind it a pair of actors are kissing and caressing each other. What you will wind up getting on film are these two eccentrics kissing and caressing each other, but they are not a meter behind the cardboard version of the Notre Dame Cathedral. Instead they are inside one of the cathedral’s porticos, behind terrifying chimeras and beneath a clear sky of diaphanous clouds – one need not go to Paris, nor to the Pamir. And the Russian movie actress in the Pamir Mountains, in all likelihood, lost some weight. They probably would have fired her in Hollywood for losing both weight and width.

In other studio facilities behind the fences, an icy silence thrives, for they are shooting sound films there, at which time the sound of the ticking of a pocket watch is being recorded. The chemical laboratories behind the fences and the edits of montage sequences are truly alchemical.

They took me on a tour of these places and acquainted me with all sorts of famous film personalities. Meeting them rendered my companions sweet and affectionate. I watched these scenes like the ram at the slaughterhouse looks at new gates. They acquainted me with a dozen movie stars. One of them, a terribly famous actress, told me that I was the first person who, while I was being introduced to her, did not pay her the compliments that she is supposed to be given.

By the way, all these things behind the fences are shrouded in frightful mystery – the mysteries of competition and patent secrets. And one should not confuse the police, who are guarding the fences, with actors, who are dressed up in costumes of all epochs and ethnographies: in America, a person and an enterprise can hire for themselves their own private police force so that it can guard their fences. In the studio offices, when typists need to rewrite a script, each separate page of the script is given to one of the individual typists so that the typists will not know the contents of the entire script and will not be able to give away any secrets. During shooting, for these same reasons, the actors likewise do not know the contents of the entire script. The actors find out about their roles together with other viewers. For these same reasons, when an actor does not know his role and the director plays it for him, very little is required of the actor: he need merely shed quarter pounds of his weight. When M.G.M. was drawing up a contract with me, there was a point inserted into it whereby I was obligated to keep my work for them in the strictest secrecy, until such time as the film studio will find it necessary to reveal this secret for *publisiti* purposes.

The output of the American film industry is well known. Approximately fifty percent of its films are devoted to gangsters and cowboys. The rest are devoted to all the remaining sources of well-being and prosperity in America and in the world, where the triumph of virtue is obligatory, expressing itself preferably in a lawful marriage, where the ending should be soothing and moral, where the hero without fail should be no more than twenty-five years old, where the heroine should be no more than eighteen years old, where a nefarious villain and a noble criminal, preferably played by a comic actor, is an absolute must. Vices in American film are named categorically, with the Puritan standard taken as the measure for assessing vices. But the social perspectives are surely borrowed from Lydia Charskaya. Motion pictures are splendidly filmed, mounted, and edited. Cinematographic technique is at a very high level. Indians! Cowboys! Hollywood is located right in the Wild West, and Hollywood does not forget its forefathers, who determined its fate, beginning with the very first farmer in California, Johann Augustus Sutter. And, therefore, they produce up to two hundred films per year that are devoted to life in the Wild West and to the life of cowboys. These films are all the same. A noble cowboy loves the daughter of similarly noble cowboy, now an old man. But there is a villain, some times he, too, is a cowboy, some times he is an industrialist, some times he is a local merchant, who either intimidates the old man or endears himself to him with fraudulent acts of kindness. The story always ends with the kidnapping of the girl and with desperate chases on galloping horses, during which the young and noble cowboy outstrips

everyone else, by virtue of which he marries the girl, after having unraveled the villainy of his rival and having outrun all their horses.

America is the country with the largest number of universities. One does not need to ask students at these universities what department they are studying in, but rather what athletic team they are playing on. And films about students are as conventional as films about cowboys. A student falls in love with a flighty girl, she scorns him, he suffers. A sporting event takes place: he wins the contest, although no one expected this. The girl's hand is in his hand, everything is *o'kei!* Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko has been in Hollywood, just like Eisenstein and me. He proposed making a movie about the Pugachev rebellion: a motion picture from the history of the insurrection of Volga Russians against the empire, a revolt headed by Emelyan Pugachev. Vladimir Ivanovich submitted a screenplay for approval, a *sinopsis* [synopsis] as they say there. The *sinopsis* was approved by the board of directors and just one modification was suggested. The board of directors found Pugachev's death to be too gruesome an ending, so they insisted that Pugachev, instead of being sent to the executioner's block, should meet with Catherine the Great. They would fall in love with each other and – *o'kei!* – get married. I don't know whether this account of the episode corresponds with the truth; they told me this story in Hollywood. But this episode characterizes Hollywood's traditions perfectly. I was witness to that.

It was a very good thing that I was in Hollywood, and not because this provides remarkable material about millions of dollars and poverty, about incredible careers and incredible falls from grace, about the dollar and passions. This is material that you cannot contrive. For only Hollywood has concocted such a social combination of pyrotechnics and art. And not because this city is more feverish than Monte Carlo in Monaco. Hollywood is a city of bigger – and no less mad – money than Monaco, a city of the passions of vanity, passions that are no less cruel than the passion of miserliness. After all, the bare foot of that same Hollywood movie star, whom I did not take pains to pay a compliment to, is sealed in memory for the ages in the cement sidewalk of one of the entrances to movie theaters in Los Angeles!

I am a writer, and my concerns are writerly ones.

The film industry – all of these wonders involving gangsters and Emelyan Pugachev's wedding take place behind the fences, where the tropics and the arctic, the *eros* of ancient times and the Puritanism of contemporary times, are situated right next to each other, where hundreds of lions walk together with Russian White Guard generals – all of this in American parlance is called succinctly: *muvi* ["the movies"].

As we know, Hollywood – *muvi* – is the third leading industry in the United States. The subject matter of this industry, it goes without saying, is art. Art is created by the brain. The brain is the subject matter of industry. Art is created by talented people. The brain of talented people is the subject matter of industry. American industry advances by means of standards and norms, otherwise it cannot compete. The textile industry produces meters of cotton chintz. Ford hurls forth batches of cars from a conveyor system. The film industry is America's third leading industry.

Writers exist, in part, to create stories. When I arrived in Hollywood, I was asked whether I needed an office. I didn't quite understand what this was all about, and so I declined the offer. In my contract, it stated that my suggestions would come into effect once my supervisor, the assistant director, gives the "o'kei." I echoed "o'kei" in reply, but all the same I became interested in the question: what exactly are writers' offices?

Behind the fences of "the movies," I had seen certain long, one-story buildings that looked like sheds, which were connected inside by long corridors, to the right and left of which ran tiny little rooms that resemble horse stalls: a chair, a table, another chair, and nothing else, besides a telephone. These enclosures are called offices. People – people who prefer to do nothing else but prop their feet up on desks, on window sills, on the backs of another chair – sit inside these enclosures from nine o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the afternoon. Sometimes several of them will gather together and chat. Sometimes they will drink whiskey. These people with their feet lifted up in boredom and melancholy are writers. Writers who earn up to two hundred and fifty dollars a week are required to sit in these offices all the time. Writers who earn up to a thousand dollars a week only have to be here occasionally. Writers who earn more than a thousand dollars a week do not even have to come to Hollywood at all. In fact, it's even better for the studios if they don't come. There are one hundred and fifty writers working in each of these barracks-looking buildings. Each of the leading film studios has its own writers' barracks of this sort.

Writers are agglomerated here not only from all across America but also from every corner of the world. Somewhere, in some small town, a writer has written a book, and this book has drawn attention to itself. And so the writer receives a brief telegram from Hollywood: "Work, live in Hollywood." Stop. "So-many dollars a week." Stop. "Give away rights to everything written for production in a movie to such-and-such film studio for five years."

And that is all.

The Lord works in mysterious ways, the film studio reasons. A talented person will perhaps write something of the sort that, to our chagrin, will be exceptionally good. It would be better for us to buy him up now rather than to have to pay him three times as much afterwards. And it would be better if he were working with us rather than with our good neighbor, a competitor like Fox or Paramount or M.G.M. Yes, and, moreover, if he were working with us, he would receive a salary, so the curve of his talent would not bother us. Otherwise, there are some writers of the kind who will turn in something that is so anti-gangster that it makes you sick, but the audience is happy with it. Talents and names are measured by dollars. And it's precisely because of this that it's better not to be a high-priced writer in Hollywood. Take, for example, Theodore Dreiser. He was bought just like all the others. In the summer of 1931, a studio produced a film version of one of his stories under his name after making several alterations, changes similar in nature to the kind made to the ending of Nemirovich-Danchenko's *Pugachev Revolt*. As far as the studio was concerned, the film version was made as well as it possibly could have been made. But Dreiser began legal proceedings against the studio. He demanded that, if the picture were not destroyed or if alterations were not made, his name be removed from it. Of course, it would have been better if Dreiser had not been in Hollywood and if he had not dropped in to take a look during the filming, the more so on

account of one bit of trouble in general, namely, the fact that Dreiser had lost his case in court. Because, after all, can one actually begin legal proceedings in court against the third largest industry in America?

Writers, it turns out, are invited to Hollywood not only to write and to think up stories. They are free to decide whether they wish to write or not to write. If they do wind up writing something, such-and-such a film studio will be adapting it for the screen at the discretion of, and in accord with the tastes of, the studio, as was the case with Dreiser. Writers who earn less than two hundred and fifty dollars a week will sometimes write things for a special extra charge and without their signature.

Special readers – who have not already been separated into horse stalls but have been gathered together in halls behind rows of tables – are split up into groups according to different national cultures: Anglo-Saxon, German, Normand, Romanesque, Slavic. They sit and read all the new books that have been published in the whole wide world. First, they read the book reviews, and then they read the books themselves. These readers determine which books are appropriate for turning into a film, and they write short synopses of the books (upon reading a new author, they decide whether or not it's worth it to buy his work for future use). Their synopses (and their suggestions about book purchasing) go to the – we will call them this – department heads. The national department heads make their selections and transfer the synopses (and the purchasing suggestions) that have been picked to their chief. The chiefs, in turn, send their conclusions to the supervisors. The supervisors either say, or do not say, “*o'kei*.”

If a supervisor says, “*o'kei*,” then a film is born, and the machine of *muvi* [“the movies”] proceeds to make a picture. Practically nothing remains of what was originally written by the writer in his novel, story, or drama, just as was the case in the stories of Vladimir Ivanovich and Dreiser.

This is one path that is followed in the genesis of a film.

There is also a second path.

Every film studio has its own storytellers and its own writers, besides those from the barracks, who are held there in reserve, kept for later use.

These special storytellers sit there and combine – first one way, and then another – all sorts of story lines, and they think up how to make something play at the movies: from what kind of life, from what country, from what kind of existence will the characters come; moreover, this one here will be the villain, and about the hero and heroine, it is said that on average they are to be no older than twenty-two years of age. These special storytellers constitute a tried, tested, and approved race of people. They communicate their ideas directly to the supervisors, without any bureaucratic pyramids of readers.

When the supervisor has given his “*o'kei*” with respect to the story line, they then dress this story line in the blood of the motion picture's meat, they hammer out a *stori* [story], as the

Americans say, and *sinopsis* [synopses] – they work out a story line and they flesh it out with narrative events. It's still not yet a screenplay or a script; it's merely:

“. . . a charming young blond man enters the room. TANYA comes out to meet him. NIKOLAI greets TANYA and tells her about the danger that lies in store for MORGAN.”

The sounds and noises that accompany the film as it plays are not worked out here. The scenery is not yet specified here. The lines of dialogue that are assigned to the characters are not yet given here.

When the *sinopsis* is ready, writers are sometimes invited out of their horse stalls. Let's say that writer so-and-so is familiar with the life of sailors at sea. They invite him out. They cryptically commission him to take a look at the synopsis and to immerse it into the maritime details of a ship, of the habits and customs of sailors, of the ethos of sea captains, of storms at sea and of dead calms. The writer returns to his horse stall, and he writes. This writer's name will not appear in the picture's credits. What the writer writes down will be corrected, touched up by a supervisor, by an artist, by a musician, again by a supervisor, and by another writer, a screenwriter who enjoys some celebrity and who is approved by moviegoers. This screenwriter, together with the film's director, will rework all the materials that have been assembled for him. This screenwriter will translate these materials into the language of cinema. And this screenwriter will sign his name to the picture.

“. . . a charming young blond man enters the office of the director NIKOLAI. (The noise of a factory and the distant sound of sirens. A close-up of MORGAN's face. A shot of a factory beyond the Venetian window.)

TANYA comes out to meet MORGAN.

(MORGAN smiles. TANYA's eyes are stern, concerned, and at the same time loving. The noise of the factory subsides. The music of Beethoven can be heard. In the foreground, the faces of TANYA and MORGAN; in the background, Venetian windows and the factory.) MORGAN is happy.

NIKOLAI . . .” etc.

But this scenario will be refined and completed by others, by nameless others. The dialogues, in particular, are always written separately, by a special nameless screenwriter. In 1930, the M.G.M. film *Big Hauz* [*The Big House*], which is devoted to American prison life, played on all the movie screens in the world. The writer who wrote this film was someone who had spent time in prison, so he didn't sign his name to it. My supervisor, Al Lewin, revised this screenplay, and my co-author, Frances Marion – the American Lydia Charskaya – signed her name to it.

Thus, if there is writerly work that needs to be done on a motion picture in America, then either a writer writes it and does not leave his name on it or else he signs his name to it although he did not write it.

Writers, even though they reside inside the monastic cells of offices, are nonetheless writers whose fates contain something fateful in them. On my final night in Hollywood – during my farewell party – the marvelous writer R., a former sailor, a seaman, said to me:

“Y-you, Pilnyak, y-you have got to be kidding – American individualism! From nine o’clock in the morning to five o’clock in the afternoon, I sit in my office and I do the very same thing that I do at night when I am writing for myself and not for the film studio: that is, I subvert and debunk what I have written in my novels . . . Y-you, Pilnyak! . . . but at home all I have is a pen and a sheet of paper, yes, and a head that is tired out from the day. At the film studio, however, there is equipment, a typewriter, and millions of dollars. And millions of movie-goers, whom the movie will dupe with its motion pictures . . . Oh, y-you, Pilnyak! You don’t want to work with us any longer? You’re leaving? Hollywood pays me money! I’ll come to visit you in the Union of Soviets when my contract ends! . . .”

Later I will cite a second conversation that I had that night. But for now I will bear witness: I didn’t meet any people in Hollywood who would not have cursed *muvi* [“the movies”] – and I met with some genuine writers. And a word must be said here about what it is that Americans understand by that concept: a contract. The fate of worker X was recounted earlier: he is the man, a Russian by birth, who was working under conditions whereby they were able freely to ship him off, like some package, to the devil, they were able freely to throw him the hell out. This is what happens when there is no contract. When there is a contract, people rise up in revolt – from the grave, it would seem, from today’s perspective. But in America people rise up in revolt not from the grave, but precisely from the present moment. The idea of slavery rises up in revolt.

A contract! An actor or a writer – it makes no difference – signs a contract for five years. It’s always stipulated in the contract that the film company can break the contract at any time and can extend it, but the writer (or actor) doesn’t have this same right. It’s always stipulated in the contract that the film company can resell its rights; the actor, naturally (in the completely American sense of that word), doesn’t have this same right. It’s stipulated in the contract that the actor is invited to play such-and-such roles and he cannot refuse to fulfill those roles or others similar to them. A refusal on the actor’s part to abide by the terms of the contract results not only in the loss of his livelihood, his bread and butter, and of his career (for although in America there exists a law against trusts, a law that prohibits trusts, the company’s bosses are members of a film industry cartel). This refusal to abide by the terms of the contract also results in both the imposition of a financial penalty for breach of contract and, possibly, incarceration in debtor’s prison. This applies to movie stars, celebrity screenwriters, and unnamed scriptwriters.

And in Hollywood one can hear dozens of stories about wonderful contract schemes.

A writer under contract to such-and-such a film studio is already spoken for, he's under their spell. He has written a story. His film studio cannot use this story for a screenplay. A neighboring film studio intends to use this story for one of its screenplays. A supervisor at this neighboring film studio doesn't speak with any writers; instead he telegraphs the supervisor of the writer who is already spoken for:

“*Khello!* [Hello!]”

“*Khello!* [Hello!]”

“We'd like to produce a film version of such-and-such story!”

“But we're also thinking about doing this!”

“Let us have the story!”

“Really, I'll only do this out of my friendship with you!”

“How much are you asking?!”

“Forty-five thousand dollars!”

“Let us have it!”

“Really, a thousand, I'll only do it out of my friendship with you!”

The friends agree upon thirty-five thousand dollars. The writer, just as before, receives his two hundred and fifty dollars from his film studio.

A writer – one who is equal to the task – is just a manuscript, and not a human being. And here is what happens with a human being:

“*Khello!* [Hello!]”

“*Khello!* [Hello!]”

“Would it be possible for us to borrow your star so-and-so for about two short weeks?!”

“But we're planning to use her then!”

“Let us have her!”

“Really, I'll only do it out of my friendship with you!”

“How much are you asking?!”

Writers and actors who are under contract, shall we say, surrender themselves up to being borrowed and lent out.

A young writer (or it could be a young actress or actor) entered into a contract three years ago for a salary of seventy-five dollars a week. He has started moving up in the world. He now has established a name. Yet he still receives his old salary of seventy-five dollars a week. The contract with him, for all we know, will be extended in two years.

An actor would occasionally like to be able to work at his role; he would like to be able to choose a role himself. But he is under contract, so a role is not picked by him, but by his supervisor.

Film studios likewise borrow and lend out directors.

But an actor can't work at his role, nor can he choose a role himself, not only because others do his thinking for him. In the name of industry secrets, an actor is not even supposed to know the script. Previously, the best scenes from rodeos, from cowboys galloping on horseback, were chosen for the movies. Previously, cinema used to pick gymnasts like Douglas Fairbanks. Nowadays that is not even necessary: everything has been replaced by technical tricks. And no sort of Douglas Fairbanks can leap the way that a skewed perspective can.

Among those photo albums, which were stacked up on the floor of the office of my friend, the film director, and which reached up to the ceiling, there were albums filled with photos of film doubles: *ekstra* [extras] who looked like famous actors. A certain poor film studio borrows a celebrated actor for a week and films this celebrity in the most challenging locales. A film double finishes playing the remaining scenes for him. The celebrity actor receives three thousand dollars a week, while the *ekstra* receives sixty dollars. A certain wealthy film studio produces motion pictures where the heroine (a movie star, of course) must leap from a cliff into the water and crawl out of a burning building. In those locales where it's expensive to do this with tricks, the double replaces the movie star, so that the movie star will not get wet, will not get upset, will not get burnt, and will not get a broken rib.

Male actors don't count, for they are men. They have to make their careers themselves. And they don't get to be called movie stars. As far as movie stars are concerned – stars in the true sense of that screen-acting word: that is, women – then it must be acknowledged that the overwhelming majority of them, with three or four exceptions (for example, Greta Garbo), created their fates not by means of their talents and not even by means of their beauty, but by the fact that they were either the wives of film directors and studio supervisors or else the mistresses of billionaires who were, besides, shareholders in the film company. Male actors who are truly talented (there are, of course, actors of this sort – Charlie Chaplin, for example, and the selfsame Douglas Fairbanks) do not confine themselves to the routine of the movies. Instead they organize their own film studios and work at their own risk and from their own fear. Some talented young people, *ekstras* who occasionally play in a number of scenes, serving as doubles for celebrity actors, are now banding together around the film journal *Experimental Cinema*, which is protesting against the traditions of the *muvi* [movies]. But one must be careful not to muddle perspectives: Chaplin is an exception to the rule, while the work of this new film journal is an exercise in Don Quixotism.

It is understandable why in New York a play is being staged where Hollywood is depicted both the way that it seems to Americans – even to Americans! – and the way that it is in reality. *Ekstras* will never become movie stars, because that isn't profitable; *ekstras* can stand in for movie stars as doubles. Movie stars are needed to make films popular. Creating *publisiti* and making the viewer fall in love with a movie star – it's more profitable this way. The goal is to make films profitable in every way. Besides, what director doesn't like adding to his own salary the salary of his wife? And what director doesn't like having a movie star on his arm? A moral lesson to the world?! Movie stars grow old; extras play their roles instead of them, under the names of the stars. *Ekstras* receive sixty dollars a week, as long as . . . as long as their fortune doesn't change. Alex Gumberg, an experienced hand when it comes to how

things work in America and a friend of mine, was absolutely right when he gave me the following words of advice just as I was departing for Hollywood:

“Please, Boris, you must be as careful as possible with *ekstras*. *Ekstras* still might think that you’re a wealthy or powerful man in the movie business. There will be no end of scandals for you.”

While I was in Hollywood, I came to understand what this warning meant. In the U.S.S.R., we experienced a wave of alimony cases. For us, this was a mere wave on the Moscow River in comparison to the Pacific Oceanic waves of alimony cases in Hollywood! The whole point of these alimony cases is to provide paths to stargazing, because for an *ekstra* there is only one normal path to glory: to become the mistress or wife of a powerbroker in the film industry. There were two other paths: starvation or prostitution. For out of a hundred *ekstras*, only five percent worked during the period of financial crisis that followed the stock market crash of 1929. All of this is in the American conception of things. A contract is a daydream and: “. . . Y-you, Pilnyak, y-you’ve got to be kidding – American individualism! . . .”

As far as I’m concerned, my dealings in Hollywood provide an extra illustration of what I’ve said above. I had a distinction that set me apart from the other people who were working there: I was a Soviet citizen. And it was stipulated in my contract that I had the right to tear up this contract at any time of the day or night. I consider what I’ve said above as an admiration of capitalism in its own eyes, and by means of what I’ve said above I illustrate American organization – both of labor and of industry. The *muvi* business is the third leading American industry. Who is the actual master of the *muvi* business: is it the supervisors? the board of directors? the shareholders? No, of course, not. The *muvi* business is a highly remarkable financial organization that never dreamed of undergoing a single tax inspection, for all the philistines of America (and of the world) pay a voluntary income tax to the *muvi* business every evening, every day, every week. The master of the *muvi* business is the spectator, the All-American philistine. The *muvi* business is an industry. Ford pleases customers with a conveyor belt of automobiles. The textile industry produces meters of cotton chintz. The *muvi* business produces feet of film. The talents of writers must confine themselves to these feet of film and keep within them. When supervisors give their *o’kei*, they are placing this *o’kei* upon the tastes of the philistine in order to please him. My traveling companion on the steamer, Mister Kotofson, the man who became a king from the intestines of pigs and sheep, is illiterate. He knows the technical aspects of intestines to perfection, he loves everything that is decent, and he wants to have the perfect technology of cinema, for he is intending to sleep peacefully, like Sinclair Lewis’s characters from *Main-strit* [*Main Street*].

And so they told me in New York that America is not to be found in New York. Well, what then: is America to be found in Hollywood!? I determined in Hollywood that both Hollywood and New York are one and the same beautiful features of a beautiful face!

If we were to leave the *muvis*, as such, out of consideration, and consider just the writers, to whose estate I belong, as such, and if we were to speak about the art of American individualism – these are old truths! – then we could say that art is active only when it creates new forms, new ideas, and new emotions, when it awakens people rather than lulls them to

sleep. For art will truly be art only when it is revolutionary, and art will truly be art only when it is created with conviction and dedication. Art is created in part by writers. In order for a writer to be able to work, he must believe in his work, in its necessity, in its significance. This, needless to say, is much more important than money. How many artistic works of genius were created in all kinds of garrets (both physical and psychological) and in hunger? A writer is like a bird: it's easier for a bird to fly when the wind is blowing upon its chest and beneath its wings. And the genuine master of American talents in the movie business, measured in terms of feet of film, is Mister Capitalism, the Nietzschean dollar.

Upon my arrival in Hollywood, I went to see my supervisors. I watched the Napoleons from philistinism and the philistines from Napoleonism. I was told that I, "in my capacity as a Bolshevik," as it was put to me verbatim, had been invited to Hollywood to Sovietize a film. They asked me whether I needed an office. They told me that in my position I would have a secretary-interpreter at my disposal. They granted me the right to send cables and radiograms to any of the corners of the world for information and documents. I could order from far and wide any books that I needed. I should have understood that once I was to have received such-and-such a number of these books, I would already be in the company of exploiters. I was told that a certain storyteller had thought up the idea of producing a pro-Soviet screenplay. Frances Marion and I were supposed to be the authors of the picture, George Hill would be the director, and Boris Inkster, a Russian national and Soviet citizen who had stayed behind when the Eisenstein group left town, would be the director's assistant (and my assistant). Al Lewin would be my supervisor. Irving Thalberg, the head of M.G.M. and the husband of Norma Shearer, a man who receives a salary of a million dollars a year, a Hollywood Napoleon with arms crossed, would be producing the film. All the people whose names I have listed here were supposed to form a *konferens* [conference] – an advisory council attached to the film. Besides being an author of the film script, I was also supposed to act as a consultant during the making of the film, so that there would not be any of the incredibly fallacious representations about life in Russia that foreigners, in their ignorance, are apt to concoct.

What was meant by the concept "pro-Soviet" was the following. In 1931, America, as we know, did not have any diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. Those Americans who were against recognition of the Soviet Union were called "anti-Soviet," while those who wanted to re-establish international diplomatic relations were called "pro-Soviet." The Russian colony in America was divided in the same way. The majority of Russian emigrés who had arrived in the U.S. prior to the October Revolution were pro-Soviet, while those who had betrayed their motherland and fled from the October Revolution were "anti-Soviet." As for me, I was simply Soviet.

And, again, as for me, it turned out that I didn't have to be either a co-author with Frances Marion – who is widely celebrated in the screen-acting world – or a consultant attached to the film.

But for several days I did consult in connection with the film. Right up until the final night before my departure, however, we did not say a word, God forbid, about politics.

Even before my arrival, the basic features of the story line had already been – shall we say – thought through. And Frances Marion had already written an initial *sinopsis*, which I was supposed to spend some time working on in consultation with my co-workers and to rework it in terms of its correlation with the truth.

“ . . . a charming young blond man enters the manager’s office . . . ”

The content had been worked out by Madame Frances Charskaya in accordance with all the rules of America and Hollywood. The hero is an American engineer named Morgan. The heroine is the charming Tanya. The villain is the G.P.U. Comic relief is provided by a good-hearted funny man, the construction manager Nikolai, who is a worker by origin, a hero of the Five-Year Plan, and a communist. The action takes place in the U.S.S.R. Morgan is traveling to the U.S.S.R. to work there in order to “study the great principles of a planned economy so that afterwards, back in his homeland, he can apply the knowledge he has acquired there” (this is copied verbatim). Tanya (“a charming brunette!”) is being expelled from America – deported, as they say there – because she is a communist and because she led a workers strike in America. There is class-based animosity and antagonism between Tanya and the bourgeois Morgan, but “their eyes met and they love each other, without they themselves suspecting it” (this is copied verbatim). They are traveling on the same steamer, but in separate classes of accommodation, of course. They sail past the Statue of Liberty. Tanya, from the lower deck, curses American liberty. Morgan, on the upper deck, whistles the national anthem of the United States. Once again their eyes meet. And so on. As soon as they cross the Soviet border, marvels begin to happen. Right away a spy is assigned to shadow Morgan (this spy later turns out to be the husband of Tanya’s sister, who is dying of consumption and dying from her husband’s infidelities). This spy and unfaithful husband right away falls in love with Tanya. He is, of course, an undercover Cheka official. Besides this one undercover Cheka official, however, there are also “overt” Cheka officials walking around in the U.S.S.R.: these men have black beards, they’re bedangled with bombs, and they’re dressed in felt boots, their eyes ablaze “like coals.” These overt Cheka officials arrest professors in broad daylight, for all to see, tearing them away from their wives, who die right there on the spot. There are no fewer marvels happening in Moscow. Skyscrapers are being erected there that are “taller than those in New York” (this is copied verbatim). Morgan is working on the construction of a factory named “Steel,” “which will be the largest one in the world.” Also working at the factory is the construction manager Nikolai (his part will be played by the comic actor so-and-so). He is a communist, a hero of the Five-Year Plan, and a former American worker who once worked with Morgan (although Morgan is no more than twenty-two years old). For the sake of some fresh air, Tanya takes her sister, who is dying of consumption, back with her to their hometown in the countryside, a village that just happens to be located right next to the construction site for “Steel.” In the village, there is fresh air as well as some large, clean peasant huts fancily decorated with Ukrainian embroidered towels (although the village is said to be located in the Urals). There are mountains of butter and eggs that are being eaten up by prosperous *paysans* who are flourishing. One revolutionary morning, some tanks drive through town, leveling the village down to the height of the surrounding land so that a collective farm can be constructed there from scratch. The local village priest has his beard shaved off. Tanya the communist is incensed by this. But a spy – her sister’s husband, who is an undercover Cheka official and a villain – has fallen in love with Tanya. He tries to convince her that bigamy is not a vice, for

under true communism a man will be able to have as many as twenty wives, and that Tanya, as a communist, should give herself up to him sexually right away. But now he suspects that Tanya loves Morgan. At this point he avenges himself against Morgan, tricking the latter into getting involved with the criminal underground. During this time, Tanya, together with the priest whose beard has been shaved off, spearheads a peasant revolt. The threat of reprisals by the G.P.U. hangs over the heads of both Tanya and Morgan. Neither Tanya nor Morgan suspects any of this, but Nikolai, the Red construction manager and communist, learns of this. He summons Tanya and Morgan to his office, and he advises them to flee from the U.S.S.R.! They flee. The G.P.U. pursues them. Audience members should be breathless from excitement: will they catch up with them? or will they not catch up with them?! This is exactly like the way it is in motion pictures about American Indians. They, of course, get away. As their steamer is sailing past the Statue of Liberty, the charming Tanya stretches out her happy arms towards it, greeting it joyfully, while Morgan sings the American national anthem (near that very same Liberty under whose skirt a prison was housed for many years). At this point, Tanya, in a completely natural American way, gives her heart and her hand, and all other such things, in marriage to Morgan, – the only thing missing is the American flag!

When I was asked at the *konferens* [conference] – after the *sinopsis* had been read very attentively – what I thought of it, I was completely frank and told them that this *sinopsis* seemed to me to be utter nonsense. To my surprise, no one was astonished at my contention. And no one was offended at my contention. We didn't touch upon politics, God forbid – not in the presence of such pure art! – but I did give them lessons in political literacy for several hours on end. They all seemed to agree with me heartily. I told them that if a villain is obligatory, then it would be well to make Russian counter-revolution the villain. I recounted to them about saboteurs and about the Ramzin trial. Thalberg asked me to explain to him again what exactly sabotage is. He heard me out, and then he said: “*O'kei*, rather than the G.P.U., let's have it be sabotage that will be the villain!”

I explained to him what the collective farm movement was all about. Thalberg heard me out, and then he said: “*Uell* [Well], we don't need to have a peasant revolt: think up some sort of exciting scene, like an insurrection! *Shchiur* [Sure]!”

I told him that an American cannot flee from the U.S.S.R., because if he does flee, that means that he is a fool, and a fool cannot be a hero. And if he is a hero and not a fool, then he will not flee, because not a single American engineer has yet to flee from the U.S.S.R. “*Uell*” – this means: “so, hence, therefore.” “*Shchiur*” – this means: “enough!” “that will do!” Americans begin their sentences with these words when they want to be abstruse.

“*Uell*,” said Thalberg. “We need the escape as a gimmick. Think up some way that the escape can be plausible for the hero, because American audiences really like escapes.”

I told him that it would be possible for us to devise such a trick only when lemons begin to ripen in Greenland, but then Greenland would no longer be Greenland; instead, it would be Hollywood. And they had invited me to be an author and a consultant in a pro-Soviet film.

“Uell,” said Thalberg. “We are producing a film that is very much pro-Soviet, and we have invited you here as a Bolshevik. But it is essential that you think up an escape. *Shchiur!*”

It should be said here that I wanted to work on the picture, for I understood what an enormous significance film has in that selfsame America. And to make a motion picture in which there would be verisimilitude, even if only in seventy-five percent of it, this seemed to me – by my reckoning – to be a big deal. Upon my arrival in Hollywood, I had laid out my plan and explained it to the Board of Directors. My plan was simple. I said that the working conditions were only acceptable for me provided that they would give me the opportunity to preserve the historical perspectives. The U.S.S.R. is building socialism. The U.S.S.R. is being led by the Communist Party. These are historical facts, and there are historical perspectives to these facts. They said to me: “*O’kei!*” “*Uell!*” At that time, I already had a conception about Hollywood in general and, upon hearing the *sinopsis* of the story line, I was inclined to consider it more a matter of stupidity than of politics, the more so since it would not require any great pains on my part to save the G.P.U. from villainy and collective farms from peasant revolts.

For about two Hollywood nights, Joe and I didn’t sleep: we were trying to think up an escape, first one way and then another! We couldn’t get anything to work out with Morgan. Then we decided that Tanya would be the one who would flee, and Morgan, out of his love for her, would run after her. We expelled Tanya from the Party. First we arranged things so that Tanya had never been to America and that she was instead a Russian *bourgeoise*, a translator, and so on. Then we tried leaving in the part about her initial stay in America. Nothing was working out! Nothing was working out with Nikolai either, for it was impossible to devise a scheme whereby a communist would help someone to flee the U.S.S.R. while still remaining a communist! We truly needed to think up, while sitting there in Hollywood, how to get oranges to grow in Greenland.

We were only able to think up one thing: the speech that I delivered at the next *konferens*.

Descartes once asserted the precept: “I think, therefore, I am.” And European philosophy struggled with that formula for a century and a half, confounding philosophy. For in accord with this formula, it was extraordinarily difficult to reconcile man with the cosmos and it was very easy to confirm the world not as a tangible reality, but as a mental representation. Philosophy struggled with that formula until such time as a man came forth and said that the root of the problem lies not in reconciling this formula with reality, but in the formula itself, for the formula needed to be recast into: “I exist, therefore, I am a part of nature.” For us, the escape we were trying to think up had turned into that very formula, “I think, therefore, I am.” It’s not worth it to concern oneself with Greenlandic explorations. It’s better not to think up a film scenario in Hollywood and then adjust Soviet reality to fit it. On the contrary, it’s better to adjust the screenplay to reality and omit the Greenlandic lemons of escapes. That’s what I told them.

“Uell,” they said to me, “but we want to produce a pro-Soviet film.”

“That’s precisely why I wasn’t able to sleep for a night and a half,” I answered.

“But a pro-Soviet film,” they said to me, “this means: let the Bolsheviks do at home whatever they wish to do, even if it means building socialism. We acknowledge the Five-Year Plan and your industrial construction. We are in favor of recognizing the Soviets and re-establishing diplomatic relations with them because it’s advantageous and profitable for us to conduct trade with the Bolsheviks. But what is taking place in Russia with the Bolsheviks does not benefit us and would do no good for Americans. We need to show in this film that even American communists cannot live in the land of the Bolsheviks. All of this needs to be shown in the film that we intend to shoot.”

I heard him out, and I realized that this was no longer stupidity, but politics, although a very stupid brand of politics. I pulled out my contract, according to which, at any time of the day or night, I could tear up this very same contract. And, guilefully extracting my name out of Hollywood affairs, I said: “*Gud-bai* [Good-bye]!” “*Do svidaniia* [Good bye]!”

They had told me that I could send for books from anywhere in the world by letter or telegram and that I could think up whatever I took it into my head to think up, as long as it was related to cinema and it was pure art. They reminded me that I was privileged. And so they asked me in amazement: do you really not want to work? do you really not want to deviate, even by just half a percentage point, from historical accuracy, from that selfsame history whose perspective you stipulated as a condition for your work?

“No,” I said. “I am not a traitor.”

“Well, but for us here in America, to deceive history and, even more than that, to deceive the government, is considered good business!” It was Al Lewin who said this to me, and, I suppose, he was serious.

I spent my final night in Hollywood with Al Lewin. I had become friends with him, and not mainly because of my employment at the film studio. During the time I spent in Hollywood, Al Lewin’s friend, the young American poet, Charles Reznikoff, a very talented man, would come visit him and stay as a guest at his place. Reznikoff didn’t take the bait and end up caught on the golden hook of the movies. Instead he worked as a sales clerk at the counter of a millinery shop in New York. Reznikoff has written some nice collections of verse, which sell poorly because they contain good poetry. Al Lewin offered Reznikoff the opportunity to come out to California for a vacation. I witnessed how Al would buy up to twenty-five copies of one of Reznikoff’s poetry books and then, on the sly, without Reznikoff knowing it, he would give them away to some of his acquaintances as a gift. He was doing this to bolster sales and keep the book in print. Al found artistic perfection in the works of Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and the Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol, and he asked me about Boris Pasternak (a poet, by the way, who is now revered as the best living writer in the world today). Al was just about the only person in Hollywood who was mindful of the U.S.S.R. and genuinely wanted to find out things about it. Al had once been a literature professor. He invited me to stay at his home and offered me the use of his Packard. And, in all likelihood, he likewise buys up several copies of

my books at a time. He is a very short man, very weak physically, and he has attentive, intelligent, slightly weary eyes. He is an intelligent and cultured person.

During my final night in Hollywood, some friends of mine gathered together to say goodbye to me. And at the moment when the writer R. was saying to me: “Oh, y-you, Pilnyak! . . . American individualism!” Al Lewin said to me:

“Don’t you want to yield half a percentage point to the movie business? But how is the movie business going to yield half a percentage point to you? The trouble is not the people, Bor, the trouble is the system!”

Al Lewin was absolutely right: the trouble is the system, not the people. Al Lewin is a good person. I recounted earlier the story about a good American cowboy who showed his love for an Indian girl by giving her a kick in the back with the toe of his boot. That took place in California. I will now recount below how California once played the role of the drayman who rescued the United States, pulling it out of the messy puddle of the financial crisis by means of California gold. California and Hollywood remember the history of how California and the Wild West were settled. Johann Augustus Sutter, this first California farmer, had a large impact in shaping the destiny of America. He was born in Germany, lived in Switzerland, and served in the palace guards in Paris until the July Revolution kicked him out of the guards. He set off for Africa as a merchant. He arrived in New York as an innkeeper. At first, he searched for happiness. Then he started to search for peace and quiet. He set off with his family for the Wild West in order to get away from people. From San Francisco, this pioneer – with two other White people, with his family, and with several Indians – traveled in a boat upstream along the Sacramento River, going to lands where no White people before him had ever yet gone. He wanted to live there like a Robinson Crusoe. In accordance with the laws governing wilderness areas, he submitted applications for these lands, and the lands started to belong to him. He built a farm that he called New Helvetia, and that people in the surrounding area called Fort Sutter. Sutter cleared the land, floating the timber downstream along the Sacramento River, and started farming. He lived for ten years in these wild, primitive environs, alone with his two comrades and his family members. He attained peace and quiet. But on January 28, 1848, one of his comrades, James Marshal, found gold on his – Sutter’s – lands. Gold! – the thing for the sake of which Europeans, generally speaking, set off for America! Two weeks later, Sutter’s lands were turned into camps of prospectors; his lands were thus cast into the mode of everyday life that Jack London has described in his novels. In half a year, all of the ragged poor in America had gathered on Sutter’s lands, creating settlements that are nowadays called towns and that bear such old names as “Whiskey,” “Mines of a Wild Yankee,” and “Port Wine.” New Helvetia turned out to be in the center of the city of Sacramento, which is now the capital of California. But Sutter was a farmer and he wanted to remain a farmer. Sutter turned to the courts with the demand that the authorities drive off of his lands those uninvited people who had gathered there. The courts confirmed his rights, but the courts were powerless. Sutter went to Washington for help, and that is the only reason that Sutter remained alive. The prospectors dealt with the decree of the courts by means of the laws that govern the wilderness and the “wild” West. All of Sutter’s properties were burnt down to the ground. One of his sons shot himself in the head, another one was murdered, and the third one ran off and disappeared without a trace. His daughter was raped and driven

insane. Sergei Eisenstein, who, like me, was invited to Hollywood, in his case by the film studio Paramount Pictures, offered to produce a film about the life and fate of this first farmer in California. They rejected his offer. Then he proposed shooting a film version of Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. He had worked for a while with Dreiser on co-writing the screenplay for it. The contract with Eisenstein was torn up, and it was torn up in such a way that Eisenstein had only twenty-four hours to leave the United States.

There are many film plots in America!

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Thus, the contention made by some Americans—that one needs to search for America neither here nor there – has come and gone. Devoting oneself to studying countries through the window of a railway car – even, and especially, a railway car like the “Twentieth Century” – is an enterprise that is unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons. I bought myself an automobile so that I could get across the country in it – from one ocean to the other – and see America up close and personal. I learned how to drive a car in Santa Monica beneath the palm trees. It became absolutely clear during the first few days of instruction, after suddenly bumping into some unexpected surprise and losing my bearings, not being able to figure out how to disengage the clutch with my left foot, that I started in the most desperate and reckless fashion with my right foot to press on the gas instead of the brakes. The automobile, in a completely natural way, changed from an automobile into a tank and drove precipitously into that very same unexpected surprise, which frightened me and which turned out to be a small garden fence. The tank ran over that fence and then through a second fence, defacing some commonplace flowerbeds. The tank miraculously came to a halt, stuck in the sand and hanging above a bluff that bordered on the ocean. This is how I learned American sangfroid and humor.

All the same, before leaving California, I decided to drive around and see all the sights. I saw places *in memoriam* of my fellow Russian countrymen.

I toured the ruins of Indian settlements and the Spanish missions (*mishens* in English). The Spanish conquered the Indians by means of these *mishens*. Each of these *mishens* – thick-walled and monastery-like in appearance – was a fortress that, without fail, contained an enormous wine cellar and a refectory that was no smaller in size. Spanish paintings devoted to the memory of local Indians from the past are preserved in some of the *mishens*. These paintings, in their unsophisticated lack of competence and taste when it comes to craftsmanship, are very realistic. In some of them the artist has depicted the conversion of native Indians to the Catholic faith: naked Indians are standing in the water, while a fat priest with a cross in his hand is standing over them on the river bank; behind the priest, Spanish soldiers armed with flintlock muskets are standing around majestically; and even farther in the background, hiding in some bushes, stood a cannon and horses, waiting for orders from the commanding officer. And that is how it was in reality. They corralled the Indians into converting to the Catholic faith by means of gunpowder. Well, lo and behold, in the sanctuary of one of these *mishens*, inside a closet behind the altar, I caught sight of a Russian samovar. It was absolutely an Orthodox Russian one, hand-crafted and made out of red copper. Judging by

all appearances, I would say that it was made some time around the seventeenth century. The presence of a Russian samovar inside a Catholic altar puzzled me, so I set off to make inquiries and to investigate the matter further. It turns out that in the seventeenth century there were Russians here. Reznov, a Cossack chieftain who commanded a Russian ship, was even getting ready to marry a certain native princess, but he didn't dare do this without first getting permission by requesting the Tsar's mercy. So he set off for home to get this mercy and he never returned back. The Spanish government, it turns out, had established a correspondence with Russian scribes on account of this Reznov. They had done this out of fear that Russian fishermen and Cossacks might seize California for themselves. The samovar had remained there ever since that time. The Spanish monarchs, who didn't know the intended function of a samovar, were using it as a washbasin during the liturgy. So the *mishens*-fortresses, it turns out, were mainly built not against Indians, but against Russians. Russians in California! Russian "Jumpers!" Will wonders never cease?! Even if this kind of patriotism doesn't contribute anything to my reputation!

I witnessed a rodeo and got to see some cowboys.

In olden times, that is to say, about ten years ago, they used to choose the best cowboys at these rodeos to play roles in their movies.

We were driving up to the mountains, and then down from the mountains, headed to the border of the state of Arizona. Down from the mountains, traveling as groups of families, cowboys had arrived, young and old alike, both male and female. Their horses – mustangs! – were standing at the hitching post. They were equine beauties that had come for the horse race. The cowboys were scrutinizing the horses. In the cattle-pens, bulls and cows were lowing. Women, many of them wearing cowboy jeans, with colorful shawls on their shoulders, were strolling around the racetrack, enjoying the festive, convivial atmosphere. Girls were double-checking the girth on the saddles of their horses. Everybody, from time to time, was eating hot dogs and drinking Coca-Cola. The chairman of the Cowboy Society of Sportsmen, a renowned cowboy and a no less renowned actor (but now already a former actor), was serving as the master of ceremony. His outfit was glittering and sparkling. From time to time, he would perform a trick roping act, throwing his spinning lasso out in front of himself, urging his horse on with his spurs, and then having his horse jump through the loop of his master's lasso. Not a single muscle on the movie cowboy's face would move.

The competition began. The first event was riding bareback on a wild bull. Some of the bulls were raging in stupefaction, jumping up into the air, scraping the ground with their horns, and kicking with their hooves. Others were lying down. There were, naturally, no bridles. The riders, if one can use that word for the people who were riding on bulls, were holding on solely with the help of their legs, maintaining their equilibrium by waving their arms in the air for balance. The winner was the one who would fall off the bull last. Then the very same thing would be repeated with horses that had not been saddle broken. Then there were races that involved riders who possessed all manner of *dzhigit* agility and dexterity. Girls as well were racing. Their agility and dexterity consisted in how well they, shall we say, carried the baton in relay races. After galloping a lap around the racetrack, each girl would jump off one horse at full speed and land on another one, and then she would speed off farther on that new mount.

One girl was lifted up off the ground and taken away to a hospital by ambulance. It's remarkable how the girls were able to jump from one horse to another at a full gallop: a young female assistant would get the horse to speed up and then the girl rider, without breaking stride, would jump from one horse to another at the moment when the two horses were level with each other. The girl rider in pursuit would grab hold of the mane of the second horse, lie prone in the air for a moment, and then in another moment speed off farther, urging the horse on with her spurs. The girls did not have their hair cut short, so their locks fluttered in the wind. Following this event, there was a lasso competition. A cow – frightened and running – would be released from the cattle-pen. A cowboy, while sitting atop his horse, had to throw his lasso onto the cow and make it fall to the ground. Then he would jump down off his horse and tie the cow's feet together. The winner was the one who did all of this in the fewest number of seconds. I must say that there were nonetheless fewer cowboys – and their horses and their herd of half-wild bulls and cows – than there were, let us put it this way, civilized spectators and their automobiles. The racetrack and the benches for spectators in the grandstands were nailed together hastily out of unhewn planks, but the restroom had running water and was equipped with a sewage system. And electric lights were hung over the racetrack for the night-time enjoyment of the spectators. Some of the cowboys likewise arrived by automobile.

One cannot compare these cowboy entertainments with the Central Asian *baiga*, although they are perhaps not of Indian, but of Asian origin (the Spaniards were Moors). Cowboy outfits, which are sold at stores in cities, are manufactured in factories, just like Spanish saddles. The cowboy competitions are already halfway theater. It's no accident that a cowboy film actor should be the one presiding at this event.

I also got to see people prospecting for gold. They are the descendants of those people who got California started, those who at one point in time – and not so very long ago – ruined the peace and quiet of Johann Augustus Sutter. It was precisely these prospectors for gold that I was going to see. Essentially, I didn't see anything. A man who looked sullen and suspicious emerged out of a cave and announced drily that we had no business being there. He was wearing a blue work shirt. Dirt had eaten into the pores of his face and hands. He went back into the cave, glancing back at us suspiciously as he did so. I don't know by what laws of refraction of the sun's rays this happened, but his eyes shone like a blue spark, just as the eyes of a horse will do on occasion from the light of automobile headlights. His eyes shone with the sinister, sizzling light of the passion and parsimony – and the hunger – of a man who was terrified, despairing, and suspicious. That's how it seemed to me. Next to the cave stood an old Ford automobile that was completely beat up. It could not have been worth more than twenty-five dollars. And it wasn't clear whether this Ford was serving as a means of transportation or as a flophouse. On the car seat inside the Ford a kerosene stove was hissing.

Los Angeles, indeed, all of California, by Hollywood's will and choosing, is adorned with monuments. The footprints of movie stars in the cement of sidewalks in front of movie theaters have a frontal view of the enormous oranges that turn out not to be oranges at all, but shops where orange juice is sold, and of the enormous teapots that turn out to be not teapots at all, but restaurants. This is at once art and monuments, advertisements and business, taken together and placed beneath palm, eucalyptus, and pepper trees.

At the very same time that Hollywood released me from my contract, that very same evening, without waiting for morning, we rolled up our sleeves, pulled white caps down onto our foreheads, and joined the conveyor belt of automotive highways to search for that selfsame America, the one that isn't to be found either in New York or in Los Angeles. I have already recounted the story about highways. These highways took us onto their conveyor belt when we needed to sense that we were driving not along space, but along a standard, for everywhere, from one ocean to the other, nothing changed except nature. Everywhere there were one and the same filling stations, one and the same breakfasts and dinners, one and the same motels. The only things that changed were the landscapes and the particularities of climate. But they were not visible on account of the highways, they were screened off by the conveyor belt of traffic. We had a record-breaking day, when in a single day we traveled by automobile a distance equal to the distance between Moscow and Odessa.

There were three of us traveling together: Joe, myself, and Isidore K., a Hollywood screen actor, a rolling stone, a person who had despaired of ever finding work in Hollywood, so he was helping us drive the car cross-country in exchange for free food and lodging. He was headed to New York, but he was prepared to go anywhere we wanted. He was a U.S. citizen. Isidore sang American hymns the whole way.

So we traveled across all of America, from one ocean to the other, with stops in some southern states, the Gulf of Mexico, the state of Mississippi, and the city of New Orleans. On our automobile trip, I also got to see the Great Lakes, the Ford auto plant in Detroit, and Niagara Falls in Buffalo.

Two natural phenomena bowled me over. They were the kind of phenomena that I had never seen before and that made my travels across America complete: the cactus desert and Niagara Falls.

The cactus desert at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, with its ghastly heat beneath a sweltering sun and its yellow sand, did not in any way resemble real, actual nature. It instead drew the fantastical picture in one's imagination of a dead sea-bottom, where enormous and terrifying cactuses, as well as yucca and wild palm trees, appeared to be sea plants and reefs made out of sea creatures. The yucca tree has not just one leafy cap, but several of them. Suddenly, out of a naked trunk, stripped of its bark, there protrudes the kind of cap that sits upon a crown. There were various kinds of cactuses: thorny ones, yellow ones that looked like porcupines, smooth ones, green ones that looked like cucumbers, small ones, the size of a prairie dog, and enormous ones, the size of three adult Indians. Both the palm trees and the cactus trees stick out of the sand that creeps beneath them, just as if they had been accidentally and temporarily thrust into this sand. My automobile ran over a porcupine in the desert there. Once we saw a herd of wild prairie dogs behind some cactus trees. Both the porcupine and these prairie dogs looked like cactuses to us. The conveyor belt of a highway traverses this desert, chopping off kilometers by means of filling stations, advertising billboards, a zoological park of desert animals, and zoological museums of Indians. All of these things are located in this desert, which appears to be a sea-bottom and which comes to life only at oases.

Niagara Falls was the capstone of my trip. It – the Niagara waterfall – is truly majestic, inimitable, and virile, this enormous mass of water that falls from granite heights towering above. It is indescribable, as are all things and events that are majestic in their simplicity. An enormous river falls from granite heights, it falls perpendicularly, drowning out, with its loud roar, all the noise coming from the factories and plants that are situated around it, creating a silence by means of the rumble of nature, particularly when a person holds his tongue when he is near it because it doesn't matter – no human voice can be heard anyway. And this is about all that can be said by way of describing this waterfall. One must remain silent when near it, near this mechanical (as opposed to a volcanic, for instance), this mechanical manifestation of the power of nature – of the colossal might of this factory of geology. The industrial plants and factories built around Niagara Falls, as well as the noisy small towns on both the U.S. and Canadian sides, these are but whelping puppies next to this factory of water and granite. They grow dumb in the silence of its roar. It's exactly right that they grow dumb and exactly right that it is in silence, because human hearing – the measure – refuses to perceive sounds next to this falling mass of gray water. Skyscrapers, the highest structures in the world, might amaze somebody else. In their mechanical urbanity and in their dimensions, the underground caves of New York, which are several times larger than the Roman catacombs, such that a person could live his entire life inside these underground caves without ever seeing any natural light, these caves might amaze somebody else. But Niagara Falls is more majestic. And it's simpler, it's very simple: an enormous river falls from granite heights, it falls so majestically that even Americans have not contrived to put up either restaurants or advertising billboards around Niagara Falls. It's very simple.

I once read a booklet written by a fellow Russian countryman of mine, Pavel Svinin, titled *Essay on a Picturesque Journey to the Republic of North American Regions*. It was published with the permission of the censors in Saint Petersburg in 1815. This Pavel Svinin describes the charms of Niagara Falls, writing:

“ . . . Amongst the savages who inhabited the lands surrounding Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, many strange and wondrous stories have been preserved about Niagara Falls . . . I will mention here one true adventure . . . Several *versts* upstream from the waterfall, an English Mariner from a certain warship was travelling along the river. Spotting a beautiful Indian maiden sleeping on the shore, he took it into his head to kidnap her. When the Indian maiden awoke, she decided to hide inside the boat on the shore that her husband was sleeping in. But before she could execute her plan, the Mariner succeeded in cutting the rope that attached the boat to a tree. In an instant, the boat was carried away by the current and soon got pulled into the rapids . . . ”

The Americans have a certain place that is advertised in all of their magazines and on the posters in the waiting area at their railroad stations: the *Grend-Ken'on* [Grand Canyon], which translates into Russian as the “Large Ravine.” We made a four-hundred-kilometer detour in order to visit this ravine, which at one time had been washed out and sculpted by the Colorado River. I wouldn't have mentioned this ravine if it hadn't been the threshold to the Zuni Indian tribe. The ravine really is very large, extending two kilometers in depth. Along its bottom

flows the Colorado River. There are trees near the ravine that date from the Middle Ages. There are Americans who stay in a fancy hotel that is located beneath these medieval trees: these tourists have either already gone down to the bottom of the ravine on donkeys or they were planning to go down there. This ravine is noteworthy for its non-negotiability for tourists. If a two-kilometers-high mountain were to stand in the midst of a flat expanse, this would be just like all other mountains. But here the ravine is two kilometers deep, so that if one wishes to become aware of its depth or its height, one must descend to its bottom with the help of donkeys. The areas surrounding the *Grend-Ken'on* – wild, primitive areas – are still inhabited by Indians. At the edge of the *Grend-Ken'on*, there is an Indian wigwam located alongside the fancy hotel. The days and the hours when the Indians will be performing their war dances are posted on a handbill.

I didn't go down to the bottom of the ravine on a donkey. Nor did I watch the Indian dances: they can be seen in Moscow by those who like to feast their eyes on Gypsies. But we did go visit the zoological garden of the Zuni tribe.

Christopher Columbus (a Jew by nationality, as several researchers maintain) reached the first American island on October 12, 1492 old style. In 1928, a certain Parisian citizen named R. M. Blank (with a hard sign at the end of his surname) published a Russian-language book in Paris titled *America*. In this book of his, *America*, Blank writes, with hard signs:

“Columbus stepped foot on this island immediately upon his arrival on its shores, on the morning of October 12th. The indigenous people were waiting for him on shore in a state of extreme excitation. They were certain that those who had come from beyond the horizon to visit them – from that place where ‘heaven comes together with the earth’ – were celestial beings . . . They prostrated themselves at the feet of Columbus and his retinue with a look of the most profound veneration and complete submission on their faces.”

This selfsame Blank writes:

“The following incident, which is noted by Herrera, a Spanish historian of the 16th century, in his *Historia des las Indias*, published in Madrid in 1601, is characteristic of the cruelty that accompanied Spanish colonization.

On the island of Cuba, a wise *cacique* by the name of Hatuey served as the head of an Indian tribe. He already had a quite clear conception about Spaniards based upon the stories that he had heard about them from his fellow tribesmen. So when news of the forthcoming visit to his principedom by Spaniards reached him, he convened all the elders of his tribe. He placed an enormous ingot of gold in the middle of the village square and then he turned toward the elders who had congregated there and addressed them with the following proclamation: ‘This here (GOLD!) is the god of the White people. Let us bow down before him, let us express to him our veneration, and let us ask him to imbue the White people with a favorable attitude toward us.’

The Indians began to pray ardently and passionately to the ‘god of the White people,’ expressing to him their veneration by all available means: gifts, dances, songs, and so on.

But this god was inexorable, so as soon as the Spaniards arrived, the very first thing they did was to grab the *cacique* himself and subject him – for the greater glory of god – to the *auto-da-fé*.

It’s true that while this ill-fated man was writhing in agony on the bonfire, suffering the final convulsions that preceded his death, a Catholic *pater* did approach the bonfire and, lifting a cross up to the dying man, proposed to him that he accept Christianity so as to guarantee that he would enter the heavenly kingdom. But the Indian replied that if it is Christians that reign there, he would prefer to be a bit farther away . . . A horrible reply, a horrible judgment!”

An edifying reply! An edifying judgment!

We set off to visit the Zuni tribe. We had to turn off the highway and make a side trip. As soon as we turned off the highway, we found ourselves in the primitive state of impassable roads: we ended up on clayey soil and in deep ruts. It was as if we had ended up somewhere in – what do you know! don’t worry! – the Karakum desert. A thunderstorm began to pour rain down upon us, and our automobile started to crawl along like a cow on the ice, aiming in the direction of the ditches and not wishing to keep to the ruts. We drove in this way, from one ditch to another. Isidore even quit singing his hymns. Before setting off for the final oasis amidst these impassable roads, in a valley between the mountains where the Zuni live, we stopped off at the – I don’t quite know how to express this – white sated houses, equipped in American or European fashion with tennis courts, of the bureaucratic officials of the Indian Department. There we received permission from a bureaucratic official, not an Indian, of course, but an American, to drive through to where the Zuni Indians lived. The bureaucratic official advised us not to spend an overnight stay among the Zunis.

That day I witnessed a level of poverty in America that was no less terrifying than that of Turkish villages of 1920. The scenery was exactly the same as what one would find in Turkey: around the oasis there were houses that looked like resting spots, riders on undersized horses, mud, and unsanitary conditions. We introduced ourselves, and an Indian escorted us on a tour of the settlement. He was a man of about forty, with a long braid, who was wearing moccasins. He posed for a photograph with us, charging us seventy-five cents for this. There were no streets in the Zuni settlement. The houses were standing any which way. One could enter a house only after climbing up to the outside wall of the house by means of portable stairs made out of poles. There were no other entrances into these houses made out of clay. As a result, every house was its own small fortress. But the ovens for baking bread were located outside, beyond the walls of the houses. These ovens, if they were to be photographed close up, using the Hollywood tricks of shifting the perspective, could be made to look like Islamic mosques or Kirgiz yurts. They are shaped like cupolas. In these ovens, they bake *maise* cakes (*maise* – sorghum – corn, these are all one and the same thing). We climbed into the houses by way of the portable stairs. Although the ovens used for baking cakes have just been described,

in one house I did see an iron stove, a portable one, which is heated by coal. I also saw a sewing machine and a nickel-plated bed frame (the bed was without sheets, of course). Manufactured items were incidental, as in Turkish villages. In every house, there were women who were sitting on the floor weaving carpets, there was an irrigation ditch flowing in the corner, and there was also a hand-mill housed there. This is where they prepare corn flour, pulverizing corn by rubbing one stone against another. They treated me to bread and to cakes that were as thin as a sheet of writing paper. I bought a carpet for twelve dollars. The woman who sold it to me said that she had been working on it for three months. Besides seeing Indians riding on horses, I did, nonetheless, see several Indians riding in old makes of cars. Our companion, who had his picture taken with us for seventy-five cents but allowed his daughter to have her picture taken with us for fifty, this descendant of terrifying cannibals and fierce warriors called Hawk Claw was a kind man, quiet and downtrodden. He offered us the use of his house for lodging for the night, and of course nothing untoward would have happened to us there. Corn was growing around the Zuni village. I didn't see an American flag flying above the Zuni village: it was flying above the house inhabited by the bureaucratic officials of the Office of Indian Affairs.

And so in order to understand the majesty of the Americans' Grand Canyon, one must descend to the American bottom of the Indians from the Zuni settlement, from their *kishlak*. Americans are absolutely right when they say that America is not only New York, or, alternatively, that America does not reside in New York. In America, there is enlightenment, liberty, and the notion that all people are equal before the law. And, therefore, Indians – these red-skinned people who were here in America, in all likelihood, for a millennium before the Americans arrived – are not considered Americans and are not citizens of the U.S.A. An Indian can only become a citizen of the U.S.A. if he is willing to register himself as such, just like a Pole who has arrived from Lodz. In those places where America was colonized by Northern Europeans – by Saxons, most of all – there are no Indians. They say that the Indians died out. It would be more correct, however, to say that they were excised, that they were massacred. In those places where America was colonized by Spaniards, the Indians remained pure-blooded or else formed an Indo-European mixture, such as the Mexicans, for example, did. Simply put, the Spaniards came to America (as R. M. Blank has recounted) to pillage and plunder. They came without women, counting on returning home after having pillaged and plundered. And they did pillage and plunder as much as they could. As required, they made the Indians into Christians. As far as temperament allowed, they raped Indian women. They were in a hurry, for before they happened upon the Indians they did not have much to keep them busy, neither them nor the Spanish kings, who were supported by the popes in Rome. And yet the Indians somehow managed to survive, acquiring Spanish blood through the Indian women who were raped. The English came to America differently: they came along with their families, they came in Puritan piety for the sake of life eternal. The English came with the unspoken compact to live well in every way possible. So in those places where there were Englishmen, there were no Indians. The good life of the English settlers turned out to be more fatal for the Indians than the violence and rape of the Spaniards. There were still some wars with the Indians in the last century, and if the Indians still remained anywhere, they lived in quarantine, just as if they were in a zoological garden, in the name of American equality of every kind. Indians live like some sort of museum exhibits that lie on the bottom of Grand-Canyonesque

contrasts, where things are the other way around. In any event, there is an Office of Indian Affairs in the U.S.A. that guards and protects Indians.

The Niagara Falls of American minds and wills is majestic.

Let us again recall Pavel Svinin:

“. . . Amongst the savages who inhabited the lands surrounding Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, many strange and wondrous stories have been preserved about Niagara Falls . . . I will mention here one true adventure . . . Several *verst*s upstream from the waterfall, an English Mariner from a warship was travelling along the river. Spotting a beautiful Indian maiden sleeping on the shore, he took it into his head to kidnap her. When the Indian maiden awoke, she decided to hide inside the boat on the shore that her husband was sleeping in. But before she could execute her plan, the Mariner succeeded in cutting the rope that attached the boat to a tree. In an instant, the boat was carried away by the current and soon got pulled into the rapids . . .

It was completely natural that the Indian should perish, battered and beaten by the waterfall. Look at how Pavel Svinin writes here in such a Karamzinian way! It turns out that the verb “to kidnap” can be used in the sense of “to rape,” and all of this together is “a strange and wondrous story,” just like “a true adventure.” It is by means of such “adventures” that the Indians have now been herded into menageries, where they are forced into performing in wild beast shows, dancing, like Gypsies, in confirmation of their exoticness.

I will continue the excerpt from Pavel Svirin:

“. . . The Indian was roused from his sleep by the rocking of the boat. He grabbed the oar and with surprising strength and skill he managed to turn it around. But his strength and skill were futile against the fury of the waves. Foreseeing his inescapable death, he laid down the oar with amazing sangfroid, wrapped himself up inside a leather pelt, and again lay down in the boat, which cascaded down into the abyss and disappeared forever!”

Truly, if there will be Christians living in the Christian heaven, as the wise *cacique* Hatuey remarked at the bonfire, then it would be better not to enter that paradise . . . Stop! Don't go!

I heard a legend about the Indians in America from several political radicals, a legend, it would seem, that is confirmed by the facts. The reader knows that a tenth part of the American population – the Negroes – were brought to America from Africa. Apparently, the idea arose: why travel across the ocean to get slaves, when it's possible to turn Indians into slaves!? The radicals claimed that the Indians did not become slaves, did not submit to the White man, did not surrender to him their freedom, not these Hawk Claws who died at Niagara Falls, wrapping themselves up in their leather pelts with “amazing sangfroid.” It's a legend, to be sure, that follows in the tradition of Mayne Reid. But in what way and under what circumstances do the Indians now find themselves living in the beastly condition of performing in wild beast shows?

And why are they not even American citizens!? The Indian Wars ended about fifty years ago. Much has been written about how they died out from natural causes and became extinct, just as did the Zyrian and the Samoyed peoples during the reigns of the Russian emperors. There are three numbers that are curious. It's not entirely clear to me how the first number arose, but according to the logic of things it has been downplayed: in 1492, there were 846,000 Indians on lands that are presently part of the United States; in 1789, there remained 76,000 Indians; and by 1930 (when for the past century they were no longer slaughtering Indians as diligently), there were 340,541 of them.

It was necessary to descend to the bottom of the Grand Canyon in order to look at Americans from there through the eyes of the Indians. Niagara Falls is truly majestic! Indians resemble cactuses from the sea-bottom of the Arizona desert. If they are still living, they are living in a way that is as unreal as is the cactus desert at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

America is "the country of a great democracy!" A historical fact all the same remains a fact: the Indians were not constitutional slaves. The Negroes are the ones who became slaves.

26

Who in the U.S.S.R. knows about the city of Dallas in South Texas (or *Tekses*)? About fifty years ago, there were about ten thousand people living in this small prairie town. About ten years ago, there were about a hundred and fifty thousand people living there. Today there are slightly less than three hundred thousand inhabitants. This city, which even people in America know little about, has a little more than seventy thousand automobiles, a little more than sixty-five thousand telephones, and a little more than sixty thousand electronic calculators. New construction in this city over the past ten years has cost a little more than three hundred and twenty million dollars. The banks in this city have four hundred million dollars in reserves at their disposal. During the final year of American *prosperiti*, they had a production output valued at three hundred and thirty million dollars for the year and a wholesale trade turnover of one billion, six hundred and eighty million dollars. To the south, the southeast, and the east of this city, abutting the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, lie the so-called Southern, Negro states. Directly north of Dallas lies the state of Oklahoma and its capital, Oklahoma City. Oklahoma City is already a famous city, having climbed up into the sky with its skyscrapers and billions of dollars. In geo-political terms, this city is much like our Dnepropetrovsk: there is steppe and grain alongside oil, coal, and industry. It's a city of factories, mines, oil derricks, and workers. And to the north and northeast of Oklahoma, up to Chicago and over to New York, there is industry, industry, and more industry. About seventy years ago, in the days of the Civil War, these places were the watershed, the dividing line between the North and the South.

The state of Mississippi is entirely covered with subtropical thickets and factories. It lies upon a multitude of rivers and rivulets overgrown with trees; it's a place where people are almost not to be seen and where the Mississippi River flows majestically in its riverbed. Its forests – God knows what kinds of trees these are: their branches, which look like liana vines that have become overgrown with gray beards of moss, stretch down to the ground and they get entangled with – as well as they themselves entangle – everything that lies beneath them.

The state of Tennessee rises up from the Mississippi River onto hillocks. This is that very remarkable state where several years ago a court ruled that man does not descend from the ape. The court said in addition that to assert otherwise is a crime punishable by a prison sentence.

New Orleans is a port that trades in cotton, cane sugar, and bananas. It occupies first place in the world in the trade of these items. Cotton in America is being eaten up not by worms, but by the financial crisis. At one time the city belonged to the French. This is the city to which the Huguenots fled, and to which the enemies, and later the friends, of Napoleon fled. American skyscrapers come crawling out from under French antiquity, blanketing and deafening the narrow French back streets below, which are lined with trellises and jalousies. The port lies upon the Mississippi River; it emits smoke, as do all ports. The residential back streets are drowning in flowers and prostitution. The shops were tumbling down and collapsing under the weight of bananas, apricots, cherries the size of walnuts, and other obscure types of fruit that are unknown to me. It turns out, by the way, that bananas do grow on trees, or – to express it more accurately – on logs. Rue Lafayette is overgrown with skyscrapers and flooded with lights at least as much as New York is, so that red hot *niagaras* of burning light fall there and red hot female nudes (*nues*) dance there.

Thus, we are in the South, in the land of Negroes. Both in Dallas and in Baton Rouge, and in New Orleans, there are two sections on the streetcars – one for *kolernye* [colored] people, and the other for “White” people. Negroes work at picking cotton in the fields, which are made up of small parcels of land in the midst of forests. I didn’t see any White people working in the fields. Many times I did see White people overseeing the work of the Negroes and supervising them. These White people were dressed all in white – in white helmets, in white gaiters – and in the hands of each of them, there is a stick. In all of the Southern states, especially in the state of Tennessee, the Ku-Klux-Klan and Judge Lynch’s court are still “working” to this day.

The Ku-Klux-Klan. In the 1870s, after the war between the Northern States and the Southern States, which was, in essence, a war of the Southern White man from Europe’s aristocratic-agricultural class, which had been frightened by the European revolutions, against Northern industry, which at that time had already come into being, a war, by the way, that was begun by the Southerners, and not by the Northerners, and, therefore, that had not in any way arisen under the slogan of liberating the Negroes from slavery, after this Civil War, the defeated Southern States organized a secret society to wage battle against the Negroes. That secret society was called the Ku-Klux-Klan. The members of this society were slave owners. If I may be so bold as to say, this society, which was considered to be, as is befitting, a semi-mystical and clandestine one, concerned itself largely with “nonsense,” as certain historians attest, such as frightening Negroes at midnight with white hooded smocks. At the same time, this “nonsense” sometimes turned out to be the murders of Negro social activists. The “society” set as its goal proving the remarkable truth that White people were superior to Black people. The Ku-Klux-Klan had lived itself out and would have died out completely by the mid 1890s, but in 1920, with the beginning of the agricultural crisis, the Ku-Klux-Klan was resurrected. This took place in the midst of very bombastic *publisiti*, at a time when the hooded smocks of Ku-Klux-Klan members were on display at all of the clothing stores and when commission agents were driving around cities and towns advertising clearance sales of

Ku-Klux-Klan membership cards. Nowadays, the Ku-Klux-Klan is no longer a semi-mystical organization, but simply a fascist one that exists for the confirmation not only of “White” superiority over the Negroes, but also for White Guard superiority more generally, concerning itself with the denial of rights for all those who were “non-Whites.”

Lynch’s court. This is a court without a trial, a court without justice. This is an instance of mob rule that never gets to court, because the police take part in these instances of mob rule. They find a murdered person (or persons), but it turns out that there is no murderer. Lynch’s court “judges” only Negroes. The standard reason for holding a trial is the assertion made by a White person, with no evidence or proof required, that the Negro person so-and-so seems to have made an attempt upon the honor of this White person’s great-aunt or first cousin once removed. At that point, the Negro is beaten up by a crowd. This is Lynch’s court. Then they place the Negro on the electric chair. This is the court of the city of Scottsboro. As is clear from reading the newspaper accounts, one can try in court not only the Negro who “seems” to have made this attempt upon a White woman’s honor, but also this Negro’s Black neighbor instead of him. By the way, as far as the attempt upon a woman’s “honor” is concerned, every White male in America who is prone to debauchery has possessed and enjoyed a female Negro’s “honor” for two dollars. Negro males possess and enjoy the “honor” of American White women only in Paris. From the days following the war, the business of providing sexual services has become the custom there, whereby White scoundrels employ Negro men for the purpose of male prostitution. These Negro men attend to the sexual needs of American ladies who are staying at the Ritz Hotel in Paris. These American Negro men are hired because they can speak English.

American schools and universities for White people only are located in gardens, in the light, in the sun. A grade school is invariably the best building in the community. A university is not a university but a monastic retreat for learning. What equipment they have! What academic resources! This, of course, does not impede the tradition whereby one must ask a student not what department he is studying in and so on. So I was once at an agricultural college in one of the Southern states. This college was for White people only. What classrooms they had! What a library! The labs, the dining hall, the gym! What experimental fields!

We were being escorted on our tour by two professors. These two professors set off with us to visit a neighboring farm, one that was being cultivated by *kropper*y [sharecroppers], by Negroes who were tenant farmers.

On our drive out to this farm, we approached a manor house amid the trees. Located in the thick bushes of a garden, this house looked like a French-style chateau. The owner, sitting under an umbrella on the terrace, was rocking back and forth in a rocking chair, which is an American invention. He was smoking a cigar. A good-natured and hefty man, he put on a white helmet and set off with us on a tour of the farm.

He explained to us that he owns a thousand acres of land, but there is a crisis in nature, and cotton is not providing any profit, so he intends to change the principles of his farming. Rather than growing cotton, he is planning to develop a farm for breeding chickens and rabbits. But for the present, while the crisis is still just a crisis, he is going to continue planting cotton, for

he has twenty families of Negro sharecroppers working for him. They are living on his land and in his houses. They receive from him a mule, cotton seeds, a plow, and acres of land. They till the soil, sow the seeds, harvest the crops, and give the owner two thirds of the harvest. The owner-daddy does not trouble the Negroes with having to sell their third of the harvest: he sells it for them. He does this with care and with an open heart.

The owner-daddy informed us that sometimes he strolls past the fields, like he was doing now with us, so that he could check to see whether the Negroes are working hard. I recalled the sensations I had experienced during those moments when I saw overseers in the fields.

And the Negroes – do they work! Children from the age of five start picking cotton in the fields. The women, out of well-meaning, friendly motives on their part, wash Daddy's laundry in the kitchen and cut the flowers in his garden. Daddy is a corpulent man with an obviously stocky physique. I requested that he take us to see the hamlet where the Negroes lived. Daddy eagerly agreed. The two professors got embarrassed and started assuring us that there was really nothing for us to see there: they were Negroes, they said, so of course it was very dirty and turbid there.

We got into the cars and drove past the cotton fields. When we arrived, we stopped near some sort of wooden shack that turned out to be a Negro's house, truly a "cabin." The "cabin" was made out of plywood. Instead of windows, there were cardboard boxes of various colors stuck into the outside wall. Opposite the house was a clay tub with water in it. A smoke stack had been attached to the outside wall of the house. Above the house drooped the branches of a marvelous tree that was unfamiliar to me.

A very aged and deaf old woman came out to meet us. Daddy started giving her orders with the tone of voice of a deity.

The two professors moved off to the side. The old woman stood there obediently, not saying anything to contradict him. The owner wished to go inside his own "house," one that he himself owned. We went inside.

The "cabin" was divided into two boxes. Both boxes were bedrooms with beds inside them but without any kind of linens for the bedding. In one of the boxes, on a dirt floor, there was the hollow of a hearth whose stove pipe receded into the wall.

I asked how many people lived here. Daddy reported that five adults, two families, lived there.

I requested that he show us some other houses. Daddy advised against our doing that, saying ingenuously that it was hot and that all the houses were of the same type as this one. Cracks in the walls of the house were puttied over with clay. The clay was made out of mud and soot. The old woman was dressed in truly tattered rags. Daddy invited us to return to his house to drink some whiskey and soda. A financial crisis, he says, is a financial crisis, but whiskey for dear guests is always at hand in his home.

After taking our final leave of the stocky Daddy, we drove on farther.

I called forth in the two professors their instincts for true erudition and scholarship. They told me that 60 to 70 percent of the Black sharecroppers live exactly this same way and that last winter many of the sharecroppers died of starvation. The young professor lapsed into a philosophical mood. The Negroes themselves are guilty, he says, for their swinish existence. They, he says, are almost not even human beings. The Negroes, he says, find all of this to be normal, and it all occurs due to their lack of diligence. This is a racial characteristic of theirs, the fact that they are only half-human.

That same day, we visited a Negro school with these same two professors. Once again, there was a plywood box leading into one single room, which was filled with antediluvian desks that had preserved on them many generations of inscriptions made by the pen knives of schoolboys. Besides the desks, there was a table for the teacher, an empty bookcase, and a Russian potbelly stove from the years of War Communism, which is used for heating during the winter months. These items were located either in the classroom or in the plywood box that led to it. A colorful bouquet of flowers was glowing on the teacher's desk. The little kids stood up in front of us in silence.

There were fifty-nine of these little kids being taught here, kids of all ages together, in this one classroom-plywood box. The one person who was teaching all of them, and who taught all the class levels at the same time, was a woman, a Negro woman, of course. The teacher was wearing torn stockings on her legs. The teacher's eyes were frightened. This teacher had received a higher education.

We expressed our gratitude and said goodbye to the two professors who had shown us the remarkably well equipped agricultural institute.

I had visited another American school for Negroes near New Orleans. We had been met there by a Negro teacher. I stretched out my hand to him. The teacher was at a loss as to what to do. He was about to pull back his hand, but then he tightly and nearly hysterically squeezed my hand with both of his. This was the first time in his life that a White man had stretched out his hand to shake hands with him, a Negro teacher!

I came down with malaria while I was in the Southern states. It happened one evening when I started feeling chilly, feverish, and asthmatic in the subtropical climate. There are no periods of twilight in the subtropics: day changes immediately into night there. In those Mississippi woods, perceptions of the cosmos get muddled because, on the ground, stars appear to be larger than they are up in the sky, even in the subtropics. On the ground, in the fields between the trees, stars occasionally begin to resemble a cosmic blizzard with cosmic collisions: stars would fly around by the billions. These stars were actually nighttime insects that were flying around, luminescent like stars. We were driving along a remote, desolate country road. Isidore was doing the driving. Isidore said that we were running out of gas, so we turned off the road and headed to a small Negro settlement that was tucked away under some trees. Negro shacks stood there in the dark. Admixed to the stars in the sky, to the stars beneath the trees, were the red dots of light coming from hearths. My arms and legs were aching from fever. The smells of the subtropics were splitting my skull, making my head ache. On the

ground, the stars were muddling my perceptions of the cosmos. All night, all night long, we sat there on a small log in this Negro hamlet. All night long we listened to Negroes singing as a choir. I fancy that I have never heard anything better. This singing was coming from those same Negroes to whom White people do not extend their hands and whom White people protect and defend by means of the Ku-Klux-Klan, but whose music, which has been profaned and degraded by taverns, whiskey, and prostitution, White people claim as their own national music. In Russia, there is a poet whose fate preordains the fate of all Russian literature. The name of this poet is Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin. Non-Russian literatures scarcely know Pushkin, this Russian genius. Unlike Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, he has not entered into universal, worldwide art. In that Negro school that the two professors from the agricultural college had taken me to visit, I saw on the wall a portrait of Alexander Sergeyevich. Two peoples in the world honor and revere Pushkin as their native genius: Russians and Negroes. And Negroes honor and revere Pushkin rightfully: I was witness to the singing that night, so I can vouch for that. But if Pushkin were alive today and if he were now to come to America, people would not shake his hand because a person who has a Negro as a grandfather is not, by American notions, a human being!

Political radicals from New York, who honor and revere the legend about the love of freedom among Indians and who are faithful to the precepts of Abraham Lincoln, send those people who wish to see the ugly, shameful attitudes that Americans have toward Negroes to visit the South. They do this in vain, for there is no less ugliness and shamefulness in New York. While I was in New York, specifically at the Hotel St. Moritz, some communist journalists stopped by to see me. Amongst them, there was a Negro journalist. The hotel administration refused to allow him to see me. I started to raise a ruckus, threatening to leave the hotel immediately. The administration explained that it was not them, they said, that was against it. This was not allowed, they said, because no guest would want to stay in the hotel. This Negro journalist made his way to my hotel room by taking the back elevator. After I had moved to a private residence in New York and I started to make some Negro friends, these new friends of mine – they were writers and artists – would not come by to see me because they ran the risk of not being allowed to take the elevator in a “White” building. And I was powerless to do anything about it.

What a talented, emotional people Negroes are! Negroes are distinguished from Americans, of course, by their emotionality. And it is absolutely true that the main American deity and Nietzschean – the almighty dollar – is not worth a plug nickel as far as Negroes are concerned. Many times Negroes have placed their fates on the scales of American history. Negroes were brought to this country by Americans for the first time in 1619. A painting that depicts this episode is preserved in Philadelphia. It hangs in the museum at Carpenters’ Hall. Carpenters’ Hall is the building in which George Washington, on July 4, 1776, declared the independence of the United States. Negroes were brought to this country in exchange for rum. In 1713, the English Queen Anne announced her monopoly over the slave trade. By this time, the state of Virginia was itself already engaged in slave breeding. The decree about the queen’s monopoly was one of the flies in the ointment of the English kingdom (not the decisive flies, but flies nonetheless), prompting the Americans to secede from England. The American historian and political scientist, President Woodrow Wilson, maintained that America did not know feudal and gentry culture, having begun its existence straight away as a bourgeois democracy.

Graphic proof of this is provided by the slave breeding that was set up scientifically and capitalistically, and that was rationalized, as hog breeding farms and the hog slaughterhouses in Chicago, for example, are now being rationalized. The science of slave breeding was worked out scientifically. It adapted itself to reality on the *latifundia* of the English nobles who fled from England during the time of Cromwell's revolution and of the French Huguenots who, in their turn, likewise demonstrated graphically the absence of feudalism in America. The political historian and president, Woodrow Wilson, recounted how the war between the Northern States and the Southern States, which had begun formally due to the violation of the principles of the unity of the states, was essentially a war for the emancipation of the Negroes. Therefore, the historical information of a factual kind is as follows: the war was begun not by the Northern States but by the Southern States, which fired upon Fort Sumter; Fort Sumter was shelled on April 12, 1861, and it was only after two years of the Civil War, beginning on January 1, 1863, that the owning of Negroes was abolished by President Abraham Lincoln; the war was concluded in 1864 with the victory of the Northerners, when the Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Armies, General Lee, was defeated for the first time, and when the fortified city of Vicksburg, one of the citadels of the South, surrendered to the North – at that time there was a very broad wave of insurgency at the rear of the Northern armies, begun in New York, on the home front, a wave of rebellions and protests against the North took place, demonstrations that expressed sympathy for the South – in New York, in particular, military commissions fulminated against Negroes and hunted them down, as if they were wild dogs, burning down entire blocks of slave quarters. These are the facts. In this war, the capitalism and industry of the North were fighting against the feudalism of the South.

Woodrow Wilson, the historian, wrote:

“ . . . It was a singular and noteworthy thing, the while, how little the quiet labor of the negroes was disturbed by the troubles of the time and by the absence of their masters. No rumor of the emancipation proclamation seemed to reach the southern country-sides. No sign of the revolution that was at hand showed itself upon the surface of southern life. Gentlewomen presided still with unquestioned authority upon the secluded plantations, – their husbands, brothers, sons, men and youths alike, gone to the front. Great gangs of cheery negroes worked in the fields, planted and reaped and garnered and did their lonely mistresses' bidding in all things without restlessness, with quiet industry, with show of faithful affection even. No distemper touched them; no breath of violence or revolt stirred amongst them. There was, it seemed, no wrong they fretted under or wished to see righted.”

Strangely enough, this American historian and president does not know – and yet I, a foreigner, do know – that the Negroes of the South turned to Abraham Lincoln and petitioned him to accept them into the army. But the president rejected their petition “with moral horror,” as was reported in the newspapers at the time. How did this historian manage to forget that the officers on the command staff of the Northern armies treated Negroes no better than Southerners did, and that in the citadel of the North, in New York, as we just said, there was a pogrom launched against Negroes? How is it that facts that are known to me are not known to an American historian? The fact, for instance, that Negroes nonetheless had a hand in the

action, such as the destruction of the Southern cities of Buford and Nashville by Negroes? And, moreover, that Negroes, in their turn, were likewise annihilated, just as these cities had been? The historian Woodrow Wilson would have been right if he had maintained that Negroes were not given the right to take part in the war, because even the freedom-loving President Abraham Lincoln suppressed this right “with moral horror.” And the historian would have been right if he had said, on the other hand, that Negroes did not take part in the war because they were kicked and beaten to the point where they were treated no better than dogs, truly no better than watchdogs in a courtyard.

From the days of the Civil War to the year 1931, slightly less than seventy years have passed, seventy years that Negroes have been protected and defended by the Ku-Klux-Klan. And I met a Negro teacher, for whom I was the first non-Negro to shake his hand. Americans from the Ku-Klux-Klan will maintain that Negroes, in general, are not human beings. Americans even in New York grant Negroes a semi-canine standing in society. Seventy years ago, Negroes were emancipated from slavery the same way that a proprietor would chase a dog out of his courtyard. I have already recounted how the mass of Negroes live. Negroes were emancipated with a rate of illiteracy of one hundred percent.

During the past seventy years, Negroes, even sharecroppers in the South, were able to create their own intelligentsia, literature, and theatre, and produce their own lawyers, doctors, and engineers. White people did nothing for Negroes! Pushkin, if he were alive today and if he were now to come to New York, White people there would not shake his hand. That night, when I listened to the Negro songs, and when on the ground there was a blizzard of stars and the ground smelled of the subtropics, nights like that endured and were transported to New York, to Harlem, to that strange and wondrous city of Negroes inside New York City. It’s a city that comes to life at night, and it’s hard to understand when it sleeps, what with all the music, merriment, laughter, singing, and dancing. I don’t know whether it’s by way of race or history, whether it’s on the basis of societal laws or biological ones, but Negroes really do possess some salient differences from White Americans. I would say that they are different in terms of their humanitarian gifts and natural endowments. Every Negro is, first of all, musical. The main American deity and Nietzschean – the almighty dollar – is in no way dearer and more precious to a Negro than an hour of good music, the well-thumbed pages of a Negro magazine, a good dance, a good conversation with a friend. That’s how it is for a Negro, and this is incomprehensible for a White American. And Harlem is not yet as multi-storied as the rest of New York, nor is it as flooded with light along its side streets: it sings, it laughs, it makes merry, it smokes cigarettes.

I used to go visit a young dramatist, named Regina Andrews. Her play was being staged at one of the Harlem theaters. Her husband was a lawyer. Despite the fact that her plays were being staged in Harlem (her plays were performed in a new innovative theater there), she nonetheless worked *daun-taun* [downtown], that is, in New York City, the city of White people, as a librarian. When I went to visit her for the first time, she, her husband, and some of their friends were playing catch near the apartment building where they lived. They were standing there as a quadrangle, throwing a baseball around to each other. Whenever I used to come by to see them, I felt the whole time that the traditions of Russian students prior to 1905 were being repeated. People ended up sitting on tables and squatting in front of doors because of the

crowdedness and their lack of standoffishness. And their conversations were truly student-like. What a cheerful, affable, comradely people Negroes are! And what a carefree people, because this one forgot something, that one was late, another one had just spent two days at a friend's house, where he got so carried away by a book he was reading that he laid aside everything else in the world on account of it. This was a circle of friends that included only three of us "White" people. I am ashamed to say that these Negro friends of mine never came to my place to see me. We always met either in Harlem or in Greenwich Village at the home of Ellen Weiner, a journalist. At Weiner's salon, there were times when we wouldn't find the mistress at home, but we would find Walter and Thomas there. They were two inseparable friends, one an actor, the other a poet, both of them Negroes. And they always had books and journals with them (they were innovators, they were Mayakovsky and Meyerhold in their younger years!). And the things they were concerned with: we must digest James Joyce and assimilate him in Negro literature; we must destroy our enemy so-and-so, who wrote at once a pamphlet and a manifesto in his journal of art and literature; we must clarify our point of view in relation to this young poet of ours, so-and-so, who transports Marcel Proust's principle of "primitive sensations" into the domain of poetry and who wants to be at once a poet and a revolutionary. To be a revolutionary means to be a communist. To be a communist means, in part, to work out a moral philosophy, to work out the principles and the rules of behavior as well as the rules that should govern one's attitude toward people. These two friends would spend hours trying to resolve the question whether under communism – when communism will have spread across the entire world – will there remain at that time or will there not remain scoundrels? There were so many interesting things they would concern themselves with! But if you happened to be in Harlem, somewhere in a basement or in a courtyard, in a small, open-air restaurant, why wouldn't you, in that case, dance to your heart's content and sing a little!? And why wouldn't you later leave for home with ten other people crammed into a car that was a four-seater?

The grandfathers of Regina Andrews, Walter, and Thomas were slaves. White people even now do not shake their hands. Negroes have many times laid their fates on the scales of American history. The Negro intelligentsia seems to me to be an intelligentsia that has not an American basis, but a European one. But if this intelligentsia were to turn out to be not a Negro one, but a . . . in the city of Dallas, there are so many electronic calculators, so many telephones and automobiles. Negroes work in the factories in the city of Dallas and sharecroppers live on the plantations that surround the city of Dallas . . . ten percent of all American workers are Negroes. It's completely natural that "a White person does white work, and a Black person does black work" (Mayakovsky).

Once, in 1928, the League of Negro Workers in the city of Milwaukee invited the Milwaukee chapter of the Socialist Party to its conference for the creation of a united front. The "socialists" declined the invitation, informing the League of Negro Workers that the Negro movement is not a labor movement, but a racial one.

In New York, if you wish to find some American rare book or some art supplies, you'll find them in shops that are appropriate for this. In Greenwich Village, they will show you Indian carpets and Indian vases. If you get interested in American national dance or American national music, they will show you the foxtrot and jazz, they will show you saxophones, ukuleles, and banjos.

And so, America is a “great” “democracy,” a country of equality for different nationalities. America is enlightenment and law! . . .

27

From the gold wash plants in the Rocky Mountains (which are now silent) – from the town of Kingman in those same mountains, across the prairie states (where there is grain, grain, and more grain, where there are grain elevators on the horizon, grain silos, windmills, water towers, farm machinery of incredible constructions and designs, long-eared mules, and steppe that stretches like a tablecloth), through the cities of Albuquerque, Dallas, and Rutledge, from the city of Baton Rouge through Washington to Boston, to the farthest northeast point in the U.S.A. – I witnessed one and the same thing. I witnessed the same thing throughout all of America. It was there in California and in the state of Utah. It was there in the state of Michigan, near the Great Lakes. It was there in the state of Florida. It was there in the state of Connecticut. It is more than just the national flag, which, as we know, consists of stars and stripes made out of madras material. It exists beneath the American flag. It is, evidently, stronger than all of America’s automotive and other locomotive forces taken together. It is: the p-h-i-l-i-s-t-i-n-e!

I realized this while I was staying in the town of Kingman, Arizona, which is located in the Wild West, in the Black Mountains, in those selfsame gold-and-silver-wash places that are enveloped by the romanticism of novels about gold digging, about wild mustangs and cowboys. We made an overnight stop in that town, staying in a motel named *Kommershel* [*Commercial*], where I wrote on my typewriter. I moved the beds aside, then I sat down on one of them, and set my typewriter down on the other one. In this town, there are only two streets in all, each of them intersecting the other crosswise. Life takes place at this intersection. The restaurant in town is maintained by a Chinese man who reprised in America the anecdote told by Aleksei Tolstoy:

“What do you serve here?”
“We serve everything here!”
“Do you serve such-and-such here?”
“That we do not serve.”
“So what do you serve here?”
“We serve everything here!”
“Do you serve such-and-such here?”
“That we do not serve.”

And so on and so forth, ad infinitum, until he gets to beef steaks. The largest building in town – the movie house – is located at this intersection. Across from the movie house, there is a drugstore. Postcards, sewing machines, and refrigerators are displayed in its store window. Out on the street, there is not a single horse, but there are some automobiles parked opposite the palisades, and some evening-time companions are having a conversation on a bench near the gates. Near the movie house, there is a crowd of about a dozen and a half people of all ages, standing mainly in pairs. They are listening to the outpourings of screen actors that can

be heard out on the street, for the movie is a talkie. But beyond this, everything is deathly silent, both the town itself and my motel, as well as the mountains all around. Conversations around the palisades can be heard until ten o'clock at night. After ten, everything, along with the movie house, totally dies down. I walked down a back street from my motel to the movie house and made some discoveries. In the store window of the drugstore, in addition to the refrigerators and postcards, pendants for watches were also displayed. I bought myself a pendant and a postcard. On this postcard, there was a color photograph of a young man with a mustache whose eyes are lifted upwards. He's sitting at a table, dressed in a colored suit that had been sewn by a tailor of average skill. This colorized young man from the postcard is smoking, and out of the colorized smoke of his cigarette there arise female features and a female head. The young man was looking into the lens of the camera. This postcard was called *amor mio* – "my love." I admired this postcard for a long time and examined most attentively the pendant, the horseshoe of family happiness. Goodness gracious! – Looking at those pendants, why, I knew what kind of soup was being served in that house behind the palisade, and in that other house over there, the one without any palisade! – Goodness gracious! – Why, I have known all this for a very long time! – Why, this isn't the town of Kingman in America, but rather the town of Katrinenshtadt beyond the Volga River, the town of German colonists in the Volga region from the days before the Revolution, from the days of my childhood! – Why, this is Baronsk (also called Katrinenshtadt), the birthplace of my father, where in 1931 my grandmother, Frau Anna Vogau, a full-blooded German woman, died. She was about as much a Russian as she was an American! My ancestors – who were Germans – came to Russia, to the Trans-Volga region, during the reign of Catherine the Great, following the Seven Years War in Germany. They came to Russia at the same time, following the Seven Years War, when waves of Europeans were leaving Europe to come to America. I looked at the pendants in the store window of the drugstore in the town of Kingman, these were the same pendants that I had seen in my childhood, in Karle's store in Katrinenshtadt. And I knew that tomorrow, at six-thirty in the morning, the thin-voiced bell on the church steeple would sound, and the entire colony would sit down at table in their homes to be fed. Papa John would give his son Jack a pendant for his watch as a Christmas gift. And that last week the judge's sister-in-law had a bout of diarrhea because she had drunk a glass of cold milk right after eating some banana compote! . . . At twelve o'clock the cathedral bell would chime noon, and the entire colony would sit down for dinner at twelve fifteen. And the wheel-wright's wife would announce to her husband that the mayor's wife had bought herself two chickens today. And the mayor's wife would tell her husband in secret that the manufacturer Theodore Becker was seen once again in the movie house with the wife of the office manager at the bank – no good will come of that! . . . At six-thirty in the evening the cathedral bell, with its thin-voiced peal, will proclaim that it is evening time. The entire colony will be eating supper. And after supper the wheel-wright will go to the gates of the cooper's house to smoke a pipe of rest and relaxation and to chat with him a little about how things are going badly with him. The mayor's wife will stop her car for a minute across from the windows of the home of the office manager at the bank and discuss with his wife yesterday's motion picture, adding quite unexpectedly that, as a result of the financial crisis, manufacturer Becker's business affairs, it seems, are not going very well, and that Mister Becker himself, by the way, is very good-looking, and might not the missus, the wife of the office manager at the bank, stop by the day after tomorrow for five o'clock tea when the manufacturer Becker will be there?

The philistine, the shallow middle-class Babbitt, the petit bourgeois! He is the one who has taken a seat and settled himself down comfortably behind the stereotypes of American well-being and behind the American flag, which consists of stars and stripes made out of a type of madras material. This philistine, he is everywhere – in California, in Utah, in Oklahoma, in Richmond, in the Bronx and Brooklyn, in Boston. He is the one who has written witticisms on the welcome signs that greet motorists when they are entering a city or town, witticisms such as the following one, written on the welcome sign for one of the towns in Texas:

“Welcome! If you wish to discover the charms of our town, you will abide by all our speed limits and driving regulations! If you wish to become acquainted with the shortcomings of our jail, you will violate our speed limits and driving regulations!

The Mayor’s Office”

He is the one who brought us into contact with the woman in the Bronx park, the woman who was puzzled why her husband had left her, even though she never drank or smoked and even though she was a true and faithful Christian woman. He is the one – the philistine, the shallow middle-class Babbitt, the petit bourgeois, the consumer of the products of the American film industry, the third leading industry in America, with regard to which people quip that if the American worker wouldn’t have had the extra ten cents he needed to go to the movies, then there would already have been socialism in America a long time ago and there would not have been any gangsterism.

The philistine! The shallow, middle-class Babbitt! – yes, he makes up the largest part of the America that I found in my search for America, a search that I undertook at the prompting of those who told me that New York is not America. He makes up the largest part of the America of all sorts of *midl’i* [middles] and *meinstry* [main streets] and golden means – the America of the shallow, middle-class Babbitt, who knows what is for supper at his neighbor’s house, who reads (or at least maintains that he reads) the Bible every day. It’s no accident that across all of America, that within all of America, there is not a single hotel room where a Bible is not sitting inside the night stand! This is the America of the petty, small-minded transgressor, the petty, small-minded swindler, who reads the Bible and the commandments of American pioneering. This is the America of the *pater familias*, dressed in a pull-over sweater knitted for him by his eldest daughter, the America of that father’s son with his pendant watches. The philistine! The shallow, middle-class Babbitt! – Sinclair Lewis depicted him ingeniously, this American philistine. He is an international phenomenon, this shallow, middle-class Babbitt. The Soviet reader knows all about him from the enormous amount of European literature that has spilled its ink in describing this petty, philistine *vobla*. This shallow, middle-class Babbitt is terrifying: he has been made a fool, duped by the barber shops and hair salons of God into fitting the convenient, familiar pattern of the *vobla*, the pattern of stereotypes and clichés, of half-baked knowledge, of petty satiety, of petty instincts, of petty contentment. And this petty philistine is himself terrified, for beyond the *vobla*-esque barber shops and hair salons of stereotypes and clichés, he is all alone, he is lonely in this enormous country of loneliness, this enormous country of the “individualistic” anarchy of conveyor belts called America.

This shallow, middle-class Babbitt is protected and defended by the stereotypes and clichés of American “democracy,” by legends about individual freedom, by dreams of becoming a millionaire, by the fear and courage of loneliness, by the notion of health and well-being as having a full stomach.

The periodical *Liberty*, the leading weekly magazine in America, which is published in New York, once pulled a stunt when it wanted to find out what American honesty was really like. The editors sent out letters in a hundred envelopes, each with five dollars inside, to different kinds of Americans: five to congressmen, five to bishops, five to manufacturers, five to shopkeepers, farmers, workers, and so on. Along with the editors, I would now consciously place workers in last place. All of this was being done in a conspiratorial way. The letters were delivered to exact addresses. The congressmen received these letters directly into their own hands, without their secretaries knowing. Each letter was composed in such a way that the person who received it evidently saw that there were dollars inside the envelope and saw that the letter and the dollars had been sent to him by mistake. In each letter there was a return address provided to which one could send these dollars back. To the congressmen, in particular, it was written: “Highly respected so-and-so” – his full name was written here – “last week you helped me, a poor man, pay for automotive repairs on the highway, and therefore I am returning to you . . .” and so on. The congressmen on that very date were at work, running the government. The editors intended to examine the nature of American honesty by tracking the return of these incorrectly sent five dollars and entering the results on the pages of their magazine. Not a word about these dollar bills having purportedly been sent by mistake to the wrong person appeared ahead of time on the pages of *Liberty*. Out of these one hundred people, only three returned their five dollars. They were two workers and one provincial small shopkeeper. In the order of American honesty, workers turned out to be . . . in last place!

In my trek across America, it was only natural that I would be called upon to visit several dozen post offices and telegraph offices. The telegraph service in America is a private enterprise, with two companies competing against each other. But the problem is not the telegraph service, with whose help, by means of a telegram, one can send flowers and neckties from Los Angeles to New York to esteemed ladies or to respected parents as holiday gifts. What is being sent cross country by the telegraph service in such instances are not neckties, of course, and not flowers, but photographs of them. The thing is that in every post office there is a window where the photographs are displayed – in full-face and in profile – of those people whom the federal police, as well as the state police, are trying to catch. And beneath each photograph there is an inscription stating that a reward of a certain amount of dollars, ranging from the hundreds to the thousands, depending on the nature of the crimes committed by the suspects that the police are looking for, will be given to the person who catches them.

In my trek across America, naturally enough, I saw a multitude of provincial cities. They were all built according to a certain standard. In the center of the city – the business part – there were two or three very tall buildings, auto supply stores, movie houses, banks, gasoline suffocation, noise, and congestion. This part of the city is called the business section. All around this section of the city there are two-story cottages, adorned with flower beds and resting beneath shady trees, with verandas facing the street and with swings on a footpath. These cottages are designed with all the philistine, shall we say, coziness of a stencil.

So we arrived at a certain craggy locale, called New York, where skyscrapers protrude into the sky with their crags. We find examples of such places in nature in Siberia, where the earth bulges out with deposits that contain within themselves helium, uranium, and radium salts. Nothing lives there – not a single blade of grass, not a single animal, not a single bird. They have all been killed off by the alpha-beta-gamma rays of radium. The snow melts there in the winter; there is death there. Indeed, just imagine for a minute that human life has left New York. New York, however, would live on in the very same way that it lives when human beings are there – there is not a single animal, not a single wolf, that would go to this craggy locale, craggy and pitted with caves that are so large that they continue beneath the Hudson River. No animal would go to this locale, one that has suffocated from gas, a locale without a single blade of grass on the concrete and iron. It would be terrifying for a wolf on these rocks. The wolf would find it stifling and hard to breathe from the gas and coal suffocation. The nerves of the wolf would be frayed from the rumble of the city and from the millions of those radio waves, both long and short ones, that permeate and enmesh the city, enmeshing it with advertising, with music, with the speeches of President Hoover about *prosperiti* [prosperity]. The wolf, for all we know, would contract a case of bear's disease from all the things that are taking place in this craggy, unnatural locale, which is situated on the Indian island of Manhattan!

We must assume that the wolf would run for his life, fleeing from this locale at breakneck speed, from one end of America to the other. He would race across Canada in one fell swoop. He would turn up exhausted, with his tongue hanging down below his ear, in Alaska. But in Alaska the wolf would find the common life and native customs depicted by Jack London and improved upon by O. Henry.

One evening in New York, Joe and I were driving down Sixth Avenue. We were planning to go to Greenwich Village, to the New York City block of antique shops, art, and bohemianism, to meet with Michael Gold. I was driving the car in accordance with all the American rules of the road. I was going at the normal speed, proceeding at green lights. Sixth Avenue – this very horrible street of suffocation by gas fumes – is, as we know, a two-story street. An elevated train speeds along the second story. The second story rests upon the first story, which supports it by means of a row of columns. People must cross streets in New York only at corners and only with a green light. Out from behind a column, by no means at the corner, a woman walked out into the traffic, two steps away from the headlights of my car. She was walking against a red light. I honked the horn. But the woman didn't hear it. All of this happened instantaneously. I jumped out of my car and hurried over to help the woman. I drove her to the hospital. Her right arm and collarbone were broken. Her face had struck against the headlight, and glass from the headlight had torn her face to shreds. The woman was sixty-eight years old, and she was deaf. She had not heard my horn. This was just my luck! I had survived the Imperialist War, the October Revolution, and the Civil War. I had traveled all over the northern hemisphere of the globe without causing anyone to have as much as a black eye, and now here, on Sixth Avenue . . .

The doctor, who was applying dressings to the woman's wounds and examining her injuries, would come out every two minutes and announce:

“Her collarbone is broken.”

“Her right arm is broken.”

“They just took x-rays of her cranium: her skull is not broken.”

“Now we're examining her legs.”

The doctor reported that he loved such-and-such brand of cigars, so I sent for cigars. When I was leaving, together with the policemen, to go to the police station, the doctor held his hand, smeared with blood, up to my eyes and started quickly rubbing his thumb against his index finger, middle finger, and ring finger. I gave him some money. The policemen were outraged at this.

At the police station they investigated my *eksident* [accident], as they say there apropos of automobile collisions. They returned to me my motor vehicle documents, and they said, as I already reported earlier, in a truly American way:

“Mister Pilnyak ran over the lady while following all the traffic regulations. The lady is the guilty party in this *eksident*. And, therefore, Mister Pilnyak can demand from the lady restitution for the cost for repair of the headlight that was shattered when it struck against her head.”

They let me off without any punishment and with playful jokes. One of the policemen asked me to drive him back to his post and got up on the running board of the car. When we were saying good-bye, he made the very same gesture with his fingers in front of my nose that the doctor had made.

I learned how to drive an automobile mainly during my trek across America. But I had received my *laisens* [license] – a document giving me the right to drive a car – in New York. When I was getting ready to acquire this document, I asked how this is done. Experts in this matter asked me in turn: do I really want to take an exam or do I want to receive the document without an exam? The building for the offices of local government in the city of New York – *siti-kholl* [city hall] – is a majestic building with many entrances. And these entrances are supported by columns in the Hellenic traditions, just as they are supported by the traditions not of the Republican Party of Hoover, but of the Democratic Party. And so right there, located directly across from the entrance that one needed to take to get into the department where people receive licenses – stretching from one corner to the other – is a cheerful little shop. It was both a driving school and a photo shop, where in five minutes one could get their photograph for their driver's license. This cheerful little shop is also an office where one can take care of all sorts of motor vehicle and licensing matters. You can come to this little shop and drink a Coca-Cola there, weigh yourself, measure your height, test your eyesight, fill out forms, get your photograph taken, pay twenty-five dollars, go back to your home and receive there by mail, without taking any exam and without making any trip to city hall, motor vehicle documents certifying that you are a *draiver*, that is, a driver, even though you might not even know how to drive an automobile. I went to this little shop out of curiosity and to witness all

that I have just described above. But I didn't find it necessary to pay twenty-five dollars, so therefore I took the driving exam, paying a bribe of only five dollars in all, the same five dollars that every American pays. By virtue of its massive scale, this five-dollar bribe changed from being a bribe to being a tip for the driving examiner.

That evening when I ran over the woman, we never did make it to Greenwich Village. And that's where American writers drink vodka. In America, *prokhibishen* [prohibition] – the dry law – isn't the kind of law to trifle with. It's the kind of law that has been inserted into the commandments of the American Constitution. Therefore, on at least two occasions, I, a foreigner, finding myself in some unfamiliar place, had to turn to a policeman and explain to him, more with gestures than with words, that my friends and I needed to have a drink. In all of these instances, the policemen would answer in the same way:

“*O'kei, boi* [boy]! *O'kei*, buddy! It's really very simple. You go around the corner to the second stoop. You tell them that police officer Charlie sent you! *Shchiur* [Sure]!”

The brother of one of my journalist friends, an expatriate from a western province of tsarist Russia, was going to open a kosher Jewish restaurant in New York with various stuffed pikes and exsanguinated chickens, and without alcohol. In a month, this restaurant owner had to take out a gangster-bootlegger license for the sale of alcohol: various inspections and police visits wore him down with their fines, evidently for his refusal to serve alcohol. For the non-American reader, this last sentence of mine will most likely seem to be delirious. It really is delirious, but it is nonetheless a fact! The man had acted in accordance with the laws and the police, who are responsible for upholding the laws, forced him to violate these laws. That is a fact, an American fact.

Things of this order are things that show the sweeping scope in America. We spoke earlier about the variety of American restaurants and pointed out that there were two reasons, in addition to the desire for satiety, for this diversity: nationality and alcohol. We are now speaking about the second reason, alcohol. Actually, the variety of restaurants in America is incredible and is in no way standardized: Mexican bars with tequila, Italian ones with Chianti, French ones with Bordeaux, Japanese ones with *saké*, Swedish ones with rum, Chinese ones with *huangjiu*, English ones with gin and whiskey, Russian ones with vodka, German ones with beer – they range from the luxurious lifestyle of billionaires to the dire poverty of dockside haunts. In some places, heavy drinkers sit in old walnut stalls of German traditions. In other places, following Italian and Hispanic traditions, they drink out of casks and sit on top of casks. These types of establishments are called *spik izi* [speakeasies] (“speak in a low voice”), but people can make noise inside them to the degree of the amount of alcohol that has been consumed. This is within the continental United States, but on the seas surrounding America – twelve miles off America's shores – an entire nation within the nation has sprouted up. The waters of seas and oceans, as we know, are neutral. Beyond the borders of a twenty-mile zone, international laws – or no laws at all – are in effect on the high seas. And a multicolored garland of ships has laid anchor twenty miles off America's shores. These ships have been converted into floating drinking establishments, where people drink, play cards, and enjoy themselves by paying cash for sexual coitus. Canada, which lies beyond the rivers and

lakes opposite Niagara Falls, opposite Detroit and Chicago, is likewise encircled by garlands of restaurants. Every evening, automobiles speed out of Los Angeles heading over to Mexico, to the Mexican border. The small Mexican village of Tijuana was simply a small poverty-stricken village. It has remained that. But right next to it, and under its name, humps of restaurants have sprung up, humps and graves.

The *bizness* [business] of the grandiose, sweeping scope of America!

Several of the phrases used above – such as “gangster-bootlegger license” – were used with complete accuracy, without attempting to generate any kinds of images, shapes, or forms. It’s a very complicated system, this nation within a nation, these armies of people, with their own flotillas, their own kings, their own soldiers, their own machine guns and cannons.

I recounted earlier how the banker, Mister Z, wanted to introduce me to Al Capone. Al Capone was not able to receive me on the day when I was in Chicago because he was busy with the elections.

Al Capone is a gangster king. He gives interviews to journalists, during which he points out how his surname ought to be pronounced – Capon, and not Caponè or Caponi, for the “e” at the end of his surname is a silent “e.” In one of his final interviews, he spoke out against communism in the U.S.S.R., calling upon his followers to do the same. He drove around Chicago in an armor-plated automobile, escorted by motorcyclists guarding him. If he needed to do away with some undesirable people who were not welcome to him, his good fellows would kill them not with the help of antiquated revolvers but with machine guns. Al Capone once had some people shot in this manner (human life for Al Capone’s good fellows is valued from twenty-five dollars and up), Al Capone once had six people shot who had been insubordinate to him. He had all six of them shot at once, during daylight hours, in a garage on one of the most populated streets of the city. The gunmen, moreover, were dressed in police uniforms, and it’s not known even now whether the gunmen were disguised in police uniforms or were rightfully wearing the police uniforms. The life of a human being is valued from twenty-five dollars and up, but when Al Capone accidentally wounds some innocent bystanders, with a stray bullet from a machine gun, he sends some money to their heirs, from a thousand to ten thousand dollars, and he sends a wreath of flowers for their grave. Al Capone lives and works exactly the same way that this is shown in Hollywood gangster films. Al Capone had them lay a pipe beneath Lake Michigan; he had them install some kind of canalization system that, by means of a conveyor belt, would transfer whiskey from Canada to the United States. Al Capone would hand pick the governors of the state of Illinois and the mayors of the city of Chicago. Al Capone didn’t attend the receptions hosted by the president, but his friend and henchman, Mister William Thompson, the mayor of the city of Chicago, nicknamed “Big Bill,” used to go visit the president as his guest at the White House.

Al Capone made a mistake by not receiving me that day: at those elections, Al Capone’s henchman, William Thompson, nicknamed “Big Bill,” lost. A different gangster won. Al Capone punished Chicago most severely: he drove the government of the city of Chicago into bankruptcy. At that point, the Chicago authorities brought Al Capone to trial. But the Chicago court did not dare to bring Al Capone to trial in his capacity as a gangster. Capone was instead

brought to trial in his capacity as a *rentier*, as a person living on income from property or investments who had not paid his income tax. What Al Capone had received his income from – that question did not interest the court. They declared that he owed millions. Al Capone came to trial in the role of a poor sheep that had suffered injury. Journalists covered the trial, sending out telegrams and news reports over the radio. Newspapers reported that Mister Capone had himself acknowledged that he was guilty of not paying his income tax. But he didn't abandon his business matters. A former friend of Al Capone, the gangster Jack Diamond, nicknamed "Long Legs," lived in New York. Diamond controlled the beer trust of the Eastern states. Diamond had been tried in court for murder twenty-eight times, and twenty-eight times he had been acquitted. Several years earlier, Al Capone had announced to the world that Diamond, nicknamed "Long Legs," had not given back to Al Capone the seventy-five thousand dollars that the latter had given him for a trip to Monte Carlo. Some unidentified people shot Diamond. This assassination attempt had taken place inside a very fashionable New York hotel. Diamond was wounded, but he survived the assassination attempt, and he refused to identify the men who had shot him. Just like in the movies. The gunmen who had shot him were never found. In December 1931, Diamond was tried in court for the umpteenth time. The trial took place in Albany, the capital of the state of New York. The state's Republican court for the umpteenth time acquitted Diamond, nicknamed "Long Legs." Diamond's friends "organized" a banquet in his honor on the night following the trial. At five o'clock in the morning, six men burst into the hotel room where the gangsters were holding their banquet. Four of them shot at Diamond. Diamond, nicknamed "Long Legs," was murdered. According to the information provided by experts, Diamond was murdered by Al Capone's good fellows. Al Capone has not yet provided any confirmation *steitment* [statement].

Charles Lindbergh, the famous pilot, the American hero who flew across the Atlantic Ocean, lives in the the city of Hopewell, New Jersey. He is married to the daughter of Senator Morrow, the recent conqueror of Mexico. A son was born to the Lindberghs, their first child. In March 1932, this year-and-a-half-old child was kidnapped. The kidnappers sent the parents a letter demanding a fifty-thousand-dollar ransom. Lindbergh was a national hero. He reported his son's kidnapping to the police. The newspapers began to reverberate with this sensational news item. A session of the president's cabinet was called in connection with this event. But the child had disappeared. Lindbergh, who refused to pay the fifty-thousand-dollar ransom, published a statement in the newspapers, indicating that he would be willing to pay a one-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar ransom if they returned the child to him. The cabinet held its meeting. The newspapers went on a rampage. The police were ready to drop from exhaustion. But the child was still nowhere to be found. Al Capone published a statement in the newspapers, indicating, first of all, that he would give two-hundred-thousand dollars to the person who found the child, and, secondly, that if they would authorize him to do so, he would undertake finding the child himself.

Al Capone was a big man! He held in his hands a monopoly over the sale and distribution of alcohol in the Midwest. He had at his beck and call dozens of seedy taverns and seedy brothels. Not only did Al Capone once wield all of this power, but – judging by his dealings with Jack Diamond and Charles Lindbergh – he continues to wield that power even today, despite the court proceedings that he has undergone. Al Capone is not alone. He's merely

fond of the limelight. A monument, however, has not yet been erected in his honor. In Detroit, a monument to Mister Scott has been erected, a monument that is no less instructive than the automotive plants of Ford, Packard, and the “General-Motors-Company.” This monument stands in close proximity to a monument to Schiller. Above this monument flutters an American flag. Mister Scott was a *butleger* [bootlegger] and the proprietor of a series of seedy dives. From the long hours worked by his prostitutes, who plopped themselves down and sat on the knees of his male guests, one after another, and from the glasses of whiskey that he sold to these male guests, Mister Scott salted away millions of dollars. When he was dying, he bequeathed to the city of Detroit a million dollars on condition that part of this money be spent on a monument that perpetuates the memory of Mister Scott. The monument to Mister Scott was erected. Above this monument flies an American flag. Al Capone doesn’t yet have a monument erected to him.

K., an investigator into American gangster matters, writes that the issue about repealing the “dry” law is raised in America at every new election, at every opening session of the state and federal congresses. The dry law has penetrated America, from top to bottom, lengthwise and widthwise, with gangsterism. The investigator K. writes, in a lyrical way, of course:

“The dry law has been existence for 11 years. During this time, some very powerful organizations have come into being. These organizations hold in their hands the mainsprings that regulate the movement of separate influential groups amongst Democrats as well as Republicans. Unlimited financial resources, the possibility of advancing one’s own people into important municipal and federal posts, a system of unpunished murders – this is what these organizations have at their disposal. We are talking about bootleggers.”

Thus writes the researcher K. He likewise provides an explanation for why the dry law has not been repealed. He states:

“From the moment the dry law was first introduced, murderers, burglars, and ‘politicians’ have crossed over and entered into the contraband commerce in alcoholic beverages. Hundreds of thousands of people are engaged in this business. America pays taxes to them. America maintains them in truly royal luxury. If the dry law were to be repealed, then within 24 hours this army of the unemployed, that is, these gangsters themselves and a part of the cadres of policemen, would occupy themselves with their basic craft, which they partially abandoned during the time of bootlegging. Safes would be opened. A radical repeal of the dry law carries with it the specter of murders and robberies.”

This is just like in a Hollywood movie, where virtue absolutely must prevail!

There is a multitude of examples and stories that I could relate to you. Gangsters and municipalities live in concord and collaboration. Al Lewin was right when he said to me that deceiving history and authority is a business and, according to American notions, a moral thing. By the way, history here is not deceived. In New York, in particular, gangsters engage in gangsterism beginning only from 14th Street and up. On the lower-numbered streets,

including Fourteenth, one can live peacefully: banks are located there. Or do they engage in robbery and gangsterism there as well?

This happens in New York, in particular. When I arrived in New York, on the same day of my arrival, they found a murdered woman in Central Park with a rope around her neck. Twenty-four hours before her death, this woman had testified before an investigative commission that had come from Washington. She pointed out individuals and an organization that consisted of judges, policemen, and gangsters who were running a *business* [business], carrying it out by means of puritanical American laws about marriage and morality. This was done by several means. Occasionally a formality, a *pro forma*, was observed and adhered to. That is to say, by analogy with the betrayals perpetrated by the Chicago slaughterhouse hogs, some scoundrel would begin to court a woman, arranging a series of rendezvous, pressing her to come over to his place and going over to her place to visit her. At the moment when the woman, presumably, was making love to him, the police vice squad would suddenly appear. And there would either be a trial, a scandal, a disgraced name, or – you must pay us some money! This is not found in American movies, but it is to be found in American reality: there are private police and private investigators, as well as espionage offices, that are working not only for America. The most important of them are Burns and Pinkerton. Sometimes the lovers have been tracked down by this police force, once again their vice squad, and, once again, there was either a trial or cash payments. And sometimes they simply demanded money. Sometimes the women didn't have any money. Sometimes the women weren't guilty of anything, not even adultery. Sometimes they tried them in court. They would publish reports about this in the newspapers. They charged the women with prostitution, and those women who were guilty only of adultery or who were not even guilty of that, they sent to prisons, to correctional facilities. The woman with the rope around her neck whose body they found on the day of my arrival, she had come – to court, no less! – to recount about how she, who was not guilty of anything, had sat in prison for three years. The court postponed her questioning until the following day. That night she was murdered. This was in New York.

Banker Z, who has power equal to that of an English monarch, is in telephone communication with Capone. Capone had “handpicked” his friend, Mister William Thompson, nicknamed “Big Bill,” to serve as the mayor of Chicago. The Chicago manufacturers and merchants invited Al Capone into a partnership with them. A certain Mister Becker, the owner of several dry cleaning and dyeing establishments in Chicago, who had invited Capone to enter into a partnership with him, joked with journalists that he had “hired a devil to get rid of some devils.” In what way does Al Capone, the chairman of a trust of gangsters, differ from other chairmen of trusts!? After signing a contract with Al Capone, Mister Becker, a painter and dyer, said to journalists during an interview: “Now I no longer need neither a public prosecutor, nor the police, nor any association of entrepreneurs. I now have the best protection in the world!”

For Al Capone, *big business* [big business] is a big deal! He needs to collect tribute from subordinates and to execute insubordinates. He needs to manage his industry, such an enormous industry as the production of alcohol, which involves factories, plants, conveyors, rationalization and standardization. He needs to attend to the correct distribution of his

merchandise. The rationalization of prostitution, making it a more efficient enterprise, is by now a subsidiary business.

There truly are so many businesses! We shouldn't think that Chicago differs in any way from New York or Los Angeles. And we shouldn't think that all businesses restrict themselves to only vodka and prostitution. In Chicago, just like in New York and Los Angeles, there are people working there in addition to bootleggers and vodka merchants; they are, let's say, *raketiry* [racketeers], who are engaged in an illegal industry that is called racketeering.

A free and independent American businessman, living in New York below 14th Street, is planning to open a dairy shop on the corner of, let's say, 27th Street and Second Avenue, so that he can sell to his customer exactly the same milk that is dispatched directly from the cow's udder into the mouth of the customer without touching human hands. There is a 27th Street and a Second Avenue in Chicago, and in Santa Fe, and in Pittsburgh. This businessman is planning to open a dairy shop, or a baker's shop, or any kind of shop in general. One would have to think, in keeping with the tradition of things, that the businessman would first of all go to the local government office to apply for a permit. But this isn't the case. First of all, he must go to the district gangster, to the racketeer. He, a businessman, must receive permission from the district gangster. The district gangster, the racketeer, must decide whether it's advisable and advantageous – or inadvisable and disadvantageous – to open up a dairy shop here. All district shops are registered with the district gangster, and when he originally gave permission to a dairy shop that has now opened in his district, he took it upon himself to attend to the elimination of dairy competition in his district. It behooves the district gangster to ascertain how much the new dairy shop intends to pay him. And it behooves him to weigh whether it's worth closing the shop of the current merchant after having granted rights to this new one or whether it's not worth giving permission to this new merchant.

I was half a witness to the business affairs of district racketeers. With permission from a racketeer, a parking garage was built in our neighborhood in New York. During the summer months, Americans have the custom of leaving their cars out on the streets at the entrances to their buildings. It was summertime, so the newly constructed garage lay empty. The owner of the garage sent out an announcement about the opening of the garage throughout his district. The garage continued to lay empty. At that point, the district racketeer who had sanctioned the construction of the garage jumped into action. Every night, all the tire tubes inside the wheels of the automobiles parked out on the streets were punctured. The owner of the garage sent out a second round of announcements. The garage wound up being overfilled.

A similar thing happened with the dairy merchants. When it was suggested that the current dairy merchant should close down his business, in view of the fact that the license in this district had been transferred over to a new dairy merchant, this current dairy merchant had to clear out of his place quickly because instead of his car's tire tubes, it was his own ribs that would be punctured.

State authorities publish ordinances in regard to racketeering and create special courts. Quite naturally, it's Chicago that occupies first place. Chicago created a racketeering court. The

functions of this court are indicated in a special act. These functions are edifying. The court tries cases for:

- (1) the destruction of a citizen's property by means of an explosion
- (2) the infliction of injury to people as a result of an explosion
- (3) the premeditated sabotage of homes
- (4) the collection of money in the form of fines
- (5) the throwing of bombs
- (6) conspiratorial acts with the aim of producing the illegal acts of boycott or blackmail
- (7) the production or sale of explosive substances
- (8) the abduction of a person with the aim of receiving a ransom
- (9) the intimidation of employees and workers

Just like in a Hollywood movie! The investigator into American gangster operations, investigator K., who has hidden his identity behind the pseudonym of a single letter, writes:

“At the time of municipal, state, and federal elections, these (racketeering) gangs perform ‘political-governmental’ functions. These gangs take upon themselves concerns about the mass electorate. Petty merchants, drivers, employees at soda shops and drugstores, the little guys in the big city, they are the ones who pay tribute to the gang. Are they about to refuse the gang in the small favor they are being asked to do: to vote for such-and-such a Republican or such-and-such a Democrat!?”

Everything happens absolutely the same way as it does in a Hollywood movie. The tire tubes inside the wheels of automobiles, by order of the racketeer, are punctured by boys in the district at the price of a penny per puncture. These boys have watched enough motion pictures about gangster life and Indian life. And they have heard enough stories about the private activity of private detectives in the offices of Burns and Pinkerton. And no longer as half a witness, but now with my very own ears, I heard the life story of the young communist journalist, T. He grew up on these same New York-Detroit-Oklahoma-American streets. The boys in their districts, on their *bloki* [blocks], as districts are called in America, these boys were strictly organized into “cowboys and Indians” bands of gangsters. They had their own field of racketeering. They stole, in an organized way, oranges from hawker trays. The boys – especially the Italian and Hispanic ones – carried knives underneath their shirts, near their hearts, keeping them sharp for future use. They would complete the tasks assigned to them by their chiefs, such as puncturing the tire tubes inside the wheels of automobiles. Each block waged war with its neighboring blocks. And coalitions among blocks occurred, just as did coalitions among Indian tribes, when several blocks unified occasionally for various major assignments, such as theft during the parades on Independence Day and knocking straw hats off the heads of onlookers on August 16th. Children always walked to school in brigades so that they would not get beaten up walking singly. And the knives that they hid in their bosom saw the light of day when the boys reached age fourteen. My young friend T. was the only one in his class who finished college and became a communist. The rest of his classmates didn't make it to college. One of his classmates died, executed in the electric chair. Half of his comrades became professional gangsters, bootleggers, and racketeers. They didn't fall out of

the American laws of cinema and of Al Capone. My friend T. joked while he was telling me his life story. He said that if his childhood friends had not had the extra pennies they needed to go to the movies, he would not have been the only one out of them who wound up in the Communist Party.

The investigator K. writes about the courtesy of voting for Republican so-and-so. I have to add that several banks and enterprises use gangster bands instead of the police to guard their assets. I have the honor to report that gangster bands take part in political life, not only ordering how – and not otherwise – to vote, but also in other ways. For example, we know of incidents where not only the Democratic Party and Republican Party, but also the American Federation of Labor, hired gangsters to beat up people attending communist demonstrations. The Republican Party and the Democratic Party, using the fists of gangsters, regularly beat up each other as a matter of traditions. We must remember what was written many pages earlier, when we were speaking about “technological” concerts and unemployment: a bridge is being constructed there, a bridge much more grandiose than the Brooklyn Bridge – a bridge from “technological” individualism to gangsterism.

I didn't see a single hotel in America, not a single hotel room – first of all, a hotel room with the number thirteen, and, second of all, a hotel room with a different number – in which there was not a Bible sitting there. Even if the bathroom might not always have one, there was absolutely always a Bible sitting next to the telephone book. And it's completely natural for Americans that the conventions of the Republican Party in America, the party that has placed Herbert Hoover in the White House as the current president, begin with prayers to the Lord God. They prefer that their conventions be opened by Methodist bishops, and then fathers from the Episcopalian Church and the Roman Catholic Church recite prayers. And the convention closes with a prayer of supplication by a Jewish rabbi.

Al Capone! – racketeers! – it would be a mistake to fail to mention the affairs of President Harding! The current president, however, President Herbert Hoover, was here during the Harding administration. He was here, in this country of merchants and tradesmen, serving as the Secretary of Commerce, serving as the far-right, right-hand man of President Harding, just as Harry Guzik served as the right-hand man of Al Capone during the reign of Al Capone. It's not known for sure whether Harding died from a cold or was poisoned, or whether he poisoned himself. Matters involving Harding are only half-known. But out of all these half-known things, the following – which was determined by the courts and fouled up by the courts – is known.

Edwin Denby, the Secretary of the Navy, and Albert Fall, the Secretary of the Interior, (former President Harding and current President Hoover, who was serving as Secretary of Commerce at the time, have nothing to do with any of this!) leased the oil-rich land at Teapot Dome in the state of Wyoming and at Elk Hills in the state of California to the oil men Harry Sinclair and Edward Doheny. Denby and Fall also placed into commission the land that had been held in reserve for the government to meet the needs of the navy. Attorney General Daugherty, an active and veteran anti-communist, was helping Secretary Fall and Secretary Denby. The Standard Oil Company was also helping Sinclair and Doheny. Beneath these oil fields and to the side of these oil fields, there arose the fictional – that is to say, it didn't exist in reality –

joint-stock oil company, Continental Trading Company. Three million dollars were dispersed among members of the government by this “company.” Two hundred and thirty-three thousand dollars in stocks were found in Fall’s possession. These had been paid to him for a summer home that he had sold. One of Harding’s cabinet ministers, William Hays, the Postmaster General, received only seventy-five thousand dollars, and that money was not intended for him himself, but to be handed over to the Republican Party. This same Hays (the mail!) delivered a package of stocks to Harding’s Treasury Secretary, Andrew Mellon, a billionaire and the leader of the Republican Party. This package of stocks was likewise to be deposited, in Mellon’s name, into the coffers of the Republican Party. (It must be said about William Hays that, after he resigned from office, he went to go work in the film industry, in the capacity, so to speak, of a “moral” dictator, where he continues to work to this day.) One million, six hundred thousand dollars were deposited into the coffers of the Republican Party, in addition to the packages intended for the Treasury Department and the Republican Party. Harding’s name, the name of the president, is sacred. The president, like God, can’t make a mistake! As a result of all these unpleasant developments, Harding either died of a cold or poisoned himself, or was poisoned by others. Herbert Hoover, the current president, was the Secretary of Commerce in the Harding administration. He, like Harding, had nothing to do with any of this . . .

Court proceedings were scheduled. It was incumbent upon this court to investigate the entire matter and to get to the bottom of it, “by and large.” The court has still not finished its investigation. The Supreme Court, in a fit of temper, nullified the contract for the oil fields, calling the transaction “fraudulent and corrupt.” This was a preliminary measure. The court has still not gotten to the bottom of this entire matter, “by and large.” Such-and-such an American court of law acquitted Fall and Doheny of some particular charges. This acquittal was reversed, however, for it was established, through the office of the aforementioned private detective William Burns, that some jurors had been bribed. But Sinclair wasn’t a cabinet secretary. Sinclair was a capitalist. And Sinclair – by this same Republican court of law as well as all the other courts of law – was acquitted!

Herbert Hoover – he had nothing to do with any of this! Not only was he not mixed up with these matters. He didn’t even know anything about them. Not once, not in one single speech, not in one single public appearance, did he ever say a single word about these matters! He, too, apparently, doesn’t know that the investigation into this case has still not yet been concluded, despite the fact that it’s an old case of long standing, despite the swiftness and fairness of American courts, and despite the fact that this case had to be investigated under his administration, under his aegis!

29

The “White House” – it’s the same kind of industrial-capitalist enterprise as all the other ones in America. The master of America – and its main Nietzschean – is the dollar. The budget of the “White House” is seven billion dollars. The gangster-racketeer-bootlegger budget is nine billion dollars. Who is the master here? It would seem to be the gangsters, since they are wealthier. But this isn’t the case. The true master is the dollar, which, as we know, is odor free. The “White House” in America is the same type of industry as all the other ones in

America. And, to boot, it still doesn't have any fresh new policies. Out of the ten Americans that I asked, nine answered:

“*Uell* [Well], politics! That's a dirty business! I'm not interested in it. *Shchiur* [Sure], the bosses who get involved in politics get involved in it not out of the sheer goodness of their hearts. Don't speak to me about their honesty! *Shchiur!*”

American newspapers differ from European ones. European newspapers prefer to be the newspapers of different political parties and to be supported by these parties. American newspapers are the newspapers of industrial enterprises and they're supported by these enterprises. For a newspaper that's published on the funds provided by the rubber industry, what's most important, above all else, is that automobile tires and galoshes are being sold. For the press that's supported by the “General Motors Company,” it's essential to get Ford to submit to its will. The press that's supported by J. P. Morgan has to strengthen Morgan's business interests against those of Rockefeller; the press supported by Rockefeller needs to do the same against Morgan's business interests. As far as politics and political parties are concerned, political parties and politics are much less businesses than are rubber, automobiles, steel, banks, and so on. Both Morgan and Rockefeller give money in support of both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, both of them at the same time, for these two parties are in charge of politics in the United States. The “Ford Motor Company” feuds so much with the “General Motors Company” that Ford gives money only to the Republican Party, and General Motors gives money only to the Democratic Party.

Politics is a bad business.

At one time there used to be a distinction to be made between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. During the years of the Civil War between the North and the South, the party of the Republicans worked with the Northerners, while the party of the Democrats worked with the Southerners. It became firmly established that the Republican Party was the party of northern industrialists, and the Democratic Party was the party of financial capital; that it was this way in the past, and it's this way even now; that in New York, in the financial center of the country, the party of the Democrats is in command. Between two evils, it's not worth choosing. For all intents and purposes, these two parties, even during the years of the Civil War, differed not in terms of their social identity, but tactically and territorially. This didn't prevent those selfsame Republicans, in the days of the final military victories of the North over the South, as we mentioned already, from inciting a rebellion against the Northerners in defense of the “democratic” South. Nowadays these two political parties – these two competing trusts – are the trusts that are in charge of American politics and that don't differ from each other even in their tactics. These two political parties are trusts that have constructed their programs upon the derogation of the programs of their competitors, upon the blunders of their competitors, upon political maneuvering, upon territorial traditions, upon capitalist competition. These trusts aren't especially businesslike: the Rockefellers and the Morgans have both of these political parties depending upon them for financial support. The highly respected Mister Kotofson, the man whose daughter in the past had a sty on her eyelid and in the future has a career as a writer, would say, just like the other eight out of ten people

along with him: “‘*Uell* [Well], politics! It’s a dirty business! I’m not interested in it! *Shchiur!* [Sure!]”

American newspapers are concerned about “rubber” (is this by chance!?), and in every issue of the newspapers the reader finds that four times as much space is devoted there to sports than to politics, domestic politics along with international politics, not to mention how much space is devoted to rubber!

In Washington, there are intermediary offices (without signboards, of course!) that buy and sell, through both retail and wholesale trade, senators, members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats, government officials, and judges. On those days that are free from election campaigning, the staffs of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party are occupied with one single thing: the allocation of posts and appointments among the members of their respective parties. This is done for the sake of defending the three “whales” (foundational pillars) of American democracy: the Bible, the Constitution, and the American flag. In no way are any political convictions demanded from the member of a party. What is demanded is that he regularly register himself as a member and – as per the formulation of Senator Penrose – that he “stand behind his own scoundrel.” According to American notions, one is supposed to see in a political party not any principles or any program, but rather the source of one’s existence. For members of a political party, that party is always clothed in the tangible forms of food, clothing, and a bank account.

All presidents devote the largest part of their time and efforts not to governmental matters, but rather to the organization of their political party in all 48 of the united states. Four-fifths of a president’s time is occupied with discussing appointments, beginning with appointing personnel at the fourth-class level in the post office and ending with appointing members to his cabinet.

There’s a book written by the American journalist, Franklin Kent, a man who is by no means a revolutionary. His book is titled *Political Behavior*. This book ought to be regarded as a textbook and reference manual for the bourgeois politicians who are now in charge of America.

The book Kent has written is, as one would expect, broken down into chapters whose titles are laconic in a characteristically American way: “Live Up to the Law and Be Licked,” “You Must Play the Game with the Gang,” “It Does Not Pay to Buck the Business Interests,” “When the Water Reaches the Upper Decks, Follow the Rats,” “Prosperity Absorbs All Criticism,” “Corruption Is Not Really a Party Liability,” “The Floaters Hold the Real Power,” “Give Them Hokum,” and so on.

Kent considers party leaders to be a group of people that consists

“of precinct and ward executives, committeemen or captains and literally legions of small job holders who constitute the governmental machines, municipal, state and national.”

In the chapter titled “Fat Cats,” Kent informs us that the normal, natural path to an elected office is by belonging to a political party:

“. . . the only key to which is in the hands of the machine. In other words, the initial step is to induce the organization – by which is meant the leader or leaders of the local machine – to take you up.”

Kent illustrates this fact with the example of the party fortunes of President Coolidge and President Hoover. He says about Coolidge that “at no time and on no occasion has he gone contrary to the organization.”

Kent illustrates this fact with matters of a different order, with the fact that

“. . . one member of Congress, a rich man from an Eastern state now serving already his seventh or eight term in the House, regularly and of course secretly turns over the amount of his salary – \$10,000 dollars a year – to the machine boss in the city in which he lives. That is all he ever has to do. He never has to bother about his nomination.”

The fate of this congressman leads Kent to provide information about “fat cats.” “Politics,” as we have said, is not considered a big honor in America. “Politics is a dirty game and I don’t want anything to do with it.”

Being a merchant of enamel ware or producing sausage at a meat packing plant is no less honorable than being elected – depending on one’s rank and grade – to municipal, state, and federal positions. But on occasion there emerge some wealthy oddballs who get the itch to receive the honors of being elected mayor or governor.

“Such men are known in political circles as ‘Fat Cats.’” “These capitalists have what the organization needs – money to finance the campaign.” “They are as welcome to the organization as flowers in May.”

Kent informs us:

“Up to date no ‘Fat Cat’ has as yet landed the Presidency, though in 1920 and again in 1928 one or two of them got fairly close to a nomination. But they are common enough in Congress.”

In the chapter, “What Happened to The Candidate Who Would Be Courageous and Candid,” it is argued that there is no room in the American parliamentary system for a courageous and candid candidate. They fail everywhere. Kent supports his assertion, in part, by citing the example of Coolidge (earlier he spoke about President Hoover).

“From first to last in the campaign Mr. Coolidge said no syllable that could possibly offend Catholics or Ku Klux, wet or dry, crooked oil men or flaming patriot.” “He held rigidly to an advocacy of the obvious – economy, lower taxes,

debt reduction, prosperity, peace, good will, the Bible, the flag, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights.”

In the chapter, “Corruption Is Not Really a Party Liability,” he reports:

“. . . they [the people] regard the charges of crookedness coming from the outs against the ins as the natural thing to be expected, as part of the game. The disposition down in the precincts is to believe that of course the ins are grafting a little, but so will the outs when they get in – it is what they all do . . . As a matter of fact they [charges of corruption] are frequently a means of arousing public sympathy for the man attacked . . . What the average voter thinks is that the others are slicker but not more honest and the denunciation of the ‘poor guy’ who got caught does not do him any particular harm. On the contrary, he appeals to his constituents for a ‘vindication,’ talks about the ‘conspiracy to rob me of my good name’ and gets reelected by an increased majority. If they can’t reelect the ‘poor guy’ himself, if he happens to have gone to the penitentiary for instance – just to show their good will the voters turn in and elect his wife. The case of former Representative Langley of Kentucky, convicted of fraud, is an instance. While Mr. Langley was in the Federal Penitentiary, the voters of his district nominated and elected Mrs. Langley to his seat in the House of Representatives.”

“The magnificent and amazing silence of the whole Republican party on the subject of the oil frauds, the utter absence from any of its regular leaders – Coolidge, Dawes, Hughes, Hoover, or any of the others – of a word of denunciation . . . certainly contributed tremendously toward obviating any political effect of their misdeeds.”

In the chapter, “When the Water Reaches the Upper Decks, Follow the Rats,” he reports:

“What this somewhat cryptic saying means of course is that a man in politics is foolish to hold on to his convictions after they have become unpopular with the people.” “No successful politician – and no successful political party can afford to stand steadfast by their convictions – and none do.”

The chapter, “It Does Not Pay to Buck the Business Interests,” by its very title, illustrates what its content is. The exhibit items that Kent dismantles and parses here are, of course, the exhibit items of the American philistine, and Kent is brief in his formulations:

“First – No attack on ‘plutocracy’ or ‘vast riches’ or ‘vested interests’ or ‘predatory wealth’ or ‘Wall Street’ or the ‘trusts’ or ‘giant combinations’ . . . is effective or popular . . . Second – if anyone – but particularly a woman – has a single share in a public utility corporation – she at once thinks her interests identical with the capitalistic class and secretly reacts against an attack on it.”

“We have become a nation of small stockholders and bond owners.”

“There are now upwards of five million holders of shares of public utility companies alone in the country.”

“Unquestionably it puts the small stockholder in the capitalist class, squeezes out of him all the socialistic and Bolshevistic virus.”

What I have just cited is one side of the coin concerning the all-American *vobla*, the philistine named the *vobla* that has settled across all of the United States, the philistine that reminisces about American equality, about “cabins” from which presidents and millionaires emerge, about democracy and pioneer matters. Kent doesn’t write about the other side of the coin, which is that “business circles” are the masters of the country, consequently, “don’t touch” them. Kent doesn’t write about this even though it’s obvious from his book, especially from the following chapters.

In the chapter, “‘Current Expenses’ or ‘You Can’t Win on a Shoe String,’” Kent gently reports:

“No President has ever been chosen in this country whose campaign was not sufficiently well financed to take care of ‘current expenses.’”

“Now by ‘venal vote’ I do not so much mean the voters who can be bought directly with a two- or a five-dollar bill . . .”

“It should be explained here that the before and frequently used phrase ‘current expenses’ does not refer to what are known as the legitimate expenses of a campaign – not for example to the expenses for meetings, music, advertising, headquarters, posters, propaganda, publicity, payroll, stamps, stationery. It does not even refer to the secret deals involving money made in every state . . . deals for example that secure the support of various foreign language newspapers.”

“‘Current expenses’ are what is spent on election day.”

“The Floaters Hold the Real Power,” Kent reports in the chapter by that title.

“He [the candidate] may have made a magnificent campaign. He may have fed the people supremely fine hokum and given a show that won their hearts – but if on election day his funds [‘current expenses’] are conspicuous for their absence he will be licked with a certainty and precision only averted by the rare political miracle of an understanding and aroused electorate.”

“Now then to get down to the cold facts of the ‘current expenses’ proposition – in every one of these 150,000 precincts of approximately 400 voters each, there are to be found always available on election day anywhere from ten to twenty men, and now occasionally a woman or two – whose chief idea about an election day is that it is an opportunity to make a little easy money. In the old days they were known as ‘floaters’ and were – most of them – ‘sellers.’ In recent years they have become runners, or workers, or watchers, or messengers, according to the

sectional terminology . . . Some of them have a real party affiliation; others do not care which party they work with so long as they get paid . . . The Democratic workers naturally look to the Democratic precinct executive for employment on election day; the Republican workers look to the Republican executive.”

“Says the precinct executive making the deal – ‘All right, \$10 for the day, Johnson, but you be out in the precinct by six o’clock and be sure and get every one of them Johnsons in early.’ All the worker has to do to earn his \$10 is to deliver his own family.”

The twentieth chapter of Kent’s book is titled “Live Up to the Law and Be Licked.” There’s no need to provide any commentary on this chapter in view of the clarity of its title and because the verity of this statement follows intuitively from what has been said above. In the chapter, “The Poison Squads,” Kent talks about the principles and practices of slander used by the American political parties, both the Republicans and the Democrats. Kent makes a slip of the tongue when he uses a phrase that encapsulates what his work is saying:

“Purity in politics is an impractical dream . . . [Politics] is a game . . . with an almost uncountable number of prizes ranging from the most powerful and important office in the world – the Presidency – to the \$2 bill eagerly sought by the venal voter on election day.”

In order to liven up the story of American politics, we should provide some graphic illustrations here.

The first illustration. It illustrates *khokum* [hokum], that is, the nonsense of every kind that entertains voters and that establishes warm, cordial relations between a candidate and the voters.

“Stalking into a crowded hall, Mr. Hill would walk to the table on the stage where, under his instructions, a pitcher of water and a glass had been placed. Picking up the pitcher he would start to pour himself a drink. Suddenly and dramatically he would throw the water out the window or dash the glass on the floor. ‘What’s this?’ he would shout. ‘Water? We don’t want water in this district, we want beer, and, boys, if you send John Philip Hill to Congress he’ll get it for you.’ Then he would grab an American flag (also planted), the band would strike up and the crowd go crazy.”

The second illustration. The story of a precinct “captain” about his battles.

“It was a darn hard blow on the Saturday before election when instead of getting \$120 for my precinct from the district leader I got \$30. I knew then that things were not going to be so good but I did not know the worst. On election day before nine o’clock I knew we were beat and beat bad. There were a dozen fellows in that precinct, all Democrats, who in every election I put on at anywhere from \$2 to \$10 each. Usually they showed up around the polling place around six

o'clock. This time it was nine o'clock before I could find one of them. Then I found one and he was good and drunk, and I got the truth. He had \$25 of Republican money in his pocket. So did every other of my dozen workers in the precinct – only one or two of 'em had \$50. They never had seen such money. Neither had I . . . nobody could buck the kind of money they had that day. They could have put over a yellow dog against the Apostle Paul."

Mister Kotofson is right:

"*Uell* [Well], politics! That's a dirty business! Don't talk to me about their honesty! The bosses who get involved in politics get involved in it not out of the goodness of their hearts. *Schiur!* [Sure!]"

I, too, am right, when I assert that presidents are elected with bribes, which is equivalent to the assertion that the White House disseminates funds by means of gangsters. The work of the American political parties that are currently in charge consists in one thing and one thing only – the running of election campaigns. That is what they do actually. What is next for the parties is to begin enjoying life, getting some rest and relaxation. They allocate posts among their members, and these pieces of the proverbial pie are not in any way meager morsels or Lenten fare, like the oil fields of Teapot-Dome. We're talking about the activity of the two parties – the Republicans and the Democrats – the political parties of American capitalists, industrialists, and the *vobla* of the philistine: it follows that we must judge these selfsame capitalists, industrialists, and the philistine *vobla* in accordance with the parties. And these American political parties are not really parties, but rather trusts that differ from actual trusts, such as, let's say, the textile industry, only in the sense that the textile industry produces dry goods and has textile factories, while here there is the power wielded by people, ranging from the mayor (or the judge) of the town of Kingman to the president from the city of Washington. These trusts are not specifically businesses: being a factory owner and a billionaire is more honorable than being a Congressman. Gangsters on the order of Harry Sinclair and Al Capone interweave their business dealings with the White House. Racketeers (and Al Capone) are concerned with elections of all sorts. Trading in alcohol, gangsters-bootleggers have a larger budget than the White House does. Before he goes to the mayor's office, to the legal authorities, the philistine goes to the district gangster. There is a Russian anecdote from the tsarist era . . .

"On the Saturday before Easter, following the pogroms against Jews and intellectuals in 1905, Ivan Faddeyevich, a merchant of the third guild in the city of Moscow, took a quick steam bath in the *banya* [bathhouse], took communion, and drank some rowanberry vodka right before matins. Then he tiptoed into his bedroom, looked inside the cupboard and under the bed – is there anybody hiding in the room? – locked the door, and then began to examine his physiognomy attentively in the mirror: his beard, nose, and eyes. Finally, he whispered to himself in the mirror: 'Ivan Faddeyevich!' he whispered. 'You and I are alone. It's just the two of us here. Confess before Holy Easter, as you would to a priest during confession, that one of us is working for the secret police! . . .'"

For all we know, this anecdote might well be applied to Americans as well. Thus, on the eve of Independence Day, an American citizen in his fifteenth-floor apartment, after having gotten drunk on whiskey, secured the doors and turned off the radio and refrigerator, so that nobody would bother him. Then he went into the bathroom and asked himself in the mirror:

“Well, John! You and I are all alone here. Between you, me, and these four walls, confess on the eve of Independence Day: am I a gangster or not!?”

30

Earlier I told the story about how once, in a Bronx park, we – the journalist P. and I – encountered a woman in tears whose husband had left her for a woman who drank wine, whereas she, the wife we encountered, was a faithful Christian and a faithful wife. A week following this encounter, on the morning of a holiday, I went to go see P. a little earlier than usual in order to make sure that I found him at home. He lived alone. It took him a while to unlock the door for me and he was a little embarrassed when he opened it. In the dining room, there remained two place settings from last evening’s dinner, and in the study a woman’s hat and some kind of toiletry article were lying there. They, too, obviously remained there from last evening. The fact that I was the one who had come to see him evidently calmed P. down. With a gesture, he informed me about what had happened. I wanted to leave. He said that there was no need to do that. He left for a minute to go into the bedroom. A minute later there came out of the bedroom behind him the very same woman whom we had encountered in the rain in the Bronx park. When she saw me, a sad look came over her face. I offered her a cigarette. She declined with all the puritanical rigor she could muster. Suddenly her eyes welled up with tears, and she began to speak, saying that she should tell me about the most recent events in her life.

“Since my husband left me, I don’t know anything about his whereabouts. He left, rejecting everything. He left me for a woman who smokes tobacco and drinks wine. Why did he leave me! – He left me, and since then my life has stopped. And I am – as God is my witness! – a faithful Christian. I am a faithful wife. And, of course, I don’t smoke, and I don’t drink.”

I looked at the toiletry article that had been left on the couch and at the two unfinished drinks that were standing next to a half-empty liter of liquor on a stool near the couch. The woman intercepted my look. With what was, most likely, blessed simplicity – *o sancta simplicitas* – she sat down on the couch, right on top of her toilet articles.

“And what about your husband?” I asked.

“Ah, God sees how I am waiting for him!” she said, lifting her eyes up to the heavens.

Presidents – gangsters – the doctor and the policeman who were standing next to that lady from whom I could have received reimbursement for the cost of replacing the headlight on my automobile that had been broken by striking her in the head. Hypocrisy! Dissimulation!

In America there are some economists and historians who maintain that the dry law has helped a lot to create the American *prosperiti* [prosperity] of recent years. It would seem that this line of reasoning proceeds from the fact of sobriety, which raised the productivity of labor. But economists reason differently. The emergence of the organized smuggling of alcohol, with its billions of transactions, with its hundreds of thousands of workers, employed both directly and indirectly, it's precisely this smuggling – in other words, gangsterism – that has done a multitude of things that contribute to the flourishing of commerce and industry, and thus to American *prosperiti*. Economists suggest that we remember here about the increased demand for motor boats, about the jute used for making bags, about forests, about bottles, about the printing of pharmaceutical labels, this in addition to those people who are themselves producing, standardizing, rationalizing, selling, and drinking alcohol. Economists of this order disapprove of the argument that, after alcohol was prohibited, the nation started to drink less and to work better, the more so since medical science has still not resolved the question of what has a better and more productive influence on the performance capability of workers: genuine alcohol or the surrogates that send heavy drinkers to the afterworld?

As far as the periods of American *prosperiti* in general are concerned, of which there were five in all, including the period between 1922 and October of 1929, some American economists propose things that are no less unusual than “prohibition” as the main reasons for these periods of *prosperiti*.

The first period of *prosperiti* began in 1825. Up until that time, America was simply a village with cities that resembled villages. America lived in a state of Quaker-Puritanical well-being.

Then it came to light that a multitude of new people had crossed the Allegheny Mountains, people who had come to America in large numbers from Europe after the storms of the French Revolution and the routs of the Napoleonic Wars. As these people crossed the mountains into the Midwest, they dragged behind themselves the first factories and plants. The cotton-refining machine, which Eli Whitney had invented many years earlier, only now sprouted into factory buildings. Axes at construction sites hammered away across the country. In that year, 1825, the world had already recovered from the Napoleonic Wars, world trade had come alive, American cotton had set off for Europe, and European machines had set off for America. This period of *prosperiti* ended in 1837, when the axes quieted down and crowds of starving people were ready to rush off to any place, even to the ends of the earth.

The ends of the earth turned out to be California gold. This was the second period of *prosperiti*. It began in 1849 and it lived on until 1857. It was made by people wearing horsehair collars instead of beards, people who washed gold in iron hand basins, the same people who destroyed Fort Sutter and who built towns with such names as Whiskey, Wild Yankee Mines, Port Wine, and Sacramento. Railways – *chemins de fer* – set off in pursuit of the iron hand basins used by these prospectors for gold. People who were not so bold preferred to plow the earth with horse-drawn plows and to reap the harvest with croppers rather than take risks on gold and sell their harvests to gold-diggers for triple the price. This period of *prosperiti* lasted eight years. The country fumed with the smoke of factories producing

agricultural equipment. The locomotives of the railways and the engines of the factories were fed by coal mines. This period of *prosperiti* gave birth to the preconditions for the Civil War. The year 1857 exploded with bank collapses. The California gold ran dry.

Fates were decided by the Civil War. The fates decided by the Civil War are well known. A new era of *prosperiti*, the third one, began in 1879. It lived for 14 years: it passed away in 1893. The financial crisis of 1857, together with the years of the Civil War and the post-war crisis that followed, lasted 22 years. Two years before the beginning of this third period of *prosperiti*, a certain Pastor Ruperti noted down for posterity:

“New York’s present social condition presents least of all a cheerful picture. The absence of work summons a growing poverty and increases the frequency of crime. The number of people who are out of work has never been as great as it is now, and the prospects have never been sadder. Poverty of this sort exists in all of the Eastern States. The judge in one large city in Massachusetts found recently that the municipal jails were not sufficient. He sent a telegram to all of the state’s prison officials, requesting the allocation of more space, but from all of them he received the same response: everywhere their own jails are filled to overflowing! Everywhere there abound vagabonds who are begging for alms. Accordingly, work shops are empty, while houses of correction are full. And meanwhile every month foreigners are coming here by the thousands, the greater part of them without any money, without any knowledge of the language, without any friends. The terrible ‘Tombs’ – New York’s municipal prison – is filled to overflowing. If one takes into account, furthermore, the demoralization of our civil servants, which is increasing more and more, then our current social life does not present anything comforting. The political parties are raising very serious accusations against each other, and if one of them removes the other from office, then it is only in order to squeeze more out of the government sponge than their predecessors did.”

But it was these thousands of foreigners, without knowledge of the language, without friends, and without money, who had left Europe for the sake of its seventy years of labor problems, they are the ones that created the third era of *prosperiti*. These people were the ones that populated America as far as the Pacific Ocean. These people are the ones that consigned outdated American handicraft and craftsmanship to oblivion and gave industry up to machines. At that moment, when thousands of settlers hunkered down into the peacefulness and tranquility – the “pacific” nature – of the Pacific, the factories and plants suddenly grew silent, the banks started to vulcanize, and unshaven, starving people set off to walk all across the country.

And once again gold saved the economy in some godforsaken place, in Alaska. The unshaven, starving heroes of Jack London and Johann-August Sutter saved the economy. From this gold, the emaciated trusts, which had become unproductive, started to swell up anew and expand. From this gold, the country was lit up with electricity, entangled in its copper wires. Warning sirens started to sound at copper-ore mines and at steel mills. Newer and newer railroad tracks appeared. Skyscrapers rose up beyond dozens of floors. This fourth era of *prosperiti* began in

1898. The twentieth century was met by it. It lived for nine years: it passed away in 1907, when one foul day the country awoke feeling very heavily hung over.

Thus, consequently, out of the four periods of *prosperiti*, two were created by settlers and two were created by gold. And thus, consequently, if we follow the logic of the assertion that *prokhibishen* [prohibition] was one of the reasons for the final period of *prosperiti*, we must agree that the preceding four periods of *prosperiti* were an accident! By dint of this unusual conclusion, which is in no way my own personal conclusion, we can come to agree that all of America is nothing more than an accident. Yet I took away just such an assertion from an American scholar and radical. And it's no longer an accident because Americans, even American scholars, in their dollar Nietzscheanism of "parliamentarianism" and "democracy," of which we spoke earlier, actually do feel as if they are living accidentally, living in some contingency. This is precisely why Stuart Chase, a radical, what we in Russia would call a Cadet, a commentator on current events who disavows *prokhibishen* as one of the reasons for *prosperiti*, considers the automobile to be the main reason for *prosperiti*.

Chase asks:

"What forces have been gathering since 1921 to make this commercial prosperity the very sizeable thing that it is?"

Chase answers his own question:

"To my mind, the largest single force has been the motor car. The automobile was something which people really wanted with a desire that amounted to a passion. The effect was two-fold. It stimulated business, and it suffused the country with the visible *appearance* of a prosperity in which everybody seemed to share. Other prosperous periods have been stimulated by foreign trade, or by the seeping of gold into the community. But this particular period was stimulated by a large, active, noisy, and inescapable article visible on every road. You could see, hear, smell the monster for miles. (Some 25,000 unfortunates are touched by it each year, never to breathe again.) Something in the nature of 500 millions of horsepower was given over to the ultimate consumer in a remarkably short space of time – the biggest single block of power, by many fold, which the world has ever delivered . . ."

"When Henry Ford and the installment contract brought the cost of the automobile down to negotiable terms, it became something that people were willing to work for, save for, strive for."

"It promised three great gifts dear to the human heart: romantic adventure, social standing, and the joy of rushing through the air (the urge upon which operators of roller coasters and shoot-the-chutes thrive). A car! My car!! Is there a mathematician with a slide rule long enough to compute the total emotional force which these two phrases have touched off in the last decade?"

“A definite physical elation, which is so universal as to be counted as a biological norm, comes from skimming along at 30 to 40 miles an hour. Neither does this thrill die as one matures. Adults enjoy it possibly even more than children. Without exception, the motor car is the most thrilling toy which *homo sapiens* has ever had to play with . . . The thrill can be enhanced, furthermore, by shiny paint; bright nickel; little metal cups on cords, which, when pulled from a dash board, glow red hot; by tiny arrows moving against lighted dials; by wicked looking lines; by horns tuned to paralyze pedestrians; by gloriously overstuffed tires. The fact that many of these accessories serve no useful function only adds to the joy of conspicuous consumption. The demand for them is colossal, and thus, beside a booming motor car industry, we have a booming motor car accessory industry. To maintain the thrill – particularly after the novelty has worn off – ever greater speeds are required. Higher speeds mean better roads. Who shall say how much of the billion or so a year we spend for highways is the result of work-a-day transportation, and how much the result of a demand to have a steeper shoot-the-chutes?”

“Once the game has begun in earnest, the whole phenomenon of competitive social standards enters – backed to the limit by aggressive salesmanship on the part of the automobile manufacturer. The make, cost and model of one’s motor car become one’s heraldic symbol of position in the community. A carpenter with a Cadillac is as good as a banker with a Cadillac. If the carpenter sports a Lincoln, the banker must take second place. The innate thrill has forced us to purchase a car. Having got it, there is no choice but to take our position in the new hierarchy of values – a model T at the bottom, a Rolls-Royce at the top. Life becomes a determined movement away from the first, up to the last. If we falter for so much as one annual model, what will the Joneses say? To a man we sign the new installment contract . . .”

“Lastly, and equally important, the automobile, beside the elation of sheer speed, and its power to determine social position, promises romance, adventure, and escape from the monotony which all too often characterizes modern life. Over the hills and far away, an engine throbbing at our door-step, and North America lies in the hollow of our hands! Mountain, canyon . . . Fifteen years ago, if one could negotiate the roads, he was indeed an explorer in a new world. He did leave his past behind; shake the dust of his city from his shoes . . .”

And Chase, of his own accord, interrupts himself here, exclaiming:

“Alas, it is not so true to-day. With 25 million cars upon the roads, the city has spilled over a thousand highways into the country . . . Once we could find escape with a motor car. Now how shall we escape from the line which creeps, fender to fender, North, South, East and West?!”

Truly, there is no way to break free from the conveyor belt of American roads! And, truly, to drive along the conveyor belts of American roads is no less exhausting than to work on the

conveyor line at the Ford auto plant! The gentleman who thought up what to do with the millions of wealthy American fools was right when he asserted that Americans have been suffocated by automobiles and that the automobile has become penal servitude for Americans. I can attest from my own personal experience that if you were to ask a thousand Americans who are driving around at nine o'clock in the evening – where are they going? on what business? – nine hundred out of these one thousand individualists would be at a loss and would not be able to answer your question. They are going in order to go, they have crawled onto the conveyor belt of roads, they are holding on to the steering wheel and – they are driving. There is no need to sit still, if you have a car! Chase is wrong, however, when he says that with twenty-five million cars on the roads, the city has spilled over onto the fields in the countryside: it's not the city that has spilled over, but rather the factory, suffocated by gas exhaust, stupefied by the intense stress of the conveyor belt, handcuffed by traffic regulations. The writer Floyd Dell told me that he no longer owns a car. He once had a car, an excellent one, a remarkable one. He drove it for two years, and for two years he didn't write anything. He observed that all across America there are one and the same motels, one and the same roads, one and the same stupefaction while driving. So he gave up driving. He prefers to get around by subway and taxi when he needs to go somewhere. He sat at his desk and got down to writing novels again.

I quoted Chase so that I could talk about the reasons for the most recent period of *prosperiti*. In the summer of 1931, a financial crisis swept across America. It was the most terrible crisis out of all the earlier ones. It arose after the fifth era of *prosperiti*. Numerous times I have heard the following conversations:

“America! The genius of America! Ford! The genius of Ford! Did you know that Ford's system is now being applied everywhere – in restaurants, even in the shops of small vendors, even for those who stroll around in parks. This is the eternal search for new forms and innovations. This is a grandiose laboratory. Everything here is discounted and everything here is regulated. The automobile – and Ford, most of all – created the last period of *prosperiti*. Some oddballs wanted to outsmart Ford. They wanted to support *prosperiti* by tossing radios and refrigerators to the masses. Can these items really take the place of an automobile!? But Ford will create a new period of *prosperiti*. Ford writes that we are still not making sufficient use of rubber. He believes that we don't need to pave the roads with asphalt, but should instead make them out of rubber. But if rubber doesn't help, then Ford will think up something else. He'll start producing inexpensive airplanes that will cost the same as his automobiles. He'll start producing them by the millions. They'll be equipped with a second propeller on the back. With the help of that second propeller, they'll be able to ascend and descend without having to make any take-off run. Every rooftop will be an arostation. Distances will disappear. America will ascend upward into the air! . . . If Ford isn't the one who does it, this, in any event, is the way things will be done. We must, we absolutely must think up something that would be the equivalent of the automobile or the gold of the Klondike! . . . Then a new period of *prosperiti* will begin.”

For the time being, America has not yet ascended upward into the air. I quoted Chase in order to give this American economist the opportunity to speak about *prosperiti*, but it ended up that I characterized the views of an American on the automobile.

Both conclusions are significant.

The American philistine in the legends about Puritanism and parliamentarianism, in the loneliness of American democracy, in the hypocrisy, in the woodcutter's cabins, in the clichés and stereotypes – he considers all of this: an ac-ci-dent!

And the American philistine in the loneliness of democracy, in the conveyor belts of highways, in the clichés and stereotypes – in the dollar, in the dollar – wants to break-free-from these clichés and stereotypes!

The word – *o'kei* – was not created accidentally by Americans; it was not created only according to the legend about its origins in illiteracy. Americans are competitive sportsmen. The Americans have a saying "keep smiling" – *khrani ulybku*. American traditions require that an American is always smiling and is always cheerful. And this is absolutely true: an American was ruined on the stock market – *o'kei*; an American smashed up his automobile – *o'kei*; an American injured his cheekbone while playing football – *o'kei*; an American was robbed by gangsters – *o'kei*! Truly, this is the way it is, and it's this way because everything is accidental.

I saw once how Americans wanted to break free from clichés and stereotypes in a truly American way. This took place in May 1931.

We were driving from Dallas en route to Baton Rouge, to the Mississippi River. After Dallas, we started seeing subtropical forests and Negro plantations, some of those several places in America that are empty and barren because this corner of America has, for all intents and purposes, been half-forsaken since the days of the Civil War. The day was scorching hot, we were weary, and so when evening time arrived we weren't taken aback very much by the fact that the village where we would be spending the night – Mineola – was packed with people and automobiles, which was unusual for a semi-desert area like this. What surprised me was the night.

I was awakened at an ungodly hour by noises in the motel. It seemed like no one was asleep in the motel; they were instead walking down the corridors, slamming doors. People were talking loudly below the windows. Along the highway, automobiles were whizzing past every second, traveling at speeds reaching a hundred kilometers an hour. Out of the darkness, headlights flashed, hissing as they cleaved the air and then disappearing into the darkness. Automobiles were going only in one direction. The number of automobiles at the entrance to the motel tripled during the hours when I was sleeping. There obviously were not enough rooms in the motel since some people were sleeping outdoors in the open air, both inside cars and next to cars. The restaurant at the motel was on the first floor, and the drugstore across from it was open. From all indications, some people inside the drugstore were drinking heavily. I smoked a cigarette at my window, lay down in bed, and fell asleep.

When I awoke, the motel was empty. This was early in the morning. There were no cars around the motel. But there were cars whizzing past the motel at the maximum speed limit, all of them headed in one direction, thousands of cars, bumper to bumper. The license plates indicated that the cars were coming from all different states, from the farthest as well as the nearest, from North Dakota, from Vermont, California and Florida, even from Canada. The cars were all makes and models: Lincolns, Fords, Nashes, Chevrolets, Chryslers, Packards, Cords, Rolls Royces, Buicks. That is to say, people of all different social breeds were speeding past. The cars were truly speeding along, like the cats in those anecdotes whose butts are smeared with turpentine.

We joined the conveyor belt. The traffic rush was crazy. But it didn't last long.

Cars were stopping between the small towns of Gladewater and Lakeview. The roads were completely filled with cars. Cars were not setting out along the roads. Only some heavily loaded trucks, which were filled to overflowing with all sorts of goods and chattels, were crawling along. Cars were getting off the roads and driving onto the fields of plantations. The plantations were all trampled down. The cars, which had lined up in rows, turned the plantations into sites for bivouacking. The plantations were shining from the polish of the automobiles, glistening from the tents, and emitting smoke from the primus stoves. Above the plantations, American flags were protruding. Thousands of automobiles were getting settled in at the plantations in order for people to live there.

Oil had been found in these places. It wasn't known for sure whether there was or wasn't any oil here. But the joint-stock companies were already cropping up. But the lands that belonged to the Negroes were already being bought up, resold, and then resold again; they were rising in price, then falling, and then leaping up again. A person who today would pay, let's say, a dollar for it, tomorrow could get a hundred dollars for it. A person who has spent a hundred dollars maybe will become a millionaire in a year; then again, maybe he'll be completely ruined financially. But people were coming here to buy, to sell – to get rich! to get rich! – to become millionaires! They were coming here to buy tracts of lands and shares of stock, half shares of stocks, quarter shares of stocks, to make out of one dollar millions of dollars! Temperate, self-restrained people were coming here to build a restaurant or to open a motel. Negroes had been driven away from here – they had run away from the White people. However, I did see one of them at the stock exchange. He was wearing a bowler hat and a morning coat, despite the sweltering heat. He was selling his tract of land. There was fear written all over his face.

We stopped our car in a cornfield and walked on foot to Gladewater . . . Engineers were drilling the earth for all to see. People's faces, the faces of those who came here in large numbers to become millionaires, their faces reflected only two feelings: fear and parsimony. It was clear, and there was no need to conceal it, that somebody was swindling somebody else. Urgently, on trucks, they were carrying benchmarks – for motels, cottages, offices, restaurants – and, urgently, they were stacking them up. The stock market was set up in the open air, near a broken fence. On some overturned land around the stock market, merry-go-rounds, a circus, a shooting gallery, an amusement park, and prostitution – mainly Negro prostitution – were

springing up. Urgently, trenches were being dug for foundations, for water run-off, for new roads. Urgently, gas, electricity, and telephone service were being installed for these new places. Radio antennas that rose up into the sky were being installed. People kept arriving, assembling here with their families, with their homes, with their household goods and chattels. Urgently, an enormous site of sedentariness was springing up. Trenches and roadside villages were laden with vans that served as living quarters. The Negro villages had emptied out. People were assembling here in order urgently to become millionaires. By all appearances, people were coming here after having sold off everything they owned at the places where they had been living previously. Perhaps they will be ruined financially, perhaps they will make millions! The expressions on the faces of these people were frightful. These people were insane and they were clearly hypnotized. These people were not hearing or noticing one another. And yet amidst these people there were some very calm and serene people who knew everything. They were the aboriginals in such matters. They were as calm and serene as prostitutes. This is the way it was, presumably, in Sutter's New Helvetia and in Alaska in their day. Here, presumably, is where the California and Klondike affairs took place. Our own Isidore succumbed to the same fever as the rest of them: he suggested that we sell the automobile right away and buy some shares of stock. He had to be persuaded to come with us and not remain there. A blinding sun was shining. Staid engineers were puttering around near two or three oil derricks that were pumping some oil samples out of the ground. Oil! – the dollar! – millions! – “liberty!” A very bright and very hot sun was shining. The faces that I saw on the Negroes at the trampled plantations near the small town of Gladewater, these faces were contorted by frightful expressions of fear, hopes, and parsimony – and decisiveness, of course, and valor, of course! To be financially ruined or to make millions! . . . *O'kei!* . . . We must ask the reader to reread the works of Jack London.

And at a distance of a hundred *versts* away from these future millions – there is the silence of the fields, the subtropical forests near the Mississippi River, and the labor of Negroes in their penal servitude.

And I recall the first days of my American stupefaction:

“. . . more! more! more! ten cents for a spoon, a notebook, a handkerchief, a pair of socks, a pen, a cup, a glass, a toothbrush, and so on, and so on, and so forth – and a mechanical fortune-telling device! drink more! eat more! go blind from reading advertisements! asphyxiate from the gas fumes! get crushed by automobiles, radios, and refrigerators! and the city, together with the people who inhabit it, has reared up on its hind legs, has lost its mind, has crawled under the ground, has climbed up on the cliffs of houses, it howls, it grumbles, it gasps, it wheezes, having made a muddle of all sorts of outlooks and perspectives because – more! more! more! ten cents for a cute little shirt collar!”

What's the deal? Why is there such a lack of taste!? Why – in addition to everything else – is there such a catastrophic lack of taste!? A lack of taste in conveniences, a lack of taste in pleasures, a lack of taste in reveries and honor? Isn't it possible that it's because all of these things are the ideals of Mister Kotofson, who lives well in every way possible, who wishes to live well in every material way possible, who knows his intestines business perfectly well and

doesn't know how to read! After all, this is almost infantile – everything always has to be the largest: the largest steamer, the largest skyscraper, the largest canyon, the largest hydroelectric power plant, the largest circulation of newspapers, the largest number of cigars smoked, the largest number of automobiles produced – automobiles, automobiles, automobiles, to the point of delirium – the largest, the largest, the largest! And ten cents for a cute little shirt collar. The fate of the billionaire Woolworth, the one who built a large number of his ten-cent and twenty-cent stores all across America, is well known. His fate is an American one, it's one success story out of millions of failures. As a young boy, Woolworth worked for a newspaper as a "gofer." While out running his errands, he would admire the store windows he saw. He would daydream: how nice it would be to buy a little book like this one here or a necktie like that one there, how remarkable it would be if his dimes would be enough for him to buy all that he wanted. He quit his job as an errand boy at the newspaper and set off with a hawked tray on which every item cost ten cents. This turned him, Woolworth, into a hero for young boys. Woolworth opened a kiosk. Now Woolworth is a billionaire who owns not only stores across the entire country, but also a multitude of factories and plants that produce the standard ten-cent and twenty-cent items sold in them. It's said about Woolworth that he realized his "childhood dream." Woolworth tells us that all of his successes were built upon his recollections of the envy he felt during his childhood. Nowadays, it's no longer just children who are buying items at his stores. Those who sing the praises of Woolworth's "childhood dream" canonize Woolworth, numbering him among the American saints. But Woolworth, it seems, was right when he took into consideration only our infantile instincts. More! more! more! and – just ten cents! – Across all of America – on the peaks of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, in the deserts of Colorado, on the Great Lakes, on the seas and the islands – protrude billboards and posters advertising "Coca-Cola," the patented American fruit drink, which has a sufficiently lousy, but sweet, taste. This fruit drink, which was invented by some pharmacist, is being drunk on all of America's highways – at five cents a bottle – and the pharmacist who invented it became a millionaire. All across all of the United States, and even in China, and even in Tierra del Fuego, the American chocolate-covered ice-cream bar, "Eskimo Pie" (*eskimo-pai*), is being sold. Covered by chocolate in a patented way, it is remarkable for the fact it does not melt in any kind of heat. It can be held out in the sun for weeks and it can be exported to China. The ice cream inside it is extraordinarily foul-tasting, but it does not melt, a bar for just five cents, and the Russian Jew who invented this ice-cream bar is now a big millionaire! more! more! more! and – it doesn't even cost ten cents, but just five!

Once I was traveling in a Russian suburban train. A healthy young woman with a milky-white complexion took a bundle out of her little basket, unwrapped it, and started eating bacon fat with some bread. The man who was sitting across from her was, presumably, rather hungry. He made a grunting sound that expressed contentment. The woman was chewing her food indifferently. The man said sardonically, to console himself: "Just think: what a childhood dream it is to eat inside a railway car!"

Yes, it truly is a "childhood dream!"

Various magazines in America have proposed that I, in keeping with my status as a writer, should write stories for them. In America, there is a standard for *belles-lettres*, for works of

imaginative literature: a novel should be no less than ten sheets long, and a story no more than four sheets long. I didn't have the leisure time available to write stories anew for Americans, despite the fact that the going rate for stories up to four sheets long ranged from a hundred dollars to two thousand five hundred dollars. I offered to look over the stories that I had written earlier and select the most appropriate one. I have in my possession a letter from the editorial board of one of the American magazines (it has a circulation of two million readers), in which they inform me that not a single one of my stories is appropriate, in light of the fact that my fictional characters are either elderly people or middle-aged people, and the magazine only publishes works about people who are no older than the twenty to twenty-five-year-old range. This assessment of my writing was the only one that was used to determine my fate.

Doesn't the contention arise here, that America doesn't have any traditions except one – the tradition of youth?

And – automobiles, automobiles, automobiles – to the point of delirium!

Coney Island brought me into contact with a certain American. I was walking along with several of my fellow Russian compatriots, and we were conversing in Russian. Just ahead of us stood an extraordinarily short man, whose body was shaped like a top, with an enormous cigar in his mouth. He was dressed in a handsome suit. He was a bit tipsy. He squinted his eyes, looking as if he had broken loose from the works of the German artist, George Grosz, and said cunningly, in Russian, with a German accent: “Well, whot do you says – *Ame-rish-ka!* . . . – *o'kei!* . . .”

This was very unexpected and very funny. We burst out laughing.

“I says – *Ame-rish-ka!*” he said contemptuously, and then added calmly and threateningly: – *o'kei!* . . .”

It happened, by chance, that our cars were parked right next to each other, so we met for a second time. He took a flask out of his back pocket. It was a special bootlegger kind of flask that fits inside one's trousers, the kind that a very significant percentage of Americans carry around with them. He offered us some whiskey. It turned out that he was a German national, not the last man of this kind in New York, and he was specifically a construction worker who did some kind of plumbing work involving sewerage systems. He informed us about this right away. He was sitting on the hood of his car, waiting for someone. On the rear bumper of his car was a placard that read: “Go ahead and bump into me, fella; don't you know that there's still room in hell for a guy like you?!” He was drinking out of his trouser flask and kept saying: “I says – *A-me-rish-ka, U.S.!* . . . an accursed country – the New World, *o'kei!*”

He was fulfilling an American tradition – “keep smiling” – he was retaining his smile. Where did he learn how to speak Russian? We couldn't get a reasonable answer to that question from him.

Legends about Ford circulate all around the world. Ford automobiles circulate all around the world. This book, *O'kei: An American Novel*, is similarly saturated with Ford. Ford has been described no less than Shakespeare. Ford laid down one of the cornerstones of the last period of American *prosperiti*. Ford, as was mentioned earlier, spilled over from his automobile plants. He even spilled over into automated dining halls. And he spilled over, by means of conveyor belts, all across America's highways and factories.

I visited Ford's automotive plant. It's actually boring to write about Ford, since so much has already been written about him. And he, like every sort of god, including the American one, only loses his luster from advertising. But Ford is the American God-the-Savior. Divine matters are not my business. Nonetheless, I will now write about Ford.

Ford has published a number of books under his own name, books that have circulated around the world in their capacity as technical gospels of the Puritan leaven. It turns out that these books were not written by Ford. For me, as a writer, there is nothing more vile than to sign one's name to something that one didn't write. But that's not the point. The point is that Ford once took to court the newspaper, *The Chicago Tribune*, which had reproached Ford for his, shall we say, lack of education and culture. Ford came to court to have his education and culture restored by the court. The court case turned out such that Ford was forced to admit that he had not written his books, even the ones about "his life and his business dealings." Ford turned out to be "uneducated" and "uncultured" all around. After the legal proceedings had concluded, the newspaper organized a contest among eight-year-old American children in which the contestants had to answer those questions that Ford hadn't been able to answer in court or that he answered stupidly. The children answered much better than Ford those questions that touched upon American notions of being "educated" and "cultured." Ford, in his responses to these questions, did not stray very far from the kinds of responses that would have been given by Mister Kotofson.

Ford is a Puritan. He doesn't cheat on his wife and he doesn't smoke. He's in favor of the dry law. The main Ford automotive plants are located in Ford's hometown, in the small town of Dearborn, several kilometers from Detroit, in the state of Michigan, on the banks of the Rouge River, that is, the Red River. What Ford owns there are truly *latifundia*. Ford himself lives beyond the gates of the plant, in the peace and quiet provided by guards and parks, to which no one is allowed entry, so that one journalist, who desperately needed to see Ford, had to swim across the river in secret, carrying his photo equipment with him, in order to get to his place. And before he could descend upon Ford, he had to dry off in some bushes. Living in seclusion, shrouded in mystery, Ford shows up at his automotive plant only once a year, appearing in the midst of his employees, in the name of American democratism, at which time these employees can clap Ford on the shoulder – in the name of this selfsame democratism – and greet him: *khello, Genri!* [Hello, Henry!]. Besides his automotive plants and the places used for his own personal residence, Ford has established airdromes, a museum, hotels, and, in particular, a public park named, by a twist of fate, Rouge (that is, Red) Park. Smoking is prohibited not only at the Ford plants, in their warehouses, and on their grounds, not only at Ford's personal residences, not only in his offices, museums, and airdromes, but even at Rouge Park. This

prohibition is not a fire prevention safety measure, but a humanitarian measure. It's for health reasons that Ford doesn't smoke. Ford is opposed to tobacco. Once you find yourself on Ford property, in that case, for the sake of your health, don't smoke!

Ford is a humanitarian! In the hospitals at Ford plants, the employees pay a fee for medical treatment. But Ford is a philosopher! And so in the hospitals at Ford plants, work – a continuation of factory work – is incorporated: payment for this work is given in the form of a reduction in the cost of the medical treatment. Boards that simulate work benches are fitted onto the bunks of the patients, and the patients screw nuts onto bolts or they tighten the screws on these bolts. Ford introduced this work for philosophical reasons, of course, in order that the patients may earn some money and kill time in a moral way, improving their sleep and their appetite, and thus getting healthy again more quickly.

The Puritan Ford is in favor of the dry law. Ford pays out the salaries to his workers by means of paychecks. The paychecks are placed inside envelopes. Ford finds this to be the best method. From time to time, some of Ford's agents will make an appearance at the workers' quarters and ask that the workers show them their checkbooks. This happens especially often with those workers who are single. The agent will ask them to tell how and where their pay has been spent. The agent wants to make sure that the worker's money has not been wasted on alcohol and prostitutes. If it's ascertained that during the past week a worker drank a toast to the health of Mister Ford, or if it's ascertained that a love-stricken worker gave his sweetheart, as a gift, a ticket to the movies as well as a bouquet of flowers (this, I dare say, is, after all, also an act of prostitution), and that he went to the expense of taking a trip with her to Niagara Falls, if the agents of Ford's morality ascertain that something such as this has happened, then the worker won't receive his next envelope with a paycheck inside it and he'll be fired, in accord with the principle of being sent off to the ends of the earth, as was said earlier. Ford can't allow debauchery and drunkenness to take place on his property. Ford is in favor of Puritanical morality!

And if exile to the ends of the earth is being mentioned, then we should also recall here the fate of my Ukrainian buddy, the worker who, after being evicted from his apartment at the Ford plant, was left without a roof over his head and was perplexed, wondering how it was that he used to have three automobiles, and now he didn't have any?

Ford is a moral economist. And Ford doesn't acknowledge Wall Street, just as he himself doesn't engage in commerce, but invents. Ford doesn't acknowledge the American banking system. He doesn't borrow or lend money at interest, considering this to be anti-Puritanical. (This is very significant. American banks – the kings of the capitalist world, the masters of the globe – can do nothing with their American compatriot, with Henry Ford. Really, isn't this a remarkable example of American "chance" and "contingency"?!) Ford's billions of dollars are invested in his enterprises, but whatever liquid assets Ford does possess, he presumably keeps them salted away in a money-box somewhere, since he doesn't deposit them in banks. Ford is too "moral," right down to his non-smoking and his forced inculcation of morality. But on occasion even Ford lacks liquidity. This was the case when he changed over from the model T to the model A. As was said earlier, Ford doesn't trade, he only invents, perfects, philosophizes, and produces. Ford's car dealers, who are dispersed across all the states, do all

his trading for him. When Ford was changing over to the model A and he didn't have any ready cash on hand, he turned to each of these car dealers with the request that they give him a thousand dollars to be counted toward every car that was delivered to them. The dealers, of course, gave him the money. Ford managed to get around having to go to the banks. It wasn't Ford himself who thought up this scheme with the dealers. The one who suggested to Ford this scheme with the dealers was dismissed forthwith by Ford from his employment.

Ford only produces. We must do justice to Ford: his automotive plant in Dearborn is not just a thing anymore, but a reality, and a reality that is inimitable and astonishing, a reality that is much more complex and at the same time much more simplified than the American conveyor belts of highways. The chimney stacks of the *Khailend park* [Highland Park] automotive plant, the main Ford plant, don't have a single soot stain on them. Their paint job is touched up every night and they are as white as snow, like Ford's gray hair and his shirt collars. The plant's buildings beyond the fences stand kilometers apart from one another, so that it's impossible to pass by all of them on foot. The squares between the buildings have been converted into lawns of green grass that are being watered every second by a sprinkler system. There is no place anywhere like this one, where ten steps (measured by my steps) away from the mouth of a blast furnace, a grass lawn turns green. Five of these blast furnaces have been placed opposite this lawn with all the multi-storied complexity of the blast furnace equipment. In addition to the automobiles and busses that drive across the plant's fields (those fields that run between the shops), there are trains with "Bolshevik" locomotives that travel there as well. These locomotives had been ordered for Russia when Kerensky was in power, but they were not accepted by the Soviet government, so Ford bought them up and named them "Bolsheviks." These locomotives, as is obvious from what has just been said about them, have been in existence for the same period of time as the Soviet government has been in power in the U.S.S.R. The engine-drivers ride on these locomotives wearing white gloves and white uniform coats. And the "Bolsheviks," that is, the locomotives, shine just as if they had been delivered only this morning from the assembly shop.

At the Ford automotive plant, one can wear white gloves without smearing them not only on the lawns of green grass and on the locomotives; one can walk through the entire factory without smearing them. Ford loves cleanliness and purity just as much as he loves Puritan morality! And at the Ford automotive plant everything is conveyORIZED.

What, one would think, could be more slovenly and dirty than foundries, especially those in which cars are born? Ford engineers, without fail, carry chronometers around with them. Every minute, every second, the engineers are checking the furnace charge, its certificates, its invoices, its chemical composition. In the foundry, there is cleanliness, a cleanliness that sparkles the way that tile and steel can sparkle. Even the floor, which is covered with iron sheets, has been polished and rosined. The workers, who have been split up according to their specializations, are stationed at places that have been Taylored for them. The engineers have checked the furnace for the new charging. The chronometers that the engineers carry around with them are absolutely precise. The furnaces shudder and groan with the feverish shakes of liquefied metal. The thermometer shows 1700 degrees of heating at the order of the chronometer in the hand of the engineer. And at that point the signal to commence work is given. The workers move at the command of the cranes. The white, boiling hot, conveyORIZED

steel flows into conveyORIZED ladles. At the command of the conveyORIZED cranes, in sync with the chronometer held in the hand of an engineer, the ladles carry the steel over to some ingot molds, and at the command of those same cranes the steel is poured into the ingot molds. The furnaces take the new furnace charge. During this time, the molten steel is turned into disks, piston rings and piston pins, into car parts, and the workers calculate the residual waste matter. In the mole-like movements of the ingot molds, the future parts of Ford automobiles cool down. Once they have cooled off, the conveyor pulls these parts out of the ingot molds at the will of the chronometer in the hand of the engineer. The conveyor of cranes carries them off and delivers them onto the platforms for the trains conveyed by the locomotives called “Bolsheviks.” The furnaces swell up from the temperature of the new furnace charge. And at this point a celestial thunder storm occurs inside the shop: the ceilings, the walls, and the air inside the shop are given a shower by dozens of hoses, a mechanical rain pours down upon the shop, and vacuum cleaners howl like celestial thunder storms, devouring the dust and the air. In the shop, it’s light and airy, just as it is in May following a thunder storm. Henry Ford, if he were to take it into his head to do so, could touch the shop without smearing his white gloves. The molding sand is prepared anew. The chronometer in the hand of the engineer keeps time as they proceed to a new casting at the foundry. The conveyor rail has concluded its work. The engineer checks the invoices and certificates of the newly conveyed furnace charge. A new smelting begins.

Everything has been Taylorized, everything has been mechanized, everything has been conveyORIZED, even here, in the foundry, where cars are born. The worker does not pass here for a human being, but is instead reduced to a component part of the machine and of time. Everything is measured in terms of minutes and seconds. One of the Ford journalists has come up with the formulation – and Ford claims it as his own assertion – that there is a very substantial difference between a loss of material, a loss of human labor, and a loss of time, because material and spent labor (the labor expended if not by one worker, then by another one?) can be recovered, but it is impossible to recover time.

Cars are born in the foundry.

Out of the “final assembly line” – out of the final conveyor belt – emerge *prêt-à-porter* cars. In this automotive plant, a new car is born every five seconds. For all we know, this is no longer just an automotive plant, but a temple of “science and technology” that borders on sorcery. The birth of automobiles here can be observed without worrying oneself at all about the cleanliness of white gloves. The conveyor belt is a quarter of a kilometer in length. At the beginning of the conveyor belt, the chassis of an automobile emerges, cranes from below convey wheels, cranes from above convey an engine and a radiator, cranes from the side lower the body of the automobile onto the chassis. The conveyor belt creeps forward like a boa constrictor, a quarter of a kilometer in length. When five meters remain until the end of the conveyor belt is reached, gas and water are poured into the engine’s gas tank and water tank. An inspector sits down inside the automobile, fires up the engine, honks the horn, and the newly born automobile escapes from the conveyor belt and runs off to the storage depots and onto the railway platforms. In this automotive plant, it’s always light. In this automotive plant, the sound of the electrical switches that bolt cars together and the hissing of the electrical air-brushes that paint the cars seem like music to one’s ears. In this automotive plant, there are

few workers, and almost no engineers with their chronometers in hand are to be seen. Here machines give birth to machines. On the wall along the conveyor belt in this automotive plant, a suspended gallery has been installed overhead, whence, as in ancient monasteries, one can in solitude offer up prayers of adoration à propos the birth of a car. Visitors here, however, including even the American ones, don't offer up prayers and they're not astonished by what they see. At other Ford automotive plants, tourists who are a bit more affluent and prosperous can take a look at things in comfort: they can do it while sitting inside the automobiles that convey tourists around the various assembly shops at the plant. At the automotive plant in Dearborn, tourists have to stand on the suspended gallery. While standing there and while witnessing the birth of a car, truly, all sorts of absurd thoughts come into one's head. And, truly, many Americans there begin to exclaim:

“America! The genius of America! Ford! The genius of Ford! After all, all of this is the very birth of a car by means of a conveyor belt. This is now being applied everywhere, even in restaurants, even by a dairy merchant! . . .”

At this automotive plant, one truly must wear white gloves.

Ford buys up his old automobiles, those that have broken down for good. I've seen how these automobiles die. A steamer arrived on the Rouge River loaded with such old-timers. Hoisting cranes grabbed these automobiles behind the chassis elbow with their hooks, lifted them up into the air, and then carried them through the air to a mashing press. This press, which in all likelihood weighs no less than a thousand tons, descends upon these old-timers. The old-timers shudder and twitch. In a minute, these old-timers are turned into a neatly compacted block of pressed iron and steel. The automobile has died. Cranes stack these blocks in piles on the railway platforms. Cranes drag new corpses to their death. The death of automobiles here is not as conveyORIZED as is their birth. And death is more sinister than birth.

The factory shops at the Ford automotive plant are located kilometers away from one another. But the people in the shops stand shoulder to shoulder, elbow to elbow, next to each other. This is required by the conveyor belt, where work is produced – to put it more precisely, where work is set into motion. People stand elbow to elbow here so that they can manage behind the conveyor belt to take the work from under the elbow of one's neighbor on the left and pass it on under the elbow of one's neighbor on the right, and so that they can manage between these two elbows to complete the task that has been assigned to the given worker. The conveyor belt is calculated according to the Ford truism about how it's only time that is irrecoverable. I knew one worker who was bald on one side of his head, the left side. He was an elderly Ford employee. He worked in the motor assembly shop. A conveyor chain with spare parts passed by him above his work station. From time to time he would get lost in thought, lift his head, and straighten his back, and the spare parts that were passing by on the conveyor chain above his head would strike him on the left side of his head. Time removed the hair from the half of his head that was being struck. The work station of this worker could have been moved over a little, but that would have slowed down the movement of the conveyor belt for a quarter of a second. In this same temple where cars are born, I saw several workers who were moving on roller skates across the clean floor next to the conveyor belt. These roller skates were their own invention. It was the responsibility of these workers at their work station beneath the

conveyor belt to screw on the automotive parts below the wheels. This screw fastening task was accomplished, of course, by electrical switches. But in order to make one's way to the parts that needed to be screwed on, the workers in several instances had to get hunched over and doubled up in such a way that their knees wound up being pressed up against their armpits. Thus, these workers work eight hours with their knees placed on each side of their chest in order to move along the stationary floor behind the conveyor belt. It would seem that one could lift the conveyor belt at this spot or else hollow out a small depression in the floor for these workers, but – that would require time, which does not get repeated or recovered! One could cite dozens of such examples. Two examples are enough.

Two examples are enough because they all drown in the following reports. At the Ford automotive plants, there are no changing rooms for the workers. The workers dump their clothes just anywhere. At the Ford automotive plants, there are no dining halls for the workers. During the lunch break, mobile food kiosks enter the shops with sandwiches, with coffee in paper cups, and with bouillon in similar cups of this sort. After waiting in line for a while, the workers proceed to eat their lunches while squatting on their haunches or simply sitting on the floor of their shops. I've already spoken about how the workers cannot smoke during work breaks, neither inside the shops nor even outdoors in the open air. The cleanliness in Ford's shops is absolute, right down to the white gloves.

I've already spoken about Ford's concerns that workers not smoke, not drink, and not lead a dissolute life, as evidenced by Ford's agents inspecting the check books of his workers. I've already spoken about how Ford schools his workers so diligently in industriousness that they work for him even while they are recuperating in the hospital.

I've already spoken about how Ford himself doesn't engage in commerce and doesn't even turn to banks for cash, but instead proselytizes Puritanism, philosophizes, invents, and manufactures. Ford is the American God-the-Savior. It's not worth writing about him because the lord gods already have enough advertising and, besides, they lose their luster from too much advertising. In my childhood, I used to know a certain Russian feudal lord named Arsenty Ivanovich Morozov. He was the owner of the Bogorodsky-Glukhovskiy Textile Mill in the city of Bogorodsk, now Noginsk. At that time, I was enrolled in the Bogorodsky non-classical secondary school (*Realschule*), which had been established on funds provided by Arsenty Ivanovich. Arsenty Ivanovich, who both owned and managed this enormous textile mill, had a certain attitude toward, and relationship with, us young boys. Besides his factory concerns, he also took care of the local Old Believers, serving as the church elder for the Bogorodsky Old Believer community. The Old Believer church was located in the forest, apart from the town. Arsenty Ivanovich always went to his temple of God on horseback, with a whip in hand. A bag was tied to his saddle. If Arsenty Ivanovich saw on the road any stray twine or a lost calkin, he would climb down from his horse, pick up the twine or calkin, and hide them inside his bag. We young boys would be on the lookout for these trips by Arsenty Ivanovich. Some of us knew how to bow unto Arsenty Ivanovich so well that he would return our bow, ask us who our parents were, and give us a ten-kopeck coin for candy. But the most beneficial and profitable thing to do was not to bow unto him. In those instances, Arsenty Ivanovich would swoop down like a black kite; in those instances, he would dash after the discourteous lout with his whip; in those instances, he would chase after the discourteous lout

for about a hundred paces. But, without fail, he would always stop his horse, wheel him around, ride up to the discourteous lout, and silently slip him a one-ruble bank note. Arseny Ivanovich's textile mill was very well supplied. Arseny Ivanovich was a slave driver who was great at making his workers break out in sweat. But, for all that, he blessed the firstborn child for half the residents of Bogorodsk . . . Arseny Ivanovich Ford has so much literature of this sort written about him that it's even boring to write about him. What provides me with some consolation is the fact that Arseny Ivanovich Ford will not be able to sign his name to the things that I'm writing about him, like he has done in the case of my professional colleagues. The writer Arseny Ivanovich Ford once wrote a book, titled *The Jews*, a very vile and very stupid piece of Black Hundreds anti-Semitism, and the "writer" himself subsequently bought up all the copies of this book off the market.

Arseny Ivanovich Ford, it turns out, is a feudal lord and a Puritan (like the Old Believers). And, like all feudal lords, he is an ignoramus and a petty tyrant. And, like all ignoramuses, he is a "philosopher." It turns out that Arseny Ivanovich Ford – a philistine, an ignoramus, a semi-literate man – is not to be separated out in any way from the American laws of Woolworth, Coca-Cola, Eskimo Pies, and Mister Kotofson.

The difference between Arseny Ivanovich Morozov and Arseny Ivanovich Ford was merely an individual one. Arseny Ivanovich Morozov would on occasion even give us young boys one-ruble bank notes. Arseny Ivanovich Ford is famous for his parsimony, which is illustrated by the following Detroit anecdote. Ford, they say, died and appeared before the apostles Peter, Paul, and the other gate keepers of paradise. They, as was befitting, began asking him about his good deeds: what, they ask, did you do while you were on earth? Ford informed the apostles about his production of automobiles. The apostles asked: "Yes, but what charitable deeds did you perform? To whom did you give alms? Did you, like Mister Scott, the bootlegger, leave money to the residents of Detroit for memorials?"

Ford rummaged about in his memory and recalled only one episode, when he gave a shoe-shine boy a nickel tip. He recounted this episode to the apostles. The apostles left to go confer with Jesus Christ and then returned to issue this resolution: Ford's charity was deemed to be unsatisfactory, his nickel was to be returned to him, and he was to be sent to eternal damnation in hell!

But Ford is the last democratic feudal lord of America, because:

“. . . more! more! more! ten cents for a spoon, a notebook, a handkerchief, a pair of socks! three-hundred-and-fifty-dollars for a Ford! more! more! more! – American periods of *prosperiti!* . . .”

For the Ford model A automobile – the "lux" model, the cabriolet *kupe-konvertibel* [coupe-convertible] that was issued in 1931 – a green stripe was drawn on the black vehicle body. Why is there such a lack of taste in the material well-being of philistines!?

I visited the Ford automotive plant in Dearborn. For ten days, I wore the Ford lapel pin of an engineer, for which I paid five (or ten – I don't remember) dollars and which provided me with

the opportunity to stroll around the Fordian manifestations of cleanliness and Puritanism while suffering from the ban on smoking. The “General Motors Company” is beating Ford because that company has rejected Fordian “Puritanism.” During the evenings that I spent in the city of Dearborn, while staying at the Dearborn Motel, a lousy little motel that, like all the other motels in Dearborn, has upon itself the selfsame green stripe of a lack of taste from the Ford vehicle bodies, during these evenings some of my fellow Russian compatriots – comrades and worker friends – used to come by to visit me. I listened to their stories about “exile to the ends of the earth” and about the three automobiles. They drove me into Detroit to show me the monument to Mister Scott, the proprietor of a series of dives, above which flies the American flag and which has been placed next to the statue of Schiller. My comrades were workers who were planning to go to the U.S.S.R. to work at the Nizhny Novgorod automotive plant . . . this is how we used to talk, this is how we used to talk over there in Dearborn about the U.S.S.R.!

On July 1, 1931, the Ford automotive plants stopped production – on orders as a result of the financial crisis. A hundred and thirty thousand workers left to take a break from their jobs and get outdoors for a while.

On the anniversary of the October Revolution in 1931, the communist Betsy Ross, the great-great-granddaughter of the first Betsy Ross, the American citizeness, gave a red banner, a communist banner sewn with her own hands, to the Detroit chapter of the Communist Party. . . . All the time I would dream the same dream, all the time I wanted to reenact, through my imagination and my knowledge, scenes from those sailing ships that were bringing the pioneers to America, such as Cabot, such as the people sitting at table in the mess room in the light of smoky oil lamps, people who had grown beards, because they were coming to America with one desire: to live well, to live well in every possible way, each according to his own understanding of what “well” means. And they were coming to America from all corners of the world, fleeing from persecution at the hands of the European authorities at the time, from starvation: sectarians, bandits, adventurers, dreamers . . .

I didn’t get to see this dream. Time has incarnated the good life into dollars. Time had established the rules of the pioneers: do what you want, do it how you want to do it, just as long as you succeeded and prospered.

But time had also done what I have written above.

33

Nonetheless, America – a country that occupies only 6.5 percent of the earth’s surface and has only 7.2 percent of the earth’s population – is the wealthiest country in the world, the capitalist master of the globe.

This country – this country that participated in the world economy (before the financial crisis) – possesses:

90 percent of all the automobiles produced in the world
70 percent of the oil extracted in the world

57.1 percent of the metalworking industry of the world
50 percent of the metallurgical industry of the world
47 percent of the chemical industry of the world

And so on, and so on, and so forth. It's in first place everywhere. Half of all the institutions of higher learning in the world are in America. America, this six and a half percent of the earth's surface, consumes exactly as much electric energy as do all the remaining countries in the world combined. One extraordinary morning, all of America could get into an automobile – all of it down to the last person – and all of America could start driving somewhere. For this, it's not necessary to raise those cars that have been flattened out by Ford or those that are wallowing in ditches by the side of highways for the edification of posterity. More than half – three fifths – of all the telephones in the world are to be found in America. During the time when Joe and I were on our trip to California, when the apartment in New York stood empty, we forgot to send in the payment for the telephone, and so they shut off our telephone service. When we returned to New York, we subscribed anew for service. An electrician came out with a new telephone. He removed the old one and put it in the corner, then he installed the new one in its place. I became a bit puzzled: why did we need a new telephone since it was exactly the same as the old one? And why was the old one placed in the corner? The electrician said:

“Do with it whatever you'd like. The cost of the telephone is included in the payment for the telephone service. It's more expensive for the telephone company to collect all the old telephones that were shut off than to leave them with the former subscribers.”

At the editorial offices of that same journal where my stories were not published due to the old age of my characters, they have their own chemical engineering laboratory. I went to visit it. This is truly an enormous white laboratory. It's divided into sections, where up to a hundred chemists and technologists, all of them wearing white lab coats, do their work. In one section, they conduct research into the technology of woolen, silk, and synthetic fibers, into the technology of the suits of such-and-such a firm. In another section, they conduct research into the chemical composition of the candy, cookies, and dried fruits of such-and-such companies. In a third section, they conduct research into the toughness of the rubber in the tires of such-and-such companies and in other products made out of rubber. The point is that this journal, in its own laboratory, analyzes all of the consumer goods for which it runs advertisements.

After each story, article, and note in the magazine *Liberti* [Liberty], which has not set the standard for American honesty, they write down: “3 min. 17 seconds,” “67 seconds,” “5 min. 2 seconds,” – that is, they write down how many minutes and seconds a reader should have to spend to read the poems, narratives, or *stori* [stories] that are being offered to him.

On the trampled down Negro fields between the towns of Gladewater and Lakeview, where either there will be oil or there won't be oil, the first order of business was to lay down water and sewage pipes, as well as gas, electric, and telephone lines. Temporary housing was being brought in for the time being. Permanent homes will be erected there once it has been planned out exactly where, upon the trampled down corn and cotton fields, to place East, West, First, Second, and other *strity* and *aveniu* (in Russian, we would call them “streets” and “avenues”)

and once gas, telephone, electricity, a water main, and a sewage system have been installed and the streets have been paved with asphalt. Preparations of this sort for future towns, where there are no houses and no people, but there are asphalt streets, plumbing, and gas lines that have been planned out, I saw not only in the stretch between Gladewater and Lakeview, but also in California and in the state of Michigan (not far from the Ford automotive plant there), and near New York.

It was recounted earlier how some cows live with a radio nearby and are milked by means of a machine.

And so on, and so on, and so forth.

But the point is not only the numbers and the statistics; the point is the tempos.

I am taking the following bits of information haphazardly from various reference manuals.

The *Dzhenerel-Motor-kompani* [General Motors Company] automotive plant in Pontiac. At this plant, the automobile models Oakland and Pontiac are produced. The assembly shops at the plant occupy a floor space of 150 thousands square meters. The plant is designed to produce one thousand two hundred automobiles per day. In just six months, from the time when the first engineers and workers originally came to these open, undeveloped spaces, in just six months, the plant was put into day-to-day operation, producing automobiles.

The glass factory in Lancaster. It burned down to the ground. Five days after the fire, the company concluded an agreement on the construction of a new factory. Four days later, the builders got down to work. Thirty working days later, the factory was put into operation.

The hydro-electric power station at Konovigo. The second most powerful hydro-electric power station in America after Niagara Falls. A capacity of 378,000 horsepower. The water falls from a height of twenty-seven meters. The town of Konovigo no longer exists. In its place lies an island that measures thirty-five square kilometers. The width of the dam measures around one and a half kilometers. Seven turbines with a capacity of fifty-four thousand horsepower each. A water flow rate of about a hundred and seventy cubic meters per second. The construction of the dam required the excavation of about three hundred and thirty thousand cubic meters of solid rock and about a hundred and sixty thousand cubic meters of sand and clay. A railroad bridge and a railroad branch line were built. At the peak of the construction, there were five thousand three hundred workers employed. All of the construction, from beginning to end, lasted one week shy of two years.

Both of the skyscrapers, the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building, these two tallest buildings in the world, were built, each separately, in less than a year.

New York has increased its population three-fold over the past forty years. Chicago has increased its population six-fold over the past forty years. Los Angeles has increased its population one-hundred-and-twenty-four-fold over the past forty years. In Detroit, the population has doubled every ten years.

In the United States over the past one hundred years:

The population has grown	9-fold
The number of people living in cities with a population over 8,000 has grown	68-fold
The number of manufacturing jobs has grown	707-fold
The number of spindles in the cotton-thread industry has grown	101-fold
The output of cast iron has grown	222-fold
The extraction of coal has grown	4289-fold
Mechanical motivity has grown	3500-fold
The railway system has grown	11400-fold
Exports have grown	68-fold
Imports have grown	56-fold
National wealth has grown	70-fold

The labor productivity of the American worker is currently 30 times higher than the labor productivity of the Chinese worker and eleven times higher than the labor productivity of the Italian worker. The labor productivity of the American worker currently surpasses the labor productivity of the German by two and a half times. For every worker who labors in American industry, four and a half units of mechanical horsepower are needed to assist him.

Twenty-nine hours (to be more exact, twenty-eight hours and fifty minutes) are spent on the preparation of automotive engines at the Ford plant (tens of thousands of them are produced each day). The preparation proceeds according to the following time schedule:

- 1) unloading from the steamer the ore that is headed to the plant 10 minutes
 - 2) converting the ore into iron 20 hours
 - 3) casting the cylinder block 5 hours
 - 4) manufacturing the cylinder block in the machine shop
(the block passes through forty-four procedures) 1 hour, 40 minutes
 - 5) assembling the engine and testing it 2 hours
- Total = 28 hours, 50 minutes

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During the last hundred years in America, everything has increased threefold, has increased tenfold, has increased a thousandfold. But some of the statistical data over the past century are curious. Pavel Svinin, a fellow Russian countryman, visited America nearly a hundred and twenty years ago. He writes:

“The European war was very beneficial and opportune for the Americans. Taking advantage of the war, with the help of their country’s neutral flag, they expanded their seafaring and commerce, enriching themselves at the expense of all the other nations in the world and, so to speak, moved ahead of them by a whole century. On the other hand, the curtailment of this commerce, the exclusion of commodities, and the embargoes revived their factories and textile mills, whose appearance was so significant that it is unlikely that the goods of other countries could ever have led to their decline. And we know that, as a result of this, the

English lost several million pounds sterling every year in the exportation of their goods. The craftsmen who had emigrated from Europe combined their knowledge and talents with American entrepreneurship and, encouraged by the protective laws and the freedom there, outdid themselves, so to speak. Not having at hand the resources of the English that were needed for the establishment of extensive institutions and seeking to find some way to make up for the high cost of labor, which was incomparably higher there than in England, Americans resorted to improving various machines, making them simpler and easier to operate. In this sphere, they have shown an especially creative mind and, in all instances where necessity was the mother of invention, extraordinary achievements. Mechanical inventions have completely replaced human hands in the United States. Everything there is done and made by a machine: a machine saws through stone cliffs, shapes bricks, forges nails, and so on . . . But nothing astonished me as much as the *Stimbot* [steam-powered boat], an invention of the Americans, and the more I examined it . . .”

“The rapid changes that this land has made in all areas and the giant steps it has taken toward power and prosperity during the course of these last ten years have made even the most fair-minded details written before this epoch incredible.”

“There is no need to search for profoundly thoughtful philosophers and celebrated professors in America. But, on the other hand, you would be surprised at the fair-minded understanding of the lowest peasant in matters involving commerce and industry . . . A passion for commercial enterprises prevails within all the social classes, and this passion inevitably gives birth to a passion for silver – a greed for money – and to other vices that flow from it . . . Money is a godhead for the American, and we could say that even to this day it is only the wealth of the land and piety that support their morality.”

Thus wrote Pavel Svinin 117 years ago.

If one out of fourteen people in Germany today is a civil servant bureaucrat, then in America it is one out of a thousand. In America, everything that can be seen and that can't be seen is measured in numbers, and everywhere prices are established – on art pieces imported from Italy, Greece, Egypt, India, and China, on exhibition halls, on showrooms, on bridges. Even on churches one can sometimes read “For Sale” signs and the price listed. This happens in those instances when the members of a congregation didn't make their payment on time, by the due date set by the contractors, and the contractors have sold the churches for their scrap value upon demolition or have sold them to other religious communities: a Methodist church to Catholics, a Catholic church to Jews. In America, one must toil, and manual labor, the labor performed by human hands, which are controlled by the dollar, must be multiplied by mental labor, the labor performed by a machine. In America, you will not last long with just speeches. As is true with speeches, a deity, like all other sorts of “spiritual” values, is not a matter of dollars in America, therefore, they're not valued.

Ford's men of letters write for him, and Ford works as a prophet (to rush about in an automobile without knowing what for – now that is of value!), Ford endorses these commandments:

“Don't honor the past and don't fear the future.”

“Our business life is a mirror of us as a nation, a mirror of our economic achievements, and it creates for us a place among other peoples.”

“Work is our one and only leader. This is one of the reasons why we don't have any ranks and titles (!).”

In America, there is industrial liberty and liberty for industrialists. Coca-Cola, frozen Eskimo Pies, Ford. In America, they used to pay well for labor because it was valuable. It was creating a sizable domestic market. But in America they were also concerned that a field of action would continue to exist for labor: not only one with broken down automobiles lying along the side of highways and telephone sets thrown away, but also one with traditions. Like the following tradition: each year on September 16th, no matter what the weather is like, straw hats, which have been tossed away, are scattered about everywhere – in garbage pits, in the Hudson River, in subway cars – all across America. On May 16th, all of America dons a straw hat. On September 16th, all of America takes off its straw hat. On September 16th, all of the gangs of young boys from all of the city's *bloki* [blocks], acting like the Indians in Hollywood cowboy movies, band together for the destruction of straw hats. These young boys are equipped with sticks that have nails at their end, which they use to pluck straw hats. These young boys are helping the machines, but the machines, which save time, are developing mass production, which doubles their “effectiveness” (an American *mot juste!*) by means of rationalization. “Our business life is a mirror of us as a nation!” The “technology” of unemployment! . . .

Posters convey the truths of American morality:

“Time is money!”

“He who does not work more than he is paid is not paid more than he works!”

“Your severed finger will not grow back even in a hundred years!”

“An accident is lost time!”

And to the breed of basses, baritones, mezzo-sopranos, violinists, and pianists who are celebrated in every possible way in America, we must add mathematicians, chemists, physicists, designers, and engineers. Their lectures are perceived as concerts. They are as beloved as are tenors. Their speeches and formulations are broadcast over the radio. Mathematics, physics, and chemistry are enveloped with emotions in America. I haven't seen this, on such a mass scale, anywhere else on earth.

The latest round of my presentations of statistical figures touched upon American technology, American standards, and American heights, features of a country that occupies only six and a half percent of the earth's surface, that constitutes only seven and two-tenths percent of the earth's population, and that has accumulated more than half of the earth's wealth. When people say that America doesn't have its own culture (they say this often), they're not speaking the truth. America does have its own proper culture. The essence of this culture consists of all that has been recounted above: skyscrapers, subway systems, bridges across rivers, railroad tracks across mountains, automobiles, mineral ores, coal, all sorts of world records. This culture is a bourgeois culture. America didn't know any gentry culture, just as it didn't know any of the overhead expenses for feudalism and gentry regalia. The northern states of America were hostile toward feudalism. If feudalism was hoping to settle down and remain in the southern states, it was destroyed by the Civil War.

Everything on earth passes and nothing is eternal, just as nothing passes as well. This American culture has now degenerated to the point where it's impossible to live in America because one can asphyxiate there from gasoline fumes. And, besides, a person there is not a person (although he considers himself an individualist), but is instead merely an addendum to the conveyor belt because the skyscrapers, twenty-story buildings, streets, and automobiles there have lost their minds and have descended into anarchy; and having become all entangled, they are now climbing over each other, in the same way that the White House got its functions all entangled with Al Capone and Edward Doheny. But a hundred years ago, even seventy years ago, this American culture was a positive, progressive phenomenon that was moving humankind forward. This bourgeois, democratic culture threw off from its legs the shackles of monarchic mold and mildew, gentry regalia, and feudal scleroses. These molds, mildews, regalia, and scleroses still exist in certain places in Europe right up to this day. Members of the English Parliament on occasion get dressed up in medieval wigs and meet in legislative sessions at Westminster Abbey. In France, the carriage from the Château de Chambord in the Loire Valley, the carriage from that very same château where Molière staged for the first time his play, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, that carriage did not make it all the way to Paris with the Chambord king. In the Château d'Amboise, which is located in that same Loire Valley, a château that to this day still belongs to the Dukes of Orléans, Leonardo da Vinci is buried. How can one not make a bow out of reverence to centuries past, when Westminster, Molière, and da Vinci were alive?! And how, when remembering the Chambords, can one not call to mind the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth! And how can one not call to mind the "gloomy German genius," which swings from Goethe to Nietzsche and from Nietzsche to Wilhelm the Second and which is currently being forged by the Polish Corridor!?! And how can one forget the Forum in Athens, the Coliseum in Rome, the pyramids in Egypt! America did not have either a period of classical antiquity or a medieval period. America has no Molière, no Goethe, no da Vinci. America has no châteaux, no cathedrals, no ruins. America arose at a time when the dust was being shaken off of these ruins, cathedrals, and châteaux. America arose without needing them. America fled from Chambord *politesses*. America did not wish to starve on account of theatrical performances – premiered at the Château de Chambord – of bourgeois *gentilhommes*, reckoning that a bourgeois can get by without any nobility. America was built not upon tax assessments and the *politesses* of balls held in châteaux located on the cliffs and

in the valleys of the Loire River, but rather on the tapping sound of the woodcutter's axe. Here arises the primacy given in America to the material, proprietary culture of things over the humanist, humanitarian culture of the spirit. And a hundred years ago all of this was a positive chapter in the history of the development of humankind, a positive, progressive, and revolutionary chapter.

The following three historical facts should not be cast off from the scales of history.

First Fact. The American War of Independence and the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 were the tocsin for the democratic revolutions in Europe, for the Great French Revolution. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed, for the first time in the history of humankind, the principles of the equality of citizens and of religious freedom, as well as the destruction of feudal privileges. In the American Revolutionary War, armed peasants, workers, and craftsmen were fighting against the regular army troops of the English monarch. They were fighting for their freedom, and they taught the French Revolution how one needs to fight against the troops of a king or of kings. A number of public figures in the French Revolution – Lafayette, for example – received their revolutionary education and training in the war the Americans fought for their independence.

Lenin wrote:

“The history of the newest America, the civilized one, opens with one of those great, truly liberating, truly revolutionary wars, of which there were so few amidst the enormous mass of predatory wars that were caused, like the Imperialist War was, by a fight between kings, landowners, and capitalists due to the partition of captured lands or stolen gains. This was a war of the American people against the English brigands who were oppressing them and holding them in colonial slavery, just as even now, in India, in Egypt, and in all four corners of the world, these ‘civilized’ blood-suckers are oppressing and holding in colonial slavery hundreds of millions of people.”

Second Fact. The General Council of the First International found it necessary and possible for it to greet the American States, the one and only statehood of its kind that existed at that time. And the American States considered it an honor to answer the First International with a letter written by Abraham Lincoln that was addressed to the General Council. The First International was now in correspondence with the American government.

But that is not all. Just as the wind of the American War of Independence was one of those winds that gave birth to the storm of the French Revolution, the Civil War turned out to be one of the winds that gave birth to the First International. On March 28, 1863, in London, in St. James Hall, a rally of English workers was assembled, a grandiose labor rally to express sympathy for the Northerners. This rally turned out to be simultaneously a preparatory step toward organizing the First International. The history of the Civil War in America was directly intertwined here with the history of this great international labor organization.

During the time of the Civil War in America, the General Council of the First International, greeting the re-election of Abraham Lincoln to the office of president, wrote, through both the word and deed of Karl Marx:

“ . . . when an oligarchy of three hundred thousand slaveholders dared, for the first time in the annals of the world, to inscribe ‘slavery’ on the banner of Armed Revolt, when on that very spot where hardly a century ago the idea of one great Democratic Republic had first sprung up, whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the XVIII century; when, on that very spot, counterrevolution could boast that it was systematically and thoroughly rescinding, like some unnecessary rag, ‘the ideas entertained at the time of the formation of the old constitution’ . . . at that point the working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the fanatical intercession of the upper classes for the Confederacy of gentry landowners (the plantation owners in the South) had given them their cue, that the slaveholders’ insurrection was to sound the tocsin for a universal holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the toiling masses, not only their *hopes for the future*, but also their *gains in the past* were at stake in this frightful conflict on the other side of the Atlantic.”

The fortunes of the American Civil War, the fortunes of the American revolution, were turning out to be the fortunes of the world-wide labor movement.

And the Third Fact. The working class has its own magnificent celebratory holiday, a celebration of the youthfulness of the working class, a celebration of solidarity, a celebration of labor, a celebration of the future – the First of May. This holiday was first established by the American Order of the Knights of Labor, as one of the first revolutionary organizations in America was romantically called.

All of this did happen! And all of this has now passed!

All the time I kept dreaming one and the same dream: I wanted to recollect in my memory the fantasy about America’s bearded pioneers. It’s simpler, it turns out, to do without any fantasy, but with some knowledge.

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A number of circumstances became the foundation of what America now appears to be or what it seemed to be ten years ago, because my fellow Russian countryman, Pavel Svinin, was absolutely right when he said that “the rapid changes in this land have made even the most fair-minded details written before this epoch seem incredible.” America was by no means being made by people wearing white gloves, although it has now made – and precisely for this reason – Arseny Ivanovich Ford. The fundamental reasons that led to the making of America are the people, the time, the American constitution, the position of America in the world, and the position of America’s land itself. The people, the time, and the American land are what led

America to the point where it is now. We have talked about this earlier and it is being recounted here now.

The people. The Russian Revolution transformed words. They say not that he left, but that they forced him to leave. They not only left Europe for America, they also were forced to leave. America was for Europe not only a refuge for the discontented, for dreamers, adventurers, and sectarians. People fled to America not only to escape from European authorities, from medieval sclerosis, from revolutions and counter-revolutions. Many exiles, convicts, and outcasts were forced to go there by the European authorities, primarily by the British authorities. Once, the kind-hearted and compassionate English Queen Anne even sent two ships loaded with prostitutes for these miscreants. During those times, when America was still an English colony, there were few authorities, and those authorities were bad ones. People steered clear of the authorities, and the British authorities were soon thrown off. If you were truly to picture to yourself Cabot's small sailing ship in the Atlantic Ocean, a ship that was traveling from Europe to America for a month and a half at the mercy of the wind, and if you were to picture to yourself the people who were traveling on Cabot's caravel, no matter whether they were members of the galley crew or were going voluntarily, whether they were sectarians or craftsmen (peasants at that time did not travel by ship, unless you count as peasants the kulaks who professed to be Quakers), then you could say with some degree of certainty that these passengers placed an axe under their pillow before turning in for the night. For all that, they owned axes that were better than, let us say, muskets. For all that, they were traveling to the New World. And you could say with some degree of certainty that these people were not very eager to speak about their past. And, for the majority of them, their kin did not have any kind of past. In other words, it was a selection of European people that came to America. And by the standards of those medieval times (for the Middle Ages continued, essentially, up until the time of Cromwell's Revolution and the Great French Revolution), this selection was a positive one. People came to this primitive land truly with the woodcutter's axes in hand to hew paths in the primeval forests. Only those survived who knew how to struggle against nature – how to toil, to make, and to do. The rest perished, and perished cruelly, serving as an edifying lesson for those who remained among the living. Man, in the first and decisive place, had to depend solely upon himself. The contention made by Americans, that a person's happiness and his fate rest entirely in his own hands, was conceived during these times. The very bounteous nature in America accommodated this contention. People in America had to make everything all over again, because besides the forests and rivers, the lakes and the mountains, the valleys and the wild animals, there was nothing there. And the months it took to travel across the ocean did not permit them to carry from Europe everything that they needed. People came to America, fleeing from Europe, fleeing from poverty mainly. People wanted to live well in a material sense. And the labor of a cooper as well as that of a physician was more honorable than the labor of a judge and a mayor, about whom unpleasant memories still remained from their time in Europe. These were the kinds of people who traveled to America not only during the days of pioneering, but throughout the entire history of America, right up until the days of the World War, because it was only beginning with the World War that quotas were set for immigration into America. This was the time when Americans considered that their own non-alien population was sufficient. After all, in just the past forty years America's population has increased in size nine-fold. After all, to this day a quarter of the population of New York speaks Russian, and if not Russian, then

Polish or Czech. This is because the last wave of immigrants to America came from the western provinces of the Russian Empire, from the eastern part of Germany, from the Slavic part of Austria. Why, even some Italians came. This last wave of immigrants differed from the pioneers by the fact that an extra century and a half of European civilization and training lay upon them. But once again it was those who wanted to live well in a material sense that were traveling there. We will have occasion to speak about this last wave of immigrants later. The people who were now in America, the pioneers, had degenerated into the all-American philistine.

Time and the constitution. The people who made America two centuries ago were inherently democrats, craftsmen mainly. These people didn't want to become bourgeois *gentilhommes*, but wanted in general to do without any nobility. These people, who didn't inquire about their past, naturally rejected any regalia and traditions from the past. For them, it wasn't important who you are – a Hellene or a Jew, a Teuton or a Gaul. These people, who didn't expatiate either about their past or upon the topic of so-called conscience, so as not to disturb the weights and the vaults of this so-called conscience, these people, like the Puritans and the Methodists, came to America fleeing from religious persecution. These people and others like them managed to settle down in such a way that to this day there are, on occasion, on one and the same premises, people praying to both the Catholic and the Methodist god, to both the Lutheran and the Jewish god. The Church in America is a matter of stupidity for each individual believer, although it is required when entering America, as it was required for me, to believe in some god, in any god, as long as it's a god. These people freed themselves from feudalism's ranks and titles (which, to this day, still reign in Europe, where some people continue to act like barons and counts). All of this was revolutionary for those times. American farmers stepped onto the land as industrialists, as craftsmen. In order to feed themselves, they didn't waste their time burying their noses in the entrails of the earth and inhaling the aroma, but instead worked the land, cultivated it. And they preferred to cultivate the land by means of machinery, of an implement, so as to avoid excessive rummaging around in the mud and dirt. If they found some better lands to cultivate, then they would abandon the old ones without any second thoughts, without any philosophizing. The dawning of America came at a time when it could no longer lose connections with the world because all of the globe was involved in the maelstrom of humankind. And America was for Europe just about the same thing that the Don Host Oblast and the Cossacks were for those Russian peasants who were indentured serfs. The only difference was that fleeing to the Don Host Oblast only called for one to have the few quick hops of a hare, whereas you couldn't very well sneak into America by escaping across the ocean. And trans-oceanic refugees had to have at least enough rubles on them to afford a ticket. This connection with the world was significant because Americans always knew all the latest news about what was going on in the world. They had a primitive state close at hand and thus, in an effort to tame this primitiveness, they availed themselves of the latest human knowledge about the world. There was nothing in America. A barrel proved to be no less important than a Bible because one could always read the Bible a bit the day after tomorrow, but to go without water until the day after tomorrow in hot weather meant that one could die. America valued the thing and made haste. There was nothing in America, and there was mainly a shortage of manpower, of working hands. This created, first of all, those conditions whereby, both in the forests and in the fields, the majority of the physical labor was being performed by unskilled workers. And, secondly, it led to the

Americans seeking to replace working hands with a machine. They were doing all of this without white gloves. Liberated from taxes and the freeloading of feudalism, liberated from the conscription of wealth for war (more about this several lines below), living amidst a very bountiful nature, the Americans, the *petit bourgeois*, saved money and accumulated wealth. The Americans colonized the primeval lands not in the way that primeval people had colonized them thousands of years ago, but as people who had come to this primitive state with thousands of years of human skills and knowledge. And so Pavel Svinin is right: the costliness of working hands was the impetus for the replacement of human hands by the machine. Pavel Svinin is right: “craftsmen,” that is, engineers, mechanics, builders, doctors – that is, the human brain – were bought up by the American dollar. But this brain itself, this human brain, went to America, to the country of democracy and free enterprise, because in those times this was the best place in the world, and the most appropriate one, for the human brain. Americans, democrats, *petit bourgeois*, people who wanted to live well, they were mainly the ones who bought up this human brain, which made their labor easier, creating machines and things, and which improved their health. Pavel Svinin is right, and Mister Kotofson confirms this: Americans didn’t need philosophers. However, Mister Kotofson carted his daughter off to be taught by English ladies who were writers: it’s only during these last twenty years that America has been allowing itself this luxury, having finally made a fortune at a time when Americans were aiming to buy the entire Athenian Acropolis so that they could have it shipped back home to themselves as a little gift from an uncle to an aunt, just as they had purchased our opera singer Chaliapin and our aviator Sikorsky. America was discovered at just the right time. The laws of American democracy a hundred years ago were revolutionary laws that were aiding the development of Americans – equal rights, freedom of conscience, freedom of nationalities. The *petit bourgeoisie* isn’t very whimsical, but it does love money and, instead of an oil portrait, it loves to hang a photograph of daddy on the wall. The American “freedom” of democracy, the anarchy of free enterprise, was positive up until that time when America finally became settled and populated, up until that time when there were not enough things. In America, there were not enough things, and so things began to be made. America made haste. All of this did happen in the past. What America is presently – this we have recounted and we are recounting here. In America, one can suffocate, from things in particular, but democracy was based upon, and rested against, gangsterism.

The land. America is called the New World. The New World hid itself nicely beyond the ocean. The ocean was essentially tamed only about seventy years ago. Even during the days of the Civil War, the English weren’t able to get to the Americans: their arms were not long enough to reach them. The Americans could maintain that “America is for Americans,” and they lived without any European harassment, although they were making haste. When the ocean was finally bridled, the Americans already knew very well how to cast their own cannons, and long before that time they were already sending not only rum, but also wheat and cotton and machines to Europe. We’re talking about the geographical position of America on the Earth. It freed America from the European plague, which thrived from the time of the Middle Ages to the present time, and freed it from European wars. America had almost no wars at all; there were very few of them, and all of them without exception were successful. But even the most successful war is worse than no war at all. And, essentially, America started to maintain a real standing army only since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The extermination of the Indians doesn't count as a war! In the bourgeois lexicon, this is called "colonization." And this process of colonization in America lasted right up until the twentieth century itself, just as did the process of immigration into America. These two processes were supplementing and replenishing each other. A wonderful country accrued to the Americans, a very bounteous and enormous land with the most wonderful climate, the most wonderful terrain, the most wonderful watersheds and rivers, from subtropical cloudbursts to taiga snowfalls. In this land and from this land, there is everything: forests, meadows, plains, valleys, mountains, wild animals, fish, reptiles, earth deposits, minerals, ores. And America kept growing, up until the twentieth century, colonizing itself after having originated as a long strip of land along the Atlantic seaboard and then stretching to reach all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Along with the lands, the French, when they were colonizing Africa, and the Russian tsars, when they were colonizing Siberia, gained populations as well, gained people who were primordial in their social relations and their ideas, people from whom you can't get anything worthwhile. Along with the lands, the English, when they were colonizing India, gained people who were steeped in Asiatic feudalism, people who would likewise give you a lot of trouble. The Americans were colonizing wastelands, sending off to these lands people from their own culture who shared their same traditions. We recounted the story of these people when we spoke about the fate of Johann Augustus Sutter. These people were making haste. These people were tossing aside everything that was superfluous and unnecessary. These people were dragging behind themselves railway lines and were plowing the land not with a plough but with machinery. All of this was being done by hands that were by no means clean. Each of these people, according to the information provided to us by Jack London, carried a dagger under his belt, but this didn't mean that a person went around looking for a fight. The lands truly were bounteous, and a person was making haste, a person was running from one mile to the next so as to grab more and more. It was precisely at this time that the commandment given by Ford came into being: "Do not honor the past and do not fear the future!" A person was remembering the traditions: he was keeping a smile on his face, *o'kei*, your fate lies in your own hands, everything in this world is a stroke of good luck, you turn around and you have become a billionaire, you turn around and you have become the president. Only do something – in this country of democrats and labor, do what you want to do, and do it how you want to do it. And make haste. This hastiness has remained here to this very day. It is reflected not only in the way that America has driven itself forward with automotive speed, but even by means of the factories that build their own equipment for only two or three years because after three years this equipment will become outdated and obsolete amidst the competition. Do something! Make haste! *O'kei!* A sporting competition! The lands were bounteous, the hands were free with democratic freedoms, everything was being measured by chance, by accident, by fortuity. Everything – the land, and the freedom, and the fortuity – was elementally rewarded a hundredfold: in elemental wealth, in fortuitous fortuity, in the elemental will of an elemental selection of humankind. Thus by the time of the imperialist World War, the Americans, after stretching out to rest against two oceans, were elementally colonizing their very own selves.

All of this did happen.

America entered the twentieth century not as a very big event and not in any way as the master of the capitalist globe. In the eighteen seventies, one had to talk about America as a great

democracy. In the eighteen nineties, one could still talk about America as a democracy. This was a large agricultural country, with a preference for extensive farming. This was a country that was rather well equipped for industry, but with a balance of imports.

Truly, there are to this day some cranks who maintain that America is the same way now as it was a hundred years ago: a puritanical and democratic country that is filled with the life stories of men such as Woolworth and Ford. These cranks confuse the America of their youth with the real America of today when they contend that Ford, it is said, remembers the calluses he had developed on his hands as a paltry engineer, that the president of the Standard Oil Company was a former bailer, that the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad (the largest one in the country) was a former shunter, that the president of the Radio Corporation of America, Sernov, a Jew from Mogilev (Belarus), was a former paperboy, and that Edison was a former mechanic at a small workshop. All of this is the case. Truly, prior to October 29, 1929, America was created in the days between the beginning of the century and this fateful date. Just as truly, these people (or, to be more precise, their companies), together with Mister Kotofson and Arsenty Ivanovich, are the ones who created the America of today. All of this is the case, all of this did happen, but it happened in the past! All of this will no longer be repeated and cannot be repeated. And this is not only because Edsel Ford, the son of Arsenty Ivanovich, no longer knows calluses and doesn't know workers either. We will be talking about him later.

Then again, we could utter a few words about him right now. In New York, I have a lady friend, Miss Margaret Bourke-White, a woman who is engaged in American business matters. To be more specific, she takes photographs of factories, plants, skyscrapers, and steamships so that her photographs can be published as posters and advertisements. Besides this, she serves as the artistic design editor for the magazine *Fortuna* (*Fortchen* [Fortune] in English). Miss Margaret Bourke-White is a famous woman in America. She has visited the U.S.S.R. twice and she keeps company with people who are pro-Soviet. She works among major businessmen. Her workshop – her *studio* – is located on the sixty-first floor of the Chrysler Building. Joe and I once stopped by to see her. In her studio, we happened upon a man who was visiting her on some business matter, an American – well, let me come right out and say it: he was a Frenchman. His surname didn't register with me. But Joe's eyes lit up when he heard it. The Frenchman bore down upon me, slipping me his address (Park Avenue, the street of billionaires) and taking out of his pocket a batch of Russian postcards and envelopes with the U.S.S.R. postmark on them. The Frenchman started to make demands upon me:

“Tell me plainly and clearly, what in the world is going on with you people in the U.S.S.R.!? I don't understand any of it! My son has left to go live with you people. As a father, I beseech you to tell me!”

Joe explained to me why his eyes had lit up. This Frenchman was a billionaire, the proprietor of the largest textile plants in Passaic, and, by his nature, an American fascist. Several years ago there was a strike at one of his textile plants. Joe, in his capacity as a journalist, went to Passaic to observe this strike and the beatings that the police were administering to the workers. And while he was there, at the Literature House, a neutral site, Joe by chance met this Frenchman's son. The son was already polished in a European fashion, and not an

American one. The exact formulation this son had used in regard to the leaders of the strike impressed itself upon Joe's memory forever.

"If the leaders of this strike were to have fallen into my hands," the son said, "I would have shot all of them down in cold blood."

"Why such cruelty and aggressiveness?" Joe asked.

"I don't intend to discuss justice with you at all," the son answered. "These strike leaders want to remove the butter from my bread and deprive me of my chicken for breakfast."

The social class dimension of this attitude is formulated very clearly here. Well, then this son left for the U.S.S.R., to go see Meyerhold, to study Russian theatre arts under Meyerhold.

Ford's generation, the generation of bailers and shunters who later became presidents of companies and billionaires, knew blisters. This generation knew how to make haste, as the pioneers had made haste. And it knew how to replace factory equipment every three years. It acted elementally with its successes and its competition, not feeling ashamed of using the means needed to reach its desired ends.

And once again – Pavel Svinin: ". . . the European war was very propitious and profitable for America, which took advantage of it with the help of the neutrality of its flag . . ."

After the World War, America entered the arena of the world circus as the world's main circus performer. Prior to the war, America used to satisfy its domestic market. During the war, America traded both with the Allied Powers and with the Central Powers, making a fortune that was no smaller than the one it had amassed by colonizing itself. America stabbed the Central Powers in the back when it became clear that the weight of American shells and of American human meat (a very small quantity) would be decisive on the scales of war and would pay very high interest. And it was at this point that America felt the desire to become the master of the world. America was starting to feel cramped on its own mainland.

And so, despite the agricultural crisis that began in 1920, America flourished after the war and continued to flourish up until October 29, 1929. America's democratic constitution, the selection of people who showed pre-eminence in labor and initiative, the period of time in the country's history when Americans could throw off the rags of feudalism, the standing of the country and its wealth in the world, the absence of war – all of these things were returning to Americans a hundredfold what they had been doing over the past hundred years. Before October 29th, by eight o'clock in the morning on October 29, 1929, the population had increased nine-fold, the manufacturing industry had increased 207-fold, the mechanical motivity had increased 35,000-fold, and so on, and so on, and so forth. We must keep in mind that every American worker is assisted in his work by four and a half units of mechanical horsepower.

All of this did hap-pen! . . . And Americans, in their hastinesses and hurriednesses, in their rules about needing to “keep” a smile on their face, did not concern themselves with major philosophies. My fellow Russian countryman Pavel Svinin is right: “The rapid changes this land has made in all areas and the giant steps it has taken . . .”

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What was true ten years ago is not at all true for today, the more so in today’s cut-throat, elemental competition, the more so when even factory equipment is being built with a life expectancy of only three years. What was positive a hundred and fifty years ago – democracy, so-called free enterprise – has by now degenerated into gangsterism, something that people had not even heard about just ten years ago. Likewise, the American flag, which nowadays can be seen protruding everywhere, even in dog cemeteries, did not protrude before the days of the World War because this flag symbolizes American imperialism. Free enterprise, the American commandment, which was a reality just thirty years ago, doesn’t exist any longer because America has been grabbed around the throat by banks in the sclerosis of trusts. And Americans have been allowed to drive automobiles only to have it reach the point of absurdity along the conveyor belts of highways and to have jets of compressed air blow upon them from below at Coney Island, suffocating from *publisiti* [publicity] and advertisements. Americans (just as they did a hundred years ago, like the woman of puritanical morals from the Bronx park) would take exception to “Eskimo Pie” ice cream bars. I came across a man, an American, who invented a method of preparing cement out of any kind of soil. His drainage pipes and the cement he uses for construction purposes are better than the standard American cement, they are more portable, and they are ten times less expensive. This inventor walks around in shabby old trousers precisely because the cement industry in America has been combined into a trust and it depends upon the substructures of Wall Street, just like it does those of the White House, and because the preparation of cement by the new methods this man has invented would destroy the old cement industry. This inventor fears not just for his invention, but also for his very life, having every reason to believe that his continued existence is not convenient or propitious in present-day America. Truly, one could have invented the “Eskimo Pie” ice cream bar before the time when it was invented. But nowadays this very same “Eskimo Pie,” armored with *publisiti*, the dollar, and racketeers, would not allow any inhabitant of a new Greenland to compete with him. Americans go away to their *kempy* – to their “camps” – for the summer. We Russians would say that they go away to their dachas. And they live there in shacks that look like little hunting cabins. These are the people who are a little poorer. On occasion, people live there who have been matched up by nationality. I used to know a *kemp* of this kind. The campers chose a man who was not a merchant to serve as their elder, to manage their supplies and rations. In a month this man resigned his post as the elder, first of all, because he had begun to get rich since the wholesale merchants started giving him gifts; secondly, because racketeers were eating away at him; and, thirdly, because he turned out to be bewitched, for he was sometimes acquiring goods for fifty percent of their cost, but he was forced to sell them according to the standard market value, that is, to overcharge his friends, his fellow campers. And he could not act otherwise, because if that were the case, all the weight of American trade laws would fall down upon him. Thirty years ago, Ford could lord it over other people the way that Arsenty Ivanovich used to do. But now he can’t do that. It’s precisely this feudal, autocratic attitude, personified by Arsenty

Ivanovich, that made it possible for the faceless “General Motors Company,” with its Chevrolets and its Buicks, with its faceless new products backed by the banks of a depersonalized, faceless America, to overtake Ford. Gangsters, who together with cement depended upon the White House and Wall Street, are by no means a fortuitous phenomenon (just as, in general, all American assertions about “fortuity” are the essence of nonsense). Gangsters, they are the American “democracy” of today. And the financial crisis that is now sweeping across America by means of boots being taken off of the feet of corpses, should by no means be considered a cyclical, so to speak, crisis because this is a crisis of the entire capitalist system, a crisis that was created over time as capitalism was dying. A country that calls itself democratic, but that exists by means of gangsters and presidents who take bribes, cannot exist, simply cannot exist. Let even the financial crisis of October 29, 1929 not be the final one!

Remarkable things are being done here that can serve as a lesson for sociologists! I once stopped on Fifth Avenue near the shop window of a clothing store. Displayed there were men’s and women’s apparel with the sign: “For the country.” And that was all. There were outfits there in imitation of what Bavarians wear. Also displayed there were the types of outfits worn by Russian Mordvinians. For those of us who live in Russia, to get a Mordvinian outfit, we would have to take a trip to a village in the Mordvinian countryside and convince the old women who live there to rummage around for a while in their trunks to find us one. Even in England, a home-made Scottish outfit is imported into London from a little backwater hamlet in rural Scotland. In America, rustic outfits are taken from the city to the country. Human America leaned up against the dikes holding back the sea, and a human wave was sent careening backwards, it climbed up upon itself, and began to press down upon itself. New York has lost its mind and gone crazy. It is suffocating, changing its shoes, refitting itself to fit into shoes taken from corpses, and bawling: “more! more! more!”

It’s a most edifying thing – this, let us say, “social” chemistry! – Americans burn their wheat (“it’s mine, don’t touch it!” “individualism!” “sacred property!” “let my neighbor do as he pleases!”), Americans ruin their cars, and they’re now the world’s most malicious imperialist country, sending their money all across the globe so that they can seize possession of the world and dominate it. Americans are now making colonies for themselves because “Pan-Americanism” is nothing other than the colonization of the rest of America. Americans want to dig a second Panama Canal so that they can finally take complete possession of the American continent and its seas. And – a remarkable social chemistry! – Americans, those people who escaped from European feudalism, want to implant feudalism in Mexico, in Peru, in Cuba, and in Argentina, and they are, in fact, implanting it in those countries. Now we should talk about American degeneration, about how America has become wild and uncivilized.

All of this happened before 8 o’clock in the morning on October 29, 1929. By this time, everything had converged. Humankind on the earth had outgrown bourgeois democracy. During the first thirty years following the Civil War, at the threshold of the new century, America, a young country *that had not yet come to a halt*, like a sturdy nineteen-year-old blockhead, was looking beyond the oceans no longer with the eyes of a democrat but now with the eyes of an imperialist. On the threshold of the new century, America pressed against its

geographical borders and set off to go beyond them. But America's "fortuities" were exhausted, and the lands were filled with people. America should have "come to a halt." Out of the anarchy of accumulation, out of the hasty (and tasteless) heaping up of wealth onto the mountains of skyscrapers, the organization of the economy should have come into being. But it can't exist under capitalism and it can't exist in a country that rests upon the principles of fortuity and special cases, a country where everything is fortuitous and special and particular and private – the telegraph, railways, steamships, the police, detectives, universities, the church. Ever since the days at the beginning of the century, ever since the days of the wartime period in particular, America started to work on the earth. But the earth itself rots under capitalism. And the global economy, refitted for machines, gave birth to the agricultural crisis that began in 1929. Once again, this was not a cyclical crisis, but a crisis of the American economic system, which had got rid of farming. Having begun to arm itself with an enormous army ever since the days of the wartime period, America has been wanting to despoil the world. But in America itself, on the streets of New York, and from New York to Portland, from Portland to Bellingham, to Tijuana, to Miami, America has become flooded with such rotten stuff that it makes even the noses of gangsters droop, sickened by the smell of it. But Hoover's nose has drooped to such an extent that he talks about a "twenty-year plan," parodying the Five-Year Plan of the U.S.S.R. In America, there is a crisis of overproduction. In America, there are twenty million workers. In America, banks are crashing, factories are shutting down, warehouses are overflowing with goods . . . more! more! more! . . . and ten million unemployed workers, every other worker, together with the members of his family, is fated to dress himself up in the boots of a corpse.

One could write an arithmetic problem for school children in the first grade: how are these problems written? "So many kilos of coffee were lying in a storehouse." "So many people were living in a city." And so on.

My fellow Russian countryman Pavel Svinin is right: any first-grader could solve this problem with the simplest long division. But in America such problems are solved in the following way: surpluses of coffee are poured out into the sea to – to provide support for the coffee market. And all of this taken together is called the sacred right of property, "democracy," and capitalism. May the American god grant them good health! But one could continue the arithmetic problems farther. There were stories told earlier about the poor, lyrical millionaire who counted forty to fifty people who are buttressed by the skyscrapers that led to the rise of New York. It was reported earlier that the *publisiti-men* [publicity man], Harry Reichenbach, had died. He died and left memoirs that reported how fifty people, and no more, owned, managed, and commanded all the hundred and twenty million different tastes of the American public, how these fifty people dressed, undressed, and put shoes on Americans, how they lengthened and shortened women's skirts, how they diversified the palette of men's suits by using Indian and electric colors, and so on. The poor millionaire lyrically asserted that in America, in New York, there are forty to fifty people who are buttressed by skyscrapers that are the same height as New York. They are called billionaires, and they freely grant to the remaining millions of Americans the right to enjoy themselves at Coney Island. The population of America numbers a hundred and twenty million people. Income tax is collected from married people who earn more than two and a half thousand dollars annually and from single people who earn more than a thousand five hundred dollars annually. In 1927, in the

best year of the most recent period of *prosperiti*, out of a population of a hundred and twenty million people, income tax was paid by only two and a half million people. Ninety-five percent of them were earning less than ten thousand dollars annually. And only two hundred and eighty-three people were receiving (they were not earning it, of course) more than a million dollars of income. In 1929, in the year of the highest period of *prosperiti* of capitalists, those who received more than a million dollars of income numbered five hundred and eleven. But in that very same year, ten thousand people became unemployed. In that prosperous year, fate bestowed a quarter of the American national income – eighteen and a half billion dollars – upon landowners, shareholders, and stockholders, that is to say, once again, upon those who don't make or do anything. (By the way, parenthetically speaking, Americans were proud of the fact that they had twenty million bank depositors). And here is an arithmetic problem for the first-graders in a Soviet school: "There were five hundred and eleven people who received annually, each of them separately, more than a million dollars, and there were ten million people who didn't receive anything at all," and so on. The problem is likewise solved using long division. But that would have been socialist arithmetic. (As far as concerns, parenthetically speaking, the parenthetical information about the twenty million American stockholders, including workers as well, this problem as well is solved by long division . . .) Capitalist integrals find it necessary to write orations about "technological" unemployment, to flood Broadway with the electric thunder of advertisements, and to shout, right under the nose of people wearing boots taken off the feet of corpses: ". . . more! more! more! eat more! drink more! wear out your boots and your automobiles more! . . . for the salvation of capitalism depends upon this! . . ."

Half of the supply of gold that people have dug up is in America. Thousands – thousands! – of American banks crashed all at once, right after eight o'clock in the morning on October 29, 1929. During the summer of 1931, American banks refused to accept deposits because they had grown fat on gold, and they went bankrupt because they had more gold than they knew what to do with it, for millions of people, who changed their footwear for those worn by indigent beggars, had lost the capacity to purchase anything . . . "more! more! more!"

The French billionaire's son, whom we described earlier, delineated his position clearly and precisely when he spoke about the butter for his bread and about the chicken for his breakfast.

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Pavel Svinin is right:

And now we must speak about the worker in America, in this country that was created substantially by the hands of the worker, the handicraftsman, and the artisan, because even bread was made here by the craftsman, and not by the peasant.

I will now juxtapose two facts.

The General Council of the First International, through both the word and deed of Karl Marx, wrote: “. . . for the workers, not only *their hopes for the future*, but also *their gains in the past*, are at stake in this terrible battle taking place on the other side of the ocean.”

This did happen. America is the country that has the highest percentage of working-class people in its population.

Fact number two: in the presidential election – when Mister Hoover was elected in 1928 by methods that were recounted earlier – the American working class was essentially absent at the polls because ninety percent of American workers gave their vote to the aforementioned Republican and Democratic parties. These ninety percent of voters did not come forth as an independent force.

On the opening pages of this American *O'kei*, I described Coney Island. I deliberately concealed one very significant circumstance there: namely, the fact that Coney Island is a site of entertainment and relaxation for workers.

I once read this description of Coney Island to one of my friends, the American communist T.

He said to me: “But don’t you think that the way you describe the American workers’ forms of entertainment will be offensive to them?”

I answered him with a question of my own: “But don’t you think that I described their forms of entertainment correctly and accurately?”

“Yes, they’re described accurately,” he answered.

And then I said to him the following, which I find it necessary to repeat here:

“If my brothers are doing some things that are stupid, it’s my duty as a writer to tell them about these stupid things they’re doing because they are my brothers. If they allow compressed air to blow upon them from below at a time when they, with their own hands, are tossing coffee into the sea and burning wheat in the fields (since they’re not, in fact, gentlemen billionaires), when they, after the collapse of the dollar, are starving while waiting in line for a heavenly bowl of bean soup, then it’s my duty to tell them that they’re looking at things askew, for they are my brothers, for the compressed air blowing upon them from below, just like the coffee being tossed into the sea, is not a ‘special case,’ not a ‘private matter,’ for each individual, but rather a matter that concerns the entire working class, because from this selfsame compressed air blowing from below to Woolworth’s skyscrapers towering from high above, it’s not so much a logical as it is a most simple bridge, constructed arithmetically upon dollars and upon bricks, a bridge of arithmetical calculation. If one of my comrades, a proletarian, is going to try to prove to me that two times two is not even seven, but a camel, then it’s precisely my duty to try to prove to him that two times two is not a camel, and not seven, but four. And one needs to say this without delay, for the

American son whom I described earlier grasped very well the essence, in terms of his own class identity, of the chicken for breakfast, just as he learned very well how to buy the leaders of the American labor movement for a dollar.”

In Washington, to date, every day when the president is home, from quarter past twelve until two o'clock in the afternoon, every American, who wishes to, can pass through the White House and can, in the name of the principles of “democracy” – of freedom, equality, and brotherhood – say hello to the president and hear a *khau-du-iu-du* [how-do-you-do] back from him.

All of this is very simple to do: one needs to sign up in the reception office and then stand in line. The line leads to the president's Oval Office. Two guards are standing at the entrance to his office. The president is standing there inside his office. The line winds its way forward like a ribbon. People shake the president's hand – “How do you do?” – and then, having now become acquainted with the president, they exit through the next door. If there are several people who wish to get acquainted with the president and if they present themselves as a delegation, they can have their photograph taken with the president. This is done right in front of the White House. The camera is focused on the spot where the president stands in the photographs. The president goes outside the White House when the visiting groups have already been seated. The whole process of immortalizing the delegation by including its members in a photograph takes no more than half a minute of the president's time. Any American citizen can become acquainted with the president in this manner and even have their photograph taken with him.

Historical treatises are written about the skyscraper-like stories of presidents who came from the cabins of woodcutters, stories of the Empire State and Woolworth skyscrapers, about the poor farmer Hoover, how, they say, these *bois'y* [boys] all of a sudden gave a whistle and up they shot to the hundredth floor of all sorts of well-being. People speak seriously about the possibilities of meeting presidents, congressmen, governors, and other political officials, just as they speak seriously about how each American can become a billionaire or the president. Truly, truly there are such people who contend that America is the same now as it was a hundred years ago, and so on, and so forth! Truly, I met workers who confirm the American commandment, who say, “He who truly wants to find work for himself will find it in America.”

The eyes of American workers are powdered with the dust of the stories of Ford, Woolworth, Eskimo Pies, Coca-Cola, the Pennsylvania Railroad shunter, the Standard Oil Company bailer, of the stories of people at the threshold of the century who were the same as these other Henrys, Johns, and Jacks, and who filled the pages of all the newspapers and magazines. In America, everything is private! Private telegraph, private railways, private police, private church! And the all-American hubbub of newspapers tries to convince people that the concern of every American – and of the worker in particular – is his own private matter, his own private destiny, “pri-vate.” I had conversations with workers who think that one's destiny is truly his own private destiny, for he believes in the idiotic American theory of fortuity, of chance. This same “fortuity,” with all the hubbub about the *bois'y* [boys] who shot up to the top of skyscrapers and about “private” matters, created such “fortuity” at a time when in America, a

country with a working class that numbered many millions of members, there wasn't – there almost wasn't – nor is there now any labor legislation. And the juridical rules between workers and entrepreneurs are established by a code of civil laws and regulations, by commercial law, by a law of merchants and traders.

In America, they say, labor is respected. I think that in America they respect the dollar much more than they do the worker, and it makes no difference how the dollar is obtained, even if it's through gangsterism. The *klerk* [clerk], Mister Johnson, was a clerk yesterday, but today he took off his jacket, donned a dark blue smock, and earns two dollars a week more after having become a worker. In American public opinion, he has come out ahead, for it isn't important how you earn your money, but it is important how much money you earn. Mister Johnson is a bureaucrat, but Mister Jackson is a worker: Mister Jackson earns more money, and he is more respected in his *midl-taun* [middletown], than is the bureaucrat Mister Johnson. The latter is sitting on a bench at the gate with two people who are more respected than he is: with a pharmacist from the neighboring *drog-stor* [drugstore] and with a dairy shopkeeper, both of whom earn as much money as he does. But the bureaucrat Mister Johnson is sitting next to them not because he earns less money than they do. Mister Jackson owns an automobile that costs fifteen dollars more than the one that Mister Johnson owns. He also owns a refrigerator, whereas Mister Johnson doesn't have a refrigerator. A district racketeer could walk up to their shop to wish them a good evening and to smoke a cigarette there, a *Lokki-straik* [Lucky Strike]. This is a stroke of "good luck." During the day, Jackson was working at a factory or was building a skyscraper, the pharmacist was trafficking in alcohol and coffee, the dairyman was selling milk and cream. This is the private business of each one of them.

Sitting on the bench, smoking their pipes and their cigarettes, the two friends are, of course, chatting. The pharmacist Schiller says to the dairyman Becker:

"*Uell* [Well], you are from Germany, Mister Becker. Even for you people in Germany, in Bavaria, there was a law right up until the middle of the nineteenth century that only the eldest son in a Jewish family was permitted to marry. The remaining male children had to remain single. Germany was considered an enlightened country. Not to mention Poland under tsarist Russian rule, where my ancestors hailed from. I came here to America. I finished pharmacy school. I traveled to Washington to introduce myself to the president, and he said to me: 'Nice to see you!' My father was a shoemaker. My sisters are still living in Poland."

The dairyman Becker says:

"I came to America with my parents. We filled out the paperwork for my mother to come later . . . I was nine years old when we came here, and I washed dishes in a tavern. In Germany at that time, a law against socialists was enacted. It was a stupid law! In Germany, bureaucrats and noblemen were ruling the country. The workers were second-class citizens, and there was nowhere for me to go. We were pariahs, outcasts. I wouldn't say that my father enjoyed good fortune in America: happiness did not befall him. But he did soon become an American

citizen, and he could vote in the elections for president, for senator, and for mayor of his city. Living here, I go to the polls as a citizen and simply make my voice heard in support of the best one out of all the candidates, whereas in Germany every social class voted separately, and preference was given to the noblemen. My father didn't enjoy good fortune in America, happiness did not befall him, no, it didn't! . . . But at least happiness lay in his own hands, and he, even in his bitter poverty, considered himself to be a citizen. His poverty was not connected in any way with political humiliation."

Jackson says:

"My father and I, we were born here in America. My grandfather came here as a young lad. At first, he worked in the coal mines of Pittsburgh. But then gold was discovered in California, and my grandfather left to go seek his fortune in California. On one occasion, he found an old, dried-up creek in whose sand, over the course of two days and two nights, he panned out two thousand dollars' worth of gold. But then he grew sick and tired of the gold fever, so he said to himself: 'O'kei, I clambered around in the mine shafts of Pittsburgh for a little while, then I crawled on my knees in the mountains of California for a little while, so now I'm going to become a farmer!' At that time, in the state of Indiana near the Ohio River, some undeveloped public lands were being given away for homesteading. It was there, in that state, that my father and I were born. My father sold the land to a manufacturer when I was ten years old. A factory was built on our land. We moved to the state of Illinois, to Chicago. My father worked at the slaughterhouses there."

The dairyman Becker says:

"You were born on a farm, whereas I was for a long time a farmhand. At first, I washed dishes in a restaurant. When washing dishes by hand was replaced by washing dishes by a machine, I became a *boi* [an errand boy] at a hotel, attending upon guests in the hallway and delivering messages. As a result, when I grew up, I became a mailman. When the postal business in New York was retooled and rationalized, numerous mailmen were let go, so I set off for the state of Florida. There were not enough manual laborers there. I met many fellow countrymen from my first homeland there and joined their *artel*, becoming a dyer. But the *artel* sent me to the state of Wisconsin to work doing varnishing. On a farm there, I met a girl who, thank God, is still alive to this day. And she became my spouse. I worked for her father for twelve years, until such time as I had saved up enough money to open a dairy store with my spouse."

I heard the life stories of these three people and their conversations directly from them themselves. During that evening of conversation, these three friends could have gone to a movie theater or to a sports club.

On Sunday, together with their wives and children, they will go to their local Coney Island. All three of them, of course, had their own checkbook and their own shares of dairy (or construction) stocks hidden away somewhere under their pillow.

It turned out that before the dairyman Becker became a dairyman and found his happiness in milk, he had been a tavern boy, then a mailman, and then a dyer (that is, a construction worker), whereas Mister Jackson, before he became a construction worker, used to milk cows in his younger years.

What I have recounted in this last section of my narrative was possible for two reasons:

It was possible, first of all, because this country was always moving without stopping, and it was moving not only forward, but also to new places. In light of the unexpectedness of all sorts of discoveries, as always happens when there are new discoveries, and in light of the constant shortage of manpower, people were seized with a thirst for working at any job you like, but mainly with a thirst for making a fortune whatever the cost. The country's ethos of constantly moving forward was creating a shortage of manual laborers. Human hands were making things, and making things was sometimes more profitable than sitting in a clerical office. Even the Pennsylvania Railroad shunters passed through a period of labor, while the Eskimo was starving from an early age. And the shortage of manual laborers suggested that human hands, that labor, be respected as a good *bizness* [business]. In their discussions about what is a "private" matter, workers apparently don't notice that a long time ago their *bizness* had turned into a *dzhab* [job].

But there is a second reason why Mister Jackson in his younger years was selling milk, whereas his neighbor, sitting next to him on the bench, was a worker. There was a shortage of manual laborers, work being done by hand was being replaced by work being done by machines. Machines grew into conveyor belts, where there was no need for one to have any skill or workmanship, but there was a need for one to know merely how to press the levers of a machine that powered the conveyor belt. No kind of special knowledge is required of a worker on the conveyor belt, but he must have reached a certain level of general literacy so that he can have some general ideas about the general work he is doing, so that he can grasp why it is that you are pressing your lever. Cows are likewise being milked by a conveyor belt and the milk is being sold at the will of a racketeer. It's understandable how Mister Jackson became a dairyman. It's doubly understandable if one remembers that this country was seen as a country on the move in the legends about fortuity, and actually was on the move in the fortuitous California and Alaska gold rushes.

It was said earlier that America needs to return to the time of the immigration of the last forty years, to those years when America became what it was prior to 8 o'clock in the morning on October 29, 1929, that America needs particularly to return to the time of this immigration. It was recounted earlier, and figures were provided to substantiate it, how American and German workers were earning their daily bread. A commodity ruble was being taken into account there. If you take into account marks and dollars, then the German worker was earning on average as many marks as the American worker was earning dollars. The American population has increased nine-fold over the past hundred years.

Friedrich Engels once said in regard to the English bourgeoisie:

“This most bourgeois of all nations apparently wants, in the end, to carry this matter through to the point where it will have . . . a bourgeois proletariat side by side with the bourgeoisie. Of course, from the perspective of the type of nation that exploits the entire world, this . . .”

This was Engels being ironic – using the term “bourgeois proletariat” – for Engels was witness to this development in particular, since the English proletariat was supporting the American revolution of the Civil War. But this irony was by no means ironical for the two categories of people who were working in factories and plants in America.

The American population over the last hundred years has increased nine-fold. This was by no means solely on account of the American birthrate. After the first period of American prosperity, following the Civil War, people came to America from Eastern Europe: Russians, Estonians, Latvians, Jews, Poles, Czechs, people from the Balkans, Italians, Greeks. These people were coming from lands with low levels of culture. These people were coming from lands where there had not been any revolutionary traditions for labor. These people, by their psychological essence, were *petit*-European bourgeois; in the best case, they were inclined toward anarchism. The poor were coming, the poor who had managed to save up enough difficult-to-come-by rubles to buy a ticket. People of this kind appeared in America even after the World War, despite the quotas. A very large percentage of these people in America (a quarter of New York speaks a Slavic language, the largest colony of Italians is not in Rome, but in New York) went to work in plants and in factories. They didn't know American traditions. They didn't speak English. They were given menial, second-rate jobs, requiring manual labor. They clambered down into mines and pits, they did the sewing for America, making clothes, they stood at conveyor belts. These people were coming from their East European and Italian cities and towns after having heard their fill of stories about all the remarkable things that were happening in America.

The first category of the “bourgeois proletariat,” a group that validated Engels's irony, turned out to be the Yankees: those people who were native-born Americans, who were steeped in America's traditions, and who spoke English. They were members of the American Federation of Labor, which we will be speaking about later. They ended up being bosses at factories, foremen, and skilled workmen. The skilled-labor jobs ended up being in their hands. The highest paying branches of labor and industry ended up being in their hands. Indeed, in certain branches of industry, for example, in the construction field, some of these workers would, on occasion, earn up to thirty dollars – up to sixty rubles – per day. They turned out to be in the American traditions of “particularities,” of “special cases.”

The second category of Engels's irony turned out to be a very large percentage of those very same people who were coming to America. A very large percentage of those people (I saw them) that were coming to America from countries that lacked culture, and didn't have any labor culture, already bore within themselves the instincts of a bourgeois. They bore those instincts at the moment, at that very moment, when they were boarding a steamer somewhere

in Europe. A *petit bourgeoisie* was coming to America. In many instances, only men were coming, reckoning that one didn't need any kind of special skills to work on a conveyor belt in America, but that one did need general literacy. And this is precisely what the European lowbrow commoner possessed. The people who were coming to America had heard all about American earnings and American marvels. It seemed to them that they were going to a place where other people had already got things started for them. During their moments of leisure time on deck while crossing the ocean, they would make their calculations (a certain Pole, an Oklahoma worker, spoke exactly these words to me):

“I'll work for three years. I'll skimp on everything. I'll save every penny. In a week, I'll earn thirty dollars, and I'll save fifteen. In a month, I'll have sixty dollars saved. In a year, seven hundred and twenty. In three years, a little over two thousand. As much as I can, I'll live a little more frugally for a while. I'll work like a son of a bitch. I'll squeeze all the lifeblood out of myself. Two thousand American dollars, that's a paltry sum of money. But for us, in our homeland (we belonged to Austria at the time), that's ten thousand *krones*, a large sum of capital. I'll work, I thought at the time, for three years, then I'll return to my homeland and open a shop in my village. I'll get married to some Polish maiden.”

“Well, so how did that turn out?” I asked my Polish companion.

“It turned out well for some others, but it didn't turn out well for me,” my Polish companion replied.

For one thing, those people who arrived from Europe, without any knowledge of the language, without any knowledge of American traditions, thirsting to accumulate wealth, undertook any work that they could find and they worked really hard, like sons of bitches. But, for another thing, not knowing either the language or the traditions, they didn't grasp what was going on around them in America, and they reckoned that it was none of their business anyway, so they didn't get involved in American matters. This was the *petit bourgeoisie* within the ranks of the proletariat.

One in every thousand of them turned out to be the inventor of Eskimo Pies or the head of the Radio Corporation of America. Certain percentages of them amassed dollars and saved them. Many harnessed themselves like draft animals, hitching up the straps of American manual laborers. They settled down, they got married, and they lived to the end of their days as semi-foreigners, dying under the banner of America. The multi-national nature of these workers, of course, didn't help them to consolidate and amalgamate. Ford, in particular, deliberately placed a German next to a Pole at the conveyor belt, and an Italian next to a Norwegian.

A certain percentage of these people broke down under the overly stressful strain of the working conditions in America. This percentage of people then proceeded to join the ranks of the poor, ragged vagabonds in America, filling up all sorts of American gateways and crannies, replenishing the number of impoverished Americans. They took up residence in New York on the Bowery, the world's most terrible, most shameful street of *lumpen*-proletarians, who didn't

want to do anything and who weren't doing anything. And there isn't a country in the world with a larger quantity of *lumpen*-proletarians than America. And there are a hundred times, many thousands of times, more *lumpens* than there are billionaires in America. They are called *trempey* [tramps] – down-and-out vagabonds who travel around the country barefooted.

Another percentage of these European immigrants, who broke down under the overly stressful strain of the working conditions in America, escaped into gangsterism. The names, Al Capone, an Italian, and his advisor, Harry Guzik, a Jew, they speak for themselves, just as the fate of a member of the *petit bourgeoisie* in a gangster mob is completely natural and to be expected.

A third percentage of these people left their jobs to find escape in the revolutionary cause – they were members of the *petit bourgeoisie* who protested against capitalism. They escaped into anarchism, challenging everything that had befallen them. The anarchist and syndicalist currents were the strongest revolutionary tendencies in the American labor movement. My Polish companion, whose words I just quoted, was an anarchist. Essentially, he wished, for the sake of all the people in the world, and for Americans in particular, that everyone and everything would go to hell! As the old Catholic adage goes, he wished that from the baptismal font, from the sacred chalice of America, they would throw the baby out with the dirty bathwater. But it's very clear that we shouldn't throw America out, if only because Americans (therefore, workers) have made a lot of magnificent things: they have learned, consequently, how to make things and how to do things, and they can make and do things.

The people who have come to America over the past forty years currently make up thirty-four percent of the entire American population. But seventy percent of the total number of workers in the coal industry, the steel industry, the oil industry, and the machine-building industry is made up precisely of those people who have come to America over the past forty years. Before 1917, entry into America was unrestricted. In 1917, Congress put in place thirty articles that deny entry to foreigners, first and foremost, anarchists. In 1921, Congress adopted a law that set immigration quotas. In accordance with this law, entry would be allowed to no more than three percent of the population of every nationality currently living in America. The census of 1910 was used as the basis for calculating what number this three percent would amount to. In 1924, the exact number of people who have the right to gain entry into America was established: 153,714 people per year. (Fixing this last number, in line with the thirty articles put in place in 1917, had, among other things, the following political aim: in accordance with this numerical timetable, entry for people from Eastern Europe had to be limited to fewer than ten thousand. The Eastern European pathway to America was cut off because Eastern Europe was contaminated by revolutionary activities. In general, the relatives of people already living in America could come only by their invitation).

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America was by no means built by clean hands, nor by the hands in the white gloves that the engine drivers of the locomotives called “Bolsheviks” were wearing while they drove around the Ford automotive plant. There is a cruel rule in life: the living forget the dead, and the dead aren't able to talk about themselves and their experiences to the living, because they are dead. If only we were able to listen to those people who went through the forests and across the

deserts of America, breaking the first trails! If only we could listen to those people who died from starvation on the first trails?! If only we could listen to all those people who perished for America, gunned down during the days of worker strikes, convulsed and turned into carbon by the electric chair, rotting to death in the prisons of America . . .

The history of the American labor movement – this is a story of betrayals of American workers, betrayals that are no less terrible than those of the Middle Ages. I know of a conversation that a German engineer, named Otto Moog, had with a certain American public figure, a Mister Childs. This conversation took place on a steamer while crossing the ocean, during a leisure moment when, under the influence of oceanic expanses, they could philosophize. They were talking about the German tax system and about the imposition of taxes on German heavy industry. Mister Childs, an American public figure, said:

“Such an idiotic tax never would never have become law in our country. Even if the socialists were to have a majority in Congress and in the Senate, they wouldn’t be able to pass such a law. We would simply have acted upon the necessary people with money, and one fine day they would have found stocks for automotive plants in their desk drawers.”

“But that, after all, is a bribe!” engineer Moog said.

“There wouldn’t have been anything immoral in this,” Mister Childs answered. “I would have cautioned them in this way against committing a stupidity that would do themselves harm: automobiles have given American workers the largest amount of work and money!”

This conversation, I must say, was both democratic and republican, and oceanic, just as it was transoceanic!

In 1869, the Order of the Knights of Labor arose in America. The Order was a clandestine organization, constructed on the model of Masonic lodges (and was, consequently, a rather mystical order). The Order’s work plan was likewise semi-secret, with an inclination toward anarchism. Nonetheless, Black Friday (the day when the financial crisis of 1873 began on the New York Stock Exchange) elevated the Order of the Knights of Labor to the crest of the labor movement at that time. In 1877, a railway strike swept across America. Miners helped the railway workers. In St. Louis, power went over to the workers, and the workers formed a Safety Committee. This was repeated in a number of other cities and towns. It was the first time in the history of America that federal troops set off on punitive expeditions all across America. In Chicago, there were battles between soldiers and workers. In 1885, there was another railway strike, and it defeated Jay Gould, a famous railway billionaire at the time. These strikes, and this labor movement, were led by the Order of the Knights of Labor. In 1879, the Order emerged out of the underground. In 1886, it had 730,000 members. But in that same year of 1886, the following two events took place. In Chicago, on the heels of a labor *lokaut* [lockout], a strike arose at the factories of McCormick, a farm equipment company. During that strike, a bomb was thrown into a crowd on Chicago’s Haymarket Square, and a police officer was killed. No one, not any court, could ascertain who threw the

bomb, but a court convicted five anarchists, who were not guilty of committing any crime, and sentenced them to death by hanging. Four of them – Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer – were hanged, while the fifth defendant, Louis Lingg, committed suicide in prison. This trial and these executions were acts of White Terror. In that same year of 1886, the leader of the Order of the Knights of Labor, the “Great Master,” as he was called in accordance with the Order’s terminology, a man who was an implacable orator and a staunch foe of capitalists, left the Order and took the post of a high-ranking government official, of a bu-reau-crat! The leader was bought out, the soldiers were executed, and the Order disintegrated.

The Order disintegrated for its own good, according to the arguments of Mister Childs, the man from the steamer. The Order of the Knights of Labor was a recondite and mystical organization, but nonetheless an anarchist one. And here we must remember a third fact about the year 1886. The American Federation of Labor had arisen as early as 1881. It was organized by Samuel Gompers, the same person who managed to live until 1925, befogging the minds of American workers and duping them for nearly half a century. In 1886, Gompers picked up those workers who were searching for consolidation and amalgamation following the disintegration of the Order of the Knights of Labor. From the anarchist Order, workers now found themselves in an organization that (while clanging the whole arsenal of American clichés about democratism, equality, and brotherhood, clanging trite slogans, such as “He who truly wants to work will find work for himself,” and so on, from the American commandments) was promising to realize Engels’s irony by creating for American workers the everyday life of “bourgeois proletarians.” The American Federation of Labor was contending that socialism was not an American concern. The American Federation of Labor was affirming how homicidal it would be for American workers to engage in a battle against entrepreneurs (since the workers themselves could become entrepreneurs, and, consequently, already were, in their potentiality, entrepreneurs). And so the Federation thought it best to sign an amicable, “philanthropic” (Gompers, a philanthropist!) agreement with the entrepreneurs. The Federation of Labor is not a political party. It’s more along the lines of a federation of labor unions. Gompers maintained that political parties, and especially socialist ones, were harmful for the American people. For the American “people” – and workers, according to the American constitution, are members of the “people,” and as such they enjoy equal rights (they can even become billionaires or the president!) – two parties, they say, are sufficient: the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. These two parties, even without workers, can pass legislation in Congress that addresses workers’ needs. Gompers got the majority of organized labor in America to follow his lead. Gompers was being helped by capitalists. Gompers tried to convince entrepreneurs to distribute shares of an enterprise among the workers who work there (so that a worker would receive a dime as profit from a billionaire’s billions of dollars). Gompers tried to convince workers to purchase shares of the enterprise where they work so that they would consider themselves to be “proprietors” (and so that they would receive a dime from a billionaire’s billions of dollars). There’s no need to try to explain why Gompers made speeches voicing “workers’ demands” not just anywhere, but at conventions of the Republican Party. There’s no need to try to explain why the American Federation of Labor endorsed sending troops to suppress the Chinese Revolution and to seize Nicaragua. And there’s no need to try to explain why the Federation was concerned that the workers whom they had consolidated might not go to the voting booths as an independent force.

There's no need to talk about the splendid personal fate of Mister Samuel Gompers, who possessed such good health that for nearly half a century he was able to toil in such a grueling business as the business of workers! The fate of Mister Gompers is truly a genuine American fate!

There's no need to talk about the twenty million depositors who put their money in American banks. That's the American system. But we must remember that a good percentage of these depositors were – workers! – they were both depositors and “sharers in profits.” They were stock holders as well! There were millions of them. There were so many of them that two hundred and eighty-three people used to receive more than a million dollars a year of so-called dividends!

I spoke earlier about the correspondence between the First International and Abraham Lincoln. I passed over in silence the fact that in 1872, following the debacle of the Paris Commune, the office of the General Council of the First International was transferred to America. The work of this office gave birth in America to a labor party that, beginning in 1877, was called the Socialist Labor Party. At the turn of the century, this party was the left wing of the Second International. But at the turn of the century, in 1899, the party split in two. One part of the party kept its earlier name. The other part, headed by Morris Hillquit, which had merged with groups of Social Democrats in America, shortened its name and began to be called succinctly the Socialist Party. In 1905, the anarchists-syndicalists separated themselves from the Socialist Labor Party and created a labor union called the Industrial Workers of the World. Shortly thereafter, these anarchists-syndicalists died in prisons. In 1919, communists separated themselves from the Socialist Party and created their own party, which for a time was called simply the “Workers' Party.” Since 1927, it has again been calling itself the Communist Party.

But we'll be speaking now about the Socialist Party, whose leader was Morris Hillquit. Before Hoover's election in 1928, the Socialist Party, which had already shortened its name, now shortened its application forms: in the questionnaire that it used for accepting new members, it discarded the article – the one and only article – about an obligatory acknowledgment of the class war. Nonetheless, a chaplain was appointed, and a candidate for the post of Vice President, James Maurer, would often give revolutionary speeches in his city:

“We are getting ready to give workers a government of the working class that is exemplary and true to type, but if a strike were to occur in Reading during the time of our term in office, then the life and property of the capitalist entrepreneur would be protected such as they have never been protected before! . . .”

But that's not all. During the summer of 1931, in June, I was witness to, and a newspaper reader of, the following instructive episode. The leader of the Socialist Party at the time was Morris Hillquit. An American oil company purchased oil and some other petroleum products from Neftesindikat, the Soviet state oil company. It purchased these items for a hundred and five million dollars. The former owners of the Baku oil fields, owners who were now scattered all over the world and all over the various “industrial trade” agencies, filed suit in an American court, demanding the sequestration of funds belonging to Vacuum Oil, a company that had

purchased oil in the U.S.S.R. The suit demanded that those funds be paid not to Neftesindikat, but to them, the former owners of lands in Baku that formerly belonged to them, lands that were their own private property. They argued that the Bolsheviks were selling stolen property that belongs, by rights and in fairness, to its former and “lawful” owners. And you know what: the solicitor who undertook to plead this case in an American courtroom was none other than Morris Gompers, or rather, I mean to say, Samuel Hillquit. Yes, yes, Morris Hillquit, that’s who it was, the leader of the American Socialist Party. America is a country of records. A case like this one, where defense of the interests of White Guard Russians against the Bolshevik Revolution is a defense undertaken by a socialist leader, such a case indeed sets a new world record for betrayal and treason.

I won’t say anything about the Communist Party in America so as not to sound like the immodest person who pats his own back or toots his own horn. But the dead aren’t able to talk about themselves and about their doings because they are dead! If only we could listen to all those people who perished for America and who died for the cause of workers in America, those who were gunned down during the days of worker strikes, those who were convulsed and turned into carbon by the electric chair, those who rotted to death in prisons. If only we could listen even to those people who arched their shoulders and hunched their backs not in prisons, but while stooping down behind the machine tools of conveyor belts! . . .

There is no need to go far back into the distant past. One need only recall the recent strikes by textile workers in Passaic, at the textile mill owned by that loving, devoted daddy whose spoiled son was talking about how he needed to have his chicken for breakfast at the same time that workers were being evicted from their homes and tossed out onto the streets. That strike took place in 1926, and it was led by the Workers’ Party. One need only recall the strike at Rockefeller’s mining enterprises in the state of Colorado on November 21, 1927 (a period of *prosperiti!*), when the police beat up the strikers unmercifully, killing six people and injuring twenty-three others. That strike was led by the Workers’ Party. Miners’ strikes flare up every year in the state of Pennsylvania. The battles with police there result in mass beatings and the slaughter of workers. Besides *kloby* [billy clubs], the police at these strikes employ the latest words in technology: suffocating gas and tear gas. On August 22, 1927, two hundred people – men, women, and the children of workers – were beaten and gassed in this manner in Cheswick. The police were assisted by the American Federation of Labor. A miners’ strike in the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia that began in 1927 lasted for more than a year. During the winter, hence in freezing temperatures, up to a hundred thousand miners, along with their wives and children, were evicted from workers’ encampments. The strike committee proposed contributing funds as collateral to guarantee that the workers’ rents were covered, but Andrew Mellon, the Treasury Secretary for the federal government and a factory owner himself, rejected this proposal. In Pittsburgh, twelve thousand people were evicted in this manner. They inhabited areas around Pittsburgh, living inside boxes made out of planks and roofing felt. Each day, the strike committee was able to hand out only nine cents – eighteen kopecks – per head to the workers and their families. Mellon, a factory owner and the Treasury Secretary, was supported by the American Federation of Labor. This was talked about even in the Senate.

Senator Hiram Johnson gave this report to the Senate:

“We saw thousands of women and children literally starving to death. We saw hundreds of destitute families living in crudely constructed shacks that were hastily knocked together.”

Senator Reed, from the state of Pennsylvania, confirmed every word spoken by Hiram Johnson. In *Ivning World* [*The Evening World*], a newspaper that is by no means revolutionary, it was written:

“. . . an antiquated law allows the coal companies to hire people at their own expense, without any monitoring on the part of the authorities, to outfit them in police uniforms, and to arm them with revolvers and billy clubs . . . plain-clothes detectives and security guards themselves throw gas bombs so as to provoke acts of violence and justify their existence on the company’s payroll. Indeed, an official investigation has established that many of the officials in the special police force, who find themselves in the employ of the coal companies, have a criminal past.”

Even Fannie Hurst, from the Hearst Press, wrote:

“. . . such a situation, where families that have been thrown out of their homes are now living like dogs in barracks and kennels, right next to their vacant homes, runs counter to any feeling of civilization.”

Fannie Hurst stated:

“. . . incipient Red Bolshevism is stalking these mining camps . . . Children are born and reared into abhorrence of the present conditions. Civilization . . .”

Workers from the American Federation of Labor, did you read about this!? Or is this also a “private matter,” like the “private” police of Mister Mellon!?

If only the dead could hear this! And if only the dead could tell us about themselves! It’s a very cruel rule that neither the one nor the other can hear this!

In the state of Pennsylvania, in the Allegheny Mountains, there are blizzards like the ones that we have in Russia in the Vologda and Pskov regions. In the valleys between the mountain tops, the towers of mine shafts can be seen, jutting out of the ground. They are silent because for a long time now the land here has ceased to quiver with the jolts from coal-cutting machines. The rails are covered with snow. Coal residue is lying on the ground around the rails. Nighttime security lights are swaying in the wind, strewing the sense of being abandoned and orphaned. The wind is howling dolefully in the winch cables. During daylight, everything here looks destitute from coal dust, dust from the same coal that drove trains across the plains and the mountains and that powered ships across the oceans, dust from the same coal that heated fireplaces and the feet of those who were warming themselves in front of those fireplaces, dust from the same coal that miners excavated for kilometers across the land. But

now it's nighttime, the land is enveloped in the solitude of electric lights and the creaking of winches that have turned silent. Near the stone-dead mine shafts, police whistles can be heard calling out to each other. But on the mountain slopes, above the mine shafts, beyond the mine shafts, bonfires across from hovels were emitting smoke into the air. These were the hovels of those people who had been evicted from their homes. The bonfires were emitting smoke in the same way that for centuries they had emitted smoke on the highroads travelled by vagabonds. People who had been evicted from their homes were sleeping in these hovels. Picketers were sitting around the bonfires, keeping watch over the night. These were workers. They were silent, warming themselves at the bonfires. Their caps were pulled down low over their foreheads. The rails in the narrow passages of these Allegheny Mountains were covered by snow drifts. But beyond these narrow passages there were direct routes leading from New York to Chicago and Los Angeles, from Los Angeles to New York. Trains were speeding along these routes, trains that were called *The Twentieth Century*, trains that paid a dollar to their passengers for every minute that they ran late. Because time – is money! Because one can't be late in New York, where . . . more! more! more! . . .

But if one were to stray from these direct routes, which are not covered by snow and that are fenced off from the natural environment by advertisements for things, if one were to have some sense knocked into them and head north, for example, to the state of North Dakota, to the American forests, to the truly natural environment, then they would see how, at each of their noble-minded conventions, representatives from the United States timber industry have requested, first of all, that an embargo be placed upon Soviet lumber, arguing that Soviet lumber has been hewn by the hands of exiled convicts. But freedom-loving America cannot use forced labor! If one were to come to America's natural environment . . . they would see forests, forests, and more forests. The nature of Jack London. And so it's nighttime, just before dawn. Fir trees, larches, cedars, snow. And at dawn, coming out of the hovels of barracks, people are going to work, those people who get paid twenty dollars a month. Here, besides the clerk, there are not any native-born Americans. Here there are Latvians, Lithuanians, and Belorussians. These people work on a contract: they get a bunk in the hovel, grub, twenty dollars pay a month, and they get to work from dawn to dusk. These people speak hardly any English. It's not clear what language they're speaking, lumping together Russian, Polish, Latvian, Estonian. These people have been living here for years. At dawn today, an incident occurred. Five days ago, the clerk beat up a worker, a youngster. This youngster had already been working here for many months. At the end of each month, this youngster ended up owing the office money for those purchases that the office had made in town on this youngster's behalf. On the evening when the clerk beat him up, this youngster was lying on his bunk in the barracks, apparently in delirium. His chest was sunken, he was coughing a lot, and he was talking to himself that evening, bothering his neighbors. People got tired of this, and he was told to stop coughing and stop mumbling. That night the youngster escaped from the camp. Five days later, at dawn, the police on horseback brought him back to the camp. This was an incident because a man entered the forests who had been there, beyond the forests. The youngster lay down on his former bunk. The clerk was very tender and affectionate. The workers poured themselves coffee from out of the pot. The workers were standing around the coffee pot, speaking in hushed tones about how, rest assured, they were glad not to be in his shoes during this battle, if he took it into his head to break the contract! The *boss* had good reason to be so tender and affectionate. The workers went over to the

youngster's bunk, sat down on the adjacent bunk, and started asking him questions out of genuine curiosity:

“Well, so how are things over there? Tell us plainly, how are things over there in town? You were in town, weren't you? Where did you go?!”

The youngster lifted up his head and said guiltily:

“I wasn't in town. For five days I just wandered around in the forests. I wanted to cross the border into Canada . . .”

“You mean to say that you weren't in town!? Oh, what a fool you are . . . well then, you really are a *trempe* [tramp]! . . .”

Dawn was breaking, it was getting light. People were finishing up their coffee, poured from out of a jug, and setting out to go work in the forest.

. . . if one were to lose one's way on routes that are not covered by snow and that are fenced off from the natural environment by advertisements for things, if one were to have some sense knocked into them and head not to the north, but to the south, there, in the states of Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, in East Virginia and West Virginia, in North Carolina and South Carolina, in Alabama, Georgia, and so on, there, Negroes are working, ten million Negroes (in the United States, there are twelve million of them in all), an entire state within a state. We have already recounted how Negroes live. On December 26, 1930, that is, on the second day of the Christian observance, in the West, of the feast of Christmas, a telegram from Jacksonville, Florida, was published in American newspapers:

FLIRTING WITH A NURSE'S AIDE (the heading is in bold face)

“Timothy Rouse, a 24-year-old Negro, was working at a local hospital on Davis Island. Accused of having a flirtation with a White woman who worked as a nurse's aide at the same hospital and of having molested her, the Negro was arrested and thrown in jail. Soon an enormous mob of people gathered outside the jail. Having obtained the release of Timothy Rouse, this mob abducted him, driving him out of town and into some woods. There, a doctor who was part of the mob performed a castration operation upon him under general anesthesia. Immediately following that operation, an ambulance was summoned, and the victim was transported to a Jim Crow hospital for medical treatment.”

This is a fact! . . . This is a fact, although it is madness! Ten percent of American workers are Negroes. Dallas, Milwaukee . . . by whose hands were these cities built? . . . In Milwaukee, the Negro Labor League invited Milwaukee's socialists to their conference. The “Socialist” Party flatly refused to do the same, for the simple reason that the Negro labor movement is not a labor movement, but a racial movement. This is a fact! . . . a fact, although it is madness!

And so: more than half of the supply of all the gold that humankind has dug up on earth is in America. Half of all the institutions of higher learning on earth are in America. Half of the electric energy harnessed around the globe is consumed in America. Eighty percent of the automobiles around the globe are to be found in America. The deepest underground burrows dug for municipal subways and the tallest buildings constructed in the world – buildings that have so crushed, strangled, and dug through New York, in particular, that it's impossible to live there – are to be found in America. And so on, and so on, and so forth. This is what all of this *O'kei: An American Novel* is devoted to.

And so: at eight o'clock in the morning on October 29, 1929, the financial crisis began, a crisis that has been commented upon by the entire globe because America was the master of the capitalist part of the globe and because everything – the largest, the most unsurpassed, the most record-setting – is to be found in America.

Everything that has been written above, all the verbs in this novel, *O'kei*, must be placed, must be transferred – grammatically – to the past tense: all of this, besides the financial crisis, “was,” all of this “did hap-pen.” My fellow Russian countryman Pavel Svinin is right:

“The rapid changes this land has made in all areas and the giant steps it has taken have made even the most fair-minded details written before this epoch seem incredible.”

At eight o'clock in the morning on October 29, 1929, as has been noted in the annals of history, America's latest financial crisis began.

From the first two jolts, from the first two subterranean-volcanic-social tremors (as Americans assure us) that took place at the Wall Street stock exchange on October 29, 1929 and on November 13, 1929, America was flung into a financial crisis. The stock market – these are figures, numbers. During the period between October 24th and November 13th, people on the stock market lost – the stock market lost – fifty billion dollars, a hundred billion rubles. They vanished into thin air. This sum of money is twice as large as the amount of the national debt of that selfsame U.S.A. in 1920, the year when the national debt of the U.S.A. was at its largest. This sum of money is equal to the national budget of Imperial Russia over the course of fifty years, if we take the year 1913 as the norm. This sum of money is equal to the national budget of the United States over the course of seven years, if we take that selfsame American year of 1929 as the norm. Stocks of the General Motors (automobile) company, for example, which were worth 4,159,770,000 dollars (4 billion!) on the stock market on, let us say, October 15th, were worth 1,617,750,000 dollars (1 billion!) on November 11th, having fallen in value by 2,542,020,000 dollars (2 billion!): two and a half billion dollars – five billion rubles – that is two and a half times the annual national budgets of Imperial Russia in the years 1912 and 1913.

Stock prices were falling:

Name of the stocks	Top price	Price on October 29	Price on November 3
American Foreign Power	199	55	--
Auburn	514	100	120
Westinghouse	299	100	--
Dupont	234	80	--
Int. Combustion	103	8	--
Webster Eisenlohr	113	4	--
United Corporation	75	24	19
United States Steel	261	167	150
General Motors	93	33	31
General Electric	403	210	186
John Manville	242	107	90
Houston Oil	109	26	--
Radio	114	26	--
Americ. Water Works	199	65	59

The names of fourteen major companies on the stock exchange have been listed here: exactly seven out of the fourteen, as can be seen from this listing, no longer had any value on November 13th. If we are to believe the American statistics, which maintain that there were twenty million stockholders in America at the time, then on average each stockholder (shareholder and so on), each one, had occasion to lose two thousand five hundred and fifty dollars. But the stock market tallied (by means of its ticker tape!) that during those days of geologically earth-shaking tremors on Wall Street 1,018,453,400 (1 billion!) different stocks exchanged hands to the astronomical sum of 125 billion dollars. 125 billion dollars – that is the same amount of money that there is in the American national budget over seventeen years and eight months. That is more money than there is in a century’s worth (the nineteenth century, for instance) of the national budgets of England, France, and Germany combined.

Uoll-strit is written “Wall Street” in English. Its literal translation means “Embankment Street,” “Wall Street.” It is along here that a New York seawall once ran, when New York still belonged to the Dutch and was called New Amsterdam. Skyscrapers and oceans began to sway from Wall Street’s earthquakes, especially during the early days and especially in the offices of *marzhinisty* [marginists].

Following American financial practice, a *marzhin* [margin] is the loan against shares of stock that a person who wishes to purchase those shares receives in advance through the mediation of a professional stock market middle-man called a broker. The potential investors who wish to purchase those shares of stock are called *marzhinisty*. A potential investor has two thousand dollars. He borrows eight thousand dollars from a broker and purchases securities for ten thousand dollars. The securities are registered in the name of the investor, but they are kept on deposit with the broker. The broker takes a certain percentage for himself. All the gains and losses from these securities, all the liability for them, rest upon the investor. If a security cost a hundred dollars at the time of the transaction (of these one hundred dollars, only twenty

actually belong to the investor) and if this security increases in value to a hundred and fifty dollars, then the investor has earned fifty dollars on his twenty dollars. If this security falls in value from a hundred dollars down to fifty dollars, the investor not only loses his twenty dollars, but he also has to pay his broker thirty dollars in addition, or else go out and hang himself.

Wall Street is a crooked, ancient, obsolete street (the only ancient street remaining in New York). Wall Street snarled, baring its canine teeth of skyscrapers at the sky and at the ocean. But the stock exchange is a two-storied building, and skyscrapers lose their proportions, without infringing upon the style of medieval solemnity of Wall (and Walled) Street.

It was the month of October, the time of year when different romances begin. In Paris, in Monaco, the theater season had just begun. In Egypt, the sweltering heat had subsided and the pyramids had now become accessible for tourist travelers. Steamers were crossing the ocean from America. Aboard the steamers, ticker tapes were working. Rich folk were sailing from America to see the pyramids and to spend some of the theater season in Paris, after finding peace of mind while resting in Monaco and amidst European culture. As the steamers were approaching Europe, hundreds of these rich folk from America knew that they didn't have their own personal dollar with which to pay the porter because they were not only bankrupt, but also in debt. Bunin's story, *The Gentleman from San Francisco*, conceived a different fate for rich folk. The ships were carrying to foreign shores the corpses of people, of Americans, who had not passed away aboard a steamer but had put a pistol to their head and shot themselves dead because they, these Americans, had been millionaires yesterday, but they awoke as beggars today. These gentlemen from San Francisco of American "fortuity!"

It was raining in New York during this time. The gunshot sounds of New York's rainy nights were interwoven with the oceanic gunshots coming from the pistols of people committing suicide.

A deathly silence always sets in following the thunderclap sounds made by a landslide or a cave-in. In the midst of just such a silence, a council of bankers gathered together inside their Wall Street offices. John Morgan sat down next to Kuhn Loeb. They told the world and America that everyone needed to calm down. President Hoover and Treasury Secretary Mellon (coal mines!) met in the silence of their White House offices. They told America and the world that everyone needed to calm down: first of all, because not all of the twenty million stock holders suffered from the earthquakes of the financial crisis; secondly, because the stock market crisis was prompted mainly by the excessive flow of capital into the stock exchange turnover; and, thirdly, because from that moment when stock market speculation ceased, it was possible for a number of enterprises to create the foundation for a new period of "flourishing," that is to say, a new period of *prosperiti* [prosperity].

Hoover and Morgan were proposing a period of calm, of peace and quiet.

I arrived in America right in the middle of this period of calm, of peace and quiet. It is still here even today. And so I am addressing myself to the day labor, the work paid by the day, of the current period of American calm, of peace and quiet, which had been proposed by Hoover,

who promised that a number of enterprises would provide the foundation for a future period of *prosperiti*. I am deliberately not systematizing my materials here so as to give them to you in the context of the daily rounds of everyday life, just as each today generally takes its normal course. Today lives by means of newspapers. So let there be newspapers. I am inserting excerpts from them into my text, just as they happened to find their way into my hands.

“STIMSON ON IMMIGRATION

Washington.

Following a protest launched by Secretary of State Stimson and Secretary of Labor Doak, the Senate Immigration Commission has decided to review Senator Reed’s bill to ban immigration for two years. An exception will be granted only for the immediate family members of legal residents of the United States.

Stimson and Doak reprimanded the Commission, pointing out that it is precisely this exception for next of kin that will give an *unfair* advantage to immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe!

Stimson is advising Congress to reduce all immigration by at least 90 percent.”

“DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION ARE SCARED BY RED MENACE

Boston.

The conference of the ‘Daughters of the American Revolution’ has decreed that it will introduce a bill in Congress to outlaw the Communist Party and also to deport all communists who are natives of other countries. Mrs. Gould announced at the conference that a decline in patriotic spirit is being observed in schools and that it would be well to have teachers swear an oath of allegiance as a sign of their loyalty and patriotism.”

“FORMER MEMBER OF THE WORLD COURT LEVELS CRITICISM

New York.

Mr. John Bassett Moore, a former American judge at the World Court, spoke before the Association of New York Lawyers and delivered a sharp critique of the government’s position toward the Soviet Union. Although he did not directly demand diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union in his speech, he did point out that such recognition would be entirely in keeping with American historical traditions, because the American government had been one of the first to recognize the regime of the French Revolution at the end of the XVIII century. Moore criticized the activity of the congressional committee headed by Representative Fish for its investigation into communism in America, pointing out that the agitation stirred up by the work of this committee actually serves to support communism. Mr. Moore believes that diplomatic recognition of the Soviets and trade with them would mitigate the financial crisis.”

“DURING THE PAST TEN MONTHS THERE HAVE BEEN 19,818 BANKRUPTCIES!

The indebtedness of the 19,818 firms that have gone bankrupt during the past ten months amounts to 744 million dollars.”

“THE BANK OF UNITED STATES HAS CLOSED. THE BANK HAD 59 BRANCHES IN NEW YORK, 400,000 DEPOSITORS, AND HOLDINGS OF AROUND 203 MILLION DOLLARS. THE MOST PROMINENT AMERICAN BANKERS CONFERRED ALL NIGHT TO DISCUSS WAYS TO PREVENT ANY FURTHER CRISIS. STATE AUTHORITIES ARE REVIEWING THE BUSINESS DEALINGS OF THE BANK OF UNITED STATES

The bank did not open its doors yesterday morning and remained closed all day. Crowds of depositors, disquieted by panicky rumors about the bank’s insolvency, began to flock toward the doors of its branch offices as early as the evening before last. Depositors stood in lines at the doors all night long. Reinforced police details were dispatched. At the doors of the branch offices the next morning, there appeared a notice, announcing that state authorities were conducting an investigation into the oversight and regulation of the bank.

In addition to the depositors, the most prominent New York bankers did not sleep all night either, as they discussed measures for averting a panic at other banks.

The bank, in all of its New York branch offices, numbers around 400,000 depositors, mainly retailers, artisans, skilled workers, housewives, and people of modest means.

The panic started the evening before last in the Bronx after one of the retailers there brought his shares of bank stock to his local branch office and requested that the branch manager buy them back from him. The branch manager started trying to talk the retailer out of the idea of selling his shares. And that was sufficient. The retailer set off to tell his relatives, friends, and acquaintances that the bank was not able to buy its own private shares of stock. At that same hour, depositors ran off to the branch offices of the bank and started to demand their deposits back. But their fate had already been sealed.”

“DEPOSITORS OF THE BANK OF UNITED STATES ORGANIZE COMMITTEES

Depositors at the Bank of United States, which closed its doors several days ago, have organized a number of committees and have hired an attorney to defend their rights.”

“MAYOR WALKER CALLS UPON DEPOSITORS NOT TO WITHDRAW THEIR FUNDS FROM THE BANKS

‘The public is worrying for nothing about the savings they have given over to the banks,’ says Mr. Walker, the Mayor of the city of New York. ‘The financial system of the United States ensures the safety of deposits. The municipal

government is depositing a large sum of money into the Manufacturers Trust Company today.’

‘The Manufacturers Trust company,’ says Mayor Walker, ‘is one of the banks from which a large number of people withdrew their savings last week. For short-term promissory notes alone, this bank in the course of the past few days has had to pay out 40 million dollars.’”

“BATTLE ON 3rd AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

Right in front of building No. 327 on 3rd Avenue, a charitable dining hall that provides meals free of charge, a crowd of up to 4,000 unemployed workers stood in an endless line, waiting in anticipation of vacant seats. The police started to establish order. Billy clubs, as per usual, were put into use. The reason for the clashes between the unemployed workers and the police is not known. Traffic on 3rd Avenue was held up for almost an hour due to the battle between the unemployed workers and the police.”

“INDUSTRIALISTS AGAIN DEMAND AN EMBARGO ON SOVIET MANGANESE

Washington.

The American Manganese Producers Association has turned to Congress with the demand that it impose an embargo on Soviet manganese, arguing that the sale of manganese on the part of the Soviets constitutes an instance of dumping, which intensifies the American financial crisis.”

“SIX HUNDRED BANKS HAVE DECLARED BANKRUPTCY

According to statistics provided by the administration of the Federal Reserve Bank, during the course of the last eight months 600 banks have declared bankruptcy, having disposed of deposits to the sum of 266,000,000 dollars. In just the past two days, 73 banks in the states of Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa have either declared bankruptcy or defaulted on payments. For the year 1930, there were, in all, 1,100 bank bankruptcies with losses in the sum of 565 million dollars.”

“CHELSEA BANK IN NEW YORK HAS CLOSED

5 branches in Manhattan. 1 branch in Brooklyn. 14 million dollars in deposits.”

“19 BRANCH OFFICES OF THE BANKERS TRUST COMPANY IN PHILADELPHIA HAVE CLOSED”

“DEPOSITOR AT THE BANK OF UNITED STATES COMMITS SUICIDE

David Polyak, a retailer, committed suicide by throwing himself out of a tenth-floor window. The reason for the suicide was his devastation in connection with the bankruptcy of the Bank of United States.”

“BATTLE AGAINST FEMALE SMOKERS

Boston.

A league to battle against smoking among girls has been formed here. The president of this league is Mrs. R. Williams.”

“SENATOR FISH HAS FOUND THE GUILTY PARTY!”

Washington.

In a speech before Congress, the leader of the congressional committee investigating communism in the United States announced that he considers the trailblazer of the communist movement in America to be Sen Katayama, a Japanese chef who is currently hiding from America in Moscow.”

“NEW SECRETARY OF LABOR PROMISES TO ELIMINATE GANGSTERISM IN THE COUNTRY”

The new Secretary of Labor promises that he will take all the necessary measures to strengthen the battle against the criminal world, which has advanced a whole series of prominent names, such as Capone, Rothstein, and others, who are openly conducting criminal activity in the country. The secretary intends to eliminate this excessively powerful band of gangsters by his favorite method, which he applies mainly to workers: namely, by the deportation of foreigners who are gangsters.”

“PEOPLE ARE PROTESTING AGAINST THE BAN ON IMMIGRATION”

Washington.

A number of social organizations have appeared to testify before the Senate’s Immigration Commission. One of these organizations pointed out that in 1929 immigrants sent 247 million dollars home to their relatives in Europe. If these relatives had come to the United States, this money would have remained inside the country. One of the congressmen quipped that this was before October 29th. The Commission is endorsing an immigration ban, which it will be reporting to Congress.”

“GANGSTER TONY VOLPE IS CAPTURED”

Chicago.

Immigration authorities have arrested Tony Volpe, the racketeer who is the biggest gangster after Capone. These authorities intend to deport him to Italy, the country whence he came 25 years ago.”

“ROUND-UPS OF IMMIGRANTS AT THE ORDER OF DOAK”

New York.

In the port of New York, round-ups are being conducted of immigrants who are being sent off to Ellis Island (the Island of Tears).”

“DEPORTATION OF ABNORMAL IMMIGRANTS”

Beacon, N.Y.

A resolution to deport all mentally abnormal immigrants has been passed. The head of the Matteawan Hospital reports that 35 percent of all the patients under

his treatment there have such psychological abnormalities, that is, about 400 people.”

“THE CONFESSION OF A POLICEMAN: A TRUE STORY

(a short narrative, a true-life incident)

‘We’ve never had as much work as we do now,’ said the *kap* [cop]. ‘And the main thing isn’t that people who have never had a *kriminal rekord* [criminal record] are now turning into gangsters. It’s understandable: a man has a wife and kids, and there’s nothing to eat. What disturbs us more are the psychological aspects. For example, a *boi* [boy] comes up to us and asks: ‘Where is there a *spik-izi* [speak-easy] around here?’ The whole psychology here is that sometimes you can’t decide whether he truly wants to have a drink and you should show the guy a good place where he could do that. Or else: is he looking to get into trouble so that he won’t have to get wet in the rain and can instead spend the night at the police station? Yesterday, for example, I was driving to a detour on my motorcycle. I drove up to the post of a buddy of mine. We’re standing there talking. It’s dark, it’s nighttime. A guy comes up to us. He’s about twenty-eight years old, unshaven, not wearing a coat, and he asks us: ‘Where is there a *spik-izi* [speak-easy] around here?’ My buddy understood at once what was going on. He gave the guy a slight shove and told him to get lost, or else he would arrest him! He had given him just a slight shove, but the guy couldn’t keep his balance and he fell over. From the ground, he says: ‘That’s just what I want: for you to arrest me!’ And I could hear tears in his voice. It became clear that the *boi* hadn’t eaten all day long and now had nowhere to sleep.’”

“REMEDIES FOR UNEMPLOYMENT

Detroit, Michigan.

An apple, as we know, was the original initiator of all our earthly afflictions. For a long time, the apple didn’t play any kind of historical role. But at present the historical fate of being America’s savior from the financial crisis has fallen upon the apple. The government thinks that this is the way to help the unemployed. Fruit growers are supporting this government initiative on the part of Mister Hoover. Slogans have appeared and patriotic propaganda has poured out, calling for the mass purchase of apples from unemployed workers out on the streets. Municipal authorities in all our cities have noted that on every street corner there are places for the sale of apples by unemployed workers. Yes, but when are all these apples going to be eaten!?”

“CAPONE, THROUGH THE MARRIAGE OF HIS SISTER, TRIES TO GET RID OF THE STRIFE BETWEEN GANGSTERS

Chicago.

A wedding took place here between gangster Capone’s sister, Mafalda, and one of the gangster chieftains, who up until this time has been feuding with Capone. Mafalda is 18 years old. She appeared in church holding a bouquet of 400 lilies in her hands.”

“HOOVER CONSIDERS OUR NORMAL LIVING AND RECREATIONS AS THE WAY FOR US TO BE SAVED FROM THE CRISIS

Washington.

In his annual address on the State of the Union, presented at the opening session of Congress, President Hoover declared that it's not the government enacting legislation, but only the people pursuing their 'normal living and recreations' that will help us in our battle against the current economic crisis. He pointed out that the federal government, all the same, is prepared to allocate 150 million dollars to public works projects for the battle against unemployment that is taking shape. Hoover also advised Congress to strengthen the laws on the deportation of undesirable immigrants. While Hoover was delivering his address, the streets surrounding the Capitol were being guarded by reinforced detachments of police officers who were armed with rifles in the event that there might be a recurrence of the recent demonstration by communists.”

“MUNICIPAL LODGING HOUSE WAS EQUAL TO ITS TASK

There was a day last week when 2,587 people, 56 of them women and 11 of them children, suddenly turned to the city's shelter for the homeless – the Municipal Lodging House – for assistance. This was the biggest day since the day the shelter was opened, but it was equal to the task. On this one day, these unemployed workers were fed at 27 food stations called 'bread lines.' They found shelter at 17 missions and at 9 social organizations that had mobilized their resources for assisting the unemployed.”

“THE MAGAZINE ‘YOUNG WORKER’ IS DENIED POSTAL MAILING”

“THE PRESIDENT IS GIVEN A REQUEST TO AID THE UNEMPLOYED SIGNED WITH 100 THOUSAND SIGNATURES”

“BANKRUPTCY IS DECLARED BY 4 PARTNERED COMPANIES OF THE BANK OF UNITED STATES”

“APPLE SELLERS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED UNEMPLOYED IN THE NEW CENSUS”

“IN SING SING PRISON THE TWO BOLGER BROTHERS, 19 AND 20, AND ITALO FERDINANDI, 22, ARE PUT TO DEATH IN THE ELECTRIC CHAIR”

“TIMBER DEALERS OF THE UNITED STATES RISE UP IN ARMS AGAINST THE USSR”

“THE NUMBER OF MARRIAGES HAS DECREASED AS A RESULT OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS”

“THE POLICE ARE HUNTING FOR THE CRIMINAL ELEMENT AMONG IMMIGRANTS”

“9 MARCHES BY STARVING UNEMPLOYED WORKERS WILL BE ORGANIZED”

“NEXT WEEK WILL BE MARKED BY MASS MARCHES OF STARVING UNEMPLOYED WORKERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY”

“AN EXPEDITION IS BEING OUTFITTED TO SEARCH FOR AN ANDROGYNOUS TRIBE OF NEGROES

Los Angeles.

Doctor Arthur Torrance, a specialist in the study of tropical diseases, has flown to New York. From there, the scientist is leaving for Africa. Arthur Torrance intends to organize an African expedition to Lake Chad. According to the scientist's hypothesis, a tribe of androgynous Negroes has been living near this lake. This is already the third time that the scientist has been going on this expedition. In 1924 and 1926, he did not succeed in reaching Lake Chad. The expedition is being financed by the Society of Tropical Medicine.”

“YESTERDAY THREE LEADERS OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS WERE TRIED IN COURT

Yesterday, in a courtroom near the Tombs prison, a review took place of the case against Sam Nesin, Robert Lealess, and Milton Stone, three activist leaders of a movement among the mass of unemployed workers who were seeking some improvement in their situation. They were demanding a government program of social security and passage of a law that would prevent unemployed workers from being thrown out of their apartments and onto the street for non-payment of their rent. These three defendants had at one time been elected by 800,000 unemployed workers who had organized their own labor councils. By the time of the trial, the district was filled with masses of unemployed workers and was being guarded by police officers mounted on horseback.”

“UNEMPLOYED APPLE SELLERS HAVE BEEN CHASED OUT OF FASHIONABLE DISTRICTS OF NEW YORK”

“NEGROES AND WHITE UNEMPLOYED WORKERS HAVE JOINED FORCES

Charlotte, North Carolina.

More than a thousand unemployed workers joined forces during a hunger march to the local *siti-kholl* [city hall]. The city's mayor had the police, who were armed with baseball bats, tear gas bombs, and firearms, advance upon the workers. The police were hoping to incite racial animosity between the White and Black workers. They did not succeed in doing this. A clash ensued as the police attacked the Negroes. The White workers interceded on behalf of their

proletarian comrades. A worker named Binkley addressed the workers, giving a speech that called upon them to join together in the class struggle.”

“A MAN STANDING IN BREAD LINES COMMITS SUICIDE

After receiving notification from his landlord that he would be evicted from his apartment for non-payment of rent, Delicio Dischito, 38 years old, committed suicide by means of gas poisoning. In a suicide note, he wrote that ‘standing in bread lines – this is a slow death from emaciation.’ And he requested that his coat be given to some other unemployed worker.”

“DECEASED MAN WILL READ HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT TO HIS HEIRS FROM A MOVIE SCREEN

Birmingham businessman X has decided that after his death he will nonetheless personally read out his last will and testament to his heirs. The businessman filmed himself reading his last will and testament in a speaking film, a ‘talkie.’ Moreover, he specified ahead of time which armchairs in the room his relatives should sit in. This speech from beyond the grave is constructed in such a way that the testator addresses himself singly to each of his heirs in turn.”

“FOR A TOTAL CESSATION OF IMMIGRATION INTO THE UNITED STATES

Washington.

The Immigration Commission in the House of Representatives has approved in principle the draft for a plan to put in place a total cessation of immigration into the United States for a period of two years.”

“AL CAPONE THE BENEFACTOR

Chicago.

Al Capone has opened a *breadlains* (a literal translation is “bread line”) where bread and soup are handed out free to unemployed workers. Al Capone is feeding unemployed workers three times a day. Up to three thousand starving workers pass through his bread line each day. It is important to note that Al Capone has requested that his bread line not be guarded by the police. There has not been a single incident there thus far.”

“FISH IS MAKING HEADWAY

Senator Fish, who has received a great amount of publicity following the work of his commission investigating communism in the United States – a commission, incidentally, that is more often called not the Fish Commission, but the Fish Comedy – spoke at Carnegie Hall in New York City yesterday. Sympathetic sighs could be heard coming from the direction of his listeners when Fish spoke about the poor policemen who sometimes are even bitten by women and children when the guardians of law and order have occasion to defend themselves from the revolutionaries. Fish said: ‘Communism stands before the court of history to the same degree as does capitalism. Capitalism can learn much from the socialist experiments taking place in the Soviet Union. If capitalism wants to be victorious

in its struggle for existence against communism, then it should protect its own house, as the communists are doing.’ Fish demanded the expulsion of all Reds and the embargo of all Soviet goods. One of Fish’s opponents pointed out how impracticable Fish’s proposals are, arguing in favor of his own contention by noting that if all the ‘Reds’ were to be expelled, the country and the capitalists could be left without any workers.”

“500 FARMERS WITH GUNS IN HAND DEMAND BREAD

State of Kansas.

500 farmers showed up in town armed with guns, demanding food and clothing for their wives and children.”

“SUICIDE OF AN UNEMPLOYED WORKER

Philadelphia.

Unemployed worker Anatole Wilson, 21 years of age, committed suicide, leaving behind a last will and testament in which he asks that his corpse be sold for 20 dollars to the university for the purposes of scientific research and that 18 of these dollars be used to pay off his creditors.”

“CRIMINALS OR MEXICANS!?”

Los Angeles.

On maps of Mexico found in Mexican geography textbooks, the states of Texas, Arizona, California, and New Mexico are pictured. The inscription reads: ‘This is our homeland, unjustly taken away from us by the United States during the War of 1846-48.’ This is what Mexicans think in regard to these lands. But the American authorities do not think this way. For them, Mexicans are immigrants. The Mexican colonies within these Mexican states are now being terrorized by the wave of arrests and deportations of Mexicans back to Mexico. Trains loaded with deported immigrants are traveling to the Mexican border all the time. In nearly every Mexican village, letters with the following contents are being passed from hand to hand: ‘I, Diego or Rodrigo Such-and-Such, am currently sitting in jail in such-and-such a town, and the authorities here agree to release me if I can get the money to pay for a ticket to travel to the Mexican border.’ The American authorities support their argument in defense of this harsh treatment of deportees by making reference to the purported fact that criminals abound amidst these Mexican colonies.”

“POLICE BEAT UP WORKERS IN ELIZABETH”

“UNEMPLOYED WORKERS DEMAND IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR NIGHT QUARTERS”

“NEW LEGISLATIVE BILLS TO BAN IMMIGRATION”

“NEW YORK’S KING OF GANGSTERS, JACK DIAMOND, IS ARRESTED, CHARGED WITH YET ANOTHER MURDER”

“A PETITION FROM UNEMPLOYED WORKERS

Milwaukee.

Unemployed workers appealed to City Hall with a petition that, in order to feed their family, they be given the funds that were allocated by the city to build a new jail. The petition was rejected by the municipal authorities.”

“PANIC AMIDST THE CAPITALISTS

James McDonald, the head of the American Foreign Policy Association, announced at a conference of pastors in New York: ‘The main threat to the capitalist world comes not from communist propaganda or from Soviet dumping, but from the fact that there are no leaders among the capitalists themselves; instead there is panic, doubts, and uncertainty.’”

“A NUMBER OF DEMONSTRATIONS BY UNEMPLOYED WORKERS ARE TAKING PLACE TODAY IN NEW YORK”

“HOOVER DELAYS ASSISTANCE TO UNEMPLOYED WORKERS”

“MASS RALLY BY UNEMPLOYED WORKERS TODAY IN MADISON SQUARE GARDEN”

“IN OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA, A MOB OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS, NUMBERING 1,000 MEN, SEIZED FOOD SHOPS”

“LADY-MILLIONAIRESSES HELP UNEMPLOYED WORKERS – BY TELEPHONE

Elizabeth, New Jersey.

At the suggestion of the Chamber of Commerce, the wives of local millionaires have come up with an amusing way of helping unemployed workers. These ladies from high society make telephone calls to unfamiliar but wealthy gentlemen, they introduce themselves to these gentlemen over the phone, and they ask them to be so kind as to do them, the ladies, a favor: namely, to give a job to one or two unemployed workers. In this way, around 30 unemployed workers have received permanent jobs that were open.”

“BLOODY BATTLE AT CITY HALL

New York City.

Yesterday at around twelve o’clock noon, on the square in front of City Hall, where a march by unemployed workers was taking place, a bloody battle broke out between workers and police. The march by unemployed workers selected its delegates, who set off to see the Deputy Mayor, Charles Kerrigan. The unemployed workers came to a halt so that they could wait for a while for their delegates. The police demanded that the demonstration break up. The workers refused. A bloody battle ensued. Numerous arrests were made.”

“GANGSTER KING, JACK DIAMOND, IS ACQUITTED AND RELEASED.
Troy, New York.

A jury has acquitted Jack Diamond, nicknamed ‘Long Legs.’ Diamond was accused of torturing a farmer named Grover Parks with fire and by hanging him by his feet. On the basis of the verdict reached by the members of the jury, the king was released immediately. During his criminal career, Diamond has been arrested 25 times, but each time he has quickly gone free.”

“DURING A STRIKE BY COAL MINERS IN A PITTSBURGH DISTRICT IN JUNE AND JULY OF 1931, 876 PEOPLE ARE ARRESTED”

“GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND MOBILIZES TROOPS AGAINST STRIKING WEAVERS.”

“A STRING OF NIGHTTIME ROBBERIES IN NEW YORK”

“SHOOTINGS, MURDERS, AND ROBBERIES IN JERSEY CITY”

“SIX MASKED GUNMEN ROB A TRAIN AND GO INTO HIDING”

“NEW WOMEN’S PROFESSIONS

Here is one of them. In large stores, a person is available, a saleswoman, who takes care of brides and grooms as they are setting up their future home. It is this female caretaker’s duty to handle the purchases for people who have little experience in family life or who do not have the time to devote proper attention to such purchases. This female caretaker rigorously steers the buyers in the direction of their own interests. She picks out everything for the young couple: not just the wallpaper for the dining room, but even the garland of *fleur d’orange* for the bride.”

“INTERVIEW WITH MR. AL CAPONE

. . . Bolshevism is knocking at our gates. We can’t afford to let it in. We have got to organize ourselves against it, and put our shoulders together and hold fast. We must keep America whole, and safe, and unspoiled. If machines are going to take jobs away from the worker, then he will need to find something else to do. Perhaps he’ll get back to the soil? In any case, we must take care of the worker, look after him, in this current period of disturbances. We must not allow him to fall into the maelstrom. We must keep the worker away from Red literature and Red allurements; we must see to it that his mind remains healthy.”

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NEWSPAPER HUMOR!

“TWO SHIRTS”

- Due to yesterday’s collapse of the Clippety-Clop [Tsok-Tsok] Automobile Company, I lost my last shirt.
- But you said the very same thing ten days ago when the Clippety-Clip [Klots-Klots] Aircraft Company collapsed.
- Yes. But that was my last silk shirt. Now I’ve lost my last linen shirt.

“STRANGE BEHAVIOR”

Doctor: – When did you notice the first signs of insanity?

Homeowner: – Yesterday, when he wanted me to pay the rent.

“FOUL BUSINESS”

Customer in a restaurant: – What is it, my dear, that smells so foul here?

Restaurant owner: – What smells so foul here? It’s my business that smells this way: it stinks!

“AMIDST MUSICIANS”

Pianist (to a violinist): – How are things going? In light of the unemployment, you must be having a lot of free time for perfecting your playing?

Violinist: – I’ve been taking my violin back to the pawnshop so often that the owner of the pawnshop plays better than I do.

“END TO DEPRESSION”

– You do know, after all, that the financial crisis has already ended!?

– Really, it has!?

– Yes, absolutely. Depression has ended. Panic has begun!

“HOW TO FIND A STREET IN AMERICA”

– Would you tell me how to get to such-and-such street?

– Turn left, count off two lines of unemployed workers waiting for free soup and turn right. Then count off another three lines of unemployed workers and turn left. There you’ll see a row of houses from which they’re evicting paupers for the non-payment of their apartment rent. That’s the street that you’re looking for.

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One could increase the number of such newspaper clippings a hundred-fold and a thousand-fold. Yes, and one needs to increase them in order to hear that calm, that peace and quiet, that Hoover and Morgan suggested. There is no need to comment on these newspaper clippings. They speak for themselves. Hoover’s wisdom is absolutely clear when he asserts in his address to Congress that “normal lives and recreations” are the guarantee of a future period of American *prosperiti*. These newspaper clippings have shown how Americans actively rid themselves of the financial crisis. As far as American calm, American peace and quiet, are concerned, we spoke about that topic at the beginning of this novel, of *O’kei: An American Novel*. American doctors who have conducted research on the effect of New York noise on the human organism contend that noise from time to time becomes a necessity. Indeed, they contend that it was precisely the human organism’s need for noise that gave birth to jazz. At

the beginning of this novel, I recounted how there is only one thing that is not mechanized in the slaughterhouses of Chicago, and that one thing is betrayal. I have consciously and deliberately published newspaper clippings about mathematical concerts (which pass through into calm, into peace and quiet). But if I'm not providing commentary on the newspaper clippings, this doesn't mean – in any way whatsoever – that one can forget about all the things that I recounted earlier in this novel, in *O'kei: An American Novel*. And one shouldn't forget, above all else, that America, all the same, is the wealthiest, the most powerful, the most technologically advanced country in the world – the most, the most, the most. Thousands of people are now striding in step with the calm, with the peace and quiet, of America. It's not only the marches by unemployed workers. They're walking in disunity, in solitude, not in concert with others. They are to be found everywhere: on "macadamized" highways and on country roads, on prairies and in forests, in towns and in deserts. Their paths meet, intertwine, intersect. They themselves don't know where they're going. These aren't *trempey* [tramps]. These are unemployed workers and people who have lost their minds during the panic. Sometimes they crawl along in their Fords, which are creaking like airplanes. Sometimes they float on rafts down the Missouri River and the Mississippi River. Their eyes are like those of the man in California who was digging for gold in a spot that had already been excavated long before. They live in caves, in deserts, on the Bowery. At daybreak, they rummage around in trash cans and garbage pits, searching for scraps.

During the summer of 1931, miners in the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia went out on strike. Later, miners in the states of Illinois and Kentucky joined them. More than a hundred thousand men went out on strike. It would seem illogical: strikes during a year when workers were starving and out of work. But the logic of things, as they actually are, pointed out to the miners that it made more sense to go out on strike and starve than to work and starve. Workers were working in the mines for only two days a week. The mine owners (cabinet member and Republican leader Mellon!) stipulated that workers could only make purchases at the stores owned and operated by the mining company. For two days of work, the workers didn't make enough money to buy bread, so they went hungry and were forced to stick their neck inside the noose of debt made by the mine owners. The workers went out on strike. A hundred thousand men went out on strike because to give battle and die is more honorable than simply to die. And this battle became a life-and-death struggle. Women, old-timers, and teenagers joined this battle. On Union Square in New York, the site of numerous labor protests, I attended a protest march that was organized to show sympathy for the miners' cause. I saw how a young girl from a mining family spoke to the crowd. The daughter of a miner, she was just a little thing, somewhere between thirteen and fifteen years old. After she had mounted the platform and found herself standing in front of thousands of eyes, she became very nervous. She began by mentioning a naïve thing – that in their settlement the movie house had been shut down and that their settlement was being guarded by police. On a holiday, she and a girlfriend of hers ran off secretly, past the police, to the movie house in a neighboring town, which was ten miles away, so that they could see a motion picture. This naïve thing seemed to me more terrible than her own terrible situation. Then she recounted how the miners were affixed to their place of work, how they were forced to buy everything at the one and only store that existed at the mining site. And they had to buy these things not for cash, but for the copper tokens that the mining company issued to them in lieu of money.

I will cite here one press-clipping, a telegram from Pittsburgh:

“Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 28, 1931.

By Sunday, the following statistics about the miners’ strike, and about the persecution of miners on the part of the private police force that belongs to the mine owners, were provided: miners killed – 3; miners seriously injured (possibly fatally injured) – 19; miners beaten with clubs and tear-gassed – more than 2,000; miners arrested . . .”

Theodore Dreiser drove around to visit the sites where strikes were being held. He wrote an appeal that he called “J’accuse.” Dreiser recounted how mounted police were driving miners away even from the sidewalks, completely prohibiting them from walking on the “proprietor’s” asphalt of the roads and streets.

It was morning, swelteringly hot, like a frying pan from the stove, and humid, like a faulty kerosene stove. It was a New York morning, fulminating with all the New York noise, stinking with all the New York odors, jammed with skyscrapers, and drenched with sun. On that morning, I was walking along Lafayette Avenue to building 54. From the windows of this building, a prison is visible on one side and a courthouse on the other. A line of people who were waiting to enter this building stretched for a long way down the street, bending around the corner to turn onto a side street. A conveyor belt of automobiles was crawling down the street. The people waiting in line were standing there in silence. Joe and I entered this building together. There were about a thousand people in the large barracks hall inside this building, the same sort of people as those who were standing in line outside. The premises were cordoned off by ropes and befouled by poverty. There was silence inside the building. The people inside the building were standing, sitting on window sills, sitting on their haunches, sitting on the floor. The clerks, who were sitting behind desks, were bored. On each desk there sat a telephone. From time to time a telephone would ring. The clerk on whose desk the telephone was ringing would get up from the desk and then stand on a chair with a megaphone in his hand. There was no need for a megaphone, however, since a deathly silence would fall upon the barracks, the kind of silence that can only occur in anticipation of something. The clerk, nonetheless, would shout into the megaphone: “A skilled workman is needed to repair a radio cabinet! Two hours of work! Fifty cents an hour!”

I had never known how the expression of hope can be such a pathetic facial expression, one that is humiliating to a person. About three dozen people raised their hands up into the air. They didn’t notice how they were jostling each other aside – work! the hope of getting some work! There is, it appears, no sound more terrible than the sound of human pleading. It’s a pathetic sound, one that’s humiliating to one’s human dignity. People were shouting at the clerk:

“Please, I beg of you! For God’s sake! . . . I’m a skilled workman, a good craftsman!”

“I have a family!”

“Word of honor, I’m a skilled workman, a good craftsman, and I have a sickly daughter!”

Twenty minutes later, another clerk shouts from another desk; he likewise shouts into a megaphone:

“Two men are needed for pruning trees out in the country! One day of work! A dollar and a half a day!”

This was repeated seven times per hour. An hour went by in this manner. Then the first group of a thousand unemployed workers, which had been inside the barracks hall, was asked to leave the building so that they could make way for those people who were waiting outside on the street, the next group of a thousand unemployed workers. So it went daily: every day eight to ten thousand people would pass through the employment office in building 54 on Lafayette Avenue. Two to three percent of the people who came here received some work, jobs for periods of time that ranged from one hour to one full day.

A man whose one hour inside the building had just expired was leaving this job market at the same time as we were. He was about thirty years old, dressed in a jacket, wearing a woolen scarf around his neck instead of a collar, and bareheaded. I invited him to join us for breakfast. This was not in keeping with American conventions. He was confused and embarrassed by our offer. He started to decline the offer. But he came with us.

It was already half a year now that he had been walking the streets, day after day, in search of work. On two occasions, he had “bought” work: that is to say, a private employment office had given him some work on condition that he hand over half of his earnings back to that office. On two occasions, he had landed in the hospital, both times for one and the same reason – from hunger. The first time, they had picked him up while he was waiting in a bread line; the second time, he had collapsed on the street. He remembers that when they were picking him up off the street and putting him into an ambulance, a policeman had said in hushed tones to the orderly: “A starving man.” And then he shouted loudly at a crowd of curious onlookers: “Hey, what are you doing here? Haven’t you ever seen any epileptics before!?” This unemployed worker had been spending the past few nights in the subways. And he had been walking around without a hat, because he had not paid his landlady for his bunk, and the landlady, when she kicked him out, had seized his things.

He said to us: “I have always respected private property, but I can no longer watch while people are eating.” His eyes duplicated the expression on the face of the man prospecting for gold that I had seen in California. This man was very obviously on the edge of physical catastrophe, but also on the edge of moral degeneration as well. He continued to speak: “Suicide, crime, insanity . . . I don’t know . . . I want only one thing: to find some work!”

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That very same day, I went to go see Theodore Dreiser. He had just returned from Pittsburgh. Joe and I went over to his place together at three o’clock. This was several days before my departure from the U.S., so we went to see Dreiser to say good-bye. Since it was summertime,

his things had been stored away and the apartment seemed vacant. Dreiser answered the door and let us in. There was no one at home but him. We took a seat in his empty and enormous study. Every time that I would meet with Dreiser, he would bring up the theme of the future of socialism. I think that he was working at this time on a piece that encompassed a range of such themes. And so, on this idle day, when he had nothing scheduled to do, Dreiser returned to the theme of socialism. He raised a question that he apparently had not yet resolved satisfactorily for himself, and so he was trying to settle it, for his own sake and in his own way:

“Under socialism, under communism, when communism spreads throughout the whole world, will there still remain any scoundrels or not?”

Dreiser is an old man. He has hands that are absolutely those of an old man and he has the absolutely old man’s habit of keeping a neatly crumpled handkerchief in his hands. And yet Dreiser has absolutely young eyes. Dreiser is a magnificent old man! We spoke through Joe. We had devised a system: after every ten sentences of mine, Dreiser would say, “*Stap!*” [full stop], and Joe would translate these sentences into English for him.

I had to respond to the question: will there or won’t there be scoundrels under socialism? I spoke about the social and biological instincts that predetermine “scoundrelism” within a human being. I told him that I was of the opinion that socialism, after it has destroyed social inequality, will destroy the “scoundrelism” that is associated with this inequality. Thus, the first thing to be restructured will be our social instincts. I told him that I was of the opinion that it’s not a long way off, however, before it will be the turn for even a number of our biological instincts to be restructured. Together with literacy in general, and with social literacy above all else, a socialized form of medicine, one that is equally accessible to everyone, that is mandatory for everyone, and that is preventative, will liberate humankind from epileptics, from tuberculars, and from syphilitics. It will restructure the health of humankind, and it will increase the growth of humankind. It will restructure the biology of the organism of every individual. It will create a healthy psychology for a healthy human being and it will destroy, consequently, the biological “scoundrelism” that is associated with the loathsomeness of ill health, of consumption, of plague.

Interrupting after every ten sentences of mine, Dreiser would say, “*Stap!*” He would listen to Joe’s translation, he would think for a moment, and then he would ask further: “Okay, but what about hunchbacks? Okay, but what will be done after that? Look all around you: humankind has already been living on this earth for a hundred thousand years and what loathsomeness it has spawned!”

I suggested that he remember not a hundred thousand years, but the last thousand years, or even the last five hundred, and trace the time from the Middle Ages to the present day.

Dreiser said, “*Stap!*” He listened to Joe’s translation, and then he raised an objection with this rejoinder: “Why from the Middle Ages and during the last five hundred years? Take the one hundred and fifty years that the United States has existed: a constitution that guarantees the rights of man and then such loathsomeness as the kind exhibited in Pittsburgh!”

We didn't come to any agreement. I believed and knew that socialism would liberate humankind from a very large amount of loathsomeness. Socialism and the future would do that, for the future of humankind is socialism. This wasn't evident to Dreiser. He didn't believe this very much. And he saw the past better than I did. In this way dinner time arrived. It had become clear by this hour on this idle day that our dinner hour was free both for Dreiser and for the two of us, Joe and me. So we decided to dine together. Both Dreiser and I had to leave to take care of some trifling matters. We arranged to meet at the restaurant, a small old French restaurant on 47th Street. Even before my trip to California, I had already been to this restaurant.

Joe and I arrived before Dreiser did. But we couldn't find the restaurant. The old, three-storyed buildings on this street, an entire city block of them, had disappeared. In their place was a wasteland, an abandoned lot where broken stones were lying around. The only thing that survived of the restaurant was the front door-stone – a slab of white stone that served as a provincial step-stone. I sat down upon it to wait for Dreiser. He was running late. A man emerged out of the wasteland, a security guard. Joe asked him where had all the buildings gone.

“The financial crisis,” the man answered. “The buildings turned out to be cheaper than the ground that lay beneath them. The rent strangled them. The proprietors sold them to avoid going completely bankrupt. One or two of them, however, have already gone bankrupt.”

Dreiser's automobile stopped directly across from the missing doorway. Dreiser took his accustomed step onto the slab of the door-stone. And it was only then that he noticed that he was stepping onto an empty space. And Dreiser became agitated. Twice he crumpled up his handkerchief. We told him about the fate of these buildings. Dreiser carefully examined the slab of white stone that served as a provincial step-stone. Such slabs of stone are to be found everywhere in the world – in China, in Turkey, in Russia, in England. The small restaurant was gone. Dreiser said to me: “You say that the future is with socialism? And that socialism will restructure human instincts? The first time I was at this little restaurant was forty years ago.”

Dreiser fell silent.

The man from the wasteland put in his two cents: “On this slab of stone, the Radio Corporation is going to be building a skyscraper radio tower that will be even taller than the Empire State building. *O'kei!*”

“The last time I was here was a week ago,” Dreiser said. “And the first time, as I said, was forty years ago. Perhaps you're right about social instincts?”

This farewell meeting with Dreiser took place several days before my departure from America. And I had finished my American novel. *O'kei!* To my right and to my left, to the east and to the west of 47th Street, New York, the island of Manhattan, was laid out. When Henry Hudson, whose name was given to the river that washes the shores of Manhattan, sailed up toward Manhattan, some Indians came out to meet him. Hudson treated these Indians to

vodka, which the Indians used to call fire water. The Indian chief drank more than the rest of his brethren. He drank so much that he collapsed and fell dead asleep right there on the spot. The Indians decided that he must have died. But he awoke after his death. He reported that he had been in a blissful state of beatitude and had visited the other world that lies beyond our own. By means of vodka, Manhattan went over from the Indians to the Europeans. And on Manhattan, as has been said, people managed to visit paradise. What would that paradisiacal Indian think if he were to see today's Manhattan, that same Manhattan where he once used to go fishing from granite cliffs! Indeed, just imagine for a minute what he would think if he were to visit that rocky locale – rocky from skyscrapers – rocky and pitted by caves, such as the caves that run beneath the Hudson River, if he were to visit that locale that has suffocated from gas fumes without a single blade of grass growing upon the concrete and iron. It would have been horrible, as we said earlier, for a wolf to walk upon these stones. He would have felt suffocated from the gas fumes and been short of breath from the coal-induced asphyxia. The nerves of the wolf would have been upset from the clattering noise of the city and from the millions of those radio waves, both long and short, that have been enmeshing the city, permeating everything with speeches by President Hoover, with mathematical concerts and jazz, with advertising and information about the coal miners' strike in Pittsburgh. It was already evening time when we bid farewell to Dreiser. Broadway was choking with advertisements:

“Underwood . . . it's the typewriter for you! . . . That's it! . . . not another word!”

“Acquire at last some Sapau flour for your little boy!”

“Lucky Strike soothes the throat!”

“How can one live without a refrigerator!?”

. . . more! . . . more! . . . more!

Advertisements were booming, bawling, and dumbfounding with their light, with their avalanches of light, with the delirium of electric light, with all manner of possible and impossible colors and glows. A conveyor belt of automobiles was crawling along the asphalt. Electric cars – from the billboards – were climbing up skyscrapers and falling down from skyscrapers. Skyscrapers were freezing to death from refrigerators. A red, electric woman's skirt was sticking out in the sky, then it suddenly turned blue. But above it flashed the words:

“Don't tell me that fortune has never smiled upon you!!!”

. . . Well, so what if – well, so what if – well, well, so what if – suddenly – above all of this – right in the very middle of the sky – they were to hang a huge poster that advertised the only non-mechanized thing from the Chicago slaughterhouses, from the city of Al Capone – a fat, rheumy-eyed, even with its fangs cut out . . . hog!?

On the 4th of July 1776, on the day of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, in Philadelphia, an American woman named Betsy Ross gave a flag, the first national flag of the North American United States, as a gift to George Washington, the first American president. On the 7th of November 1931, in Detroit, an American woman named Betsy Ross, a communist, the great-great-granddaughter of the first Betsy Ross, gave a Red communist banner to the Detroit chapter of the Communist Party.

MOSCOW

Yamsky Field Street

Ugodsky Lands

October 1931 – February 18, 1932