In Memorium

Morris Watnick

Those of us who were privileged to have been his close friends note with special sorrow the death of Morris Watnick, a member of the political science department of the State University of New York at Binghamton on April 1, 1974. He was sixty years of age and had been on the SUNY faculty since 1966, having previously taught at the University of Washington (1960) and at Brandeis University (1961-65).

Born and raised in New York City, Morris Watnick held the B.S.S. degree from the City College of New York (1936) and the M.S.S. from the New School for Social Research (1942). For many years he served with the U.S. Government, first as intelligence research analyst with the Department of State and then as publications editor with the U.S. Information Agency. He held research fellowships at the Russian Research Center, Harvard University (1957-60) and at Ohio State University (1960-61); he was a Fulbright fellow in 1964-65.

His teaching interests centered on Marxist theory and international communist movements, leading him to offer courses not only on China and the Soviet Union but also on the history of political thought, economic planning, imperialism, and the politics of developing areas. Broader still was the range of his scholarship. Those of us who came to him with our manuscripts—for he was a superb editor—were repeatedly startled by the reaches of his learning. He gave unstintingly of himself, enriching our arguments with factual information and theoretical insights. In the circle of his friends he was a brilliant conversationalist, disturbing us with searching questions and rollicking us with pointed anecdotes.

Of his own work he was unduly modest. For two years he was editor of and almost sole contributor to a little-known but remarkable journal, *Under Scrutiny,* published for the U.S. Information Agency. There he wrote quickly and voluminously, in contrast to his later scholarly work where he was more sparing (in part because of recurring illnesses). Yet it was here that he made his mark.

Of his extraordinary essay "The Appeal of Communism to the Underdeveloped Areas" (1952), George Lichtheim (then writing as G. L. Arnold) said: "Mr. Watnick probably has done more than any other recent writer in this field to illuminate the deeper causes of colonial 'unrest' and the link between agrarian disintegration and revolutionary intelligentsia politics." His several essays on the Hungarian Marxist aesthetician and philosopher Georg Lukács, published in *Soviet Survey* (1958-59), earned him international recognition as one of the few people who both knew and understood Lukács' work. With the forthcoming publication of his translation and introductory essay to Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital,* and some of his materials on Georg Lukács and the theory of class consciousness, Morris Watnick's contribution will be the greater still.

Two of his colleagues at Binghamton, Professors James P. Young and Arthur K. Smith, rendered him fitting tribute when they wrote: "The list of students and faculty colleagues who knew Professor Watnick and learned from him is long, going far beyond those who were fortunate enough to be his students in the formal sense of the word. His friends will remember him with special regard, as a kind and gentle man whose only enemies were sham, hypocrisy, and intellectual dishonesty. At a time when entrepreneurial vigor is all too often confused with dedicated scholarship, Morris Watnick truly knew what it meant to pursue the life of the mind. We are all diminished by his loss, but in a deeper sense we, his colleagues and his students, are enlarged by his example."

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George Lichtheim

George Lichtheim was born in 1912 in Berlin, and spent a few years as a child in Constantinople, where his father, Richard Lichtheim, was at that time representing the Zionist Organization in the capital of the declining Ottoman Empire. Like many of his colleagues in the early Zionist movement, Richard Lichtheim came from a highly assimilated Jewish-German family, and his conversion to Zionism was rooted in the universalist ethos of 19th century Central European liberalism. These seemingly conflicting convictions of his father — a universalism embedded in an historical awareness of the meaning of particularism — were central to the ideas that were to emerge in George's own writings.

It was this richness of the Central European intellectual Jewish tradition that formed the spiritual background of George Lichtheim's early years. Despite the Zionist background at home, George came in his student days in the 1920/30's under the influence of the dissident Marxist ideas of the German *Sozialistische Arbeiter-Partei:* his favorable political authors were Karl Korsch and Franz Borkenau. After the Nazis came to power he spent a brief period in London and then, between 1934 and 1945, he lived in Jerusalem, where he worked for the *Palestine Post.* When the war was over, he was sent to cover the Nuremberg Trials for the *Post,* travelled widely in Europe and subsequently settled in London.

His Jerusalem years were far from easy: though they were intellectually perhaps the most stimulating years of his life, he felt basically out of place. The company he kept in Jerusalem was as exciting as it was unique: he was involved in a literary-cultural circle that included, among others, the historian of Jewish mysticism and messianism Gershom Scholem, the historian of science Shmuel Sambursky, the Egyptologist H. J. Polotsky and many other Jerusalem luminaries. It was the cream of the German-Jewish intellectual elite that found its way in those years to Jerusalem and they adopted George

despite his much younger age. Nonetheless he felt constricted in Jerusalem, the imminent Arab-Jewish conflict depressed him, and despite his deep feeling for Israel he felt at home in Hampstead much more than in Zion.

I have dwelt at some length on this unusual background of Lichtheim because he was an unusual person, not easy to fit into neat categories, often perplexing and sometimes extremely irritating. He could be simultaneously at home in a number of cultures — but belonged to none. German by education, he felt abhorrence at Germany and in his later years had little sympathy for the philistinism of the *Bundesrepublik;* Jewish by background, he felt that Zionism, despite all of its historical justification in the age of nationalism, was too parochial for his truly catholic intellect; English by adoption, he felt that Britain too was going down the drain and that he himself was upholding the ideas of English liberalism much more than the English society in whose midst he was living. The perpetual pilgrim, the committed yet alienated intellectual, the Wandering Jew, Lichtheim always remained a free-lancer, living by his wit, unattached and un-affiliated, a rarity in the second-half of the 20th century — the private scholar. Despite occasional short spells at a few universities, he rejected the many offers that came his way from various universities and research institutes. The consequent necessity of living by his pen sometimes affected the quality of his writing: but by and large his ability to sustain over a relatively long period of time the steady stream of informed, intelligent, sparkling and witty writing still stands out as an unusual achievement, almost without parallel in our present age.

For George Lichtheim straddled the gap between high-class journalism and academic writing in a unique way, being much more the 19th century *littérateur* in the style of de Tocqueville, Mill (and Marx) than a 20th century academic geared to the distinction between 'journalism' and 'research': I am sure that had he chosen to write about this arbitrary dichotomy, he would have come up with a typically iconoclastic piece that would have shattered many a sacred cow in the groves of academe. He was not, however, himself totally immune to the value judgement inherent in the distinction: for many years he sheltered his journalistic pieces behind the pseudonym of 'G. L. Arnold,' and only with the publication and success of his *Marxism* did he drop this defensive device and signed all his writings (except, of course, the necessarily anonymous contributions to the *TLS*) with his true name. It was as if only with the publication of a 'serious' study did he feel reconciled to his self again.

I still consider *Marxism* to be his major work, despite his many important later writings. Published in 1961, it was this book more than any other that reestablished the academic respectability of dealing with Marxism as an intellectual and historical phenomenon, rescuing it from the jejeune apologetics of orthodox Marxists as well as the no less arid polemics of its Cold War opponents. Here was a work that could integrate Marx's intellectual achievement into the fabric of Western philosophy and culture while at the same time pointing out to its historical limitations. This ability to see the enormous importance of Marxism as well as see through it was perhaps connected with Lichtheim's own ambivalent attitude to bourgeois society itself: nobody could be a more typical product of the High Culture of the European bourgeoisie, and one facet of this upbringing was the critical faculty that led him to embrace socialism as part of this heritage. Yet despite all this attachment to the social vision of Marx (if not to his analysis), one would be hard pressed to classify Lichtheim, the author of *Marxism,* as a 'Marxist' in any of the many accepted senses of the term. The world which Marx envisaged moving towards socialism was itself shattered beyond repair in 1914, 1917, 1933, and 1939. For Lichtheim the bourgeois world was dead, but it did not die the way that Marx had forecast for it; with its violent death under the impact of world war, bolshevism, fascism and modern techological horror, the dream that was nascent in this bourgeois world — the dream of Marx — was also affected, probably mortally affected.

Hence Lichtheim's growing pessimism, not only on a personal level, which led to his suicide in London in 1973 — but also on a general cultural level. Hence his distaste for the various bastardizations of Marxism, be it at the hands of New Left students, whose ignorance of history he saw as a New Barbarism masquerading as an intellectual vision, or at the hands of Third World dictators for whose antics he had as much patience as Marx had in his days for the mixture of petty tyranny, chauvinism and quasi-social rhetorics symbolized by the *Bas Empire* of Napoleon III. Hence also his quest for path-breaking attempts to apply the traditional categories leading from Kant through Hegel to Marx to contemporary reality: his Introduction to a new English reprint of Baillie's translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* has a whiff of this; and his great admiration for Habermas and his attempt to bridge some of the traditional epistemological dichtomies between 'theory' and 'practice', i.e. between philosophical cognition and socio-historical action, has also to be seen in this context.

In a world of academic over-specialization sometimes devoid of intellectual commitment and political enthusiasm sometimes innocent of knowledge, George Lichtheim was an oasis. He may not have left disciples. But he left all of us impoverished by his tragic decision to depart from this world which he made so much more intelligible to so many of us.

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