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Pictures from the Czech Pilgrimage

Alexander Runciman Jr.

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PICTURES FROM THE CZECH PILGRIMAGE

I

You stand on some hill,
over your shoulders, below you,
two old women,
their grey discs too distant for faces;
and one smaller, a daughter, we can't be sure.
There are many we can't see.

The three of you do not understand
Marketa Luskacova. The middle one
carrying the cross frowns,
not understanding, and with its weight.
The other two carry pikes.
You have come in your lined faces,
in canvas coats and your whiter shirt.
The cross has a ladder up to the beam,
a nail, branches of a hawthorne
curved, its long spikes. A grey hammer
is attached, and thick heavy tongs.
The letters at the top
do not say in Rhode Island.

II

The women in white
carry huge madonnas in gilt rococo frames.
They lead, and the men
in black behind them.
The line they make: black upper left
down across the hay field, white near the woods.

III

The pillar is taller than the man with large ears,
his head angled, his eyes, his open mouth.
He holds a paper and must be chanting.
The congregation sits, an old woman,
white face and hands, a black hooded cape,
she neither hears nor sees, she is inside.

IV

It is a world of old women.
That plaid can't be called a dress.
She is no older, no more lined
than the land she came from.

V

This is enough.
They are seated on a fine hillside. The far hill
has farms, a road along the river.
There are no children.
He stares, looking away below,
or at the new hands on his knees.
She is younger, face intent on some patch of grass,
hearing only.
She looks on him, fingers holding up a cheek,
frowning, thinking.
The old one has pain.
Three others stand. And the priest,
flowers bloom at his feet,
what he says is nowhere in the picture.