W H I T E S H A D O W S

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This happening at the Deutsches Haus is really chapter three of a work in progress. Chapter one was a story I wrote two years ago, The Shadowman and the Light. Then, chapter two, the exhibition of Heinz Emil Salloch's work at the Ostholstein Museum in Eutin, Schleswig Holstein. Chapter four will be a November exhibition in Berlin, a show of some German artists, emigrants in the 1930s and another written chapter, "In Germany" which will recount in the manner of a Bildungsroman, the intimate epic which began several years ago when I decided to take my father's early German works out of the sea chest in which they had been hidden for fifty years.

The working title of the work in progress is White Shadows. It is a story about things, people and spirits leaving Germany and coming to America and then about some of those things going back to Germany. But the back and forth, the comings and goings are not the true sense of the adventure. The real reading of the compass, the direction of the narrative, and of the images, at least such is my wish, will go from whatever moves out of the dark and progresses toward the light. Vast ambition: we'll see.

1933 -- a hot summer day. The style, an ardent nascent expressionism. The palette, a light dusting on one side of the bridge, then a series of greys, then darker blues, and as though sprinkled over the whole of the drawing, a scattering of ash: the content, a short camel back span, supported by sturdy arches, a medieval construction that disappears on the far bank, where five pine trees twist in a threatening wind, already covering the sky with sombre clouds. I am just like all the other children who always surrounded my father when he painted. Only this time my father explains what he sees,

and why he paints it "like this." He speaks German. His language is ironic, elegant, personal, lyrical, colored, mischievous, full of laughter, and light.

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I am in the library, on the wooden bench with its high curlicue back support. My father sits opposite me in his rocking chair. It is eight o'clock in the morning, in a village on the north shore of Long Island, about forty miles from the city, between the bedroom suburbs and the Gold Coast. We are having coffee and my father is reading the paper. I am staring out the windows. They are small windows with Venetian blinds that are half drawn. Bookshelves frame the openings and most of the books in this part of the library are old, with old dark green or old dark brown bindings. Between us, serving as a table, a sea-chest glows darkly. Its wood has been refinished, it is a hard wood, the pattern of its grain is as powerful and visible as the pattern of our family grain is fragile and virtually undetectable to the naked eye. Or so it comes to me just then, a morning thought, fugitive, and not to be remembered for the next twenty years. I run my hands over the grain of the wood and notice my father taking the gesture in from the corner of his white flecked eyes. Is he thinking about my hand, about the wood, or about his paintings from Germany which are kept stored in this sea-chest, one of three, in the house? There is no point in asking. I have asked before. I have been told once, "It is far more complicated to leave your own

country – far more complicated than you can imagine.” I have been told once, as it were, once and for all. Yet ask again I do. Again and again, the last time, on the veranda of a hospital in Maryland, with my father in a wheelchair, his back to me, his hands and fingers clutched to the armrests. "What are you thinking, Henry?" How tired his voice sounds when he answers: "Why should I tell you? Do I know who you are?"

IGe

Fast forward, to 2000: After my mother’s death, I began an inventory. I showed some paintings to a few people. They were my first angels, Barbara T., Mary Ellen C., Karen P.: each had a hand in sorting through the snips and bits of the past, turning them into something that could be shown, a collection with a history, with an inventory, with something that took it out of bulk and confusion, into the light of things that had a sense and were freighted with quality, and purpose.

Finally, to interest people in my father’s work, I had a small, attractive pamphlet made. A nude was reproduced on the cover of the little book and it spoke for the man’s graphic talent, for the way Beckmann must have influenced him, spoke for his youth, for his reckless devotion to the emotion of a chalk stroke and to the tension a line could bring to paper the way a lightning stroke brings tension to the sky. In the early pieces, a swollen expectation fills the trees and all is spring -like and fecund. In one painting dated 1928 the sunshine

reflects off the water, bounces off it like a high note in a cadenza, and then off a shipside, and a dock, calling attention to the shadow shapes and patches of light which never leave the Schleswig-Holstein landscape alone. In another watercolour, a field of poppies is examined from below, the heads of the poppies floating over the paper like balloons, like hallucinations, like red clouds, full of hope and promise. And then it is 1933. Charcoal lines dominate the gouache, the pastels, the watercolors. Village streets tighten, roofs pitch forward toward the abyss.

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The first photograph I can remember looking at with any certainty as its author was in colour, a colour slide, like everything in those days. There were colour slides and there were gun metal blue projectors. You took trips and when you came back and some friends or family had come to visit for the weekend, the slides got projected against the pine panelled walls of the living room. Sometimes the slide got stuck in the projector. Then it would heat and once or twice such a slide burst into flame and the house burning down was what you saw projected on the pine panelled walls.

The photograph I have in mind was of a fountain in Aix en Provence. Sunlight washed the ochre walls in the background and seemed to splash onto the street as if it were water. The water was wet, the stones were old, the sunlight was warm. I don't know what happened to those slides. They were boxed, labelled, and eventually lost. Or

not: something must have remained because forty years later a knock came on the door. An Italian editor was there. He had seen some of my work on the wall of a mutual friend. She had given him my address. He wanted to publish them. Really? *Si, e vero.* After that I began to use a better quality paper for my developments.

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I rarely imagine my father when he was young. I don't know how. One exception proves this rule. As I see it, and him, it is a mid April morning. The sky is gray, the streets of Berlin are broad, the city slow and stately in its movements but a little nervous too, like a Victorian lady on a promenade, a little afraid of what the sun may do to her complexion. Better an overcast sky.

I see overcoats, and black limousines, and vendors, and I see my father. He is a lank presence, with a wry smile and he hesitates for a moment, staring up at the museum where he has often gone to look at the paintings of the Blaue Reiter, work by Franz Marc, Kirchner, portraits by Max Beckmann. When he goes now, he knows there will be nothing to look at. Over the last week the authorities have removed all decadent art from the walls. Yet he wants to go to look at the empty spaces where that art once was.

The emptiness is what intrigues him. Where will it lead his imagination, his eye, his heart? What lies beyond the vanishing point of a blank rectangle? He climbs the steps slowly, drawn forward by the irresistible tug of

nada, of *nichsts*. Behind his shiny uniform and his puffy biscuit face does the museum attendant worry about my father? Has he seen him before? Why does this bohemian come back now? Perhaps they exchange a few un-pleasantries, the one slurring his menace, -- "Your turn will come soon." – the other politely shaping his reply -- "Ah dear fellow, my turn has already come."

Inside the museum, someone from the mayor's office is showing the new situation to some military authorities. Boots echo in the vast chambers of the galleries. My father's presence is almost unnoticed. He moves slowly, barely stopping to examine the new paintings that have been quickly discovered in the museum's cellars and used to fill the gaps: there are hunting scenes, castles, still-lives from the nineteenth century. *Natures mortes.* But the job is only half finished and what finally brings my father to the attention of the official delegation is the way he has of standing in front of the empty spaces that no one has yet had the time to fill.

"What does he think he is doing?" "Move on young fellow, there's nothing to look at here" "Yes, so I noticed. That is what caught my eye." "Get out of here. This is a state institution: this isn't for the likes of you. What are you doing here anyway?" "I am closing my eyes."

InGe

On the outside cover of the notebook my father used to keep the log of his production, a place and a street name were recorded: 67, Argonnenweg, Adlershof. It took my friend, an information specialist, Dorothee R. a day to discover that Argonnenweg had been renamed

Steinmannstrasse by the East German municipality. The Argonne had been a major World War I battle, a principle German victory. Under Soviet tutelage, the East German regime had done its best to efface traces of anything which might lead the population back to a reverence for fallen heroes. It wasn't just fathers who had disappeared. It was the idea of fathers.

We drove down along the Spree. On the far bank old factories were being converted into elegant lofts. Along the river, commerce still plied its trade, barges and tugboats trundling up and down the quiet waters, though now, sometimes forced to navigate between pieces of contemporary sculpture. Yet as we passed under the Jannowitzbrucke 2005, Heinz Emil Salloch's brush would hardly have had much touching up to do to bring A 453, Jannowitzbrucke 1934, medium, acquarelle, datum 8/34, preis, 12 marks up to date with the present landscape.

67 Steinmannstrasse, Adlershof: the house was still there, a small corner building, on a street lined with trees. Two names on the doorbells, one German, one Vietnamese, suggested an initiative but I didn't want to go inside. Even had it proved possible, walking around in rooms where Heinz Emil Salloch had woken up, made coffee, sharpened pencils, looked out back at the little garden – in a sorry state of neglect – put a blanket over his shoulders and sat down at a makeshift desk to do some more drawings, or to correct some papers turned in by his fifth grade elementary school pupils, that would have been trespassing on something.

I stared at the little house, stared at it unflinchingly, conjuring with spirits. I wished there had been a studio with huge windows in Berlin. Later, a studio with huge

windows in New York would not have been bad either. I was a congeries of knots, some of which I knew were made of very German fibres. As we drove away, I said something to that effect: *Dass hat sich gelohnt*." Martin remarked that since I had come to Berlin I had begun to lard my speech with German expressions. Were we watching a native son, being born? I considered all possibilities. It seemed unlikely, but what was likely, I could not explain any better. We drove back to Berlin proper in silence. I believe I must have disappointed my hosts: They wanted a whole family saga to fall into place. But of course, they were German. Painfully they had pieced together the fragments of their own stories. My intimate little epic was child's play compared to theirs. Or perhaps I thought, I only felt the way Heinz Emil Salloch must have felt when he turned his back on Argonnenstrasse, 67 in 1937. However small and cold in the winter, and however small and very hot in the summer, the little house was nevertheless what he called home. I wondered what his suitcase was like when he left: a portfolio, a back sack. I took no pictures that day. There was not enough light.

Work in progress

My first camera is a bulky Contax and it gets stolen on a trip to the south of France. My second camera is a light Rollei and I lose it on a trip to New Mexico. My third camera is a Contax again, this one smaller, pocket size, and I lose it too – on an airplane. Now I have a Contax once again, a T3, but it has a problem with the lens, and I

have a Leica now too, a l948 Leica that I only manage to load successfully every second time. Maybe these problems are salutary. Maybe you have to have a problem with the light before you capture it, before a photograph will speak for how important you think it really is.

Walking around Kiel where my father lived in the late 20's, I wondered whether something like this same set of considerations was what had moved him to paint in the first place: I went to the Muthesiushocschule. The kind of paintings I had discovered made it plain to others that he must have been a student there. But in 1933 the Nazis destroyed the studio facilites at the school. And in 1944, because Kiel was the center of U boat construction, the allies destroyed 97% of the city. People at the school were very excited when I showed them some slides of my father's work. Somebody even used the phrase "this residue of our light." Maybe you have to have a problem with the light before a painting like a photograph will speak for how important you think it really is.

What else was in the dark? I began to wonder. I had no letters. And of course in our family no one made home movies. But wasn't there a short story? Hadn't I written and published it in the *Paris Review* more than twenty years ago? Whatever that story had been about, had it not also been about my father? I went to the Public Library in New York to get a copy. I waited for a while. They said it would be another forty five minutes and I went outside.

Outside it wasn't much easier to wait but there was a coffee shop across Fifth Avenue and there were people to

watch. I remembered something of my father's early pleasure in the city, the way he liked what a wonderful writer, Lenny Michaels once called the "city's quick going places," the way he didn't like the daily commute, and something about the determination with which he did his work. I remembered something about him later too, ill, and tired, looking worn, looking worried. He was the art director for a group of industrial, medical and pharmaceutical magazines and I wondered whether the sense of design in his paintings had not found its way into his commercial art. If we went back and discovered the catalogue of *Interscience* publications, might we not discover an unsung genius? I could still see the rulers and the ink with which he worked, the large sheets of paper and the slowly unfolding designs: I had never thought about them before. I had never realized I remembered them before either. It seemed to me I could see them much more clearly than I could see my father.

My volume of the *Paris Review* was waiting for me when I went back into the library. I opened my book to the issue of the magazine and found my story. It was called "Nightrise," and I remembered being grateful to my former wife for having once commented that she never understood why people said that night fell.

"Night does not fall, it rises."

The first paragraph of the story speaks for itself. It also speaks for my father quite eloquently and it speaks for the power of memory and the force of forgetting. The names have been changed but it is essentially biographical and I quote that first paragraph in its entirety:

"Renata said: I've never seen Rheinhardt use more than one match to light a fire. When I break a glass he tells me I've lost control. Just watch him come through the door, every night, punctually, six minutes after the 5:38 gets in. He wasn't always the way he is. Before he came to this country, his paintings were violent. The villages were orange, the trees were blue. Then, when Hitler came to power, the canvases turned black. He was a teacher to support himself. Did you know that? But first they took the history books away and then they took the literature away. He turned to music but one night somebody smashed the instruments and finally gym was scheduled where they had once art. When they took the children away, Rheinhardt tried to kill Hitler. Hitler was supposed to address the greater East Prussian conference of high school teachers and Rheinhardt sat in the front row with his father's old revolver. But Hitler never came."

InG

Eutin, three o'clock one afternoon two years ago. The village was quiet. Behind the brick walls that lined the quaint streets the tips of garden trees shot toward the grey sky and seemed to loft a canopy of prosperity over the surroundings. I had parked close to the castle that shelters the Ostholstein museum but I was five minutes early. I wandered among the shops. After the butcher shop with its huge choice of sausages, there was a lingerie shop. There the choice was small and not what you find in Paris. On a street corner, four men argued the virtues of the new Chancellor. That she was a woman

didn't matter: that she was selling out to the Americans did. I stopped wandering and walked toward the museum, my suitcase clattering behind me.

Dr. Hahn, the director of the museum was expecting me and moments later, we were upstairs in his office, coffee cups, paper cutters, posters for the next exhibition. For the last time I hoisted the suitcase to one table, moved it further, to the next, a sturdier cabinet. I opened the seals on my beast.

Outwardly, I was calm, -- inwardly the truth was otherwise: Three years ago my heart had soared when I was told it would be possible to do an exhibition. Out of the darkness into the light, out of the shadows into the bright attention of the people whose paintings these were, and from then on, would be too. But now what would Dr. Hahn say? Would he be disappointed by the real thing, the wrinkled, torn, brittle paper? Would he finger the works speculatively, grimace a little, smile, shake my hand and say he looked forward to seeing me again, on 10 September, wondering how he was going to squeeze this work in between his other on-going concerns?

But Dr. Hahn was thrilled. He made gruff sounds and squinted with pleasure. "Yes, Yes," he said and repeated. He went back to the work. I had more coffee. At last he was finished. He nodded and smiled and to make sure I had understood, he turned my way and nodded and smiled at me. In the fifty pieces which I had had photographed for eventual use in a catalogue, he said he had more than enough for a good show. But he wanted to keep everything, examine it closely. He was fascinated by Heinz Emil Salloch's repertoire, saw that each item could be located in the logbook – and like the very good

museum director I knew him to be, began to compare, trying to locate the pieces which could be traced back to Lubeck. There was a foundation in Lubeck that supported arts relating to that city: perhaps we could get some help.

It was not yet night as I drove back toward Kiel. The road floated ahead of me. The horizon seemed to want to lift the road higher, up toward that light. From a recent exchange with a friend who was an art critic, I knew there was a phrase in German which described this phenomenon quite perfectly: I had suggested I had once heard a friend say *Es wurde weite*, it is becoming wider. This woman said one could do better: as I proceeded back west, toward Kiel and the declining light, but into the promise of other light to come, what she called a Friedrich sky, I tried out her ideas: for example there was "der Himmel offnet sich." Or I could exclaim, "Was fur ein weiter Himmel." Also available was "das weite Himmelszelt," heaven's tent, or a little dose of anthropomorphism might be in order: "der Himmel hat wieder seine Weite." What was simplest, we had concluded, that was what was best: Truly, "Es offnet sich," yes, truly, it was opening. Maybe that is why I take photographs, to record the ongoing nature of that event.

During my travels, in my several hotel rooms, at night, before I fell asleep, I would read passages from a book I had brought with me: Robert Musil's diaries, 1899-1942. I had read his novel *The Man without Qualities*

when I was in college, and I knew I was feeling a bit like his hero when I left New York with my Samsonite, filled with my father's works on paper, not sure of my qualities, except determination. But was that really a quality? Was it not just a consequence of the situation into which I had worked myself? To want to accomplish something is merely the promise of an activity. Without an attendant awareness of its import – which is to say, for someone else – the most virtuous practise may be a hollow exercise. I thought Musil would have approved of such a cautious approach to self-congratulation. Perhaps Musil would be a friend.

How richly I was rewarded: Work in progress was nothing for Musil: everything was work in progress and I could imagine him reading over my shoulder, and pointing to the relevant passages, telling me, See, I told you so: for examples:

"In truth one does not function in this mode or that; the way things actually happen is that, when one comes into contact with other people, they strike within one a quite specific (or quite unspecific note) – and this then is the mode in which one functions."

And:

"Intellectual progress has always simply consisted in correcting, at every stage, the errors that one produced [for oneself] at the previous stage."

And…

And emotional progress? I wondered, sitting at the bar of a restaurant in Kiel. I was alone and at the end of my trip. I had my Musil, I had Dr. Hahn's approval ringing in my ears. I didn't need anything else.

"May I have a white burgundy, please?"

I continued my reading. I paged through the volume. Perhaps I looked up at the ceiling, just then, wondering about angels, longing for a fresco. Perhaps I ordered another glass of white burgundy. I do know I did look down, at the ground, because instinctively, I had spent those two weeks always looking down at the ground and back over my shoulder, checking to make sure the Samsonite suitcase I had bought in Chinatown in Manhattan was still safely in place, at my feet, my burden, my accomplishment, my friend, my own sea trunk.

But it wasn't, of course.

What happened at that exact instant has a name: an epiphany. I cannot account for it, I can only describe it. My finger was on a line in Musil and I froze at the bar, or rather suddenly a force greater than anything I could remember in a long time filled me and immobilized me there, as one might become completely still in anticipation of a gift one cannot believe someone is about to make. You know where I was, Kiel, you know what I was doing, drinking, you know what I was thinking, whatever came to mind, thoughts as friends, keeping myself company: until I saw that the angels had stepped aside, and in their place, there was Heinz Emil Salloch in his chair. In his rocking chair, in his wooden chair at the head of the table as I was growing up, in the chair where he played his lute, in that last wheel chair, his back to me, his voice coming at me like an echo: "Do I know who you are?" Only now he had turned around and he was staring at me. There was so much more going on in that face than I knew I would ever understand. He shrugged. Why bother trying? He was right. It was my turn to speak, it was my

meanings that interested him, this absent father, -- by the way, looking distinctly German, "Well," I said out loud at the bar, as though time were suddenly suspended and everything was again happening all at once, but this time for all the right reasons, as though with me pulling, and he guiding, we had crossed the golden lacquer of the years together, gotten the cart to the temple, and were standing there side by side, me, exhausted, and he, never to be tired again, for after all, he was dead:

"Well, old man," I said, "Now you certainly do know who I am. I am your son."

To conclude, these words jotted in the margins of a notebook (where a poet goes to survive, a poet once said…)

Susan Sontag has written that photography is always a return. I would like to consider another possibility. Suppose photography were an advance; suppose light could be accumulated, one patch of light leading to another and to another, light stones across a darkness until finally there was such a sufficient, such a steady progress of images, it made a world in which the dark was finally left behind and on the far shore, everything became visible. Imagine stepping from light patch to light patch, always moving forward. The river gets deeper but you proceed anyway.

I know so little about my father, -- he had a good eye, long hair, a wry sense of humour, a quick wrist that made for strong charcoal strokes (and that would make of

him an excellent badminton player later on in his American life).

Have you noticed? (I asked myself) I only ever remember the photographs I have not taken. The flock of geese on the lawn of the hotel at five in the morning at the Hotel Atlantic in Hamburg, the sun glinting on their beaks, a man rolling an inner tube among them, dawn on his shoulders, yet nothing absurd about the scene, geese and man as one. A bouquet of lilies at the far end of a dark panelled room, out on a terrace, above a garden, just that instant of impossible bejewelled brilliance set in the emerald ring of the dark going city; a couple, black, entwined in each other's arms on the Pont Marie in Paris, watching the sun go down, unaware of how the light catches their bodies, makes of them an intimate cathedral capable of holding its own against the stones of Notre Dame.