

Vasilis X. Spiliotopoulos: Interview on the occasion of “Stowaway of a Life”



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How did your need to write begin?

Honestly, I've expressed myself through writing since a young age. In elementary school, I wrote an essay against the death penalty, which earned praise from my teachers. Even then—and I believe still today—written expression surpassed spoken word, as ideas and meanings found clearer channels on paper. Along the way, I collaborated with various print and online media (Vima tis Kyriakis, Protagon, etc.), writing mostly on historical themes with an existential bent. Within that expressive need, for some years I had decided to write a book about the course of the revolutionary movement in Russia up to the outbreak of WWI and the subsequent revolution. The research was indeed years-long, but the opportunity for devotion arose simultaneously with my own battle against multiple forms of cancer. My fundamental fight for survival became a reflection, a dialogue with my illnesses, so that pain and a desperate confrontation further cultivated the inner ground, which found expressive form in “Stowaway of a Life.”

What inspired you to choose World War I and the Russian Revolution as the canvas for your story?

The Russian Revolution, its ruthless challenges, and merciless upheavals composed a complex historical moment that resonated with the mysterious depths of my being. Without a doubt—and without clear consciousness—the entire trajectory of the revolutionary movement, the overthrow of tsarist imperial reality, the mass deaths of WWI,

the Russian Revolution, and finally Lenin and the Bolsheviks' doctrinaire, political triumph, carry a profound cosmic imprint. Thus, even though history is mostly classified, something deeper always remains untouched, deep within the "existent." One could speak of the triumph of an immeasurable microcosm over the macrocosm, of the undefinable over our bounded knowledge. Let's not fool ourselves: history without philosophical thought is meaningless, incomplete. That is what I tried—at least partially—to capture in my extensive, but hopefully not verbose, text.

The narrator is a "stowaway" of life—a muzhik who reaches the tsar's court. How symbolic is that title and who is it addressed to?

Firstly, without symbolism our intellectual horizon narrows. Symbolism is a gateway to the beyond, to the dimension where language fails to give meaning—at the edges of the world of "ideas," where unreachable ideals shine. Without any pretension, I consider the narrative multi-layered. At its core it pulses with tension between linear expression and search for "mathematical" harmony. Reading, for those who don't just want to skim, invites a strong intellectual fusion of fiction, historical chronicle, and philosophical inquiry. Thus, the narrator is a figure who attempts to transcend the limits of origin, mental constraints, and the unquestioned terms of his time, to rise above conditions as far as a mortal can. He strives to detach from fragmentation and approach the authentic. The tracks of mechanical existence and societal status quo aren't enough. He's a traveler who questions impositions and distractions—no "ticket" sets his course, and he consciously avoids every controller on the road to self-awareness. At the same time, he doesn't yield to semantic misconduct or arbitrary claims. His compass is the deep integrity of being in an effort to "resonate" with the whole. He has courage, but no violence—constructive audacity, but also constant humility. The narrator speaks to all of us, both by stance and narration. He wants to remind us of the hideously deforming lenses of ego, arrogance, and submission to the temporary. I speak of a genuine hero who reminds us that only honest strength defines the "I" and its world. Otherwise we exhaust ourselves in a world defined only by versions and probabilities.

You present the decline of the Tsarist elite as inevitable. Do you believe historical repetitions are unavoidable?

Man's attempt to define patterns to atone for fear of mental fragmentation is a sad testimony to our cowardice before the incomprehensible whole, or worse, our laziness to define the "being" and "I," to accept the discontinuity of our logic, and harmonize with the world in a reintegration, ultimately a restitution of that damned "Exit." We demand a structured world, suffer desperately in the midst of the indefinable, even today when quantum physics has opened our eyes. If "Stowaway" narrates anything, it's the history

of missed opportunities of a regime, a period; ultimately the failure of the famed *Zeitgeist* of the “age of empires.” Tsarist Russia, imperial Europe, rejected alternatives, stubbornly clinging to the unchanging. Undoubtedly inevitability seems linked to human perception—and that’s precisely where it prevails. But nothing repeats; it rather oscillates. We are inertia and habit despite constant entropy everywhere. Tsarist Russia and imperial Europe were disproven, their order overturned, replaced by “chaos”—once again without curing human stupidity. That last thing doesn’t repeat—it prevails!

If the narrator lived today, which modern society would he consider “ready to collapse”?

As I mentioned, entropy is foundational to our world. Thus collapse and renewal are unavoidable. It’s the destructive power but also the creative one. We blind ourselves, celebrating order and structure, while cosmic forces spin the “new discourse.” Many temples burned, many gods reduced to literary allusions. The question isn’t “which society,” but “when”? History has a saturation point—when social, political, economic, and especially cultural phenomena lose their legitimacy, maximize the ever-present falsehood, the distorted. They break fundamental values—Popper’s “world of ideas.” That’s the moment of fragmentation and saturation, when arbitrariness splinters the intellectual field and magma of upheaval flows. Every world of ours—the sum of human presence—is nothing more than formations of lava... This is our world, which means so much to us, but nothing to the existent. We should become humble before the undefined, integrate our “culture” into the world. Become world-citizens, away from paradoxes of fanaticism and dogmatism. Today, burning zealots of arbitrariness, with societies tottering on the brink of the absurd—those that don’t serve collective expectation but brazenly delegitimize any moral axiom—now that saturation point is here and rocking our world, fragmenting it critically. Above all, the foolish idolization of the immeasurable narcissism—on every level and dimension—is venerated. We are foolish and deprived, with leaders who either ignore societies or inflate their egos under the weight of history.

You include an extensive bibliography at the end. Do you believe good literature has a duty to “enlighten” the reader?

Writing “Stowaway of a Life” required numerous primary and secondary sources to approach—even partially—the “soul” of a period that spans broad stretches and marked by complex processes and events. I believe literature, in its literal sense, cannot be divided into good or bad—I can’t label my own work. I deeply believe that not only literature but in every aspect of life, words must carry dimension and method—that is, substance and value... This includes, first and foremost, our own actions, which must be

governed by “logos” (reason). Thus, my writing process is a transformative, agonizing process against myself and the demons that govern me. Therefore, I believe my writing has a strongly existential shade. I hope it provokes questions. As I said, every person’s cultivation lies in defining the “I,” revealing its demons, ultimately confronting them—whatever their size—with only effective weapons: values. That’s my aim in writing—the ebb and flow of existence to record a melody...

How do you balance historical accuracy and literary freedom as a writer?

My main guiding principle was the golden ratio (ϕ). I tried to stay between historical truth, the spirit of the era, and the psychological retreats of my characters—a bundle of vibrating strings—so that the emerging “sound” conveys essence, i.e., causes questions whose answers mostly resonate in a harmony close to the critical ϕ . I don’t mean to predetermine or manipulate readers; rather, I hope to invoke in them those unreachable ideals active in Popper’s “third dimension.” A world of ideas—primarily ethics—is desirable. The book isn’t lyrical, yet it’s imbued with a romanticism I tried to harmonize with the barbarity of the WWI and Revolution era. The narrative is a “Pyrrhian dance” between fiction and historical truth, with the latter occupying the main part.

Does contemporary political and social reality influence your writing?

No influence from today’s gods, provided I could step outside their “orbit.” Yet the trace of the now is inescapable. We shuffle around like crippled, almost blind wretches, with will and imagination as our only tools—desperate flickers through the transient haze of our being. Simply put: the “becoming” constraining frame determines my existence, even while nothing escapes my view... I am part of the cohesive substance of my “universe.” And yet I struggle to be both body and current, to accept indeterminacy, to escape Newtonian laws, Galilean physics. I seek metaphysical worlds, to depict history “as such.” But nothing escapes the “heaviness” of existence or of the world. “Stowaway of a Life” is a narrative of today about Russia from the late 19th to early 20th century.

Do you see parallels between early-20th-century Russia and the world today?

My gaze follows the fractures of fragmentation now spreading rapidly around us—politically, economically, especially in societies where dogmatism and fanaticism mislead our navigational compasses. Intellectual and ethical saturation have drained everything fertile, so the ground beneath our feet is covered in drying cracks that deepen and spread until eventually collapse and upheaval become reality. I hear the leitmotif of disillusionment everywhere; I search for the first signs of collapse, upheaval. I know human arrogance can be treacherous; I might fail to recognize it... We’re steeped in pride again, while the terms of our coexistence dramatically lose their legitimacy. His-

tory never repeats, but is characterized by entropy, which persistently punishes the unrepentant—us! The pattern of cleansing belongs to the melody of the “existent.”

The book reminds us that the idea of “certain stability” is ultimately an illusion. Is this our era’s “chimera,” especially given what’s happening in the world now? And do you aim to warn with your book, or simply record the timeless human blindness to inevitable upheaval unfolding over time?

The idea of “certain stability” is literally madness—evidence of our stubborn obsession with “eternal order” in a universe born and moving toward chaos. We deny the temporary to uphold our cowardly being against decay. It’s tragic that we evaluate existence and becoming in economic terms—this rampant commodification has no real bearing on anything truly existent. Our “world” teeters on a counterfeit currency spinning on its axis, while we have recklessly bet on heads or tails... But momentum decays over time, until indeterminacy, alternatives, and probabilities cancel our gamble. “Stowaway of a Life” confronts the adulteration of human reason, seeks the authentic, which is the only safe path in this so indefinite world. It aims to evoke in the reader questions that spark reflection and cultivation. It’s a guide to integrity—in the broadest sense...

What truth did you realize most powerfully once you finished and handed in the manuscript?

“Not enough!” Maybe only a different font can capture my tone of anguish. I sought creative inspiration and expression chiefly like a stage composition—Beethoven’s “König Stephan, King of Hungary” Op. 117; please listen to it! I aimed for unity with the core of authenticity, the center of the cosmic, yet I remained in orbit—perhaps elliptical... I close my eyes and form hope in the next book, essentially a continuation of the first. It’s true that the world itself tolerates human maladies and misfortunes. Human partiality excludes approaching the essence; our actions remain dull, devoid of value. The only redemption: surpassing Schrödinger’s limit...