

Dear colleague, dear Alvaro Mutis,

I am writing to you from the Czech Republic, a country whose prohibited writers you were sympathizing with either in a vociferous manner or silently in your heart during the period of communists domination of Prague.

I had to live without my passport for nearly twenty years. I was not allowed to travel abroad nor freely receive foreign visitors or exchange letters.

Let me share with you my first foreign trip experience. It was almost like attending a manifestation with several dozens of Czech authors participating. President Havel provided the plane because none of the participants could afford to pay for a normal air ticket. On the first night, some of us were invited to a party held in an apartment of a great writer, so great that it took my breath away.

I would be a bad guest if I disclosed my host's name and the name of the country. However, today I know that thousands and thousands of similar parties are being held. There were about sixty people, it was only possible for each to exchange a few words with others in such a short period of two hours.

My first conversation started in a fantastic way: a famous artist stopped in front of me, a man my friends and I had been invoking for thirty years as in a prayer, the "God" of our young reflections on the world and its tragic comicality.

I ejaculated it immediately, the sentence being as long as four normal sentences.

"God" had a nice and polite smile and said: "Very interesting. Thank you." And he walked away to approach somebody else.

I was afraid my exaltation had touched him. Only after our third conversation did I understand what I had done wrong: my confession was an exposition inviting to a longer conversation which would have meant usurpation of this great man for a period considered impolite and unpractical. This would have prevented him from speaking to all guests. The purpose of that evening was not conversation, but the evening itself.

I realized how many artists were addicted to the "Spirit" that addresses us from stereotypical videoclips: bizarre images precipitating in rapid sequences so that one can perceive them globally, receiving them as a whole, but none of the images specifically. Both the creator and the spectator create and watch for other reasons than to see.

What to do about that? I often hear people saying - also as a politician - that this world, deprived of original relations among people, must be remedied as a whole, i.e. collectively. But I, as a Czech playwright and citizen, have had a bad experience with such an approach. I do not believe that the best thing to do is to protest against the dark. However, there is an old wise saying calling upon everybody that suffers from the dark to light up a candle.

I am happy to learn that you ^{also} are a member of that loose community that Mr. Batus has gathered in Société imaginaire to which he has also invited me. I am sending you my words as a message saying that here in Prague and in Central Europe people converse as before and some people regularly meet and exchange letters because they like each other or just because they wonder what the others are doing.

Yours sincerely

Milan Uhde