

Rising power of Hope in the Vulnerable and Devastating Modern Times: With Reference to Krasznahorkai's Santantango

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Santantango (1985) is debut novel of Laszlo Krasznahorkai a Hungarian writer, rightly considered as 'Hungarian master of the apocalypse', it is now regarded as a classic, and magnum opus of apocalypse. 'The end of the world is coming in a deluge of rain that is turning the world into a muddy wasteland that mirrors the spiritual condition of its inhabitants', *Santantango* is a novel about the end of the world that reflects on the everyday inner despair of humanity in the present day as much as in 1985 Hungary, when it was compiled, cleverly constructed, often exciting and possessed of a distinctive, compelling vision of artistic creation. it has been made into a stunning, but grueling seven-hour black and white film by Bela Tarr. (*Santantango* is translated by British poet George Szirtes, assumed to be done 'at the helm of the translation'). It is well-known for its insanely long shots, watching this movie resembles the reading experience of this novel. Krasznahorkai explores dystopian, melancholic, existential and apocalyptic themes, his works such as *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989), *Destruction and Sorrow Beneath the Heavens* (2004), *Seiobo There Below* (2008) and *Baron Wenckheim's Homecoming* (2016). are the brilliant works which explore eastern life culture and history. In 2025 he was awarded the Nobel prize in literature, 'for his compelling and visionary oeuvre that, in the midst of apocalyptic terror, reaffirms the power of art', the style and ways of Krasznahorkai's writing makes to undermine as well surpasses all the other contemporary writings. Writers such Jose Saramago- *Blindness* (1995), Roberto Bolano- 2666, published in 2004, David Foster Wallace- *Infinite Jest* (1996) and Mikhail Bulgakov- *The Master and Margarita* published in 1967. (The literary works of Hungry writers as become a point of discussion for the past seven decade in encompassing the Hungarian literary genres like prose, poetry and novel, not excluding novella and drama etc. more prominent, as post-modernist, obviously again as engrossing Hungarian classics like *Embers* by Sandor Marai and *Fateless* by Imre Kertesz, Magda Szabo's *The Door*, Antal Szerb's *Journey by Moonlight*, Imre kertes's Nobel- winning *Fatelessness*, Ferenc Molnar's *The Paul Street Boys* and Mor Jokai's *Man with the Golden Touch*)

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Laszlo Krasznahorkai's novel *Santantango* relates itself with the impoverished lives of the residents living in a dilapidated, rain-drenched Hungarian estate, a place which is nearby a Hungarian town. He writes the novel using twists, multi-part, winding sentences instead, the sentences speak to themselves, discussing the themes, correcting the earlier moments, or arguing with one another, Each chapter consist of one long unbroken paragraph, which give a sense of breathless anxiety that propels itself along with a darkly funny narrative touch throughout, and makes the reading of the work seem much or less frightening than a causal reader might think it is a literary work of endless continual words of beakless formation of long paragraphs as "one- paragraph chapters". Krasznahorkai expertly uses the plot to set the basis for the thematic subject of his novel. Before delving deep into the story of *Santantango*, it is undeniable to remember a Hungarian critic remarks, "the grandeur is clearly palpable but people do not seem to know what to do with it". As in the words of Eileen Battersby, the chief literary critic of Irish Times states that, "Krasznahorkai has studied humanity, our weakness and folly. In his wry, engaging disenchantment lingers hope in the lucid pursuit of salvation. "something is going to happen today". remarks one of the character in *Santantango*, and to read Kraznahorkai is to experience that frisson of anticipation and excitement, knowing that an intoxicating adventure really does await us". The reading of this novel makes the readers to feel some sense of disconsolate melancholy, which seems to be precisely the state of being that Krasznahorkai is the master of describing:

"He gazed sadly at the threatening sky, at the burned-out remnants of a locust-plagued summer, and suddenly saw on the twig of an acacia, as in a vision, the progress of spring, summer, fall and winter, as if the whole of time were a frivolous interlude in the much greater spaces of eternity, a brilliant conjuring tricks to produce something apparently orderly out of chaos, to establish a vantage point from which chance might begin to look like necessity....and he saw himself nailed to the cross of his own cradle and coffin, painfully trying to tear his body away, only, eventually, to deliver himself- utterly naked, without indentifying mark, stripped down to essentials- into the care of the people whose duty it was to wash the corpses, people obeying an order snapped

out in the dry air against a background loud with tortures and flayers of skin, where he obliged to regard the human condition without a trace of pity, without a single possibility of any way back to life, because by then he would know for certain that all his life he had been playing with cheaters who had marked the cards and who would, in the end, strip him even of his last means of defense, of that hope of someday finding his way back home".

On the facade, he is writing a novel about those impertinent citizens, living as a dunkers and cheaters, who live this because the government is now unconcerned and indifferent with them as they pose no use subsequent the downfall of their industry, it is also highlighting, the failure of totalitarian communist leadership present in Hungary at that time, the novel *Satantango* and the novelist *Krasznahorkai*, pose several questions about its purpose and intention of writing, obviously readers may think and contemplate to comprehend critiquing systems the depart individuals forgotten and without agency, while using bleak, intricate prose to immerse readers in a world where charismatic figures (like the devilish *Irimias*) offer false hope, revealing humanity's susceptibility to manipulation and pervasive bleakness of a decaying world, all as questioning concepts of redemption, authority and purpose through a darkly satirical, yet left to the point of deeply human consideration.

Before considering into the thematic material to explain *Satantango*, it is significant to have an understanding of the overarching plot within, the core issues at the heart of *Satantango* are larger issues of existence and the lack of existence: the beginning and the end of humanness, humanity, history, politics, economics, progress, death, redemption, salvation loneliness, despair and the apocalypse. *Krasznahorkai* provides no answer to any of the quires he poses, the novel could be read as a condemnation of the Soviet-Communist system of economic and social constructions; or it could be read as a Biblical metaphor; it could be read as a satire of mankind's susceptibility to fall victim to every conjurer, ruse and Ponzi scheme; or it could be, and this is most likely, all of the above, none of the above, and a something else that exists just outside of our human understanding.

In the novel *Satantango*, the citizens of the estate are living in squalor and perpetual drunkenness, they cheat wives and husbands, leave their children to prostitute themselves, and drink all the while on the entire day, and even nights to pass the time. The estate they live on, was once some sort of agricultural industry, now that it was desolate and useless, the government has given up on this community leading to their current state of living, their indifference and irresponsible attitude leads to the suicide of a young girl *Esti*.

Consequently, enters *Irimias*. *Irimias* is exactly a government worker-an informer of sorts, but he represents other entities: the totalitarian state, the material form of Satan, or a foreshadowing of a fascist capitalist state, he leads them to believe he is bringing them to a literal Eden, and instead (without their knowledge) tears them from their homes and sets them to work as spies. They believe they are going to work for certain individuals while *Irimias* builds his Eden, but instead they will report on those they are working for, it ends with the doctor of the estate hearing the same ringing bell *Futaki* heard at the beginning and deciding to write their tale, record and conceptualize reality, trying to find order and meaning (or prove its absence) in the disordered, decaying Hungarian hamlet, presenting patterns as a way to control overwhelming details and resist the pervasive spiritual and political rot. he writes on the nervous conversation of objects and signs, a fruitless effort to make sense of a world where hope, belief and genuine connection have crumbling, he is rightly reflecting the novel's motifs like nihilism, totalitarianism and the failure of reliance.

The theme of nihilism is present throughout the novel, nihilism is the belief that life is meaningless- that there is no point in morality, love, or enjoyment. The use of nihilism, to set a quick basis for what readers believe that the purpose of the novel was, *Satantango* opens and closes with the ringing of a bell. when *Futaki* hears it in well, a religious person (or someone who believes in signs) would believe it was a sign from God, but, this is what comes to *Futaki*'s mind: "and he saw himself nailed to the cross of his own cradle and coffin, painfully trying to tear his body away, only, eventually, to deliver himself -utterly naked, without identifying mark, stripped down to essentials- into the care of the people whose duty it was to wash the corpses, people obeying an order snapped out in the dry air against a background loud with torturers and flayers of skin, where he was obliged to regard the human condition without a trace of pity" (P-4)

Instead of thinking of something beautiful, what comes to his mind is thoughts of death and the meaninglessness of life. He is presented with God and thinks of the Devil. it is almost as if he is seeking this pain, or these "torturers and flayer of skin".

But who else hears the bell? the doctor or the narrator of the entire work. The book ends with his writing down the first few pages of this novel, signifying his authorship or the work, Before getting into his experience with the bell, it is important to see his worldview as well. far before his hearing of the bell he sits and watches the people of the town He thinks:

"He was lost in successive waves of time, coolly aware of the minimal speck of his own being, seeing himself as the defenseless, helpless victim of the earth crust, the brittle arc of his life between birth and death caught up in the dumb struggle between surging seas and rising hills and it was as if he could already feel the gentle tremor beneath the chair supporting his bloated body, a tremor that might be the Harbinger of seas about to break in on him, a pointless warning to flee before its all-encompassing power made escape impossible, and he could see himself running, part of a desperate, terrified stampede comprising stags, bears, rabbits, deer, rats,

insects and reptiles, dogs and men, just so many futile, meaningless lives in the common, incomprehensible devastation, while above them flapped clouds of bird's dropping in exhaustion, offering the only possible hope" (P-59)

Again like Futaki, his world view holds on to some meaninglessness of life. he sees himself as a small part of a pointless world, immaterial speck of time that comes out to experience something insignificant while hills rise and sink before him. He views life as a simple waiting game for death and that death is "the only possible hope".

Finally, to drive this point of nihilism home, can be connect to what the doctor experiences when he sees the bell. Again it should come to mind that a bell usually signify something grand and beautiful, but when he arrives at its source, there is some disfigured creature speaking in incomprehensible bursts, and we are uncertain if it is even human. it is not some God ringing the bell, and it is not even the devil. it doesn't matter what it is as long as we know it is the something grotesque, something that is suffering through life performing menial pointless tasks, just as the townspeople seem to be doing.

In the second part named, 'The Estate', it relate the theme of nihilism into a bigger picture Futaki and the doctor open and close the novel-they represent the readers with most of the books philosophy- but they rarely play a big part in the central moments. Esti as young as she is, already seems to deny the importance or beauty of life, and instead seek solace and consolation in death, she kills her cat and then herself, waiting for a guardian angel to come and take her up. But at one point, in the novel few descriptive paragraphs breaks so that it represent song or a list of prayer as a part of Esti's contemplation:

"She could sense their presence without seeing them, she knew they were there, that she facing them down there" (P-109)

Esti is factually viewing her family and village members from a higher place. She could be acting as the only base of good throughout the book, watching over them from a vantage point, some symbolic sense of heaven maybe, it is no coincidence that Krasznahorkai close to break this line up. he wanted is readers to think on this line, as a metaphor or something more important. down there calls to mind viewing Earth from above, like an Angel or God, she may be acting as an guardian Angel over their entire estate yet as she watches over it all she remembers her mother's words - "there is nothing for you here" it sets in motion her nihilistic beliefs: she comes to realize the lies the town and even her brother tells her: apathy sets in Esti kills herself and the town loses its guardian Angel.

The loss of this Angel is what gives Irimias a way to enter, but first the reader see the outcome of this loss at the bar there are no redeeming qualities expressed in this chapter just drunkenness cheating anger. The rain pours down onto the bar as if prophesy some apocalypse, and most importantly, the spider's weave their webs on these still living, breathing inhabitants, the spiders give them a figurative sense of the dead -yet even they refuse to stay with these corpses and their immorality- and then retreat back to their holes.

In the third part named , 'The Journey', after Esti death (or more accurately, the fallings of the townspeople to protect her) open a doorway or a purpose for the devil to come into their lives it calls to mind a sort of Faustian bargain. maybe an unwilling or an unspoken one for the townspeople, but still similar, they are promised an Eden and so set to destroying their former homes and leaving the decrepit estate, but this is all lies as the devil is wont to do, they are sent out to work for certain individuals, believing that one- day Irimias will come back for them to present this Eden. but the devil (or maybe he is a simply minion of the Devil) it is just using them to learn- to spy for his master , which as presented in Part 1, Chapter 2 happens to be the totalitarian bureaucracy of the Hungarian government.

Does this new work give their life purpose? Will their conditions of living improve? Will they receive some sort of satisfaction with their work, or some hope that something better is coming- an Eden ? it is all possible but hard to believe. they had a purpose before on their estate, but once their use had run out, they were forgotten and most likely will be again, they will revert back into alcohol or some other vice as a means of passing time and forgetting; they will bribe, steal, cheat and fight, they may hope or set their sights on some other Christ figure, may be this time one who is not in disguise, but as their story closes, it feels as if the thought of survival hope becomes an absurd.

In the end it has been named, 'Hope', Satantango is apparently and exceedingly nihilistic and provides a terribly pessimistic world. It does give hope Krasznahorkai gives us scenes that provide some solace or comfort that there is something that matters, whether from a religion, artistic or social perspective. In the scene when Esti's corpse (or soul) is rising above the fog seeming to be taken to heaven, Irimias cowers, he is seeing the innocent saved and brought to what is real Eden. there is a light and beauty after death, and maybe that shows him it is feasible before death as well. The doctor finds comfort in writing in art. he finishes his chapter having possibly found a true purpose the lives of these souls. or maybe his comfort is in providing some form of social commentary in showing what is country has done to eat citizens. happens when people are forgotten. He is criticizing his government and country for allowing life to reach such low levels and gloomy sort of dismal things. It is social commentary, but not heavy- handed blatant allegory and rather it is an art at its peak. it provides us with a tapestry

of never-ending thoughts, paragraphs and sentences, taking stream-of-conscious to a more philosophic and meaningful level. His descriptions of life, sunrise, and rain, are written in some of the most touching and unique pieces of prose, induced to write the bleak presentation of life with feeble sort of hope in his sentences readers, experience new lease of life so desperately with the creatures, a light in a dingiest of bars and hovels and all they need to flourish is a little help, hope for a concrete or abstract material or an immaterial thing of human assumption in any form might germinate optimism or the ray of hope for survival.

when we look back as a reader of the novel *Satantango*, we can arrive at the perceptions of profound ambiguity and cynicism which arose out of recurring despair, as the deceived inhabitants, following the false prophet Irimias, who makes others embarking on a journey of self-discovery to understand inescapable chaos of life, a testament to humanity's rotten core and failed promises of salvation, turning around unavoidable entering to the void, while mirroring broader societal disillusionment by proving that life is endless chance of creatures cyclical suffering in which it could be manipulated by other creatures and sometimes mysterious occurrence which is also a part of over-powering strength and strategy of nature, in its broader sense of understanding. ultimately, it is timeless portrait of human irreparable rottenness, indicating hope as extended terms of faith and future.

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