

The Ball

(*Il Ballo, 1841*)

Part I

Raddled *Chilosca*,
The Gothic beauty,
Has sent out invites
To a swank party;

To an "At Home" in
The mansion she rents
From Farinata's
Abased descendants.

Magic lantern slides
Seem to play on the wall,
Painting goblins and fiends
Showing up for the ball.

In fantastic fresco,
See the antic dancer
Who skips to the tambour
Of the circus barker!

The horde swells, 'til
The court's a rout;
Hundreds, each out
To sport his snout:

Barons, Princes,
Dukes, Excellencies,
All bows and scrapes and
Reverences.

The flunkey's eyes
Assess each chest,
To what's pinned there
His yells attest.

Among so many handles
How ill-fitted *my* name!
How hard it jangles
On the ear—the same

As in a music
Solemn as can be,
When cornet or oboe
Is chirping off key.

With an Olympian
Nod of her crest,
The crusty, dumpy
Goddess of the feast

Becks and blesses
From her divan,
Into the mincer presses
Woman and man.

In clipped, laryngent
Vacuous accent,
Paid is the toll of
Compliment.

Off down the corridor
Squeeze the *bon ton*,
Buffeted, muttering:
"Pardon, pardon!"

Oh, hallowed rafters,
Portraits and busts!
Attuned to the argot
Of Tuscan dust;

If centuries of it
Fair gave you the pip,
May the pidgin of—*lodgers*
Come as a fillip!

Oh, stomach the breath
Of a rude villain,
Who has no more wit than
To talk Italian.

Backing and tacking,
Inching onwards *en bloc*,
Craning as from a crow's-nest
O'er chignons and curlilocks,

I reach a sort of room
Like a steaming copper,
Giving off a hum
Of rotting matter.

Here, seemingly moved
By occult forces,
A wooden congress
Creaks and prances.

German puppets
Togged-up in state,
Like birds wrapped
In a fowler's net:

Their leaps as stiff,
As taut, as harsh,
As spooks and skeletons
Dipped in starch.

No happy faces, no
Robustiousness;
Only a most elegant
Disgustedness.

Their spirits stoppered,
They open their pores
To the vapid thrills
Of tepid amours.

Their furred tongues
Of costive pride
Make endless blague,
But nought beside.

But of round and dance
They'll have no more:
It's a bore; and so,
To t'other floor

Ladies and gents all pour:
In furious disorder,
They swoop like rustlers
On vittles, bottles, butlers.

What barking and ordering!
What roaring and pouring!
What bending of elbows!
What shoving and clawing!

A vortex of swinjers,
Of snatching fingers;
Platters like mangers;
Titanic trenchers.

The belly's not asked
To stomach the lot of it,
Much of the spread goes
Home in the pocket;

And in the junket
Of joy unreserved,
A number of spoons
Creep off unobserved.

* An introductory note on Giusti (1809 - 1859) by Nigel Dennis was published in September ENCOUNTER, with a first selection of Mr. Dennis' translation.

Part II

He runs things down,
To pick 'em up cheap,
Then plays 'em up,
To sell at peak.

He's a hit at whist
With brides and daughters,
He makes monkeys of
Meddlesome mothers

And cuckolds of hubbies
Shrunk by years and paralysis;
Caught cheating, he chuckles
And bilks on his losses.

No. 2's blood turned blue
At his recent knighting
By a Christian King-of-kings,
By which I mean, ban-King.

He'd bribed his way round
Both judge and priest,
Been set free to compound
Loans at high interest:

Now, scorning the pennies
Of the Florentine mob, he's
Got his screws on the thumbs
Of the proper nob.

He flies his knight's banner
At their palace gates,
Enticing like a trapper
The insolvent inmates.

Like the putrescence
That slowly invests
The body in which it's
Become the guest,

But, sucking virility
From the host's debility,
Shares eventually the
Prey's infirmity;

Just so, the mouldy
Patrician—he,
Of ribs once peerless
But now shirtless—

Infects his eater
With his own hauteur,
Makes proud the creditor
By being his debtor.

And so, life returns to
Dead courts and palaces
As the knighted loan-shark's
Enfeoffed residences.

The illustrious ones
Detest him silently,
Pay homage and loathing
Simultaneously.

But he ignores equally
Hatred and dignity; he
Asks the kisses of the debtor
To play cat-and-mouse the better.

No. 3 will tell you he's
On the run—like a good book
Hot off the press, but one
That the printer never took

To attend the dinner
At which priest and censor
Chew-over what titbits
They'll cut out and devour.

Wounded at Rimini, he
Escaped capture and
Running for sanctuary
(Or so runs his *story!*)

Went homeless and hungry.
He says he dreams nightly
Of rope and drop: *I* fancy he
Sleeps like a top.

Oh, honourable sons
Of this our nation, sons
Of a century that
Decoys stupidity—oh, you

Magnanimous heroes,
Be alert for the cheat
Who feigns fear of the gallows
To elicit secrets.

Like classic Alcibiades
Of ever-changing norm,
This roving informer
Exists in proteform.

His disguise takes the style
That will be noticed least:
In London, he's an exile;
In Rome, a priest.

Among Royalists, he's a souse,
Raising his glass and crying:
"Friends! Here's a health to the
King!"
But when he comes to *my* house,

It's *O Italia mia!* he
Croons with a sigh;
For the songs of the free
Make the tunes of the spy.

There, amid flaccid
Daughters-in-law, and
Amid their re-painted
Mothers-in-law;

'Midst diplomatists
In swallow-tails and braid,
As a-dangle with gewgaws
As a pedlars' parade,

I spot a posse
Of lower station,
Another specie,
Wholly plebeian.

Yes, I, who's guilty
Of a one-track fantasy,
Chasing like crazy
My love for democracy,

Am shaping a grin
At seeing such cullies
Picking their noses in
The Holy of Holies

And am heading their way
When I go all queasy,
Appalled to recognise
Four obscenities.

No. 1's the person of
A once-would-be friar,
Who now, for the hell of it,
Calls himself "The Prior,"

But has neither cassock
Nor clerical halter,
Bows more to the sauceboat
Than to the altar.

Beloved of the gourmand,
At grub, a dab hand,
He's feared but courted for
Cuisine of another brand.

He cooks-up the gossip,
He concocts the chitchat,
He decants the vices
Of this person and that.

Part III

What horror struck at
Me, as I made inspection
Of shameless *No. 4*.—that
Loathsome infection!

All powdered and painted
To pass for a chicken,
But toothless and two-faced,
“At Home” in the midden.

The modern way’s to play
Awfully bored with dead
Titans, but for any Tom
Thumb of today, to go way

Overboard. From the ruffraff,
You pick a palpable dwarf
And inflate on his behalf
A puff called “an epigraph.”

So, who will suspect me
Of staging a farce,
If I choose *No. 4* to be
My horse’s arse?

Donkeys’ years old,
Once rich, well-bred,
He got bored to death
By not being dead. So

He looked for distraction
In foreign lands; soon, he
Was top chameleon of
The pilgrim band. But he

Blued so much abroad that
When he had to come back,
All but his social rank
Had been lost up the crack,

And he must fawn for bread on
Peregrinating Russkis,
A shabby patrician in
Pursuit of gutses;

Guzzling goodies
From foreigners’ hands,
To redeem a birthright
Eaten in foreign lands.

In threadbare clothes he
Struts and bustles,
Curvets and trips with
Jerky muscles, and

With the irony of
An elegant rudeness,
Piping in sentences
More French than indigenous,

Cries: “*Eh, bien*, ninnies;
See how I run! How I
Make the grade with
Foreign chums! Who

Must first gorge their bellies,
So as to spew ’em empty, who
Boast like Hercules, while I
Milk ’em prudentially.

So, why the squawks from
Patriotic pikers? *Nom de Dieu!*
What’s Italy, I ask you, Sir,
If she’s not a *taverna*?

Do we want mine host to
Distinguish too nicely?
To ask well-heeled toss-pots
For their *bona fides*?

Better he learn that
What’s known as ‘honour’
Stretches every whichway,
In the manner of rubber.

The stodgy home-body
Who sends up such a groan,
Has a sort of home-sickness
In his bones. Why, I’m

Told of one grumbler who’s
Got it into his noddle,
That for manners and grammar
Home-chat is the model.

He slavers and havers
About Spirit, Art, History. . . .
All those ancient cadavers
Of glorious memory.

But what validity
Has his currency?
I’m Royster-Doyster,
The world my oyster.

My creed’s frankness and *élan*,
Plus always keeping going,
Stand-pats and thick-heads can
Have what’s over.”

How was I supposed to
Rebut *No. 4*? Salutes of bad
Eggs is all I’ve had
When I’ve preached before.

So I hewed to *his* line and,
Though stung, said: “How true!
What’s Italy but a *rendezvous*
For pirate crews?

One does meet a few
Honest ones who
Come and go, with no
Axe to grind, no row to hoe;

For the rest, Italy’s
A bucket; annually
It must catch what’s vomited
From the Alps and the sea.

His cash buys each rover
The same obeisance, he
He bandit, slut, or de-
Bagged prince; and he

Perfectly naturally
Makes one of a *canaille*,
Punctilio not mattering
To the garbage fly.

Round this fair horde
With its shady cadres
Of self-styled Lords and
Their non-Ladies—round

This exotic jungle mess
Personified by human dress—
Presses the scum of our own
nation
To dress the stage of degradation.

At the vandal wassails
Of Count Off and Count If,
We mete out the brio,
They fork out the *rosbiff*.”

“*Eh, bien*, your head wants
Looking at!” cried *No. 4*—that
Martyr to the starched cravat:
“Not only did I freely gather

Bias and gall from all your blather,
But *scruples* too! I do aver
You're no more than a greenhorn,
Sir,
A babe newborn—*adieu, parbleu!*"

Off he goes, with the demeanour
Of a fellow who's in the know,
And who means to find more
swallows
Before summer goes.

On the Death of Duke Francis IV of Modena

(*Per La Morte del Duca Francesco IV de Modena, 1846*)

At last, the ducal thug is dead!
God! Stage the march to his stone bed!
For his clergy—prison-guards, whom praying's left goose-necked;
For his last candle—at grave's head, a guillotine erected;
For his safe conduct—a passport, by Satan validated.
While blacklegs stanch their tears with office blotters,
We'll crimp our mourning-bands—to frill pigs' trotters!*

*Modena was (and still is) renowned for its pigs' trotters.

Two Epigrams

Whene'er Lucretia meets a handsome gent,
Love's power is too strong: she's soon recumbent.
Very few men are handsome, yet Lucretia
Seems to find every man a handsome creature.

* * * *

Commonsense, once founder of a school of thought,
Is found no more where scholarship is taught.
It died when Science, its child, dissected it,
Curious to know what made the old man tick.

Translated by Nigel Dennis

NOTES & TOPICS

“1917”: an Afterthought

On Totalitarian Models—By RICHARD LOWENTHAL

SOME non-western nationalist leaders have been far ahead of the western communists in recognising the importance of Russian totalitarian institutions as an engine of state-directed social development, and in viewing this instrumental function as completely separable from the egalitarian and internationalist goals of the communist ideology with which these institutions had been historically bound up in their Russian origin. It was nationalist leaders of this type who were to make the first attempt at a selective imitation of the Russian model of the single-party State.

The first nationalist leader to act in this way was Mustafa Kemal—later Ataturk—at the turn of 1922–3. Having won his “war of liberation” with Soviet support, he decided to transform his wartime ascendancy into a dictatorship of development. Faced with the problem of basing the new régime on the principle of popular sovereignty without granting freedom of organisation to conflicting interest groups, he found a ready-made solution in the single-party state created by his erstwhile Russian allies. But neither then nor in the early 1930s, when he borrowed some of their techniques of planned industrialisation, did he accept the egalitarian and internationalist ideology of the Bolsheviks. I cannot here discuss the strong and weak points of the achievement of Kemalism; but the history of modern Turkey has remained remarkable for proving that even a single-party dictatorship may come to surrender voluntarily its monopoly of power—provided that its legiti-

mation is not based on world-wide, utopian goals, but on a task of national development that is by its nature limited in space and time.

The next non-Communist nation builder to adopt the model was Dr. Sun Yat-sen in late 1923. He was not only impressed by the Bolshevik success in consolidating their revolutionary power and defying the imperialists, but already by Kemal’s precedent in imitating the institution of one-party rule without taking over the ideology. In the next few years, the Kuomintang was to benefit greatly from direct Soviet advice not only in becoming a modern, centralistic mass party, but in creating the first Chinese army based on loyalty to a political idea. But in accepting Soviet aid and advice before he had control of a state, Dr. Sun (in contrast to Kemal) felt compelled to accept the co-operation of Chinese Communists in many important positions in his party, thus permitting a germ of dualism which was to grow after his death until Chiang Kai-shek decided, in 1927, to extirpate it by a massacre. Though this traumatic operation did not prevent Chiang from completing the unification of China, it left the Kuomintang régime with a fear of mass organisations that was to become a built-in obstacle to effective modernising reforms. This helped the Chinese Communists to survive in their new rural strongholds. When the conflict with Japan enabled them to compete with the Kuomintang as champions of national resistance as well, they eventually emerged victorious over the largest experiment in nationalist one-party rule that ever was attempted.

A long period elapsed before the next great wave of one-party régimes in under-developed countries started in many of the new African states that emerged in the late 1950s and early ’60s, with the adoption of one-party rule by

This is the concluding section of Professor Lowenthal’s article in last month’s ENCOUNTER, “1917, and After: on the Model of the Totalitarian State.”