



# The Enemies

*Die Feinde*  
*A Defence of Eternity*

Jaromír Hladík

CLEMENTINIUM EDITIONS

*Clem*

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*Die Feinde*

*A Defence of Eternity*

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*In the same Bibliotheca Hladikiana :*

*Sefer Yetzirah — The Book of Creation*  
*Hermann Barsdorf, Berlin, 1928.*

*A Defence of Eternity, Volume One.*

*A History of the Conceptions of Eternity.*  
*Prague, 1928.*

*A Defence of Eternity, Volume Two.*

*A Critique of Linear Time.*

*Prague, 1929.*

*The Jewish Sources of Bohme.*

*Prague, 1934.*

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*A Defence of Eternity*

Jaromír Hladík

*(Hradčany, Prague, 1939)*

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*Bibliotheca Hladikiana,*  
*under the direction of W. D. F.*

*The Enemies (Die Feinde)*, by Jaromír Hladík. Edition established from the German notebook known as the “Hradčany manuscript,” preserved in the *Národní archiv*, fonds Hladík, shelfmark H-1939/1, and collated with the winter-1939 copy.

Composition: L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X, EB Garamond.

Format: 105 mm × 170 mm (Clementinium Collection).

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## INTRODUCTION

*"I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed"*

*In Borges's tale The Secret Miracle, the play The Enemies is at once real and non-existent: it occupies no library shelf, yet it structures the consciousness of Jaromír Hladík, a Jewish writer in Prague in March 1939. Condemned to death by the Nazis, Hladík is granted a "secret year" in the frozen time before his execution; there he mentally completes his drama. Of that interior play a single trace outlived him: the German notebook walled into a Hradčany barracks, recovered in 1993, from which the present edition is drawn. The text presented here does not presume to fill that silence, nor to rival Borges: it attempts to render visible, scene by scene, the inner play which, in the story, survives only in the memory of a man facing the firing squad.*

*The verse from Genesis (3:15) constitutes the subterranean axis of the drama:*

*"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."*

*This oracle, addressed to the Serpent, designates a conflict older than empires: the unbroken struggle between a faceless Evil and a vulnerable humanity that resists it. In The Enemies, this enmity is played out not by allegorical abstractions but within a precise historical and spiritual configuration: a converted Jewish banker in Hradčany, a circle of "respectable friends," and a city preparing to surrender itself to the Third Reich. The biblical word translates here into a millennial tension between the Jewish people and the successive powers that seek, according to the age, to expel, assimilate, or annihilate them.*

*Baron Viktor von Roemerstadt concentrates this tension. On the surface, he embodies the success of integration: ennobled, cultivated, perfectly at ease in Austro-Hungarian then Czech salons. Beneath, his lineage leads back to the ghetto and to a grandfather who "entered the baptismal font as into a second womb." The world that exhibits him as a symbol of modern Europe never quite forgives him this double birth. The "bruised heel" of Genesis is figured here in this assimilated Jew, whose apparent security conceals a hereditary vulnerability; the "crushed head" of the Serpent can only be glimpsed, if glimpsed at all, on another plane: that of consciousness, of language, and of art.*

*Composed in the spring of 1939, as German troops entered Prague, the play itself unfolds "on one of the last evenings of the nineteenth century," in a library in Hradčany. It refuses to treat the biblical prophecy as a mere theological motif. The Serpent is not a decorative devil but the sum of the institutions, doctrines, and habits that prepare the catastrophe we now call the Shoah: gossip elevated to ideology, clerical contempt disguised as solicitude, financial calculation rebaptised prudence, the uniform speaking the language of destiny. Hladik, as Borges draws him, is a Jew and a writer grappling with this convergence of ordinary functions into absolute evil. He cannot stop the tanks; he can only order his sentences. The present text takes seriously this limited but essential form of resistance: the ordering of a lucid mind within a fate it does not control.*

*The form of the drama is deliberately classical and unsettling. It observes the Aristotelian unities with an almost ritual rigidity: three acts, one evening, one library, a clock frozen at seven o'clock. Within this simple frame, one finds the circular structures dear to Borges: the obsessive chessboard, recurring motifs, doubles answering each other from scene to scene. The game of chess becomes the concrete icon of the biblical verse: two colours locked in an ancient war, a king too far advanced, pawns sacrificed "to save the position." The characters are at once social*

types (banker, priest, colonel, journalist) and interchangeable faces of the same threat; their polite conversation slides slowly toward menace, then toward the unreal. In the end, Roemerstadt's library is mirrored in the asylum cell of Jaroslav Kubín, a madman who repeats the same hour: a double of Hladík himself, condemned to compose under threat, but also a double of a people returned, century after century, to the same scenario of suspicion and persecution.

To read or perform *The Enemies* is thus to enter, in one's turn, the "secret year" granted to Hladík: that narrow space where nothing more can be changed outside, but where everything may still be ordered within. In this space, the promise of Genesis is reversed: while history continues to strike the heel of the "chosen people," the Serpent's head receives its wound, not from an army or a decree, but from the victim's stubborn refusal to be deprived of form, of meaning, and of style. This play is the record of such a refusal. It is not a consolation, but a testimony: even when the bullet has already been fired, a human being may still answer Evil with the patient architecture of a work, and thereby conquer a victory that no dossier, no camp, no oblivion can ever quite erase.

\* \* \*

## *PRESENTATION OF THE MANUSCRIPT*

*DESCRIPTION AND PROVENANCE OF THE NOTEBOOK*

*The text of *The Enemies* that one reads here derives from a manuscript notebook discovered in 1993 during the demolition of an old Austro-Hungarian barracks in the Hradčany district of Prague. The building, disused since the 1960s, adjoined the castle and overlooked the old Jewish ghetto: from its windows, before the redevelopments of the nineteenth century, one could still glimpse, below, the crowded rooftops of Josefov and the squat gable of the Old-New Synagogue<sup>1</sup>, legendary theatre of the Golem and of the nocturnal meditations of the Kabbalist rabbis.*

*In the course of the demolition work, the labourers brought to light, within a partition crudely doubled with brick and plaster, a cavity some forty centimetres long. It contained, wrapped in a piece of oilcloth, a notebook with a blue cardboard cover and a black cloth spine, of a format close to octavo. The paper, yellowed but intact, bears a Czech watermark from the 1930s; the ink, browned by time, allows one to make out changes of pen and of hand across the pages. On the first leaf, in pencil, a title: *Die Feinde. Eine Verteidigung der Ewigkeit* (“*The Enemies. A Defence of Eternity*”). Below it, in ink: Jaromír Hladík. The notebook is today preserved in the Národní archiv, fonds Hladík, under the shelfmark H-1939/1.*

*The cavity also contained, distinct from the notebook but clearly bound to it by the hand and the ink, several other documents: an annotated copy of the Calve edition of the *Defence of Eternity* (volume I, 1928; volume II, 1929), a sheaf of loose leaves paginated by hand, and an annotated copy of the translation of the *Sefer Yetzirah* published in Berlin in 1928. These materials are described*

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<sup>1</sup>The medieval synagogue of Prague, heart of the historic Jewish quarter, associated in tradition with the legend of the Golem of Rabbi Loew.

and edited in the corresponding volumes of the same *Bibliotheca Hladikiana*.

*The leaves are filled with a close, regular hand, in literary German, with a few rare insertions in Czech, Hebrew and Yiddish. The dramatic text, at first continuous, fragments into three clearly delineated acts; later stage directions are added in red pencil in the margins. Several passages are carefully crossed out, then recopied below in a more concentrated version: one recognises here, scrupulously carried over, down to the very deletions, by the hand that established the notebook, the work of an author who corrects and tightens. At two places, a hand, doubtless the same, has added, on a page left almost blank, brief reading lists: among them one notes, among others, Buber, Die chassidischen Bücher, Zohar (French trans.) and Sefer Yetzirah, eigener Versuch ("Sefer Yetzirah, a personal attempt"). These two leaves are not reproduced in the German Fragmentum that follows; they did not appear to present dramatic value sufficient to figure in the transcription.*

*No decisive external proof attests to the existence of a Jaromír Hladík in the catalogues of the period; the name figures neither in the parish registers of Josefov nor in the files of the Prague police for the years 1925–1939. Graphological comparisons, conducted sporadically from letters of German-language Prague writers held at the National Library, have furnished no convincing correspondence. One will note, however, that the spelling of the first name (Jaromír and not Jaroslav) and certain turns of phrase in the stage directions seem to betray a bilingual Czech-German author, familiar with Prague topography and the nuances of the Jewish liturgy as much as with Catholic rhetoric.*

*The notebook presents, materially, the traits of an authentic working manuscript: deletions, variants, displacements of scenes, occasional corrections of vocabulary. One observes also, in the margins of Act III, several pencil notations in very imperfect Hebrew square script and in Yiddish (fragments of blessings, a proverbial maxim, a notation "before the letter" that seems to refer back to the Sefer Yetzirah), as though the author, at the moment of tying together his circular construction, had felt the need to lean explicitly upon a mystical imaginary already very present beneath the surface of the play. The fact that the notebook was walled up in a military building overlooking the old Jewish quarter further reinforces this resonance: we know how much Prague, since the sixteenth century, has projected onto its walls and its attics a whole mythology of the hidden manuscript, of the rabbi who creates Golems, of the clandestine treatises of practical Kabbalah circulating beneath the cloak of the imperial authorities.*

*The text published here follows the Hradčany manuscript in its most advanced state. We have slightly modernised the punctuation, regularised the use of capitals, and restored certain proper names in their most probable Czech or German spelling: the Jewish quarter is named Josefov. The German notebook nonetheless alternates between Josefov and Josefstadt, according as the Czech topography or the German speech of Prague prevails: we have preserved this hesitation. The notebook bears but a single notable material injury: a page eaten by damp at the beginning of Act II, where Roemerstadt reads the Colonel's declaration aloud. Where the damp has carried words away, we have marked them with bracketed ellipses, without attempting to restore them. We have invented no entire speech of our own; the copyist of 1939, however, confesses*

in his *Nachschrift* to having completed certain lines “where the sense required it,” and these we have left as he transmitted them. The English titles (*The Enemies, A Defence of Eternity*) follow the translation that may be inferred from the German mentions of the manuscript (*Die Feinde, Eine Verteidigung der Ewigkeit*).

One will note, finally, that the German subtitle *Eine Verteidigung der Ewigkeit* (which replaces, on the first leaf, an initial attempt at *Trauerspiel* struck through with a firm stroke, as though Hladík had renounced midway the presentation of his play as a tragedy in order to give it as a defence) takes up exactly the title of the eponymous philosophical essay attributed to Hladík (*A Defence of Eternity, in two volumes*). This superimposition is doubtless not fortuitous: it invites one to read the play as the dramatic version of one and the same metaphysical thesis. What the Defence undertakes to demonstrate by the concept (namely eternity as a refusal of time as a “European superstition”), *The Enemies* puts to the test upon the stage, by enclosing its characters within an evening that cannot end and a chessboard that frees no square.

One will note also that the play unfolds during an undated Prague evening, a close of Habsburg *Mitteleuropa* that Hladík continues to keep alive through language even though the Monarchy it evokes has, at the moment he writes, been gone for twenty years, and the evening it revives for forty. The imperial titles, the *Oberst*, the *Crown*, the *Monarchy*, belong to a dead world that the memory of a condemned man restores intact: deliberate anachronism, or the simple effect of the cell where time has stopped.

*The notebook bears, on the inner board of the cover, a pencil inscription, in a later and firmer hand: J. H., Hradschin, März '39. No other signature comes to confirm or to refute this attribution.*

*The reader will recognise in the name of Hladik that of the protagonist of a tale by Borges, published in Sur in 1943 and collected in Artificios (1944, then Ficciones), where the play (which Borges names Los enemigos) is given as unfinished; the German title Die Feinde is the present edition's reconstruction. The present volume does not undertake to decide whether Borges invented Hladik or whether he gathered, by way of rumour, the report of his existence (whether Borges had wind of a real Hladik, or whether the notebook is the late work of a reader of Borges): the question remains undecidable.*

*The German Fragmentum that follows the play reproduces, at its close, a brief Nachschrift des Abschreibers: there the copyist declares that he established his transcription in the winter of 1939, soon after the hand that wrote the original, and confesses that he does not know whether a certain Jaromír Hladik ever lived. This postscript of the copyist, foreign to our own work, has been preserved in its original position.*

*One will therefore carefully distinguish three hands and three moments. The German original dates from March 1939 (März '39). The copyist (the Abschreiber of the Nachschrift) established a transcription of it in the winter of 1939; it is this copy, and not the autograph, that was walled into the barracks partition and exhumed in 1993. The establishment of the text read here, the collation, the modernising of the punctuation and the present critical apparatus*

*are, by contrast, the work of the modern editor, who laboured over the recovered notebook between 1995 and 1999. None of the three hands spans both 1939 and the 1990s: the copyist of the winter of 1939 knows nothing of Hladík's fate, and it is to the editor of the 1990s, and to him alone, that the editorial choices of the present Bibliotheca Hladikiana belong.*

*W. D. F.  
Édition Clementinium.  
Bibliotheca Hladikiana.*

## CHRONOLOGICAL MARKERS

*Around 1899 — Probable birth of "Jaromir Hladik" into a German-speaking Jewish family of Josefov (inferred from Borges's tale, which gives his age at his arrest in 1939).*

*1939 — March: German troops enter Prague. Hladik, as described by Borges, is arrested and condemned to death; it is during this interval that the play is set and, perhaps, composed.*

*1941–1945 — Deportation and destruction of the Prague Jewish community. The name Hladik appears in no surviving register.*

*1993 — Demolition of an old Austro-Hungarian barracks in Hradčany; discovery of the German notebook containing Die Feinde.*

*1995–1999 — Transcription, translation, and establishment of the present text from the so-called "Hradčany notebook."*

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

**Viktor von Roemerstadt** — Banker of a converted Jewish lineage, Baron, owner of the Hradčany library.

**Julia von Weidenau** — Roemerstadt's fiancée, former betrothed of Jaroslav Kubín.

**Jaroslav Kubín** — Writer (almost a poet), confined in an asylum; the Baron's imaginary double.

**The Journalist** — Society columnist, ironic observer, almost a chorus.

**Herr Direktor Klein** — Prague banker who answers to Vienna, friend and associate of Roemerstadt.

**Canon Doktor Moser** — Catholic priest, "spiritual" and political counsellor.

**Oberst von Harrach** — Colonel in the Imperial Army, figure of the militarised State.

**The Doctor, the Nurse** — Staff of the asylum where Kubín is held.

**The Servant** — Roemerstadt's manservant.

**Levi** — Roemerstadt's employee in Josefov (never seen on stage; appears only through his letter).

# ACT I

## “The Position”

*The library of Baron Viktor von Roemerstadt at Hradčany. Books to the ceiling. A high window where the last evening light glows red, almost bloody. From an unseen drawing-room: faint Hungarian music, a csárdás repeating a few bars too often.<sup>2</sup> A great clock shows seven. A wide table at the centre: carafes, papers, a silver tray, and a chessboard in mid-game.*

### SCENE I

*ROEMERSTADT is alone, bent over the chessboard. He hesitates above a knight, withdraws his hand, knits his brows, paces about the table.*

#### ROEMERSTADT

*(softly, to himself)*

A move  
that does not lose. There must be such a square.  
An unoccupied refuge, a quiet corner  
where the king may breathe once more.  
And yet every line I trace  
ends in the same motionless catastrophe.

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<sup>2</sup> Csárdás: a traditional Hungarian dance, often associated with the melancholy virtuosity of gypsy violins.

*(He bends lower, following lines in the air with his finger.)*

If I take — he checks.  
 If I advance — he forks.  
 If I withdraw —  
 there is no retreat. The board is saturated with yesterday.

*(He straightens, looks towards the window.)*

Outside, the city plays its own endgame.  
 Flags, newspapers, sermons, uniforms —  
 white and black, white and black.

*(He forces a dry smile.)*

They will say it was plain from the very first.  
 That any clerk behind a counter  
 might have foreseen the fall of Roemerstadt & Co.  
 “At chess,” they will remark,  
 “we call this an over-extension.  
 He marched his king too far towards the centre.”

*(The clock begins to strike seven. Roemerstadt counts the strokes, his lips moving. There is a slight hesitation before the final chime, as though the mechanism doubted.)*

Seven o'clock already... or still?  
 Time, like this game, refuses to move on.

*A SERVANT appears discreetly at the door.*

## SERVANT

Herr Baron...

*(A small bow.)*

A gentleman insists upon seeing you.  
He has not given his card.

## ROEMERSTADT

Then he is either a fool or a creditor.  
Show him in.

*The servant bows and withdraws. A moment later, THE JOURNALIST enters: impeccably dressed, urbane, holding gloves and a hat. He pauses to look about him, a little too admiringly, then bows.*

## JOURNALIST

Herr Baron, I am honoured at last  
to set foot in the legendary Roemerstadt library.  
The town speaks of nothing else.

## ROEMERSTADT

Then the town has little enough to chew upon.

*(Gesturing towards the chessboard)*

Do you play?

## JOURNALIST

Badly. I prefer to watch.

*(He glides towards the table, lowers his eyes upon the chessboard.)*

Curious. Your king seems... exposed.

## ROEMERSTADT

The position is temporary.

## JOURNALIST

All positions are.

*(He smiles, without warmth.)*

Forgive my intrusion. I come, as they say,  
upon a matter of mutual interest.

## ROEMERSTADT

Mutual interest is seldom mutual, and seldom interesting.  
Who are you?

## JOURNALIST

A servant of the public word.  
We deal in rumours and reputations.  
You, Herr Baron, are often in the headlines.

## ROEMERSTADT

Headlines are for criminals and clowns.  
I am neither the one nor the other. Merely a banker who  
reads too much.

## JOURNALIST

And who plays too far towards the centre, they say.

*(Roemerstadt's eyes flash; the Journalist raises his hands in apology.)*

Ah, forgive me. I glanced at your game.  
The metaphor offered itself.  
*(A pause)*  
There are stories in the town.  
About certain loans, certain... connexions.  
The markets are nervous.  
Vienna listens closely to every murmur  
that includes the name of Roemerstadt.

## ROEMERSTADT

Vienna would do better to attend to its own debts  
before it counts mine.

## JOURNALIST

Of course, of course.  
And yet there are other murmurs. Older ones.  
Names scribbled in old police reports,  
in parish registers, in hospital books.

*(A slight lowering of the voice.)*

A certain Jaroslav Kubín, for instance.

*(Roemerstadt stiffens almost imperceptibly.)*

## ROEMERSTADT

You have wasted your ink if you have dug up that file.

## JOURNALIST

On the contrary, I have spent only time,  
and time, they say, costs nothing.  
He was once betrothed, was he not,  
to Fräulein Julia von Weidenau —  
before she had the good fortune  
to find herself beneath this roof.

## ROEMERSTADT

You are impertinent.

## JOURNALIST

I am curious.  
He is in an asylum now, the poor wretch.  
The doctors tell amusing tales:  
he believes himself to be Baron Roemerstadt.  
He paces a bare room,  
speaking of dealings he never concluded,  
of parties at which he never appeared,  
of enemies conspiring in a library he does not possess.

*(A short laugh, almost kindly.)*

Madmen ape power. It is an old comedy.

## ROEMERSTADT

Few are foolish enough to choose me.

## JOURNALIST

A strange choice indeed,  
for a man without fortune, without title, without...  
*(He gropes for the word)*  
origin.

*(The word hangs in the air like smoke. Roemerstadt lets the silence grow thin,  
then cuts it.)*

## ROEMERSTADT

Origin is a game for theologians, not for bankers.  
My accounts begin in this city, in this street.

## JOURNALIST

The accounts, yes.  
But men remember other registers.  
The baptismal fonts, the old streets down below,  
the names exchanged for other names.  
The town has a long memory  
for those who, as they say,  
have entered history by the servants' door.  
I do not judge. I note.

## ROEMERSTADT

History has many doors.  
Some open upon palaces, some upon... counting-houses.

## JOURNALIST

I come to warn you, in truth.  
There is a mood in the town, a... tension.  
Certain people have decided that certain families  
are less... rooted... than others.  
The wind is seeking branches to break.

*(He glances once more at the chessboard.)*

You have, perhaps, set your king  
upon a square of the wrong colour.

## ROEMERSTADT

You speak as though the game were already lost.

**JOURNALIST**

No game is lost  
so long as there remains a move that does not lose.  
But such moves grow rare.

*(He takes up his gloves, making ready to leave.)*

I think of you, Herr Baron,  
as a man of intelligence.  
I should be sorry to see you  
confounded with the likes of Jaroslav Kubín —  
a man who does not know who he is,  
nor where his game truly stands.

**ROEMERSTADT**

And what must one do, according to the town,  
to avoid such confusion?

**JOURNALIST**

Little enough, they say.  
Choose one's friends with greater care.  
Let certain charities lapse.  
Let certain names depart the registers.  
These are not my words. I do  
but report the temper of the town.

*(He bows.)*

I remain, of course, at your disposal.  
Whatever you decide, the chronicle will record it.

*(The clock begins, curiously, to finish its earlier striking, like a delayed echo.)*

### ROEMERSTADT

And you will sleep well, whichever line you take.

### JOURNALIST

I sleep very well.  
It is, I believe, my only vice.

*(He pauses at the door, looks back.)*

Some enemies are very patient, Herr Baron.  
And the most patient do not even hate.

*He goes out. The Hungarian music swells for an instant, then subsides. Roemerstadt stands motionless, then of a sudden sweeps the black queen from the chessboard with the back of his hand. It falls, spinning across the floor.*

## ROEMERSTADT

*(to himself)*

Madmen who would be me...  
and men of sound mind who wish that I were not at all.

*(Blackout, or a brief dimming.)*

## SCENE II

*Later, but the clock still shows seven o'clock. The red light through the window has not moved. ROEMERSTADT stands at the window, his back to the room. The chessboard has been set out in a new position, every bit as intricate. A SERVANT opens the door.*

## SERVANT

Herr Baron, Herr Direktor Klein and Domherr Moser.

*Enter THE BANKER (KLEIN) and THE CANON (MOSER). Both are well fed, well dressed, and smile with a practised unease. Klein crosses the room without a glance at the chessboard; he goes straight to the window, draws out his watch, consults it, and puts it away.*