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As the number of publications in English on Imre Kertész is surprisingly small, Thomas Cooper's informative and rich book is particularly welcome. It presents Kertész's oeuvre in three ways: it contains, in order, Cooper's essay, "Imre Kertész and the Post-Auschwitz Condition", the transcript of a conversation between Cooper and Imre Kertész, and the translation of Kertész's important lecture, "The Holocaust as Culture."

"In his writing Imre Kertész explores the possibility of continuing to live and think as an individual in an era in which the subjection of human beings to social forces has become increasingly complete," said the Swedish Academy's press release in 2002, when Imre Kertész received the Nobel Prize. The main question of Thomas Cooper's book is: did the era that de-humanized the individual end sixty seven years ago, or is it still continuing? As the Swedish Academy's release adds, for Imre Kertész, Auschwitz "is the ultimate truth about human degradation in modern existence." In Kertész's understanding, Auschwitz does not denote a single historical fact, but it is the embodiment, both cause and effect of humanity's profound cultural crisis that cannot be disregarded in the post-Auschwitz era. In his introductory study accompanying his translation, Thomas Cooper cites Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* in order to show the connection between Adorno's post-Holocaust aesthetics and Imre Kertész's art of the novel. Adorno is using the chronotope of "nach Auschwitz" in order to announce a new chronology starting with the rupture of the Holocaust. We know, however, that Adorno's considerations have not become part of the common European self-recognition, but remain tasks and demands the individual faces living in the "nach Auschwitz"-time. Cooper, however, is not only concerned with Kertész's understanding of Auschwitz as a rupture, but also wishes to understand Kertész's detailed experience of history of the post-Holocaust era, the succession and the relationship between Nazism and Communism, the Szálasi-era and the Kádár-regime.

Thomas Cooper's introductory essay is a thorough summary of why Kertész's description of Auschwitz is unique. He underlines: "Kertész is always grappling with the [...] inadequacies and risks of representation" (1). In *Fatelessness* Kertész gives an account of a teenage boy's experience of Hungarian antisemitism, of deportation, of agony and survival in the concentration camp universe. But the novel is anything but a sentimental narrative – its criticism of the institutionalized remembrance of the Holocaust is witty and sharp. Kertész's view on Auschwitz in this novel is both immediate and retrospective; he depicts the reality of the camps and also the aftermath, the distortion of the personality, the corruption of relationships – and in greater measure, the deconstruction of European society and culture. The language of *Fatelessness* challenges the reader with its pastiche-like complexity, with the young narrator and victim embedding the sentences of others into his own text, even adopting the viewpoint of the perpetrators such as Mengele, ad absurdum. Thus, Kertész provides a frightening account of domination and submission, of adjustment, adaption, of human nature's decomposition under the authority of dictatorship. The most provocative implication of the novel according to Cooper is the inner transversability between victim and perpetrator, presenting Auschwitz as "a refutation of the ethical teleologies that preceded it" (2). Kertész's

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resistance to the ideological presentation of the Holocaust stems from the endeavor to sustain the moral indignation after the catastrophe. It is also rooted in Kertész's criticism against all oppressive regimes that put restraint on liberty and human dignity. And Cooper is very much interested in the biographical background of Kertész's ideological criticism. One of the main questions throughout the book is related to Kertész's post-war experience, his refusal to leave Hungary and the Communist regime. The fate of *Fatelessness* is symbolic in this respect with the book's grim adventures summing up life under Kádár perfectly – Cooper tells the story of the novel's initial rejection, and later its publication, its initial reduction to silence, and finally its rediscovery.

In the second part of Cooper's volume, *A Conversation*, he keeps asking Kertész about the latter's life under one repressive regime after the other. Cooper, who taught at the University of North Carolina and is now a faculty member at the Károly Eszterházy University, proves to be a good pedagogue and his interview with Kertész offers a lot of information for non-Hungarian readers on this grotesque and specifically Central/Eastern-European historical situation. (Cooper mentions in passing the hardships his American students had when encountering *Fatelessness* for the first time.) Kertész's decision to stay in Budapest both after the Holocaust and after the revolution in 1956, however, remains a puzzle not only for foreign readers but the Hungarian readers, as well. In his second longer novel, the *Fiasco* Kertész reflects on his decision to become a writer, a witness, and not exile himself of his native tongue. The narrator of *Fiasco* calls this realization, the need of surrendering life to writing "grace" ["kegyelem"].

In the third part of Cooper's book, in the brilliantly translated lecture, "*The Holocaust as Culture*", Kertész is speaking about the fate of Jean Améry. The strange "gift" of the Kádár-era was exactly its continuity and correlation with Auschwitz, given that in Communist Hungary moral corruption and cultural crisis continued to be prevalent, and so it did not appear that the catastrophe was over. Whereas in the West it was latent and hiding in oblivion – this is why a lot of survivors decided to step out of it, to step out of life. Apart from Améry, Kertész mentions Celan, Borowski and Levi, and continues: "If from time to time I compare these fates, demonstrative in many senses, with my own, then I am forced to conclude that clearly I was helped over the course of the past decades by a 'society' that, following Auschwitz, amply demonstrated through the form of so-called Stalinism that there could be no question of freedom, liberation, catharsis, etc. – none of the things intellectuals and philosophers in more fortunate climes not only spoke of but also clearly believed in. I was trapped in a society that guaranteed me the continued life of a prisoner, thereby also excluding the possibility of my erring. This is clearly why I was not engulfed by the high tide of disappointments that overwhelmed those who had similar experiences but who found themselves living in more open societies, the rising waters first splashing at their feet as they tried to flee, then slowly rising to their throats." (72-73).

Kertész admires Améry for his sharpness, his clarity and honesty – Améry's decision to write, to bear witness, was an offering, a sacrifice, says Kertész. Améry wanted to make the unspeakable and unwanted knowledge audible, but it was an *ab ovo* impossible endeavor. Imre Kertész's oeuvre serves this endeavor, too, as it keeps drawing our attention to the recognition that "the Holocaust is a value, because through immeasurable sufferings it has led to immeasurable knowledge, and thereby contains immeasurable moral reserves" (77). The Holocaust as culture, or rather, as the counter-culture of self-knowledge is an ever-disturbing vision of morality's deep failure. Thomas Cooper in his book is offering us three ways to preserve this culture.