

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

A Child of our Time, a novel, by Ödön von Horvath.

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A Child of our Time,

a novel, by Odon von Horvath. (Dial Press, New York)

In summer, 1938, the German-Hungarian writer Odon von Horvath ~~has been~~^{was} killed by ~~the~~^a falling tree on the Champs Elysées, ~~at~~ⁱⁿ Paris. How many more important and even more horrible events have occurred since that time! Yet the strange and sinister death of this young and highly gifted poet remains a moving and terrifying fact in the memory of those who used to be his friends and are familiar with his fascinating books. Our mourning, however, is mingled with another feeling, a feeling which is very strong in us when anyone, and more especially a poet, "dies his own death." ("Oh Lord, give to each one his own death!" as Rainer Maria Rilke has prayed.) The death often comes ~~pass~~ to pass in a way strangely befitting the style of their work; in the end they must experience what they once merely dreamed. Before the bombs actually were destroying the boulevards and avenues of the world's most beautiful city, an innocent tree had to transform itself into the deadly instrument killing a poet who walks through a stormy night. This silent tree which became a murderer and the dreadful incarnation of evil, might have been an idea of Odon von Horvath, the poet.

For he always seemed to be attracted, and in a strange manner even amused, by all the manifestations of evil. He enjoyed telling grim, fantastic stories with a smile at once childlike and somewhat cruel, stories about revolting monsters and grotesque accidents. Behind this cold curiosity, however, there was shamefully hidden something different and more precious. For Horvath was a moralist too. If he had not, in ~~the~~ his heart of hearts, been a moralist, he could very well have made his peace with Nazi Germany, where there could have been no objection to the Hungarian "Aryan" and successful playwright. But he definitely turned

his back on the Third Reich. The first book he wrote in exile, the first novel he ever wrote, known and celebrated in this country as "The Age of the Fish", is not only the cool, detached description and analysis of evil, but also, and above all, its indictment. The "godless youth" which is the collective hero of this extraordinary story, the youth of Hitler-Germany, seems to be possessed by wicked demons.

The same Bad Spirit and Great Enemy is appearing, once more, in Horvath's second and last ~~new~~ short novel, "A Child of our Time". This book impresses and moves by many qualities and charms we admired in "The Age of the Fish"; it fascinates by the same kind of magic realism which, at certain moments, reminds ^{one} of Franz Kafka's prose. Yet I feel "A Child of our Time" to be an anti-climax, compared with the earlier book. Its composition is less concentrated, the ~~plot~~ plot is less dramatic, its characters are not quite as unforgettable. From the literary point of view Horvath's last work seems to be a slight decline, although it certainly is still more interesting, even from the purely artistic angle, than 90 percents of all the novels written and published today. Its true significance, however, is not esthetical but moral.

The simple fellow who is presented as the leading character - the average man "of our time" who does not find his place in a post-war, or pre-war world; the narrow minded young soldier who enjoys taking and following orders, suddenly and surprisingly goes through many spiritual and sensual adventures. He has doubts, and dreams, and visions; he experiences forms of love, and sadness, and tenderness he never knew before. He endeavours, he wants to change, to improve, to become a human being instead of remaining what he was: merely a soldier. ~~For~~ Finally he recognizes the Great Enemy, ~~and Wicked Demons~~. The Age of the

Fish is dominated by the demon of coldness, and the Child of our Time desperately tries fighting him. He freezes to death, and we watch, horrified, his transformation into a snow man. But his human heart keeps burning under the icy cover which eventually may melt. For I am sure that Odon von Horvath, the poet who was familiar with the Devil and has been killed by a diabolic tree, also believed in the miracle of resurrection.

Klaus Mann.

A Child Of Our Time, a novel, by Odon von Horvath. (Dial Press N.Y.)

In summer, 1938, the German-Hungarian writer Odon von Horvath has been killed by a falling tree on the Champs Elysées, at Paris. ~~un~~ Many more important and even more horrible events have occurred since that time. Yet the strange and sinister death of this young and highly gifted author remains a moving and terrifying fact in the memory of those ~~who~~ who used to be familiar with his personality, or who know his fascinating books. In a mysterious way this odd accident seems to be connected with the cruel character of our time. Before the bombs actually were destroying the boulevards and avenues of the world's most beautiful city, an innocent tree had to transform itself into the deadly instrument killing the poet who walks through a stormy night. ~~Is it true, then, that poets must anticipate the tragedies which already are prepared for the masses?~~ - Our mourning about the loss which Horvath's death meant to so many of us, was mingled with another feeling, a feeling which is very strong in us when anyone, and more especially a poet, "dies his own death". ("Oh Lord, give to each one his own death!" as Rainer Maria Rilke has prayed.) The death often comes to pass in a way strangely befitting the style of their work; in the end they must experience, or suffer in death, what they once merely dreamed. The silent tree which becomes a murderer, ~~turning into~~ ^{and} the dreadful incarnation of evil, might have been an idea of Odon von Horvath, the poet.

For he always was attracted by the phenomenon of evil. ~~which did not mean to him primarily a moral or religious problem, as it was for Dostojewsky and the whole generation of authors working in his shadow; but rather a horrifying natural force, quite beyond human judgement.~~ He seemed fascinated, and in a strange manner even amused, by all the manifestations of evil; he enjoyed telling ~~with~~ grim, fantastic stories with a smile

at once childlike and somewhat cruel, stories about revolting monsters and grotesque accidents.

Behind this cold curiosity, however, there was shamefully hidden something different and more precious. For Horvath was a moralist too. If he had not, in his heart of hearts, been a moralist, he could very well have made his peace with Nazi Germany, where there could have been no objection to the Hungarian "Aryan" and successful playwright. But he turned his back on the Third Reich. The first book he published in exile, the first novel he ever wrote, "known and celebrated in this country as "The Age of the Fish", is so full, from cover to cover, of this abhorrence that it takes the reader's breath away. The godless youth which is the collective hero of this extraordinary story, the youth of Hitler-Germany, seems to be possessed by the evil demons.

And ~~this natural, or super-natural power, this~~ ^{the same} Bad Spirit and Great Enemy, is dominating also Horvath's second and last short novel, "A Child Of Our Time". It impresses and moves by many qualities and charms we admired in "The Age of the Fish"; it fascinates by the same kind of magic realism which occasionally reminds of Franz Kafka's ~~at once classic and daring~~ prose. Yet I feel "A Child of our Time" to be an anti-climax, compared with the earlier book. Its composition is less concentrated, its characters not quite as unforgettable. From the purely literary, ~~esthetical~~ point of view, Horvath's last work seems to be a slight decline - although it certainly is still more interesting, ^{even} from the artistic angle, than 90 percents of all the novels written ~~to~~ and published ~~now~~ today. Its true significance, however, is not esthetical but moral. For the simple fellow who is presented as the leading character - the average man "of our time" who does not find his place in a post-war - or pre-war - world; the narrow minded young soldier who enjoys taking and following orders, - surprisingly goes through many spiritual and sensual adventures, and has dreams and visions

he never had before; he endeavours, and hopes, and begins to understand many things, and he wants to change, to improve, and finally he recognizes the Great Enemy all of us have to overcome. The world we are living in is very cold. The age of the Fish is dominated by the demon of coldness. The average man, the child of our time, freezes to death. We watch, horrified, his transformation into a snow man. So the wicked principle seemingly comes out victorious. We feel, however, that Odon von Horvath - who was familiar with the charms and dangers of Evil - firmly believed in the strength and final triumph of Good. The ice will melt, and the Child of our Time is not doomed to remain a snow man. For his human heart keeps burning under the ~~cover~~ mortal cover.

Klaus Mann.