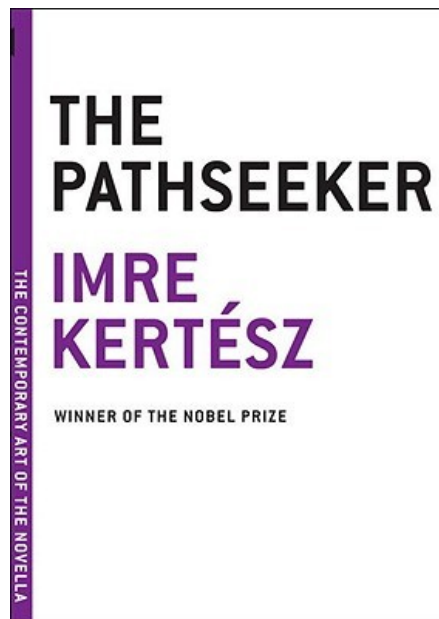




The Pathseeker

Imre Kertész

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"There's no such thing as chance...only injustice."

From the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature for “writing that upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history...”

The acclaimed Hungarian Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész continues his investigation of the malignant methodologies of totalitarianism in a major work of fiction.

In a mysterious middle-European country, a man identified only as “the commissioner” undertakes what seems to be a banal trip to a nondescript town with his wife—a brief detour on the way to a holiday at the seaside—that turns into something ominous. Something terrible has happened in the town, something that no one wants to discuss. With his wife watching on fearfully, he commences a perverse investigation, rudely interrogating the locals, inspecting a local landmark with a frightening intensity, traveling to an outlying factory where he confronts the proprietors ... and slowly revealing a past he's been trying to suppress.

In a limpid translation by Tim Wilkinson, this haunting tale lays bare an emotional and psychological landscape ravaged by totalitarianism in one of Kertész's most devastating examinations of the responsibilities of and for the Holocaust.

The Pathseeker Details

Date : Published April 1st 2008 by Melville House (first published 1977)

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Author : Imre Kertész

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From Reader Review The Pathseeker for online ebook

Melville House Publishing says

The new Contemporary Art of the Novella series launches with this stunning work from Nobel Prizewinner Imre Kertsz, author of *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* and *Fatelessness*. In a major work never before translated, the acclaimed Auschwitz survivor continues his blistering investigation of the methodologies of totalitarianism.

Robbie Bruens says

Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* features a protagonist named Bob Arctor who wears a 'scramble suit' that disguises him as nothing more than a 'vague blur.' But Arctor at least has a name, which is more than can be said for the Commissioner, the ostensible central character of *The Pathseeker*.

The Commissioner is not only a vague blur himself but lives in a world composed of vague blurs. Or maybe that's not quite right, maybe the world he inhabits is actually far too brightly lit and well defined and that's what causes him to blur and melt and fail and fail some more.

The Pathseeker is an alluring cipher of a novella. It begins in unsettling suspense as The Commissioner conducts a friendly interrogation of an unnamed man. We get the impression that the Commissioner is executing an investigation of sort, potentially into crimes or transgressions committed in the past.

Just as the Commissioner treatment of the unnamed man shades into a kind of psychological torture (the unnamed man calls the Commissioner 'inhuman' through gritted teeth), the story takes a left turn out of the realm of suspense and into a sort of paranoid, misanthropic travelogue.

The Commissioner's investigation is never clearly defined. He goes on two fact-finding missions to distinct, remote locations that require him to rely on bus and train connections to reach. Both missions become circuitous and almost entirely aimless, or at least asymptotic.

The Commissioner can never quite find what he's looking for, for what he's looking for is a reflection of himself in the objects he interrogates. Yes, he interrogates objects with his gaze. It's very sunny. Too bright, the light and heat are suffocating in fact. Turn them off.

Another title for this book might be *The Tourist*. The Commissioner wanders in fashion similar to tourists, or not a tourist exactly, but rather a wanderer. Late in the book, he's identified as a foreigner in the land that provides the location for the story. His thoughts are constantly filled with disdain for tourists and locals alike. He becomes very confused, and is constantly getting lost. The sights he seeks out never end up looking quite like they're supposed to.

A woman in a veil appears to him. Later she kills herself in a newspaper. He begins to calculate the expenses required by the sea voyage he will undertake next.

Shafiqah Berry says

It was a troubling and disconcerting novella. But powerful nonetheless. The idea that a crime can be so egregious that it erases the names of people and places and the world goes on seems to reference the author's experience in Auschwitz and it is a hauntingly disconnected tale.

Rafal says

This book definitely requires a deep knowledge of the place and time it was written to make any sense. And unfortunately, I just do not think it works well otherwise.

the story is fairly intriguing. A detective is investigating an event that happened in a random Eastern European town. The townspeople are suitably mysterious and the entire story reads like a gaslight mystery. This was all written and developed very well. However, unless you know the geography, cultural mores, and behaviors of people in the area, chances are there will be no payoff. Oh you didn't know that person was being suspicious? But they made this minor facial gesture used only in that part of the world that implies they were lying. You had no idea this was a holocaust novel? but they mentioned a clearing near a forest within a 30 minute train ride and short walk from a hotel with a pachyderm-like logo. How could that have been any clearer?

Overall, this read like the first few chapters of a mystery novel. that then ended and told you nothing. If not for the afterward, I would have had no clue what happened.

Lysergius says

This is a very strange little book, filled with anonymous people. Only one character has a name. The narrator appears to be investigating something, we are never told what; clearly something in the past... The whole scenario is extremely sinister, peopled with brutal people. Some of the narrators hallucinations for want of a better word partake of this brutality; scenes of normal life suddenly become filled with conflict and abuse.

One suspects without knowing something of Kertesz history this would be a meaningless exercise. But we know there is no such thing as chance... only injustice.

Chuck LoPresti says

If the intent was to make you understand what it felt like to be persecuted by nameless people for nameless crimes - this is a great read. The prose is good but rarely takes flight in this brief read. If you like wandering around in the dark without something warm and moist to eventually bump into - you're going to love this.

Julia says

I was really disappointed with the book of Kertesz since he is awarded with the Noble prize but I do realize that it is impossible to enjoy all the authors, even distinguished ones. "The Pathseeker" is a short form, Kertesz describes totalitarianism and alludes to what happened during the WWII - the biggest tragedy of our times - Holocaust. I think the topic is extremely important and that is why, so difficult, so overcomplicating

the story and the language did not really help in understanding the book. I do not know if it is the fault of the translation or the language of Kertesz but I didn't enjoy it at all. I was struggling with finishing such a short read, which meant that I didn't appreciate what I was reading. Nevertheless, I would like to try different books written by this author, which may appeal to me more.

Jim Elkins says

Very pallid, even timid evocation of the way that scenes of horror from the past are forgotten. (A concentration camp is turned into a harmless cultural center.) But it's pale, and there is no drama in moments of discovery or search -- passages that Kertesz apparently thinks are very suspenseful.

Lau says

A book that deserves a second reading, because you can't fully understand it after reading it once.

Farhan Khalid says

Readers may find themselves mystified by this novel. What is it about? Who is the commissioner and what is he doing? Who is ghostly veiled woman who briefly passes through the action? Where exactly is it all supposed to be taking place—which town or even country—and when? (*Afterword by Tom Wilkinson*)

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VISITING

A single minute of unclouded freedom from care

He swept his eyes over the scene:

Your own laws are the only ones applicable to you

It had been impossible for a person not become aware of certain things, albeit involuntarily

Anyone who said any different was lying

That wasn't the right word for it, yet this wasn't the place for being modest, so was it all right for him to speak instead about duty, the agonizing duty of knowledge

One had certain thoughts: one can't help it

And although those thoughts don't stem from yourself

His eyes burning with a strange light, his voice switching to a whisper

The possibility, you catch my drift? Nothing else, the mere possibility

And that what happens just once, to just one person, has now transcended the frontiers of the possible, is now a law of reality

Our constant anguish feed if we did not all feel we had a small part in universal evil?

He flashed a wryly meditative grin

Time is dangerous enemy

A minute of silence arose—almost an awkward silence, one might say

A straight question deserves a straight answer

You're getting trapped in strange contradictions

A sense of duty in the wider sense is a trap

Her eyes—at other times a familiar mirror—were filled with anxious questioning

TURNING POINT

FIRST TRACES

DIALOGUE IN THE SQUARE

Was that really what it was, the town? They came to houses, clusters of houses, later on regular streets

Everything was perfect, like an optical illusion

Everything was revealed, and nevertheless everything resisted

Everything was there ought to be there, and yet

Everything was nevertheless false, different from how it ought to be

All of a sudden, the town had begun to speak

Details to be hidden in the guise of the timelessness that had been conjured up for them and of this fleeting present

No doubt about it: that was the color. In that brightness of light—this color too was timeless

This too made tangible only by a mundane moment, yet

A totally different moment that nevertheless could only have been hit upon in the merciless grip of this deceptive present

For which momentarily no congruence of the map, no reconciliation of the grand total on the inventory of items, could provide requisite proof

Its decorations, streets, buildings, and ornaments were submerged in time:

The mask of eternity had fallen away from them, and on display was its momentariness

DISORIENTATION
THE GATE

Expectations builds on monotony, the risk was of going to pieces

"I made a mistake. I don't know which way we should go", he said

"We'll ask someone", the woman said quietly, without any sign of surprise

Stealing the magic of simple things in this absurd suggestion with her smile

Tourists were like ants, diligently carrying off the significance of things, crumb by crumb

Her figure was already made smaller by the distance and the immeasurable perspective of the emptiness down below

That was precisely the question that was supposed to be heard, and melting away just as feebly in the space

Yet multiplied in the same way from the echo as if —yes—that question was not even his

She has simply shouted it out, thereby, as it were, breathing life into the mute souls of each and every question

ASTONISHMENT
INSPECTION
HOSTELRY

He himself would lay down the law on his desk

He alone would answer for his mistakes and his results

His voice was echoing over the scene

His words were capable of breaking through floodgates

Nothing at all that was supposed to be here was here

This place was not what it was either, just his own stubborn obsession

He himself was not who he was

His mission was an error

Space, time the ground beneath his feet—nothing was true

Only this irresistible impulse, constantly assailing every sensory organ

THE PALM COURT
THE VEILED WOMAN

He had to protect his secret, the responsibility—this consuming emptiness

There's no such thing as chance. Only injustice

RUSH HOUR

Cheating and lies set in blank verse

His knowledge was futile, his truth was indivisible

ANNOYANCES
CONFRONTATIONS
UNMASKING
RECKONING

Had he wanted definite evidence of his questionable existence?

This fact was now staring with such stark clarity, like this spacious landscape and endless highway in the hard sunlight

This was what he wanted: to make a splash with his presence, advertise his superiority

Celebrate the triumph of his existence in front of these mute and powerless things

AT THE STATION

He caught himself immersed in a rough computation of expenditures on the sea voyage that would be starting the next day

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Auschwitz myth is the only thing that truly interests me. In contemplating a new novel, I can only think about Auschwitz again. Whatever, I think about, I always think about Auschwitz. Even if I may seem to be talking about something quite different, I am still talking about Auschwitz (*Galley-Boat Log*)

Brendan says

Does anything retain meaning when you return to it or does it only exist as long as it never changes?

Dave says

I'm pretty sure I didn't get this book; It's like an elaborate puzzle that I'm supposed to care about, but doesn't seem to add anything.

Brian Sullivan says

Masterful I had to read it a second time to fully grasp its subtlety.

Jasmine says

Think Auschwitz...

I suppose on some level a meditation on what writing looks like after Auschwitz.

Amy Spinks says

I was preparing for a study abroad program for teachers. This book was a required read for the trip. I read it, and was confused. But, then I went to Buchenwald where our scholar told us about the author. It is an account of a survivors return to Buchenwald where he found a museum and lots of nothingness! The camp is only a shell of it's prior existence. As a survivor seeks to find peace, he returns to the place of his pain and finds only a semblance of the past he remembers. This is a great book to use on the classroom.
