



The Return of Munchausen

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky

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First inspired in the eighteenth century by the tall tales of the real Baron Hieronymus von Münchausen, the legend of Baron Münchausen—as transmitted and transformed by Rudolf Erich Raspe and Gottfried August Bürger—soon eclipsed the fame of his living counterpart and has captivated the European imagination ever since. An irrepressible cavalier and raconteur, the Baron gallivants through battle (in one episode he climbs aboard an outgoing cannonball only to change his mind halfway and hop onto another one heading in the opposite direction), scoffs at death, and inflates his own stature at every turn.

In Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky's update, the Baron returns in the troubled twentieth century, where he will rediscover the place of imagination amid the tenuous peace, universal mourning, and political machinations of the aftermath of World War I. "To me," he claims, "the debates of philosophers, grabbing the truth out of each other's hands, [resemble] a fight among beggars over a single coin." Transcending truth, the Baron instead revels in smoke and mist. He is a devotee of the impossible and a worshipper of "Saint Nobody." But lost as he is in the twists of his imagination, can the Baron heal Europe through diplomacy—or at least hold a mirror up to its absurdities?



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