

EUROPE, THE INNER CONTINENT

Account of 43-day train journey through 20 cities

by Professor OLIVER FRIGGIERI

As the train went on, and more cities unfolded themselves in front of us, it somehow became less difficult to look back and take stock of the whole thing. Was it real, after all? More than one hundred writers from all over Europe were called to meet on a particular day in Lisbon, at a particular hotel. From there they were to depart on a trip which for various reasons, including the fact that the guests happened to be busy people, was to be rather long. A journey through twelve countries across the continent, with cultural events planned in detail for every two or three day stop-over in twenty European cities... That already sounds like the outline of a novel. So it was meant to be, a far reaching inquiry into something much profounder than encountering new persons, making new friends, beholding the astounding beauty of some of the more important cities in Europe.

Much deeper still, there was something which was supposed to make us deduce new questions from old answers, or provide new answers to the old questions. That is why we believe literature is so important, after all; there lies its major function, its sole justification. Perhaps Europe itself can be somehow defined in these terms.

*Europe, this also is an ancient dream,
Dreamt by the mighty to rule over the rest,
Designed to fortress maps,
Constructed in battle infields of red,
And willed it when hunger struck in earnest.
From nurtured havoc then a flower blossomed
That missed being crushed and whose perfume
Evoked keen interest and begot regret.
In the fall of empires it was resolved
Never again will past darkness/all.
Europe of old webbed wisdom and folly,
And often payed its thirty pieces of silver
To buy flesh and blood, threw the dice
For the garb of the Crucified, destroyed the world
For then to make it rise again, and perhaps tomorrow
The gates of regret will be prized open.
On this destruction will rise the Common House
And the new comandament will come to pass: never again.
From the womb of this shrunken woman emerged life and death.**

That is how I think I can best express my awareness of being a European. Literature express could hopefully provide a deeper explanation to that. We were not invited to visit cities for purely touristic purposes, nor were we expected to react as average tourists. Writers are travellers by nature, and that may make them less curious, less motivated to discover places for discovery's sake. Their basic interests are embedded in the need to

explain what is somehow already experienced. Therefore the whole idea of organising such a summit must be really original; it is most unlikely that such an event is ever repeated. Its singularity makes it all the more unique and memorable, really worth writing about. It constitutes a sort of exception. Our point of departure was itself challenging. Almost all of us were strangers to each other, perhaps embarrassingly unhappy with the prospect of having to share a train for so many days.

*A stranger lugs in a sack solitude,
Like him she knows the way and carries him with her,
Lovers going nowhere alone.
East and west, he bids well with a single word
And people, east and west, move on.
He has nothing to declare as he steps down
The aeroplane, and attracts no suspicion.
Without a passport, without money, with an undated ticket,
He heaves the sack without letting go,
Steps up with each voyage the new solitude
And presses it with those garnered before.
Should he ever find anyone to stop him,
He knows how to defend himself
According to the rules of a nomad without relatives,
And without a nation, without a surname, without a name.
The antiquarian of solitude increases the wealth
At every airport without paying duty.*

Perceptions, perceptions, that is what humans are mainly made up of. The process of knowledge starts with simple apprehension, but then reasoning leads to new logical conquests. And this time we were in for a much bigger share. New faces about whom almost nothing was previously known except that they belonged to writers. That was the real point of reference: a common bond, transcending citizenship and ethnicity, relating us to each other in the name of the Word, our recognised source of salvation. Something was expected to happen, we were now finally on the move, and we cheered, we shouted, and the more sensitive amongst us embraced each other and maybe shed a tear or two. The destination was really afar:

*The train is at last in motion and in one jolt
The pensive faces moved. This mute face
Staring at me hides a long history
Like this chain of black wagons.
This voyage will last long. Stare not at me,
Your gaze too powerful to converge on me,
And should it search deep much will it find in me.
Look elsewhere through the window and forget all
And I shall lower my head perhaps to sleep.
So pass the hours without reflecting,
This is the moment of truth for our souls.
For each appointment there is an excuse
And no need exists to find the meaning of all.*

*The voyage, long as it is, must end.
There at the station we shall get lost in the crowd
And we shall have no time to stare. You look elsewhere
Through the window and forget all,
And I shall lower my head perhaps to sleep.*

Within a comparatively very short time we managed to become friends and to understand that, in spite of being unknown to each other, something much deeper had automatically united us from the very start. That awareness was to give us enough moral strength to stay till the very end. Our staunch belief in the intrinsic value of literature must have played a fundamental, albeit unconscious, role, in making friendship so easy and equally so necessary. Above anything else, the acknowledged concept of poetry as the most sublime of all literary genres, as amply stated in our discussion in Moscow, must have helped us a lot in forging new allegiances. It facilitated matters even from a purely organisational aspect, and reduced the difficulties one could initially identify with a presumably exceptional occasion. Whatever our genre, poetry is there to give shape even to what is most inherently unpoetic. The world is frequently like that, waiting to be poeticised. Our creed, at least my creed, runs as follows. Perhaps there is nothing better than a wide and deep look at so many cities to prove that poetry is necessary universal. We could not afford to forget this belief at this stage.

*The deep felt scream which in the hue of the square
remains unheard and silent grows deeper,
the sigh of a bird struck in the sky
by who and why unknown, the blood trickling,
the tears of a woman in love pained,
the tears of her husband, a marriage in the endless gaol,
the hunger of the famished, the sickness of the diseased,
the long trekking of horrified refugees
approaching the frontier of their own death,
the defeat of he who fell forever
struck down by the burning shot from a rifle,
the slaves of views incarcerated
to pay for the alluring sin of their thoughts,
solitude, the pain, the weariness
of he who walks and stumbles
rising and stumbling again right up to the hilltop
where a cross and three nails await him -
grist to the mill to the poet.
To ensure that all he has done he has done well,
A poet presses words together and produces fire
Burning his hands. A poet removes words from their place
And wrings them until tears begin to trickle.
A poet stabs words deep with a blade
Until blood ebbs and endlessly flowing.
If his words possess fire, tears and blood,
A poet rests his mind and writes on.*

*His eyes stay open and stare unyielding,
Unseen and never caught,
And his heart measures the weary hours.
Night is a prayer of a sleepy universe,
Night the station to a halting traveller,
Night is the aperitif of a last supper,
The labyrinth of a lost soul searching,
If only for an oil-lamp that keeps it company.*

So, why have so many writers, with such a diverse background, found it easy to interrupt for so long their daily programme and to adhere to such a taxing schedule? Apart from the more obvious explanations, I suggest we could all guess that in the long run this suspension of normality was to prove very fruitful from the creative point of view. This is what I repeatedly gathered from most of my colleagues. We needed, anyway, to have a sort of profit motive! Being continuously on the move, having to stay in a hotel for just two or three days knowing that the next place is urgently waiting for you, trying to cope with a daily tight schedule, having to be mentally alert to take part in a debate or face a gathering of fellow writers and members of the public, and so on and so forth... all this was worth going through. It was hectic and rightly so, since it brought out of us the best in us. It sharpened our ability to concentrate and to be efficient in the shortest time possible. The organizers did a marvellous job indeed even in this respect. It probably made us meditate more than usual on fundamental aspects of life, like time and space. On a train or in a hotel these dimensions assume a different aspect. Restriction in either sense may provoke thought more than expected.

*Each wave comes and goes, wishing for something
I too seek. Oh, frivolous wave,
Here lie sunken all efforts,
The ocean beckons like a graveyard
Waiting for the next in line to go in place.
Each pebble a witness to how it all began,
Reticent, each pebble a sworn secret,
I too at the start played joy fully with pebbles.
The ocean beckons like a graveyard,
Yesterday it was one endless warm swirl,
Sleepless, a watchful sentinel,
Laughing at us, children/ailing to grow up.
Dumbfounded we count time and from our hands
Drip the cold and wasted years.
The years are precious coins, counterfeit coins.*

This authentic tale was all, or almost, about time. And time will have to pass before the real results of this trip are definitely reaped. Where inspiration is concerned, as we all well know, a writer cannot easily determine when and what to write. Something inside must happen, and that is the inner call, quite different and distinct from the initial motivation. Literaturexpress has provided the opportunity for anyone to assess possibilities, ponder upon so many things, perhaps even to resist the most elementary temptation we were all exposed to: to write. That is the easiest and the most difficult task faced by a writer.

But this may be just another generalisation. I know that some of us have already embarked on a novel related to this experience. When we had covered most of our itinerary at least one writer claimed that his novel was ready. That means our time scales differ enormously, and we all have our own way of discovering the right moment to put pen to paper. On the other hand, a poem is frequently outlined in a short time, in a sudden answer to an inner instinctive call. It is always like a postcard; it does not carry much weight, it travels afar, it conveys a message equally simple and permanent. A poem, a souvenir of the heart. And it is sunset which probably typifies best all this.

*And enters desire riding on a crest,
Everyone looks and greets her,
And my heart is on the quay waiting
As is her custom when sunset beckons.*

*With hope she undoes the nets and peers inside,
With love she is used to ask for nothing
And keeps her silence,
With sadness she knows the catch is not for her.*

It was basically the vague idea of being motivated to write a new novel, my sixth one by this time, that convinced me to accept the invitation. Literaturexpress, it could be seen from the very start, had all the necessary ingredients. If variety is really the spice of life, here we were going to have more than our normal portion. Travelling through Europe by train, discovering so many cities, spending a number of days in each, meeting local people, visiting places of historical and literary relevance, paying homage to famous poets and writers of the past: this sketchy description of our colourful daily routine is enough to show that a writer could only benefit from such a venture.

On the one hand, we were going to have so much time at our disposal. It could be employed in any manner any writer can opt for. On the other, the schedule was really tight. Our days were going to be like a race against time. I guess the programme was so planned, intelligently, as to ascertain there was no time when boredom could creep in. It would have undermined the whole idea of such a literary summit. Ignoring these two extremes one could properly assess the significance of the journey: a challenge under all respects, an invitation for all to temporarily change the pattern of their life, even as average tourists or literary travellers. This was a time for writers to review their own *raison d'être*.

*I am a pilgrim who night and day travels
To where his heart once ordered. His heart, in hand,
Guides and talks to him until he reaches his decision.
Hope betrays him and hope spurs him on.
I am a nomad pacing, sandals shuffling,
Seeking a ray of light from a window partly closed,
Expecting the first welcome from a door ajar.
I am a silent bird in search of a water spring
Somewhere in the distance from a past nest.
In winter I beg nocturnal shelter and leave,
In summer I wait for the rains to return.
I am a stranger and I carry my fortune with me,*

*There is less than an hour ahead of me,
There is less than a century behind me.
Do not die in my hands, oil lamp of my sorrow,
I nestled you protectively in my arms from the winds,
I kindled you with oils that fell from my heart,
I deposited in you the entire hope of a hidden day,
I breathed life in you from a mouth now speechless.*

A long trip by train, cutting through the heart of Europe, was not simply bound to commemorate or re-enact similar historical occurrences. It was essentially meant to construct a specific environment, the main feature of which was movement, perhaps velocity. Continuity, uninterrupted progression. We were consequently expected to grow immediately into a community of people looking for the next destination as soon as one is finally reached. Thou shalt not belong to anywhere: somehow I felt this commandment being spelled loudly for us in every railway station. It is one of the more original and intriguing features of the whole project.

Arrivals were probably the most engaging moments. Some of them are worth describing in great detail and will surely retain their prominence in our memory. As soon as the next city approaches, we were all overtaken by a new sense of curiosity, as well as by a disappointing feeling of sameness. Oh, another city! Yes, of course, and a different one. And that is where the paradox lies. People soon came to greet us, frequently with brass bands and flowers and balloons and folk dances. At least we could congratulate ourselves that our arrival, always on time, was somehow changing the routine of particular communities, even though for such a short while.

People knew we were writers, and knowing that made them show respect towards us in no ambiguous manner. One can safely say that the image of a writer is still widely respected in Europe, and that implies that what we stand for has not actually gone down the drain. Needless to say, a whole literary tradition accounts for it. Poets, novelists, dramatists are regarded with esteem, and their relevance is not normally put into question. This is a feeling I constantly got, and I must confess it frequently moved me almost to tears. Do we really merit all this confidence? Our books speak for us, and the final verdict is only theirs. The art of writing, epitomising our crave to understand the mysteries within and around us, is indeed a privilege, even though it carries a price. Nothing in life is either free or easy.

*Like a candle in the night, a poem
You carry to show you the way, and you must shelter it
With your hands if a breeze threatens. When it is snuffed out
You are left with nothing, and even your innermost desire
Will have died a natural death.
Futile is the flickering of this oil lamp,
At least in darkness sleep arrives and you converse
With your heart with no interruptions,
Maybe she hears you, maybe you will scold her.
I scold you, heart of mine, for desiring all this,
You made me long for a universe which never existed,
You left me a child in a world of adults,
You sired me to leave me here by myself.
Futile too is the poem, it oozes out of my hand
And I refuse to gather it.
It dies out on the way and I hardly notice.*

There they were, the people of Bordeaux, Lille, Dortmund, Malbork, Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, St. Petersburg, Moscow and the rest. Not all cities expressed their welcome with the same intensity, since cultures differ even in this respect, but all of them showed they were aware that the presence of so many literary writers from so many countries had something spiritual about it. We are not politicians, although our impact is heavily political. We do not normally profess any specific ideology, although we all have our strong beliefs. Our most faithful allegiance is, I suppose, to our inner self, to whatever we believe is the truth. May God help us! Some people asked us from which country we came, others wanted to know what was the purpose of our visit, but most of the onlookers just gazed at us, almost wanting to detect for themselves what type of flesh and blood a literary writer is made up of. The general applause, as intense as it was unanimous, was gentle like any other manifestation of respect we have been exposed to.

Somehow I needed to convince myself that writers are not quite distinct from the public, neither in theory nor in practice, especially if they happen to embark on such a trip. I kept saying to myself that all the respect shown to us so passionately and so clearly in most cities was essentially a manifestation of faith in what we really stand for. What do we stand for? I have my own firm ideas about the nature and the role of a writer, and I am sure that others may not find themselves in agreement with me at all. Literature is mainly the domain of divergent views, and writers tend to disagree even with themselves. But fundamental principles, I believe, still prevail and command a lot of adherence in most literary circles. Faith in literature is faith in the more positive and inspiring components of the human spirit. Literature implies that life is not simply what it seems to be, but also has a hidden significance which has to be unearthed. Experience demands an explanation, and that explanation must transcend its own empirical definition. The art of writing is a sublime attempt at putting essential questions into shape, an act responding to an innate quest for understanding.

*Illiterate that I am, with trembling hands
I transported the book of universe
To read the yellowing pages in the light of the lamp.
Illiterate that I am, I see the words and stumble,
I stutter and syllabise unknowingly.
Illiterate that I am, hope falters, biting my nails,
I close the book again, secretly put out
The light and fall asleep.
Illiterate that I am, I dream of a boy who cries*

*For failing in exam for evermore.
Indifferent to all the globe turns on and on,
And carries me oblivious in its wake, illiterate that I am.*

That is why it was really heartening to notice the way people greeted us on our arrival in the railway station of, say, Dortmund, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Warsaw and Berlin. The colourfulness of popular dancers and musicians, the intensity with which they presented themselves and sought to convey a message quite loud and clear: all this was an expression of something meaningful which goes beyond the nature of the event, underlying the whole idea of Literaturexpress. On the other side of the fence, namely so far as the greeting public was concerned, there was another fundamental lesson to be drawn: human beings

have to belong to their own plot of land, to the immediate space where they have seen their life take shape.

National colours are definitely stronger than ever in Europe nowadays. My most unforgettable impression is that every community, be it part of the centre or peripheral, is profoundly proud of its identity. Dances, songs, costumes have all intelligently portrayed a respectful and most fascinating image of cultures. Love of the motherland, and sheer joy for belonging to a particular land: that message could not be missed. Europe is ideally one as a concept, and in due course it may become one as a political and economical entity, but it is surely made up of an endless number of diverse countries, varying in size and all else, which are all adamantly tied to their roots. It is the manifestation of normality: a community belongs to somewhere, and people will eventually reach out for new pastures and when their faith in themselves is sufficiently strong. The dangers of any sort of extremism are only overcome if normality is guaranteed. This is, I believe, another constant lesson derived from literary tradition, highlighted by various features of our journey.

Such ethnic and cultural self-esteem begets mutual understanding, the recognition of diversity as a sign of spiritual richness and the basis for international fraternity. All the faces beheld for one single moment have their own history to tell, are microcosms of the complex experience of their own country. In their loneliness, as they themselves waited in a railway station for their train to arrive, they inadvertently narrated the story of their own survival, there in the remotest part of their country, somewhere where two countries meet to guard the demarcation line of their respective territory. Our journey enabled us to meet the common folk rather than to discover official institutions. We were frequently greeted also by people who did not know anything about our project. They too imparted their own lesson of loyalty, generosity and fortitude. Such is the stuff common people are made up of; their unpretentious tale is about silent suffering and prudent happiness, and it can be read on their faces, especially when they smile to a foreign traveller from afar and just for one fleeting moment. They then speak in symbols, the language of the deep.

*Soul of mine, these blank faces that stare
Out of passing trains know much.
Should you ask, they will throw open a book
which you will take long to read and find hard to grasp.
They wrote it together in blood and slammed it shut,
And today they are leafing it with trembling hands.
Eyes filled with words seeking exit,
Like their vines heavy and benign.
Should you ask for a little, they will give you
The more you ask.*

As Maltese I am naturally most aware of the Mediterranean, and particularly of Southern Europe. Souther than Malta is only the wide ocean leading toward Africa. Whichever the region we come from, there is certainly a point wherein we recognize ourselves as parts of a much bigger whole. Rediscovering our own roots is a way of discovering those of our brethren.

*Here in the depths of the South ring still
The voices of ancestors, perhaps rumblic still
In the heart of earth the echoes*

*Of meanings lost,
Colonies of the soul the nocturnal memories of old,
Cities lost in the ocean of desire.
Magna Graecia, Hook for you somewhere inside me,
Lost are the distances between reality and dream,
One homeland beckons us,
It is the word of a mother, an invitation to live.*

Such lessons could not be easily missed at any time during our journey. Every occasion celebrating a new arrival showed that inhabitants are necessarily identified through a specific set of traditions, and they regularly did their best to put them on show. The sounds of their traditions are the language of their collective soul. Any degree of mutual understanding amongst European nations can be reached and maintained only along these lines. The smaller countries are mainly concerned with their own survival whereas the leading ones are protagonists in all respects. Where does the image of a unified Europe come in? How can unity be attained through the recognition and cultivation of diversity? Are unity and diversity necessarily mutually exclusive?

By now, especially if set against the background of literary history, the answers to these questions are sufficiently obvious. They still have to be transformed, however, into a political and cultural programme. Writers, thinkers, philosophers have long established the parameters within which the new image of a culturally unified Europe can be properly placed. These were some of the more important thoughts we expressed in our formal discussions in Lisbon and in the House of Poetry of Paris. I am sure they deserve to be followed up in practical terms and on a continental level.

Europe is manifestly multicultural. "European culture" is too wide a concept to really signify anything specifically. But there is actually a common core, there are phases in history when the continent could think of itself in terms of a central spiritual nucleus. Geographical, cultural, political, linguistic, religious, ethnic differences turned Europe into a melting pot. We, members of Literaturexpress, have been singularly lucky in being able to assess for ourselves, and in different modes, the extent to which Europe can be described as a colourful, multifaceted, multidimensional entity. No detailed description can do justice to what such a spiritually rich continent is or can offer to its inhabitants and to the other parts of the planet. But literature can definitely go a very long way into creating an environment in which all feel equal because they all equally belong to a common spirit. That surely exists.

We have frequently looked for the older features of every city, trying to identify roots of all sorts, anxious to reach the deeper layers where the real sense of things is. Literaturexpress has been a sort of pilgrimage in search of something characterising us as both Europeans and writers. We could compare and contrast, observe and conclude. Streets proved as revealing as museums, and common people as interesting as experts. Cities could be seen and experienced in a sequence, as if they constituted an interminable gallery of paintings of various eras, all produced by artists who together formed one complex tradition. Europe as perceived through such a persistent look is certainly different from itself, a mixture of constants and variables. Following this exceptional journey, notwithstanding my numerous visits in the past, I find it more difficult than ever before to define the continent according to fixed criteria. Europe is so culturally rich that it evades any simplistic definition. This is what makes it our real home, a common one in which there is a place for a whole variety of cultures.

*I searched through every language perhaps to understand,
I learnt by heart the rules, employed them
In the measured dosage of every grammar.
I looked for the most difficult word in every dictionary
And every simple word I -welded with it.
Each syllable I measured with my own benchmark,
I wove the accents into a melody
And my tongue loosened. I searched through every language,
And my heart trusted them not and spoke still
With the echoes of silence.*

If this occasion could provide us with a new perception of what we have been acquainted with through study and experience up to now, then it will definitely be worth remembering and commemorating. That would constitute a remarkable literary landmark in itself. Whether cities were seen for the first time or not, the way the whole thing was held transforms it into a sort of revisitation.

Some of us may have been tempted to try their hand so soon at a long literary work, given that such a happening is not likely to be repeated, and that certain situations could best be recorded there and then. It must have been exciting to outline a novel as our train moved on for such long periods of time. It has been definitely intriguing to put down impressions, or descriptions of people, places and particular moments of the day which all had something unique attached to them in such circumstances. Memory was bound to play the leading role, and one could now afford not to make full use of the imagination as usual. Some of us may have employed their faculties in absorbing this experience in its entirety without committing themselves to writing at such a stage. All alternatives are attractive and justifiable. Time will put them into perspective all the more.

A writer is a strange animal indeed, but even strangeness can be at times predictable and fall into specific patterns. The pattern in question is, I would say, the ability to wait for the right moment. Perspiration does not by itself necessarily beget inspiration. Am I correct in saying that most of us were looking for inspiration in whatever could be within our reach, hoping to be eventually able to put things into shape? There is no hurry at all to do that, I could sense most of us saying to themselves. That means the journey was taken very seriously as a sort of recognition of our identity as writers.

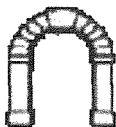
We had ample time to discuss what being a writer is and involves. Certain cities offered a more peaceful and silent environment, an added opportunity for us to come to grips with the question of who we are actually. This is as a rule the question the situation imposed on us most automatically. Other cities were expected to play a different role within the patterns of the project. For example, Lisbon and Madrid impressed us because of their enormous cultural heritage, but even Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn have their own evocative character, whichever angle one looks at them. For most of us the latter three have been a real discovery and one can imagine they will soon be gaining a lot of popularity in the outside world. Paris is always what it has been traditionally to so many writers; it is suggestive and solemn, frivolous and grave, a fascinating lady indeed, capriciously moody. Lille looked poetic under all respects, and her serenity is enviable. As we got nearer to Brussel I remember recalling that the colourful landscape, accompanying us uninterruptedly all along, has always been the writers' most secure point of reference. Ecology is quite recent as a science or a field of study; ecological poetry or literature in general is as old as the known

history of humankind. Dortmund and Malbork are two places where a deep sense of relief and serenity was almost imposed on us by the charming character of the city, as well as by the silence of the surroundings. Berlin greeted us with great joy, and had its original way of doing it. It is a marvellous city, solemn and inviting.

One can go on endlessly trying to describe the most typical aspects of Literaturexpress and their significance. Opinion may differ, and so will standpoints and points of view. But one thing is to be taken for sure: none of us left the train as one had joined it on the first day of the trip. Something in us, I venture to say, had in the meantime changed, and it will eventually leave its impact on our future literary output. The Literaturexpress must have reached the aims for which it was conceived and organized. Back home, dutifully back home, we carried with us not only memories of all sorts, but also a resolution to give a better contribution towards the elimination of unnecessary national and international barriers, and to go on doing our part in the building process of a new Europe. If most of this project is intellectual, then it is up to us to assume the role which is uniquely ours. The role of a writer is to be a protagonist of events, not in terms of their factuality but in the light of their moral justification.

Now that the journey is already a memory, we can look back not simply out of sheer nostalgia, but also to better understand what it meant to live within a literary community for a considerable number of weeks. Maybe the journey is still on, the train will go on moving towards the destination which only our craving heart can somehow identify. In solitude, now that all writers are heading back home, in the silence of this uncertain hour, the mystery of being unfolds itself. Or at least we reach a stage of intense emotion. Mystery is the ultimate city in the list, the durable abode of our feelings and thoughts, the recess of our innermost desires still unfulfilled. We now become aware that a glimpse of our past is still waiting for our next book to give it life, a permanent niche in the memory of whoever will one day look back and recall that there was once a train waiting at every station for a number of writers initially summoned from all over Europe to meet on a particular day in Lisbon, at a particular hotel, and from there to depart on an itinerary across the heart of Europe ... It is now all unredeemably over, or is it? A duty duly fulfilled, a job done well, a commitment for the days to come. Mystery looms ahead, it is eternal, and it goes on, beyond the given limits of any journey. A new day is dawning, the old train will now have to resort to its previous routine. All writers have left. The silence of old is with us again, deeper than ever. Till then, I will go on saluting any wayfarer the way my Maltese forefathers did, and the way we still do: "*Is-Sahha u s-Sliem!*" May you be healthy and have peace!

*Should you at night open wide your heart
The night steals in immediately and sleeps there.
Should you at night fix your gaze at the stars,
They will address you with the language of secrets.
And should you stay awake for hours, you will hear
In silence the heart of the universe beat.
Fear nothing: listen carefully and you will follow
The two hearts beat as one.
You will have discovered the closed door of mystery. No one has yet crossed the
threshold of that door. Remember well the road to know your way back again.*



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