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THE GARDEN CITY AND THE SOCIALIST VICTORY CITY: FROM COLONIAL TO DICTATORIAL CITY SCHEMES

Keywords: urbanism, modernisation, garden city, colonial, totalitarian, communism, first- second- third-world

Abstract: *The comparison of modernization schemes in twentieth century urbanism allows bringing together the West and the Rest, since the garden city project, first encountered in George Bernard Shaw's play John Bull's Other Island (1904) is replicated in an account published in 2014 about the Fascist transformation of Sofia into a garden city according to a master plan of German inspiration and in keeping with the totalitarian city ideology in the early 1930s. This case is discussed in the CEU book by Jan C. Behrends and Martin Kolrausch (eds.) Races to Modernity: Metropolitan Aspirations in Eastern Europe. 1890-1940, chapter 8 and it calls to mind Nicolae Ceaușescu's East European Socialist Victory urbanization project as another version of totalitarian architecture and ideology that declared city-razing as the first stage in achieving a utopian kind of victory and modernization. Romania's totalitarian predicament is typified and followed in the description of the capital city razed and redesigned that a novel published in Britain in 2011 presents: Patrick McGuinness, The Last Hundred Days, translated into Romanian after being shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2012, possibly because it reads in many respects like a spy novel, presenting the face and reverse of communism on the eve of its fall. The passage from colonial to dictatorial city schemes is effected by a comparison between, on the one hand, some excerpts from the fictional memoir about Bucharest, at the same time a roman à clé, and, on the other hand, the First World War roman à clé whose action begins in Letchworth Garden City, fictionally presented as Biggleswick. John Buchan's spy novel Mr Standfast (1919) poses as a mere spy novel, while containing, as revealed by Pamela Shields's bestseller Hereford Secrets and Spies (2009), a great number of real/historical clues which enable the comparison proposed.*

In Chapter 2 of the 1919 spy novel *Mr Standfast* by John Buchan one discovers a full description of the garden city scheme; it is connected to fictional Biggleswick, but renders quite faithfully, and in an ideologically correct form, the intention behind building such real garden cities as Letchworth, actually lying near Hitchin on the map of metropolitan Britain. Letchworth/Biggleswick stood apart as the first historical Garden City constructed (in the early years of the twentieth century) according to the paradigm presented in his 1898 book by the social reformer Ebenezer Howard *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (reissued as *Garden Cities of To-morrow*).

'It is one great laboratory of thought,' said Mrs Jimson. 'It is glorious to feel that you are living among the eager, vital people who are at the head of all the newest

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movements, and that the intellectual history of England is being made in our studies and gardens. The war to us seems a remote and secondary affair. As someone has said, the great fights of the world are all fought in the mind.¹

One encounters the same history-making project joined to one of the Enlightenment “great laboratories of thought” in the liberal *cum* conservative lesson in cultural materialism and colonial history offered by George Bernard Shaw in *John Bull’s Other Island*, a play about Ireland on the eve of decolonization, in 1904.² Shaw’s fable satirizes the liberal reformist garden city colonial scheme from the perspective of a conservative who mistrusts the galloping modernisation promised to backward Third World countries by the typically colonial reunion with the First World of eager Second World settlers. The Second World Irishman, Larry Doyle, a civil engineer who lives in London, of course, leads his colleague, Tom Broadbent, a determined Englishman, to Ireland and his native Rosscullen, where the play itself will be set from Act II onwards. In the following exchange from Act IV, Keegan, the patriotic voice of lucid Third World Ireland is addressing the First World capitalist projector Tom Broadbent who has also been campaigning for a seat in the Westminster parliament to represent Union Ireland:

KEEGAN. Sir: I may even vote for you.

BROADBENT [*sincerely moved, shaking his hand warmly*]. You shall never regret it, Mr Keegan: I give you my word for that. I shall bring money here: I shall raise wages: I shall found public institutions, a library, a Polytechnic (undenominational, of course), a gymnasium, a cricket club, perhaps an art school. I shall make a Garden City of Rosscullen: the round tower shall be thoroughly repaired and restored.

KEEGAN. And our place of torment shall be as clean and orderly as the cleanest and most orderly place I know in Ireland, which is our poetically named Mountjoy prison. Well, perhaps I had better vote for an efficient devil that knows his own mind and his own business than for a foolish patriot who has no mind and no business. (Deane et al. 470)

A more complete, enlightening description of the real Garden City project is given in the following comedic exchange from the lighter Act I:

BROADBENT. Have you ever heard of Garden City?

TIM [*doubtfully*]. D’ye mane Heavn?

BROADBENT. Heaven! No: it’s near Hitchin. If you can spare half an hour I’ll go into it with you.

TIM. I tell you hwat. Gimme a prospectus. Lemme take it home and reflect on it.

¹ The title of the enlightening chapter of *Mr Standfast* that contains the excerpted text is “The Village Called Morality”, but no page numbers were available in the Gutenberg Project e-book *Mr Standfast* accessed at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/560/560-h/560-h.htm>.

² 1904 is both the year of its publication and the background of the play’s fictional rendering of contemporary history. Shaw wrote the text at the request of the cultural nationalists gathered around Dublin’s Abbey Literary Theatre, without giving his commissioners what they wanted, which was not a lesson in colonial *cum* anti-colonial scathing lucidity, necessarily, but rather some patriotic boosting of the national cause.

Cultural Representations of the City

BROADBENT. You're quite right: I will. [He gives him a copy of Mr Ebenezer Howard's book, and several pamphlets]. You understand that the map of the city—the circular construction—is only a suggestion.

TIM. I'll make a careful note o that [looking dazedly at the map].

BROADBENT. What I say is, why not start a Garden City in Ireland?

And indeed, it appears that the Garden City was one colonial advancement means, in so far as we find garden cities mentioned in India, South Africa, Australia and Palestine, namely throughout imperial Britain's sphere of influence. But when one finds the same urban development scheme emulated in pre-war Germany (with Hellerau, near Dresden, set up the same year as Letchworth in metropolitan Britain), then in Germany's inter-war satellites (in Bulgaria, and in association with Nazi planning ideals), its range and miscellaneous patterns of influence raise a number of questions. Some of these are answerable with John Buchan's spy novel *Mr Standfast* (1919), in reality an actual British spy's *roman à clé* whose clues are traced back, once the reading of the novel is complete, to several historical realities of the First World War by Pamela Shields in *Hertfordshire Secrets and Spies* (2009). On the other hand, one can advance in time and with the veiled realities surrounding life in the garden city by reading not about John Bull but about Bulgaria in the volume *Races to Modernity: Metropolitan Aspirations in Eastern Europe between 1890 and 1940*, edited by Jan C. Behrends and Martin Kohlrausch in 2014 at the CEU Press. The latter book is the occasion to review the urban modernization processes, ideals and institutional battles constitutive for the recent history of eleven cities: Petersburg, Kiev, Polish Wilno, Moscow, Athens, Belgrade, Sofia, Warsaw, Kaunas, Talinnn and Riga plus Helsinki – in the Baltic Republics, and Zagreb. Elitza Stanoeva carries Mr Standfast's garden city missing clues into the Bulgarian landscape, with her contribution to the CEU volume, titled "Architectural Praxis in Sofia". Thus it is that the volume's eleven thick descriptions of Eastern Europe urbanization invite reflection about the patterns of European domination understood in tandem with the white colonization of Ireland, all the while the clues of the spy novel's setting in a garden city work their way into the postwar reality through the Bulgarian gate.

The proximity of Bulgaria and Romania has suggested continuing the pre-war case study of Bulgarian modernization, which showed, among other things, how the Nazi garden city put paid to Sofia's Bauhaus development: we have read the Bulgarian pre-war case study side by side with the Romanian post-war and, chronologically almost already post-communist, story about the last hundred days of Bucharest's forced modernization at the hand of its dictator and belatedly Stalinist zealot. Jointly reading about the pre 1989 communist havoc in Bucharest and the edification plan for Sofia in the 1930s can teach a lesson about patterns of urban modernization at the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century, contrasting colonial and dictatorial city schemes and their effects. The transformation of Romania's capital into the Socialist Victory City project by dint of bulldozers and cranes emblematic of Nicolae Ceausescu's dictatorial communist regime is documented for foreigners in Patrick McGuinness's fictional memoir *The Last Hundred Days*. This is another *roman à clé* about the 1989 events which led to the would-be bloody Romanian revolution presented with an insider's eye as a *coup d'état* in a memoir made public in 2011,

when the book appeared at Seren, in Wales. Apart from noting that the latter book expects its own kind of Pamela Shields bestseller to be written (and published) before it can reveal the relevant clues, its text invites carrying further into the communist fold the ideological critique of garden city planning in Ireland, as made in *John Bulls Other Island*.

We are aware that the need to articulate drama boutades, spy novel and communist memoir clues with the history lessons and lessons in urbanism put forward by a systematic study of modern city planning carries us the same way as the theoretical studies of Western postcolonial and Eastern postcommunist phenomena put in circulation by recent titles and authors among whom, in Romania, Bottez *et al.* 2011 (the *Dictionary of Key Cultural Terms* regarding postcolonialism and postcommunism) and Ștefănescu 2013 (whose *Siblings of Subalternity* reverses the historical order of postcommunism and postcolonialism). And we can only hope that our story may not remain as good as fictional, being ready to add for its completion and validation theoretical findings about our post-age in so many respects.

The scene is now set for beginning our own narrative about Western garden cities, the First World War and its aftermath, moving further and further East and more and more into recently modern times while the garden city scheme travelled from liberal and/or imperial Britain to other places than the ones included within its 'natural' sphere of influence.

Placing side by side the subversive view of garden cities encouraged by George Bernard Shaw's play and the real acts of subversion emanating from the pioneering Garden City of Letchworth, alias Biggleswick in John Buchan's spy novel set during World War I and written soon after, in 1919 – is a way of throwing light upon the secret connections between the West and East undergrounds. In *Mr Standfast*, the two undergrounds met – and of course clashed in a feverish battle between Western and Eastern spy networks – in an environment that extended the vegetal urbanism metaphor as far as to make the actual British garden city function also as a germination bed for subversive, pacifist and/or communist activities; they were cultivated so as to be monitored (and finally counteracted) by successful British MI5 activities. After noting that this goes to prove how the progressively planned organic communities of garden cities were appropriated for the goals on the secret agents political (and, in times of war, also military) agenda, it is more important to review what we learn from Pamela Shields's book *Hertfordshire Secrets and Spies*, which gives (and holds) the clues of Buchan's *roman à clé*. For a start, Shields records Buchan's declaration, in his autobiography *Memory Hold the Door*, that "he never invented anything for his Richard Hannay books" (and *Mr Standfast*, is the third of the series).³ Next Shields makes good the sense that garden cities served as

³ All the ensuing quotations from Pamela Shields's text have no page numbers come from the electronic book excerpts available at:

<https://books.google.ro/books?id=0HWIAwAAQBAJ&pg=PT67&lpg=PT67&dq=garden+city+in+british+spy+novels&source=bl&ots=Q9QIKFLkZa&sig=r9LoHNhWU7nMCdFxGr55IKmyNE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjtn-OrgtTQAhWEBiwKHdb0CF8Q6AEIGTAA#v=onepage&q=garden%20city%20in%20british%20spy%20novels&f=false>. The excerpts from Shields's Chapter 17 were consulted between May and November 2016 while drafting the present article.

germination beds for subversive activities and activists when she traces the creation of the first garden city to the history of communist agents under cover. Here are a few excerpts from Chapter 17 of *Hertfordshire Secrets and Spies*. The first revelation is connected to *The Daily Mail* saying that “Letchworth was a haven for Communists”. Next, when she makes a case about the presence in Letchworth/Biggleswick of Russian refugees after the 1905 failed revolution, Shields writes:

In *Herbert Morrison – Portrait of a Politician*, Letchworth is said to have attracted socialists and anarchists. It was the centre of the underground for the conscientious objectors such as Morrison’s friend Frederic Osborn with whom he stayed. Ebenezer Howard, founder of the garden city told Osborn how to dodge the authorities when he went into hiding.

And after thus tracing subversion to the name of the real founder and theorist of the garden city, Ebenezer Howard, most interestingly, Shields’s 2009 bestseller singles Lenin as the main antagonist spy of *Mr Standfast*. According to Shields, Lenin was Britain’s most dangerous enemy during WW I and “his Bolshevik Party was actually an intelligence agency”. Lenin is reported by Shields as having “vowed to bring down every European monarchy starting with the Tsar”, which is precisely what, in *Mr Standfast*, the British spy Richard Hannay wishes to prevent. In the words of *Hertfordshire Secrets and Spies* “Britain’s Secret Service (SIS) said Lenin was in league with Germany. Lenin’s own people accused him of being a German spy when the Kaiser arranged a sealed train for his return to Russia”. The plot of *Mr Standfast* gravitates around the idea of preventing the fictional foreign spy who stands for Lenin to ally himself with Germany. Britain’s MI5 agents with fictional names in the book, but including among them the flesh and blood person of *Mr Standfast*’s author, knew that “if Lenin allied himself with Germany, Britain’s chances of winning the war were slim” because “[t]wo million German extra troops would be freed up to fight Britain”. As a further proof of the presence in the real, just as well as in the fictional, garden city of German and Russian agents – here is what we read in the same chapter 17 of *Hertfordshire Secrets and Spies* “The Letchworth branch of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) attended Lenin’s RSDLP Congress in Southgate Road Brotherhood Church in Islington. . . Letchworth also had a Brotherhood Church.” The mention of Islington among the places adjoining Letchworth recalls the origin of the fictional garden city’s name traced by Pamela Shields: Biggleswick conflates the names of Biggleswade and Ickleford, actual localities near Letchworth. Names also indicate the strategy which generates *Mr Standfast*’s clues by conflating British intelligence records about German and Russian spies and organizations. The same happens with Lenin’s identity, which is veiled when presented as the arch fiend and antagonist of Richard Hannay in John Buchan’s novel – with anything but Russian names. He appears first as Moxon Ivery, the British academic pacifist type in Biggleswick, next as Jacques Bommaerts and Chelius, the inhabitants of underground residences of foreign spies in the Swiss and Italian Alps, respectively, and finally as the American journalist Clarence Donne from Kansas City, before hitting the ground and shedding, as it were, all pretenses, as the German Graf von Schwabing. The Russian connection kept carefully hidden till the end of the spy novel but revealed by Pamela Shields

represents the crux of the *roman à clé* and is also supported by the displaced reference to the real *Underground Russia* organization of refugees in the British garden city of Letchworth. One paragraph from Shields's seventeenth chapter reads as follows: "Lenin made many visits to Britain [and stayed in Letchworth in 1907] as a guest of Rev. Bruce Wallace and must have met Russian refugees. At 85 Norton Road in the cottage 'Obломova' was Russian refugee Mrs. Fanny Stepniak, widow of a Russian revolutionary who died in 1895. Mrs Stepniak died in 1945. Her husband's real name was Kravchinsky, author of *Underground Russia*"

But the Russian connection appears in *Mr Standfast*, again, as the organization of German spies divided into the *Stubenvogel* or Cage Birds and Wild Birds, the former being the men who gathered and spread intelligence, while the latter were the ones who acted "in—Pavia, and Hofgaard, and Conradi" as well as in the Outer Hebrides (and they can be seen at work in Buchan's chapter 6, "I Hear of the Wild Birds"). The readers of *Mr Standfast* learn about the Underground Birds in Chapter 14, during an enlightening exchange between the British spy Richard Hannay and one of his bosses, the American Blenkiron:

'They're the intelligence officers and their business is just to forward noos. They're the birds in the cage, the—what is it your friend called them?'

'Die *Stubenvogel*,' I said.

'Yes, but all the birds aren't caged. There's a few outside the bars and they don't collect noos. They do things. If there's anything desperate they're put on the job, and they've got power to act without waiting on instructions from home. I've investigated till my brain's tired and I haven't made out more than half a dozen whom I can say for certain are in the business. There's your pal, the Portuguese Jew, Dick. Another's a woman in Genoa, a princess of some sort married to a Greek financier. One's the editor of a pro-Ally up-country paper in the Argentine. One passes as a Baptist minister in Colorado. One was a police spy in the Tsar's Government and is now a red-hot revolutionary in the Caucasus. And the biggest, of course, is Moxon Ivery, who in happier times was the Graf von Schwabing. There aren't above a hundred people in the world know of their existence, and these hundred call them the Wild Birds.'

The connection with the garden city scheme is provided by Pamela Shields's account not only through the already mentioned intervention of Ebenezer Howard in her previously transcribed quotation from *Herbert Morrison – Portrait of a Politician*, but also through the link of John Buchan himself as a visitor of Letchworth under cover at the same time when Lenin visited the garden city. The next quotation contains the sequence of clues from Shields's spoiler of the fictional story about German versus British spies in the same chapter 17 of *Hertfordshire Secrets and Spies*:

After the failed Russian revolution attempt in January 1905, when refugees left Russia, Lenin was already living in London. With much sympathy for them in Letchworth, some ended up there. Charles Purdom said 'Russian refugees found a temporary home in the town, including, for a short time V.I. Lenin'. Given that Arthur H. Turner [in *Mr Buchan Writer* 1949] said that Buchan was called home to work in intelligence for six months, the link with Lenin would explain Buchan's presence in Letchworth.

The nicest surprise, however, reserved by the clues in Pamela Shields's *Hertfordshire Secrets and Spies* is related to a revelation about the fictional Moot Hall, "a red brick building . . . used for lectures and debates" (as described in Buchan's second chapter). Not only do we learn that it stands for "[t]he real meeting place in the garden city, Mrs. Howard's Memorial Hall", but, in a bracket, we also read that speakers [in the Memorial Hall] included G.B. Shaw and Rider Haggard. This means that the author of *John Bull's Other Island* chose to visit the real garden city after having written to decry its despicable colonial function in the cues read at the beginning of the present paper.

But the garden city story only comes full circle after being allowed to traverse the borders of the British metropolis and its empire and when the boutades in *John Bull's Other Island*, the spy novel, and its real life clues eventually add up. Says Pamela Shields:

Buchan was very well aware that Letchworth was a focal point for pacifists and conscientious objectors. . . the Home Section of the Secret Service Bureau . . . investigating espionage, sabotage and subversion in Britain (MI5) [and it housed] the Important People Club [founded by Vernon Kell] to gather intelligence on Irish sympathizers, Communists, trade unionists and pacifists".

Whether acting as the fictional lair of figures gone underground in Buchan's novel or as a real cache for similar inmates, the garden city's popularity among progressive civilians and intelligence service members both West and East of what was to become later in the twentieth century the Iron Curtain is now vindicated. By their obvious flocking together, without being birds of a feather, German, Russian, British and American secret agents vied with each other for inventing or borrowing most efficient lines of action associated to places that accommodated and enabled them, for example the garden city.

When returning from the fictional or real strategic underground connections and clues bred in the garden city in the next stage of our paper Bauhaus needs to be mentioned as the next progressive step in articulating modern and progressive urban planning schemes. Introduced in the 1920s by Walter Gropius in Weimar, the term (which derives from punning on the German word for 'housing construction', *Hausbau*) captures the avant-garde, artistic and revolutionary, spirit and the agenda of the movement. In the practice of the school, the inspiration for the building of new housing was cubist, being designed to improve life and the dwelling patterns in the modern urban environment. The Bauhaus architect and city planner wished to respond by creating functional, ecological and culturally distinct living quarters to the needs of emancipated workers in densely populated cities. Its style was international, in the best tradition of metropolitan modernism. With the advance of the retrogressive Nazi ideology and its establishment in the political centre after 1933, we find the former garden city's novelty invoked to cut short Bauhaus populism and internationalism. Surprisingly or not, garden city urban planning resurfaces in the European Nazi satellites. Here is how it is invoked in the architects' archive for Nazi Bulgaria, in Elitza Stanoeva's contribution to the CEU volume about *Races to Modernity in Eastern Europe*, "Architectural Praxis in Sofia". The relevant passage reads as

follows: “In 1937, a new master plan for Sofia was commissioned to the German architect Adolf Muesmann, who applied the accepted Nazi version of the garden-city planning ideal” (Behrends and Kohlrausch 200). After documenting her statement by reference to a 1984 periodical study published in *Journal of Urban History* (No 11) by John Lampe, “Interwar Sofia versus the Nazi-Style Garden City: the Struggle over the Muesmann Plan”, the Bulgarian author implies that the garden city urbanization model was used in Sofia in reactionary ways by the Nazi city’s planner who backed away from the revolutionary, progressive Bauhaus scheme. Trendafil Trendafilov, “the author of the most thorough Bulgarian treatise in urban planning”, in Stanoeva’s words, is shown to contradict himself when denouncing his own formerly progressive Bauhaus treatise titled *The Modern City* (of 1927). In a subsequent text he authored in 1941, “The Totalitarian City”, Trendafil Trendafilov says: “how deadly are hitherto prevailing geometrical and landscape solutions in urban planning, how maleficent is today’s barrack, barn-like, waffle multi-story architecture. . . , and how it is not possible in buildings with more than three stories to raise children” (qtd. in Behrends and Kohlrausch 201). Beside the way this quote testifies to the fact that Bulgaria’s outstanding Bauhaus architect was a regular turncoat, his words set the tone for the transformation of progressive into retrogressive and dictatorial rhetoric here, in the service of the Nazi city planning cause, and elsewhere, too.

The denunciation of the Bauhaus emancipative goals and the deleterious attitude it presupposed, which was soon to become materialized in the never ending wave of destructive hatred of the other and of the formerly acceptable world order is met with in the last text to invoke in our research. A later, communist counter-modern blind alley reduplicated the Nazi one, taking the form of the dictatorial return, in Romania under Ceausescu’s regime, to Stalinist revolutionary city planning – with devastating effects, as shown in Patrick McGuinness’s 2011 memoir about Bucharest as the Socialist Victory City. It chronicles the self-subversive victory of a retrogressive dictator over the past of an entire nation, which is defeated and left at the mercy of . . . progressive destruction. To communicate this and many other underlying paradoxes of the Romanian city-scape, the first-person protagonist of *The Last Hundred Days* claims that he was a professor of English posted at the University of Bucharest and dwelling in the downtown area. In reality, there is no trace of the Pitar Moş Street atmosphere or faculty building situated near the Piaţa Romană Square in *The Last Hundred Days* because the memorialist is, obviously for the eye of a realer academic denizen of the University of Bucharest, describing throughout the book life in the *French* Department and the Edgar Quinet main campus; the latter does, indeed, open on the University Square, where the metropolitan underground was actually being constructed at the time of “the last hundred days”.⁴ There are numerous referential displacements of this kind in the text, which indicates another *roman à clé* dealing with “secrets and spies”, just as *Mr Standfast*. Only, here the underground is a

⁴ Searching for potential clues about the author, we have found on the internet that Patrick McGuinness is a professor of *French* and comparative literature at Saint Anne’s College, Oxford, which explains why his fictional statements about the English Department connection are French biased and do not tally in so many ways. This also explains many turns of his literary, poetic style in the memoir, which is his single long narrative attempt so far.

repressive rather than subversive secret police network, ready to perpetrate crimes not in the name of any clashing international interests, as in the First World War, but for waging a local war. Ceausescu's modernization of Bucharest was waged in a way that reiterated the Cold War tenseness ripe with telescreen surveillance and the tireless bellicose propaganda described in George Orwell's dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the Romanian novel, also set in the 1980s, the local population's fate was dependent on what Patrick McGuinness calls, in an inspired way, the dictator's "whim to power". It materialized in the dictatorial urban plan which left the city "a heat beaten brutalist maze whose walls and towers melted like sugar" (24), and where "buildings were suddenly begun and then just as suddenly abandoned. It was done on a whim, but a whim with hundreds of cranes and diggers and bulldozers, tens of thousands of workers and tones of concrete to express itself *the whim to power* Nietzsche would have called it" (31-2).⁵

Digging beyond the unreality of brutally waged power, the nearly naturalized foreigner Leo O'Heix, who had been posted earlier than the narrator at the University of Bucharest and for long enough to understand the nightmare and translate it for foreign eyes, "welcomes" the newcomer and the reader to *The City of Lost Walks*. This is the title of O'Heix's "practical guidebook [of Bucharest] for a travel company" since its author "had finished up composing an urban elegy, a memorial to a place gone or going at every cobble and cornice" (46). Because "every cobble and cornice" that goes can be captured in words by people like Leo, for whom "the city's redesign had not succeeded in obliterating the place's memory of itself", the warmth of the place can live on paper, when the buildings it described no longer stood, in the memoir within the memoir, *The City of Lost Walks*:

Beyond Aleea Alexandru, the Ottoman artisans' houses are lined up in a row, their tanneries and stores across the road and further down Strada Rabat. Queen Marie of Romania would visit the tradesmen here in disguise on her frequent incognito trips around the city. A small mosque to the east has Bucharest's oldest minaret and dates from the late sixteenth century. Nearby, a hundred yards to the west, the Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius faces the Lutheran Kirche that serves the German community. The building next door, the nineteenth-century Hotel Particulier that once belonged to the Cazanu family, now houses the Union of Artists. (McGuinness 47)

After reading, on the same page, that the ghost of the old city "ached Leo the way a lost limb aches on amputees, pulling on the vacancy it once occupied" (47), and learning that he had also filmed the destruction of buildings by bulldozers, we are told that, for fear of censorship and the punishment which Ceausescu's regime was well prepared to inflict, Leo O'Heix saved the accompanying *City of Lost Walks* film archive in "video boxes of action films and horror movies....: *Rocky, Rambo, Friday 13th, Indiana Jones*" (48).

⁵ Bald references to pages from McGuinness's book will be given in brackets after the in-text quotations.

Snapshots of the actual city's destruction and redesign appear in other places than the fourth chapter in the book's first part, from which the previous has been excerpted; another observation worth remembering from here, however, is that O'Heix "could not keep up with the city's obliteration" for "[t]he place was coming down faster than it could be described"(46). The first protagonists (perpetrators, in fact) of "Ceausescu's great 'modernisation' project" (12) are "the cranes and diggers that stalked the city's streets like Meco monsters" (in Chapter Two, page 25), "[giving] Bucharest the look of a deserted funfair" (16) and making manifest in the background, an incessant and "insistent clatter of building works, the hollow peal of scaffolding poles and the chug of cement mixers" (17). The chronicled result is that "all is lack and absence, space unfulfilled" or rather filled with dimness: the dimness of Bucharest, this "half-lit capital of a police state" revealed, however, in the distance "the *pall* of light . . . where they worked, 24/7, on the Palace of the People and the Boulevard of Socialist Victory" (17, author's emphasis on the very poetic paradox). Erected in "the urban clearing" (50) left behind after some of the city's heritage churches had been successfully reduced to heaps of stone and rubble (and there are two such church demolition scenes extensively presented in the novel), the 'Palace of the People' rose, "reared up" are Patrick McGuinness's words, "a sort of urban phantasm", "the steel frames of this vast palace" promising that "[i]t was going to be the biggest building in the world" (62). Mentioning "[t]he gargantuan scale of its pettiness", the narrator adds that "[w]ith the sun behind it, it looked translucent, traced in the dust it threw up around it" (*ibid.*). Its insertion in the urban landscape is like that of a mirage: "[f]urther beyond, [where the narrator records that he] caught sight of the *Boulevard of Socialist Victory*, a vast avenue that didn't so much vanish into the distance as use it up, drawing everything around into itself". (*ibid.*)

The void Boulevard of Socialist Victory is described also as "a wide, new avenue, full of unfitted shops and offices. Bent saplings were planted at intervals along the pavement and held upright by splinters of wood." (113) Its protracted state of temporary half-way finishing is evocative of ruins left behind by the falling of bombs nearby causing the desertion of housing and turning everything into a kind of surrealist movie studio before or after the shooting of the film: "Wires and piping stuck out of the ground. Incongruously new and polished shop signs had already been put up – butchers, bakeries, clothes shops and supermarkets – but the places they designated had yet to materialize. There was even – black humour – a travel agent, already decorated with posters of Hungarian lakes and Black Sea resorts" (113). The geography is there, we could add, but the life goes categorically missing.

In fact, this vista leads to the recording of a more complete scene of destruction. One page further, the narrator's filmic travelling leads from "narrower unfinished streets that stopped abruptly a few hundred yards further down in a mass of rubble and slabs" into an actual cemetery in order to chronicle the second scene with the demolition of "some of the city's heritage churches . . . successfully reduced to heaps of stone and rubble" (63). The previously mentioned "narrower unfinished streets" and "the mass of rubble and slabs" are shown to

[come] up against an old monastery that blocked its path and stood there, contemplating its next move. A painted wooden gate with carved posts and a small

roof stood there between it and a ramshackle cemetery where gravestones were scattered haphazardly like grazing sheep. Beyond them lights burned in the monastery windows. Diggers and dumpers stood outside, their articulated claws hanging slack, open jaws silhouetted against the clear sky. I thought of dinosaur skeletons in the museum: it was as if they lived once more and had the run of the streets.”(McGuinness 114)

The ensuing contrast with the Boulevard of Socialist Victory is all the more moving:

The Boulevard of Socialist Victory, wider than the Danube and twelve stories high, was assembled with the mix of a careless sloth and paranoid haste that characterize eastern bloc public projects. In different parts of the vast building site, men and machines worked in deafening noise and blasted white light. But here, almost a kilometer away, it was darkness. Open holes around us disgorged bilious water that smelled of rust, metallic effluvia and industrial decay. As we approached, an open gutter higher up the slope seethed with waves of slurry that rustled and sucked as it descended an uncompleted marble staircase. (McGuinness 115)

No wonder, then, that the ‘stages’ of Ceaușescu’s ‘modernisation’ programme should be labeled as “architectural pogroms”, directed at everything ancient “in villages and towns all over Romania” (48), but especially in Bucharest. Neither should one be surprised at the recurrence of EPIDEMIA snapshots, after the first encounter with the capital letters of the word painted in communist red on the façade of a polyclinic that the memorialist passed (in Chapter Two). Because it was a “hi-tech clinic” that “served the [communist] Party” (26), the pasting of the emblematic word’s letters becomes instantly symbolic.

Fronted by forceful iron gates, its marble steps led to a porch with a glass roof, elegant but inconspicuous. Drawn up in front were Party ambulances, white Mercedes estates with red stripes and blue revolving beacons.

Along the building’s grey façade, workmen in overalls went slopping white paint over some writing watched by young men in suits. It was an unequal battle; the bright red letters pushed through their thin emulsion. *EPID – EMIA*, the word’s two halves separated by the gates’ black bars, along which someone had dragged the brush in a long bloody hyphen. The red gloss had dripped like something from a cheap horror film, a ghastly violent red in a place so grey. (Mc Guinness 26-7)

It seemed to drift, by osmosis, into the eyes and lives of Romanians whose haggard faces obsessed the foreigner. “EPIDEMIA: its name was marked out in the eyes of the thin savage young men who stalked the outskirts of the market, where produce was so scarce most of the stalls had packed up and gone by eight in the morning”(27). They left behind, as we read on the same page, “displayed like jewelry, laid one by one and side by side across the concrete tables . . . green peppers withered like old socks, gnarled carrots, a few lettuces”; the description continues with items earmarked as pathological emblems of city life and of its Leninist, dictatorial planning: pickles. They were “the only things that seemed in plentiful supply” and “looked like brains in jars, organs and appendices suspended in formaldehyde, waiting

for the jolt of current that would turn them into living limbs” (*ibid.*). And the memorialist communing with himself immediately wonders “But what sort of electricity would it take to transform these bowed and broken dollpeople into revolutionaries?” The answer provided by the second part of the novel revolves around the same keyword, Epidemia, painted on the façade of the Natural History Museum – and it is surprising. It shows that the secret leaders of the Romanian revolution came from the ranks of the Inner Party members (as Orwell would call them) to orchestrate a *coup d’état* as a nearly perfect replica revolution. What incited such members to action was the creed spelled out for the benefit of the foreign memorialist by his friend Sergiu Trofim (alias Silviu Brucan). Trying to teach the Westerner a lesson, this belated believer in communism says: “Nothing I see around me here, or out there beyond our borders – in Britain, America, Europe – has shaken my belief that the socialist state is the highest and most equitable form of human society and I do not want to make my country safe for big business.” A few sentences later he becomes polemical also.

But you are under the misprision that the liberal capitalist state works. For whom does it work? Not for your poor and your unemployed, your third-world workforce and their pillaged resources. For whom does cheap petrol work? Not for those who produce it. Cheap food? Cheap manufacturing? Nothing I have seen has changed my faith. Not Stalin, not Ceaușescu, not . . .not this . . . He indicated the freshly painted EPIDEMIA on the wall of the Natural History Museum. Do you think that you who live in capitalist countries would believe in the right to a job, a decent wage, free health and education if socialism had not shown you the way? The welfare state? The National Health Service? Socialism showed you that what your employers and bosses sometimes gave you out of paternalism or pangs of social conscience was in fact life’s necessities, the minimum. You only think of them as rights because of socialism. Until socialism they were merely privileges or random acts of charity or luck . . . Without socialism, without Lenin, and Trotsky and Victor Serge such things would be unimaginable. Capitalism owes its better self to us”.(McGuinness 240)

When Trofim’s interlocutor intervenes to contradict the former’s forecast that “[t]here will be no revolution” because “[i]t is not the Romanian way”, the culmination of the boutade comes: “The Party will intervene and I will support that. Gorbachev is right – our survival depends on liberalization and opening up, but also on keeping control. Ceaușescu come and go. They are expendable. The Party stays” (241).

What can one make of the fact that this declaration of staunch, utopian faith, which is also a clear acknowledgment of the dictatorial communist epidemic spread from Stalin to Ceaușescu over several twentieth century decades sounds uncannily like the last words uttered in *Mr. Standfast* by Lenin dressed in German garb by the author of the English espionage *roman à clé*?

my country has the habit of doing justice on her enemies. It may interest you to know that the end is not far off. Germany has faced a jealous world in arms and she is about to be justified of her great courage. She has broken up bit by bit the clumsy organization of her opponents. Where is Russia today, the steam-roller that was to crush us? Where is the poor dupe Rumania? Where is the strength of Italy, who was

Cultural Representations of the City

once to do wonders for what she called Liberty? Broken, all of them. I have played my part in that work and now the need is past. My country with free hands is about to turn upon your armed rabble in the West and drive it into the Atlantic. Then we shall deal with the ragged remains of France and the handful of noisy Americans. By midsummer there will be peace dictated by triumphant Germany.' (Chapter 16, "I Lie on a Hard Bed")

The above flaunting words destined to annihilate the other come, in John Buchan's novel, right before the fall of the Allies' bitterest foe who is uttering them; but in the Romanian context, they are merely the clue for grasping, in the comparison announced by our title, the difference between war-time developments (involving, in the spy novel, the triumph of "good" over "evil") and civil-war turns (which are more muddled). Both of these long quoted passages acknowledge the mutual disdain and hatred that animates the perpetrators of secret, open, civil or colonial wars and revolutions which wreak havoc. They compromise and ruin in action, by testing them, modern utopian doctrines, not only towns – as witnessed in the memoir about the overthrow of Ceausescu's totalitarian regime (and city planning). It took a revolutionary *coup d'état* to overthrow, when not the time, but the first-world agencies were ripe.

Whether the actions of the Russian first-world (in this case, Gorbachev's in respect to the Romanian second-world communists or *compradores*) compare sufficiently convincingly, in their relationship with the Moscow satellites (countries and cities), with the British first-world actions in respect to their colonial third-world subalterns and second-world partners, or, on the contrary, as the quotation from Mr Standfast suggests, they would compare rather more credibly, with the relationship of the Nazi first-world metropolis to second-world garden cities (as in Muesmann's Bulgarian masterplan for Sofia) is a question to be weighed and settled in another paper; and by reference, necessarily to the argument that Ștefănescu's *Siblings of Subalternity* puts forward when it develops the definitions and distinctions of the entry on colonialism authored in the *Postcolonialism/Postcommunism Dictionary of Key Cultural Terms*.

For the narrower scope of the present paper, suffice it to mention that there is no room for planting would-be garden cities in a country with an entrenched totalitarian regime, where actual parks resemble prison-yards or concentration camp 'commons', as we can read quite plainly, in the foreigner's English language, about communist Bucharest.

Bucharest's modern parks were flat, planted with dwarfish shrubs and benches arranged to give the sitter maximum exposure and maximum discomfort. You never stayed long anywhere, harried on all sides by an invisible watchfulness. All the fountains were dry. As you walked you passed statues of one of the harmlessly dead: composers, poets, historians, scientists, evacuated from their own stories by these anonymising official monuments. *The safe and useful dead*, as Stalin called them. . .
“(McGuinness 53)

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