

My Two “Long Voyages” – and the Third One

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For the title above, I borrowed the title of Jorge Semprun’s novel published in 1963, in which he described a long journey of his. I talked with him about this and my own long voyage over lunch when he visited Budapest.

Now that I am entering my 96th year, I have not travelled for a long time. It is nevertheless a good feeling to look back on the many exceptionally interesting journeys that brought beautiful colours into my life. My story about traveling, however, is rather unusual. During the first thirty years of my life, I could not travel at all. I was nine years old when the flames of war engulfed Europe, and soon afterwards I lived in Stalinist, closed-off Hungary, where the borders were surrounded by minefields. Then, from 1960, the borders opened. My first unforgettable journey took me to Sweden, to the congress of the International Historical Association. I will never forget the excitement when I gave the first, approximately five-minute speech of my life at an international professional forum. How could I have imagined then that these professional forums would become the natural setting of my life and that I would eventually be elected president of the very Association I was visiting for the first time.

But let me turn here to two of my long voyages. The first took place at the end of December 1944, and in terms of distance it was not even that long, exactly 600 kilometres between Komárom and Dachau, near Munich. I made this journey, however, crammed into a sealed cattle wagon, over six days, supplied with one small loaf of bread and a piece of marmalade for the entire journey. Semprun’s “long voyage” took him to the Buchenwald concentration camp, and he made it in four days under similar circumstances. I experienced and remembered this journey as a long voyage, since it influenced virtually my entire life, shaping both my personality and my views, this journey undertaken at the age of 14.

My second long voyage took place 46 years later, in 1990, when I was already 60. It was a 10,000-kilometre journey between Budapest and Los Angeles. I had travelled such distances more than once before, but this was nevertheless a fundamentally different, long voyage. Packed into a container, a fragment of our furniture and books, sealed in 37 boxes, also accompanied us to the new setting of our lives, America.

There is, however, one more, third long voyage ahead of me, and in connection with this it is time to orient myself regarding my future. The information I have received so far is not particularly encouraging. For one thing, there are few sources from which reliable information can be obtained. It is true that our bookshelves contain a whole series of travel guides, but none of them offer any guidance on this. The Bible seems truly suitable for this purpose, but surprisingly, it too is extremely terse. I received the most well-founded information from the authentic Jheronimus van Aken, who in the 15th century, under the name Hieronymus Bosch, provided thorough information in the world’s first surrealist paintings. I stood for a long time

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before his pictures in Madrid’s Prado Museum, as well as at an exhibition in his native city, Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands, which fortunately I managed to catch, displaying 35-40 paintings attributed to him, borrowed from all over the world.

Based on these, it seems that heaven, if they find me suitable enough to enter it at all, appears, according to everyone’s unanimous opinion, hellishly boring, with uneventful days and its monotonously flat, eternal music. True, the Bible describes heaven as an ideal place where pain and sadness do not exist, where we can meet everyone who was dear to us in our lives. Jesus enthusiastically emphasizes that this is the place of ultimate happiness, full of delights, where the streets are made of gold and the walls are adorned with precious stones. Well, I don’t know, I have no desire for streets built of gold, that is more suited to Trump, to satisfy his royal airs.

Hell, where supposedly it would be quite easy for me to get in, seems unpleasant. Even on cold days, I do not think I would like to be roasted on a spit over a fire. And I do not like torture at all. It is rather disgusting that the Bible even mentions worms that never disappear, and that these gnaw at people. I have already experienced something like that here on earth, during the war. I did not like it then either. Incidentally, it is most often emphasized that the deepest darkness reigns there. This is already the case in many countries here on earth, yet it is not pleasant.

The decision is not easy, but I cannot wait much longer to make it. I am ill and weak, My serious illness and weakened condition do not allow me to continue writing, which – I am not exaggerating – has meant life to me during these past few years. I bid farewell with affection to my Dear Readers, thank you for being with me during these final years. I promise, however, that when I am already there, I will send word – either from heaven or from hell - in a short blog post.

GPT translation of the text “Két “nagy utazásom” – és a harmadik.” Click [here](#) to see the original.