

ILYA EHRENBURG

The
D.E.
TRUST



A History of Europe's Destruction





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BOSTON • 2025

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The D.E. Trust. *A History of Europe's Destruction*

Translated into English by Alexander Pinsky

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Translator's note

This book was written as a warning. That warning went largely unheeded at the time of its publication in Russian and in a few foreign translations (German, Czech and Japanese) that were published shortly afterwards. My aim as its translator was to make that warning heeded by the English-speaking audience because it is as relevant today as it was in 1923—the year it was first published. In fact, some pages of this book read as if they were just written today, not over a century ago. This book is a dystopia, and as a matter of fact, one of the first dystopias ever written. It is also a bitter satire, and as most books of this genre may be found offensive and disturbing by many readers. It is certainly not the most pleasant reading, not the stuff for faint-hearted. It just shows the reader that a fatal mixture of greed, hubris and folly is more likely to destroy the most advanced civilization than any natural cataclysm.

No wonder then that this book was written by the eyewitness of the greatest man-made catastrophes of XX century: both world wars, Russian revolution and the Holocaust. Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967) was born in Kiev and grew up in Moscow. He attended prestigious school in Moscow. He got involved in the revolutionary activities at the time of the first Russian revolution of 1905–07, was arrested and expelled from school and was forced to emigrate at the age of 16. He spent most of his years in exile in France where he met and

befriended Pablo Picasso, Diego Rivera, Amedeo Modigliani and other great artists and literary figures, served as a war correspondent with French army in WWI, returned to Russia at the time of the revolution of 1917 only to leave it again in 1921 after being disillusioned and repelled by the atrocities of Russian civil war. These feelings found their reflection in his poem “Prayer for Russia” (1918) and in his first novel “Julio Jurenito” (1922). He spent most of 1920–30s travelling across Europe and briefly visiting Soviet Russia. He served as a war correspondent for Soviet newspapers during the Civil war in Spain. He returned to Soviet Union in 1940 after the fall of France in WWII.

In 1941–45 he was one of the leading war correspondents of Red Army. After the war he was a prominent anti-war activist. He published his three-volume memoir “People, Years, Life” in 1960s where he revived many names that were thought to be erased forever from the memory of most Russians at the time of Stalin’s purges. He died in Moscow in 1967.

1

Mr. Twyweight's early breakfast

On the eleventh of April, 1927 at 9:15 AM Mr. Twyweight, the owner of the largest meat packing company in Chicago had commenced his early breakfast.

Unlike most of his fellow Americans, who began their breakfasts with eggs, Mr. Twyweight always ate pears from California and yogurt first and then eggs as well. On that memorable morning, he as his custom dictated picked a large and juicy fruit and began to contemplate the profitability of buying the stock of his competitor's Mr. Cheers enterprise, meanwhile dripping the juice of the pear on a napkin. He wrote in his small notebook:

Pigs per hour — 820 per day 8200 per year . . .	2,492,800
Sheep “ — 900(X10) 9000(X394)	2,736,000
Oxen “ — 460 “ 4600”	1,398,400
Canned meat	31,000,000
Sausages	2,000,000
Blood (to Mr. Choate's sugar refinery).	700,000
Innards (for sausages, local util.).	—
Horns (to comb factory “Electra”)	1,200, 000
Other refuse (approx.).	1,600,000

After that Mr. Twyweight uttered “Hmm” clearly expressing his doubts.

Still holding a pencil in his right hand, he ate a cup of yogurt and wrote on a special page of his notebook:

1. *Find out to whom exactly Cheers sells the stomachs and for how much.*

It is important to note that the first quarter of an hour of Mr. Twyweight's early breakfast was not completely devoted to the calculations of Mr. Cheers's profits and devouring of a Californian pear and yogurt. He also managed to make a brilliant discovery.

All scientists who worked on the biography of that outstanding organizer of the best meatpacking factory in the world came to the unanimous conclusion that with Mr. Twyweight's departure America lost a brilliant philosopher who had enriched the treasury of scientific thought with his numerous publications in the areas of zoo-psychology, anthroposophy, and eugenics. His name, which is now only familiar to a few specialists studying the history of Europe's demise in his time, i.e. in the mid-1920's through the late 1930's, was as popular in the USA as the name of the famous pen manufacturer Mr. Waterman and the heavy weight boxing champion Mr. Jampes. Three events were especially important for Mr. Twyweight's popularity:

1. He once has read in a newspaper that every man excretes per year:

Solid excrement48.8 kg
Liquid refuse	438 kg
Costing	\$.2.65

Which are wasted. And to promote rational economy he signed an agreement with one suburban kitchen garden enterprise where he travelled daily in his automobile at 9:30 AM right after eating his pear and eggs. This heroic deed of Mr. Twyweight was mentioned by the newspapers of every state, from Alaska to Mexican border.

2. In 1926 Mr. Twyweight had dictated to his female stenographer a short but very thoughtful essay on eugenics, while taking sulfuric bath: "Our moral duty, or on necessity of multiplying rationally". It was published in a small booklet with appropriate illustrations and turned

out to be great success. In the state of Ohio all the best graduates of elementary schools were awarded that booklet by Mr. Twyweight.

Even those who shunned reading books were still familiar with his name due to his vast and diverse activities. Should a random passerby, say in the 5th Avenue in NYC raise his eyes to the sky, he would immediately see a purple image of a young delicate pig enwreathed with the inscription:

JUST ASK FOR TWYWEIGHT'S FILET

So, great Mr. Twyweight having just finished eating his pear and calculating the profits of Cheers blessed the world with another discovery, namely, after recalling the highly acculturated entertainments of yesterday—watching a swimming competition and listening to the singing of famous soprano Mrs. Aide—he wrote in his notebook:

2 Prove beyond doubt that man originated from a frog (discovered by me—T.)

Despite the profundity of this thought it was not the reason April 11, 1927 may be truthfully named an historical date.

Events of utter importance happened later. The early breakfast of Mr. Twyweight went on.

A lackey brought a midsize egg in a silver cup. Mr. Twyweight carefully took off the shell on top of the egg and suddenly shuddered: in the colorless goo of egg white there was a small but distinct bloody spot. Mr. Twyweight pushed the egg away, visibly disturbed. The owner of a meatpacking factory where no less than eleven thousand pigs and seven hundred and eighty oxen were slaughtered daily was a vegetarian, and according to Lord's commandment was merciful to the beasts and sustained himself predominantly on fruit and dairy products. Once he spotted blood in egg white he fell into deep contemplation: does prevention of birth amount to murder, and if so, how can a devout vegetarian feed on eggs? After a minute hesitation he stirred the egg white with a spoon and

then decidedly pushed it away and resolved not to eat eggs for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, unlike the rest of Americans.

But not even that touching decision made April 11, 1927 the day of glory. Removing an inedible egg the lackey gave Mr. Twyweight his morning mail, over thirty letters. Mr. Twyweight sorted out eleven envelopes with European stamps and threw them in the waste basket unread. He hated Europe that did not want to buy his canned meat and multiply in a rational way. Quickly scanning the rest of his mail, he fixed his attention on the last letter. The following was printed on a crispy sheet:

#32174

Trust Company for the Destruction of Europe

April 10, 1927

To: Mr. Twyweight in Chicago, Il

Dear Sir,

The present is to inform you that according to the resolution of the Trust Co. on April 4 this year we commence the realization of the discussed plan of the destruction of Europe.

My absolute regards,
Jens Boot, Director.

— Very well, — uttered Mr. Twyweight and took a note in his notebook.

After that he unfolded an issue of “Chicago Tribune.” His eyes unwillingly stopped at the bottom of the fourth column, where the word “Europe” stood and now occupied his thoughts and deeds. He boringly dragged his eyesight over the number of cables that reported on the all kinds of wars in the Balkans and Rhine states. Only three reports were about peaceful business:

Geneva. Chairman of the League of Nations Mr. Bar-gos, at the banquet in honor of the tenth anniversary of that

organization made a speech noting the brilliant successes of the policies of peace, humanism, and justice despite multiple complications. Representative of Luxembourg declined the invitation to the festivities. Lilac dress of M-me Traindadais, vice-president's spouse designed by M-r. LeBain (Paris, 2 Rue de la Paix) was of note. Menu: assorted appetizers, turtle soup, sole a la Grenadine, filet de la paix, asparagus with sauce Lam-beron, ice cream Fjord.

Copenhagen, Institute of Higher Statistics

Reports that the loss of lives in 1924–26 exceeds the number of casualties in World war of 1914–18. As everyone knows the war cost in Europe were:

Killed in action.	10, 200,000
Decline in birth rate	20, 850,000
Increase in mortality	6,700,000
All37,750,000

In the years 1924–26.

Killed (in national and civil wars)	9,600,000
Decline in birth rate (compared to 1913)	18,000,000
Increase in mortality (malnutrition, epidemics, etc.)	28,000,000
All	55,600,000

Venice: The false rumors of Gabriele D'Annunzio' s death are dispelled.

The great poet is alive and well and just finished a new ode "On the annexation of Macedonia."

He plans a weeklong trip to former Greece. The poet considers taking part in the sport events (motor sled riding on the slopes of Mt. Olympus). Dante's Memorial Society presented the poet on this occasion with green suede breeches and mittens designed in the shape of lyres.

After finishing the cables Mr. Twyweight looked at the wall where among other charts and diagrams was the big map of

both hemispheres. Once the charming daughter of the Phoenician king and now a miserable whore, Europe was taking her regular bath. Mr. Twyweight poked it in the forehead, his index finger hitting Madrid. Done with his early breakfast he went to the kitchen garden company as usually. His notebook was left at his desk.

April 11, 1927, to do:

1. Find out to whom Cheers sell the stomachs and for how much.
2. Prove beyond doubt that man originated from a frog (discovered by me — T.)
3. Destroy Europe.

Other Events of that Memorable Day

That same morning the identical letters with the letterhead of D. E. Trust Co. and signature of Jens Boot were received by two other members of the company's board, Messrs. Jabbs and Hardyle.

Mr. Jabbs was also having his early breakfast consisting of eggs and ham (he wasn't a vegetarian).

Mr. Hardyle pushing away a tray with coffee drank only soda (he had more than his fair share of cocktails last night).

After reading the letters they quite approved the diligence of Jens Boot.

Mr. Jabbs even squinted with pleasure and chewed on a thick unlit cigar forgetting to light it up.

Mr. Hardyle used a letter to tickle a charming Javan girl that curled up at his feet.

Mr. Jabbs was in Pittsburgh, PA, and Mr. Hardyle — in Boston, MA.

They have finished their breakfast. A bath that Europe was taking at that time must be rather called the afternoon one. The dusty clock at Friedrichstrasse Station in Berlin was showing 5:58PM. Disheveled gray-haired woman that stood under the clock was yelling: "Be-uer!"

No one was buying newspapers that reported on the anniversary of the League of Nations, sixteen different wars and green breeches of Gabriele D'Annunzio. The woman's yell got weaker and weaker and then at last died out completely.

Then a neatly attired young man with orange gloves rushed to her side, snatched a newspaper out of her hands and gave her a small 100,000 marks bill. Poor woman could not take it because she passed away at 5:59 PM after showing remarkable resilience. But instead of showing respect to a lady that managed to die standing upright, the young man hastily unfolded the newspaper and froze over the stock exchange report:

	April 10	April 11
US Dollar	60,800,000	54,000,000
RF Franc	3,210,000	2,970,000
Thaler	89,000	81,000
Ruble	450	415

“Mein Gott!” — he moaned and sat on the pavement. His heavenly blue right eye covered with an eyeglass shed a stream of tears that spilled on a dusty sidewalk of dilapidated and half-ruined Berlin.

“Mein Gott!” — mumbled a doctor trying to feel nonexistent pulse of a dead paper peddler. — No carbohydrates, neither fat, nor protein — hundred and eighth case just today.

“Mein Gott!” — whispered the girlfriend of young man frau-lein Mizzi. — It’s black Wednesday. Ninety-four went bankrupt, six committed suicide and Otto broke his eyeglass.

Everything was as usual. Not just in Berlin, but in all of Europe nothing remarkable happened.

In Bergen (5:18 PM) fisherman Christens took his boots off and pulled ashore a slimy flounder. American lady aimed her Kodak at him and smiled. As a matter of fact, nobody bought his flounder.

In Paris (5:07 PM) banks were closing. M-r Violle exited the building of Credit Lyonnais, waved his cane, adjusted a handkerchief in his breast pocket and waited for a bus. His handkerchief was stolen while he was boarding a bus. M-r Violle cursed the government and lost his appetite.

In Genoa (5:47 PM) steamer “Caesar” docked. A whore named Pireta pointed to American sailor at her skirt and

purse. The sailor got the hint and followed her around the nearest corner. Pireta dreaded malaria and wore a garland of garlic bulbs on her neck to ward off the pestilence. The sailor didn't like the smell of it and paid her nothing.

In Kozlov (7:42PM) commissar Vanya Globov was interrogating a petty thief who stole a turtle shell lorgnette that belonged to the itinerant director of "Timber Trust." Globov was utterly bored. The thief begged pardon and his guard cursed and kicked his butt now and then with his government issue boot. Commissar's daughter was rehearsing revolutionary melodies behind the wall. Globov produced two photographs out of his breast pocket, one of Sonya Zaykina and one of Karl Marx. Sonya cheated on him. Marx passed away long time ago. Vanya yawned and stretched himself on a sofa.

So it was going in old decrepit Europe in that hour. Somebody was honored in Lisbon and someone was shot in Budapest. In those places where neither speeches, nor shots were heard one still could hear snoring, clocks' ticking, drunken hiccups and rumbling of hungry stomachs. The seas were roaring as usual, the southern ones with their octopi and colorful shells, the western ones with their lobsters that looked like self-important professors and the northern ones swarming with silver herring.

In the mountains where the heels of the Lazy One were resting a pillar stood as usual. According to the order of local authorities it was freshly painted and the inscription on it informed:

Europe ← . . . → Asia
A sparrow roosted on the pillar.

Absolutely no one was thinking of the pillar, neither of the seas, nor of Europe's destiny.

Only far, far away in another hemisphere where the clock showed 9:30 AM where the workday morning was underway the director of secret "D. E. Trust Co." Jens Boot bent over the map of Europe and issued bold directives to eighteen thousand six hundred and seventy agents of the company located in all countries of Europe.

The Root of Evil, or Ethnographic Curiosity of the Prince of Monaco

The prince of Monaco, being the potentate of one of the tiniest states of Europe (area 1.5 square km, population 24,600 people) was, according to most historians, a man of immense curiosity. All his time free from the thorough studies of the game of roulette was devoted to travelling. Europe owes its demise to precisely these propensities of that thoughtful monarch.

In the spring of 1892, the prince travelled to Holland. He spent three days in the Hague and was utterly captivated, even broke in tears seeing the impossible beauty of the XVII century painting by Jan Maas that depicted a copper basin. In Gouda the prince purchased a pipe, in Haarlem — a tulip bulb, and in Leyden — a young prophet. Prince kept a diary that fortunately survived and showed us the colorful life in that part of Europe at the end of XIX century.

On June 18 the prince embarked on a small yacht at the northern town of Den Helder and at about 2:00PM landed on a low shore of the isle of Texel whose small population was mostly employed in collection of eggs of the sea birds, as was recently discovered by Mr. Bearway.

Passing by a small house the prince noticed a few red heads of Dutch cheese. His thought at the moment were occupied by his beloved roulette, that's why he threw one of the heads of cheese and shouted the words of croupier: "Make your bets!"

Nice looking young Dutchess with gentle soft facial expression wearing a starched oorijzer on her head came out, picked

up the head of cheese that had rolled away and went back inside the house without uttering a single word. The prince followed her absentmindedly and came inside as well. He stayed there for four minutes being alone and unrecognized.

Exiting the house he thoughtfully repeated: "The bets are made."

Even the smart neighbors suspected nothing bad: first of all, the prince spent no more than four minutes inside the house, and second of all, the oorijzer of the young Dutchess looked completely in order and undisturbed.

The prince wrote in his diary:

"The isle of Texel (4 degrees longitude, 53 degrees latitude). Bird's eggs. Cheese. Population is friendly. The angles of oorijzers must prick men's cheeks quite painfully. However, the bets are made!.."

The smart neighbors have missed a lot that time: namely, on March 18, 1893 the nice looking soft-faced Dutchess who took off her oorijzer on that occasion delivered a son who was named Jens Boot.

He inherited a high passion for big time gambling from his royal father, that helped him a lot in the future in the business of destruction of one fifth of the world. He also inherited the liking of good milk from his mother, that's why in all those years of wars and revolutions he always kept with him a can of condensed milk made in Middelburg.

Further Consequences of Prince's Careless Attitude

Nothing is known about the early years of Jens Boot except for the fact that he had swallowed a lobster's antenna in 1897 which had upset his loving and caring mother a great deal.

In 1901 we find this gifted boy in Brussels at the cathedral of St. Gudula. He serves there as an altar boy handing the incense burner to the priest, singing with his angelic voice, and delighting the eyesight of Lord Almighty with the pristine whiteness of his laced robes. But his spiritual career is being impeded by his passion for progress. On March 26, 1902 he shows up in the altar wearing bishop's purple soutane, and since this vestment is too voluminous for a nine years old boy it also envelops his childhood friend Jaco-a shoe shiner and seven sparrows. Two boys play ceremonial march with the help of two incense burners and one sauce pan antedating the advent of jazz by many years.

Resourceful Jens was sent to the orphanage of St. Francis where six nuns began to pull his cute pink ears and blond hair off his head, meanwhile weeping and praying to St. Theresa; and then they were helped by father Benedict, who commenced to mollify the sinful flesh with his corny fingers.

Father Benedict did such a great job that Jens's body quickly learned to bend twofold, fourfold, eightfold, and even sixteenfold. That determined his further destiny, and in 1904 he became a pride of Medrano brothers circus in Paris. But his own

uniqueness was not enough for that idealist boy. That's why on October 16, 1906 he attempted to bend one of Medrano brothers, namely fat Gaston at least twofold. The results of that attempt were far from satisfactory: it ruined Gaston's plastron as well as the steak eaten by him just before that, and two days later sent Jens on a long voyage aboard "Gambetta" steamer in a role of cook's hand.

Fourteen years old Jens Boot reached the American shore and was delighted: life in Europe from the moment of swallowed lobster's antenna to good old Gaston's ruined plastron was too depressing. But being too young he wasn't certain about his feelings and soon returned to Europe where he was occupied in all kinds of business over the next three years: attended middle school, served as junior barber in Bucharest, picked cigar butts in the streets and entertained public by swallowing burning newspapers.

On July 3, 1910 Ms. Jopple was sitting under her big parasol at the esplanade in Cannes trying to paint the frothy waves of Mediterranean that resembled the weightless seraphs' down with her highly inspired brush. To her utter surprise the figure of Aphrodite Anadyomene suddenly emerged out of the sea froth that on the closer scrutiny turned out to be male, namely Jens Boot, who tried to cool himself in the depths of the sea on that exceedingly hot day. Judging by the pictures that have survived Jens Boot was an exceptionally goodlooking man. No wonder then that the next hour he was having teatime with Ms. Jopple being offered to serve as her regular model.

Ms. Jopple was fifty-eight years old. The proximity of heavenly beauty utterly destroyed her ability to stain canvas with a brush. But that artistic failure had not diminished Jens's manly prowess a single bit. After spending a year with Ms. Jopple Jens decided that his mission was accomplished and, ending the life of that gifted artist with the help of certain chemicals, became the owner of her Riviere villa, pig farm in Yorkshire and guineas at the Bank of England.

But Jens Boot at that time was not in Yorkshire but in Nice, only eighteen kilometers away from Monte Carlo. To that

hospitable place he went after mourning the untimely departure of poor Ms. Jopple.

— Eighteen! — shouted Jens betting his entire Riviere villa.

— Eleven, — was polite croupier's answer.

— Eighteen! — Jens repeated stubbornly betting all his Yorkshire pigs

— Thirty-four, — croupier answered with some hesitation.

— Eighteen! — Jens had bet all his guineas that he already had exchanged for francs

— Zero, — whispered the croupier compassionately.

Jens Boot left the casino being a pauper again consoling himself with a thought that he just presented his father with only two hundred and fifty thousand pounds of sterling for the priceless gift of life that he received from him.

Not being too upset Jens Boot acquired a new vocation. He became a hired tango and waltz partner for the ladies over forty. Every day from 5 to 7PM he had to endure their flabby stomachs covered with silk or velvet clinging to him. The ladies weighed from 80 to 100 kilos, and Jens was literally sweating while dancing with them — real Adam's curse. Jens was a really good dancer and oftentimes he wanted to invite some young lady. But that was strictly forbidden by the syndicate of eleven honorable matrons who owned his legs.

All that was going on till January 14, 1914, when something really catastrophic happened, something that hastened the demise of Europe a great deal.

5

Thank you but I don't dance *(On the role of personality in history)*

The vulgar opinion of many Americans or Africans attributes the guilt for the destruction of Europe mostly to cunning and soulless Mlle. Lucie Flamengo. Is it worthwhile to dispel such a delusion? Whatever intellectual and spiritual powers that person was endowed with they were most certainly inadequate for the task of turning that great continent into a wilderness. Before even meeting her Jens Boot was thoroughly disgusted with European civilization having gone through a great deal of hardships in his turbulent twenty-one years of life. Moreover, Europe was doomed even without Jens Boot. The war of 1914–18, economic and spiritual disarray of the following decade served as clear signs of catastrophic condition which began long before the creation of the famous Trust Company. But the activities of Jens Boot had no doubt hastened the events by the order of several centuries, and his meeting Mlle. Lucie Flamengo led the great adventurer in its own turn to the most crucial decisions.

This meeting took place on January 14, 1914, as was mentioned before, at 5:30PM in Paris at the establishment named “The Tea Star”. As usual Jens Boot was dancing with eleven ladies of the syndicate. But at the aforementioned hour he noticed a young and stunningly beautiful woman with red forelock over pale face. Ignoring all reasons and tradition Jens Boot came to the beauty who just finished dancing with a young diplomat and was drinking her tea. He bowed ceremoniously.

— Thank you, but I don't dance, — she answered with scorn shaking her red forelock and biting on an almond cake with her sharp teeth.

Jens Boot bowed ceremoniously once again and stepped away. And the beauty that turned out to be seventeen years old daughter of the owner of thirty oyster farms and six silk factories was already dancing with someone else. The dames of the syndicate surrounded Jens and squeezing him with eleven flabby bellies chastised him for the breach of contract. Jens went out. He knew that he had fallen in love. He also knew that Mlle. Lucie Flamengo did not want to dance with the poor hireling dancer.

Stopping at the window of Cunard Line shipping company he looked at the map of Europe. Surrounded by the seas the daughter of Phoenician king was still basking.

— Gorgeous continent! — Jens Boot thought. — But everything is designed in such a way here that makes life impossible... Maybe I should move to Africa... There is sand and skies there...

He was about to open the door of the shipping company but then turned and unthinkingly bought an issue of evening newspaper and began to pore through it calmly.

Great ideas need some time to mature.

6

Europe or Mlle. Lucie Flamengo?

There was nothing extraordinary about the fact of reading evening newspaper. On the contrary, Jens Boot used to buy “L’Intransigeant” every day. It was from this newspaper issue bought on August 2, 1914 that he had learned that different states of Europe declared war on each other.

It must be told that Jens Boot was a man without nationality. He believed that the passport has to be changed as you moved from one country to another just as one changed an attire. To be Dutch in Italy seemed as absurd to him as wearing a fur coat in the streets of Naples. He carried a full set of passports in a neat light swine leather case along with his collection of neck ties. He spoke eight languages fluently and when asked about his nationality in intimate conversations replied without a shred of irony—European. Since the declaration of war caught him in Paris, he turned out to be French and was immediately mobilized. For the next three years the life of Jens Boot was as dull and monotonous as that of millions of Europeans at that time. He was dispatched to the battery of 305-millimeter guns and destroyed the invisible adversaries while feeding on cold soup covered with a layer of solid lard.

Only once he was moved by a rather ordinary spectacle. Jens Boot looked at the Somme valley from the top of small hill. Before him was bare devastated land. Jens shuddered like a lover who suddenly saw the face of his young girlfriend looking suddenly aged and exhausted, like a face of an old hag. And since

Jens had studied Greek mythology at middle school, he uttered with bitterness to his comrade corporal Michaud:

— Poor Phoenician princess!..

But Michaud did not understand and just giggled.

For three years Jens Boot did the same as others, but considering his future heroic deeds one might easily suppose that his head was full of thoughts of the sort far from trivial.

In the spring of 1917 Jens Boot hid himself in the steerage of a transport and later landed in Arkhangelsk. In October of that year we see him in Moscow aiming his guns at the Kremlin. Calculating the shells' trajectory he mumbled:

— Let's try it! Perhaps, it can be fixed.

Jens Boot sincerely and diligently tried to fix many things. He was leading operations for the liquidation of various consulates in Moscow, fought against French expeditionary force near Odessa, and for four years his heart was beating against a hard booklet in his breast pocket which was his membership card of RKP (Russian Communist Party).

But in 1921 when the communist government of Russia commenced to install state capitalism Jens Boot who was not a cunning politician but an honest adventurer freed his heart sending his party membership card to the regional secretary, shot three chairmen of the trust companies, four chairmen of stock exchange committees and one bank director, took a required document out of his leather case and departed to the bourgeois countries. Jens Boot much preferred the old-fashioned speculation to New Economic Policy. He bought and sold all kinds of merchandise: stock of different mining enterprises, dollars, jewelry of famous beauties, the hearts of ministers and even some disputed cities like Fiume, Memel, Tchernowitz, Wilno and some others.

By 1925 he became fabulously rich surpassing in wealth the Rothschilds, Stinnes, Luscher and other owners of both industrial and financial capital of Europe. But with his habits of a small business manager wealth was of little interest to Jens Boot.

The only diversion of that melancholic billionaire was travel. Led by some secret instinct he never left Europe but for

the whole months on end he crisscrossed it in various express trains. He travelled from one sea to another, from the apple orchards of Normandy to the jasmine gardens of the Golden horn bay, from the dwarf fir trees of Lapland to the orange groves of Messina.

The sunset over the translucent valley glowed through the misty window of a sleeper car. Yes, the red forelock was charming on the pale face of the Phoenician girl abducted by a bull! And when the night covered the world, when the lonely electric moon was lighting the sleeper compartment of the train car rushing from one sea to another Jens Boot the former circus boy at Medrano's, a former Red Army soldier under the command of Budenny and now a billionaire in the purple pajamas — he loved Europe wildly and passionately. Yes, not his motherland, nor the world but just a part of it, delicate fugitive, coveted Mlle. Lucie Flamengo!

(It must be added that Jens Boot never looked at himself in the mirror at night).

In the daytime he saw everything: slaves in his mines, deputies, professors, prostitutes and many more. He also saw his own puffy and sleepy face in the mirror. And in the daylight Jens Boot hated Europe, nursing his hate like a baby under his flannel vest. At every terminal in the world, be it Torneo or Palermo, he poked his head out of the window and felt that disgusting smell of rotting flesh as if an old crone with black rotten teeth breathed in his face. That was the smell of Europe. And Jens Boot understood that Europe is old, repulsive, that it was possible to love her only in the darkness, with your eyes shut, never touching her rough skin. Jens Boot was neither a philosopher, nor a politician. That is why he did not write treatises on the decline of the Old World and did not take part in the meetings of Comintern.

Perhaps, that man was born for primeval life. His mother, although she wore an oorijzer knew very little of the treasures of European culture. She was mainly occupied in collecting the eggs of seabirds in the almost barren isle. From his father Jens inherited only a passion for gambling. Should Jens Boot had

gone to Africa at the age of nineteen he would find an adequate application to his proclivities there: he would collect the eggs of ostriches, which are quite nutritious contrary to the popular belief and hunted the kings of the desert, lions, which is not much different than playing roulette, by the way. But he had nothing to do in derelict and corrupted Europe of 1920-s.

Once he was passing through Edinburgh and decided to get married. It was in May 1926.

*And not a lone treasure, I suppose,
Will pass grandchildren and to others fling,
Again a scald will ancient songs compose,
And, as his own, will again them sing.*

—Osip Mandelstam, 1914



These lines were written by the great Russian poet who was a contemporary of the author of the book that you now hold in your hands. They were born in the same year — 1891, and knew each other quite well. The fate of the book is reflected in these lines with high precision indeed: it went largely unnoticed not only by its contemporaries but by their children and grandchildren as well. However, that sad fact made it no less valuable or relevant in our time. In fact, its relevance only grew higher over the century that passed since its first publication in 1923. Some pages of it read as if they were written today, not a century ago.

It was written by an eyewitness of the greatest calamities of the XX century, a man who lived through both world wars, Russian revolution and civil wars both in Russia (1918–21) and in Spain (1936–39), through the desperate chaos of post-war Germany of early 1920s, the bloody spectacle of Stalin’s purges of 1930s and late 1940s — early 1950s, through Khrushchev’s so called thaw (Ehrenburg actually coined that very term attributing it to post-Stalinist USSR), and Khrushchev’s overthrow. He was one of the few true eyewitnesses of the century, a rare person who managed to survive it unscathed, despite being in the limelight and even in the crosshairs of multiple adversaries.

The most amazing thing is that in this book, that has now become available to English-speaking readers, most of the atrocities that happened in the XX century were predicted long before they actually happened. Some of them may yet happen in the not very distant future if the warning that was written over a century ago still goes unheeded. As a matter of fact, there are many more means of destruction nowadays than there were at the time of the first publication of the book. However, the author who had no formal education beyond middle school was able to predict such “wonderful” inventions as long-range missiles and biological weapons even then. As for the destructive propensities of mankind as well as hubris, stupidity and greed — they are as triumphant today as they were a century ago. And that is why it is so important to heed that warning indeed.

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