Europe from its foundations to the 21st century
Welcome

An evening last month going through the Ovi magazine online articles I noticed that for the last two years one way or another most of us have written something about the European Union and the recent economic crisis. I also noticed that most of us troubled with the contemporary situation we forgot what Europe is about and what was the dream behind the European Union. Just like everybody else nowadays we see the things that separate us and we miss the things that unite us and that has turned into something ugly.

Barriers have risen between north and south and old prejudice have surfaced. But this is not the Europe we were dreaming, this is not the message and the example we were trying to build and pass. And definitely this is not the Europe we want. And here start the misunderstandings, because this is not the Europe of Merkel, Sarkozy, Cameron and Hollande; this is definitely not the Europe of Machiavellians. This is the Europe of Plato, the Europe of Pericles, the Europe of Robert Schuman and Alcide De Gasperi. Is the Europe of art, of philosophy, of literature; this is the Europe that founded democracy and the settler for all victims of prejudice all during history. The foundations of all above are lost in centuries of history and we earned them with sacrifices and blood. And this is what we are called to honour today.

And the members of the Ovi family honour this call in this thematic issue hoping that we will be listened if not from Merkel, Cameron and Hollande but from the people who want and feel that a united Europe is not a case of currency but a cultural obligation.

Thanos Kalamidas

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Europa quo vadis? Europe, where art thou going?

Europa, nosce te ipsum? Europe, do you know yourself?

The two questions above asked in the 21st century in the year of our Lord 2012, seem to me to be quite fitting and timely, given the current economic predicament of the polity dubbed European Union. We need not go into the complex details of the ominous signs of a union, initially considered the most noble political experiment ever devised in the history of human kind, that seems to be coming apart at the seams. They are well known, and can be easily gathered from our daily newspapers.

The above questions allude of course to the famous Greek myth of the goddess Europa abducted by Zeus in the form of a black bull. There are many paintings of such a myth. One contemplates in it a beautiful goddess riding a bull on the sea venturing on a journey that is yet unknown while her attendants look upon the event in dismay and wave a desperate goodbye. They must surely have been wondering where she might possibly be heading to, as she navigates the rough sea on the back of a bull. The perplexity of this bizarre scene is also ours. We ask: where is this polity called the EU headed to? As the song aptly announces: the answer my friend, is blowing in the wind.

Only two weeks ago on 7 June 2012 I contributed an essay titled “Has the European Union’s Political Experiment Failed?” (see http://www.ovimagazine.com/art/8731) which reported on a debate conducted in Toronto, Canada on 25 May 2012 under this premise: be it resolved the European experiment has failed. Josef Joffe, the publisher-editor of the German weekly Die Zeit opened the debate with this bleak pessimistic assessment: “Europe has transcended a thousand years of war; but 27 nation-states will never grow into one.” He then went on to advise the goddess Europa that she return to terra firma, get rid of her fantasies of adventurous journeys to the beyond, and simply settle down modestly into a more regular kind of life, the routine everyday life of “homo economicus.” In other words, what we need is fewer ideas on justice or freedom and more ideas on which markets to export our goods. Nowadays, the goods are much more important that the common good. He then switched metaphor and offered the spectacle of 27 climbers attempting to climb Mount Everest. Only two or three are well prepared and fit for the ascent; the rest are unprepared. The tragedy that will occur is that all of them will be dragged into some crevasse and lose their lives. This may happen even if the two or three fit and prepared climbers are selected as leaders of the expedition.

It couldn’t be clearer: this is a union of disparate nations with disparate languages and cultures, mostly unprepared and unfit for the arduous dangerous political climb leading to the summit of full integration or genuine confederacy. We can well imagine who those two or three fit members of the union might be: Germany, France and perhaps the UK. The rest of the unfit majority will eventually doom the expedition. This should have been foreseen right from the start.

But of course what Mr. Joffe forgot to remind us of is that such an expedition has been ongoing for sixty some years now and that there was an original carefully thought-out plan or a visionary project on
how to reach the summit. It was provided by the founding fathers of the EU. This begs the question: do we know, or better, do we remember what that plan was? I would advise that we refresh our memory in this regard. So, I boldly propose a different premise for a future debate on the European Union which I sincerely hope will take place in the pages of Ovi magazine. The debate can be framed thus: “be it resolved that the European experiment has not failed. The original EU project to climb the arduous mountain of integration and assimilation, social justice and genuine democracy has been found too difficult and has never been tried.”

The rest of this introduction to the thematic issue Europe from its Foundations to the 21st Century, will attempt to explain what the above suggested debating framework is predicated upon: the fact that the EU cannot be reduced to a mere economic political union of nations attempting to achieve the summit of modern progress and prosperity. In other words Europe, as Thanos Kalamidas, the editor of this magazine has repeatedly proposed, is much more than an ongoing modern economic unity guaranteeing peace and prosperity for two generations now. Of course that would constitute an achievement in itself, but Europe is also much more. It is exactly, the reductionist operation of considering the EU a mere economic union buttressed by a powerful euro, that might doom the whole experiment to an unprecedented failure. Let me further explain.

In 2005 I wrote a book which was a collection of essays on Europe, its history, its cultural development and identity, the very philosophical idea of Europe and the constitution of the EU. The book is titled: A New Europe in Search of its Soul. It began with three quotes. The first one is by Paul Valéry: “As far as I am concerned, any people who have been influence throughout history by Greece, Rome and Christianity are Europeans.” The second one was by one of the founding fathers of the European Union, Robert Schuman: “The place where I feel most European is a cathedral.” The third one is in the form of a warning, or a prophecy if you will, by the late Pope John Paul II in a speech he delivered at the European Parliament on October 11, 1988: “If the religious and Christian substratum of this continent is marginalized in its role as inspiration of ethical and social efficacy, we would be negating not only the past heritage of Europe but a future worthy of European Man—and by that I mean every European Man, be he a believer or a non believer.”

What all those quotes have in common is the idea that beneath the economic issue within the EU, now in a crisis, there is another more urgent issue: that of cultural identity. The problem resides in the abandonment and/or the neglect of the original vision of the EU founding fathers as elucidated by them some sixty years ago. Such a vision was based on general Christian values and it included economic, Christian values as well as more secular values. The three founding fathers I am referring to here are Schuman, De Gasperi and Aedenauer who were all practitioners of their faith. Their vision of social justice was inspired by the Papal social encyclicals and the classical Christian view of social justice. The question naturally arises: is it reasonable to return to the Christian ideals of the EU founding fathers? For a more in depth look at this issue of the original issue of the founding fathers see my essay posted in Ovi in June 2, 2008 and titled “A Hard Look at the EU’s cultural Identity” (http://www.ovimagazine.com/art/3068) as well as the essay posted in August 22, 2009 titled “Impressions of Italy and the EU: Now and Then.”

What seems to be lacking within the economic, coordination of is a deeper kind an inclusive to be achieved society the rights of
diversity? A nostalgic return to the Greek-Christian synthesis and the Christendom of medieval times (at times imposed politically) will not do either, and is not even desirable. That was a synthesis meant for Europeans Christians (many of them forced to get baptized by their kings who found it politically convenient to switch from paganism to Christianity), not for non-Christians, not to speak of the non-Europeans which are now counted into the millions in many countries of Europe.

In any case, it is undeniable that at present no spiritual foundation for a genuine unification exists. The Constitution, which nobody even calls “constitution any longer but a compact, mentions a fuzzy kind of spiritual heritage, almost as an after-thought. Many Europeans don’t seem to be too concerned about such an absence, if indeed they even perceive it. Unfortunately, the prophetic words of the former pope John Paul II to the European parliament in 1988 that to ignore such a legacy is to ensure a non viable future for European man were all but ignored. Some kind of new synthesis is needed. One can safely declare that it will not even be envisioned, never mind implemented, unless Europeans, begin a serious reflection and a debate on the original idea to which Europe owes its cultural unity and identity. That of course carries the risk of being perceived as an old European, maybe even an anti-modern and anti-progressive, rather than a “Neo-European,” but I would suggest that without that original idea, which precedes Christianity itself, a crucial novantiqua synthesis will not be perceived either and Europeans will then be sadly condemned to repeat their history.

What is this European original foundational spiritual idea that precedes even Christianity? Simply this: a commitment to theory, the theoretical life which in its Greek etymology means the contemplative or reflective life in all its various aspects: the philosophical, the scientific, the aesthetic; in short the primacy of a holistic life of contemplation. All this sounds strange to modern and post-modern ears accustomed to hear praxis and a purely pragmatic notion of rationality emphasized over and above theory. Marx, for one, expressed such a mind-set in the 11th of the Theses on Feuerbach with this catch-all slogan: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, the point is to change it.” Indeed, but it must be pointed out that to start with praxis is to put the cart before the horse.

When Valery says that anyone influenced by the universality of the idea of Europe is a European he does not mean it in a chauvinistic mode, nor as a geo-political reality, nor in Machiavellian-Nietzschean terms of “will-to-power,” or in terms of real-politik. He is simply stating a cultural reality. If the European Union were to be reduced to an economic union, its leveling effect on European culture would be devastating. We would end with banalities such as: we are all Europeans because we all go to soccer games on Sunday! Europe’s political and economic unification must be accompanied by a strong awareness of a distinctive cultural and spiritual identity. This is the reason why the dispute over Europe’s Christian heritage is so important. In writing the preamble to the EU constitution, the most significant element in the European tradition is erased at the peril of building on political sand, as Kurt Held reminded us in his essay on Europe titled The Origins of Europe with the Greek Discovery of the World,” with the following words: “A European community grounded only in political and economic cooperation of the member states would lack an intrinsic common bond. It would be built upon sand.”

The silver lining in all this is that contemporary Europeans have preserved their diverse languages, customs, and histories, even at the regional level which points to an appreciation for tradition and heritage, indispensable elements for a strong cultural identity. But the whole continent needs a strong spiritual reintegration as well as a political-economic one. That requires that it assimilate essential parts of its spiritual heritage: the Greek sense of order and measure, the Roman respect for law, the biblical and Christian care for the other person, the humanitas of Renaissance humanism, the ideals of political equality and individual rights of the Enlightenment. The values left by each of these episodes of Western culture are not as transient as the cultures in which they matured. They belong permanently to Europe’s spiritual patrimony and ought to remain constitutive of its unity. None can be imposed in a democratic society. Yet none may be neglected either, the theoretical no more than the practical, the spiritual no less than the aesthetic.

In recent times Europeans, discouraged by the self-made disasters of two world wars, have been too easily inclined to turn their backs on the past, to dismiss it as no longer usable, and to move toward a different future identifying themselves as “Neo-Europeans” with a new identity. In the years after World War II, the model of that future was America. In recent years, Europeans have become more conscious of their specific identity and are beginning to intuit that such an identity resides in the past; it stems from a unique past, created by the hundreds of millions of men and women who for three millennia have lived on “that little cape on the continent of Asia” (Paul Valery) between the North Sea and the Mediterranean, between Ireland’s west coast and the Ural Mountains. It has given Europeans, in all their variety, a distinct communal face.

I’d like to suggest that a new awareness of cultural identity would make Europeans view the entire continent and its many islands, not only their country of origin, as a common homeland with common purposes. This unity of spirit in a rich variety of expressions must be remembered in forging the new European unity and ought to have been mentioned in the EU’s constitution. Its Constitution ought to have had a preamble with a vision that inspires the people. That vision cannot be only economic and political but is necessarily a spiritual one as the founding fathers well knew. Without that kind of cement the whole edifice will eventually crumble and the way to nihilism and eventual disintegration would be open. The antidote to that kind of cynicism and despair is what Ignazio Silone called “the conspiracy of hope,” alive and well among all Europeans who understand that not by bread alone do humans live.
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http://www.newropeans-magazine.org/?option=com_content&task=view&id=2197&Itemid=90

The above link will take you to the “invitation to the reader” as found in the book A New Europe in Search of Its Soul. It has three parts. It was originally published, before the appearance of the book by Newropean Magazine in May 2005.

Professor Emanuel Paparella’s contributions to Ovi magazine dedicated to the idea of Europe can be found collected in a book published by Ovi magazine with the name “Europe beyond the Euro.” You can find and download the book in the pages of the Ovi bookshop.
It has become a cliche to say that the solution to the European economic crisis is political integration. Like most cliches, that's a misleading half-truth.

Allow me to address the European predicament at the foundation—the psychological and spiritual level. Just as economic policy without political direction is a ship without a rudder, political policy without fundamental insight and vision inevitably runs aground.

From across the pond, it seems to me that the first question Europe needs to answer is not whether or what kind of country the EU will be, but what is “the United States of Europe”s place in and relationship to the global society?

If you like paradoxes, as I do, this one is a beauty. The world is so interconnected and interdependent now that to say Europe does not exist in isolation sounds redundant. The paradox is that the unification of Europe cannot occur in the reality of our present historical context without first looking to humanity as a whole.

Yet our disappointing conventional president intones conventional thinking in repeating: “The solutions will be debated and decided by the leaders and the people of Europe.”

It’s common to hear politicians in the United States say that “Europe punches below its weight.” But Washington doesn’t want Europe to become a heavyweight contender in terms of global leadership.

Though it’s inconceivable that a United States of Europe would try to compete militarily with the United States of America (which has a monstrous military twice the size of all other militaries in the world combined), Europe can and should compete on the field of ideas and leadership.

However if Europe continues to focus on its internecine struggles, rather than on what a new and United Europe would look like and mean for humanity, unification will continue to be a pipe dream. Obviously, the European Union needs a unifying vision of what Europe could be to the world.

In all of Europe, are there no more compelling leaders than the sharp-elbowed technocrat Merkel, the plodding functionary Barroso, or the hamstrung ideologue Hollande?

That’s not a call for the ‘strong leader’ solution of the past, with all its latent potential for evil, but simply pointing out the necessity of a clear and convincing voice of insight, vision, and reason.

This is what many people across our divided political spectrum in America thought they were getting in electing in Barack Obama. What we got instead was a simulacrum of passion, the emptiness of reason without insight. Obama ran his transformation con game precisely at a moment when the passion of...
insight was most urgently needed to infuse the spent evils of the Bush era. Instead he drove the last nail into hope’s coffin in America. And now the hounds of hell are back at the door, fronting an even more malleable lapdog in Mitt Romney.

Of course, in hindsight the Obama con was inevitable given the rapid decline of America, the erosion of anything that could be called character in its people, and the willful devotion by our media to satiating the superficial whims of a celebrity-oriented culture that even sickens people here in California.

So will Europe break free of America’s dead-end globalizing culture (not to mention passé French pretensions and soulless German pragmatism), and chart a new course? The prospects don’t look good at present, since Europe remains self-absorbingly in America’s thrall.

Indeed, there seems to be almost as much numbness there as there is here, differentiated only by thick layers of tradition and sophistication. It’s amazing to think that there are still people in the world, especially demonstrably in the Middle East these days, who actually feel: “Give me liberty, or give me death.”

Given our interconnected histories, can the last ember of America’s revolutionary spirit find a ready hearth, and ignite what life remains on the Continent of our birth? Wouldn’t that be an irony of history?

Can the USE (really?) be the first confederated country to lead in the only way that now matters—with respect to the common challenges urgently facing humanity as a whole? Such a question sounds ludicrous in our cynical age, but there it is.

Without facing the world as it is, the Continent and the world may well once again degenerate into the Europe and the world as it was.

Let’s take the critical question of what to do about a country banging at Europe’s back door—Iran. Recently I heard US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laughingly agree with the Mephistophelian James Baker when he said: “At the end of the day, if Iran does not comply and end its program to gain a nuclear weapon, we should take them out. And the United States is the only country that can do it. Israel can’t.”

There you have it.

By what right does the United States claim such authority to go to war against Iran? By the ancient right of military power, which holds that might makes right—with much less intelligence in its use than Cyrus the Great. Given America’s recent track record in Iraq, how will Europe respond? Can it respond?

The European conundrum is the same one that confronts all peoples in our de facto global society: How are the old national identities to be woven into a workable global polity and its subsets? Obviously, the patriotic citizens of the nation-states of Europe cannot combine into single country anymore than the patriotic citizens of the city-states of Renaissance Italy could combine into a modern state.

No, a larger construct has to absorb the smaller; the smaller cannot be merged into the larger. And the larger construct now isn’t the United States of Europe; it’s the unparalleled reality of the global society. The old citizens of nations cannot be reshaped into the new citizens of the world, or of Europe. Basic attitudes have to change.

The future of humanity is too important to be left in the hands of increasingly irrelevant leaders of fading and failing nation-states guided and driven by national interests, rather than the interests of humanity. And international institutions, as manifestations of nation-states, are looking more and more like boils on the world’s body politic.

Democracy depends on the caliber its citizens, but very few thinkers are attending to what it means to be a good citizen in the new global context.

In the end, the urgent necessity is not for some political program that magically unites a disparate and divided Continent. The urgent necessity is for ordinary people all over the world to hold their beliefs, opinions, traditions, and even knowledge in abeyance, and hold the space open to question and awaken insight together.

That action, taken at the spiritual, philosophical, and political levels, will ignite a revolution like the world has never seen. Let it begin in Europe.

Martin LeFevre

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thecostaricanews.com - http://www.arushatimes.co.tz/ - fountaingraylight.net
It started long before I took my first European passport and it came quite naturally. It was the day somebody asked me where I was from and I answered from Europe. You see when the question came I had already lived in three different European countries and my family roots were found in another two.

I born in Athens, Greece; spent time in Berlin Germany, study in England and France. Lived for brief periods in Brussels and now permanently in Helsinki Finland. Nowadays when I go back to Greece for holidays people ask me where I am from and a few years ago a Greek prime minister to my fascination pointed in a press conference that I speak really good Greek!

And if back in late 1970s it sounded a bit weird when I said that I am European, in the beginning of the 21st century more and more people identify themselves as Europeans. And not only Europeans. I remember one of the last interviews Nina Simone gave and when the reporter asked her why she moved to Europe leaving behind all the American stardom she enjoyed for so many years she answered that she feels free in Europe pointing that despite all the theories and the announcements she never felt free of prejudice in America. Even the worst enemies of democracy, tyrants as later proved like Khomeini found settler in Europe. Because Europe knows that democracy is not just a word but a way of life that you need to fight for and protect. And Europe has done both for centuries.

And yes democracy started in Greece but later Renaissance handed out to all Europe the same way it handed out art, literature and philosophy making them common good and part of the pan-European heritage. Even the languages, the different European languages have common roots that link them one to another. And perhaps it was Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Paul-Henri Spaak, and Alcide De Gasperi who put the foundation of a united Europe but the links were there far before them. They just eavesdropped the sound of the magnetism that was bringing one nation closer to the other. The treaty of Rome in 1957 just verified what was there for long time.
From the Treaty of Rome to Treaty of Lisbon Europe gone long way and like it happens in cases like that Europe took the difficult way occasionally not learning from her mistakes. And the thing the bureaucratic part of the organized anymore union doesn’t listen is the citizens who in majority nowadays consider themselves Europeans beyond borders and treaties. The funny thing is that the bureaucrats are listening more the screams of the xenophobic and insecure xenophobes that rise all around Europe that the simple citizens. Check the statistics of all the European counties and you will find out that except a loud minority the majority supports the idea of a United Europe and the dream of a federal Europe, the united states of Europe with common defence, common economy and common justice. Do you think David Cameron would even think to ask for a referendum in Great Britain now, after forty years in the Union if he didn’t know that the result would give him the chance to shut for good all the reactionaries of the far right?

In the meantime Europe is in a deep economic crisis but this happened mainly because local interests and personal agendas overwhelmed the European politicians and instead of fortifying the Union they stood numb in front the evolution of resultants and interests that don’t want this Union. Sometimes even us the European underestimate the power this Union has. Just imagine the number of former colonies the European nations have in good relationship and influence. Just think how many countries this minute use the euro as their exchange and commerce currency from Asia to Africa and South America and you will understand that certain resultants don’t want this union. But even them cannot fight people’s conscious and the people of Europe more and more feel Europeans. And from Lisbon to Helsinki they demand to be heard. Beyond currencies and treaties.

Daddy, loves Mummy. He kicks her, punches her, shouts nasty words and makes her cry. And Daddy loves me. He burns me, slaps me, locks me in a cupboard and calls me a failure. I hate love.

STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NOW!
On May 25, 2010, Guardian, about two years ago, Étienne Balibar wrote of EU as a ‘dead political project’. He discussed on a series of questions: the possible default of Greece, the expansive European rescue loan, the condition of devastating budget cuts, the Portuguese and Spanish debts, the threat on the value and the very existence of the euro, and the announcement of budget austerity measures in several member states.

Clearly, this is only the beginning of a very heavy crisis. The euro is the weak link in the chain, and so is Europe itself. There can be little doubt that catastrophic consequences are coming. The Greeks have been the first victims, but they will hardly be the last, of a politics of ‘rescuing the European currency’, measures which all citizens ought to be allowed to debate, because all of them will be affected by the outcome. However, the discussion is deeply biased, because essential determinations are hidden or dismissed.

Balibar went on with some reflections. ‘If in its current form, under the influence of the dominant social forces, the European construction may have produced some degree of institutional harmonisation, and generalised some fundamental rights— which is not negligible— it has not produced a convergent evolution of national economies, a zone of shared prosperity. Some countries are dominant, others are dominated. The peoples of Europe may not have antagonistic interests, but the nations increasingly do.

As it is well known any Keynesian strategy to generate public trust in the economy rests on three interdependent pillars: a stable currency, a rational system of taxes, but also a social policy, aiming at full employment. This third aspect has been quasi-systematically ignored in most current commentaries. Furthermore, all this debate concerning the euro monetary system and the future of Europe will remain entirely abstract unless it is articulated to the real trends of globalisation, which the financial crisis will powerfully accelerate, unless they are politically addressed by the peoples which they affect and their leaders.

Balibar added ‘We are witnessing a transition from one form of international competition to another: no longer (mainly) a competition among productive capitals, but a competition among national territories, which use tax exemptions and pressure on the wages of labour to attract more floating capital than their neighbours.’ Now, clearly, whether Europe works as an effective system of solidarity among
its members to protect them from ‘systemic risks’, or simply sets a juridical framework to promote a greater degree of competition among them, will determine the future of Europe politically, socially, and culturally.

There is also a very important tendency: a transformation of the international division of labour, which radically destabilises the distribution of employment in the world. This is a new global structure where north and south, east and west are now exchanging their places. And, Europe, or most of it, will experience a brutal increase of inequalities: a collapsing of the middle classes, a shrinking of skilled jobs, a displacement of ‘volatile’ productive industries, a regression of welfare and social rights, and a destruction of cultural industries and general public services.

At this point we cannot help asking: is this the beginning of the end for the EU, a construction that started 50 years ago on the basis of an age-old utopia, but now proves unable to fulfil its promises? The answer, unfortunately, is yes: sooner or later, this will be inevitable, and possibly not without some violent turmoil... Unless it finds the capacity to start again on radically new bases, Europe is a dead political project.

To be sure the breaking of the EU would inevitably abandon its peoples to the hazards of globalisation to an even greater degree on the one hand. On the other, a new foundation of Europe does not guarantee any success, but at least it gives her a chance of gaining some geopolitical leverage. With one condition, that all the challenges involved in the idea of an original form of post-national federation are seriously and courageously met. With the assumption that a new sharp democracy cannot avoid confronting the current crisis of liberalism — the fact that liberalism as an ideology is exhausted, that neoliberalism is a facade, and that we live in a new political climate. More, these days the worldwide neo-liberalism has embraced an extremely savage form of capitalism, especially when it makes use and abuse of the ideas of democracy and liberty as the justification for the operation of neoliberal capitalism and practice of financial imperialism.

These involve setting up a common public authority, which is neither a state nor a simple governance of politicians and experts: securing genuine equality among the nations, thus fighting against reactionary nationalisms; above all reviving democracy in the European space and resisting the current processes of ‘de-democratisation’ and ‘statism without a State’, so dear to neoliberalism. Once again, the ground of democracy and freedom becomes an issue: once again democracy simply needs to re-affirm itself. Something obvious should have been long acknowledged: there will be no progress towards federalism in Europe if democracy itself does not progress beyond the existing forms, allowing an increased influence for the people(s) in the supranational institutions.

Does this mean that, in order to reverse the course of recent history, to shake the lethargy of a decaying political construction, we need something like a European movement, a simultaneous movement or a peaceful insurrection of popular masses who will be voicing their anger as victims of the crisis against its authors and beneficiaries, and calling for a control ‘from below’ over the secret bargainings and deals made by markets, banks, and states? Yes, indeed.

At the same time, according to Balibar the question concerns the intellectuals: what should and could be a democratically elaborated political action against the crisis at the European level? It is the task of progressive intellectuals, whether they see themselves as reformists or revolutionaries, namely to discuss this subject and take risks. If they fail to do it, they will have no excuse.

This the realistic and, at the same time, pessimistic picture sketched by Balibar: unless it
finds the capacity to start again on radically new bases, Europe is a dead political project.

On November 25-2011, Der Spiegel-Online International, Jürgen Habermas in an interview stands for The Philosopher’s Mission to Save the EU. He gets really angry. He is nothing short of furious -- because he takes it all personally; ‘he leans forward; he leans backward. He arranges his fidgety hands to illustrate his tirades before allowing them to fall back to his lap. He simply has no desire to see Europe consigned to the dustbin of world history.’ And, in succession ‘I am speaking here as a citizen’ he says. ‘I would rather be sitting back home at my desk, believe me. But this is too important. Everyone has to understand that we have critical decisions facing us. That is why I am so involved in this debate. The European project can no longer continue in elite modus.’

As known, Europe is his lifelong project; it is the project of his generation, of the European Constitution. Usually he says clever things like: ‘In this crisis, functional and systematic imperatives collide’ -- referring to sovereign debts and the pressure of the markets. Sometimes he shakes his head in consternation and says: ‘It is simply unacceptable, simply unacceptable’ -- referring to the EU diktaat and Greece’s loss of national sovereignty. And then he is really angry again: ‘I condemn the political parties. Our politicians have long been incapable of aspiring to anything whatsoever other than being re-elected. They have no political substance whatsoever, no convictions.’

It is in the nature of this crisis that philosophy and bar-room politics occasionally find themselves on an equal footing. It is also in the nature of this crisis that too many people say too much, and we have someone who has approached the problems systematically, as Habermas has done in his Zur Verfassung Europas (On Europe’s Constitution), just published book.

Zur Verfassung Europas is basically a long essay in which Habermas describes how the essence of our democracy has changed under the pressure of the crisis and the frenzy of the markets. He says that power has slipped from the hands of the people and shifted to bodies of questionable democratic legitimacy, such as the European Council. Basically, he suggests, the technocrats have long since staged a quiet coup d’état.

But, does he have an answer to the question of which road democracy and capitalism should take?

Habermas refers to the system that Merkel and Sarkozy have established during the crisis as a ‘post-democracy’. The European Parliament barely has any influence. The European Commission has ‘an odd, suspended position,’ without really being responsible for what it does. Habermas sees a divided Europe in which states are driven by the markets, in which the EU exerts massive influence on the formation of new governments in Italy and Greece, and in which what he so passionately defends and loves about Europe has been simply turned on its head.

Yet, unlike Balibar, Habermas is a virtually unshakable optimist. His problem as a philosopher has always been that he appears a bit humdrum because, despite all the big words, he is basically rather intelligible. He took his cultivated rage from Marx, his keen view of modernity from Freud and his clarity from the American pragmatists. He has always been
a friendly elucidator, a rationalist and an anti-romanticist. Habermas truly believes in the rationality of the people. He truly believes in a public sphere that serves to make things better.

’Sometime after 2008’ says Habermas ‘I understood that the process of expansion, integration and democratization does not automatically move forward of its own accord, that it is reversible, that for the first time in the history of the EU, we are actually experiencing a dismantling of democracy. I did not think this was possible. We have reached a crossroads.’

He is a child of the war and perseveres, even when it seems like he is about to keel over. This is important to understanding why he takes the topic of Europe so personally. It has to do with the evil Germany of yesteryear and the good Europe of tomorrow, with the transformation of past to future, with a continent that was once torn apart by guilt -- and is now torn apart by debt. He speaks of a lack of political union and of ‘embedded capitalism,’ a term he uses to describe a market economy controlled by politics. He makes the amorphous entity Brussels tangible in its contradictions, and points to the fact that the decisions of the European Council, which permeate our everyday life, basically have no legal, legitimate basis. He rails against ‘political defeatism’ and begins the process of building a positive vision for Europe from the rubble of his analysis. He sketches the nation-state as a place in which the rights of the citizens are best protected, and how this notion could be implemented on a European level. He says also that states have no rights, ‘only people have rights’, and then he takes the final step and brings the peoples of Europe and the citizens of Europe into position -- they are the actual historical actors in his eyes, not the states, not the governments. It is the citizens who, in the current manner that politics are done, have been reduced to spectators.

In short, his vision is as follows: ‘The citizens of each individual country, who until now have had to accept how responsibilities have been reassigned across sovereign borders, could as European citizens bring their democratic influence to bear on the governments that are currently acting within a constitutional gray area.’

This is the Habermas’ main point and what has been missing from the vision of Europe: a formula for what is wrong with the current construction. He does not see the EU as a commonwealth of states or as a federation but, rather, as something new. It is a legal construct that the peoples of Europe have agreed upon in concert with the citizens of Europe -- we with ourselves, in other words -- in a dual form and omitting each respective government. Habermas prefers to speak about saving the ‘biotope of old Europe.’

There is an alternative, he says, there is another way aside from the creeping shift in power that we are currently witnessing. The media must it is an imperative, help citizens understand the enormous extent to which the EU influences their lives. And the politicians would certainly understand the enormous pressure that would fall upon them if Europe failed. The EU ‘should’ be democratized.

All Habermas offers is the kind of vision that a constitutional theorist is capable of formulating: the ‘global community’ will have to sort it out. In the midst of the crisis, he still sees ‘the example of the European Union’s elaborated concept of a constitutional cooperation between citizens and states’ as the best way to build the ‘global community of citizens’. He is, after all, a pragmatic optimist. He does not say what steps will take us from worse off to better off. If the European project fails, ‘he says, ‘then there is the question of how
long it will take to reach the status quo again. Remember the German Revolution of 1848: When it failed, it took us 100 years to regain the same level of democracy as before. A vague future and a warning from the past — that is what Habermas offers us. The present is, at least for the time being, unattainable.

As it is evident the Habermas’ vision is a sort of neo-federalist model that gives wings to imagination and which in the different national arenas unchains an ample, public and dramatic debate on common interests. Only in such a way a European integrated politics can enter into action. In his opinion, only countermarked by a common passport European citizens can learn to recognize, beyond their national boundaries, each other as belonging to the same political community. The civic solidarity, till now limited to the national state must enlarge to that of citizens of Union so that, for example, German and Greek are ready to give themselves reciprocal guarantee. The Habermas’model, in sum, substantiates a mayor cohesion among the countries of European Union, an enlarged basis of solidarity that aims at something like a European demos.

No doubt, the Habermasian notion of constitutional patriotism of Europeans remains ongoing, grounded in the future. And the actual democratic deficit is not simply an institutional phenomenon, which concerns the limited powers of the European Parliament, it is also a deficit of the public sphere and of the formation of political will. The institutional manoeuvring is possible only if so far as institutional change goes hand in hand with real processes of creation of a European public sphere.

The new European public sphere would be an arena in which the Europeans participate in discussion about matters of common concern, in an atmosphere free of coercion or dependencies that would incline individuals toward acquiescence or silence. Habermas’s institutional concerns centre on empowering voice and on disenabling other means of collective judgement within democratic arenas-coercion, markets, and tradition.

Today, the nation-state remains an indispensable intermediary in European politics. The European civic duties, as they presently exist, can be executed only indirectly, through nation-state administrations; yet actions can be taken on the European stage only on the basis of nation-state empowerment of European authorities. Today, the EU is marked out as a state in suspension between the intergovernmental and neo-federal models.

In order to give the European citizens more democratic control directly (and not through their national governments) over the representatives of European sovereignty (the Council, the Commission and the Court) Habermas has believed in a European Constitution, unfortunately the plan has failed.

What kind of institutional and political architecture for Europe? Maybe an empirical experiment that assumes the form of model in the inner kind of post-modern federation? While it seems difficult to balance the institutions and the citizenship, to maintain stability and liberty, a network model could again risk becoming...
an instrument into the hands of bureaucracy. Will the European Union, born after the long season of modernity, succeed in gaining politics and power presently appearing divided and follow different routes?

In re-formulating and raising the main points of human existence and welfare it seems that Europe cannot help giving itself a kind of post-modern constitutional frame grounded on ethical values, a kind of totally new and cosmopolitan model.

We need to re-address the issue of Europe. A rethink of the institutional and political architecture is needed. The way in which the European Union exercises its powers needs to be clarified.

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Professor Francesco Tampoia

Francesco Tampoia, born in Acquaviva delle Fonti (BA) philosopher and historian, Ph. D. at University of Bari with a dissertation on the political thought of D. Hume, had followed courses of specialization in London, courses and professional conferences in Rome and other Universities. From 1980 he has published widely. He has written 4 books, more than 100 articles, including essays and reviews, and collaborated to different cultural and scientific, national and international journals.

How can I play hide & seek when 21 children die every minute?
Who’ll play football with me when 21 friends die every minute?
If I close my eyes and count to a 100. 35 children are dead.
Does Europe need a new Renaissance?

By Christos Mouzeviris

In the recent years Europe comes on the spotlight of the global news, only for its economic woes and inability to cope with the ongoing economic crisis.

Just like many times in the past, Europe is in the centre of the global interest for all the wrong reasons. We have been there before so many times and as some say, we always recovered and became stronger.

But how will Europe look like, if we ever get out of this new low we have reached? In the past after every dark page, there was a golden period: the Renaissance after the Dark Ages, new European kingdoms after all the invasions and wars. With destruction always came rebirth and Europe always remained one of the leading forces on this planet, a main shaper of human history as we know it.

Also, we should consider what would be the catalyst that will put Europe back into the reigns of any progress of this world. What sectors we should encourage to grow, what resources do we have to exploit and how we could put it all together?

If we examine European history, our greatest achievements and contributions to this world were our culture, science and industries. On the recent years they all suffer in a bigger or lesser extend. Long gone are the days that we enjoyed European (French or Italian for example) music, films and art. The days that European fashion was in its heydays, our factories were producing, our products were sought after all over the world and prominent European literature and philosophy were influencing the way the world thought.

Europe today listens to American hit music and watches Hollywood films. Our clothes and most of the goods and gadgets we purchase are made in China or India. There are very few prominent scientific discoveries or breakthroughs and very few well
known writers, poets, thinkers or philosophers. We live in a fast consumerist and ephemeral society, largely influenced by the “Anglo-Saxon” or American way of living, while our economies are now based on services, banking, the markets and the monopolies of the few.

Europe is the continent who influenced the most this planet, for good and for bad. Starting from the antiquity and the Greek and Roman miracles in drama, philosophy, astronomy and mathematics, other later European nations continued their traditions; French, German, Italian, Spanish, Austrian, Dutch, Flemish and Portuguese explorers, scientists, philosophers, scholars and artists contributed to the enrichment, expansion and the zenith of European culture in all four corners of the Earth.

Later, after so many wars and strife Europe found itself at the heart of the industrial revolution, which fuelled and was fuelled by another two world wars. During this period that shaped the most our modern day Europe, we had great technological and industrial advances that unfortunately also came with great tragedies. After the wars Europe was devastated so it had to lean on and accept the help from America, in order to stand on its feet again.

That came with a price: our economies today are modelled after America and are relying on the banking sector and the markets, just like it was decided after the wars, during the cold war period. Our capitalist societies were formed during that time and 70 years later this system is in crisis. Europe is at cross-roads. But it is not just a financial crisis; it is a social, cultural and ethical crisis above all.

After the wars many of our fathers had to live in absolute poverty and deprivation and had to work really hard. So it was very easy to lure them and turn them into over spenders: all it had to be done was to pour bucket loads of cheap money into our economies and their pockets, created in our banking system with credit and bad loans and that was it. People went mad and wanted to live our version of the “American Dream!” Be able to spend and have the lifestyle they watched for years in the Hollywood films.

That was going on for decades in our countries. Due to globalization, a phenomenon
That of course will mean that many will lose their monopolies, especially in the rich countries. We will see a transfer and sharing of wealth, but not in a bail-out form as we are used to now. We won’t have the taxes of the workers of a few countries be used to keep unproductive and easy to manipulate the rest of their “partners.” Rather shared opportunities equally distributed across Europe and not just in few. New education systems and universities that can be linked or cooperate with each other even more closely than now, will enable our young people to become young scientists. We could use those new scientists to expand our innovation and scientific research.

That in turn will create a new type of industrial revolution. Instead of wasting money in bailing out the banks, securing the interests of the few, keep the status quo and balance of power in place, we will have a collective renaissance across Europe. In all necessary fields: cultural, scientific, industrial and economic. Simply because they all have to go together, if the stability and prosperity is meant to last.

An educated person with reasonable career opportunities does not easily make the mistakes that many in the hardest hit from the crisis countries like Greece, Portugal and Ireland did over the past decades. Tricked, manipulated and deluded by their leaders who answered to rich elites inside and outside their nations, with limited education and qualifications, is there any wonder that they messed up?

But our leaders instead of promoting growth and investments in all the spheres that I mentioned above, they are looking to promote only economic growth, in the form of bail-outs and support for the banking system. That unfortunately has negative effects in all societies and in Europe collectively. It creates divisions among the European populace and it impoverishes the receivers of this “aid.” That aid that has as only purpose the exploitation of the natural resources of the weaker nations by the rich elites of the northern European countries. We can see that clearly in the case of Greece, where our lenders ask from us to sell to them heaven and earth, in return for their “generosity” and “support.”

Sixty years ago, while the ashes of Europe were still warm, some enlightened people dreamed of a better, different Europe. And that led to what we called today the E.U. the European Union. But this dream became a nightmare recently, simply because our leaders are so easily corrupted by money and power. They rich elites of some countries dictate the fate of the rest of the continent and drive them into the old feuds, divisions and nationalism, a dangerous mix to have with an economic crisis.

So instead of unity, diversity, solidarity, and growth we have bigotry, nationalism, greed, protectionism and divisions. The dream of real European renaissance after WW2 was flushed down the drain with the help of billions of euro from the banks, the help of the markets and the rating agencies and the power mongering of our ruling elites. And even still, on the verge of a total and catastrophic collapse, they refuse to invest in our youth’s future rather save and protect the investments of the few.

To me they just reflect the decay that Europe suffers from: we are an old, tired and sick continent. The remedy to this situation is not just a financial one. It must include a cultural and industrial regeneration, a new renaissance that will mark a new path in our history. Hopefully we will be able to walk this path together, united in some form with the common good in mind. A utopia? Most likely. But the more our leaders waste time trying to preserve the interests of the lobbies they answer to, the more this utopia becomes more necessary and urgent!

Christos Mouzeviris
A Greek living in Ireland, a Journalism student and interested in politics, history, art, nature, traveling and music. His blog aims to give an alternative perspective of EU and European politics to the citizens of EU, and re-enact their interest in European politics. He believes in an equal and prosperous Europe for its people and nationalities, but with an equal distribution of wealth, equal opportunities and development for all the continent. He loves traveling and would like to start a travel blog as well. He created his blog, with a vision into making it a real movement: the Eblana European Democratic Movement.
Searching For Henri

A short story about Europe by Richard S. Stanford

George knew that the bar with its ten brightly lit windows bathing the dark stream of the outer boulevard in a sheet of flames would be a good place to start. He figured that any man who grew up among the idle rich of Geneva would find solace in a place like the Folies-Bergère regardless of his circumstances. Entering through the glass doors, he made his way through the crowd to the barmaid standing at the marble-top bar stocked with bottles of champagne, beer, a glass tray of oranges and two roses in a glass. Alina was talking to a dignified gentleman who wore a top hat. She leaned forward to whisper in his ear. He smiled. She turned to George and asked him what he would desire. Alina wore a black velvet jacket trimmed tightly at her waist; her large, melancholy eyes contrasted with her gentle smile. George asked for a Pernod.

When she turned away, George could see himself reflected in the large mirror that spanned along the entire length of the bar. He looked past himself to the reflection of the full saloon - everyone talking very loudly, outbursts of shouting, laughter breaking through the murmur of hoarse voices. Sometimes, fists pounded on the tables making the glasses tinkle. With their hands folded on their stomachs or clasped behind their backs, the drinkers formed little groups, pressed one against the other. A large crystal chandelier hung over the throng, illuminating them with a dazzle of light and shadow. George looked at the face of every man in the mirror but could not see anyone clearly because of the smoky haze. All he had to facilitate his search was the daguerreotype portrait, taken almost twenty years ago.

When Alina returned with his Pernod, George asked, “May I ask you a question?” She smiled demurely. “I’m looking for Monsieur Henri Dunant. He’s about 50, from Geneva. He may, however, have changed his name.”

“You’re so pleasant, Edouard,” said Alina with a twist of her lip. She looked to George. “There is a hospice on rue de Chazelles. Many jobless foreigners stay there. It’s run by a Madame Boche. If you look north from the Parc de Monceau you’ll see a huge statue of a woman surrounded with scaffolding. Walk towards her and you will find rue Chazelles.” George’s eyes squinted, his forehead creased. “This is Paris, Monsieur. Believe in anything.”

George finished his Pernod, laid some coins on the counter. “I’m staying at the

“Through the grainy surface of the photograph Alina could see that this Henri was a sophisticate with warm eyes, a determined smile, perfectly groomed hair and beard. He wore a dress jacket with a black silk bow-tie. Alina said he had been in here several weeks ago, asking for work. That night, however, he was dressed in a dirty black overcoat. He was deferential to the manager who turned his nose as if he had a foul odour then dismissed him. She offered Henri a drink, on the house, but he refused politely, although he wouldn’t mind an orange and she handed him one from the glass bowl. His hands, she could see, were soft; not the hands of a working man. Alina knew that men such as he were escaping from something. She could see in his sad, tired eyes that he was evading visions of things he had seen. For the past few months he had been sleeping under the Pont des Invalides but with colder weather coming he was worried about his health. Alina told him of a hospice she knew on rue de Chazelles where he could have a room in return for services. He thanked her and just before he turned to leave, he took her hand, brought it to his lips and kissed it. No man had ever done that to her and she shivered. The man smiled, lowered his head, then dissolved into the smoke.

The man in the top hat at the end of the bar approached and asked to see the daguerreotype portrait. He said he was sympathetic to people who were searching for another. It had to be the loneliest of things to do. If you are searching, you must be alone; and if you are searching for another person, they must be alone too; and if you are searching for another, you must be among strangers, otherwise you would not be searching at all. “I find it interesting, this similarity between you and this man. Curious.”

“He’s not my twin, if that’s what you’re suggesting,” said George. “And, he has aged since this photograph was taken.”

“Then the print will not do you much good, will it,” said the man handing it back to George and returning to his drink at the end of the bar.

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George took out the daguerreotype print from inside his jacket and showed it to her.

“A thief, maybe?”

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George was certain Alina had been exaggerating and continued thinking so until he reached Parc de Monceau. The first indication he had of something unusual was seeing people standing motionless in the park, all looking up above the rooftops to the north. When George saw it, he stopped too. At first he detected a mirage, a vague outline through the coal smoke pouring from the chimneys. Then a gentle wind blew and like a painting it revealed itself.

It was a statue so large he could not take it all in with one glance. He raised his eyes slowly to take in all of its height, rising fifty metres into the grey sky, sparkling of raw copper so vast it absorbed all the light, the right hand extended further upwards to the heavens, gripping a torch. The head was enormous, culminating in a crown of daggers, and it was a woman. There was nothing in her eyes to indicate her personality but the line of her huge mouth and her eyelids told scores of tiny men riveting her together, polishing the flowing stola that swept up from her feet and into the horizon. She was enveloped in thin scaffolding up to her chest and on the platforms were a resolute female gaze that did not look down upon her subjects nor up to any God only straight into the horizon.

George continued on, making his way across the park and down an alleyway to the rue de Chazelles. The buildings here were lower, no more than two storeys and ramshackle. Here, the woman with the torch loomed larger, her shadow undulating over the buildings. When George looked away from her eyes, he saw a short man standing in the middle of the street looking at him.

He walked towards George with a severe limp and a mischievous smile.

“This is Liberty Enlightening the World," he said as if he were introducing a stage act. "A gift to the United States, if they ever finish it. And what is this idle gentleman looking for?”

The hospice. The man held out his open palm open. Not a word can be uttered in this city without a price attached to it. George dropped a couple of sous into it. The man pointed to a doorway just a stone’s throw away.

George knocked on the door and looked up to the rows of windows spanning the four storeys, their black shutters with broken slats lending an air of desolation to the expanse of wall. The door was opened abruptly by a tall woman, her face carved with deep wrinkles. Oui, she was Madame Boche. George showed her the photograph of Dunant. She stepped back and said "Just because I'm the concierge of a hospice doesn't make me ignorant."

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They reached the fourth floor where the corridor led off echoing. Madame Boche stopped and opened a yellowed door. George stepped inside. He looked round the room, its walnut chest on one drawer missing, a wicker chair and a little stained table with a cracked water jug standing on it. George noticed that the wicker chair was placed precisely at an angle to the window facing north thus offering a perfect framed image of the upper torso of the Liberty statue. George sat in the chair.

"He would sit there for hours looking at her," said Madame Boche. "Why is a man such as this wandering the streets of Paris as a beggar?"

"I don't know. That's what I am trying to find out." George turned to her standing in the doorway. "Why did you say 'a man such as this'?

"It was indeed a terrible battle," said George without any true idea of how terrible it really was. He was only nine years old at the time: But he'd read Dunant's own account of the 1859 battle, A Memory of Solferino. That book had now brought him to this wicker chair.

"All battles are terrible, sir, but they are more so when you lose your own."

"I'm sorry. How many?"

"My husband, my brother, and a cousin. Not even their bodies made it back. Our lives together were just beginning. Then it was all over, finished." Madame Boche turned to look sternly at George. "It is not right that the images he saw that day and the things he did to change everything have been forgotten."

"I agree. That's probably why its called a memoir, because memories are never forgotten," George should know. He first read the book late into the night at the offices of Die Otschweiz. He was desperate. Conrad, his editor, had given him an ultimatum: write a story or he'd be sent back to the typesetting department. George hadn't written a decent story in weeks.

"How do you know the book, Madame Boche?"

"Just because I'm the concierge of a hospice doesn't make me ignorant."
“I never thought that. The book was well known, then?”

“When five thousand Frenchman are killed in one day, then yes, it becomes ‘well known’. Everyone read it. For some it was the only account of what had actually happened to their loved ones. And there are the walking wounded, over 12,000 of them. You met our gatekeeper on the street? Maurice. He is one of them.” George realized the resilience he had detected was real.

“There must be many others who need this room?”

“I’m hoping he might return. I can wait a few more weeks.”

A Memory of Solferino was not a long book but it was horrific in every meticulous detail:

The stillness of the night was broken by groans, by stifled sighs of anguish and suffering. Heart-rending voices calling for help. When the sun came up on the 25th, it disclosed the bodies of men and horses covering the battlefield; corpses were strewn over roads, ditches, ravines, thickets and fields; the approaches of Solferino were thick with the dead. The poor wounded men that were being picked up all day long were ghastly pale and exhausted. Some, who had been the most badly hurt, had a stupefied look as though they could not grasp what was said to them; they stared at one out of haggard eyes, but their prostration did not prevent them from feeling their pain. Others were anxious and excited by nervous strain and shaken by spasmodic trembling. Some, who had gaping wounds already beginning to show infection, were almost crazed with suffering. They begged to be put out of their misery and writhed with faces distorted in the grip of the death struggle.”

George walked around the room. On the back of the door hung a pair of muddy trousers. In the centre of the mantelpiece, between two cheap metal candlesticks (not a pair), lay a couple of pink pawnbroker’s slips. Why would Dunant have left these behind? Was he giving up any hope of having the money to buy back the items or was he shedding his past?

As George walked across the park, he looked back at the Liberty statue receding below the rooftops. He crossed rue de Courcelles jumping over the gutter flowing like a dark brown putrid stream. He recalled the day he went to the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross perched on the top of a hill overlooking the clear blue waters of Lake Geneva. It was a modest 4-storey government building devoid of ornamentation. George had thought then that this story would be an easy one: he would interview Dunant, write the article and satisfy Conrad.

Once inside, he asked a young woman at the front desk if he could please speak with Henri Dunant. “Who?” Her reaction puzzled George. He repeated, slowly this time. The woman shook her head. After some coaxing, he convinced the woman to fetch someone who may know the man was seeking.

George looked at four framed daguerreotype photographs mounted on the wall behind
the woman’s desk. Four? What happened to the Committee of Five? The photographs were of very distinguished gentlemen, noblemen in their own right: Gustave Moynier, the current President, was in the middle; beside him General G.H Dufour and Dr. Théodore Maunier; and on the other side, Dr. Lothi Appia. Where was Henri Dunant? George heard the sound of rapid footsteps echoing down the hallway. Coming towards him was a tall man with a flowing moustache and intense blue eyes. He put his arm around George as if he were an intimate, and guided him through the front doors. Once outside, the man took his arm away and faced George. “What do you want?” he said sternly.

“Dr. Appia?”

Appia nodded. “I repeat, what do you want?”

George told Appia who he was, the story he was planning to write and that therefore talking to Henri Dunant seemed elemental. Appia looked to the sky while stamping the ground with his foot. “Damn! I knew this would happen.” George had thought this would be a simple matter of telling the story of the founder of the Red Cross, his inspiration and the genius of his original ideas. Instead he was in front of the building housing the organization Dunant founded, where his name has been obliterated, with a man so angry that George feared he might punch him in the nose.

“Forget the story, Monsieur. The Red Cross is young and does not need anything to upset its progress.”

“You realize, of course, your saying that makes it all the more imperative for me to write this story. How could anything about this man upset your progress? Where is he?”

Appia sighed deeply and shook his head. “Last I heard he was in Paris but I don’t know exactly where.”

“There is no picture of him on the wall. I just read a pamphlet you published on the history of the Red Cross and his name is not even mentioned. Are you planning to destroy all copies of _A Memory of Solferino_ just to finish the job? With all of that, I already have the first part of my story. So, Dr. Appia?”

“I truly don’t know where he is in Paris. I’ll give you the name of a former diplomat there who worked with Henri when he was first seeking audiences with several heads of state.” Appia scribbled out a name on a pad of paper and handed it to George.

“But what happened here? Why did he leave? Why has his name been erased?”

“There was a scandal.”

“What? A woman?”

“No, no, no, nothing like that.”

“What then?”

“Bankruptcy. He spent over ten years travelling throughout Europe, attending meetings, writing letters, visiting diplomats and presidents, establishing this very complex organization. It took him two years alone to write _A Memory of Solferino_. It became a best-seller within weeks.”

“I know,” said George.

“But in that time he didn’t appoint anyone to take care of his businesses. He had land and water holdings in Algeria and Italy. He was worth millions at one point and he forgot it all. Just left it. All for this,” said Appia gesturing with a sweep of his hand to the building. “By ’74, he was bankrupt and then there were lawsuits. Investors wanted their money back but there was no money there. Nothing.”

“I still don’t understand. Why didn’t the Committee just hire him? You have the money.”

“Monsieur Moynier wanted nothing to do with a scandal such as this. It would be a black-eye against the organization at a time when we needed, and still need, support from many governments and governments don’t like bankruptcy – or bankrupts.”

“Is this Moynier’s doing?”

“I cannot speak to you anymore. I must go.” Appia turns to walk back into the building.

“The diplomat in Paris knew nothing of Dunant’s whereabouts, so now George found himself at the top of the hill at La Maison des Arts. There was a crew of workers digging up the pavement.
of the street. George followed Madame Boche’s directions and took the winding street to the right. He turned a corner hoping to see a street sign but there was nothing to identify the patches of wasteland and narrow alleyways running off between the blackened walls, the gutters flowing of dark water. One alleyway lead into another, each narrower than the last until finally he emerged into a small courtyard. Four storeys above the narrow opening allowed in dull grey sunlight that cast over a storefront of dolls, exactly where Madame Boche said it would be. The dark windows of Au Bébé Bon Marché reflected a circle of large dolls from the inside while outside were a couple of dozen smaller dolls each fitted tightly within open packing boxes as if laying in coffins. Did their repair services include reviving dead dolls?

Across the from the doll shop George saw three spheres clicking together in the gentle wind curling through the courtyard entrance. In the window of the pawnbroker’s storefront was a painting on an easel, full of vibrant colours in a dizzying array of swirls leaping off the canvas.

George entered the pawnshop to find more paintings covering the entire length of a wall and up to the ceiling. They were riots of colour. One painting of flowering apple trees scaling a hill; another of deep, fresh undergrowth, a seated woman, a child, a dog, a butterfly net; a maid with her charge – blue, green, pink, white, dappled with the sun; the Seine and telegraph wires and the springtime sky; a Parisienne with red lips in a blue jersey; a bare-shouldered dancer in yellow, green, blond rust on the red fauteuil. Had George entered the wrong door?

A glass counter along the opposite wall suggested perhaps not: On display were rings and necklaces, watches and pendants, ornate vases and leather gloves. Eminating from the back room George could hear an animated discussion growing louder. A man burst through the curtain, wearing glasses, engaged in an argument with his newspaper.

“Monsieur Marescot?”

“Yes, you have found him,” he said without taking his eyes off the newspaper. “Can you believe these bastards! Annexing Tahiti! What do we need an island of sand for? To fill flower pots? Who will pay for this imperialist stupidity? Dupes like us who can’t find it on a map. Why? Because it’s not on any map!”

George hands Marescot the pink slips. “Am I in the right place?” says George, looking over to the paintings.

Marescot takes the slips with his free hand. “Oh, those. They are not for sale. Purely for decoration.”

“Odd for a pawnshop.

“When you see such sadness every day, people selling off their last possessions just to buy a loaf of bread, one needs art around to elevate one’s spirits.”

“An expensive hobby.”

“These artists will be famous one day, especially that one – Degas,” he said pointing to a portrait of a nude. “Today they are considered hacks. But when they do become famous, these paintings will make me rich, so this is not a hobby. Now then, where did you get these?”

George explained how he had gotten the pawn receipts and why he was looking for the man who pawned the items.

“Yes, I remember him well and I know who he is,” said Marescot. “One moment.” He goes to a wooden cabinet behind the counter. “He took particular interest in the two Degas paintings over there. The nudes.”

George walked over to two paintings of nude women who were not posing in the classical sense. One was stepping out of a bath; the other drinking a cup of chocolate being served by a fully dressed maid; both with their backs to the painter and thus displaying their derrières prominently. To George this was art torn of any romanticism. “I suspect Monsieur Degas is obsessed with asses. And Dunant was interested in these?”

“He liked them all. He has a very modern eye.” Marescot returns with two items that he places gently on the glass counter. “I will keep them until he can buy them back. That is why they are not on display. Most get thirty days and that’s it.”

“May I?” Marescot nods. George opens a slim black case. Inside is an elegant medal - a five star degree hanging from a red velvet ribbon.

“He is a Chevalier of the Légion d’honneur, awarded to him by the Emperer in ’65,” said Marescot. “A man must be truly desperate to pawn such an item.”

“Or he is shedding himself of his past.” The other item is a gold-plated pocket watch with a gold chain. George snapped open the lid. The watch was still keeping time. An inscription was engraved on the inside of the lid: To Henri/S.E.D 1848. George closed the lid. “Do you have any
idea where I might find him?"

"I gave him 100 francs for these, more than I would’ve given anyone else. If you do find him, tell him I will keep these for him."

There was a letter from Conrad waiting for George at the front desk of the Hôtel Boncoeur. Conrad was giving him one more night in the hotel. If he didn’t find out anything after that there would be no story.

George went up to his room and began to write his observations to Conrad in the hope he could convince him that he was making progress. It was, of course, a lie. With his account of a bar, a statue and a pawnshop, he may just as well have been a tourist writing of his travels. There was this city, its unrelenting sounds coming through his open window from the unanimous night – the rattling of carriages, horses’ hooves clopping the wet cobblestones, the water gurgling down the gutters, the laughter curling up from the café across the street, the idle chatter of couples walking arm-in-arm, the high-pitched notes from an organ grinder and the woman alongside singing out of tune:

"Every mornin’ when I wake,
I feels all upside-down
I sends him off to get some hooch
For roughly half a crown
He takes his time along the way
I know where he’s at
He’s stealing half my drink away
The filthy little brat…"

Beyond, as far as his eye could see, the sparkle of a million gaslight stars from the streets and the rooms and the bars, the sparks spiraling from the chimneys, the matches igniting cigarettes, the fires burning under the bridges, and the thought that somewhere in this constellation is a man who should be the most famous man in the world is inexplicably and utterly alone, penniless and forgotten.

George thought none of this was pointless. Up to this point his journalism had been reports on fires or the speeches of politicians. It had never been what he’d wanted it to be. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. He looked at his watch - it was 1 AM. "Who is it?" he called out.

"Alina."

George jumped up from the chair and swung open the door. The barmaid’s blonde hair shone under the gaslight. "May I?" George stepped back. "Leave the door open. I don’t want to give people the wrong idea."

"It’s a hotel," said George. "That’s why people come here."

"Indeed. I didn’t tell you everything the other evening. May we walk, please?"

George closed his notebooks, retrieved his coat, and escorted Alina out the door. "Where are we going?"

Alina and George walked side-by-side but not touching. George could not help looking at her swaying stride and the secret of her lips. For once, he chose not to ask questions, instead to be led, willing to take the risk that she might be leading him into an ambush where he would be robbed by her lover. Alina broke the silence.

"You never thought it odd that a man in Henri’s state of poverty would walk into the Folies-Bergère?"

What George did find odd was Alina had referred to Dunant by his first name. "You said he was looking for work."

"Ah, the first of many lies I told you. If you want to be a successful journalist, you should learn to pick through such things. The truth is, he was looking for me."

"You’re lovers, then?"

"Heavens, no. We are cousins. He came to me for help and I treated him much like the rest of the family did, only I gave him an orange."

They paused at an intersection to wait for a procession of carriages to pass. George could now see a strained grimace on her face. They crossed the boulevard, her pace quickening. George hurried to keep up.

"We grew up together in Geneva. He was ten years older than me but we were always good friends – he protected and indulged me. He behaved more like an uncle. He often took me to the opera. He loved Mozart," her voice trailing away as if in a dream. "My family moved to Paris but we kept in touch until Solferino when he stopped writing to me. A few years later his book was published. Like everyone else I read it. It was the voice of a different Henri from the one I knew. A very different one."

"What did his family do to him?"

"They threw him off. We all did."

They crossed Quai des Tuileries and down to the black waters of the Seine, flowing with
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old corks, vegetable peelings and a swirl of floating garbage caught in an eddy. A short distance downstream was the arch of a bridge from where they could hear the rumble of passing carriages and omnibuses, and all they could see of the city were its roofs as though they were looking up from the bottom of a hole. From under the bridge on the embankment they could see barrels of fire.

“That’s Pont Solferino,” said Alina, pointing. “It’s ironic, no? It should be called Pont Dunant but instead they named it after the battle.”

“You think he’s there?”

“I don’t know. But if he is, I’m bringing him home as I should’ve done in the first place.”

They walked along the embankment towards the barrels of fire, passing men huddled up against the wall, their eyes hidden.

“I don’t understand why your family and Moynier treated him in that way. He may have been bankrupt but look what he created.”

They walked slowly, regarding each huddled shadow as closely as possible.

“It had nothing to do with bankruptcy. It was nothing like that at all. You don’t know, do you?”

“Until I meet him I have no idea of him at all.”

“You know enough. Henri is homosexual.”

George stopped, the heat of the nearby fires warming his skin. Alina looked back at him.

“Does that change things for you?”

“No, not at all.”

They carried on along the embankment, nearing the bridge and the fires, the smell of dead fish permeating the night air. “Henri travelled all over Europe while he was attempting to secure signatories to the Covenant of the Red Cross. He met diplomats, attachés, army generals, presidents, kings. Along the way he had liaisons with several men. He had a long relationship with an Austrian chargé d’affaires and they were discovered together, in a hotel room where a conference was being held. That was it. Moynier was never going to tolerate that so he told Henri to leave the Committee – quietly or he would find himself in prison for treason. Henri didn’t want to harm the image of the Red Cross, so he left. The shame of bankruptcy was just a front.”

George and Alina reached the underside of the bridge where groups of men gathered around several fires burning from large metal barrels. Suddenly one of the men bolted towards Alina, his eyes flaring. “What do you want here, you fucking whore! And you, what are you? Her pimp!?”

George quickly stepped between Alina and the enraged man. “It’s all right, my friend. We’re just looking for someone.”

“Friend? You’re not my friend! Are you the police?! Yes, you’re the police! Lift up your skirt, you little slut,” he said moving closer to Alina. “Let’s see what you’ve got under there!”

“No, no, we’re not. We…” George shouted then froze when he saw the flash of a blade. The man lunged at Alina with a knife. George grabbed Alina by the arm, pulling her away. The man advanced on them. He flashed the knife into George’s face. “We mean no harm. Please put it away,” pleaded George. The man started to laugh. “Ah yes, I have myself a chicken.” Suddenly, another man jumped in front of George, facing the knife. “Stop it, Compeau! Put it away!” Compeau holds the knife out stiffly. He shakes his head. “I’ll get you next time,” he says and walks away.

The other man gestured to George and Alina to follow him. “You people should be more careful. This is not a place to be at this time of night.” The man had a full black beard which camouflaged the nervous tick of his upper lip. His eyes often darted back-and-forth but he did not slur his speech and George believed he was not a drunk like many of the others.

George showed the man the daguerreotype. “We’re looking for this man. He goes by the name of Henri.”

The man tipped the print towards the firelight. “Ah yes. Henri. He’s been here many times.”

“Is he here now?” asked Alina eagerly.

“No, he left about two weeks ago.”

“How long was he here?”

“Sometimes for a week, sometimes for a month. He’d come and go. He wasn’t like any of these other men. He wasn’t here because of alcohol or opium. Why are you interested?”

“He’s my cousin,” said Alina.

“Oh, a close family then?”

Alina looked away, her eyes pained.
When George told the man who Henri really was, the man chuckled, “You’re not serious, are you?” Their stoic faces convinced him they were. “Well, I suppose that makes sense. He often treated these men for their cuts and bruises and told them to stop fighting amongst themselves. Some of these poor souls have survived one war or another with their brains fried. Henri talked with them endlessly. He had the demeanor of an aristocrat. I could never figure him out.”

The man had no idea where Henri had gone or if he would ever come back. George gave the man a few coins. “He talked to me, too. I was at Solferino. This is what is left of me.” The man walked off into the smoke of the fires.

George and Alina continued along the quai, passing under Pont des Invalides where there were more barrels of fire. They paused to look at some of the men but stern gazes told them to move along. George felt it a hideous image to see that while Paris was expanding, its old neighbourhoods turned upside down by the widening of boulevards, there were people such as these who were being left in its wake like so much detritus.

As they walked away from the river to the Champs-Elysées, Alina kept her gaze fixed on the ground. She walked fast and George had to quicken his pace to keep up with her. Again they did not speak as they walked along the empty quiet streets. It was just as well, as things for George had become very complicated and he wasn’t sure if he had the courage to say it. From the moment he

The following morning as he walked along the platform of the Gare St.Lazare towards his train car, George thought about other newspapers where he might find work. He could prepare a dossier of his works so far which, in truth, wouldn’t fill much more than twenty pages. Or perhaps he should give it up entirely and return to teaching where the only stresses were the petulant students. Suddenly, he stopped, his eyes following the steam hissing from the locomotive and rising up to the domed roof of sooty glass spanning the station platform. The conductor blew his whistle. George did not move. The locomotive hissed, black smoke billowed from its stack, energy rumbled from the engines, the wheels strained for motion. The conductor blew his whistle louder. George did not move. The conductor gestured madly for George to get on the train. “Of course,” said George. “Solferino.” He turned, ran down the platform and out of the station.

George could see that Maurice was lost in his memories. He thanked Maurice, wished him good luck and headed off down the street.
“Switzerland?”

Maurice nodded. George returned to him, taking his hand and thanking him. “Just be true to him, that’s all I ask.” George promised then watched Maurice limp away to the entrance of Madame Boche’s.

Stepping off the train at the Heiden Station a few days later, George felt everything familiar. He had never been to Heiden before but it was Switzerland and he was home, surrounded on three sides by the Appenzell Alps and the sweet aroma of Lake Constance shimmering in the distance. With the air of one returning home after a long wandering exile, George walked into the village. The light, he thought, familiar in its sharpness, would have drawn Dunant here, as a creature instinctively finding its natural habitat.

George did not have that much time. Conrad had read his notes, the opening paragraphs of his article and while Dunant had still not been located, he found the story of the search and its illusive protagonist to be compelling journalism, worth the expense of another train ticket. But if it was to be published, George had to find his elusive subject.

A stranger on the street directed George to the local hospice. Unless Dunant had come into a fortune in the past three days, a hospice was the logical place to start. It was a three-storey building located off a public square, nestled within a copse of trees. The building was pure white, immaculately clean with each window of the upper floors framed by green shutters. George rang the bell at the front door and a few moments later it was opened by the concierge who was dressed more like a butler. George had been around the soot of Paris long enough to have forgotten the obsessive perfections of his homeland. George asked him if Henri Dunant lived here, as a creature instinctively finding its natural habitat.

“The wonderful thing about Paris is that there are a dozen newspapers all of which end up abandoned at a café table or a library, and there is yours.”

“Silence, Edouard,” she said playfully.

“I understand you have been looking for me, Monsieur Baumberger,” came a voice from behind George. He turned quickly, thinking this was a dream. There he was, rather formidable, tall in his dark cloak, white cuffs over his wrists, a box-like smoking cap crowning his brow, a fine white beard spread in cloud wisps around his chin. Stormy intense eyes considered George. The skin on his face was darkened, leathery, not tanned from the sun but weathered by the wind. Given his situation, there was a certain satisfaction to him that he had found his prey rather than the prey finding him. For the moment, all the questions George had planned to ask dropped out of his mind.

Now George would have to write the truth— that he had failed and he knew she would want no part of failure. George drowned his thoughts in Lake Constance.

“I know what you are going to ask me,” Dunant finally said. “I read newspapers, including yours.”

“That’s how you knew?”

“I am very sorry to have caused you so many difficulties,” said Henri Dunant, his voice refined, not deep but firm, clear. “I had not counted on your perseverance. Come, let us walk together.”

Henri led the way along a path with a marching stride. George did not detect any weakness or a loss of self-awareness in him, rather a focus on the path ahead, alacrity to everything around him. Henri was tireless. Every so often he would stop at a stream or a public well for some water, only to continue walking as if he had a destination or purpose of some kind—a person to visit, a meal to be eaten, an appointment to be kept. It took all of George’s energy to keep up to Henri’s pace. It was clear that the last ten years of his life had been spent perfecting this discipline, now taking the two of them down a gentle slope of hay grass, pasture, rocky outcrops, through to the valley floor and the shores of Lake Constance.

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...day. He slept soundly, awaking to a dull, cloudy morning. He looked out the window – the hills were we will continue our talk."

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Henri ignored him and continued walking. George saw that Henri’s face had gone dark, his eyes moistened, his gaze deep inside, the world shut out.

It was sundown when they returned to Heiden. Henri stopped at a street corner. "There is an inn just over there where you can have a room for the night. I will return to the hospice. Tomorrow we will continue our talk."

"You won’t walk off somewhere?" asked George.

Dunant chuckled. "Perhaps," and he walked off down the street.

George was exhausted, eager for a good night’s rest and time to prepare questions for the next day. He slept soundly, awaking to a dull, cloudy morning. He looked out the window – the hills were shrouded in mist and on the street below he saw Dunant in his cloak, seemingly impervious to the steady rain. In his furtive manner, Dunant resembled a spy as if he were stalking an enemy agent. He

"You slept under a bridge in the middle of winter," said George almost incredulous.

"Yes, in this cloak." Henri turned away and began another march. They continued along the shoreline, Henri letting the water lap over his boots. "I know nothing about business or finance. Never did. The companies were a family inheritance that my older brother was supposed to manage but he was smart – he became a doctor. I went to see the Emperor to have him sign a water rights document for our properties in Algeria. Battlefield? What did I know of battlefields. I arrived in Solferino in a carriage. I stepped into another world of 40,000 dead or dying men. My body went numb. Men with gaping wounds, some cut in half, others riddled with bullets, and hundreds more crying for help... for their loved ones. I heard more mothers’ names that day than I had ever thought existed. The ground was red. Everything broke down around me, everything went dark."

"Of course you were. You’re a journalist, a writer. Don’t lie to me. I’m a lot of things but stupid is not one of them. You asked me about the Degas’ paintings. That means you were in Marescot’s shop which means you saw Madame Boche which means you met my niece Alina which

years and that he would break it when he was good and ready. Whatever was he contemplating in his silent walking?

The walking continued the following day, and the day after that, and the day after that until George had lost no sense of time. Maybe this is what walking does, he thought. Fortunately the weather cleared, the sun shone bright and he felt it best not to force Dunant into anything, not to corner him with questions. He was able to watch Dunant closely and he saw in him what he had seen in Compeau who had attacked Alina, and in Maurice of rue de Chazelles – eyes which are glaring and dark. The eyes of most people dance amidst their surroundings, picking out, taking in, sly, aware; but those of Compeau, Maurice, and Dunant, and of the men he had seen under Pont Sollferino were of a different ilk, eyes fixed straight ahead, never bothering with superfluous detail. They possessed, too, a sense unique to those who have returned from war. The fact of their own survival means little to them, for what they have seen has changed them irrevocably, altering the substance of their bodies, the flow of blood through their veins and the manner in which their brains record reality while at the same time unleashing demons in the night, where sleep is the hour between the dog and the wolf. To them, death would have be a relief from the madness of this mundane world.

But Dunant somehow had the wit to collect himself. He organized conferences, met with kings and generals, signed international treaties, wrote a best-selling book, experienced great art, witnessed the construction of the world's largest man-made sculpture, and conceived of one of the most original ideas in the history of human affairs. And now, he walks.

Finally, sometime during the fifth or sixth day, Dunant broke his silence. "I went to Berlin in 1863 and met with King Wilhelm of Prussia. He was to be a signatory to the Geneva Convention of the Red Cross. In private, he told me of Bismarck’s plan to carry Prussia to the peak of conquest and his attempts to thwart him. He has not succeeded. There are many calamitous days to come. The weapons of destruction being created will wreck havoc upon soldier and civilian alike."

"There are peace activists who say that the Red Cross should be working to prevent such calamities rather than patching up the soldiers just to fight again," said George.

Dunant grew angry, his stare becoming intense. "Yes, I founded an organization not devoted to peace. Why if we let it run amok, the Red Cross can single-handedly start the next war. That is just one of my curses. I am bankrupt! I am therefore irresponsible! I am a spy! I am homosexual! Is it any wonder I grew weary of it all?! Is it any wonder that I wander?!"

Dunant glared daggers at George who was afraid he had pushed too far, too fast, that he might lose him. Dunant turned sharply and marched up the hill. George went after him. "I'm sorry, Monsieur Dunant. I wasn't going to ask you about…"

"Of course you were. You’re a journalist, a writer. Don’t lie to me. I’m a lot of things but stupid is not one of them. You asked me about the Degas’ paintings. That means you were in Marescot’s shop which means you saw Madame Boche which means you met my niece Alina which
means you met Maurice, the only person in Paris who knows where I am. Write whatever you want, Monsieur. I've read it all."

Before George could utter a word of defence, Dunant was gone over the crest of the hill. He knew this time it would be best not to follow him. He returned to the inn and passed a sleepless night fearing that everything he had worked for these past few weeks had just gone up in smoke. At the first glimmer of sunrise he looked out the window and was relieved.

Henri’s eyes had lost their intensity and he walked at a more leisurely pace. “Did Maurice tell you of his phantom leg?”

“Yes, he mentioned it.”

“You lose many things in a war. Lives. Legs. I have a phantom mind. It’s the mind I had before master stroke, sir.”

I reach out to touch it, it’s not there and I am left with this lame one, the one that limps around there. Sometimes when I’m lying down I think I can feel it, my old mind, like an old leg, but when I reach out to touch it, it’s not there and I am left with this lame one, the one that limps around everything.”

“You had enough of a mind left to conceive the idea of the neutrality of the Red Cross, the idea that doctors and nurses under its flag would treat any soldier regardless of nationality. That was a master stroke, sir.”

“At Solferino I saw doctors walking away from dying soldiers simply because they were in the uniform of another country. They couldn’t see them as human, only as the enemy. The idea is if you look into the eyes of an enemy, you will see a human being who should not suffer. Once we come around to that way of thinking, it then becomes possible to stop the slaughter in the first place. You can’t be an enemy one moment and a human being the next. The people who serve under the flag of the Red Cross are the true advocates of peace. Every life they save increases the possibility of a new way of thinking.”

Henri was silent for the rest of their walking that day and they parted in silence. George

slept fitfully that evening, and in the morning crawled out of bed to look out the window. Henri was not there. It was just as well. The past week of hard walking had taken its toll on George and he was thankful for a day of rest, a chance to write up his notes. The next morning Henri was again not waiting like a spy on the street. George rested for a second day, using the time to start writing the article.

The third morning was another matter. With Henri still not waiting out on the street below, George immediately set out for the hospice and knocked on the front door. The concierge opened the door, his expression still dour. He leaned back to the hallway table and handed George an envelope. The door slammed shut.

The envelope was addressed to George in a clear, elegant script. He crossed the square, made his way to the park and sat on the bench where he had first met Henri. For a few moments he took in the serene panorama of Lake Constance. He opened the envelope.

‘Dear George, By the time you read this I will be in the midst of another wandering. Please do not bother Maurice or anyone else — no one knows where I am going. How could they when I don’t myself. Be assured I am not doing this because of any anger towards you. I appreciate your professional responsibilities and I admire your tenacity. You have seen all of my world, you have enough now. Write what you must but be honest.

You asked me why I liked the art works in Marescot’s shop — Degas, Cassatt, Renoir. It might interest you to know that Alina’s friend who is always sitting at the end of the bar in Folies-Bergère is one of them — Edouard Manet. We have not heard the last of them. Their paintings inspire a new vision of seeing the world in ways it has never been seen before. Their art will change the world. That is why I admire their paintings.

I trust we will have the opportunity to walk together once again. I cannot promise I will say anything. My sincere regards, Henri Dunant.’

George put the letter back into the envelope, looked up to Lake Constance and wept.

Later that day, George took the train back to Geneva. He wrote the Dunant story in one day in his office at Die Ostschweiz. Conrad liked it and published it the following week. The impact was immediate. Within a week he and Conrad received requests from newspapers and magazines throughout Europe to reprint the article. It was translated into six languages.

Georges was visited by the public prosecutor of the district, who asked him several questions about Dunant but did not want to know where he was. A month later, fraud charges against Dunant issued over fifteen years before were dropped. Some, but not all, of Dunant’s creditors also withdrew their bills. The German Red Cross organized a subscription for ‘a tribute from the German nation’.

A note arrived from Dunant: he was back in Heiden, “surviving a worldwind, no thanks to you. Please come for a walk.”

When George arrived at the hospice, the concierge welcomed him with a slight bow of his head and a smile. This time, he led George down the hallway towards a room. The door was open and he could hear a woman’s strident voice from inside. George came to the doorway of Room 12 for the first time, to see Dunant not as a spy on the street but rather being scolded by a tall woman in a large black dress. The woman saw George. “Is this the writer?” she demanded in a Russian accent.

Dunant affirmed George’s guilt and introduced him to Countess Maria Fedorovna. She approached, fire in her blue eyes. George stepped back, half-expecting a blow. Her face was a stunning display of refined lines, high forehead, curved lips and intelligent authority. “You are a brave man, sir, and you have done the world a great service. You must carry on with that service by convincing this stubborn old mule,” flashing her eye at Dunant, “that he must leave this…this…” looking at the raised eyebrows of the concierge, “this place and inhabit a more hospitable abode more
in keeping with his stature.

“...very comfortable here, Countess,” said Dunant.

“A rodent would be comfortable here!” She turned back to George. “I implore you, sir. Henri will no longer have to concern himself with money. I am a widow and I want nothing in return except that this great man be comfortable.”

“I suspect he is comfortable here, Countess,” said George timidly.

“Wonderful. Two stubborn old mules. Please. For me,” she said, kissing George on the cheek then swishing off down the hallway with the concierge in escort.

George stepped into the room. It was perfect simplicity: narrow, sun streaming in, a bed, a chair, a table with several books and notepaper, and a view of Lake Constance, so unlike the room in Madame Boche’s hospice and yet much the same. George could also see on the table the black box containing the Légion d’honneur medal.

Dunant rose to shake George’s hand warmly. “It’s good to see you, my friend. I don’t know if I should thank you, however. My life, as you see, has gone somewhat upside down.” He took the gold-plated pocket watch from his vest and snapped it open. “We have some time before the next inquisitor arrives. Come, let’s walk.”

They set off up the pathway they had taken many times before, making their way up to the crest of the hill.

“You know I haven’t read it,” said Dunant with a sly smile.

“So you don’t know if I was honest.”

“I suspect you were,” said Dunant with a chuckle.

“What does the Countess want you to do?”

“She wants to put me up in her palace outside Moscow. Can you imagine? Me in a palace. It would be an absurd comedy. No, no, I am very content here.”

“Will the Countess withdraw her support if you don’t?”

“She will huff-and-puff but no. I am a prize. She is a widow. She needs prizes.”

“You have so much more you can do, Henri.”

“And I will. I’ve been offered several projects from the German and French Red Cross.”

“But what about the International Committee?”

George’s story on Henri Dunant and his subsequent journalism over the past fifteen years had brought him an international readership that he never considered possible. It had also raised Dunant from obscurity to the ultimate recognition. But here was George, approaching the chaotic skyline of New York City arriving for a job as the International Editor of the New York Times. His new Editor at The Times felt that being the International Editor meant knowing America as much as he did Europe. He was therefore paying for his transatlantic passage as well as a transcontinental tour across the United States to San Francisco for he and his wife, Alina, who now came to his side and kissed him on the cheek.

“It’s cold out here,” she said. “You must come to the cabin and help me collect our baggage. We’re docking soon.”

“Yes, I’ll be right down.”

“She’s magnificent, isn’t she.”

“She truly is. If only Dunant could see her now.”

“Maybe one day he will,” she said, kissing him again then walking off along the deck.

In his hand George held a copy of the London Times that he had bought on the dock just before they set sail from London six days ago. Dated December 10, 1901, there was a front page story

“Moynier will never relent nor forgive. But it doesn’t matter, you see. The Red Cross is active in twenty-five countries now, including the United States. My work there is done. No. Sometimes there are just some places one must call home. But tell me about you, George, tell me about your whirlwind.”

They continued along the crest of the hill, over it and down into a deep valley. They strolled for several hours. Over the ensuing years George visited Henri regularly, ambling with him for hours. It was the most peaceful time of his young life.

There was, however, one more journey they both had to take.

The sun broke clear as George stood on the deck of the S.S. Adriatic steaming through Upper Bay towards New York City harbour. As the ship neared Governor’s Island, George saw her once again – Lady Liberty now anchored atop a stone pedestal, adding even more height to her majesty. She reached so high that it was impossible to look at her without the sky forming the background. The torch was also illuminated, creating a fire floating in the sky. Flocks of birds soared around Lady Liberty’s head in perpetual delight while below them scores of ships jostled alongside tugboats, barges and steamers from every place on earth. Imagine, George thought, what Madame Boche and Maurice - all of Paris for that matter - would think of their statue now stretching her arm to the heavens while seemingly floating on water.
that George would treasure forever: “Henri Dunant to be awarded first Nobel Peace Prize.” The article went on to tell the story of the Battle of Solferino, Dunant’s book, and his founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It made no mention of his years of poverty in Paris nor that he lived in a hospice in Heiden.

George wanted to attend the award ceremony; to complete the story full circle. But Henri insisted that the opportunity awaiting George in America must not be compromised. “Carpe diem, my friend,” he said, his eyes fixed straight at George’s, asserting that action must be taken. They stood together on the station platform at Clapham Junction on a foggy morning a week ago. Henri had come to London to be with his aunt Sophie (the S.E.D inscribed on his watch) who would escort him to Oslo. The New York Times had sent George their confirmation by telegram and these days that means ‘make haste’.

“I’ll write to you about the ceremony,” said Henri with a wry smile. “I attended many such things in my previous life. I assure you, you are missing nothing.”

“Yes, I am. You are about to receive the most prestigious prize in the world, the first one. I think I’ll be missing a great deal.”


“10,000 francs. Surely you can come to America.”

“The Nobel money will remain in trust in a Norwegian bank and an executor will disperse the funds to the Red Cross and the hospice in Heiden.”

An ear-piercing whistle sliced the air. A locomotive was making a thunderous approach.

“You don’t seem to understand, George. There are still creditors who would seize the money the moment it touched my pockets.”

“It’s been twenty-five years. Surely…”

The thunder grew louder.

“Creditors never forget. Besides, it is no matter to me.”

The locomotive arrived at the platform in a blast of steam. George stomped his foot, unsure if was angrier with the head-splitting sound or that this would be the last time he would see Henri.

“Don’t be so upset. I’m accepting the Peace Prize. But I’ve been without money for many years now. I never knew how to use it then and I still don’t.”

The compartment doors swung open. George recalled the train he had not taken in Gare St. Lazare. That train had brought him here. Henri extended his arms, embracing George completely, blanketing him with warmth. In that moment George understood that Dunant possessed something not shared by other people and it stirred his heart. Doors slammed shut, the whistle blew long and hard. Henri began his release and gently pushed George onto the moving train. George jumped onto the running board as the train pulled away.

“You were truthful with me, George. I will never forget that.” They waved to another until the distance reduced them both from sight.

“Excuse me, sir. We are docking shortly,” said the ship’s steward, awakening George from his reverie. He was watching another steamship cruising past and the forlorn people on its deck. He asked the steward what was happening on that ship.

On the deck of the ship were several people bundled up grey blankets, sipping on cups of steaming fluid, all looking very pale and staring off blankly. A man appeared with a stethoscope dangling around his neck, obviously a doctor. He went to someone lying on a stretcher, checked their pulse and heart, patted them and turned to walk away. The man stopped, looked out over the rail of the deck and caught George’s eye. The man nodded, smiled, then continued along the deck.

“Oh that,” said the steward. “We got a telegraph message about them last night. A ferry ran aground and sank off Long Island. We sailed over to help but by the time we got there, everyone had been rescued. Fortunately, no deaths. Everyone made it. Now please, sir, you must leave the ship.”

“Yes, of course,” said George, and as he walked along the deck with the steward, he heard the engine of the rescue ship cut out and the black smoke spewing from its stacks blow away, clearly revealing the main mast and flying high at its apex was a large white flag with a bold red cross in the centre fluttering in the wind.

Richard Stanford
When I’m not writing short stories and essays or producing documentary films in Montréal, I can be found mucking about in my gardens trying to create the perfect eggplant.
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