

David Sweetman

An Adopted Life

The cantonment's hazy
clapboard beehives
and the Sikhs drone-headed
in military turbans

watching my natural father,
English shorts limp
as the airless
afternoon flag,

saluting me, broad
open-palmed
as if slapping away
a troublesome Indian insect.

A sickbed photo to ease
those toyless postwar days
when a pillow-plume restored
Europe's dead courts. *The stars,*

said the Kaiser,
*are medals awarded to God
for favours.* And anything
was possible

when the Benares
medicine tray was rimmed
with hated Swastikas
etched in brass, light

as scratches on a cornfield
where I watched
a poppy's wounds embrace
the khaki bees

that snuffled in its
dreaming tears and felt
the symbolism of remembrance
defeating me. The angel

on our memorial
brandished her sword,
a madcap nanny
whipping her charges to bed,

in storybook and comic
two wars merged

and I imagined
a conscript's leggings

spreading upwards
until mummified
he rose from mud
to confuse history.

The chapel plaque
had sharper inscriptions
added later, after father
was brought back, dying

almost an afterthought,
eardrums split
on a shore-battery,
a torrent

flushing each seared
aural snail
as I was conceived
just months before.

Recently my new,
my only real father
reminiscing about
my childhood pneumonia

a decade before
tetracycline, told how going
reluctantly to work he saw
the overblown wax poppies

blossoming on his Wolseley
and was overwhelmed
by the thought of my dying
in his charge. He said

he broke down
but I elect to see him
reticently covering his face,
raising a hand

in broad, open-palmed salute
to the mosquito memory
that carries our private,
chosen bloodline.

Michael Charlton

On the Origins of the Cold War

The Eagle & the Small Birds

2. The Triumph of the Commissar

"The eagle should permit the small birds to sing, and care not wherefore they sang."

CHURCHILL to STALIN, at Yalta
(4 February 1945)

WITHIN A MONTH of his return from the Yalta Conference, President Roosevelt's euphoric vanity that, after the War, he would be successful in persuading Stalin into the intimate collaboration for which Roosevelt longed, was quickly drained away.

On 24 March 1945, while he was at lunch in the White House, the President was handed a cable from Averell Harriman, his Ambassador to Stalin in Moscow. Roosevelt read it with mounting anger and agitation, then said loudly, "Averell is right. We can't do business with Stalin. He's broken all the promises he made at Yalta." In his final communications to the Soviet leader the President wrote of his feelings of "bitter resentment" and of Stalin's "vile misrepresentations." A week later Roosevelt was dead.

Over the next three years, "the Spirit of Yalta" was extinguished in the confirmation of the most pessimistic forecasts of how Stalin would choose to interpret those famously ambiguous accords. As the Soviet Commissar took over from the Nazi *Gauleiter* in command of the capitals of Central Europe, the West's uneasy hopes at Yalta—that if the new men fulfilled Stalin's demand for governments "friendly" to the Soviet Union they could also pose as patriotic, independent leaders—proved illusory.

In these years both the nature and the exercise of Soviet power created fundamental resentments, which must be seen as fatal to reconciling the peoples concerned to the long-term continuation of Russian domination.

By 1948, Czechoslovakia—a parliamentary democracy since World War I—had been subverted. By 1949, a shuffling procession of tormen-

ted "enemies of the people" crowded the courtrooms of Eastern Europe. The "new purges" culminated in the "Show Trials"—ceremonies conforming to the Moscow precedent, which demanded blood sacrifices. Among the victims was a Czech Communist, Eugen Loebel.

LOEBL: "I was told that, apart from Slansky, nobody would be sentenced to death. And I think the interrogators believed that as well. As a matter of fact, when I wasn't sentenced to death, but others were, I envied them—how better off they are. I was still in solitary confinement: they don't suffer any more. I was interested in whether my ideas of the trial were right. One, that it is a kind of Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, without the Army. And the other, whether my analysis is right that it was anti-Semitic. You see, once one is in solitary confinement one lives in a world of ideas. The ideas are important because you don't live with anything else. I was more interested in following what they said—whether it was exactly in contradiction or not. So the actual sentence, the death sentence (I was prepared either for life or for death), is really better than to be sentenced to life under those conditions."

— *I have here the words of the Prosecutor summing up at the trial.*

"I demand the death sentence for all the accused. Let your verdicts become an iron fist, without the slightest pity. Let it be a fire which burns out the roots of this shameful abscess of treason. Let it be a bell ringing through the whole of our beautiful country, for new victories on the march to the sunshine of Socialism."

Do you remember that?

LOEBL: "I remember that, and on top of it all there was fantastic applause. It took three years, from the beginning of my imprisonment to the trial, so to be treated that I confessed to being a traitor. And