

Introduction

by *Branko Lenski*

Miroslav Križža is a titanic writer who comes from a small historically underprivileged country, Croatia—today one of the six republics of the Federative Peoples' Republic of Yugoslavia. An independent kingdom in the Middle Ages, Croatia was subsequently dominated by Hungary, the Hapsburg Empire, the Turks, Napoleon, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire before becoming part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918, a name officially changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. Between 1941 and 1945 Croatia was nominally an independent state headed by a Quisling; then it once again became part of Yugoslavia.

Born in 1893, Križža spent his youth in Austria-Hungary, at a time his native city of Zagreb was called Agram in German. He interrupted his studies at the Budapest Military Academy Ludovicum in 1912, when, in an outburst of militant nationalism, he

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volunteered in the Serbian army. He placed high hopes in Serbia for the future of the southern Slavs, but the Serbs, believing him to be an Austro-Hungarian spy, sent him back to the Austria he loathed. During World War I, he served in the Austro-Hungarian army as a private. Between that world war and the next, he was strongly opposed to King Alexander, and in 1929, when King Alexander established his royal dictatorship, Krleža became the regime's most virulent social critic, with whom the liberal-minded intelligentsia strongly identified.

Krleža's sway over the minds of several generations of young and not-so-young Yugoslav literati between the two world wars was as overwhelming as was Gide's influence on the French during the same period. Unlike Gide, however, Krleža was not only the mentor of the young, but also their black angel: the burzhesnik, the enunciator of political, social, and historical upheavals to come. He foretold them with the fervor and conviction of a prophet and a Marxist. Between 1929 and 1941, the opening night of a play by Krleža was a major cultural and often political event; the police were likely to close it down at the last minute. During the fascist occupation of Croatia, Krleža stayed in hiding. In Tito's Yugoslavia he became vice-president of the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences and editor in chief of the Yugoslav Encyclopedia.

The volume and scope of Krleža's writings is vast and impressive. He has written more than fifty volumes of prose and poetry. Among his plays, the best known are *The Glembays*, *In Agony*, and *Leda*, all published in 1929. These plays constitute an organic entity, along with the short stories of the *Glembay* prose cycle. Here we meet the Glembays and the Fabriczys, two patrician families who marry, give birth, and die on the soil of Austria, Hungary, and Croatia between the days of Empress Maria Theresa (1717-1780) and those of the Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Jasenovac concentration camps (1941-1945).

Besides works of fiction—poems, novels, short stories, and plays—Krleža has written numerous essays, polemics, articles,

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speeches, and dissertations on art, literature, philosophy, music, medicine, and politics.* In trying to convey the variety of Krleža's literary endeavors, one must also mention his journal in particular the four volumes of his *Diary for the Year 1942* 1943; his autobiographical notes for the years 1914-1921, published under the title *The Old Days*; his book of childhood reminiscences, *A Childhood in Agram*; his *Fragments from the Journal* for 1967 and 1968; his travelogues, among which his *Journey to Russia*, published in 1925, is a classic; his film scenario based on the short story in our collection, *The Cricket Beneath the Waterfall*; and, finally, his writings and annotations as editor in chief of the Yugoslav Encyclopedia, a work he has successfully brought to completion.

< Krleža's first novel, *The Return of Philip Latinovicz*, was published in 1932 (American edition published by the Vanguard Press, Inc., 1969). His second novel, *On the Edge of Reason* (to be published by the Vanguard Press), originally appeared in 1938. The first part of his third novel, *Banquet in Blithuania*, came out in 1938, the second part in 1939, and the third in 1962. By 1972, Krleža published all six volumes of his historical roman-fleuve, *The Banners*, and at present he has almost completed his eagerly awaited novel, *The Devils Among Us*.

The short stories of Miroslav Krleža have appeared under various titles. Among these are, in chronological order, the collection of short stories *The Croatian God Mars*, published in 1920; the novella *Devil's Island*, 1924 and included here; *The Glembay* prose cycle, 1932, from which we have chosen three stories for this volume: *Dr. Gregor and the Evil One*, *The Love of Marcel Faber-Fabriczy for Miss Laura Warronigg*, and *A Funeral in Teresienburg*. In 1933 Krleža published a collection of short stories under the title *One Thousand and One Deaths*,

* Krleža's comments on various subjects, mostly concerning twentieth-century European literature, art, philosophy, and politics, gathered from numerous essays, speeches, and articles, have been published in Austria as dictionaries of ideas: *The European Alphabet* and *The Political Alphabet*.

from which we have chosen *Hodorlahomor the Great* and *The Cricket Beneath the Waterfall*. The present volume is the first collection of his stories to be published in English.

Since 1950 Krleža's works have been translated throughout the Eastern European countries including the Soviet Union, as well as in the West, notably in Austria, Germany, France, England, Sweden, Norway, and Holland. In the broader spectrum of European literature, Krleža's *The Return of Philip Latinovicz* can be said to have prefigured such classics as Sartre's *Nausea*, Camus's *The Stranger*, and in a general way the novels of Beckett. In 1961, Krleža, along with another remarkable Yugoslav writer, Ivo Andrić, was among the prime contenders for the Nobel Prize. Ivo Andrić won the prize while Krleža continues to be a nominee.

The geographical setting of almost all of Krleža's fiction is Pannonia, once a Roman province, today a territory encompassing western Hungary, eastern Austria, and northern Yugoslavia, bordered on the north and east by the Danube. The fact that Krleža refers to a modern region by its ancient name must be seen as both an attempt at universalization and as an ironical device: we are confronted with a part of the world that has been stagnating for many centuries. It is a real and at the same time mythical region, like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, obeying the specific laws of the author's imagination. Nothing changes in Pannonia's utter desolation, where pigs eternally grunt, horses neigh, and somber women creep about in muddy hovels. As Philip, the hero of *The Return of Philip Latinovicz*, travels home after twenty-three years of wanderings throughout Europe, he sees the same old monotonous cottage roofs, the mares and cows in the pastures, the plowfields, the pigs. Just as on the day he left, red peppers hang from the windows, cheese is drying in nets hung on stakes, cocks are crowing, and hens are scurrying panic-stricken across the road just in front of cart wheels. Yet, not knowing better, the peasants seem happy. They are superstitious, most of them illiterate, blessedly ignorant. The

Bolteks, Yagas, and Rezikas of Pannonia, the laborers, coachmen, maidservants, soldiers, and vagrants, thrive in Pannonia's mud by unknowingly becoming a part of it. The small towns are hornets' nests of gossip.

Krleža presents us with various middle-class characters, from those who stand low on the ladder of importance, such as the father in *Devil's Island*, to important industrialists like Domaćinski in *On the Edge of Reason*. On the intermediate levels of the social hierarchy, busy with social climbing, pursuing their own interests, are eminent doctors, lawyers, magistrates, counselors, prosecutors, politicians, members of the government, sophisticated ladies and gentlemen, the Pannonian Bobbys and Robbys, Mukis and Kukis, Babys and Ladys.

With Voltairian irony, Rabelaisian laughter, and Orwellian satire, Krleža ridicules the degraded Pannonian intellectual and moral climate. He bombards bourgeois respectability and every kind of oppression of the free expression of man's thoughts. He analyzes the origins of wealth among the Pannonian rich and somewhere on each genealogical tree he finds a murderer or a swindler. The first accumulation of capital reeks with the stench of blood.

Beside the peasantry and the bourgeoisie, there move, heavily plumed like peacocks, decorated and titled, the nobility: numerous counts, dukes, barons, generals, eminences and excellencies, titleholders like Count Uexhuell-Gyllenband Cranensteeg, the Countess Oreyval, née de la Fontaine of Kissasszony-Fabarany, and the Baroness Inkey, born Ludmila Theodora Maria Gabriella. Krleža caricatures the Pannonian nobility's liking for everything foreign. He pokes fun at the shallow pretense and self-importance of those who parade in Pannonia like demigods and demigoddesses flaunting their titles. The upper middle class, following the example of the aristocracy, likes to embellish its names: Baločanski signs himself von Ballocsanszki, Domaćinski, Domatchinski.

A Funeral in Teresienburg is a long procession of impressive

names and titles—Krlježa's funeral oration over the dead body of a condemned system. What is being buried in *A Funeral in Teresienburg* is not only the body of a young first lieutenant but, more generally, everyone who walks behind the coffin: the dignitaries with heads devoid of a single intelligent thought, dentured and coifed waxlike figures in cloaks, helmets, straps, chains, bronze lions' heads, two-headed golden eagles—all the pomp and ceremony of a crumbling empire.

When Krlježa published *A Funeral in Teresienburg* in the *Glembay* prose cycle in 1932, Austria-Hungary had been dead and buried for fourteen years. Was Krlježa only whipping a corpse? Was he only spitting on a tomb? Austria-Hungary was dead, but "Pannonianism" had survived and Krlježa continued to fight against it. Fascism was on the move. From the ashes of a fallen empire ghosts would soon arise. New forms of Prussianism and Teutonism were to emerge. The extermination camps of the early forties were not far ahead. After *The Return of Philip Latinovicz*, in *On the Edge of Reason*, and most clearly in *Banquet in Blithuania*, Pannonianism goes beyond Austria-Hungary to become a European phenomenon.

Krlježa portrays the peasants, the bourgeoisie, and the nobility who live in and around those small Pannonian towns with poplars along the roads, the blacksmith shops and taverns, the steeples in the distance, and the brickyards on the edge of town where, when the bus returns at a monotonous pace from the hotel on the main square, everybody already knows who arrived that afternoon: a new officer or a traveling tie salesman. . . . But there is a fourth group in his fiction; the Pannonian Don Quixotes—the seekers, the dreamers, the prodigal sons, the neurotic artists and vagabonds who refuse to succumb to the Pannonian mentality, fighting to the very last to escape it. These heroes are Krlježa's fallen angels who seem to have retained the memory of a former paradise they seek to recapture. Through them Krlježa castigates and brilliantly illuminates the Pannonian mode of existence while at the same time criticizing the heroes'

lofty dreams and attitudes. Some of these dreams glorify a particular woman, others an escape to a foreign country, still others the return home after futile wanderings abroad. Philip struggles with his faltering capacity to give his ideas visual expression; Baločanski discovers only when close to old age the possibilities of a freer life; Kyriales revels in wisdom and preaches it as he travels. All are defeated and end in suicide or abandon or are completely shattered and full of remorse for their initial folly.

Philip hopes to find new creative energies in his return, only gradually to discover that he will never fulfill his artist's dream: to express on canvas that barbaric, Pannonian instinct for dynamic movement coupled with the typically Pannonian impulse toward self-destruction. He will never be able to paint the smell of roasting pork, the noise of the fair, the horses' neighing, the cracking of the whip, because he lacks the brute force, the thick skin, the solid nerves, and the cunning required for survival and success in Pannonia. To paint pigs one has to be a talented "pig" oneself. Philip meets Kyriales, the extravagant Greek from the Caucasus who knows that in the Pannonias of this world one is better off selling pots and pans than trying to paint. This doctor of both philosophy and dermatology, who seems to have been everywhere and know everything, shatters Philip's remaining faith in his artist's calling and in the human race in general. According to Kyriales, man is a shameless, false, stupid, malicious, apelike beast, a beast greedier than the hyena, which at least, when gorged with carrion, falls asleep next to it; whereas man, stuffed, goes on eating and, seeing other hungry animals of his species, licks his lips with satisfaction. Kyriales has the appetite of a pig and gives the impression of being strong, but in the end he too succumbs. His body is found near the railroad. Tired of having deceived himself for so long with hypothetical truths about his clear-sightedness and superior outlook, he commits suicide.

The protagonist of *On the Edge of Reason*, the lawyer, for fifty-two years has lived a most respectable life from the view-

point of his neighbors and fellow men: never a scandal in his life to feed the town gossip, professionally successful, faithful to his wife, the very prototype of a model citizen. Then, one night at a party, listening to the all-important Domatchinski bragging about how he once shot down four thieves who were trying to rob his wine cellar, he hears himself saying: "What you did was criminal, bloody, and depraved." This moment marks the lawyer's fall from society's grace. He is persecuted, tried, abandoned by friends and family alike, jailed, exiled, put into an insane asylum. . . . At the novel's end he sits alone in a hotel room trying station after station on the radio. But Europe has no solace to give. Quite the contrary: All he gets is a cacophony of sounds reflecting the chaos in the European mind—among them military marches, a premonition of the gathering storms.

In *Banquet in Blithuania* the liberal politician Niels Nielsen confronts the dictator Barutanski. The battle may appear at times to be futile; the ideal may seem weak compared to the political reality of the day. But Nielsen will continue to fight because—and this aptly illustrates one of Krleža's fundamental beliefs—against stupidity, violence, and arbitrariness the printed word still remains the most prestigious and effective weapon.

There are many more rebels, protesters, fanatics, and drop-outs in Krleža's fiction. Leone, for instance, in the play *The Glembays*, is the prototype of Krleža's oversensitive, critical intellectual who denies his patrician family and the social order of his time. Krleža is fascinated, too, by Juraj Križanić, a seventeenth-century Croat who one day, laughed at by all his neighbors, set out from his village for Moscow in a horse-driven carriage full of books and documents, intent on alerting Russia's rulers to the historical obligation of Russia toward their Slavic brethren—only to be scorned and thrown into Siberian captivity where he remained for seventeen years—time enough to ponder his sin of idealism and imagine what his life could have been instead. In this volume we encounter various idolizers of

women, like Ramong in *A Funeral in Teresienburg* and Marcel in *The Love of Marcel Faber-Fabriczy for Miss Laura Warronigg*; of escape to another country, like Orlić in *Hodorlahomor the Great*; and of the return home after a long absence, like young Gabriel Kavran in *Devil's Island*, a novella that can be viewed as a seed of Krleža's major novel, *The Return of Philip Latinovicz*.

Krleža is attracted by tortured men whose lives are manuals of self-destruction. The same holds true for Krleža's women. If there be some general truth in the saying that women of twenty are crude, like Africa; women of thirty full of hope, like Asia; women of forty generous, like America; and women of fifty wise, like Europe, then it can be advanced that Krleža shows a predilection for portraying women in their forties, former beauties full of autumnal charm, rich in experience, open, hurt by life, with nothing to hide.

Only with these women can his equally tortured heroes find a few moments of deep understanding and meaningful respite. In describing such relationships Krleža has written some of his most beautiful pages, as, for instance, when Philip and Xenia Raday console themselves by attributing their sufferings, the deep wounds and beatings they have taken from life, to some ancestral, primeval force, feeling as if someone else's life is streaming through their hands, revealing itself in chance touches. Xenia Raday in *The Return of Philip Latinovicz*, Jadwiga Yesenska and Wanda in *On the Edge of Reason*, are all women whose very names evoke something languorous, and strangely attractive. And Laura Warronigg, the silly "twenty-year-old goose" in *The Love of Marcel Faber-Fabriczy for Miss Laura Warronigg*, becomes interesting only twenty years later when, as the tired, disappointed, and anxious heroine Baroness Lenbach in the play *In Agony*, she slowly but inevitably slips into suicide, struggling in vain to retain her last lover, Dr. Križovec. Time is dealing out poetic justice; the old wounds have been cauterized;

life goes on. The rich texture of Krleža's prose integrates the swelling of memory, the nostalgia for childhood dreams and for a time of life and an epoch that are no longer:

Twenty years later, when all that was to happen had happened, when Laura and Marcel stood in life like two shipwrecked persons, there emerged in their conversations the old recollections of their Bukovec adventures, distant and faded as old English rubbings in half-darkened rooms. Marcel, who had just returned from Russia, was lingering for a while in Zagreb, anchorless in the mist of his Croatian homeland. He and Laura would meet in the front room of Laura's fashion shop, *Mercure Galant*. At that time Laura was already doomed to commit suicide, but the somber and sad conversations about all their past involvements were infused with the silent, golden light of the bygone days of Bukovec.

Their conversations about the Bukovec drawing room! Its enormous old-fashioned sofa in the corner with the Oriental rugs, the sofa piled high with too many red, black, pale blue, and yellow cushions, and above, on the golden console, the gilded baroque saint with outstretched arms. The embroidered designs on the silk cushions, the vases and the jars in the Viennese glass cabinet, the clocks on alabaster pillars, and the tabouret where the old butler set the silver tea tray: all this stood before Marcel like the silent replica of an afternoon with sun shining through the green crests of the linden trees under the balcony. . . .

In such passages we are close to the foundations of Krleža's fictional edifice upon which the author sheds much light in his remarkable book of reminiscences, *A Childhood in Agram*. As a child Krleža slept under a baroque ceiling, gazing at it intently before closing his eyes. Later, when he began to write and throughout his career, he was to translate into literature that

rich ceiling with its fallen and not-yet-fallen angels, devils, saints, warriors, trumpets, flutes, cymbals, drums, bows, arrows, candles, banners, horses, eagles, prayer books, and wreaths. He was in love with the baroque architecture of his childhood and later, wherever he traveled in Central Europe, he would visit houses that followed the basic design of his own home, knowing where to locate, with eyes practically closed, a ceiling similar to the one in Zagreb.

In a broad sense, Central Europe is Krleža's literary territory, and Pannonia is part of Central Europe. He has peopled it with extravagant characters, corrupt and refined. He has ferociously attacked the Central European, Austro-Hungarian Pannonian bourgeois culture, but cannot help also admitting that this culture was able to produce a material civilization that on the whole compared favorably with that of the French. To understand Krleža one must bear in mind his own ambivalence. Along with his violent negation there exists a strong affirmation. He is in love with what he denigrates, just as he cannot help tearing apart the ideals of his dreamers for which, in the same breath, he voices profound nostalgia and admiration. When asked whether his Glembays and Fabriczys ever existed, he retorted: "Of course not. Had they existed, Zagreb would today be another Florence." They grew out of the baroque ceiling of his childhood and he made them live.

In *A Childhood in Agram*, Krleža recalls how, forty years later, the odor of old church books would bring back long-passed sensations of his earliest youth. Even today, while walking in places cherished in his youth, he inhales the perfumes of earlier years, his heart swelling with remembrance for things past, all the old sweetness and warmth preserved in memory. Krleža recalls the stillness of a room, the deep perspective formed in the shadow of a burning candle, the distant echo of thunder, the muffled roar of guns, the outpost with the young soldier who must kill for the first time, the penumbra of a church where one hears the twittering of swallows outside. All of these scents,

noises, colors, perspectives Krleža weaves into the rich texture of his fiction.

One thing Krleža sensed from the very outset, deeply and intuitively—the existence of two different realities: One, a brute reality, used, abused, fragmentary, and diminished by the rational ideas of the man to whom the tree he observes hides the forest; the other, a pure, fantastic, virginally untouched reality that is fresh, childlike, and immediate, more real than the reality divided by reason. Consequently there are two kinds of people: First, men who have completely lost the link with their childhood, members of a molded and deformed humanity, actors reconciled to their parts, men turned gray and inert, fodder for statistics and consumer reports; the other, the poets, all those referred to by average talentless man as dreamers and schizoids, individuals who want to live life with the intensity of their childhood, for whom reality remains the prickly warm ball of a porcupine slowly moving in the dust under moonlight. The poet, the artist, the creator, the seeker is the man who remains, in the innermost core of himself, a child. And from the outset of his career Krleža has sided with that child against all the forces intent on annihilating him. As can be seen from *Conversations with Krleža* by Predrag Matvejević, published in Zagreb in 1969 and quickly sold out, Krleža is in sympathy with the often naïve student rebellions in both East and West in so far as they are an expression of the vital force of youth, of the child's voice inside the growing man, a manifestation of the Luciferian biological substance against the tyranny of suppressive forces, a new version of the old struggle between tradition and adventure.

But Krleža has lived through a succession of isms—fascism, communism, and socialism, among others, and knows both sides of the coin only too well. He is equally suspicious of the right and the left. He expresses as does no one else in today's letters the wisdom of a third world that has demystified many consecrated historical, political, and artistic cults. "Those rebellious

leftist youngsters," he said in 1969, "who are being heard today in the cities of Western Europe believe that reality can be stepped over and that, as in a beautiful dream, they can free themselves overnight of their earthly shadow. They think they are more intelligent than we are, as if we too have not been persuaded in our dreams that centuries can be leaped over. The difference between us and them consists only in that we have been what they are today and the same thing will happen to them that happened to us—they will live to see their ideals come true."

Krleža has rebelled during his long career against the military and social establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, against the despotism of the old Yugoslav monarchy, against fascism, against the communist bureaucracy of the Stalinist era, and in particular against Zhdanovism, the most odious and perverse interference of state-legislated mediocrity in the domain of artistic expression. After Yugoslavia's famous breach with the Cominform in 1948, Krleža saw a number of the ideals for which he had fought as a young man become realities under socialism. But Pannonianism remained, and with it the continuous need for the battle against human stupidity, under whatever label it performs at any given time its seemingly eternal functions. Paraphrasing Maupassant, who once wrote, "How beautiful was the Republic under the Empire," Krleža exclaimed in 1969, "How beautiful was socialism under capitalism . . . !" reminding us how easy and comfortable it is to be a socialist under capitalism when all the blame can be laid conveniently on the capitalistic system. But who is to be blamed under socialism where men also suffer from toothaches, illegitimate children are born, husbands and wives cheat each other, and where people can also be petty, nervous, mean, ailing, and poorly paid, trying to knife one another in every walk of life? Commenting on some petty feuds among Yugoslav intellectuals, Krleža appeals to his socialistic fellow men to transcend their futile disputes and open

themselves to the light of intelligence and the possibilities of broader understanding. For "what matters most is intellectual and moral integrity."

In the meantime, whether as editor in chief of the Yugoslav encyclopedias* or writing about the cultural treasures of Dalmatia in *The Gold and Silver of Zadar*, or about the tombs of the Bogomils, or about the role of literature in socialism in his significant speech at the Writers' Congress in Ljubljana in 1952, Krleža fights unceasingly. "Let us emphasize and be proud of what we have and what is ours alone rather than bemoan what we lack," he seems to be suggesting to his countrymen who, in the course of centuries of historical adversity, have mastered to perfection the art of complaint. Inevitably he has moments of doubt, expressed so eloquently by Niels Nielsen in the first volume of the novel *Banquet in Blithuania*:

To write? What? Empty sentences? Stupid, bombastic, empty sentences? To speak? To whom? For ten thousand years mankind does nothing but talk. From Socrates to the Vatican endless lecterns and pulpits . . . To print? For whom? To prove something? . . . Pointless. What's left? To lie? Where are the bridges that lead to salvation? The truth? What is truth? Truth is everything you feel that should be better kept to yourself, better not pronounced; it may harm us, because, spoken out, it certainly disagrees with our petty, egotistical momentary interest. That's what truth is. The truth is when you feel something should be said, but what in your own best interest it is wiser and more polite to hush. Is there any benefit in expressing truths? No, there isn't. Because for centuries prison warrants have been issued against truth.

* In addition to the eight-volume *Yugoslav Encyclopedia*, there appeared under Krleža's directorship, among others, a seven-volume *General Encyclopedia*, a six-volume *Medical Encyclopedia*, and a four-volume *Art Encyclopedia*.

Nevertheless, Krleža continues to express his truth. Writing may not lead to salvation, but words are his only weapon.

Krleža's denials of certain ways of living rest on a deep personal faith from which they derive their strength and conviction. "To refuse the world is a way of accepting it," says Krleža in a statement that permits us better to understand the negative universe he creates in order to transform it through the very power of negation into its opposite.

There is something insufferable about a hot Sunday afternoon in August in one of the many Pannonian small towns with "gray, dusty, unwashed windowpanes, bare curtain rods, moth-balled rugs, paper lanterns in the windows of stationery stores." It is on such a Sunday afternoon that the narrator in *The Cricket Beneath the Waterfall* runs into his old acquaintance Dr. Siroček and in a tavern tells him about the unusual things that have been happening to him recently—of how, for instance, he has been hearing voices of people who are no longer. Dr. Siroček listens with interest and sympathy. He invites the narrator into the latrine where once, beneath the waterfall, he heard the voice of a cricket. Ever since, Dr. Siroček carries bread crumbs in his pocket in case the cricket is heard again. The mere possibility of hearing its voice from out of the heart of the Pannonian wasteland transforms the loneliness of two people into a shared experience of human understanding.

Since the early part of the century when he began writing, wherever he has gone—in classrooms and in military barracks, in hospitals and prisons, behind coffins and on devil's islands, on trains and in hiding—Krleža has been following that voice into the darkest recesses of the night and of the heart of man.