

ate myself, to fawn to him and lie. I'll go to him happily and proudly, as befits my character.

So I said:

- I'll take it!

Torino, November 6, 1908
Translated by Ljiljana Šćuric

"The Confession"

I regret having to stop writing. But if I were to go on like this, I would spoil everything I had written so far, just as if I had clumsily pressed a wet hand over the still undry ink. For when I started on the first story, I never dreamed I would end up writing ten of them, a whole book, and call them "burlesques". Only after I had sent the first one off to a publisher did I become greedy for the royalties and said to myself: "Well, well. True, I had wasted a crown for a shave; but if I hadn't wasted it like that, I would not have been able to write so many lines, worth all of twenty crowns." And that put me in such a good mood that I decided to write another one, two, ten... I took hold of life and began to draw from it all those events which are so small and trite that everyone abounds in them and overlooks them; yet they are so great and unusual that they are worth underlining. Small as a material fact, great as psychological matter. Thus I conceived the "burlesques": to find in our psyche that which others have already found in life: the grotesqueness of the trite, the importance of the insignificant, the incredibility of normalcy, the coincidence in everyday life: "The Charmed Cupboard - Peasants in the City - An Hour After Midnight - The Mouse..." In all of them coincidence is the main factor, grotesqueness the only point, and the spirit depends more on the goodwill of the actor than on the effort of the writer. The author throws the burlesque on paper heedlessly: a coincidence can turn into

something worthwhile; the actor goes through his role superficially: a coincidence can bring out brilliant acting...

So I put neither effort, nor time, nor reflection into the writing of these novelettes: I wrote them while resting from studying, while digesting dinner, while waiting for the rain to stop and - here I must stop to explain:

I am a very clumsy man: out of clumsiness, I will break my glasses and then be so enraged that in my fury I break the lamp...

I am also naive: once I saw a sign on a liquor-store: "American bar for 10 fillers". I went in and said: "A bar, please." Everyone laughed. They explained to me what a bar was and that it is not something you drink from a glass, just as you don't eat an "inn" or a "bakery", etc. - I was horribly embarrassed. "They will think I'm an ignoramus, a block-head, a provincial, a boor, an idiot, a moron...", I thought, and the thought was killing me. I tried smiling as if I had only meant it as a joke. But my face was already colored in a tell-tale blush. Then I thought of a way out: a man standing next to me was paying his bill; I concentrated on his fingers, looked askance at his wallet, his pockets, gave him a once-over. I bought nothing; I went out, waited and started following him from afar. Everyone took note of my behavior and looked on. I followed the stranger and then, having noticed a policeman, took a powder. I was pleased with myself. "Now they think I'm a thief, the more because I didn't order anything in the bar. So now they will interpret my naive question and my confusion as masterly pretense of a knave with other plans which he cannot and will not reveal..."

Further, I am self-conscious: a large, yellow and red smelly boil had formed on my nose. It hurt, but I was even more pained because of the impression it made on others, those who are forced to look at me: bartenders, waiters, bar patrons and barbers. I was so considerate that I went only to the less frequented joints, i.e. the expensive ones. Because of the scab, I had no appetite, and still I ordered more courses than others, I chose the more expensive ones and tipped lavishly: all in an attempt to paralyze the unpleasant impression I made on the owner and the waiters, so they would see I was a good customer, would like me and forget the scab on account of the profit... Thus I ate when not hungry and spent money for no reason at all. And when I remembered that

I could have made tea and hot chocolate at home, by myself, the scab was already gone... Whereas, while it was still there, I would never have thought of it because I would feel that eating for dinner what others eat for breakfast means having no dinner and that everyone would notice the fact. So passers-by would not only see me as scabby but also as hungry, which would completely destroy my social life...

I am also small: Diogenes had only one desire - for Alexander to move out of the sun. Diogenes was semibarbarian, because he thought only of his own comfort. With me it is the other way around. I had a head-cold; I used up all my clean handkerchiefs; I had to wipe my nose with my - mouth. And when I did use a handkerchief, I soiled my nose, hands and mustache. Now there was only one thing I wanted: a clean handkerchief. Thus I was in a state of constant fear that someone would hear me wiping my nose with my mouth or see on my skin what should be in my pocket... I was afraid people would be disgusted, would turn away sickened by my face and would refuse to shake my hand. I suffered the tortures of Tantalus. I didn't go out; I sat in my room brooding, full of dark thoughts, self-pity and self-contempt. I came to be disgusted by myself: the yellow, carrion-like, slimy image of the gob pervaded my fingers, my tobacco, my mind and my soul. And when I finally got hold of a clean handkerchief, I walked about town all day long, rejuvenated, merry and light, wiping my nose frequently and needlessly, thus quickly soiling the handkerchief and regretting my wastefulness bitterly the following day...

I am also sly. The other day I visited a relative with the express intention to be invited to dinner. He did invite me. I protested. Very cautiously, though. Only after we had eaten did I start lamenting about having already paid in advance for dinner at the inn for that day (I had not a filler on me). My relative replied: "You could have told me so." "But I didn't want to offend you by turning down your invitation." So he gave me two crowns - as compensation. I took them and left abruptly, pretending to be angry and offended. Noticing my demeanor, he sent me ten crowns by mail, writing that the other day he didn't have more on him and that I should not think badly of him for having given me two crowns as if I were a beggar... I was elated with the unexpected manna, but wrote the following: "Your gift truly pains me: it pains me that you should think I am nothing but a knave prepared to do anything just to

elicit money from you... You cannot imagine how much I suffered on account of these ten crowns... I would be devastated if you should think that I wanted to take advantage of you..." Because of that letter, he became my true friend and benefactor, for, as he put it, he could see that I have character...

I am also vain. I read all the writers in order to be able to say: Oh, of course I read Maupassant, etc... in the same way I drink various wines, smoke foreign tobacco and go to see exhibitions... Actually, I am poor - I only take dinner at the inn. A neighbor offered me another serving, realizing I could not pay for supper, and I would have gladly eaten it, had I not been forced, in the name of civilization and tact, to say the following: "Oh, please! I could barely eat what was on my plate... I take sweets and liqueurs for supper. I cannot support other food. Nothing to be done about it! My stomach is very delicate... Nerves, my dear sir!" In a word: I am cultured. What impression I make on others, how they see me - those are the questions of my conscience, the pointers of my movements, the regulators of my life. The man who rapes a young girl, calls someone "an ass" to his face, calls a whore - a whore, spits in the theater... he is vulgar, he is not cultured, because he is honest, instinctive and inconsiderate.

They say: robbery and extortion are crimes of deceit, the defrauding of civilization. All that is rough, direct, open, heroic, becomes softness, hesitation, pretense and slyness; the acrobatics of the muscles become acrobatics of the tongue: murder - a lie, nudity - a suit, simplicity - shame, instinct - reason, tragedy - comedy: pure, great, full sentiments become a garrulous, artificial, small sensitivity, and fate, murder and war turn into adultery, scheming and jokes.

That is why I wanted to title these burlesques "Confessions of a hero of our times": the woes and secrets suffered and concealed by a man who would rather be considered...

The first time it came unexpectedly: it seemed to me at first that a wagon was passing and that the dog was barking as it always did when it heard a noise at night. Then I met my brother's gaze (we were both in bed, and due to a cold I hadn't been out for three days) - a gaze smiling, sleepy and lewd, and I immediately realized that his physiognomy expressed mystery, spookiness, the heaving and lowering, swimming, swaying and bursting of the brain. It was an earthquake.

And every time - during the quakes or talks of spirits, or when a suspicious cracking was heard at midnight - I noticed on everyone around me a similar, lewd expression, as if something lascivious was being discussed or nudity watched, something like, when old men ostensibly benevolently fondle or tug at a young girl while their palms bristle from her innocent hair. How come? Maybe at such moments passion equals fear: both originate directly from the instinct of self-preservation, and a mystery envelopes stories of ghosts, suspicious sounds, earthquakes and our disguised passion during benevolence, aesthetic observation of nudity and the cynical or innocent joking about sex. Our lips turn pale, our blood rushes, our spine bristles and our hairs move as if someone were pulling them the way an elderly teacher pulls a girl's hair, and she is frightened at first and turns pale with fear and would blush bashfully because of the embarrassing punishment, if she didn't sudden-