

MITCHELL COHEN

The Wager of Lucien Goldmann

Tragedy, Dialectics, and a Hidden God



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TRAGEDY, DIALECTICS, AND
A HIDDEN GOD

Mitchell Cohen

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For Nicole Fermon

Then call it what you will,
Call it fulfillment! Heart! Love! God!
I have no name for it.

—*Goethe's Faust*

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Acknowledgments

SOME TWO DECADES AGO, as an undergraduate in a seminar on Eastern European communism, I became fascinated by Georg Lukács. Two of his books, *Theory of the Novel* and *History and Class Consciousness*, made an enormous impression on me, and as I wrote a paper on Lukács, I became both intrigued and perplexed by his renunciation of both works and his subservience to Stalinism. It was extraordinary, I thought, that this remarkable thinker had forsworn his most compelling theoretical work. So I began inquiring about the fate of his ideas—the ideas of the “young Lukács”—after he disowned them. This led me to Lucien Goldmann.

That same semester I read Goldmann’s book on Kant and, frankly, probably did not understand much of it. I also read the English translation of *Les Sciences humaines et philosophie* and was taken by the sort of questions its author posed. Finally, I read Goldmann’s essay “Reflections on *History and Class Consciousness*” and was impressed by Goldmann’s effort to save Lukács from Lukács, both philosophically and politically. This led me, in the late 1970s, to write my doctoral thesis at Columbia University on Goldmann, but after completing it, I turned to another interest, which resulted in my writing a book entitled *Zion and State: Nation, Class, and the Shaping of Modern Israel* (in it I used a number of themes and ideas I derived from Lukács and Goldmann). Then, in the late 1980s, I returned to Goldmann, and the outcome is this book, a work larger and more mature (I trust) than the thesis, although much of the latter has been incorporated into it.

This is a somewhat roundabout way of saying that this book has a long history and therefore, inevitably, I have accumulated many debts in writing it. I am very grateful to Annie Goldmann, Lucien Goldmann’s widow, for sharing generously her remembrances with me and for allowing me access to her personal archives. I am also especially grateful to Youssef Ishaghpour, a fine cultural critic and thinker who studied with Goldmann in the 1960s. He has been, during my stays in Paris, an invaluable interlocutor, always ready to share his rich insights into Goldmann’s work (and into other subjects too).

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I wish to thank both these journals for permission to reprint the respective materials. In the final chapter, the quote from the poem "The City of Yes and the City of No" is from *The Collected Poems, 1952-1990* by Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Edited by Albert C. Todd with Yevgeny Yevtushenko and James Ragan. Copyright © 1991 by Henry Holt and Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Co., Inc.

Finally, I would like to express special thanks to Peter Dougherty of Princeton University Press—a fine editor and friend.

New York City
August 1993

A Note on Titles, Abbreviations, and Language in the Text

ONLY SOME OF LUCIEN GOLDMANN'S WORKS have been translated. When I refer to those that have been, I use the English titles. When I refer to a text by Goldmann that has not been translated, I use the original French title. However, when I quote Goldmann, I have, in almost all cases, translated directly from the French, although sometimes in consultation with the published translations. The reader may find details about the translations of the major works and the original editions of Goldmann's books in the Bibliography. I use the following abbreviations for some of the titles of Goldmann's works in the text: *Kant* for *Immanuel Kant (Introduction à la philosophie de Kant)*; *Novel* for *Towards a Sociology of the Novel (Pour une sociologie du roman)*; "LH" for "Lukács et Heidegger," the short appendix to *Kant*, which was dropped after the 1945 German edition; *LH* for *Lukács et Heidegger*, the book Goldmann was writing when he died in 1970. Abbreviations are explained in the text when they are first used. Goldmann's use of French and German was without contemporary American sensibilities when it comes to sexism in language. I have tried to be as sensitive as possible in this regard, but not to the extent of anachronism—Goldmann's *l'homme tragique* cannot be rendered as "tragic person"—or awkwardness. In presenting his ideas, I have sought to be faithful to his own voice, for better or worse.

THE WAGER OF LUCIEN GOLDMANN

Introduction

Eppur si muove?

IT IS SAID THAT GALILEO, after recanting before the Inquisition the theory that the earth moves, arose from his knees and murmured beneath his breath, “Eppur si muove”—yet it still moves. This phrase was chosen by the Romanian-born philosopher and critic Lucien Goldmann as the title of his address in February 1969 to a conference in Stockholm organized by Bertrand Russell to protest the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Viewing the year 1968, in particular, the events in Prague and Paris, as a historical watershed for the European Left, Goldmann, though steadfastly identifying himself as a socialist, contended that “in relation to this turning point . . . the old words ‘reform,’ ‘revolution,’ ‘socialism,’ ‘capitalism,’ ‘liberalism,’ ‘democracy,’ change their meaning and will only remain valid to the extent to which one gives them new meaning.”¹

His death the following year in his adopted home, Paris, deprived Goldmann of sufficient opportunity to make such reformulations. To assert that the earth “still moved” had a dual meaning for him: it was a defiant reassertion of his own, singular version of Marxist humanism in the face of the bitter end of the Prague Spring, and it represented an insistence that the rebellions in Paris and Prague demonstrated that one-dimensional societies could not, after all, triumph permanently. During his lifetime Goldmann was most renowned for his work on the sociology of literature and philosophy. However, as Herbert Marcuse wrote in a volume of *Hommage* published not long after his friend’s death, for Goldmann, “philosophy and political radicalism were one, Marxist theory was in the facts themselves; the philosophical and literary documents contained, in themselves, their translation into social reality. . . . He was an eminently political being, and the imperative to change the world was in all his ideas.”²

Nevertheless, while others in the Left Bank—notably, Louis Althusser—staunchly upheld the “scientificity” of Marxism, Goldmann was acutely aware that Marxism was in crisis—indeed, radical crisis—and would have to reinvent itself radically if it were to survive. He had been an anti-Stalinist since his youth in Romania and through the 1960s had argued for a market socialism. Concurrently, he contested the structuralist, scientific, and antihumanist theorizing infecting French left-wing circles in that tumultuous decade. Had he lived into

the 1970s, he would undoubtedly have had little patience with post-modernism. In fact, the popularity of these trends in the Left Bank was one reason why Goldmann's own name and work were eclipsed—despite his eleven books and the acclaim of thinkers as diverse as Alasdair MacIntyre, who declared him “the finest and most intelligent Marxist of the age,” and Jean Piaget, who characterized him as “a creator of ideas as one rarely meets in a lifetime” and “the inventor of a new form of symbolic thought.”³ Surveying the efflorescence of cultural theories and declamations about “texts” in recent years, it is difficult to find works with the persuasive force, originality, and depth of Goldmann's chef d'oeuvre, *The Hidden God*, which combined serious scholarship with theory.

To uphold, as Goldmann did in 1969, that “new meaning” had to be sought for basic terms of political and intellectual vocabulary was a sign of doubt and confidence. A dialectic of doubt and confidence characterizes Goldmann's writings as a whole, beginning with his early writings. This was a Marxist who did not portray his aspirations for humanity's future as an inexorable unfolding of history's laws, but as a wager akin to Pascal's in God. “Risk,” he wrote in *The Hidden God*, “possibility of failure, hope of success, and the synthesis of the three in a faith which is a wager are the essential constituent elements of the human condition.”⁴

Few theories have had the historical impact of Marxism, and few have engendered comparable anticipations of human emancipation. Few have seen as much brutality committed in their name. The twentieth century, according to Marx's prognoses, should have issued in a free and classless society in which, as *The Communist Manifesto* proposed, the condition for the liberation of one would be that for all. Instead, the twentieth century belonged to Hitler and Stalin, to world war and cold war. Little wonder Goldmann was preoccupied with tragedy, although denying that his own thought was tragic. Still, as Goldmann himself often argued, an oeuvre takes on an objective meaning beyond its author's intentions.

This was one reason why Goldmann inveighed against the use of biography to unlock texts. His own method, which he eventually classified as “genetic structuralism,” synthesized concepts drawn from two chief sources. The first was the Marxism of Georg Lukács. Ultimately no single book affected Goldmann as much as this Hungarian philosopher's tour de force of 1923, *History and Class Consciousness*. In it Lukács contended that knowledge and being would merge on the morrow in working-class consciousness and consequently in universal proletarian revolution. The second source was the “genetic epistemol-

ogy" of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, in particular, his contention that the basis of human knowledge was the genesis of "totalities" he called "mental structures." From Lukács's theory of class consciousness and Piaget's epistemology Goldmann fashioned his own idea of the "transindividual subject" of cultural and historical action. This subject was composed of an ensemble of individuals, whose common "mental structures" came about as a consequence of their genesis within a common sociohistorical background. The true subjects of cultural creation or historical action were transindividual, according to Goldmann. The achievement of great authors—Pascal and Racine, for example—lay in the coherent elaboration in their works of the worldview implicit in the mental structures of a social group. Discerning that worldview and the mental structures within it allows us to delineate the meaning of the writings of Pascal or Racine beyond their immediate, individual intentions.

In *The Hidden God*, this approach proved remarkably fertile. I shall, in the course of this study of Goldmann, often make use of his methodological insights. However, I will also ask the type of question he preferred to make secondary—in this case, how did Lucien Goldmann become Lucien Goldmann? Hence I begin with biography, presenting Goldmann's life until his academic career began in Paris after World War II.⁵ It is, I think, intrinsically interesting as the story of the genesis of an intellectual. It will also tell us a good deal about his preoccupations with Marxism and tragedy. Still, Goldmann would be correct in contending that it does not tell the entire story—it cannot, in his terminology, fully understand and explain his work. For if Goldmann insisted that he was a dialectician studying tragedy and not a tragic thinker, and if we apply to him his own suggestion that the meaning of an author's work transcends his intentions, then we will see that Goldmann's work, while championing Marxism, coherently and acutely elucidates, embodies, and elaborates the contradictions of Marxism and its adherents—contradictions between Marxism's fecundity and its fate, between its emancipatory content and the repressive forms that were deployed in its name. Goldmann's work is structured by a dialectic of tragedy and hope, and he was a tragic dialectician.

To miss this dialectic of tragedy and hope is to miss Goldmann. Consider the caricature drawn of him by Allen Bloom. "Lucien Goldmann," he wrote, "told me a few months before his death that he was privileged to have lived to see his nine-year-old son throw a rock through a store window in the Paris of '68. His studies of Racine and Pascal culminated in this. *Humanitas rediuvivas!*"⁶ Bloom's assumption, apparently, was that Goldmann's study of the tragic vision in seven-

teenth-century France ought to have led to resignation or ought to have made a neoconservative of him. This assumption is possible only by misconceiving the relation between politics and scholarship in Goldmann's work. His study of great figures of Western civilization, such as Pascal, whom he called the first modern dialectician, did not aim to save Western culture from the Left on behalf of resignation or an elite studying classics. To the contrary. Irving Howe once wrote that André Malraux achieved depth of vision in *Man's Fate* because he acknowledged the authority of defeat.⁷ Similarly, Goldmann recognized the authority of tragedy, but while upholding human possibilities. He was a relentless humanist. For Goldmann, the project of the Left was not the negation of Western civilization, but its fulfillment, and he maintained that Marxist humanism represented the culmination of what was best in the European heritage. His fear was that capitalism would savage that heritage and cut it short. Marcuse wrote of Goldmann's "deep apprehension lest Western society destroy all that was dear to him," his fear that literature, art, and all of humanity's creations and creative potentials would be vanquished by adaptation to a world that valued consumption rather than culture and community.⁸ The authority of tragedy demanded not a closed mind and resignation, but openness to human possibilities.

It is remarkable that from a viewpoint opposite to that of Bloom, Edward Said is guilty of the same type of misconstruing—that is, missing the dialectic of tragedy and hope that structured Goldmann's thought. In an essay on Lukács and Goldmann entitled "Travelling Theory," Said proposes that "Goldmann's adaptation of Lukács removes from theory its insurrectionary role." Said proposes that in the work of Goldmann, a "politically committed scholar," an "awareness of class or group consciousness is first of all a scholarly imperative, and then—in the works of highly privileged writers—the expression of a tragically limited social situation." In contrast, the revolutionary class consciousness ascribed by Lukács, the "directly involved militant," to the proletariat, was itself "an insurgent against the capitalist order."⁹

But between *History and Class Consciousness*, written in the aftermath of Bolshevism's triumph, and *The Hidden God*, which was presented originally as a *doctorat d'état* at the Sorbonne in 1956, came Stalin and Hitler instead of world proletarian revolution—all of which is absent in Said's interpretation. The absence is glaring, for it is only by ignoring the intervening history that Said can oppose Lukács, the "directly involved militant," to Goldmann, the "politically committed scholar." He thereby misses the vital difference: that between a Marxist intellectual who believes in 1923 that the working class is about to become the

“identical subject-object of history” and a Marxist intellectual who, after Stalin and Hitler, is consumed by the authority of tragedy—yet who still insists on hope, insists that his Marxist humanism “still moves.” The hidden god may have become the hidden class, but Goldmann’s Pascal is a man of paradox, poised between tragedy and the dialectic. Echoing Lukács’s early essay on “The Metaphysics of Tragedy,” Goldmann presented tragic man as a being in the world but not of it, since real value lay in the transcendent, in a *Deus absconditus*. Since the deity is hidden, this world becomes the sole reality that humans face. Pascal, tragic thinker and harbinger of the dialectic, says both yes and no to this world. And he wagers. So, too, Lucien Goldmann, but not quite: he insisted on the yes though haunted by the no. He was a dialectician and proponent of—wagerer on—human “hope” and “possibility” who equally recognized the authority of tragedy in the human condition.

When Goldmann read Lukács seriously for the first time, in Switzerland in the early 1940s, the two texts that made a particularly profound impression on him were “The Metaphysics of Tragedy” and *History and Class Consciousness*. The first, a pre-Marxist work, envisaged an unbridgeable gap between authentic life and everyday existence, in which everything is “an anarchy of light and dark” and “nothing is ever completely fulfilled.”¹⁰ *History and Class Consciousness*, which re-injected vigorously classical German philosophy and dialectical categories into Marxism with vigor, contained a brilliant critique of bourgeois social science and philosophy on one hand, and anticipated the imminent revolutionary transformation of the totality of human reality on the other.

It is hardly surprising that both these works—one focused on tragedy, one suffused with apocalyptic utopianism—intrigued him so. Goldmann was then a refugee, and Europe was engulfed in world war. Born in Bucharest in 1913, his youth was spent in difficult straits in the Moldavian town of Botoșani. After spending the academic year 1930–1931 in Vienna, where he studied with the Austro-Marxist philosopher and sociologist Max Adler, Goldmann entered law school in Bucharest. The Romanian Right was then ascendent and anti-Semitism was fierce. Goldmann was active in—and eventually in conflict with—communist student circles. The source of tension was what might be called his premature anti-Stalinism. He received his degree but emigrated to Paris, where he lived until fleeing the Nazis, first to Toulouse and then to Switzerland. There, he befriended Piaget and immersed himself in Lukács, while becoming increasingly interested in Pascal and Racine and writing a doctoral thesis on Kant. The war’s end

brought him back to Paris, where he affiliated with the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and obtained French citizenship, though with some difficulty. He was apparently rejected more than once, and even after he was naturalized, he harbored the fear that, somehow, he might be sent back to Romania, where his former communist comrades had come to power. As one consequence, he was cautious about writing directly about political matters for most of the 1950s.¹¹

In 1952 Goldmann published *The Human Sciences and Philosophy*, a withering critique of mainstream methodology in the human sciences and the first full-length exposition of his emerging methodological ideas. Their fullest elaboration and application came in his study of Pascal and Racine three years later, *The Hidden God*. This *doctorat d'état* was presented for a six-hour public defense at the Sorbonne in February 1956. As reported in *Le Monde*, at its end, an admiring though wry member of the jury, Jean Piaget, addressed the candidate: "Monsieur Goldmann, you know, no doubt, that there are interesting but false theories. There are true theories which contribute little or nothing. Yours is very interesting—perhaps it is true." As described in the weekly *L'Express*, the panel, composed of especially eminent scholars—in addition to Piaget, Jean Wahl, Henri Gouhier, Maurice de Gandillac, and Octave Nadel—was thoroughly seduced by Goldmann's unorthodox interpretation, except for Nadel. The latter characterized Goldmann as an electrician who deformed a chateau while trying to illuminate it.¹²

The Hidden God provoked rage from traditional and conservative interpreters of Pascal and Racine. Goldmann's suggestion that Pascal was a precursor of Marx was particularly irksome to some: how could a foreigner—a Marxist!—trespass on sanctified French terrain, and with such conclusions? Equally annoyed were the "orthodox" Marxists of *La Nouvelle Critique*. As two of his students, Sami Naïr and Michel Löwy, later commented, for Communist Party intellectuals, Goldmann was a non-Party spoilsport.¹³ Despite—or perhaps because of—these accusations of heresy, *The Hidden God* placed Goldmann on the French intellectual map. Yet while he eventually attained secure academic status, he always remained something of an outsider and few of his leading students were French.

In the ensuing years, Goldmann played an active and prominent role in French and European intellectual life, writing on a wide array of subjects for journals of the non-Communist Left, such as *Les Temps modernes* and *Arguments*, and engaging intellectuals across the continent. "His flowing white locks," Leszek Kolakowski recalled, "and bear-like silhouette were familiar to participants in innumerable con-

gresses and humanistic symposia at which in a bass voice and passionate somewhat aggressive tones, he would expatiate time and again on the principles of genetic structuralism as exemplified particularly in Pascal and Racine."

Goldmann appears as "Fabien Edelman" in *The Samurai*, Julia Kristeva's roman à clef about French intellectuals in the 1960s: "Graying, potbellied, smiling, with his shirt open and of course no tie, he addressed everyone by the familiar *tu* and was always ripping up existentialism and lauding dialectical reason (as overhauled by Pascal), alienation, and the New Novel."¹⁴ (Goldmann was Kristeva's doctoral adviser upon her arrival in Paris from Bulgaria). Witold Gombrowicz, in his diary for 1965, expressed almost comic fury after an encounter with Goldmann. The latter pressed his own interpretation of Gombrowicz's play *The Marriage* against that of the playwright: "Goldmann, professor, critic, broad-shouldered Marxist, decreed that I did not know, that he knew better! Rabid Marxist imperialism! They use that doctrine to invade people! Goldmann, armed with Marxism, was the subject—I, deprived of Marxism, was the object."¹⁵

In 1959, Goldmann became a directeur d'études and chair of the section on the sociology of literature at the École des Hautes Études. He held this position until his death, although in the early 1960s he also founded the Center for the Sociology of Literature at the Free University of Brussels. While he continued his cultural writings, his politics became increasingly explicit. The axis of Goldmann's politics was the realization of the individual in "the authentic human community." The latter he often identified with "totality." In his first book, Goldmann had presented Kant as a thinker in quest of a totality he took to be unattainable. Lukács's contribution in *History and Class Consciousness*, Goldmann later contended repeatedly, was in returning the Hegelian—and therefore a historical—concept of totality to the center of Marxism. For Lukács, "totality" was the perspective of the proletariat, the universal class, which in understanding its own interests understood thereby humanity's interests, which in revolutionizing itself revolutionized the world. For Goldmann, as for Lukács, "totality" was a matter of both method and aspiration. Marxism, by thinking historically, dialectically, and in terms of transindividual actors, a "we," provided the possibility to actualize "totality," something impossible for Kant who could not go beyond the individual.

While the young Goldmann, like Lukács, believed that the proletariat was the historical guarantor of his wager, by the late 1950s this was no longer the case. Goldmann still posited the "objective possibility" of socialism, but he had concluded that it was no longer plausible to envision the traditional working class as the revolutionary agent—the

transindividual subject—that would transform history as Marxism had conceived it. Nor, of course, would Communist parties, which, according to Leninism, ought to have rendered explicit and embodied the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness much as, on the cultural level, Pascal and Racine's work did for the tragic consciousness of the *noblesse de robe* (legal nobility) in Goldmann's interpretation of seventeenth-century France. (Goldmann's personal experiences, and not only his theoretical conclusions, could only have made him skeptical of Communist parties. The behavior of French Communists in 1968, when Goldmann supported the worker-student revolt, probably reminded him of his unhappy encounter with their Romanian counterparts when he was a youth in Bucharest in the 1930s).

While the question of class was always important for Goldmann, unlike Lukács he almost always formulated his politics as the quest for "the authentic human community." This "totality" was not one into which the individual or the particular vanished; the whole required the parts no less than the parts required the whole. Again unlike Lukács, he argued that liberal values, such as individual freedom, tolerance, and equality before the law were historical products of the emergence of market societies and that however much socialism sought—and ought—to negate capitalism, it could not negate these principles, save at its peril. Consequently, he came to conceive "the authentic human community" as a decentralized market socialism based on *autogestion*, workers's self-management. In the early 1960s he embraced the quasi-syndicalist notion of revolutionary-reformism, formulated by such theorists as Serge Mallet and André Gorz. They argued that a "new working class" had been created as advanced "organized" capitalism displaced liberal capitalism. This metamorphosis had engendered and required "new middle strata" of professionals and technicians, who would, it was proposed, lead the traditional working class in a struggle for the qualitative transformation of the workplace, in the direction of democracy and self-management. "*Autogestion*" was one of the watchwords of the "Events" of May 1968 in Paris, and the French New Left in general; Goldmann embraced it, as did the *soixante-huitards*, although not uncritically.

Throughout the 1960s, especially between 1968 and 1970, Goldmann often sounded like a man in search of a transindividual subject to win his wager. He passed from Europe's intellectual world as the 1960s did, succumbing in October 1970 to hepatitis complicated by internal hemorrhaging. In his writings, Goldmann proposed that transindividual mental structures and not biography should be the locus of research; likewise, Goldmann disregarded the biographical in himself, as his friend and rival Henri Lefebvre observed. Goldmann was neglect-

ful of his own health, usually obese, often ill: his premature death at age fifty-seven corresponded, in a way, with his oeuvre.¹⁶ Six volumes of his shorter works and essays, two of which he was laboring on when he died, have been published since.

Lucien Goldmann's work never received its due. While discussions of him appear in various histories of Western Marxism and several valuable, short books on him appeared in French, German, and Italian in the early 1970s, this is the first attempt to capture his work as a whole rather than in an introductory manner. In one way or another, all of Goldmann's writings are deeply engaged with previous philosophical controversies concerning method in the human sciences. For this reason, the biographical chapters in this book are followed by two chapters analyzing in some detail the debates preceding him. Goldmann's work cannot be understood or appreciated fully apart from them. Thereafter I treat, in consecutive chapters, Goldmann's theories themselves, their various applications, their engagement with the French intellectual world of his day, and finally Goldmann's politics. Goldmann tended to be a hermeneutic thinker, that is, he tended to theorize through interpreting the works of others. For this reason I have sought, throughout this book, to situate Goldmann in relation to the writers to whom he was responding or, more specifically, in relation to their arguments.

There is a decided slant toward philosophy in these pages. This is because Goldmann's principal achievement was, in my view, as a philosopher of the human sciences, and his theory of them is embedded in all his literary studies and political pronouncements. He insisted on the partial identity of subject and object and his writings on method cannot be artificially separated from the object of his studies.

If the subject is always within the object, if facts and values cannot be simplistically separated and opposed to each other, then a scholar ought not to feign a false and unattainable objectivity, argued Goldmann. Rather, the scholar's perspective should be declared openly in order to facilitate criticism of his or her work. It is a point with which I concur; and I readily declare my sympathies with his endeavor, although, again, it will be evident that I intentionally violate several of his precepts in the ensuing pages. *Eppur si muove?* It is unpopular nowadays—even considered futile by some—to ask this question of the work of a socialist humanist, however anti-Stalinist, unorthodox, and inventive. Goldmann's work, or at least my analysis of it, will, I trust, respond for itself.

Part One _____

GENESIS

1

A Youth in Romania

LUCIEN GOLDMANN SPOKE RARELY of his origins. Perhaps this was for personal reasons, and perhaps it was due to his own methodological strictures against biography. In any event, records of his youth are few. Indeed, they are so sparse that details must be presented with constant caveats. He did leave an important clue, however, in a passing remark he made in 1959, a quarter of a century after quitting Romania for France, in a commentary on Marc Chagall's paintings. The milieu of Chagall's adolescence, said Goldmann, was similar to that of his own.¹

He did not elaborate. Instead, he focused on how the "mental structures" generated during Chagall's youth in the Jewish community of Vitebsk (Belorussia), at the turn of the century, found expression in his paintings. Among these structures were the separation of urban from rural existence, and especially the estrangement of Jews from peasant life. Chagall pursued an artist's career—a path taken by relatively few eastern European Jews, as Goldmann noted. This choice indicated an unease in the painter, a sense that for him the Jewish world was "problematic." In this, he was like Racine, the Jansenist turned playwright, whose tragic vision absorbed much of Goldmann's intellectual energies in the 1950s. Having quit the Jansenist world "for the 'world' at large," Racine still saw the latter "in the very categories" of the former.²

The same may be said, at least in part, of Goldmann, an eastern European Jew who, like Chagall, eventually made France his home. Unlike Chagall, Goldmann pursued a career well-populated by Jews—that of an intellectual. However, the Jewish and Romanian worlds from which he came were problematic for him. (One day, the Marxism he avidly embraced within them both would be problematic for him too). Isaac Deutscher's description of the "non-Jewish Jew" suited Goldmann well; he dwelled "on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and natural cultures"; he was "born and brought up on the borderlines of various epochs"; his "mind matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other."³

Indeed, here was a Romanian Jew who, immersed in German philosophy, sought to synthesize the Marxism of a Hungarian (Lukács)

with the epistemological theories of a Swiss (Piaget) in a theory of culture that he applied to Pascal, Racine, and Jansenism in seventeenth-century France. Did not Novalis declare—in an aphorism prominently quoted by Lukács at the beginning of his *Theory of the Novel*—that “[p]hilosophy is really homesickness; it is the urge to be at home everywhere”? But the effort to be at home everywhere runs the risk of being at home nowhere. Goldmann’s thought was structured by a dialectical tension between his restless quest for “authentic human community” and his powerful obsession with the concept of tragedy. He insisted on the possibility of the former while recognizing the authority of the latter. He was a dialectician of tragic hope. To discern the sociohistorical genesis of this dialectic, we turn to Romania at the turn of the twentieth century.

I

Shortly before World War I, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, “Romania’s Marx” according to Karl Kautsky, described the country as “a monstrous mingling of old and new,” in which bourgeois legal structures were superimposed on a largely peasant, precapitalist society.⁴ Lucien Goldmann was born Sergiu-Lucian Goldmann on Kiseleff Street in Bucharest at 8 P.M. on June 20, 1913, and spent his youth in the town of Botoșani, in the northeastern province of Moldavia. He later returned to the national capital to attend university. In the interim, Lucian, as his name was spelled in Romanian, was exposed to all that troubled a profoundly troubled country. Romania was an overpopulated land, rife with conflict between town and country. Rural poverty was extensive and brutal. The peasantry, which composed some 78 percent of the population and was politically disenfranchised until after World War I, periodically expressed its grievances violently. Industrial development was slow, although postwar land reforms fueled a small commercial class and hurried a decline of the aristocracy. As of 1930 only 10 percent of the population could be classified as proletarians.

Romanian society was characterized by an essential contradiction, argued Gherea in his book *Neoserfdom* (1910), a minor classic of Marxist literature on underdevelopment. In the aftermath of the various European revolutions of 1848, liberal ideas and institutions had been fostered in Romania, although without any corresponding social and economic development. The 1866 constitution gave joint legislative responsibility to the king and parliament, but left the land’s feudal struc-

ture in place. Politics was dominated by the Liberal and Conservative parties. There was, in brief, a bourgeois superstructure with a feudal base—in Gherea's words, a "gap between formality and actual reality."⁵ Leon Trotsky, who befriended Gherea when he came to Bucharest to report on the Balkan Wars for a Russian journal in the summer of Goldmann's birth, wrote: "The fundamental question of Romanian social development, the agrarian question, cannot . . . be solved from within parties in which the tone is set by serf-owning landlords dressed in European liberal clothes."⁶

Nationality problems plagued the kingdom as well. Until 1914, ethnic Romanians comprised most of the population. World War I doubled the country's territories, however, resulting in an enlarged presence of national minorities. By the time of the 1930 census, ethnic Romanians comprised 72 percent of the population (some 13 million people); 8 percent were Hungarians (1.4 million people), 4 percent were Germans (0.7 million people), and 4 percent were Jews (0.7 million people).⁷ In these circumstances, increasing numbers of ethnic Romanians found an outlet for their frustrations in a fierce racial nationalism. Chauvinist agitation, combined with the neglect of rural grievances by relatively moderate but corrupt governments in the 1920s, contributed to the rise of peasant parties on one hand, and to movements that were protofascist, antileftist, antidemocratic, and anti-Semitic, on the other (the most notorious was the Iron Guard). A. C. Cuza, the "apostle" of Romanian anti-Semitism, was dean of the law faculty at the University of Jassy, not far from Botoșani.⁸ For the Romanian Right, the peasant embodied the nation; Jews, who were not legally emancipated until 1919, were viewed as aliens and competitors, particularly in the universities, the seedbed of Romanian fascism in the 1920s. Goldmann's teenage years were in a world of relentless anti-Semitism. There were, as one scholar put it, "two antipodes of Romanian social, ethnic and cultural symbolism, the Jew and the peasant." Nationalist students demanded anti-Jewish quotas, and bitterly complained of Jewish overrepresentation in professional schools.⁹

A counterforce, though modest, came from the Left. Romanian social democracy was founded in the 1890s, but socialist ideas established a (minor) presence in the 1870s and 1880s as exiled Russian and Bulgarian revolutionaries passed through the country. In 1880, Gherea, a Ukrainian Jew born Solomon Katz, published the first Romanian-language socialist pamphlet, "An Open Letter to Premier I. Brătianu by Caius Gracchus."¹⁰ Nineteenth-century Romanian socialists were influenced not only by Russian but also by western European—especially French and German—socialist thinking.

It was mostly intellectuals who were drawn to Marxist ideas; there was no social base for a proletarian movement in this agrarian land. Populists, most famously Constantin Stere, branded social democracy an "exotic plant." Certainly, such suggestions were reinforced by the central roles within social democracy of first Gherea and then Christian Rakovsky, an ethnic Bulgarian who would later be an ally of Trotsky and a victim of Stalin's purges. Romanian rightists maintained that left-wing ideas were "foreign" and often identified Jewry with Bolshevism. Undoubtedly, they felt their views confirmed by the large number of young Jews who rallied to the Left, which consistently denounced anti-Semitism.¹¹

The Romanian Social Democratic Labor party was established in 1893 under Gherea's leadership and was oriented toward the mainstream of European Marxism. Gherea believed that socialism could be born only after capitalist development displaced feudalism; it was capitalism, therefore, that was on the Romanian agenda—the existing bourgeois superstructural forms had to be given a capitalist content. The party survived only until 1900, when a bloc of leading members moved to the Right.¹² It was reconstituted a decade later; consequently, its status was tenuous when Romanian communism emerged from splits in its ranks after the Russian Revolution. (Gherea died in 1920.)

The impact of the Bolshevik and Hungarian revolutions on the Romanian Left was profound. In the postwar period, virtually every hue of Marxism could be found within the kingdom's borders, albeit each with few followers. Some writings by Lenin and Trotsky were issued in 1918 by a "Romanian Revolutionary Communist Committee," and in the ensuing decade Romanian communists published materials in numerous languages, including Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, German, and Yiddish.¹³ The progress of Romanian communism was, however, quite slow. The Romanian Communist Party (RCP) was founded in 1921 and banned three years later. It faced severe repression on one hand, and competition from Social Democrats for support within the small working class, on the other. The RCP was also hampered by factionalism and purges, born of meddling by the Comintern. It is estimated that its membership dropped from two thousand in 1922 to twelve hundred in 1931.¹⁴ In that year, at its fifth congress (held in Moscow), it came firmly under Comintern dominion.

The RCP, like the Social Democrats, advocated a proletarian ideology in a precapitalist society. Its organizing efforts centered on three major groups: workers, peasants, and national minorities. It was a strong proponent of minority rights and recruited many Jews, especially young intellectuals, into its ranks. There was even a Yiddish-speaking Organization of Communist Jews.¹⁵ Alexandru Dobro-

geanu-Gherea, Constantin's son, was among the Jews who achieved prominence in the new party at this time, along with the future foreign minister Ana Pauker (Rabinovici) and her husband, Marcel. Among its supporters was a young Botoșani Jew named Lucian Goldmann.

II

"From a sociological point of view, the town in which I spent my youth probably differs little from many other Moldavian towns," reads an unpublished autobiographical fragment Goldmann sketched in 1956. He recalled a small city, not much industrialized, its mill having been destroyed by fire, its sugar works providing two to three months of seasonal employment each year—"one of the principal events in [Botoșani's] social life." It was a world Chagall might have painted:

Around the town was an extensive agricultural range composed partly of large and medium sized landed estates [*exploitations*] whose owners lived in the city, and partly of a small scale peasantry and agricultural workers. The sale of agricultural products from all these lands naturally constituted the principal source of revenue for the town's inhabitants. Within it there were two communities which were numerically almost equal: Jews and Christians. The former were concentrated in crafts and commerce. Some were quite rich [but] the majority was extremely poor. [Christians] occupied all the public positions in the civil and military bureaucracy, and also [were the] manual workers and menial laborers.¹⁶

Botoșani was a crossroads and the site of crosscurrents. It was the capital of Botoșani district, a market town for agricultural produce and a commercial junction for goods passing to and from Austria and Russia. The municipality had a lively civic and cultural life, with a good theater and numerous publishing houses and journals. The region as a whole was vibrant in Romanian cultural history. The national poet, Mihai Eminescu, was born near Botoșani in 1850, and the nationalist historian Nicolae Iorga was born in the town in 1871, and attended the same *liceu* (academic high school) in which Goldmann would later be enrolled.

Jews first came to Botoșani in 1540, and the city's Jewish community became one of the most important in Moldavia, the second largest in the province until the late nineteenth century. In 1899 Jews numbered some 16,817 in the town, making up 51.8 percent of its population, including 75 percent of its merchants and about 68 percent of its artisans. In 1930—the year in which Goldmann left—some 11,840 Jews

lived in Botoșani, composing approximately 36.6 percent of the inhabitants.¹⁷ There were numerous Jewish houses of worship, and the town's rabbi, Ezra Zuckerman, had an excellent library of Judaica. In tumultuous times, Moldavia's Jews, town dwellers with highly visible middleman roles in a predominantly rural economy, were easy and frequent scapegoats, entrapped between estate owners and peasants. There were anti-Jewish riots in Botoșani in 1870, and Jews there, and throughout Moldavia, were particularly victimized during the peasant uprising of 1907. "It was directed at first against Jewish tenants in northern Moldavia," Rakovsky wrote, "and was prompted by the antisemitic outbursts of Romanian liberals and nationalists. After plundering the Jews's farmsteads, however, the peasants turned on the Romanian tenants and then the landlords. . . . The whole country, that is all the villages, was engulfed in the flames of the rising."¹⁸

This "jacquerie," which occurred just six years before Goldmann's birth, was especially traumatic for the Jewish inhabitants of Botoșani city, for the national upheaval began in their province. Peasants rampaged through the town center; local Old Believers (Russian Orthodox schismatics) plundered Jewish stores; the populist newspaper *Moldava de Sus* (Northern Moldavia) called upon "all true Romanians" to join the struggle "to save our ancestral land and our race from the plague and infernal plans of the Yids."¹⁹ If Gherea, who wrote *Neoserfdom* in the aftermath of these events, identified the contradiction between a bourgeois superstructure and a feudal base as Romania's essential structural quandary, one could add that the Jews were in the pith of the contradiction, particularly as commercialization of Romania's agriculture began in the late nineteenth century.

Jews had no political rights and were forbidden to own rural land. (This changed only when citizenship was officially conferred after World War I.) They were, however, permitted to be *arendași*, managers of the estates of the large landlords. Among their tasks was the subletting of small tracts to individual peasants. "While serving as a tool of feudal exploitation," wrote Trotsky, "the rightless Jew has at the same time to serve as the lightning-conductor for the wrath of the exploited." Romania's ruling strata, he observed, not only needed Jews as intermediaries between landlords and peasants, they needed hatred of Jews.²⁰

In the late nineteenth century, the number of Jewish *arendași* grew, and many were Austrian in origin. Botoșani district had the highest percentage of cultivable land (52 percent) leased to *arendași*, and the second-highest percentage (28 percent) of land let to Jewish *arendași* in particular.²¹ However, unlike their non-Jewish counterparts, these Jewish managers could never hope to purchase the tracts they supervised;

their status was that of permanent middlemen with no options outside of utilizing their positions to their best, if limited, advantage. In practice, this often meant extracting the highest rent possible. At the turn of the century, these circumstances, combined with often bitter competition among both Jewish and non-Jewish *arendași*, intensified resentments towards Jews in general.

The *arendași* composed a social stratum doomed by historical developments—not unlike the noblesse de robe of seventeenth-century France, who would one day preoccupy Goldmann. A chief concern of Romanian peasants was to obtain easier conditions for agricultural leases.²² Conservative populism, articulated in particular by Vasile Kogalniceanu, agitated on behalf of the small peasants and against the *arendași*—though not against the landlords. The chief demand was that land be rented directly by landlords to peasants, and not through the *arendași*. Similarly, the *arendași* were the targets of the Village Cooperative movement, which called for rents to be paid directly to landlords. The Liberal party, advocate of a select program of industrialization, also attacked the *arendași*, and the Conservatives, who were beholden to the big landowners, preferred peasant ire to be deflected from them toward the *arendași*.²³ Consequently, when the revolt broke out, the Jewish *arendași* were the first quarry, although the violence soon expanded beyond them. According to the report of Ilie Vasescu, prefect of Botoșani province,

[T]he inhabitants . . . are demanding the expulsion of the Jewish *arendași* from the estates. On the pretext that they have not been getting what they wanted, armed bands of peasants have been organized who devastate and destroy everything and steal everything they find. . . . They take over the town halls and expel the communal authorities. It is therefore a complete revolution.²⁴

Bucharest eventually suppressed the uprising.

Reforms enacted after World War I divided estates to the benefit of small landlords and peasants, redistributing some four million hectares.²⁵ The day of the Jewish *arendași*, Moldavia's quintessential rural middleman, was over, although anti-Semitism was not. During the war itself, when Goldmann was a child in Botoșani, the retreating Romanian army brutalized Jews in the town and throughout Moldavia and Wallachia. "The Jew is without any protection, [is] beyond the law" wrote an observer shortly afterwards.²⁶

In short, Goldmann passed his childhood in a period of trauma, and his youth at a time of battling ideologies and prejudices. His parents were relatively prosperous and secular Jews. They rarely went to synagogue although "Gică," as Lucian was affectionately known, received

some religious education, was taught some Hebrew, and had a Bar Mitzvah.²⁷ His father was in the legal profession and was twenty-nine when his only son was born. Joseph Goldmann died of chronic syphilis seven years later, leaving his wife Serafina (née Bernbaum) destitute. She was twenty-four when she gave birth, and came of Polish-Viennese background. Her son's file at the University of Bucharest contains an official certificate of her indigence and numerous pleas for aid by him to the dean.²⁸

What his mother could not give to him financially, she gave culturally. "She was a hard woman and that was decisive for his development, along with his father's death," according to an acquaintance. "She may have been the most cultivated woman in the city, having been imbued with a profound literary culture. Their home was filled with books and languages—it was impregnated with intellectual life. This was the milk she gave him."²⁹ Nonetheless, the relation between mother and child seems to have been difficult. After Goldmann quit Romania in the 1930s, he had only occasional contact with her. She spent World War II in hiding, and remained in Botoșani until Goldmann arranged for her to come to Paris in the 1960s. She died not long before the death of her son.³⁰

Goldmann received his secondary education at the August Treboniu Laurian academic high school, which was famed as one of the finest in the country. Founded in 1859, the Laurian became a liceu (roughly equivalent to a French lycée) in 1889, the first in northern Moldavia. It was known for its French teachers. Goldmann spoke Romanian, Yiddish, and German from his early years; the last seems to have been his native tongue.

The student body at the Laurian was mixed. Of 521 pupils in the school year 1927–1928, 162 were Jewish (31.1 percent), and 359 were Christian (68.9 percent). This represented an exceptional situation; before citizenship was granted to them, Jews were barred from state primary schools, and secondary schools opened their doors infrequently. Goldmann was an undistinguished student. He received his baccalaureate in August 1930, tenth in a class of thirty-nine, passing exams in Romanian, Latin, French, geography, natural sciences, natural history, and civics. Beyond schoolwork, however, he developed a passion for poetry, especially that of Baudelaire, Heine, and Rilke, and avidly followed literary movements abroad. He was, according to a schoolmate, "a teenager full of intellectual zeal." When this schoolmate subscribed to Henri Barbusse's journal, *Monde*, Goldmann habitually came to borrow it as soon as it arrived from Paris.³¹

Goldmann's political education began in 1927, when he became a member of the Botoșani chapter of Ha-Shomer ha-Tsair (the Young

Guard), a Zionist socialist youth movement. His mother enrolled him primarily for social reasons. At age fourteen, Lucian was fatherless, had a physical deformity—he was hunchbacked and rowed regularly on a nearby lake in the hope that muscles would disguise this fact—and was a lonely youth with few friends. In Ha-Shomer ha-Tsair he discovered a “home” in “a community of intellectual youth,” in the words of David Zoller, the former head of his chapter.³² Goldmann was an active and then a leading member for three years.

Ha-Shomer ha-Tsair was born in pre-World War I Galicia as an apolitical youth organization. Its founders were attracted to the romanticism then current in German and Polish youth movements and were also influenced by Viennese intellectual trends. Members tended to be from middle-class backgrounds, like Goldmann’s, and many young Jews in Goldmann’s liceu passed through its ranks. In it they were intensely educated to a vision of “youth community” in which the individual, the “I,” would be fulfilled in a “We.” Western materialism was shunned, lofty values embraced, and the “middleman” status of many diaspora Jews rejected as a source of vulnerability and spiritual deprivation. (Surely, the fate of the *arendăși* made this poignant for Botoșani youth.) “Without being religious,” comments a historian, “they were imbued with a religious spirit in the sense of a moral revivalism and inner faith.”³³ (Guards) engaged in a youthful pursuit of moral perfection, turning to eclectic sources for inspiration. Their readings ranged from the Prophets, the Essenes, and the Hasidim to the New Testament, Martin Buber, and Gustav Landauer. They were particularly stirred by the romantic anticapitalism of Gustav Wyneken, the ideologue of the German Free Youth Movement, who summoned disciples to create egalitarian and pacifist youth communities based on ethical absolutism and hostility to all things bourgeois.³⁴

By the mid-1920s many Shomrim sought “self-realization” as “pioneers” in communal farms (*kibbutzim*) in Palestine. Local chapters in the diaspora, including Goldmann’s, trained members in agriculture with this in mind. In late 1925 a severe economic crisis engulfed Palestine and radicalized Ha-Shomer ha-Tsair there. The Palestinian chapter proceeded to affix Marxism to its ideology of “individual-in-community,” and members turned anxiously to the writings of Lenin, Kautsky, and Max Adler for intellectual guidance.³⁵ A similar turn followed in diaspora chapters during 1926–1928, precisely when Goldmann joined. The ideology that emerged was a *mélange* of Zionism, Marxism, romantic anticapitalism, secular religiosity, and communitarianism.³⁶ This was the context in which Goldmann first studied Marxism. His chapter “imbued” its recruits with “humanism,” according to Zoller: “We instilled in them a vision of the world.” Goldmann