

SARRASANI

BETWEEN THE FABLE AND THE EPIC

by
Gustavo Bernstein

*To my father,
inspirer and instigator
behind these pages.*

Homeland is wherever I pitch my tent.

Trude Stosch-Sarrasani

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INTRODUCTION

Letter from Trude Stosch-Sarrasani

With love and joy I add my words to this book written by author Gustavo Bernstein, who I held in my arms as an infant when his father used to grace us, Gabor Némedy and me, with his visit.

Today, thirty years later, it is he who engraves my memories in the history of the Sarrasani Circus; the circus I loved and will always love with all my heart.

All my respect and gratitude for this great task and my best wishes for you, Gustavo.

Forever yours,

Trude Stosch- Sarrasani

PREFACE

Some words awake illusions, suggest fables, radiate fantasies. For some miraculous reasons, they are voices growing in people's imagination; names which act as archetypes, phonemes that become symbols, sounds that last throughout the centuries. Such is the case with SARRASANI. The mere mention of this word invokes the nostalgia of an exuberant world, a splendor full of magic and color.

Not in vain this legendary circus has become a headlight, an unavoidable reference, a mirror for all circuses around the world. This is not a hazard matter. Because, despite of its artistic prestige or its mythic dimension, its adventures or vast anecdotes, Sarrasani's Circus history is not exempted of most sumptuous and stirring epic facts: those of a gorgeous enterprise dealing with political controversies and the most dramatic crisis of the twentieth century, and those of a family saga that fights to stay at the top among the social upheavals of two stricken continents. Because Sarrasani affronted the worst conflicts, weathered the hardest tempests, survived the most dramatic, turbulent, polemic and hope shattering periods, and faced the persecution and power manipulation; and arose miraculously harmless. It is enough to mention the First World War, the crisis of the 1930s, the spout of Nazism, the Second World War, the rise of the Peronista movement, successive military putches or Berlin's Wall fall.

In Germany, Sarrasani's family mausoleum has been declared National Monument. In Argentina, their name left inerasable traces in tango's history, the most popular country's artistic expression.

They existed; they exist and will continue existing new circuses, but Sarrasani, I insist, remained in history as a symbolic name, a sound covering a whole expressive genre, a magic voice which, for the popular imagination, is simply synonym for circus.

SENIOR

An early orphanhood

He was just a boy. Young Hans must have been about fifteen years old when he decided definitively to run away from home. With a change of clothes on his back and without a cent in his pocket, he prepared to take a chance on his childhood dreams. Besides, his father's attitude did not give him much choice. He had stubbornly tried to eradicate all "suspicious" artistic leanings in his son, unceasingly. As if it was a crusade. Although this habitual harassment would come to an end one day after the midday meal when the father rushed into the child's room to find him once again improvising juggling tricks with oranges:

"I've told you a thousand times not to play with food!" the parent furiously reproached his son.

Immediately afterwards he would confiscate the fruit and warn his child to study. The father could not know that this would be the last time, the straw that broke the camel's back, and a final stop for that relationship full of conflict. Nor did the child suspect that this impetuous decision would mark his life forever. Much less guess that this sudden escape, this strike for freedom, reflected the features of a classic heroic destiny: a young orphan, and a path marked by arduous challenges. The die was cast. The hero had chosen his route. The fable had begun.

Dreams of an artist

The circus was the golden dream of this child, the dream that kept him awake at night. From an early age he used to escape with his sister and slip under every new tent that arrived in the city of Lomnitz. His father, a respectable businessman and member of the glass workers union, however, had envisioned a different future for him. His long awaited son, born in April 2nd, 1873, would be a chemist and would transform his modest glass factory into an industrial powerhouse.

Yet, young Hans could do little to obey this insistent paternal coercion. The call from within was too strong. Every aspect of the circus fascinated him: the camp, the bohemian lifestyle, the sense of community, the caravans, days spent globetrotting. He had always dreamed of forming part of an elite group of artists traveling around the world. And with

this decision he had found his path.

Thus, after roaming through storehouses and stables in rural Germany, surviving thanks to the generosity of the locals, the young wanderer came across the modest circus of Oscar Kolzer. His widow – reticent at first – when faced with the tenacious insistence of the child, offered him a place in her *troupe* in exchange for food and lodging.

Full of eagerness, the child began by cleaning cages and yards. With scrupulous attention he initiated his tasks every morning: he swept, shoveled out animal manure, carried hay, cleaned the warehouses. It was not long until the director called him to her wagon. Hans was promoted to animal keeper and would receive a small salary. It was then that young Hans began to suspect that nothing could ever take him away from that world.

It was a small circus made up of just a few wagons, a patched tent, a number of animals and a heterogeneous group of artists, which oscillated between young beginners and veterans with graying hair. A certain sepia tone covered that supposed world of fantasy and color, although this detail held little importance in the child's eyes. In that precarious corner of the suburbs he had found nothing less than a shelter from his state as orphan.

Young Hans lived hours filled with loneliness, too. His amusement often consisted of stealing make-up from the clowns and improvising pirouettes in the darkness of the stable. It was not by chance that one night, during a tour through Berlin, he was discovered by the clowns Eugén and Didic when he was trying to train a disobedient donkey, which stood rigid and indifferent to the boy's efforts. Moved by the scene, the clowns decided to adopt the child almost as a pet for their act. They would teach him the basics and take him early to the stage; a significant gesture in the circus world, where knowledge is transmitted within families, from generation to generation, as if every new offspring should safeguard the future of this race of artists.

In the meantime, the young apprentice started to train on his own a little black poodle, a present from his new "tutors", which had also become his main emotional link both inside and outside of the camp. They made an inseparable duo. Wherever the child went, the little dog followed him. It accompanied him through all his daily tasks and slept by his feet at night.

Show after show, the clowns enthusiastically observed the boy's innate sense of humor and his decided charisma with animals. All that he hid behind a shy personality surfaced with the audience, far from frightening him, brought out all his histrionic potential. Yet more than a year had passed. The adolescent Hans had started to develop the features and ambitions of a young man: he began to feel, with increasing impetus, the need

to star in a solo number on stage.

At Christmas 1890, almost like a Christmas present, the debut he longed for finally arrived. Before the introduction of the master of ceremonies, and in front of a multitude of spectators, Hans drew back the curtain and the circle of light illuminated his figure. Dressed in a colorful clown costume (which he had sewn with cloth pieces given to him by his tutors), he strode onto the stage with long and rhythmic steps, only to suddenly stumble and fall in the center of the ring. Children burst into laughter. Immediately a little black dog rushed in barking to encourage him to stand. This is how his act began. Later, between gags and clownish pirouettes, Hans made Polka the poodle dance and perform acrobatic leaps. The dog ran around the ring, jumped over obstacles and then howled until his trainer performed the same agile moves. The trainer, at last, became the trainee, and left the stage jumping, following the dog's instructions. He only came out again at the end of the show, with the rest of the cast, to share in the applause of the audience.

Apparently the new clown did not perform his job poorly: the audience responded enthusiastically and the success of his act gave him a sudden prestige and a growing space in the show. So much so that young Hans soon dared to ask the director to double his salary.

His companions began to look at him with suspicion. His tendency toward solitude off stage did not help. They branded him (not inaccurately) as selfish and lonely, as well as a bit eccentric because when not at a scheduled rehearsal, Hans preferred to polish his routines or to observe the work of other trainers and artists. He was not inclined to participate in social events. He did not go to bars or dancehalls. He considered it a superfluous expense, a frivolous luxury that had nothing to do with the plans he developed during long nights of contemplation. Hans Stosch spent his adolescence between this extreme asceticism and a rigorous work schedule. It was almost a monastic life, curiously more similar to that of a monk than a traveling artist.

But what generated most of the comments among his companions was his apparent indifference to female sensuality, to the point of provoking the type of typical suspicious remarks common in such cases. The boy had rejected several invitations from a veteran acrobat of the *troupe*, and there was a rumor that one night he had been seen running utterly terrified from her caravan, followed by his faithful little dog. However, this rumor seemed to increase his appeal in the circus world, rather than scare women off, until it became almost an obsession. The point was not just to seduce the boy, rather to make him surrender. Finally, one morning at dawn there were no more doubts: his poodle Polka woke

up quietly and stretched by the ladder of the wagon from which he had once fled.

The tours followed one after another. Several cities from Eastern Europe had already seen the abilities of the young clown and his partner. His presence during the show began to increase: he maintained his traditional opening, but also worked as a catchall clown who would fill in between acts. Children preferred him and he had an unexpectedly positive repercussion among parents.

He was already the protagonist of the show when one night – as he would tell himself some time later – he had a vision. During the dream, among huge flames appeared the letters of his artistic name: SARRASANI. He was fascinated by the sound. To him it seemed forceful, safe. It also gave him an air of Italian origin that worked as an exotic spell in the Saxon imagination. He knew, too, that it referred to “Sarrasine”, the famous novel by Balzac, which tells the story of a young traveling artist who was subjected to successive deprivation until a sudden and mysterious fortune changed his life. The parallels with his own life and hopes were more than remarkable, and the boy did not doubt about paying tribute to the author who supplied him with such exuberant illusions during his difficult beginnings. That would be his name from then on, as well as an undeniable reflection of his character. Once again, as he had done throughout his life, he would respond to impulse, to intuition, to his inner voice.

The court jester

For the new artist, the moment had come to widen his horizons. Hans found himself facing both his inner desire to explore new paths, as well as offers from other circuses. By this time his act had expanded. Polka would act with other animals, though the little poodle remained the main character. Much as the dog ended the act by taming the trainer, so he did with other animals: a goose, two horses, a donkey and a chimpanzee.

Starting in 1892, Sarrasani intensified his tours through Germany, Holland, Switzerland and Hungary reaching the same level of success with different circuses. More than a year had passed and his fame continued to rise in the circus community. Already well known by his artistic name, Hans decided to adorn his costumes with black satin gloves while giving a series of shows in the city of Stuttgart. The beautiful young lady at the shop welcomed him with deference and displayed several pairs of gloves on the counter. Hans tried them on. He observed them, felt the fabric, but could not decide;

something held him back. At one moment, between one pair and another, their hands touched slightly and a shy complicity appeared in their eyes. The gallant Hans dared to speak and extended an invitation. The following day the young lady was seen enjoying the show from the first row with discreet joy.

Maria Ballhorn, born on October 20th, 1873, the daughter of a police officer, was the name of the beautiful young lady who helped her aunt in the glove shop. Although her father was not pleased with the activities of her new suitor, her mother showed herself as almost as in love as her daughter. This peculiar man attracted both women almost irresistibly. He brought fresh air to their ordinary lives: the fantasy of bohemia, the charm of the unexpected, a dash of spontaneity and the illusion of faraway worlds, exotic places, paradises only dreamed about.

But Hans did not have much time. His roving life required constant and unexpected changes of environment. A circus only stayed a month or a week in a city, depending on its success. No tour routes were ever confirmed. Besides, remote lands could keep him away from Germany for a long time. It could be years before he returned to Stuttgart. That is why the young man, accustomed to making sweeping decisions, decided to get through the formalities quickly: he proposed marriage without delay.

Maria and Hans were married shortly thereafter. It was a plain, quick ceremony without much pomp. On the bride's side, the closest family participated. On the clown's, only Polka the poodle and his tutors Eugén and Didic, who traveled from Baviera for the wedding, presumably (though this remains unconfirmed) to act as best men.

Both physically and emotionally, they made a formidable couple. The blond Hans was not heavily built, but he was tough and stocky, and, above all, direct, incisive, tenacious. A boy who needed a constant challenge. Maria, on the contrary, was a small, delicate young woman, of fragile appearance, but firm character and, most of all, extremely diligent and helpful. Usually she lacked initiative; her greatest joy was to merge herself into the dreams of those she loved.

Soon the harmonic marital bond strengthened. The attractive partner adapted rapidly to the nomadic existence, accompanying and assisting her husband with joy and attention to detail, in private and on stage. She also proved to be an efficient administrator of their income, which increased Hans's enthusiasm and allowed him to concentrate without distractions on perfecting his art.

"Clown Sarrasani and his amusing animal family", said the advertisements. Six greyhounds, three chimpanzees, a horse, two cats, six geese, three bears and a little pig

were part of the new show, which was still characterized by the interaction between its members. The dogs jumped over hurdles held by the monkeys, the chimpanzees rode bicycles led by the dogs, the pig was pushed in a baby carriage and lifted and rocked in the arms of the bear. All of them answered to Polka's barks.

And as the family of animals grew in number and diversity of species, so did the family lineage: in 1896 their daughter Hedwig is born, and the following year their son Hans. By that time, Sarrasani was already a renowned artist. His colorful image as a clown surrounded by the diverse fauna of his act constantly illustrated specialized magazines. Positive reviews acclaimed his talent in the circus magazine *Der Artist* and offers for work arrived one after another. His act had already traveled the main cities of Europe, from St. Petersburg to Barcelona, from Rome to Copenhagen. The most important circuses of the continent competed for his name. As did royalty, who fought for the services of the famous juggler to entertain at their social gatherings. Including the sovereigns of Sweden, Holland and Portugal, but most especially the family of Tsar Nicholas II, for whom Hans became a prominent court entertainer.

The dreams of childhood appeared closer than ever. The young traveler had found his path. Before the end of the century, Sarrasani would reach fame as the most prestigious clown-trainer of Europe.

Tradition and nostalgia

"Full circus for sale". The advertisement was not unusual for the times. The arrival of the American circus with the new concept of three parallel rings had forced most German circuses into bankruptcy. They were simply unable to compete with the bombastic production of the foreign companies. The monstrous machine that was the "Barnum & Bailey Circus", for example, caused a huge sensation starting in 1898 when it arrived in England to kick-off a five year European tour.

Now it was 1901. In the past remained the German victory in the Sedan (1870) – efficiently conducted by Bismarck, the famous "Iron Chancellor" –, which put an end to the Franco-Prussian war and precipitated the founding of the II Reich. Germany was now a powerful federative state conducted by Emperor William II, with a remarkable expansionist vocation. This ambition resonated with an almost collective synergy among

the inhabitants.

Prestigious Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, for example, couldn't sleep but for the ambition of possessing a circus of his own. The fateful local circus market did not intimidate him. He believed that the crisis could not be explained solely by a general circumstance, rather by the particular situation of each circus and its manager. "If foreign circuses succeed, why can't domestic ones?", he asked himself. On the other hand, that same success served as eloquent proof of the genuine interest of the public, a public that did no more than discriminate based on the quality of the show. Therefore, for Hans, it was more a question of supply than of demand.

There was another motivation for someone of Hans' character, more relevant than any abstract theory about the surrounding market. His famous clown-trainer act no longer satisfied him; and that was enough. He needed space in which to develop the multi-faceted character that he felt stirring within. His aptitude for staging had been more than proven. As was his ability as an artistic director, a complementary task he had been performing successfully in his most recent acts. It remained for him to demonstrate his managerial talent, but he was not afraid of the challenge. He had an excessive, if not reckless, faith in himself.

His plans for the show were clear: he would remain faithful to the European tradition. He was not interested in imitating foreign circuses. He considered the three parallel ring format an example of vapid sensationalism, a division that undermined the unique brilliance of each act. Far from enhancing, this system distracted. He would prioritize excellence over an avalanche of superimposed visual stimuli. Instead of quantity, he would offer quality. He would not focus his show on the exhibition of freaks, physical defects or other human oddities. "Not the eccentric, not the sensationalist; only the suggestive", he repeated to himself.

Further, and principally, while he would not renounce his aesthetic roots, he would adapt to the urgent technological advances of the time, something that the Americans had already done masterfully. He would do so, not only in terms of the elements inherent to each presentation, but also in relation to each technical detail of the circus itself. Lights, sound, comfortable seating, the image of the tent itself had to be flawless. Hans knew that this *aggiornamento* was essential to consistently renew the enthusiasm of the audience. Excessive nostalgia – he affirmed – was the reason for the stagnant state of European circuses. Without a change of perspective, they would soon succumb to the incipient charm of foreign circuses. Technique was not an aim in itself, nor an oppressor, rather a way of

introducing and further improving the creative richness and sensitivity of the artists. That was the seed of the idea for his circus, in that belief he laid the foundations for his plan, and with that aim he went to the auction, to win and to begin the definitive journey to Radebeul. There he would rent a house from which to launch his enterprise.

However, there is a detail that should not be overlooked and that surely acted as essential psychic trigger for the resolution with which Hans undertook his objective. A short time before these events, during a traditional presentation of his act in the city of Frankfurt, he suddenly discovered an unexpected presence in the first row: his father. The image paralyzed him. He had not seen his father's face for twelve years, when he decided to run away from home. Yes, of course, he had visited his mother, who was sitting next to her husband with undisguised happiness. Hans used to visit her secretly, when the patriarch was away from home, and he kept up fluid correspondence with her when he was on tour. And she had been, undoubtedly, the promoter behind the propitious visit.

With a drumbeat of cymbals, the orchestra saved him from losing his place. The opportune tricks of the clown would do the rest. The act gracefully came to an end and the public clapped fervently as he left the ring with his animals. Later, in the dressing room, an endless embrace sealed the long awaited reunion. Words were unnecessary. Tangibly, offspring and primogenitor re-established an old communion. They had spent too many years apart and the mature gesture of the father put an end to old sorrows and, at the same time, gave his son strength to face future challenges with inner harmony. Besides, Grandfather Stosch finally met his daughter in law and his grandchildren. It was the blessing Hans needed.

During the winter of that year he prepared the great opening. With Paul Thalheim, a young carpenter from Radebeul, he began to build wagons for lodging and for the animals. In the meantime, he started casting new artists and technical staff and prepared the program for the show with meticulous care. During his leisure time, he drafted text for publicity and plans for press campaigns. And finally, a pleasant surprise: Max Friedländer, who had begun by painting his first posters of Hans as a clown-trainer and, through those mysterious connections of the spirit, had become his best – may be his only – friend, came from Hamburg to collaborate on graphic designs.

They were intense, joyful days for the restless adventurer, turned manager. His family and his best friend shared this happiness with him. Maria, in the middle of creative overflow, dealt with the mess of papers, materials and tools that abounded in the house and cared for Hedwig, who was almost five years old, and Hans, a year younger.

The girl liked to sit on her father's knee and accompany him as he wrote, taking notes or designing details for costumes or the tent. The little one, on the contrary, was a bit mischievous and naughty, and he was frequently seen coming from the garden covered with mud. In those cases, "uncle" Max was the one who cushioned his father's anger, while the boy sought the solace of his mother.

Such were the little everyday distractions. With the exception of these aspects, they were days of hard work and, upon occasion, excessive tension. Both his family and group of assistants had to deal with daily outbursts of temper, not to mention the artists. If his personal talent was legendary, so were his difficult temperament and his extreme obstinacy. And this enterprise was vital to his life. It required absolute concentration. The camp, far from the romantic image that had fueled its creation, was not exactly a placid place. It turned into a sphere of constant tension. The entire company had their nerves on edge, especially the director, who overreacted to the slightest inconvenience.

A recent shock made this sensitivity understandable. His poodle Polka, blind and almost without a sense of smell, died a slow, agonizing death of senility. The director did not mention the subject, but his obsessive devotion to his work – everyone knew – was a means for overcoming his sadness. That is why, in spite of certain excesses on his behalf, an invulnerable cohesion kept the project on track. They continued working relentlessly. And the most important fact: a certain air of mystique kept the enthusiasm alive within the group. In a small pasture of Saxony a fire was building.

Finally the moment arrived. In his judgement, everything was ready. They would polish small details show after show. From the program, a modest opening could be expected. It consisted of a family of riders, a clown who acted with a pig, a group of four ground acrobats, a fixed bar gymnast, a strong man who dragged 75kg with his hair, three jugglers, a lady who trained 20 parrots and 20 kittens, a sword-swallower from Turkey, a Chinese contortionist and Sarrasani himself with his animal family.

Meissen, a city near Dresden, was chosen as the location to pitch the tent for the first time. For the opening, with an evident sense of superstition, he chose a symbolic date: his birthday. The night Hans Stosch-Sarrasani turned twenty-nine, with a full house which exceeded its capacity, in the midst of an exultant atmosphere as if anticipating a huge party, a fierce wind vehemently swept away the right side of the tent. Abruptly, the orchestra stopped playing. The show was paralyzed and the audience broke out in screams. The director hesitated for just a moment, before appearing in the ring with the megaphone in hand. He signaled his assistants and asked the audience to calm down. He then gestured

for the musicians to resume the atmosphere of the circus. The show must go on. On the contrary, Sarrasani had become the show itself, standing in the middle of the ring, giving directions and calming the hysteria of the audience with humor.

Fortunately, the episode was not fatal. Nobody had been hurt, only the tent was damaged. And, unexpectedly, the audience itself collaborated to overlook the misfortune and continue with the show. What could have been a tragedy concluded with a happy ending in all its splendor. A promising baptism for what would soon become the most prestigious circus in Europe.

Sensationen! Sensationen!

Cartography became Hans Stosch's new obsession. Little by little the map of Germany became too small for him. The circus was growing in size, quality and diversity of artists. The stylistic profile of the shows was getting closer to the one he had dreamt about in the beginning. He believed the show to be solid enough to leave the fringes in pursuit of the conquest of the large European capitals. There, on his own terms, he would dispute public preferences inch-by-inch with the big domestic circuses. Such was the fighting spirit that fueled his everyday mood.

It was not just an act of faith. This excessive confidence was based on the three main pillars of his circus. The first, the root, the core: designing a quality program. Nothing made sense if his circus was not a worthy product. Therefore, he prepared each act himself, with an almost minimalist concept. He did not ignore any detail as they all contributed to the overall harmony of the show. It had to be technically perfect and well coordinated. But the coldness of the method was just the skeleton, the structure of the show. He then added glamour, a certain fantasy to draw the audience into a landscape of dreams. With this in mind, he remained open to all possibilities. To the traditional acts of the classic repertoire, such as clowns, jugglers, tightrope walkers, contortionists, ground and air acrobats, jockeys or animal tamers, he added a range of exoticism previously unknown. Slowly, as he had planned, he began to incorporate artists from far away continents and cultures. Troops of Moroccans, Chinese, Japanese, Javanese, Turkish and Hindus rotated in every season, bringing a lavish fascination to the circus ring.

This strategy appealed to the collective consciousness and to his burning desire to

discover new worlds. The universe spun in the circular arena of Sarrasani, it became a microcosm of sorts, a gathering of cultures from across five continents.

The new idea was an immediate success. *Sensationen! Sensationen!*, proclaimed the newspaper headlines. The commotion even reached the intellectual sphere, where the enterprise was viewed as an anthropological approach to show business. Because they were real artists, not impersonators of other cultures. And the fact that nationalist sectors considered it “an artistic foreign invasion” was of little importance. Hans focused primarily on respecting his own convictions. And the shows, instead of contradicting this philosophy, endorsed it completely. His declared artistic approach did not vary. The circus was faithful to its European aesthetic roots, though not his artists, who could come from any region on earth. He did not prioritize a chauvinistic criteria in his selection, rather obeyed a sense of a quality, a concept of style. Being talented was enough.

This cosmopolitan group of artists was soon joined by a flow of immigration that would become an undeniable reference point in Sarrasani history, and perhaps a landmark in the history of the circus: “The Wild West Indians”. A recreated Far West in the round arena under the dramatic effects of the spotlights. They were not in this case, “pale faces” dressed up as “redskins”, either. Stosch hired real Native American Indians, who he had to convince, bring and indoctrinate for the show, almost like a Jesuit missionary whose only gospel alluded to the redemption of show business.

The idea was not original. For some time the Indians of North America had been playing a predominant role in the collective imagination of Europe, stimulated mainly by the visits of the first Sioux in the “Buffalo Bill Show”, and by the famous books of Karl May (1842-1912), author of adventure novels who had become famous not only for the exotic and remote context of his stories, but particularly for his tales about the Indians of the North American countryside. Although the most significant feature of this author, born in Radebeul, was that his adventures took place in his imagination as he, like Emilio Salgari or the Brontë sisters, had never been away from his hometown.

Hans maintained an adolescent admiration for this author and they developed a quick friendship. They had met through the initiative of the circus director when he arrived in Radebeul and had consulted the author several times on doubts regarding indigenous rituals. Not in vain the magic of Sarrasani had turned this act into something so astonishing that he soon hoisted it as a banner, a classic ritual of the circus, which was renewed and expanded each season.

Animals were another strong point in the program, which expanded, as well. He soon

introduced a group of ten Hindu elephants, which he conducted personally and which became the symbol of Sarrasani: the director, dressed as Maharajah, leading a colossal throng of pachyderms with his cane. He also incorporated ten African lions, ten Bengal tigers, eight ostriches and several camels, bears and zebras. Later he added Arabian horses and a pack of greyhounds. Later still, he widened the spectrum again: including an act with hippopotami and another with seals; and soon, others with buffalo, kangaroo and tapirs. The camp had slowly turned into Noah's Arc, a zoo roving around the European continent. In 1912, they talked about a community of four hundred animals.

Sarrasani watched another issue with special care, the overall image of the circus, its visual presence. The façade was becoming more ostentatious, more opulent in quality and details. The subsequent designs resulted in an art *nouveau* architecture, worthy of the best theaters of the world, behind which an impressive *chapiteaux* was erected. And like the exterior urban image, this spatial effect was transferred to the interior, which was equipped with the most modern industrial advances. The texture of the tent, the tightening cords, each detail of its construction had to be new, had to surprise and, above all, had to create a feeling of extreme comfort.

Unexpectedly, this zeal for *avant-garde* technology brought agreeable side effects. Private companies began to offer massive support to the circus as a result of the indirect promotion of their products that the circus brought them. All technological novelties that appeared in the market were immediately offered to Sarrasani. The result was definitely amazing. Thirty bent fire lamps lit the façade and another twenty lit the center of the arena, sparkles of light emerged from the tent. A decoration of faceted glass and star roses welcomed the public in the foyer. The circus seemed to be a mirage in the night, an alien hallucination landing in the city. In winter, a line of stoves placed under the seats warmed up to six thousand spectators. The circus also counted on a fire fighting machine and its own generator, as well as a novel steam machine that created a mysterious atmosphere. After years of work, Sarrasani had succeeded in creating the most modern circus of his time.

But an excellent product was not enough. The program could be magnificent; the circus, wonderful, but all these efforts were useless if it did not reach the public. Communication was essential. The third pillar of this successful tripod, therefore, was publicity, something for which Sarrasani showed an unsuspected talent. This – he would always admit – he had learned from the Americans.

It is worthwhile to digress for a moment, for in addition to the legendary posters

drawn by his friend Max Friedländer (a true aesthetic revolution for the illustrations of the time, with his acute sense of composition and use of color) and the diverse publications and brochures, Stosch supported his campaign through a fluid relationship with the press, whom he treated with special deference. This was complemented by his lucidity, intuition and courage to exploit unexpected or apparently adverse situations. Such was the case of the much-commented story that entered the annals of circus history as “The battle of Berlin”.

“The strongest men in the world” did not seem to interest anyone, except the stubborn director who had hired them for the entire season and who had begun to envision his investments vanishing into thin air. Day after day he tried in vain to think of a tactic to save the act. However, nothing interesting came to mind. It was during one of those typically sleepless nights when the idea was born. Without delay, he put it into practice the very next evening. When the workday had ended, he gathered his strong men and went to a well-known bar in Berlin. There, in an atmosphere of joviality, they drank abundant quantities of beer while they enjoyed a moment of relaxation. Between toasts, loud conversations and songs sung out of tune, a sudden punch in the middle of the group broke the table. Immediately, another punch in the face began the fight. In the midst of screams, violence took over. Tables and chairs were thrown, destroying the bar and smashing glasses and mirrors. One of the strong men wrested the bar from its foundation. The crowd, half scared and amazed, observed from the edges of the room. In less than one hour the luxurious bar was turned into a pile of debris. The scandal soon reached the streets; headlines told the tale in the press the very next day. The entire city commented the happenings. Finally, with a sold-out show, Sarrasani happily paid the damages.

Of course, the increasing success of the circus had one specific cause. One person made every decision. It was a vertical structure at the mercy of the director’s mood. Though brilliant and clever, Sarrasani was also tenacious and hardened, and persistent to an extreme. Perhaps the latter of these qualities was the most important, the essential ingredient in his character, the root of his achievements. He charged like Quixote, with an absolute faith in himself. He did not consider himself a thinker; he did not intellectualize his behavior, his processes or his quests. He was more a man of action, a fundamentalist in battle, and a mystic of the fight. In that instant he felt his blood boil. And that Masonic attitude, that inexorable certainty of victory, transmitted enthusiasm to the people, although it inevitably caused the occasional sting. Sarrasani was not exactly a naïve romantic. On the contrary, he was a pragmatic dreamer, a man with goals, a player who expected results

from the game. Someone who did not hesitate when making decisions. Like Moses in the desert, he had created for his *troupe* an implacable almost military code of obligations, which included severe punishment. He knew the idiosyncrasy of the circus very well, he had grown up in that world; but the charm of the bohemian, the ethereal roaming of migrant life – he believed – did not go against the discipline of daily work. On that point, primarily, he was demanding and inflexible that is why he generated a certain ambiguous devotion among his followers. For some, he was a leader. Fascinated, they succumbed to his charisma, to his vigor, to that almost animal magnetism that emanated from his being and, especially, to the hypnotic look that paralyzed wild beasts. Others, on the contrary, saw him as a tyrant, an inaccessible despot incapable of compassion. They tolerated him for a season and then resigned (if they hadn't left earlier or weren't fired). But all, without exception, recognized his immense capacity for work and his excessive passion for the circus.

How that introverted young man had become such a leader warrants a psychoanalytical study. For those that had known him since his youth, the transformation was surprising. Not his decisiveness or courage, which were apparently unchanged characteristics, rather his slow conversion to extrovert, something that had been unthinkable in that roving young man.

One thing he certainly maintained from his most modest beginnings and never abandoned even at the height of success was his sense of austerity. He led an almost Spartan personal life. All luxuries or opulence were reserved exclusively for the show. All profits were reinvested in the circus. There is a minor event that eloquently illustrates all of these qualities.

One night while he was dismantling the camp to head for a new city, Stosch found a strangely shaped piece of rusty iron on the circus ground. His face was transformed. Indignant, he picked up the object, blew off the dust and raised it towards the embarrassed looking people around him and remarked:

“This belongs to the front section of wagon 157, and it will still be usable if reconditioned!”

However, aside from these extremes, one intrinsic aspect of his character stands out among the many memories of him, lending him the air of an almost helpless child: his persistent fight against fate. Stosch was an incurably superstitious man, and a lover of fetishes. He heeded all well-known superstitions and appealed fervently to all sorts of talismans and amulets. It was evident that he bet heavily on his work, but not for that

reason would he tempt fate. This was, among his personal beliefs, a variable he valued as highly as each drop of sweat. He got annoyed, for example, if someone whistled under the tent or came in with an open umbrella. If a black cat crossed the street in front of him, he threw his hat up in the air three times. He never dared walk under a ladder. He always carried with him, among his personal belongings, an ivory Buddha (a present from a *troupe* of Chinese acrobats) which he kissed every morning on its belly and its head before starting the workday. Not because he was devotee of *Zen*, rather because for some obscure reason, he believed that object brought good luck. A funny contrast to his belief in modernity and his rational obsession for order.

The princess of the Elbe (and her “Golden Palace”)

Pickaxe and shovel. Pickaxe and shovel. The machines removed earth continuously. The huge excavation was a sign of what was to come. Solid foundations and large iron profiles began to give shape to the structure. A crowd of workers continued to build the wall day after day. A Cyclops like construction, a strange round building was emerging by shores of the Elbe. The dream of a home of his own was becoming real. Sarrasani was building his new circus immersed in dream architecture. Dresden, the most royal-like metropolis of the Kingdom of Saxony, a landscape of small urban palaces built with refined baroque details, formed the ideal setting for the circus: lustrous bronzes, copper finishes, pilasters, rose tones and the richest and most diverse ornamentation. The “Circus Theater Sarrasani” was rising unstoppably in a city at the height of its glory.

The original idea, to be honest, had been to install the circus in Berlin (where it had always been successful), but the reticence of the authorities and the pressure from existing circuses that feared the competition, had denied him the possibility. In spite of this, and out of an almost perverse desire to cause trouble, Stosch left a wooden circus installed on state land in the capital. The structure was the object of a long negotiation until finally the director had to dismantle it under police supervision.

He was no luckier in his next choice: the city of Munich, capital of the Kingdom of Bavaria. There, too, the local communities denied their support. Dresden, then, was the third option. It was a smaller city and less centrally located than Berlin in relation to the German border, but it gave him a more interesting radius of influence with regard to the

circus' insertion into greater Europe. He was not abandoning the German confederation and, yet, at the same time, remained remarkably close (very convenient for touring) to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria and Switzerland; which opened a diversification of routes and, therefore, of risks.

Both the Kingdom of Saxony and the City of Dresden fully supported the project. Tax benefits, soft loans and remarkable political support stimulated the rapid start-up of the project. Construction began in 1911, facing the elegant Carolaplatz (Carola square), the brain of the Neustadt (new city). And its final shape was not a surprise. Colorful postcards with the image of the "Golden Palace" had been distributed throughout the city.

Its heart was the central dome, with a diameter of 47m and an inner height of 35m. The building rested on the surrounding walls. Stosch was particularly concerned that all spectators have a perfect, unobstructed view. The ring, which could be submerged and filled with water, measured the standard 13,50m in diameter. The stage could be raised to reach a height of 17 m. In the cupola of the dome was a movable ring which that supported the lightening and air systems, as well as allowed for a cage full of wild beasts to be raised and lowered. The building was a purposefully non-flammable construction with a high degree of fire safety and a private group of firefighters that lived alongside the artists – not in vain was it an obligatory place in the city to house dramatic excursions of people. It had a total capacity of 5,000 spectators, as well as all kinds of gastronomic offerings and entertainment. The stables were conceived as exhibition rooms, like a zoo to be visited daily. A machine room capable of heating even the farthest corner completed the technical equipment. In conclusion, Sarrasani, faithful to his meticulous style, had thought out each and every detail of his circus. Therefore, it is not surprising that the building in Dresden became an unavoidable point of reference in the circus architecture of its time.

The final coronation of such efforts was set for Sunday, December 22nd, 1912. The Sarrasani Circus Theater, remarkably illuminated, opened its doors to the city. All Dresden, dressed to the nines, massively attended the opening of the much-promoted building. Groups of visitors waited in amazement in the foyer, until the staff, in red and gold uniforms, guided them to their seats. The program began with the complete parade of animals and the multiracial army of artists and employees moving to the majestic sounds of the orchestra. Hundreds of people marching in full pomp, an impressive image of color and fantasy. A kaleidoscope of illusions spinning under the circular sky of the new building.

The impetuous march culminated in the presence of a stocky, charismatic man, of average height and blond hair, impeccably dressed in black tails and a silver vest, with a

coat of arms of diamonds and rubies on his lapel. All of the lights, all of the applause centered on that one figure which ascended a triumphant platform to begin the show. Hans Stosch Sarrasani fulfilled, that evening, the dream of his life.

A convoy of artists

The Maharajah became the new hero of the city. Wearing a Hindu turban and holding a stick mounted with precious stones, he majestically conducted a group of elephants. Sarrasani himself was the star of the show and his circus, the emblem of Dresden. Act after act, the audience continued to be amazed. The Wild West Indians assaulted a stagecoach on horseback, Chinese acrobats flew through the air hanging by their long hair, Japanese jugglers built the great human pyramid, a clown stumbled and entered the lions' cage by mistake. In the second act came the finale: a huge cascade of water began to fall over the arena, creating a huge fountain. Artists then emerged to begin the famous Sarrasani aquatic pantomime.

Curious visitors from all over Germany flocked to the Saxon city. Sarrasani was an unavoidable center of attraction. It had enjoyed two years of uninterrupted success, which culminated with a traditional summer tour around Germany and its neighboring countries. It was then that the circus recovered the romanticism of the tent and its roving profile. Caravans carried the artists through vast territories. Other supplies were transported by rail. In each new locale, Stosch raised a fascinating megalopolis in a few short days from which the *troupe* began its parades around the city. Representatives of exotic and colorful cultures dressed for a big party rode horses, elephants and camels, bringing commotion to the streets. It was a parade of singular proportions, which aroused widespread curiosity. Strongmen showed their muscles in tight costumes. Acrobats jumped and capered about. Fire-eaters threw flames into the air. Jugglers on stilts showed their balance and dexterity. Clowns wandered about offering their jokes. Musicians played to the crowds. Then followed animal tamers, contortionists, dancers and the remaining employees in impeccable circus costumes. A huge masquerade offering splendor and joy. Everywhere the circus went, the colossal company drew huge crowds. The public overflowed the sidewalks to share in their happiness. The arrival of the "big circus" was always a magical event, a party awaited with excitement.

Europe in flames

On August 1st, 1914, in the middle of the show, an army officer intruded the ring escorted by a group of soldiers. To everybody's amazement he reads the order for mobilization. Germany had declared war on Russia. In the midst of cheers and the uproar of the audience, the director started making calculations. Disaster was imminent. German artists and employees had to present themselves immediately to serve in the war. Foreigners from "enemy countries" would be incarcerated and later deported. The rest would attempt to return to their home countries. The majority would make it. Even the Indians would reach the North American coast. However, the Japanese *troupe* had bad luck. Their ship sunk on the high seas, victim of a German torpedo fired by mistake.

The trigger had been pulled one month before in Sarajevo, with the assassination of archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir of the Austrian-Hungarian imperial throne, at the hands of a Serbian nationalist. At that time, Austria (induced by Germany) attempted to subdue Serbia, which opposed its expansion into the Danube. Russia, which had traditionally supported the Slavs, immediately mobilized its forces. The II Reich declared war and in the following days, the alliance system rapidly expanded the conflict, incorporating France and Great Britain.

The war surprised Sarrasani on a successful tour in the north of Germany and Holland planning to travel to England by sea. But as the international situation deteriorated, he decided to strike out towards a neutral country: Belgium; a goal that could not be realized due to the German attack on that country on August 4th. The circus was stuck in Essen.

The Babel tower that had learned to live together under the bell jar that was the circus tent, disseminated rapidly. In just two days the circus was dismantled. Of the five hundred employees and artists only forty remained, and with the aggravation that the company was not working in their own building but on a summer tour. The whole circus structure seemed paralyzed. A comeback became impossible: customers could not travel by train. At the same time, the restriction of fuel prevented travel by automobile.

In mid-September, after difficult negotiations with the military authorities, the circus returned to its headquarters in Dresden. However, every day without income foreshadowed

a dark future. The maintenance cost of the animals alone was sufficient to exhaust company funds in a few weeks. Under these circumstances, there was only one way out: Circus Theater. Even though in the past Sarrasani had criticized comedies in the ring, he could not conceive of an alternative. It was simply a question of survival. Worse yet, the contradiction acquired more dramatic overtones: the political situation demanded the inclusion of themes exalting patriotism. A curious paradox for a man that, a short time ago, celebrated a vast diversity of races and cultures in his circus ring.

With this in mind, Sarrasani traveled immediately to Berlin in search of Adolf Steinmann, a prestigious playwright. Work was not scarce for Steinmann in those days; he had already informed by telegraph that he was unable to take any new projects.

Regardless, Sarrasani succeeded in convincing him to meet briefly for coffee to discuss future projects. He dropped by to pick up the playwright in his director's caravan one morning, where they talked and shared the aforementioned cup of coffee. The vehicle stopped after a few hours. The urban landscape had changed. The city was no longer Berlin, but Dresden. The caravan had parked in the Carolaplatz, facing the colossal building.

It was logical that Steinmann complain about the "kidnapping", what was surprising was that he accepted the project. The hierarchy of the theater fascinated him. The new play would be titled "Europe in flames".

The show, markedly anti-Russian, filled the circus tent and gained the praise of the German military. It was the first of twenty other plays written for circus theater. But the truly sensational aspect of these plays were the technical special effects: a railway wagon exploding on stage, a nocturnal attack of London by a zeppelin, a submarine going under (represented through aquatic pantomime), sleet falling over battle scenes, etc.

In spite of the success of these plays, the German economic situation did not cease to be a problem. The artistic chess move of Circus Theater only slightly avoided the crisis, earning the minimum amount of funds required to keep the company functioning. Further, Sarrasani wished to return to his true vocation as soon as possible. It was, one could say, a personal issue. The circus theater did not satisfy him, it was far below his level of sensitivity.

In 1915, after serious contemplation, Sarrasani decided to resume his circus tours no matter the cost or the means. Once again he took a risk: he went abroad to search for opportunities that the circumstances of his country denied him. Possibilities were limited. The war narrowed the spectrum. Denmark, a country that had maintained on the fringes of

the conflict, was chosen as the final destination. To this end, Sarrasani gathered a new *troupe* and transported 160 animals by raft from Warnemünde to Gedser. Three days later he staged the *première* in Copenhagen.

The immediate and smashing success brought enthusiasm back to the director's life. The repercussions of the show surpassed all projections. The originally planned brief season was extended for a triumphal period of six months. However, an unfortunate episode ruined this renewed hope. During a show, two lions attacked one another out of jealousy. The animal tamer was unable to interfere and the wild beasts, increasingly out of control, destroyed each other furiously. The scene was one of bloody carnage. The interior of the tent seethed with hysteria. Suddenly, the commotion was silenced when two shots rang out, leaving an atmosphere of total astonishment in their wake. The beasts, torn apart, fell stiffly in the middle of the ring. The following day, the local animal protection society requested that the authorities send the circus back to its country of origin.

Back in Dresden, it became increasingly difficult for Sarrasani to maintain the company. The situation in Germany, immersed in war, became increasingly complicated. Once again, the animals devoured his daily budget. To make matters worse, the Saxon government, due to the overall crisis, began to implement extreme measures. Food would only be provided to animals that performed "Auxiliary War Service". This explains why armies of pachyderms, camels and horses moved daily in long processions around the city, carrying coal, food and tobacco for hospitals and army battalions. A scene worthy of surrealism. Long lines of elephants and camels passed in front of refined baroque palaces. Discouraged faces emerged from behind the elegant facades, with expressions vacillating between amazement and consternation. These everyday pilgrimages of working animals became a new (and perhaps macabre) form of entertainment. The circus went back to the streets, but this time without the fanfare. The colorful parades had become drastically lugubrious and gray. Each day the animals walked more slowly and seemed more exhausted. Every day they woke up weaker, less willing, ill.

The difficulties faced by the circus increased month after month. Its arches had begun to show obvious decay. The deterioration of the building was a telling symbol of the situation. Food rations grew smaller every day. One morning, while Sarrasani walked around the cages at dawn, he found 36 lions and 24 tigers, dead. At some point they had received tainted meat. The illness had finished them off.

Mortality among the animals continued to rise. Many died of starvation. Others were

slaughtered, at the director's instruction, to feed the more expensive species. They had to shoot an elephant for becoming irreversibly aggressive. As time passed, the once huge zoo is devastated by a daily count of death. Two elephants, 3 hippopotami, all of the monkeys, 3 kangaroo, 2 tapirs, 24 camels, 4 zebras, 44 reindeer, 30 ostriches and 30 Danish dogs died.

The circus palace had become a desolate ruin. Death had devastated every corner of the Sarrasani Empire. Without employees, artists, or animals, Sarrasani wandered, taciturn in the darkness. From the remains painful howls could be heard, hair-raising images that stalk his memory. That air of a warrior in his glory had been replaced by that of a gloomy and depressed specimen, a pale ghost of his former self. Dramatic scenes surrounded him, without pity. The elephant that had been shot, was cut into pieces and distributed among the inhabitants of Dresden. Its liver alone yielded 384 portions. Each one cost 85 cents.

From the Bolshevik revolution to a gala dinner

Visceral screams. Howls of pain. Sad melodies filled with drama. They were Russian artists expressing the Slavic soul far from their homeland. Musicians that had fled the Bolshevik revolution, mitigating their nostalgia through the modest parody of a circus. Sarrasani made his way between the ruins, almost like a survivor between the remains of the apocalypse. He had the bare minimum. The most precarious basics. But he also had an infinite willpower. From the old splendor to a rigorous administration of poverty. He was a magician, a conjurer, an illusionist.

After a period of painful seclusion, Sarrasani resumed his work. He no longer had masses of animals or crowds of artists. Nor could the magnificent building in Dresden be maintained, much less the tent and its numerous technical staff. Amidst so many obstacles, however, the director found a way out: the circus theater, a sort of variety show filled with circus artists.

In contrast to old times, when the theater invaded the circus, it was now the circus that invaded the theater. A contained group of artists and a small orchestra were the only assets required to go on tour. And they did not skip a single city in all of Germany that had a theater of its own. Not even the smallest village. Full of illusions, the *troupe* traveled the

theaters of the country. The combined energy of this group of survivors was unprecedented for its director, who appeared more motivated than ever before. He vibrated with emotion among his people. And he found in all of them a desperate will to live.

The program was an example in austerity. An austerity, however, that they faced with humor. The re-edition of a “Wild West” inhabited by “Saxon Indians, made the Sarrasani, a precursor to the anthropological circus, legendary. He who had once proclaimed the authenticity of race, unexpectedly resorted to masks. But his intention was not to deceive; rather he covered his own artifice with a thin veil of irony. His Indians talked and howled in a harsh German dialect.

To this act he added the aforementioned group of Russian artists, a juggler, a pair of acrobats, a magician, three clowns, a contortionist from India, and a ninety year-old tight rope walker who closed the show with his son, conferring a touch of humanity to the otherwise technical display.

Slowly Sarrasani began to enjoy success once again, and also to rebuild a new working staff, as the previous one had been decimated by the vicissitudes of war. For example, out of the group of exiled Russians came Josef Bamdas, who had arrived as a musician that played the *balalaika* (a kind of triangular, three-stringed lute used to play popular folk music) and since the co-ordination of a tour through the Slavic countries became Sarrasani’s right hand man. Thus, he returned to the front pages of the newspapers as the pioneer of staged show business.

But his drive prevented Sarrasani from working on that scale for too long. Brazened by success, this obsessive megalomaniac designed a new project of kingly proportions. During the winter of 1921 he leased the Messehall in Frankfurt, a huge conference room with a capacity to hold 15.000 spectators, which he reconditioned for the circus. It was no longer a *variété*, rather a show designed to occupy an enormous space. To that end, he hired a new “army” of artists (among them, for example, 40 air acrobats and Alfred Schneider, an animal tamer with his group of 24 lions) and launched a huge publicity campaign. All tickets were sold out 30 days in advance.

The show premiered on November 2nd. The Frankfurt Nachrichten printed an article describing the circus on November 3rd: “All you can ask for in circus art was represented. In the midst of a multicolor whirlwind, all kinds of daring artistic expressions emerged. Sarrasani has fulfilled his promise. He has placed the foundation piece for a renaissance of German circus art.”

Nonetheless, one month later, on December 2nd, the front pages of the newspapers

ruined his dreams: “Sarrasani Circus closed”, shouted the headlines. The chief of Frankfurt Police canceled the concession to the circus in response to a resolution from the city government in defense of “local enterprises”. Obviously, for certain interests, the presence of Sarrasani represented an obstacle.

This arbitrary decision brought dramatic consequences: Six hundred employees were left without jobs, fifteen days of sold-out tickets had to be refunded, the cost of dismantling and sending the entire circus back to Dresden had to be absorbed and the space reconditioned as a convention room.

Only after insistent protests and thanks to the fervent support of the public, Sarrasani was able to partially revert the measure and obtain permission to work for another month, from December 12th to January 10th. This enabled him to take advantage of the valuable holiday period: Christmas, New Year and the Day of Kings.

Events unrelated to the show marked the year 1922. The highest inflation rate ever experienced in Germany removed most of the country’s circuses from the circuit. Only 3 companies remained out of 30, among them Hans Stosch’s Sarrasani, who had returned to Saxony to celebrate his “30-years as an artist, 20-years as a director of the circus and 10-years as a citizen of Dresden”.

But even if the circus was named Sarrasani, it would not survive such an immense economic crisis unharmed. Prices had quadrupled in one year and in 1923 they reached disproportionate levels, with the German mark falling to almost one billionth of its original value. Hundreds of companies, from a diverse range of activities, went bankrupt. At that point, due to the immediate devaluation of the currency, the director resorted to a clever solution: circus tickets for the lower income sectors would be exchanged for goods. Which is to say that Sarrasani returned to the primitive barter system. For a kilo and a half of oats you could get a ticket in open seating. In this way, the circus gathered food to feed their animals and the public could afford to see the show. The impressive building gave the impression of a charity. Long lines of people carrying bags of goods formed in front of the circus. A night of illusion for their families was worth the sacrifice.

Sarrasani, in the meantime, traveled to Berlin in search of breathing space. He imagined that a season in the city would make the crisis more tolerable. But after several days of searching, nothing certain appeared for the foreseeable future. Destiny, however, played him an unexpected hand. One night, while dining in an elegant restaurant, a chance meeting occurred. Hugo Stinnes, an industrial tycoon fascinated by the magic of the circus and an historic follower of Sarrasani, invited him to join his table. Accompanied by their

respective wives, they enjoyed a comfortable and extensive discussion about the destiny of the circus and probable future scenarios for times of such conflict. Stosch expressed many doubts and some hope:

“Here, in Germany, numbers rule. The dollar absorbs all profits like the desert absorbs each drop of rain”, stated the director.

The tycoon played with the phrase and asked the waiter for a chilled bottle of champagne. He uncorks it himself and serves the glasses one by one. Once he had finished the ritual, he raised his glass and, before the toast, suggested:

“I have the money; you have the courage. What do you think of South America?”

It was the year 1923. Friedrich Ebert, the first president of the recently formed Weimar Republic, excited about German cultural and entrepreneurial representation in far away lands, sent Sarrasani a farewell letter in which he declared his willingness to assist on any matter of protocol which might arise and expressed: “My best wishes for you on your trip abroad. I am convinced that your activities in South America will bring prestige to Germany.”

The conquest of the Americas (or a German in the tropics)

The Danzig, the Ludendorff and the Tirpitz are the names of the three ships that Stinnes put at Sarrasani’s disposal to cross the Atlantic and begin the conquest of South America. The tour was a true voyage into the unknown. The destinations had been identified as Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, although the information obtained about them beforehand was no guarantee. There were more enigmas than certainties. It was impossible to determine if the circus would last the projected time in each city, if they would find appropriate terrain, if the economic situation would be stable, if the governments of each country would support the tour, if the show would be accepted by the public, and many other doubts. But in spite of the unknown variables, 230 men, 180 animals and 120 wagons went to the sea on November 4th 1923.

The journey lasted almost a month. It was a month of open seas and salty breezes, of idleness and cards, of one or two exotic ports, of parties, drinks, diverse languages and hand signals, of fleeting love affairs and of renewed stars shining on the deck.

The port of Rio de Janeiro – capital of Brazil at that time – was full of children. In astonishment they contemplated the scene: flying elephants disembarking on the dock. It must be a hallucination! Impressive pachyderms with covered eyes floated in the air. Their stomachs were bound with leather harnesses, which hung from the chains of a crane. Later came camels, horses, oxen, hippopotami, cages and vehicles. The port landscape gave a fantastic background to the scene.

The following morning, in the center of the city, under a burning sun, a huge drill perforated the ground. The army of technicians worked incessantly. In just a few days the magnificent circus-city was finished. Its ostentatious façade looked impeccable from the front. Behind, was a huge tent capable of holding 7,000 spectators. On the edge of the property, three long tents lodged the animals and 120 caravans formed a perfect line. In the background stood the “Sugar Loaf”, the typical rounded hill of Rio de Janeiro.

The fascination was mutual. Brazilians observed the preposterous German enterprise, much as the Europeans succumbed to the colorful exuberance of Rio and the indolent pace of its inhabitants. They watched one another like two mutually fascinated strangers. On one side was an evident inclination towards idleness and amusement; on the other, an inherent excess of discipline, order and articulation of thought. One group gave itself over to the natural flow of events, the other sought to transcend through the artifice of action. It is not surprising that the blond and stocky director, impeccably dressed in a white suit, became an almost spectral figure for the Brazilian mulattos. His circus, installed in the very center of the city, represented a victory for willpower, for the indomitable voracity of the white man. The conquering spirit of the western world had disembarked in the tropics.

San Pablo and the main inland cities of Brazil fell victim to the same captivating effects. Such a large circus company making its way through the voluptuous geography of the country was a moving spectacle. For the natives it was, surely, a rarely seen human and artistic event. The tent exuded furor in the cities. Precision and an unprecedented meticulousness shone in its interior. The Saxon air of the company cast its spell almost as much as the colored stones and mirrors had done in the past.

The spell was inversed in mid-February when Carnival arrived. Sarrasani was then the delighted one. His legendary artists’ parades paled in comparison to the giant masquerade of Rio. Costumes, stages, ostentatious carriages showing their splendor in time with the incessant rhythm of the drums. Black, almost naked or scantily clad bodies with incandescent clothing. For the first time in his life, the director participated as a spectator in such an event. Surrounded by his personal entourage and visibly impressed, he reviewed

the procession attentively, without missing a single detail. Flashes of light reflected in his pale eyes. From time to time, he produced a small notebook and took down drawings, ideas, thoughts. What he would never be able to reproduce, what would always remain unattainable, was that which surpassed all decorative efforts: the sensuality, the cadence, the innate musicality of the dancing bodies. On that point, he was confronted by the whims of blood, a lineage impossible to stitch into the golden borders of a coat of arms.

As for the rest, the tour was only partially successful. Economically, it had its high and low points. The success of the show was obtained in spite of delays caused by politicians that on various occasions had to be resolved through diplomatic intervention, or through certain monetary contributions. On the whole, the enterprise broke even.

With regard to the show, Sarrasani had caused unsurpassable repercussions. In addition, he had gained an important resource of ideas and contacts, as well as a group of artists that he decided to incorporate into his *troupe* when he returned. Of course, as a tribute to the host country, these artists participated briefly in the show; although by this time it was perfectly clear to Sarrasani that his selling point in South America was to be found in the contrast, in exotic features, in the face of European culture.

The Queen of the Río de la Plata (or the whims of a diva)

The trip to Buenos Aires annihilated the budget. The dark morning in the Riachuelo, the foggy landscape of the port, the expression of the inhabitants already spoke of a different idiosyncrasy. The change, to be honest, had been briefly foreshadowed on a fleeting stop in Montevideo. The Uruguayan capital, with a melancholy similar to that of the city of the *Porteños*, had acted as a transition of sorts to this abrupt change in habit. In the ports of the Río de la Plata, the reigning atmosphere was without a doubt different. Sarrasani was no longer facing the stereotypical Latin American city. The human and urban features did not differ significantly from those of his continent. The “local color” that so fascinated the European traveler, faded here to sober shades of gray.

Buenos Aires, “the Queen of the Río de la Plata”, was by then a bountiful city. Capital of the fifth exporting country in the world, it flirted with the capriciousness of a diva from the Old Continent. Its physiognomy demonstrated the features of a lady of noble birth. Sarrasani was anchored in South America in a metropolis that considered itself to be

a mirror of Europe, of the most glamorous aspects of Europe. Its architecture, far from the American colonial style, fancied itself as reflecting the best of Parisian baroque. It was not about cultural contrast, rather about emulation. Buenos Aires boasted of being a polished enclave of the west on an aboriginal continent.

An excursion into the city yielded an unsurpassable piece of property, in the very center of the city, facing the Retiro Railway Station. The impressive circus machinery was erected there in just a few days. Its arrival had caused an unusual commotion. Crowds descended every evening from the trains to cross towards the shiny metropolis. Sarrasani used his talent for publicity and hit on the right target. He succeeded in installing in the minds of a people avid and curious for all things foreign, the cultural archetype they so longed for: to witness the renowned perfection and quality of a German enterprise. The show did not differ at all from that exhibited in Brazil. As before, he incorporated artists and themes of the native folklore (and even some elements of the “Circo Criollo”) out of deference, as a compliment to the guests. Fragments of popular dramas such as “Juan Moreira” or “Martín Fierro” were interpreted by picturesque *gauchos* who were incorporated into the cast of European and Asian artists. Among the latter group we should mention: the Müller family of fabulous springboard acrobats; the Wortleys, eminent trapeze artists; Rocasimi, the clown-tamer of lions; John McKeegan, the “stylist” of the rope; the Sawada brothers, air “kamikazes”; Delaune, the magician; Goscinki, the European “Hercules”; Fritz Schultz and his Bengal tigers; Franz Kraml and his pachyderms; and the traditional presentation of wild beasts, horses and camels. For the tour Sarrasani had added the exotic exhibition of the “4 Watussi sacred oxen”, the immense hippopotamus “Oedipus” and Aduona the dancer with her tame snake. The program was completed by an orchestra of 50 professional musicians graduated from the most prestigious conservatories of Budapest, Berlin and Vienna. On this last point, Sarrasani introduced an innovation born of the native land. Cesar S. Cesso, sergeant-major of the Argentine Army (an Italian immigrant naturalized Argentine), from then on would abandon his position to lead the famous circus orchestra, opening and closing the show with a theme of his own: the new “Sarrasani March”. This melody would become the musical *leit motiv* of the company.

The outrageous success of the circus was unimaginable even for Sarrasani and his cast, while the political repercussions of the event surpassed their imagination. The president of the country shook hands with the director upon his arrival. Through that gesture of welcome, he made the stranger a permanent guest of the most important

personalities of the time and a recurrent figure in local aristocratic and intellectual social events. Everyone was delighted to enjoy the visit of such a renowned artist and his wife. Though underneath the official story, there was gossip about a dark Brazilian girl who traveled with the circus with no other role but that of the famous visitor's lustful lover. Actually, this gossip was never proven and generated the most frivolous of comments. For example, that the fifty year-old director was liberating himself from the repression that had marked his youth, that such affairs were a typical European eccentricity, that it would be nice to have a daguerreotype of the troubled German face next to the vivacious features of his mistress. Or that when they made love, the dark lady exerted a sort of witchcraft, or that the German claimed that in the moment of orgasm, he felt a strange liberation, as if a monster within had been let free.

It is worth remembering that the political *corpus* of the country at that time was lead by the Radical Civic Union (Unión Cívica Radical), the first political party that had reached power through the universal and obligatory vote. This party was in its second consecutive term under President M.T. de Alvear, a politician of significantly more conservative tendencies than his immediate predecessor, Hipólito Yrigoyen, and with a decidedly European focus. The latter to the extent that in the future his critics would remark on his "unusual" way of "governing the country from Paris", a city that counted him among its frequent visitors.

However, government deference granted to the circus, such as tax exemptions, had an historical and non-partisan political base: the reason was to be found in the will of the *Porteños* to feel that they were enjoying a show of the same caliber as great European performances. This mania was not exclusive to the ruling class, rather it was common to the entire society at that time, as proven by the crowds that approached Retiro square daily.

Not in vain so much hospitality and unexpected impact encouraged the director to modify his initial plans and extend his stay longer than originally intended. This including a tour to the inland cities of Rosario, Santa Fé and Córdoba, where he was no less successful than in the capital.

When Sarrasani returned to Buenos Aires, he was welcomed again by President M.T. de Alvear, who, in a well-attended act of protocol, shook his hand and gave him a medal of honor for bringing "the majesty of his art, not only to our Federal Capital but to our entire country".

Finally, after two years of intrepid adventure through Latin American landscapes, a sudden telegram from his partner compelled him to return to his country. Hugo Stinnes, his

personal Midas, was about to go bankrupt. Sarrasani, in the meantime, returned to Germany taking with him a veritable fortune.

Circus sinks on the high seas

The news convulsed the German press: “Sarrasani Circus sinks on high seas”, announced the dramatic cable. The sensationalist papers printed page after page about the fascinating story of the circus, recently submerged in the Atlantic after its triumphal journey to South America. In the wings, however mischievous smiles could be seen. The trick had been conceived by a friend from Buenos Aires, with the director’s blessing, who maintained a rigorous silence from his office in Dresden.

Some time later, when nerves seemed to have calmed, a new caravan with a huge copper lion on its roof drove through the streets announcing, amidst the sound of roaring, the imminent return of the circus. The effect was doubly potent. On one hand, the impact of the unexplained survival of the circus. On the other hand, the novel technical resource. The megaphone had been recently invented and produced by Luchterhand & Freitag, a company from Berlin which, like many others, turned to Sarrasani to publicize their products.

“The most fabulous show between two worlds”, shouted the new slogan; referencing, of course, the recent intercontinental adventure. After two years of travels, the heroic comeback of the circus would be presented in the historic building in Dresden, in order to reflect the fruits of such an innovative experience in the ring. Pilgrimages from all over Germany arrived in Saxony to attend the promising show, now promoted with a new addition of South American *gauchos*. The city became a great party once again. The success of the circus affected other civilian activities, as well, by bringing benefits due to the constant flow of visitors.

In the midst of so much noise, however, the mysterious director remained in seclusion, making virtually no public declarations. He presented his elephants as usual dressed as the Maharajah and after the show he returned to his privacy. Far from soothing the commotion, this fact provoked the most farfetched rumors: that an incurable illness afflicted him, that he had been infected with an exotic disease in a South American jungle, or that his transatlantic adventure had been so intense that it had weakened his will. Others

said that he was experiencing a metaphysical crisis or, the most prosaic of all, that his partner's bankruptcy had completely ruined him and that the apparent "triumphant comeback" was just a smokescreen. Thus, rumors arose from the most diverse interpretations that the collective imagination could conceive of, although all of them, invariably, merely fed the publicity machine.

Conscious of the effects of this situation, the director did not change his policy. He was rarely seen in the city, much less in public meetings or social events. He was difficult to find anywhere, but in the circus arena and it was completely impossible to obtain any kind of declaration. Day after day the mystery grew. Only those closest to him (and a group of designers and technicians he met with in secret) knew about his plans. In the most rigorous of silences, Sarrasani was planning his next attack.

Arabian Nights (the mirage of technique)

The new *façade* looked like a picture from "Arabian Nights". A glowing mirage in the nocturnal city. Twenty-eight thousand round lamps sustained the sumptuous, oriental style front, an obvious reminiscence to the Moorish gardens of Alhambra. Behind, "Sarrasani's technological miracle": his new mobile winter circus, a technical challenge with a capacity for 10,000 people. He had given it the nickname: "Yrigoyen", as a tribute to the popular Argentine president, who possessed such a resounding name.

The construction was built without a single nail or screw. The pieces fit were held together by new industrial elements called bolts, the entire structure worked as a perfect gear. Eight steel poles of 26m in height assured a modern system of support. The double canvas covered a total diameter of 85m on which the dome was raised. A thermostat kept the temperature between 21° and 24°C through an air heating system. It was a design equipped with the most modern developments in the industry.

Sarrasani's delirium for technical advances finally began to flourish. The famous stilt walkers handing out leaflets in the streets seemed archaic to him as a system of publicity. To the impressive tent he added a balloon, which preceded the circus in each city, announcing its arrival alongside a squadron of seven planes which would glide endlessly on arrival day.

The modernization process continued through the increase of the vehicle fleet. The

rapid evolution of the automobile industry in recent years had allowed him to become almost completely independent from the railroad. He had taken an important step in this regard on his trip to South America; though with this expansion Sarrasani completed his own diverse transportation system, so that only the largest animals would depend on railroad transport. The Daimler Benz Company, pioneer in the development of internal combustion engines, and companies such as Adler, Hanomag and Opel, among others, provided him with new designs for trucks and automobile bodies in accordance with the specific needs of the circus. His total fleet of vehicles soon reached: 150 cars with trailers, 30 fully-equipped mobile houses, 15 cage-wagons specifically designed for wild animals, a special wagon for the famous hippopotamus “Oedipus” with a special hot water system, 6 generators, 15 office-wagons and 12 wagons equipped as mechanical service stations. The fleet also included cars to transport people, panoramic buses, kitchen-wagons, bathroom-wagons and the jewel of the convoy: the luxurious and mobile director’s house, 22m long, which included a study, a conference room, two bedrooms, a dressing room; and in the interior, the most sophisticated decoration.

As the young Hans had dreamed in the beginning, all of the inventions modernity offered had become an essential and fundamental part of his enterprise. Sarrasani revolutionized circus equipment once more with *avant-garde* technology.

The circus’s artistic innovations were no less revolutionary. Faced with the renewed competition of foreign three-ring circuses, and, mainly due to the impersonations of his closest German competitor (the Krone Circus, perhaps the only one capable of putting him in the shade), Sarrasani makes “a size decision”, as well. While still being faithful to his historical roots, he decides to extend the traditional circle from 13,50m to 17m, which implied a 25% visual enlargement and, therefore, a complete aesthetic restructuring of the show.

The optical effect was no longer the same. The new space invariably demanded a new visual design. This decision, apparently insignificant and related only to numbers, would revolutionize formal show criteria. The dimension of the stage supported the change, which increased space available for the various acts. However, it was also an excuse to put into practice certain artistic developments that Sarrasani had been contemplating for some time. He had even considered giving an oval shape to the ring at one point on his South American tour, a project he soon abandoned thinking that the shape would detract from the intrinsic charm of the circle, the unconscious effect that this geometric figure provoked in the audience. He still preferred the pure shape of the

circumference, which, apart from inevitably alluding to historical rituals, enabled an even view from all sectors of the tent.

The new ring affected solo acts or those with three or four characters in terms of the use of empty spaces, as well as acts with groups of artists, whose number had to increase in order to occupy the entire stage. In this last case, Sarrasani showed, once more, his exquisite sensitivity to the art of conducting the masses. The images on the arena varied like a kaleidoscope. The psychedelic lights and sounds highlighted this phenomenon. It was not astonishment through noise; rather all elements flowed harmoniously, like a vivid, iridescent dream. At times, the characters melted into one another in vigorous brushstrokes of light, filling the atmosphere in an intense symphony of color.

In his public announcements, the director liked to mention his admiration for the music of Richard Wagner, who had greatly influenced his show in epic terms, and also accompanied on more than a few occasions the acts themselves. This surprising artistic revolution caused a commotion in other circuses, which soon became visibly obsolete. Without intent, he had fomented an *avant-garde* artistic and technical movement which his colleagues would gradually be forced to imitate.

As in his best times, Sarrasani set out to conquer Europe with a circus and a renewed style. His name regained the splendor of years past. On January 24th 1928, in the city of Chemnitz, the majestic construction is presented to the public. There had never been a better setting for his famous slogan: “The most fabulous show between two worlds.”

Crash ***(the tentacles of Wall Street)***

1931 is celebrated with a lavish anniversary party: 30 years of the Sarrasani Circus. The illuminated sign reading “1901-1931” sparkled on the façade of the Circus-Theater in Dresden. A huge wave of stories invaded the press. Front pages congratulated the “Saxon National Circus”. Once more, historic reports describing the voyage of its founder and a photographic essay of his life appeared. Attached were extensive articles about the evolution of his art; from his modest beginnings to his tremendous present. These were glorious times. Germany acclaimed his fame.

But all that glitters is not gold. Behind so much fanfare, a dramatic economic situation was lurking. For more than a year the survival of the circus had been almost a

miracle.

The crisis began on October 24th 1929 with the crash of the New York Stock Market. The initial financial euphoria that had turned stock sales into the most fashionable entertainment of the time ended fatally in a frightening wave of bankruptcies and suicides. The Wall Street crash did not affect Sarrasani directly. When it came to gambling, he obeyed as puritan a morality as with regard to alcohol, (perhaps because managing his circus brought him enough excitement, betting and vertigo). But the crash affected the world economy and Europe, of course, was not exempt. In other words, the huge circus company, the impressive and monstrous enterprise mounted for its director, would not survive the sadly famous “crisis of the 30s” unscathed. Even though the home office was located in Dresden, it was mainly an operating center whose scale was incapable of supporting the international dimension of the circus. Sarrasani’s income primarily came from tours around the main cities of the continent, all of them now submerged in a deep depression.

Sarrasani had already appealed to every available resource. Supported by the constant praise of the press, he had started and won a fierce and resounding tax war. If his circus was considered a national cause, if it brought prestige to his country, why not consider certain tax benefits that would allow it to survive?

In spite of this, the situation continued to worsen. The tax benefits did not modify the purchasing power of the public. Finally, a series of dismissals of artists and technicians followed the lavish 30th anniversary celebrations. The lights of the celebration were no more than illusion, a brief twilight before the debacle.

The attempt at a commercial solution came through Switzerland, the only European country that offered a certain level of stability. Although the sudden tour, which appeared to progress wonderfully, would not be especially remembered for its success. A fatal misfortune took place when the caravan traveled from Zurich to Basle. Car 117, overloaded, fractured the frame and smashed the brakes to pieces. The vehicle went downhill and crashed into a wall. The driver and co-driver died instantly. The grief of Sarrasani could not be greater. The pain of losing his people had a cruel addition: the tragic accident was due to a “technical deficiency”.

Other roads were immediately sought to soothe sadness, to erase painful traces. As if it were a geographical superstition, all of the vehicles set out for the Netherlands, a country full of pleasant memories for the circus. Although financially speaking, the new *tourn ee* was as unstable as the economic situation of the country.

But these circumstances did not significantly affect Sarrasani's frame of mind. In those days, he was obsessed with signs of fate. Because an automobile tragedy (as if that technological development were evil) invaded the bosom of his *troupe* once again: his personal chauffeur, while driving Sarrasani's car, died unexpectedly in an accident. This time a third party was responsibility, but the pain burrowed again in the spirit of Sarrasani, who offered his employee a funeral procession never before seen in the city of Amsterdam. Six hundred artists and employees paraded behind the coffin, the last respects offered by the circus to which the driver had faithfully served.

This sign reaffirmed the support of the German working class for Sarrasani, which had historically venerated the leader of show business. The Dutch press, on the other hand, attributed an opportunistic note to his behavior, insinuating an attempt to gain publicity. In any event, the conflicting press coverage kept the heartbeat of the circus alive in the media.

The tour continued on to Belgium. From the very beginning, in the city of Liege, Sarrasani's attention is drawn to the negative billboards, which showed a huge and powerful German lion trying to devour the rest of Europe. The design demonstrated a political parallel. The circus was accused of being militant and the figure of Sarrasani infused with responsibility for the sufferings inflicted on the Belgian people by the German army during the First World War. The billboards also urged the public not to contribute a single franc to a company of enemy origin.

The press, of course, did not miss the opportunity to echo these sentiments which fit so well into their own agendas. But in spite of these indications of reality and warnings of his closest collaborators, the stubborn director announced the debut for December 12th. The show would begin with the Belgian national anthem and the profits would be donated to a local charitable institution.

Outside the tent, protests addressed the audience: "Remember our invalids", proclaimed the billboards; and a group of injured veterans claiming indemnification for their disabilities joined the crowd. The atmosphere was becoming more and more violent. The protest began to demonstrate the potential for violence and the mounted police were forced to surround the circus in order to provide protection to the show.

The visit had turned into a complete failure. Sarrasani, in private, spoke of a haunted tour, of a path mined with bad luck. This belief that brought little consolation, however, as his will was nourished by an irreconcilable ambiguity: superstition persisted alongside a no less extreme obstinacy; a characteristic which flat-out rejected the idea of dismantling the enterprise and returning immediately to Dresden. And besides, return to what? The

German economic depression did not guarantee a brighter future.

Thinking that perhaps the Flemish people would receive the circus with less negative feelings, the director decided to change direction towards Antwerp. They arrived on Christmas Eve and the entire *troupe* of artists, technicians and executives in celebration of the holiday assumed the commitment of staging an unprecedented opening night as a sort of spell against bad luck. But the new city did not harbor a more promising destiny. The pledge was not enough to overcome the hands of fate. On the debut, New Year's Eve 1931, the tent was completely empty; not even a single seat was occupied. The only visitor was a symbolic one: a brief and conclusive threat. The following night the circus burst into flames. The most modern circus fire department of the world could not succeed in putting out the fire. Out of fear of a freeze, the six thousand-liter tank had been emptied the previous day. The official Antwerp firefighters arrived late. By dawn, the entire circus was nothing more than a huge terrain of still-burning ashes.

All kinds of stories circulated about the catastrophe. Some of them (alluding to the suspicious emptying of the water tank) referred to an act of arson perpetrated by the director in order to collect insurance money and thus resolve the financial crisis of his company, while, at the same time, generating publicity. The investigations yielded little in that respect: nothing more was found than a fuel can of unknown origin. The reasoning, though improbable, appeared logical. It was accurate as far as results were concerned. The accident preserved the circus economically, though given Sarrasani's frame of mind; it was difficult to believe that he would burn his own creation, something closer to the act of an oriental *bonzo* than that of this virtual paradigm of a western gladiator. The reality of the situation ended in the total destruction of the net worth of the circus. Except for employees and animals, the rest of the circus quite literally went up in smoke.

A typical Freudian cast

Since the fire in Antwerp, the director was a broken man. A heart attack was the result of that catastrophe. It had almost paralyzed him. Josef Bamdas, the Russian immigrant that had won Sarrasani's trust with effort and loyalty and who had become his right hand man and main advisor, played a central role in the reconstruction of the circus. As did Maria, his wife, and his son and namesake, Hans, who to differentiate his father,

became known as “Junior” within the circus, while the director was called “Senior”.

The lady, who had been an efficient administrator in the early days of her marriage, demonstrated herself to be an authority on the inner workings of the company, a task Senior was no longer able to manage. The passage of time and the many difficulties had damaged the director’s will, and his wife took his place with stoicism, almost as an act of love for the man who had created the fantastic world which had treated her like a queen. She was not concerned about the rumors of her husband’s very real indiscretions. Those who slandered him could not, for all that, claim a better future. She would not allow a minor and common weakness in her husband to darken vast years of happiness. In the world in which Maria moved, she had never met an example of rectitude in that respect, either. Her husband was no different from the rest, except for his affable, overwhelming charm and perhaps for his gallant discretion. Thus was Maria’s internal reasoning. She was a woman of strong convictions and a hardened temperament, although absolutely reserved regarding her emotions and more than reluctant to face or cause public scandal. Any marital conflicts between them always remained in private. This was her inexorable code of conduct: No scenes or confessions to third parties. For Maria, only Gad and her husband were appropriate listeners for her concerns. She was indifferent to the opinions of others, and even more so when they referred to a suspected deterioration of family ties. Her feelings towards her family did not allow for doubts or external gossip. And the circus was the family project that kept that tie alive, a tie to which she had dedicated her entire life. And she would continue to do so.

As for Junior, he was already over thirty. After a series of successive misunderstandings, his difficult relationship with his father was finally enjoying a period of stability. It had not been easy for either of them. A typical Freudian cast marked the family structure: his sister Hedwig, one year older, monopolized her father’s attention, while his mother saved her tenderness for her son. This inevitable game of family relationships had led to a typical rebellion against parental authority; behavior that his father interpreted as a personal challenge. In order to change his son for the better, the director subjected him to the same severe discipline with which he treated his employees. Failure was predictable. The rules of professional relationships could only bring disaster in a relationship regulated by emotion. The harsher the discipline, the worse the transgressions. With one aspect that worsened the situation: the child had always been more inclined toward adventure than books. He also showed an enthusiastic vocation for the circus world, which his father, due to his son’s poor grades, rather than encourage,

strictly denied. As tends to happen in these cases, the son's interest became irreversibly more intense. Fascinated by the Native American Indians, Junior surreptitiously stole into the rehearsals to watch or participate. He spent hours inside the tent stealthily joining the preparation of each *troupe*. At other times he wandered the stables, helping with the feeding or maintenance of the animals, especially the horses which were his favorites. The community of artists and employees who adored the charming, intrepid little boy who defied the director's orders, of course, supported this behavior. Though firstly and obviously, he could always count on his mother's approving wink, as she perceived in her son the same adventurous spirit as in his father, in spite of their differences.

Perhaps it was that same spirit that made Junior, at 19 years of age and having finished secondary school, enroll as a volunteer in the Saxon Regiment of Hussars in 1916 (during World War I), a decision he made in spite of the family's obvious disapproval. Nonetheless, the boy left, and the evolution of events became his ally. The distance of space and time and the stalking figure of death would do away with the daily resentments of the past in both father and son. Upon his return, and to everyone's surprise, the "prodigal son" enrolled in business school and later took advantage of his lineage to obtain a job at Dresdner Bank.

This plan did not have a linear, rather an elliptical objective. With a store of knowledge of his own, the son returned to the bosom of the circus. His immediate intention was to familiarize himself with the intimate details of the company, rotating through its different departments, from chief of the caravan to publicity manager. Each season he took a different job, always, of course, with the consent of his father, who followed with attention the fortunate mutation of his offspring. Finally when the artistic director had to be dismissed, the young man convinced his father to allow him to take the job. Junior's ability in this new role did not surprise anyone, especially not his father, who had secretly valued the talent of his heir. However, on this occasion, as opposed to in the past, the father expressed his pride publicly.

Hedwig, his daughter, had chosen an opposite path. Without losing the love and eternal fascination of her father, she began to show less interest in the circus, eventually distancing herself completely. An essential factor had influenced her natural predisposition: she had a family of her own. And in that sense, curiously, she demonstrated marked similarities to her mother. Her original devotion for her father was now focused on the care of her three children and her husband, Mr. Brandt, an engineer who favored a more traditional way of life in the powerful port city of Hamburg.

Thus was the Sarrasani family structure in early 1933. In addition to his wife and son, Sarrasani relied on three other fundamental members of his community: Max Friedländer, his friend and companion in the circus adventure, and his two loyal employees, Bamdas and Von Hahnke. All of them, through great effort, had succeeded in rebuilding the circus in its home city of Dresden. The Provincial Government of Saxony was influential in the rebirth of the circus, by obtaining, through its representation in Berlin, significant financial support for the endeavor. When combined with the insurance money, these funds brought new energy to the company. Sarrasani was more than a symbol in Dresden, it was also an emotional, economic and cultural catalyst for growth.

Judenzirkus ***(or early murmuring of the Third Reich)***

Just when everything seemed to be on track, a new shadow began to stalk the destiny of the circus. Expectations were definitely limited. A dark future had begun to gather on the political horizon. The growing popularity of National Socialism negatively affected the director's mood. Not due to obvious ideological discrepancies, for Sarrasani was accustomed to dealing with the continuous fluctuations of power, rather because of the recurrent interference of nazi followers in the management of his circus; an intolerable situation for this ally of free enterprise. In any event – he affirmed – in his circus, he would be the only one to exercise authority.

Therefore, one evening after dinner, Sarrasani gathered his closest staff and informed them of his decision. Junior and Bamdas would immediately depart for South America to explore the situation and establish contacts for a potential comeback. There was no time for a twenty-day ship crossing. They would travel by a novel form of air transport: the Graf Zeppelin, a dirigible of German origin that crossed the Atlantic Ocean in just three days. It took off from Friedrichshafen, a city by Lake Constanza and landed in the Brazilian city of Recife. From there, a hydroplane would take them to Rio.

The voluptuous South American landscape represented a sort of Eden for the Director, a paradise far from the wars and political conflicts of his home continent. And he was not mistaken. The return of his travelers brought more than auspicious news. A new development also spurred their enthusiasm. The National Socialism Party, on campaign through Saxony, would have forced the director to lend the circus building for a Party

event. Sarrasani escaped the situation by invoking a previously arranged show with sold-out tickets for the date in question, but he secretly knew that as it concerned the company, he had made a mistake. It was, as they let him know, *one of those offers he couldn't refuse...*

Procedures were accelerated. It was Senior who then traveled quickly to execute the contracts and try to obtain, through his personal contacts, a line of credit that would allow him to begin the international move of the circus. In the meantime, Junior remained in charge of operations in Dresden, where he attempted to negotiate the necessary guarantees for a subsidy concession with the Reich. But the objections of the Minister of Finances were too numerous. On the one hand, they did not see an ally in the patriarch Sarrasani. They held him responsible for the violent dismissal of three party members, who, in an attack of rage, Senior had pushed brutally down a staircase and now refused to re-incorporate. On the other hand, they had an economic argument: the company was too ostentatious for the times faced by the country and the fixed costs of the enterprise were too high.

This last argument, though true, hid another, subliminal message that both father and son knew well. The Reich would potentially consider the possibility of giving a loan to the company, if they arrived in South America with a “purified” structure, that is to say, without a single employee of Jewish origin. The “national cause” argument, which the director had used to utilize to obtain benefits, was now working against him. However, the reason Senior did not accept the requirement was a mystery that is hidden in the depths of emotion. He did not offer a rational, convincing explanation. Even though he would have been forced to dismantle a large part of his *troupe*, there was no reason why he would not have been able to incorporate new, efficient employees. Several times during his long career, he had be forced to rotate his personnel. The director neither claimed nor denied that he was a supporter of the Jewish community. Both positions were irrelevant and indifferent to him. For Sarrasani, there were no inferior or superior races. Talent, not origin, was his one and only discriminating factor. He had spent his life in a cosmopolitan community. His circus had always been a microcosm of the nations and cultures of the world. He would not dismiss Jews for a simple question of personal loyalty. Max Friedländer had been his friend all his life. Josef Bamdas was a genius in terms of the administration of the circus (a merit Senior liked to attribute to himself when recalling the arrival of the Jewish Russian who had been a musician in an orchestra of *balalaika*). Dr. Ney, in house legal counsel of the company, had been efficiently resolving the permanent

legal inconveniences of the firm for some time and Dr. Katz, his Business Manager, successfully fulfilled his role as spearhead in commercial transactions. These, together with Von Hahnke and his own family, composed the administrative nucleus of the circus. But at least ten or twelve other Jewish employees worked in different areas of the enterprise. It was not by chance that the National Socialism Party referred to the Sarrasani Circus, pejoratively, as Judenzirkus (Jewish circus).

Negotiations, therefore, could not have gotten much worse. To top it all off, almost as a joke or a provocation, Senior initiated negotiations with the shipping company of Arnold Bernstein, a man not exactly of immaculate Aryan origin, who offered the circus certain monetary benefits in transportation in exchange for publicity in South American ports. How could the Reich endorse the arrival of the National Circus under the sponsorship of a Hebrew businessman...!

Negotiations lengthened. Differences slowly became abysmal. But between doubts, messages and commercial maneuvers from one continent to the other, destiny dealt a fatal blow to the family, precipitating the return of the patriarch. Maria, his wife, was put into Breslau Hospital, where she fought desperately against death. The attacks grew more intense every time. A cruel intestinal illness consumed her body. The end was imminent. On the evening of August 30th, accompanied by her loving children, she exhaled her last breath in exhaustion. Her husband arrived the following day. This time, the funeral was completely private.

Friday 13th *(the Führer's shadow)*

“Sarrasani Circus: closed until further notice”. Thus read the sign in the ticket window in Dresden. What was once was a temple of show business now seemed a building filled with ghosts. A cold wind slipped through the shutters and reverberated in the deserted interior of the dome. Its director had emptied it carefully and immediately initiated the departure. In Germany, people do not need the circus any longer, he would announce, they attend free nazi parades with more enthusiasm. This irony would, perhaps, become prophetic.

The chosen destination was Holland, which at that time offered exile to more than a few Germans. An arrangement with the railroad allowed Sarrasani to move all of his circus

possessions to Amsterdam, the layover where they would continue presenting the show until obtaining the loan for the trip to South America. But to everyone's surprise, the circus is received in a most discourteous way. The Dutch Communist Youth organization identified Sarrasani as a Hitler propagandist and started a campaign against him. Once again, demonstrations appeared in front of the circus. Once again, the signs of a boycott. Once again, obscene drawings over his posters. The patriarch, weakened by age, begins to fear the worst. Old ghosts surfaced in his memory. That ill-fated Belgian fate stalked him threateningly. To make matters worse, the eternal Dutch-German rivalry drew a group of nationalist followers to the protests. It was Max Reinhardt, a renowned theatrical author and director (who was known for mixing diverse fashionable aesthetic tendencies on stage and incorporating elements from other artistic genres such as the circus), who interceded publicly on Sarrasani's behalf as the leader of a group of exiled German artists. It is worth mentioning that Reinhardt, given his Jewish origin, had been one of the first artists to appear on the Nazi's black lists. And who, in light of his own artistic reputation, had come to represent the predicament of artists in the European intellectual spheres of the time (much as Sartre would do, subsequently, in post-war Paris). His firm support not only dispersed the most sordid suspicions, but also gave Sarrasani a level of recognition uncommon in an artist of the masses.

Of course opinions in his favor did not require much justification. It would have been sufficient to number the Jewish employees in his circus, as more than eloquent proof of the ideological character of its director. Besides, the employees that had been violently dismissed from the home office in Dresden were not exactly Marxists.

As a result, the demonstrations broke-up immediately. Sarrasani publicly thanked the group for the gesture and announced a two-month stay in the city. He then continued on to Rotterdam, the main port in the country, where he finished the brief tour and remained until obtaining the funds necessary for the desired escape. As if this were not enough proof of his strength of will, he installed the circus on a site bordering the wharf, a literal transition between continent and ocean.

Day and night the director held negotiations with influential entrepreneurs, all of which were unsuccessful. He received the same negative response from financial institutions. Paradoxically, the circus was stranded meters from the port, unable to embark; stranded in a state of anguished waiting, as if condemned to an eternal purgatory, as if the sea was a sort of Eden, an inaccessible beauty that both inspired and denied illusions.

Finally, after the devastating comings and goings, the tenacious director reached an

agreement with the Private Bank of Consul Harney, in exchange for a mortgage on all of his circus assets. Nothing would stop him. Nothing at all. Not even his deep-rooted superstitions from the past. So much so that on “Friday the 13th” of April 1934, at 1:00 PM, he loaded everything and the ships set sail for Brazil. Another epic story began.

Stowaway on board (and the chanting of the mermaid)

A week later, positive signs could be read in the recently downcast visage of the director. The reason for the trip, the movement of the ocean and the far away American horizon renewed his hopes. A minor incident serves as a good example; an episode that resumed the list of old anecdotes and signaled the return of that legendary playful spirit within Sarrasani. It was a comeback celebrated by the entire *troupe*.

A stowaway who did not belong to the circus group had boarded the ship, and against all presumptions, not only did not hide but even joined the group. He ate lunch, dinner and participated in many group amusements: card games, dancing, sing-alongs. The camouflage was perfect. The circus people assumed that he was a friendly sailor; the crew, on the contrary, believed that he was an employee of the circus. The audacious stowaway survived on the edges of this misunderstanding. But some days later the transgression is discovered and the offender, arrested. The director, who was travelling on another ship, is consulted by telegraph about what to do with the young man. Sarrasani answered without delay:

“Hire him immediately! The boy shows intelligence. I want him in my circus!”.

But perhaps, from this trip, there is another story worth mentioning that would become essential to the future of the circus. It all began in the port of Rotterdam on departure day. A young girl, of twenty years of age, fragile, delicate and extremely beautiful, arrived at the wharf carrying a huge trunk. The sight of the graceful girl wrestling with her ungainly luggage, while the gusts of an incoming storm hurried the departure, was so moving that it did not escape the eyes of young Sarrasani (famous for his weakness towards women). Without delay, gallant Junior, wearing work clothes and displaying his kindest smile, approached the girl to offer help. The short distance was sufficient for him to learn that her name was Trude and that she came from Zurich as a new member of the Escamillo Ballet, a dance act that had joined the South American

expedition. The young lady, rather distant, appeared grateful, but not particularly curious about the man who had come to her aid.

Once on board after the ship had set sail, Trude entered the management staff dining room in search of someone with authority to resolve the problem of her trunk, which did not fit into the narrow cabin she was to share with another dancer. In response to her question, the waiter peevishly conducted her to the manager of the trip: a man who responded to the nickname Junior, seated at the head of a long table wearing an impeccable white suit and smoking a cigar. Somewhat bewildered, but with her usual grace, Trude approached young Sarrasani to explain her problem. Inevitably, a knowing smile appeared on both of their faces. Junior immediately excused himself from the table and left with the girl. After walking around the ship, almost without speaking, they detoured to a narrow ladder that descended to the platform where the wagons were parked.

“Have it brought here”, he said, pointing to his own caravan. “And use it as if it were your home”.

Noticing the astounded look of the girl, he immediately explained:

“Don’t worry, miss; I’m not capable of such rudeness. The wagon remains empty. During the trip I will be staying in a cabin.”

Trude took some of her belongings to the caravan, but did not move in herself. The gesture, however, had created a bond and a daily excuse for courting; a relationship that would continue on the high seas during the next two weeks of the trip. At times, one looked for the other with some banal excuse; at other times, they simply met by chance and the pleasant surprise would be visible on their faces. Later there would be a private dinner, some dancing and an evening walk on the deck. The misty horizon and the southern stars surely provided the rest. Because one golden day at dawn, with the Brazilian coast in sight, the couple sealed a secret pact of love with a kiss.

A thread of light at sunset

On April 29th 1934 the unloading began. After two weeks of navigation, Rio de Janeiro welcomed Sarrasani with a splendid day. Once again, the curious crowds observed the descent of enormous animals through the air onto the docks. Once again, an impeccably dressed blond Hans, Senior breathed in the tropical air and descended from the

ship. Behind him, came the changing faces of his cast.

Given the sudden and improvised nature of the trip, it took them fifteen days to install the circus metropolis on the Esplanada do Castello and promote their arrival with the classic parades and short street acts. On May 14th, the radiant Moorish façade glittered with light beneath the hills. In a tent filled with 10,000 spectators, Sarrasani appeared in the center of the arena to conduct a sublime opening act. The magnificence of the circus had returned to South America.

Although, to be honest, by then it was definitely Junior who ran the company. His father was too frequently weakened by shaking and fatigue. The recent losses had damaged his health, and now that he had relaxed, his body began to show the signs of too much tension. He was also afflicted by a heart condition. Consequently, he devoted himself more to supervision than to action. He became an advisor to his son on important matters, or a supervisor, when he vetoed any of Junior's ideas that, he believed, would distance the circus from its historical tradition.

The days passed more calmly than in the past for the once reckless entrepreneur, Senior. Without leading a contemplative life, something that would have been impossible due to his character, he enjoyed leisure time or took long car rides around the bay of Rio. The beaches of Ipanema and Copacabana counted him as a frequent morning visitor. Daybreak over the sea calmed him, he said. In the afternoon, he left in search of distant beaches to enjoy the sun, the limpid sky and white sands. It was rumored that a young mistress used to travel with him incognito, stretched out on the back seat of the vehicle and covered with a blanket. This time it was true. It was Elly Turhöff, an Austrian artist remarkably younger than the director, who had appeared in his life some time after his wife's death. A relationship that, in any event, and perhaps due to his excessive Puritanism, Senior never officially recognized. However, precautions taken in this case were insufficient and the clandestine relationship was a well-known secret among the cast members. And so the theories began to circulate: She represented the illusion of keeping up the struggle or she was a thread of light in the sunset, or a sweet sigh amidst agonizing death rattles. Or that she inhabited a fortress in him, she was the wife of the monarch and enjoyed the enormous privilege of being his object of desire, his daily longing, his life-giving elixir.

In the meantime, the tour continued on to Sao Paulo. With its usual success, but not without a meaningful addition. Son visited his father hand-in-hand with Gertrude Helene Kunz, alias Trude, dancer of the Escamillo Ballet, who he loved and intended to marry.

This was – Junior emphasized – a formal introduction. Senior, as was his custom, scrutinized the young lady with acidity:

“Oh, yes...! And what do people think about this?”

But he was met with a curious surprise: she, unexpectedly, answers him with vigor (something Senior was not accustomed to), though not without tact:

“What people say is important when it comes to the circus, not private life, which is not open to negotiation.”

Junior, delighted with the scene, received a wink of approval from his father. The patriarch completely agreed with his son’s choice. He, too, had succumbed to the talent of the distinguished girl. Besides, he was already aware of the relationship, and had been informed that they had been living together for some time in his son’s caravan. On the other hand, he did not underestimate the importance of the moment. The fact that his son had introduced him to his beloved was not a minor event. This was the first time that he had done so, in spite of his long list of female conquests. And his happiness could not be greater. Times of emotional upheaval for the boy belonged in the past. His constant love affairs seemed to have found a definite home in this exquisite girl from the Central European Alps. This was perhaps the final joy a son could offer to his father.

Because the patriarch’s health was declining. His heart condition became worse by the day and, in mid-August, he was given a severe medical treatment in the German Hospital in Sao Paulo. In addition to his clinical state, he began to suffer an anomalous accumulation of liquids that slowly bloated his entire body. Nonetheless, Senior managed to be affable during visits, deprecating the situation with humor. He frequently showed his inflamed ankles (which had reached almost the same size as his thighs) and joked:

“So much time with the elephants and one day your legs become like theirs...”

On the night of September 20th, almost without strength and with his body completely swollen, Hans Stosch-Sarrasani asked for permission from his doctors to attend the circus. The following day, at dawn, in a cold, aseptic hospital room, almost as an irony of fate, the murmuring of a Hebrew prayer could be heard. Max Friedländer, his eternal friend, leaned over the bed and closed Senior’s eyes for the last time.

Elephants wear mourning, too

The news spread like wildfire. A crowd congregated in front of the tent waiting in line to participate in the funeral ceremony for at least a moment. Innumerable offerings and wreaths bordered the arena circle. In its epicenter, a majestic altar was raised and lit with impressive candles. The world press dedicated its front pages to the King of the Circus. The headlines of a local paper, the “Diario da Noite”, would become a motto: “*¡Morto Sarrasani! ¡Viva Sarrasani!*”.

The coffin is carried by land to Santos, and from there to Bremerhaven by ship. On October 19th, in the “Palace of Circus” in Dresden, a new ceremony took place. In this case, it was remarkably plain. The foyer of the building was completely covered in black, only decorated by his name written in golden letters and filled with the many wreaths of flowers continuously sent by the public. The Führer did not express his condolences, nor did any government representative. Only family and a limited group of friends. A small altar with a cross stood behind the coffin.

The masses gathered spontaneously in the street. Official declarations were not necessary; the inhabitants of Dresden, by their own initiative, had decided to express their grief. People gathered at the entrance of the “Palace of Circus” to pay tribute to their “King”. The historic elephants of the Maharajah lined the streets shrouded in mourning. The legendary Sarrasani Firefighters escorted the coffin among the honors of the crowd. Pain and grief filled the faces of the citizens of Saxony. Astonishment was seen in the faces of children. Low sobbing in those that had witnessed the magical epic. And, at that moment, there was not a single brushstroke of color in the landscape. Gray, a gray city, and a black ribbon pinned to a lapel.

The cause for this reaction was a magic character, a man full of charm who, through his convictions, had forged a legend. He was, too, a man not exempt from the human condition, but he had known how to deal with it in the midst of greatness. Senior, the Great Maharajah, the King of the Circus, the legendary Sarrasani, he who had brought the people of Dresden worldwide recognition, was leaving forever. The funeral car escorted by a long line of vehicles took him straight to the Dresden Tolkewitz Cemetery, so said the obituary, where he was buried alongside his wife. The chords of the Sarrasani March faded slowly, heavily, in agony, like a lament, into the moving cry of a bugle. With this last rattle of death, the ceremony was concluded.

JUNIOR

The show must go on

The show must go on, or so says the old adage. Mourning, in show business, is a private affliction, an internal corrosion, an anguish that eats away in the shadows. It is strictly forbidden to eclipse the splendor of show business. The stage must be preserved unharmed, undamaged by despair. And that was exactly the message sent by Junior to the South American subsidiary. Sarrasani was no exception. The day after the funeral, installed in Sao Paulo, the circus resumed.

Meanwhile, in Dresden, Junior and Hedwig held a private meeting to decide how to organize the inheritance. An inheritance, apparently, as desolating and traumatic as the absence of the patriarch. While they inherited a great name, they also inherited a debt of the same size. The impressive assets hid equally or more significant liabilities. The debts surpassed imagination. The company was on the verge of bankruptcy. Worse yet: its leader, the invaluable figure when it came to asking for loans and support, no longer steered the ship, a fact that logically generated concern amongst the creditors.

The level of uncertainty was even greater due to the lack of a will. The children could easily refuse to accept the responsibility for their father's debts and, thus free themselves of all liability. However, the situation followed the expected course. Hedwig, who had distanced herself from the circus years before, demonstrated little interest in its fate. Junior, therefore, decided to assume the debt and take over the management of the company.

A brief explanation is required at this point. Hedwig's decision was not motivated by a lack of courage or commitment to her father's work. It responded more to her historical conduct and personality. She had never been particularly fond of the circus, not even at its moments of greatest success. And this was not related to a lack of interest in her father, either, for whom she had demonstrated great affection during his life. Besides, although she was interested in rebuilding the company, she knew nothing of the business. Her decision was, therefore, honest and wise. If anyone could prevent the disintegration of the little empire created by his father, it was Junior, her younger brother. In any event, he was the appropriate person to take control. His life had always, since his very early childhood, been linked to the circus. He formed part of the circus and was intimately familiar with its each and every detail.

The state of the company, it's true, was not very encouraging. But the son possessed,

in addition to his passion, the same fighting blood as his father. Although, perhaps in his case, these qualities were mixed with a more conciliatory, thoughtful character. Junior knew that the company's financial crisis was terminal and that the Nazis were on the lookout to seize the assets through third parties. This situation, complicated by his father's historical conflict with the Nazis drastically limited his maneuvering ability. He had few choices. Either he renegotiated or succumbed. Who else would infuse a company in such conditions with new energy if not them? What other state would invest at that time in a German enterprise? With the Third Reich, at the very least, he could use the historic argument of "Sarrasani as a national symbol" utilized so many times by his father with the different groups that had held political power in his country at different times. That is why he believed it was so important that he re-establish diplomatic relations with the marionettes presently in charge. If the negotiation advanced and he successfully obtained a new infusion of capital through a subsidy or a state sponsored loan, perhaps it would be subsequently easier to secure re-financing from his creditors. The success of the first objective was, therefore, essential to the achievement of the second goal. The two were linked.

There was also the internal front. On this level, it was no longer a question of convenience, rather one of conceptual differences with his father. Junior had been arguing for a reduction of the circus structure for a long time. He believed that the company was over-dimensioned, a fact, which generated excessive fixed costs and unnecessarily high transportation expenses. Since leaving Dresden, he had campaigned insistently for a more agile circus that would enable them to move more quickly and to enter into the circuit of smaller cities, not just the large capitals. The well-known proverb of Mahoma and the mountain eloquently synthesized his reasoning, particularly in the case of South America, where a lack of infrastructure and long distances complicated the participation of spectators from inland cities. But Senior had paid little attention to these arguments. He believed that part of the circus charm came from the exaggerated megalomania of the event, and these operating changes would adversely affect the quality of the show. That is why he firmly maintained his course, even when the numbers became alarming.

In actuality, this was nothing more than the classic generation gap: the conservative spirit of one versus the renewing goals of the other. While the father held onto the historic manner in which he had created the circus, a manner which had brought him much personal satisfaction, his son proposed a structural adjustment in accordance with the changing times, an adjustment which would allow them to face certain circumstances with

more flexibility. Add to this typified difference, the intrinsic aspects of their individual personalities, which, by the way, had begun to exhibit interesting conflicts.

Regarding the father, although he was a tidy, methodical man in his private life, he was an extremist when it came to business. His impulses surpassed all logic. Both in his projects and in his personal reactions, he showed an extreme tendency toward excess. The immense structure created around Sarrasani was not the result of chance.

The son, in contrast, led a more extreme personal life and was prone to outbursts (there were rumors that he drank in excess). However, with regards to the company, he was extremely reflexive and rarely allowed himself to be ruled by impulse, unless he considered the action the wisest choice.

Thus was the situation when Junior assumed control of the headless company. The most prestigious name in the history of circus, the biggest show, but with a weak economic structure and abominable relationships with the political institutions of its own country.

***Junior's first journey to the New World
(including: the fundamental pact with the minister, the purging of the staff,
the new agile and swift circus, political lobbying, the exotic race of Aryan
aborigines, the betraying winds that lash the South and the boy that one
morning sold him the newspaper on credit)***

Junior fixed the sights and aimed straight for the target. Without hesitation. The objective was the very brain of the Führer. He asked for a private meeting with Josef Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda of the Third Reich. After the infamous raised-arm greeting (an imitation of the Roman Empire), the Minister invited him to sit and present his case below a huge vertical banner with the red and black swastika in the center. Junior, with planned eloquence, referenced the origins of the conflict and the immediate projects to be undertaken by the circus in the future, such as an urgent reduction of its scale and a suggestive “restructuring” of personnel. He did not forget to mention that one of his directors, Max Friedländer, had left of his own volition after Senior’s death and that certain other individuals no longer formed part of company management. The minister got the point immediately and conceded a limited guarantee from the Third Reich. His motives were apparently twofold. First, in order to maintain the positive image of a German company abroad. Second, to determine if they could count on a higher degree of loyalty from the son than from the father.

With this concession, Junior returned rapidly to Sao Paulo. The first objective was to move the circus. The stay in the city had been lengthened more than expected or convenient, due to the patriarch's illness, resulting in more and more empty seats at every performance. The plan was as expected. Junior immediately reduced the circus's traveling assets, by temporarily leaving an important part of the assets (almost one third) in storage in Rua Glyceiro, and commenced a tour of short stays and constant rotation throughout the Brazilian territory. The itinerary included Campinas, Ribeirao Preto, Araraquara, Sao Carlos, Rio Claro, Piracicaba and concluded in Santos on December 19th, 1934.

Financial results improved remarkably, a fact that increased the confidence of the new director and endorsed his abilities against the potential doubts of his employees. This initial success encouraged him even more. He sent a note to his lawyer in Dresden requesting a meeting of creditors and crossed the ocean by zeppelin to attend the assembly in the Excelsior Hotel in Berlin on December 21st. The surprising new attitude and convincing explanations about past and future events generated enough confidence to secure a new moratorium agreement. Junior finalized negotiations and, without time pressure, decided to return to South America by ship.

Before setting sail, perhaps as a tribute, Junior played a trick worthy of his father. Gustav Von Hahnke, Senior's old advisor, travels to the port of Hamburg at Junior's request to say goodbye. He had not gone on the South American journey and had begun working as editor of the "Demminer Tageblatt" newspaper. The conversation moved between successive anecdotes and glasses of beer in the ship's bar. Drink after drink, alcohol mixed into a fog of tobacco and nostalgia. A lingering mist invoked the memories of old times. By the time they recovered their senses and went out on deck, they realized that the port was a distant dot on the horizon. Among the salty breezes of twilight, a far-off horizon surrounded the lonely ship. Junior, in the immensity of the sea, raised his trophy: Gustav Von Hahnke returned to South America with him as his private secretary.

In any event, the new measures would not be easy for the new director to implement. The excessive postponing of an issue agreed upon with the German government began to generate suspicions and the Nazis positioned convenient supervisors who did not cease their reports. The promised "restructuring" of the staff clearly affected the Jewish personnel of the company, a fact that, aside from the emotional aspects, was complicated in operating terms as most of them held management level positions. The incorporation of Von Hahnke into the administration, softened the bloodbath, but a number of these employees were still essential to him. An alibi, however, allowed him to clear

disagreements. In the case of certain employees, such as Dr. Ney and Dr. Katz, Junior facilitated the means for inserting them in a new company and obtaining Brazilian citizenship. While he kept others working in the shadows. Such was the case of Bamdas, who immediately traveled to Montevideo and Buenos Aires to initiate the procedures required for the impending arrival of the circus.

The tour continued on to Porto Alegre and continued to function marvelously. Gustav Von Hahnke, already in his position, was in charge of spreading exaggerated news about accidents occurred during the trip to keep the press in suspense and generate additional publicity that brought them excellent profits. The trick paradoxically turned against them. On the afternoon of January 26th, during a normal show, the feared violence of a *Pampero* (a strong wind from the Pampas) broke a tent seam and caused such an inner whirlwind that the tent was torn from its stakes and into the air in one sudden movement.

The news about the catastrophe was true this time. And the reaction of the local media was moving. Radio and press released special announcements expressing their solidarity with the injured and encouraging them to overcome the terrible event. Without delay, Junior sent someone to get replacement equipment from the warehouse in Sao Paulo. A few days later the circus was able to stage sold-out shows once again and had secured the overwhelming support of the business and political authorities of Brazil. The auspicious re-opening provoked an extension of their stay in the city.

Even unfortunate events seemed to be on Junior's side at this stage. The prolonged stay in Porto Alegre continued to sell out and Montevideo, the next city on the tour, was perhaps not the best place to stop at this time. Uruguay was going through a bloody political crisis. Disputes between the troops of Terra's de facto military government and the opposition's uprisings had reached a high point. The decisive battle was taking place at that time in Sierra Chaco, where the official authorities resorted to the use of heavy artillery forces and the Air Force. At the same time, a strong and arbitrary wave of arrests was affecting the country. Under such circumstances, Junior seriously considered skipping the country and proceeding to the port of Buenos Aires by sea. Obviously, not because of an ideological objection, from which he remained absolutely distanced, rather out of a concern for the security of his company. Given the open conflict, traveling by land was simply too risky.

But the winds of favor stopped suddenly. A new *Pampero* tore the tent again during an evening show. A wind that strong had never before appeared in the zone. The magnitude of the gale was such that it broke flagpoles, turned over vehicles and destroyed

the employees' lodgings. The camp was reduced to a desolate state. All had been brutally devastated. No one had been hurt, but unfortunately this time there was no replacement for the circus.

These were days of grief for Sarrasani. Junior's geometric strategy had succumbed to the whims of nature. Fate had demolished plans rigorously drafted by reason. Its impeccable design vanished in the wind. The achievements attained up to that moment seemed to disintegrate into thin air. One night had been sufficient to undo the previous happy months of success. And the disaster affected not only the general structure of the company, but each individual member of the cast, as well. Both materially and emotionally, the circus was destroyed. A general sense of despair corroded the spirit of the troupe. Laconic phrases, distressed silences, looks and moans of pain. A complete catastrophe.

Von Hahnke, inspired, brandished one consolation through the media: "The German flag, still enveloped in the merciless storm, kept on flying high, undamaged, as an unequivocal sign of German stoicism". The phrase was not naïve at all. It was directed to a specific audience, perhaps the circus's last resort: institutional solidarity. And with that spirit, Junior paid a visit to the German diplomatic community in Brazil.

The strategy had the desired effect. The Third Reich sent an order and the German colony offered Sarrasani food and lodging. They also quantified the circus's needs and donated an important amount of money to help the affected artists. At the same time, the German chocolate manufacturer, Neugebauer, kindly offered the use of its warehouses until the circus could be rebuilt. An additional, unexpected and significant level of support came from the Brazilian authorities. The government of Rio Grande do Sul (perhaps in order to curry favor with the growing German state) offered to transport the circus to the border with Uruguay. An extremely generous offer considering the magnitude of the company. It is important to remember that even after the restructuring, Sarrasani continued to transfer a significantly large amount of cargo. The amount of employees alone was considerable: 400 including artists and technicians. To the personnel, was added a similar number of animals of various species (which were not precisely the size of domestic pets): elephants, hippopotami, buffalo, polar bears, lions, tigers, camels, race horses, etc. They also carried a mobile power plant, a crew of firefighters with a 6,000-liter tank and air-conditioning equipment. Lastly, the extensive staging paraphernalia: the exuberant wardrobe and infrastructure for 7,000 people. In short: a caravan of impressive magnitude.

Junior, concerned about risks in Uruguay, vacillated at first; but, unaware of another

alternative, finally decided to accept the attractive offer. It took the convoy five days and nights to reach the border town of Santana do Livramento, where they proceeded to transfer from the Brazilian railway to an Uruguayan train, by which they travel for an additional two days.

Contrary to his fears, the Uruguayan tour went well. Nothing could have been better for the recently established dictatorship of Dr. Terra than a circus installed in the center of Montevideo. The much repeated slogan “Bread and Circus” (dear to any self-respecting demagogue) persisted, apparently, within the Uruguayan governor, which was delighted with the presence of such stimulating entertainment in the city. In this case, as well, the lavish transport of the circus to the capital was undertaken by the host government. Another wink at diplomacy, another good will gesture between nations. Precautions did not end there. The army, fearing potential attacks, escorted the expedition throughout the country.

The debut in Montevideo began with the offering of flowers to General Artigas’s National Monument and continued with the parade of the orchestra along 18 de Julio Avenue. A new tent housed the show. In a box of honor sat the head of state’s wife and their six children. Near them, the families of several ministers. Needless to say, the local press showered the event with praise.

At that time an anecdote circulated around the world regarding this same press. One morning, Junior, interested about political events in his country, went to buy a newspaper from a street vendor; only to realize that he had left the house without his wallet or money. The newspaper boy gave him the paper anyway “on credit”:

“Here you are, Mr. Sarrasani, take it please.” “I know you and your name guarantees me that I will receive my money”.

The following Monday, the director gave a free show to all of the newspaper boys in Montevideo. Five thousand boys filled the circus tent and the union named him honorary member of the organization. A brilliant publicity idea, worthy of the best moments of his father. Every week from then on, the circus’s publicity magazines were distributed throughout the city for free. The effects of this gesture, combined with official support, resounded with success every evening in the ticket booths. The long awaited departure for Buenos Aires began to appear possible.

Tango for Sarrasani (or the story of a disappointment)

Two ships of 12,000 tons had crossed the Río de la Plata to disembark in front of an enormous crowd. Sarrasani's comeback revolutionized the *Porteños'* docks. People flocked to see the arrival of the circus, which was, as usual, an event in itself. And in this case, it was not just another arrival in just any port. This was Buenos Aires, the capital of show business in South America and the city responsible for his father's best memories. Junior was aware of this and thus staged the disembarking like a lavish parade of artists. Different casts descended from the ships as if coming out on stage. The circus's own orchestra marked the pace. They got off by the gangway in high spirits, their chests swelled with pride. They looked like gladiators returning triumphantly after ten years of absence.

The *Porteño* debut took place in Puerto Nuevo, in front of Retiro square, on March 28th 1935. The circus camp was an attraction in and of itself, with a luminous, splendid and radiant 60-meter Moorish façade, and 200 caravans perfectly aligned alongside a huge tent with a capacity for 7,000 people. It was the biggest circus event ever seen in South America. This time Junior spared no expense. It was his opportunity, his tribute. The majestic Sarrasani of his father's day was rebuilt again in Buenos Aires.

An enthusiastic, elegantly dressed audience entered the ample foyer. It was a forerunner of the show, where clowns joked with the children and the jugglers amazed their parents. The tamers offered their animals to be petted and Junior himself walked around with his famous chimpanzee, which earned him a lyric by Discépolo and a privileged place in the history of tango. Everything, absolutely everything that night, conspired to make the evening a success. All was in order, the celebration could begin.

Inside, the multitude filled the tent. Junior spied on the euphoria of the crowd from behind the curtain. He watched with joy and an inevitably melancholy aftertaste. He watched and his memory conjured up images of his childhood, when it was his father who waited by his side in the wings and spied on the audience. He watched and imagined that his father still stood by his side, looked at him, and winked in tender complicity. He watched and closed his eyes, searching briefly for his father's strong chest and warm embrace. And he opened his eyes again, and looked at the audience again, and looked one last time, because there was no time left. Because the clash of cymbals began, and the trumpets played their first chords, and the Sarrasani March resounded with fanfare and

because, suddenly, he felt pats of approval on his back. Junior then drew back the curtain with decision and entered the ring with a proud air, a firm step and his head held high. An ovation came down from the tiers. The orchestra vibrated in the heights. All of the spotlights held a single focus for that one moment.

Almost like a paradox of destiny, while his father had foreseen their exodus as an indispensable distancing from German political problems, his son had transformed those same unfortunate problems into favorable circumstances for the circus. In his expedition on the *New Continent*, he surprisingly discovered that support for the Aryan government of the Führer from the ruling classes of these native lands was not insignificant. And when these classes chose the circus as a means to maintain their constant flirting with the Third Reich, Junior did not object, although he knew that so many gestures of good will towards his company might be transitory.

In each country he visited, the young director was welcomed with honors. And Argentina was no exception. There, again, the affinities of a South American dictatorship with the German State favored the circus tour. In this case, it was the government of General Justo, who had succeeded Uriburu, after the latter had overthrown the second government of Yrigoyen through a *coup d'état* in 1930. It is worth noting that Argentine military leaders had always made an effort to emulate the model of the German militia. Their admiration and sympathy for the Third Reich were both public and evident. And the anticommunist policy of the Reich obviously received its strongest support in these lands.

In this context, the holiday of May 1st 1935 represented a controversial political landmark for the circus. The National Socialist Workers Party had asked Sarrasani for the use of his installations to celebrate the occasion. Swastika emblazoned flags flew for the first time under the circus tent in front of 12,000 people (between circus employees and German residents) who gathered to celebrate National Labor Day and to swear fidelity to the Führer. Outside a flag with the Nazi emblem was also visible. However, that was not the only unfortunate aspect Junior had to face, rather the cause of an unforeseen consequence: that night the Nazi standard disappeared from the flagpole. As no one could be held directly responsible, the authorities blamed the director. The director, meanwhile, blamed local subversive groups that must have surreptitiously entered the circus grounds to remove the flag.

The incident worried Junior, who was determined to mend the conflict-ridden relationship that his father had developed with the German government. Therefore, he did not miss the opportunity to declare his deep uneasiness and to criticize the infamous act. A

typical after-the-fact declaration that, at the very least, got him out of a tight spot.

To be honest, Junior demonstrated a peculiar talent for diplomacy. Not only regarding the difficult situation of his home country. Wherever his circus disembarked, he succeeded in negotiating effectively with the local government of turn, the ruling class and the press. Even in Argentina, he had managed to obtain an unprecedented reduction in taxes. He also secured important contracts with businessmen for the renewal of the tent and for providing food on circus grounds, as well sponsorship for his circus in the graphic media and on the radio. Companies were eager to associate their name with Sarrasani. And they were not mistaken: repercussions in the public increased daily.

Success was renewed every night and Junior was officially recognized everywhere he went. Everything seemed to be going smoothly, until the day a German cable signed by two mysterious initials arrived to the office-wagon. Trude, the director's official girlfriend, that young lady with strong character once blessed by Junior's father, felt sure that behind those initials was a female and she consequently interrogated her beloved. The director paid no attention to her insistent questions or simply answered with excuses. However, three days later the suspected lady disembarked in Argentina. Trude needed no further explanation. Without blinking, she quickly went to her room and started packing. Junior ran after her. He explained, gasping for breath, that it was a mistake, that the lady in question was a talented artist who had come to join the cast, of course there was nothing happening between them, and other such explanations. But it was useless. His arguments fell on deaf ears. Trude, suitcase in hand, left for the port in search of a ship destined for Hamburg. Junior's tenacious insistence on the way to the port was completely ineffective. This time it was his girlfriend who did not answer. She remained firm and irreversible in her position. It would have been impossible to dissuade her. The girl was unstoppable and Junior could not make her see reason. Junior's last resigned words were for the ship's captain, to whom he entrusted the care of his fiancée.

Once on the high seas, when the fresh Atlantic breeze began to blow, Trude, shivering, searched unsuccessfully for her fur coat. Of course, the small suitcase she packed so rapidly did not have the capacity of the huge trunk she had wrestled with in the port of Rotterdam. Many of her belongings had had to be discarded. She set sail with the bare essentials, what she had found at that moment, just enough to forget about the circus forever. Which is why she was so surprised when, from her cabin, she spied an airplane flying over the ship's deck dragging a sign that read SARRASANI. Passengers congregated on the deck, equally amazed at the strange maneuver attempted by the plane.

Nobody could have imagined that the package dropped on the deck contained the girl's expensive fur coat.

The Land Registry Office

The ship set out in the direction of her past. For fifteen days, Trude stared at the horizon, contemplating her life. Perhaps she thought about her childhood in Zurich, with her sister Erna and their little dog Nelly running after their sleigh. Or conjured up the image of her mother, Aulda, spinning away the hours while snow fell outside the window. Maybe she remembered her father, Robert Kunz, a prestigious cellist at the Tonhalle Symphonic Orchestra, proudly transmitting his passion for music to his daughter. For Trude had initiated her artistic career as a flute player for a Swiss orchestra and only in her adolescence had she taken her first dance steps and set out on a tour through the north of Italy. That had been the beginning. Since then she had begun to feel an indomitable desire to discover the world. Thus she did not hesitate when her agent told her about the trip to South America with the Escamillo Ballet and the Sarrasani Circus. She packed her trunk and left for Rotterdam full of illusion.

But fate had played her a bad hand. A disappointment in love sent her back to her homeland. The trip had ended in failure. She fatefully returned, immersed in frustration, in a sadness she could never have imagined. After fifteen days of languid horizons, the ship at last reached the port of Hamburg and the girl returned by land to her childhood home.

Her father, mother and sister already knew everything. Her arrival was not a surprise for them. The surprise was for Trude: a love letter from her boyfriend, via zeppelin, had arrived before her ship. Also waiting for her was a telegram from Gustav Von Hahnke, Junior's private secretary, who confessed himself ignorant and unsure as to how to proceed, given that the director was very ill and asking for her repeatedly. He also enclosed a return ticket for the next zeppelin.

Young Trude spent barely a night in her childhood home. Victim of a sudden feeling of guilt, she decided with her parent's support that due to the complexities of the situation, it would be best to return and solve the matter personally. The following day, without delay, she crossed Lake Constanza towards Germany to return once again from Friedrichshafen. The zeppelin made its first stop in Recife, in the north of Brazil; and

Trude confronted her first inconvenience. In order to continue her trip, Trude would need a new visa, given that her previous one had already expired. The girl, just twenty-one years old, did not let them intimidate her. With authority she answered:

“I’m Gertrude Helene Kunz. Please call the Sarrasani Circus in Buenos Aires and address this with Mr. Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr.”

The incident was resolved immediately and shortly thereafter, the girl, transferred to a hydroplane headed towards the Argentine capital. Upon landing in her final destination on the Río de la Plata, a lonely motor boat approached to welcome her under the violent midday sun. Standing up in the bow was the impeccable, immaculate figure of a man in a white suit and hat, carrying an exuberant bunch of red roses. Trude saw him slowly approach and she suddenly understood – half-bewildered and half-pleased- that it had all been a hoax.

“I thought you were ill...”, she greeted him ironically.

“Oh, my love!”, answered Junior, offering her the flowers. “With you by my side, I can’t remain ill”.

The reunion, as tradition demanded, was celebrated with a private dinner and a night of love. The following day, in the morning, Junior asked her to accompany him on a business errand and they both headed to the Land Registry Office. He explained that he had purchased a piece of land for the animals and that he needed to register it in her name for tax reasons, as well as in light of the concerns of his creditors regarding the financial situation of the circus. He said that everything had already been arranged and that when she was asked a question, she would only need to say “yes” and sign the document. The procedure was completed rapidly and Trude followed the instructions to the letter: in response to the official’s question in Spanish, she answered “yes” and signed. In the evening, when the couple descended the luxurious stairs of the hotel arm-in-arm to attend a gala dinner, they discovered an elegant crowd waiting for them in the entrance hall. Immediately, the chords of the wedding march are heard. Trude looked at her husband in astonishment. Junior kissed her and invited her to the party. The Land Registry Office had really been the Justice of the Peace.

*A sapphire surrounded by diamonds
(and the dubious honor of emulating the zeppelin)*

The wedding celebration was held in the Jousten Hotel, a place particularly favored by the German community of the country. More than 300 guests, an overflowing menu and numerous speeches and artistic shows. A scene worthy of a circus couple. The pomp and sumptuous excess lasted all night long; joy and happiness until dawn. Then, to the nuptial *suite*. Junior marched as happy as naughty child. Trude, ecstatic as a maiden cunningly abducted by the man who loved her. The double doors opened to a bedroom full of magnificent gifts. On the bed, laid two pairs of Chinese silk pajamas with embroidered golden dragons. On the night table, a huge sapphire surrounded by diamonds.

Married life became the eminent director. He was affable, calm in his decisions and receptive towards his employees. And the stability, far from relaxing him, provided him with a new frame of reference, a safe port from which to set out on new adventures.

The circus had recovered its old dimensions in Buenos Aires. A fact that to some extent worried Junior, who still believed in the benefits of an agile company. But his idea of a mobile circus was clearly defeated by reality. The daily success of the circus in the capital completely undid his plan. At the same time, even though it would have been preposterous to leave the city, it seemed a pity, given the fervent response of the public, not to start a tour immediately through the inland cities. Faced with this dilemma, the director felt impelled to take a risk and double his bets: he created a branch of the circus. A division would remain in the capital city and the other would start the tour. At the same time, a periodic renewal of acts would nourish the stable company allowing the recirculation of artists to the traveling branch. In this way, it was not necessary to release valuable acts that otherwise would have returned to Europe. Both branches would therefore complement each other perfectly.

The alternative company began its tour in Rosario, the second most populated city in the country. It then proceeded on to other important cities where it remained for relatively long periods of time: Santa Fe, Tucumán, Córdoba and Mendoza. Although it also installed itself in smaller cities such as Villa María, Mercedes or Chacabuco for a few days at a time.

A significant event took place in the city of Córdoba, where the circus was installed on July 9th, Argentine National Independence Day. In light of the occasion, the director decided to host a special function and invite the provincial authorities. The governor, the commander-in-chief of the army with his officers and Bishop Pacelli (who four years later would become Pope Pious XII and proclaim the dogma of the Annunciation of the Virgin) attended the show alongside other ecclesiastic dignitaries. The tent looked radiant, full of

small flags embroidered in light blue and white and with the huge native coat of arms presiding over the arena, crowned by an embossed rising sun emitting rays of gold. The show began with the National Anthem and a huge Argentine flag flew from the heights.

The effect surpassed all expectations. The conspicuous visitors spared no praise, either personally or in the media. And the return of such kindness did not take long in appearing. On August 17th, a military parade was held to commemorate the anniversary of the death of General San Martín (Argentina's most important historical leader). Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr. attended as the guest of honor.

The political support obtained by the circus did not pass unnoticed in its homeland. The Third Reich regime had reversed its position towards Sarrasani; they now saw him as a representative that brought opportune political benefits. After almost two years of touring, it was possible for Junior's circus to return to its home. The desolate Dresden building would soon see its artists shine again. Before that could happen, however, Sarrasani made an investment in the future: he bought a piece of property in Ezeiza, a few kilometers from the Argentine capital, where he planned to install his winter headquarters. His idea was to turn his father's famous slogan into a reality: "Sarrasani, the most fabulous show between two worlds". But this time, in two stable capital cities. The South American division would be based in Buenos Aires and led by Josef Bamdas, while the European branch would remain in Dresden, under his management. Both would be able to tour through extensive continents.

On November 13th 1935, the circus' European division set sail for Hamburg. Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr. left Argentina after an audience with President General Agustín Pedro Justo. On that occasion, the leader pronounced the memorable words that would resound in the press and be incorporated from then on into the circus's publicity package:

"When you return to Germany tell your countrymen that the Argentine people consider the Sarrasani Circus, and the dirigible Graf Zeppelin, to be the strongest exponent of German genius overseas".

Return of the prodigal son

The lights of Carolaplatz were lit once again. The *troupe* returned to its home, by the Elbe River. Animals roared once more in the stables of the old "Palace of Circus".

Elephants, its symbolic representative, strolled the sidewalks once again. Clowns and jugglers offered their art to amused pedestrians. The building slowly recovered its legendary splendor. All Dresden welcomed its most illustrious representative. Sarrasani, the heart of the city, had come home.

The local community anxiously awaited the circus opening. Advertising announced an extraordinary party by the end of December to celebrate the Christmas holidays. “SARRASANI brings a gigantic, sensational program from South America”, read the Saxon newspapers. They highlighted among the artists: The Gaucho Riders, Springboard Smith, The Four Brazilians, The eternal Wortleys, Billy Jenkins the arch-cowboy and his eagles, The 4 Sawadas, The Romans, and, for their last appearance before returning to their native Ethiopia, The 10 Sons of the Abyssinian Desert. As well as the usual large animal acts: African elephants, Bengal tigers, Arabian horses, camels, hippopotami, Watussi oxen, etc. A colossal performance to commemorate their homecoming.

All of Germany turned their eyes to the circus. People even traveled from other cities and provinces to attend the much-promoted event. They were driven by joy and, why not, by a certain curiosity. They wanted to know if the returning event would be equal to the magnificent Sarrasani of other times. They wished to verify the extraordinary news that came from other continents. They wanted to see if the father’s legend was to live on in his son.

Junior knew that upon returning he would be exposed to such scrutiny. And in addition: the omnipresent observations of the Third Reich. In that sense, the stay abroad had been fortunate: it had distanced him from this pressure, in a more peaceful, less controversial place where he could strengthen his own management criteria.

Although the changes, to be honest, were not obvious; at least not in the first stage of his local comeback. And although they existed, they were imperceptible to the immense audience. Because it was not exactly aesthetic concerns that kept the director up at night. He was not overly interested in innovating in that respect. He believed that his father’s work in that area was impeccable. It was enough to try to be a worthy follower. That is why when the curtains were drawn and the welcome ovation exploded, no one was disappointed. Sarrasani had come back home, its quality intact, its emotions, unchanged. The vigorous presence of old glowed in the arena once again. There were no doubts: the prodigal son had returned.

Although, perhaps there was one difference. The legendary Maharajah did not conduct the elephants anymore. And his son was neither a clown nor an animal tamer. He

actually had an aptitude for balance. He proved himself to be quite the tightrope artist. He had achieved excellent tricks on the financial tightrope. Not in vain, when everyone gave his hopes for dead, the circus survived vitally on both continents. And the root of this miraculous success was undoubtedly Junior's pragmatism. It soon became Sarrasani's new trademark. It was the mark of his management; a signature that did not gleam for the audience, but did had positive effects on the company's internal administration.

Superfluous expenses had been reduced to a minimum. Growing profitability encouraged further improvements. The firm was undergoing a true healing process. The director though it indispensable that the circus enjoy more freedom and less interference from external factors; perhaps the goal that required the most prudence and concentration. His fate on this issue literally hung by a thread. His every move was preceded by a sustained reaction. The web of conspirators and intrigues awaited just one false step. The tiniest imbalance could have been fatal.

Junior, however, showed a vigorous survival instinct. If the father assumed a radical stance with the government in power, the son adopted a more conciliatory attitude. Far from becoming an enemy, he negotiated tours through the entire German territory. The light, agile concept that had proven so successful in South America was applied with the same success in his home country. The tour included 32 large cities, but the cast also divided and covered small cities with success, as well.

The internal atmosphere of the *troupe* was different, as well: the director's contemporary attitude had altered his relationship with personnel. In contrast to the force with which his father had exerted his authority, the son implemented a relationship based on stimulus and response. He attempted to achieve that each individual perform their tasks with conviction, that they believe in their role, not act mechanically, like an automaton obeying an order. Every task, even the smallest, was assigned as if it was fundamental and its performer enjoyed ample trust. People worked, then, more out of enthusiasm than obligation. On all levels, the relationship between management and personnel had become more fluid, a fact that brought surprisingly practical results, but also more than one annoyance. Several times, someone attempted to take advantage of the situation.

The most transcendental case took place by long distance. A group of employees in the South American division conspired to remove Bamdas from his position of behind-the-scenes manager of the circus. His Jewish faith prevented him from appearing explicitly in management and that weakness was exploited by his subordinates. It was, given the circumstances, a very delicate situation.

Junior, in complete privacy, decided to send someone trustworthy to resolve the conflict: his own wife. Bamdas received Trude in Buenos Aires and explained that he had lost control of the circus and that he was constantly being extorted by threats of resignation. An inspection of the grounds spoke more eloquently than words. The personnel responded in surprise to the unexpected visit and the unimagined presence of the young lady. Trude was appalled. The state of the circus was deplorable: dirty, dark, abandoned. A layer of dust covered the golden letters of SARRASANI. All was immersed in the most pathetic decay. An opposite image of the success built there only one year before.

Trude and Bamdas elaborated a plan and presented it to Junior, who, from a distance, agreed immediately. The following day, the South American division was dissolved. The circus would return to Germany. Bamdas took charge of the dissolution and in a couple of days the ship was ready for departure. Once the preparations were complete, he went home to bathe and change clothes. A few hours before setting sail, he was to have lunch with Trude in the hotel to say goodbye. Bamdas would obviously not be traveling. His return to the “Aryan” country would have been too risky. Therefore, he would no longer work for the company. After 20 years with the circus, he would have to explore a new path.

But the young lady waited for him in vain. Bamdas never arrived to the hotel for lunch. Instead, Trude received a desperate note from Bamdas’ wife saying that her husband had died. The fatal episode took place when he left a shop where he had bought a new shirt and a tie for the occasion. Suddenly, shortly after he had stepped out to the street, he dropped dead of a heart attack.

The melanin is a subversive substance

Nazi banners flew high in the afternoon. Red and black vertical flags were placed in the heights of the stadium. The swastika was multiplied in the stands. Euphoric crowds cheered from the tiers. Hans and Trude watched the show from the audience. The Fuhrer greeted the public from a box of honor. The effusive ovation sounded like thunder. Down on the field, the Olympic torch opened the games. It was 1936. Berlin was the focus of the world and provided an historic opportunity for the German leader to prove the superiority of the Aryan race.

Suddenly the euphoria turns into silence, into anguish, into distress. The stadium becomes speechless. The director and his wife look with fear towards the box of honor. The hieratic face of the Fuhrer becomes upset. Jesse Owens, the black American runner, has crossed the line on the first place and in between the general perplexity will raise his fist in the top of the podium celebrating his first gold medal. After, another three will come in different metric disciplines. A shameful situation for the host state who watches the wreck of its tidy racial postulates. The melanin, that wicked pigment, had subverted the most modern anthropological thesis preached by the German theoreticians. The rised arms of Owens hoist also a symbol.

The couple's stay in Berlin had a business justification, as well. The circus was performing in the capital at the time. Junior, who would not have missed the enormous crowds for anything in the world, had negotiated his presence with the leaders of the Third Reich. And he had paid a price. The interior of the circus tent had been transformed into a microcosm of the stadium. Nazi banners decorated the boxes. Swastikas hung from rows of seats. And the SS became a constant presence. The difference took place in the ring, where the benign nature of the show had been meticulously supervised. The evident racial diversity brought no side effects and did not provoke any reaction. On the contrary, the circus appeared a naïve and anachronistic niche in light of the political declarations of the time. The star of the circus, the "arch-cowboy" Billy Jenkins (an artist of Jewish descent who changed his surname and declared himself a fervent fan of the Führer) had ridden to the most popular restaurant in the city, rushing forth among the astonished diners while shooting his pistol into the air. The method was not new to the circus. The father's talent for publicity was equally present in his son.

1937 brought moments of great success to Sarrasani. Three new acts, which were incorporated among many others, caused a sensation: Scarlett's chimpanzees, Little Fred's football-playing dogs and the clowns, the 4 Gerardos. They also completed their first *tournee* abroad since their return to Germany, a circuit that included Czechoslovakia, The Netherlands and Belgium. And as to ring out the extraordinary year, they celebrated the 25th birthday of the Dresden home office: "1912 – 1937, 25-years of Sarrasani Palace". An impressive program composed of "25 international sensations". The show began with the overture from Richard Wagner's opera "Rienzi". Then, the director opened the show. "More than 1,500 acts have worked during these 25 years in Sarrasani Palace", he repeated every evening, and the ring was filled again with old glories and their descendants: the Chinese Hay-Jung; the black cast from Cameroon and, among them, Trubka, world master

trainer of animals; the 5 Cimse with their “motor race in the air”; the 10 Flying Leotaris; the Sobolewski riders’ troop; the Siete Menorka gladiators; the three Cavallini clowns; Dominik Zaizeck’s polar bears; Frohn’s seals; the 4 Wallenda, tightrope artists; Alice Corini, the equestrian artist; the 3 Truzzi, musical clowns; Marion Spadoni, with her dance and magic act; Captain Novaddi, “the living armor”; the 3 Ugh-Gluck, “Eskimo sensation on metallic rope”, etc., etc., etc. Such an exuberant spectacle had never before been exhibited in the history of Sarrasani, nor in the history of circus. The program also included the pantomimes “India, country of wonders”, with fire eaters, fakirs, and dancing snakes and “One night in Seville”, a show with Flamenco music and dance. Lastly, the unexpected comeback of the legendary Sioux Indians, the act representative of one of Sarrasani’s triumphant periods.

1938 did not bring a decline in this success. Another long list of artists renewed the show: The 5 Taloboyes, trampoline virtuosos; the 2 Kimri, a trapeze duet; the Cavallini clowns; Guldan’s bears; Roland Schusser, “the lion hunter”; Staniewski’s horses; Tom Jack and his “ice men”; Aage Markoni, “the human kangaroo”; Bim-Bom, musical clowns; and “Cesar and his tightrope-walking lion”, a wild animal that walked along a double tightrope. The performance concluded with the “Sarrasani Aquatic Arts”, an act in which a high waterfall fell into the ring creating a round pool, and “Spain, pantomime of fire”, whose plot alluded tangentially to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Of course, German support to the forces of Franco was not left out of this last script, which concluded with air strikes over Barcelona. The bombs destroyed a zoo, freeing uncontrollable animals that fled alongside men and women amidst strident light and sound effects.

These last two years had been the most successful in Junior’s management career, both artistically and financially. Then 1939 began, a year subjugated to the first strikes of the Third Reich’s expansionist policy. By that time, Germany had already annexed Austria, the region of the Sudetes and the Czech part of Czechoslovakia where it created the protectorates of Bohemia and Moravia. With the invasion of Poland, on September 1st, war became inevitable and was declared two days later by Great Britain and France.

The inevitable crisis was not alien to Sarrasani: continuous army recruitment affected his staff. The escape of artists and employees to their own countries became commonplace, and the incorporation of foreign acts, problematic and rare. The exodus brought devastating results to the circus. The reduction in personnel complicated touring, an essential source of income for the company, and the entire circus was forced to take refuge in its home city of Dresden. Third Reich Propaganda also “suggested” certain subject

matter for the show in order to “keep German spirits high”. “Nena Sahib” was the new super-production displayed in the Dresden arena. The poster displayed a suggestive title: “Heroes of India’s freedom in struggle against England”. The staging, full of magicians, fire-eaters, snake charmers, fakirs, *bayadères*, elephants and camels, reflected the history of the Hindu revolt against English domination.

A fairy godmother is born in open war

White, very white. An immaculate woman. The perfect symbol of purity. There, in the center of the ring, in the very center of the circle. With the circus lights sparkling on her figure and a drove of snow-white, winged Lipizzane horses trotting ethereally around her. She was the show’s newest attraction; an unexpected presence that brought renewed energy to the downcast visage of the circus. All Dresden attended the show, captivated by this fairy godmother that redeemed the sorrows of the world with sparks of magic and fantasy. An oasis of sweetness, candor, innocence, in the midst of such violence. A light of hope in the darkness of night.

Amazement grows when people discover that the angelic lady who led the equine spectacle with delicate grace was the director’s wife. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani was back on stage. After eight years of immersion in administrative tasks, tours and marital obligations, the young dancer stepped onto the stage once again. The dance, this time following the rhythm of the waltz, embodied by the cadenced flight of the winged, white horses. Phrases emerged like so many caresses from her lips. The riding whip moved like a magic wand capable of granting all wishes. Enthusiastically blessed by Junior, the explosion of his beautiful wife in the ring had been planned some time before under the direction of Ernst Schumann, training master especially hired to coach the young lady’s talents.

It was 1940. The circus only included artists from Axis countries. Other local animal trainers joined the new star: Hermann Hauptf (felines), Karl Reindl (lions) and Fritz Oehme (elephants). Also, other effect oriented acts such as Sobbot’s pigs, Kling’s anthropoids, Tagora’s fakir arts or the volatile Turuls. The quality of the show was directly proportional to the available resources. Prosperity, at that time, had become an effort in nostalgia. Resources were barely sufficient to ensure daily survival.

Technical personnel had also been renewed. The majority of them were Czechs or Poles who had avoided conscription. With no circus experience whatsoever, the director

decided to hold preliminary shows before setting out on a brief tour through the main cities of Saxony. That was all the director could get from Third Reich this time.

They were not times of fluid relationships. Trude's repeated conflicts with the unions and the Chamber of Theater created a feeling of unease among the regime supervisors. And the director's persistent refusal that his wife joins the Nazi Party did little to placate them. The director's affiliation was not enough. National circumstances demanded absolute compromise, they affirmed. And Junior hid behind the excuse that his wife was Swiss and, thus had never been interested in Politics. But the irony was not effective. His desire to distance her from political affiliations was poorly received by the councilors and the results were increasingly harmful to the company. Any efforts he made through official channels were suspiciously obstructed.

Tired of the conspiracies and intrigues of minor officials, and weakened by his heart condition, Junior decided to surpass all obstacles in one fell swoop: he arranged, as he had done in his early days, a private meeting with Goebbels. One week later, Trude Stosch-Sarrasani, his envoy, went to the Reichstag building in Berlin.

The ministry was being remodeled. Amidst clouds of dust and debris, Trude announced herself to the guard and is led up a temporary stairway to a cold, improvised office. The first things she noticed after opening the door are a suspicious bed and a luxurious desk in the center of a barely whitewashed room. The minister was not there. The guard asked her to wait and left her alone in the empty room. After a while she heard a strange noise, the dissonant beat of approaching footsteps. The door opened and the figure of Goebbels appeared like a ghost against the dusty background of construction. He stopped and greeted her with a "Hail Hitler". The young lady, standing, responded to the greeting and when the man entered the room she discovered the origin of the strange sound: the Third Reich's Minister of Propaganda was lame.

A few gestures of courtesy preceded the conversation. Trude expressed her gratitude for his deference in accepting her visit and excused her husband's absence due to health problems. Immediately afterwards, she frankly described the company's complicated situation. The minister, surprised at the conviction with which Trude expressed herself, scrutinized her silently. She then requested the concession of a tour through Hungary and permission to tour the main cities of Germany. Her argument does not differ from historic ones: Sarrasani was a legendary symbol of Germany and its future was being threatened by the personal prejudices of minor officials. Goebbels remained circumspect and restrained, rather unexpressive. He responded by stating that he was perfectly aware of the company's

circumstances and that he was not indifferent to the circus's future. He also promised to analyze the issue and send a prompt response. That was all. They said goodbye with the same greeting as when they met and the *aide-de-camp* guided her to the street through the labyrinth of scaffolding and dust.

Anticipating a favorable response, Junior sent Gabor Némedy, a Hungarian trapeze artist of his confidence, to begin negotiations in Budapest. In the meantime, Trude's certificate of ethnic origin (the source of permanent pressure exerted on the circus by Dresden officials) finally arrived from Switzerland. The girl had repeatedly requested it from her family and, inexplicably, the procedure was delayed. When Trude read it, she immediately understood the reason: the name of her grandfather, from her mother's side, was Samuel Widmer. She could no longer delay its presentation and she had few options: she could either leave for Zurich, or she could commit forgery and rectify her lineage. The risk of the second option, in those days, was frightening rather than amusing. It was not a childish prank, but a crime that could cost Trude her life.

The forgery was miraculously accepted (perhaps because she was not a suspect and the document was presented as part of a mere bureaucratic process) and the problems slowly began to disappear. On the one hand, a cable with the Minister's written approval arrived: the circus's request had his full endorsement. On the other hand, Némedy returned from Budapest with unsurpassed news. The tour was to begin in spring 1941.

The reduced company arrived first in Slovakia, where it enjoyed a moderate success in several small cities before entering Hungarian territory. But it never reached its destination. On June 22nd, the German army invaded Soviet territory and the circus was forced to return. What looked like a graceful escape finally resulted in another failure. Dresden seemed to function like a magnet, inexorably drawing in the circus. Any attempt at escape was in vain. The tentacles of the city always seemed to trap it once again. As if against its will, an obscure form of sorcery tried to keep the circus in the city.

To defeat the magnetic effect

Berlin was the new aim. The director would not allow any more setbacks. He was stubbornly unwilling to fold his hand to fate. If survival was not to be found abroad, then he would establish his circus in the very heart of Germany. "Do not even unpack", was the

order. What's more, they incorporated a new wagon. The equipment left in Dresden would be included in the tour. They would not stint on this exhibition. The circus would rush vigorously into city.

Everything was ready for July 9th. The technical staff, established in Berlin, finished the details for the debut, which was to take place in just two days. Junior and the artists were still in Dresden. The date reminded the director of the spectacle presented six years before to celebrate the Argentine National Holiday. He commented this to his wife among the noses of the Lipizzane, while they strolled through the stud feeding the horses. The walk usually continued through the rest of the stables, while they examined and caressed elephants, camels and wild beasts. It was a private ceremony they both liked to reserve for the mornings.

Trude felt protected by her husband's strong form; and for him, she was a haven of peace. The contrast between them harmonized in shape and essence. The stout Junior and his life of dissipation next to his delicate wife, of demure manners. The circus world rotated around them.

Having finished their morning walk, the couple, hand-in-hand, walked to the director's convertible and kissed each other goodbye. It was a radiant, sunny midday. Junior was to leave that same morning for the capital and Trude to travel the following day with the rest of the cast. They were to meet there the day before the debut. But reality had other plans. Trude and Junior never saw each other again. Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr. died of a heart attack that same night in the Excelsior Hotel, in Berlin. He was just 44 years old.

Requiem for love

Profuse obituaries filled the newspapers. The front pages showed an undeniable headline. The entire press paid tribute to the young director's brief career. They emphasized, primarily, his courage and loyalty as a son demonstrated by voluntarily assuming his father's pressing debts, when he could have, using the same name, initiated an enterprise free of worries. But they also mentioned a curious episode. A gold and diamond watch had been stolen from the deceased's inert body. His young widow, recently arrived to Berlin and visibly inconsolable, ignored the crime. Hedwig, the director's sister, in a better frame-of-mind than Trude, demanded an urgent investigation. Some months

later the guilty party was found: the elevator attendant of the hotel had entered the room after the surprised call of a stupefied maid and surreptitiously taken the watch from the dead man's vest pocket.

The funeral was held on July 14th, in the Berlin tent. Two coffins contained the dead body: an internal coffin made of lead and an external one of oak, both with a large opening in the area of the face. Sarrasani's green and white flag covered the rest of the coffin. A condolence telegram signed by Goebbels arrived from the Third Reich.

The following morning, the citizens of Dresden congregated in his "Palace of Circus" to say their last goodbye. The pilgrimage surrounded the lavish building. In the center of the ring, this time the lights illuminated the director's coffin. In the afternoon, the funeral procession began its march. He was to be buried, alongside his parents, in Tolkewitz Cemetery.

The debut in Berlin clearly established that, as Junior would have wished, the circus would not be stopped. There was only a slight variation in the traditional order of acts. This time Trude's act would close the show. The entire audience, of course, was aware of the recent events. A standing ovation greeted the sudden appearance of the girl. The image caused a sudden commotion in the tent. The spectators fell into an absolute silence and contemplated the scene in bewilderment. In the center of the ring, the fairy godmother was dressed in black that evening. The act itself was in mourning. With vital energy, a winged drove of black horses danced around her. The orchestra played the strains of a requiem.

TRUDE

A lineage marked by fate

It was 1941. Trude was only 28-years-old. An extremely beautiful young girl, of slender form, refined features and heavenly eyes; she was diaphanous and full of charm. At that age, she already showed the demeanor of a lady. A distinguished lady, with kind, elegant, and aristocratic manners. Though she had shown such characteristics since her young childhood. Not because she possessed a dubious ancestry full of coats-of-arms or celebrated last names. Rather she belonged to that stock marked by fate, to that fortunate, arbitrary lineage guided by the inscrutable will of the gods. A gift which needed no enhancement; a quality inherent to her character, an aura that emanated from her being. Ostentatious clothes or extravagantly adorned surroundings changed nothing. In the splendor of a palace or amidst the stench of the stables, Trude maintained her grace. She handled herself like a princess. A luminous, crystalline princess. Her image as fairy godmother was not an artifice conceived for the ring, because, in fact, she did not act. She was always herself and behaved the same way in her daily life. A halo of candor seemed to envelop her. She asked for everything sweetly, with an unreachable delicacy. Never a raised voice, never the slightest sign of violence. Never a burst of temper. Everything around her flowed with simplicity and pleasantness. An order of hers was almost like a caress. Not in vain her employees' affection bordered on veneration. An exacerbated esteem enthroned her as a type of muse.

But to say that she inherited that vast empire while still a young princess is an incomplete description. It must be said, too, that she inherited it under the most difficult of circumstances, during the world's worst historical crisis: in the middle of the Second World War and among Nazi leaders who were ravaging Europe. And it must be mentioned that amidst that horror, immersed in the most brutal of circumstances, Trude did not deny her abilities. Nor did she hide behind the excuse of her youth to avoid the challenge or renounce a bit of her delicate nature. True to herself, with amazing will and judgement for a woman her age, she accepted the challenge much as she obeyed the hands of fate.

Thus, suddenly, like an unimaginable trick of destiny, the youngest director in circus history was also the director of the most prestigious circus in history. Sarrasani had a new face.

A pearl shining bright in the Danube

(and an urgent call from Herr Minister)

Berlin was working with a full tent. A cruel paradox of show business turned personal misfortune into a morbid attraction. Night after night success was renewed and culminated by the act of black horses led by the young widow. The stay was unforeseeably lengthened. In the meantime, Trude was planning her future steps. Hungary appeared to be the most immediate destination. The frustrated tour that had detoured to the German capital, had become a possibility given that the armed conflict had ended (or, was at least, temporarily controlled in the area). A brief exploratory telegram received the immediate answer that Némedy's arrangements were still valid.

After five weeks of emphatic success, the new director decided to leave her painful memories in Berlin and depart immediately for Hungary. The entire *troupe* comprised a long caravan destined for Budapest. Amazingly, in middle of the war, the Hungarian capital looked much better than they had expected. The city remained intact. Thousands of small lamps illuminated the huge façade of Sarrasani once more. The waters of the Danube magnified the nocturnal splendor of the circus. A pearl shining brightly alongside sumptuous Magyar palaces.

The tour, in Junior's style, continued through various small inland cities in the country. An unusual eagerness kept the seats full. The resulting income surpassed all expectation, as if a few hours of magic, illusion and fantasy could somehow undo daily misfortunes. The Hungarian period was inevitably extended. Earnings were reinvested in circus infrastructure, a bit deteriorated due to the immobility of the previous year. The director, a horse lover, also incorporated a new troop of Hungarian horses, in addition to the Orlöffs (the black horses) and her beloved Lipizzane horses (which are born black and turn completely white after a few months).

A sudden summons interrupted the tour. The Reich's Chamber of Theater ordered the director to travel immediately to Berlin. The circus returned to Budapest, with Némedy in charge, and Trude proceeded with disgust to the unavoidable meeting. After waiting in the halls of the remodeled and gleaming ministry, Goebbels received the young woman in his office. A visible tension marked the official's features. The *aide-de-camp* bowed in military reverence, turned on his heels and left. Trude, taking unusual liberties, made a subtle joke, alluding to the subordinate's rigid gestures. The Minister attempted to restrain himself but a smirk slipped through, and then a decided smile. With a few words of praise

for the director's charming manner, he invited her to take a seat. The meeting continued in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. They spoke for a while about horses and certain animal training techniques. Trude shared some of her own. The minister listened attentively and nodded in accordance with her ideas. He then purposefully mentioned his profound interest in animal behavior and, in particular, Konrad Lorenz's most recent theories – so in vogue at that time.

“Well...”, he finally stated with irony, “the most important thing is always sugar, isn't it?”

“With all respect, *Herr Minister*”, answers the girl, “allow me to disagree. Carrots are better; sugar eventually rots the teeth...”.

The Ministers desk appeared overflowing with photographs of demonstrations and arrogant parades. Stiff, uniformed troops marching in unison. Stiff banners showing the impassive face of the Führer. Multitudes cheering the triumphant passage of the troops. Masses and masses of people. All huge, colossal. All presented with the aesthetic belief that size is a synonym for greatness.

Among the abundant paraphernalia, a letter could be seen. Their conversation was suddenly interrupted. The minister excused himself and left the office for a moment. Trude took advantage of his absence to glance at the letter. Three gentlemen had petitioned the minister to assume the management of the circus. They justified their request based on the chaotic state of the company that was deteriorating the image of Germany in a worrisome manner. They also warned against the risky future of the Sarrasani if it was left in the hands of a young girl. The note was signed by Fritz Mey, Paul Wache and Werner Westerholt, old maintenance employees who had been fired one year before by Junior. The reason for her presence in Berlin became clear.

After a prudent period of time, the minister returned to his office and said goodbye to the young woman. The director responded that she would be honored to host their next visit. And perhaps – she added – it would be better if it could happen in the near future. The minister, apologizing, remarked that in spite of the excellent references he had received from close friends, his visit to the circus would not be possible for the time being. He further advised her, in passing, to be cautious and offered his services for any potential problems that may arise. The director thanked him for the compliment and his kindness and left the office escorted by the *aide-de-camp*.

Goebbels' preference for Trude and not for the conspirators, aside from the sympathy he felt for the girl, obeyed a strict logic. In the first place, as part of the family saga, her

management of the company, maintained the legend of Sarrasani as a family enterprise. In second place, he foresaw in the young woman's beautiful face an unsurpassable image for the German circus, an opinion he would voice in due time.

Trude returned to Budapest with essential information. The minister's behavior represented a kind of support, and, at the same time, a demonstration of authority. It was obvious to the new director that, apart from his endorsement, she would also be subtly supervised. She was suddenly immersed in a web of intrigue from which she had emerged unharmed, thus far. But upon leaving Berlin station, she was met with a curious surprise. Fritz Mey, the main conspirator, approached her kindly to say hello and to offer his service for the not so easy task of managing the circus in such difficult times. The director scrutinized the conspirator's sharp features in silence. The whistle of the train forced an outcome. "I appreciate your offer", Trude answered, "but it would be best if you expressed such things to me in writing.

New face of the circus

After her return, the director reorganized the staff. A number of her husband's old collaborators had already left of their own volition after Junior's death, perhaps anticipating the unavoidable failure of the company in the hands of a young girl. Others, suspected of speculating on personal gain in the event of a potential crisis, were removed. The restructuring yielded a new triumvirate. Gabor Némedy was to be responsible for artistic direction, while Hans Schlenkrich would take over the administration. All future decisions were to flow from this triangle.

If Senior's cycle was characterized by his creative exuberance and Junior's for his pragmatism, Trude's cycle, which was just beginning, seemed to decidedly emphasize social concerns. Given the circumstances, the director concentrated her efforts on maintaining her troupe safe from the harshness of the war. She used her contacts to obtain special rations of food and clothes, and even, upon several occasions, relief from military service by using the excuse that she urgently required the personnel to keep the company functioning. By the end of that year, she had also opened a dining wagon, a library and a mini movie theater-cinema with weekly functions.

Regarding the movie theater, that invention of the Lumière brothers (previously used

by Senior and Junior to document shows) had taken another step forward in its development by incorporating sound to the succession of images. Much as the German State used this form of media to promote its greatness through different documentary films, Trude shot the first institutional film with this new sound format entitled “12 minutes with Sarrasani”. It was a film of exquisite montage and excellent technical quality, which narrated a day in the life of the circus, from the artists’ preparations until the evening show, hosted by its director.

All circus publicity from then on (as was predictable) was distinguished by the beautiful features of its charming muse. Her photographs accompanied press reports, shone on program covers and were also printed and distributed as postcards. Close-ups of her face or her full slender figure. The diaphanous maiden surrounded by her winged white Lipizzane horses or next to the vigorous black Orlöff, wearing an elegant evening dress, making decisions in her office, feeding the elephants and wild beasts in the circus stables or caressing her puppy. With that mixture of audacity and tenderness, fragility and courage, the young director’s image became a recurrent icon in Germany of that time. A delicate fetish at the high point of violence.

What remained unresolved was undoubtedly her own emotional adjustment, the reason that Trude shortly brought her family from Zurich to live nearby. Father, mother and sister moved into the Sarrasani House of Radebeul (a small villa near Dresden bought by Junior years before), where the circus also maintained stables and warehouses. This support was essential for the young woman in such fateful times, and brought a comparable sense of peace to the family as well, whom, in spite of the efforts involved in moving to a new community, accepted the decision immediately. Their routines did not alter significantly. Her father continued to play the cello in an orchestra; her mother, as usual, stayed at home; and her sister (whose husband was to disappear in the war) gave piano lessons.

Meanwhile, the circus was back in Berlin where, as a result of their recent success, it would remain for six months. Regarding the building in Dresden, the young director’s audacity encouraged her to make a decision unprecedented in the history of the company, though of impeccable commercial logic (perhaps worthy of Junior’s extreme pragmatism). If it was not feasible to maintain a stable circus palace and a tour at the same time, why not lease out the building in periods of absence? The building was an asset like any other, which instead of representing an expense could generate income for the company. Thus, for the first time, the “Palace of Circus” was let to a variety show. The most important

detail was the quality of the show, because Sarrasani's name provided the backing. So they were particularly careful in selecting the tenant. The lucky winner was Hans Hassblach, a talented young man who had revolutionized the genre and promoted himself, in a clear parallel to Trude, as "the youngest variety show director in Germany".

But the truly lucky man was someone else, and not for commercial reasons. Gabor Némedy, Trude's right hand, had won a place in her heart, too. An intense romance had grown as a result of the daily adventure that was the circus. The Hungarian acrobat, who had joined the circus in 1933 as a part of the Wortley group, had been her professional support during the difficult moments of the inheritance and had slowly become her emotional refuge, as well. With his erect figure, his wide shoulders of a trapeze artist and his sober, virile face, he accompanied the girl in all decisions and, to avoid any unkind insinuations, to all social events.

The greater political-cultural mission

The program of winter 1942 was titled "The Thousand Wonders Express". The influence of the Hassblach style had left its mark. To the traditional circus show, they added "Friedsland's fabulous oxen" and "Row-Li-Ers", an unusual act of motor racing inside a lions' cage; but of special note, a huge number of variety show stars: De la Parso, harmonica solo player; M. Blütikofen, humorous tenor; the 2 Gebards, a couple of minstrels; Bobby Streib, the comedian; the solo dancer Ursula Deinert; Charlotte Rickert, act of strength and Televox, the man-machine accompanied by Wendling, the engineer. Némedy had also paid special attention to staging, scenery and light and sound effects.

That was to become Sarrasani's style in those years. A large dose of tidy, jolly entertainment marked by the limited possibility for hiring foreign artists and scarce opportunities for starting new tours. With the exception of short journeys through the country and a visit to the occupied Polish cities of Poznań and Lodz, the remainder of the time, the circus stayed in its permanent home. Therefore, acts had to be periodically renewed or rest for a short period and then return with some new variation.

The tendency for vaudeville intensified the following year. The idea was to generate agile productions, which could be modified every fifteen days and take advantage of the available arsenal of singers, actors and comedians. Given that the circus could not change

their venue, they would change the show. It was the only way, given the situation, to maintain public interest and curiosity.

This criterion dominated throughout 1943. Only in 1944, was the Sarrasani circus able to resume the technique of the grandiose production. On April 2nd in Dresden, they opened “Around the world in a circus tent”, a circus musical show with ten acts uniting a single plot throughout the performance. The story’s protagonist was Trude, who played a young, glamorous circus director that went on stage riding her steed and led her *troupe* through exotic Eastern scenarios, amidst much song, dance and acrobatics. The uniqueness of the show was to be found in its artistic adaptation: a moving display of human masses harmoniously coordinated in Senior’s old style.

Gabor Némédy resorted to all available means, including the domestic help, to fill the stage and the ring. He also created innovative technical conditions: lighting the ring from the inside, a technique that generated amazing effects when the wild animal cages were placed in the center. It seemed as if rays of light seeped through the bars. At the same time, he hung microphones all around the stage so that the sounds of the animals roaring would reverberate throughout the entire arena. He did not save on clothes, either. Although the circus possessed a plentiful wardrobe, all costumes for the show were new.

Having survived five years of war, Sarrasani achieved the miracle of putting on a lavish show. The media, as susceptible as the spectators, responded with complimentary, supportive reports. Audiences once more resounded with great enthusiasm. Again, the young director’s beautiful face monopolized the praise. Even the Third Reich, not to be excluded, paid tribute with bombastic compliments through the Imperial Chamber of Theater about “the greater political-cultural mission promoted by Sarrasani for the greatness of Germany”.

As an irony of destiny, nobody recalled that a beautiful Swiss girl and her partner, a handsome, young Hungarian man, managed “the great German circus”.

Fear and trembling ***(and certain risks of naïveté)***

“In case of alarm we beg our audience to remain seated and follow the instructions of circus personnel. Do not run or push. Do not leave the building. Keep calm.” The text, printed in red letters, headed the programs. It referred, of course, to the misfortunes of an

eventual air strike. Against the possibility, the circus offered “model anti-aircraft shelters” in the building basement.

The director, just the same, had taken other precautions. She kept an entire travelling circus and approximately seventy animals in Prossen, a small village by the Elbe, not far from Dresden. The necessary specimens for each show came from there periodically. She had also lent thirteen Arabian stallions, eleven elephants and a hippopotamus to the Knie Brothers’ National Swiss Circus in Rapperswil. In view of the probable outcome, the goal was to save the capital of the company; which was required by the government to continue its performances in Dresden as an “act in the interest of the war”.

When, by the end of 1944, the order arrived to hand over all fuel, tires, tents and other useful elements which would be needed for the “final victory”, the director decided to ignore it and she buried 55 tires and two tent-stables (for elephants and horses) in a forest on the outskirts of Radebeul.

The loading was handled in an atmosphere of nervous tension. During the process, Némédý, visibly upset and irascible, argued fiercely with a blacksmith over a triviality that was unrelated to the job at hand. The man had just cut the shoes off a horse and hurried the animal along with a pat on its haunches. But that minor, innocent (and evidently daily) gesture, incomprehensibly triggered a disproportionate anger in the Hungarian, who, arguing that it was an unnecessary punishment for the animal, insulted and arbitrarily fired the employee.

Consequences soon arrived. That apparently trivial incident would change the direction of their lives. Trude, Némédý and Schlenkrich, the circus’ complete triumvirate, were arrested by the Gestapo and questioned that very day. The administrative manager was freed without charges. The attack would clearly fall on the managing couple. The lady was accused of favoring foreign employees (Czechs and Polish) in the distribution of their meager food rations and was held in Schiessgasse prison for some weeks while the affair was settled. Némédý, on the contrary, would be sent to the feared Müncher Platz prison for an indefinite period of time. They had an additional charge against him, aside from complicity in the charges brought against Trude: in a private party he had jokingly parodied the Führer.

Although, to be honest, several different factors affected these decisions. There had always been too much naïveté in Trude’s relationship with the Third Reich; as if she did not clearly understand the dimension of the barbarity that confronted her. She undertook the task with little seriousness, almost with an exasperating indolence, one could say. She

had incomprehensible (and thus, perfectly avoidable) responses and frictions with the Reich which were not ideological, but merely unconscious. The forging of her lineage certificate could be considered proof of that. But there is another anecdote, perhaps a minor one, which eloquently illustrated her naiveté.

One day, a boy had spent the entire morning decorating the sawdust ring with a yellow star that fit perfectly in the center. In the afternoon, a Gestapo inspector arrived for his daily visit and stood looking at her, his face red.

“It’s nice, isn’t it?”, commented Trude, who had approached him in welcome.

The inspector burst into a rage and ordered her to destroy the star immediately. Only in that moment did Trude realize that the drawing represented a Jewish six-pointed star.

There is an infinite number of episodes similar to this one. And even contradictory examples. On one occasion she hired the Coltmanns, three Hungarian clowns of Jewish origin, who she sent to Germany during the Nazi raids assuring them that they would be safe in the circus. A promise that was only fulfilled miraculously because, whether she was conscious of it or not, she would not have been able to do anything in an eventual Nazi raid but plead pity.

Which is exactly what she was forced to do in the case of Sascha, Bamdas’ daughter, who had clandestinely returned to Dresden with her mother when her father died in Buenos Aires. Trude contended that the girl’s Jewish condition was null or, at least, objectionable because given that the religion passed through the mother (as Judaism affirmed) this was not the case: the girl’s mother was a Christian. She also requested that the girl be left in her custody to perform specific tasks for the circus, as the possibilities of finding workers was scarce; a request that after much stubborn pleading, was finally conceded.

That is to say, that Trude never presented an argument based on doctrine, or demonstrated a militant attitude against the Führer’s government; rather that she interceded only in circumstances which directly affected her person or the circus, or simply, as already mentioned, she acted out of naiveté. And even though her company acquiesced to most of the Reich’s requirements, these minor indiscretions on Trude’s part generated tensions with its officials. Regardless, given that they had no real charge against her and after considering the political aims met through the continuity of the circus, they finally decided to free her; though, as a means of precaution or coercion, they kept her companion under arrest.

This strategy proved useless. Only two months later, on Tuesday, February 13th 1945 – during Carnival – the debacle arrived. At 9:10 PM the warning alarm sounded: enemy

planes approached dangerously from the city of Meissen. The performance was immediately interrupted. Seats were emptied in the pre-established sequence, calmly, without panic, and spectators evacuated the arena with the help of the ushers and headed towards the anti-aircraft shelters. The bombing started soon thereafter. From the basements, the public heard the thunder of bombs with anxiety. One by one, they detonated closer and closer. Then came two hours of screaming, escape attempts and attacks of hysteria which had to be contained by the personnel. At 11:00 PM the alarm ceased. Desperately, the spectators left for their homes. Outside everything crackled. The circus caravans and wagons had exploded. Hay and brushwood warehouses were in flames. Anguished animals cried impotently from within their cages. Innumerable bonfires burned everywhere. A whirlwind of fire had devastated the city. People ran stunned with no definite destination. Trude ran to the stables, as well. A group of horses had succeeded in escaping and ran uncontrollably towards the Elbe River. Then came the second attack; by surprise this time. The earth trembled; it shuddered. A whistle was heard and, immediately, the detonation of the bombs. The explosions came increasingly closer. Everyone dashed to the shelters again. Smoke and the smell of gunpowder did not let them breathe. No one knew how long they would resist crowded in that warehouse: hours? All night?

Finally the bombing began to cease. Slowly, everything seemed to calm down outside. The city recovered its calm. Then, suddenly, a line of fire entered the shelter. Utterly terrified people tried to escape. Shoving, scrambling, desperation. Bodies fell and were trampled. Soon the entire building started to go up in flames. The fire found abundant nourishment in curtains, clothes and furniture. Sarrasani Circus Theater, the “Golden Palace”, was a huge bonfire rising in the night, an infernal pyre. The glow lasted until morning. Towards dawn, when the fire had decreased, when the circus was no more than a burned skeleton, the dome collapsed in deafening thunder.

Walking through the rubble

Flocks of vultures flew over the banks of the Elbe. Scavengers looking for their inert victims: animals’ and men’s bodies scorched by fire while running in desperation looking for relief in the water. A gray fog darkened the landscape. It was Ash Wednesday: the “Carnival” was over.

The English bombing was considered the cruelest of the war thus far (only surpassed later by the explosions of Nagasaki and Hiroshima). They had used – as a kind of trial and provided by American forces – an explosive never before used in a military action: white phosphorous bombs, a substance that when put in contact with air, reaches such a high temperature that it provokes the instant ignition of all nearby matter. Asphalt, stonework and even reinforced concrete burned immediately. Dresden became a huge bonfire. Such immolation, however, was useless for strategic purposes. It was rather an act committed out of rancor preserved by the English since their stoic and historic resistance to the German siege of London; and at the same time, an outcome of the intrigue of a domestic alliance whose main purpose was to discourage and/or complicate the advance of Russian battalions in the east. Although the effort would be useless. It is true that they would find a devastated territory, with the resulting logistical problems caused by such a situation, but the Stalinist army would not be deprived of finally taking the city.

Dresden, cannon fodder in the allied dispute, was literally a city in ruins, a region of carbonized debris, a devastated moor of scorched stones, torrid remains for archaeological exploration. Who else but archaeologists could reveal that such a petrified chaos had once formed part of the splendor of a princely city?

After the German surrender on May 8th, the citizens, submerged in the remains, developed new routines. The effects of the postwar period redesigned the social dynamic. Under the ruins of the “Sarrasani Circus Theater” a smuggling headquarters emerged; through its tunnels, the whole post-war black market was traded. It seemed the rubble was still a symbolic urban reference. The “façade” was a sort of pub called “Jumbo Tunnel” (in honor of the effigy of a circus elephant that remained standing) frequented daily by different musical bands. The spectators, in exchange for the show, brought wood or charcoal to feed an old iron stove. A communion of noise and alcohol silenced the ghosts of war. Faces fought between pitiful drunkenness and depressed, errant looks. That half-lit underground dump became a habitual shelter where people went to dull their many afflictions.

One evening, bitterness finally demolished all spirit. The sad episode had circulated throughout the city: Trude Stosch-Sarrasani, the fairy godmother with her winged horses, had committed suicide. Her temperament could not resist the hard blows of fate, it was commented with sorrow in the darkness of the basement. Glassy eyes and laconic dialogues threshed through the final aftertaste of night. Logs crackled. It had been a crude, desolate winter. In the surface, a cloak of snow still covered the burning remains.

But the rumors were false. The story was quite different. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani, the morning after the bombings, had furtively left to find shelter in the warehouse in Prossen, a bunker that held the only remains of the circus. She traveled in her automobile, avoiding the rubble, while refugees carrying their children, walked, searching for a new life.

Astonished, the circus employees welcomed their disconsolate director, with her frayed, muddy clothes. They would have never suspected to find their angelic heroine in such a state, to find such untidiness in the immaculate queen of the arena. But visions of pain and death had been engraved in her face. Explosions beat repeatedly in her memory. The sound of the dome plunging to earth resounded nightly in her inevitable nightmares.

Meanwhile, the air strikes continued to destroy the main German cities. The radio provided little reliable information. An anguished uncertainty corroded the director's spirits. Only being with her horses calmed somewhat, the ill-fated loneliness of those days; perhaps the only balm able to mitigate the pain of that cold, pastoral confinement.

One night an unexpected visitor knocked on the door. The insistence of the knockings startled Trude awake, and she went to open the door in her negligée. As soon as the door was open, they held each other in tears. Gabor Némédy, her companion, her lover, her support, had managed to escape from prison. It was not an unusual circumstance during that tumultuous time. However, the situation held serious risks. The Nazi regime, still in power, threw out the last strikes of a cornered animal. That same morning, the couple decided to escape from Germany until the storm passed. They improvised a carriage out of a wagon and two circus horses and headed for Görkau, Czechoslovakia, where the winter headquarters of the Kludsky Circus was located; it would be their temporary refuge. Schmitter, a loyal employee who used to work as a cashier, would stay with the circus's remaining possessions and sufficient capital for their eventual transfer to a more convenient site.

Celebrations of the German surrender met the couple in Czech territory. Although not in their planned destination, to which they never arrived. They lived anonymously in a village boarding house in Northern Bohemia, awaiting daily events. Radio news soon revealed that the allied forces controlled Germany. Russia would occupy the eastern strip, which included Dresden and all of Saxony, and the west would be divided among the British, the French and the Americans. The escape plan suddenly changed direction. They no longer had to escape from the Gestapo, rather from Stalinism.

On the border of Western Bohemia, they decided to re-enter Germany from the

south, an area controlled by the Americans. As they crossed the border, they discovered a state of celebration, drunkenness and uncontrolled outbursts, irrigated with mugs of the best Czech beer. A festive atmosphere that was not exempt from acts of brutal revenge against collaborators of the Third Reich, a daily risk for the director due to her strong German accent.

After a few days of tense transit, they crossed the border again and headed for Nuremberg. The journey seemed at last to reach a happy ending. The chosen city, they thought, would serve as the new headquarters to re-establish the scattered circus possessions and organize for the future. However, when they arrived, the scene left them speechless. They were faced with one of the cities that had suffered the worst destruction due to the bombings.

An old friend came to their aid. Countess Faber-Castell kindly invited them to stay in her luxurious castle on the outskirts of the city. The Count, meanwhile, offered to send an employee to Prossen in order to bring the caravans and animals back to the stables of their mansion. Trude thanked them for their kindness and gave the employee a letter of authorization. The man rushed off on a motorcycle only to return after a few days, riding a downcast horse and leading another as a replacement. That was all that remained of the huge travelling circus that had been left in the care of Schmitter. Some scoundrel had presumably stolen everything: the tent, the 60-meter façade, the 30 wagons, 40 horses, 8 mules, 4 camels, 6 zebras, 4 oxen and 12 dogs. The Russian militias, in turn, had taken a liking to the motorcycle.

The claim for capital lent to the Knie Circus proved ineffective, as well. After the surrender, 14 horses, 11 elephants and the hippopotamus were considered “property of the German Empire”, that is to say, claimed by the Allies as “evaded capital”. Besides, four of the elephants had to remain in the circus as payment for food and maintenance expenses incurred.

A dark sky threatened the rubble of Nuremberg. No less somber, was the future of the last heiress of the circus dynasty. The destruction of war had left her in a state of unpredictable abandonment. Gunpowder had detonated the collapse, but a series of iniquities had then demolished the remains. Beyond the palace windows, a landscape of dried, black branches reached the horizon. Days faded bitterly into one another for the castaway couple. Legal claims would take years. And, in the meantime...?

In the meantime, their sorrow did not stop there. A last misfortune completely undid her. In her eagerness to find a solution, Trude and Némedy decided to return to their

artistic careers as employees in some minor circus. A minimum material and moral subsistence was all they longed for to survive the moment. Unfortunately, a series of intrigues and delays destroyed that last illusion, too. Mrs. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani was strictly prohibited to act due to her “eminent Nazi past”.

A last black brushstroke tore the canvas landscape. Suddenly, a raven had perched among the dried branches.

A Soap's brand

The “Persil” Certificate was the domestic nickname for the document granted by the “de-nazification” authorities. The curious reference came from the most well known brand of soap in Germany. Its possession was enough to erase any potential spot from the past. And something perhaps even more paradoxical: the popular word completed the resurrection of the sadly famous fetish of the extermination camps.

Regardless, the preposterous bureaucratic idea was inapplicable in Trude’s case. The accusations were equally absurd. The circus history itself, under its three successive directors, offered innumerable examples of evidence to refute the false accusation. Its activity during Nazi period did not imply tacit support of the regime, much less an ideological endorsement. Rather, on the contrary, the repeated negotiations with the officials in power were a survival mechanism; not unlike that used by virtually all private companies that continued to function during the almost twelve years of the Führer’s rule. They did not differ from negotiations with the various regimes of other periods or, even, of other countries. Further, the very essence of the circus belied the idea that its owners would be concerned with racial uniformity, or support the very conflict that undermined their ability to tour and imposed thematic censorship on the show. Such an idea would have only meant permanent artistic and economic losses.

Even so, procedures became difficult. The bureaucracy had to process tons of similar cases. In the meantime, the couple, unable to work, unsuccessfully traveled from office to office. They all yielded delays which were impossible to overcome.

Thus was the situation when an unexpected meeting brought doubly pleasant repercussions to Trude. Coincidentally, between comings and goings in the city, she came across an old and dear friend of the family. Max Friedländer, Senior’s historic friend and

colleague, and painter of the legendary Sarrasani posters, had returned to Germany. Due to his Jewish origin and the growing influence of Nazism, he had immigrated to the Netherlands in 1934 with Junior's assistance. But as soon as the German army entered Dutch territory, he had been forced to escape in a precarious boat headed for the Swedish coast. He had returned a few days before to visit his daughter, who had immigrated to the United States and was currently married to General MacCloy, American representative of the forces of occupation. Needless to say, the necessary procedures were then completed with all due speed.

No one was more surprised than Mr. Schulte. *Frau* Trude Stosch-Sarrasani had visited his circus asking for a job as equestrian artist. She was accompanied by *Herr* Gabor Némedy, who offered his services as an acrobat. He was alone, but he agreed to train two assistants to create the act. Schulte accepted immediately, and told the couple about his early days in the circus as a traction engine driver in Senior's Sarrasani Circus. It was an honor for him – he said – to include them in his show.

Seasons followed one after another. Thus arrived contracts to work in the circuses of Max Holzmüller, Emil Wacker, Adolf Fischer, and Franz Althoff (with whom Trude maintained a close friendship). When Fischer was unable to pay their salaries, they negotiated with the Dinslaken Town Council to continue their show independently on an open-air stage, as in the times of traveling jugglers. By that time, the small *troupe* had begun to grow. Several ex-Sarrasani artists, scattered after the war, had begun to congregate once again around their former director. Old acts were reworked. What had changed were the uniforms. The euphoric applause of the allied army replaced their SS predecessors.

Destiny seemed to be on Trude's side once more. Having recovered part of her cast, the director rented a modest tent to continue with the show. But, though decent, it was not adequate to revive the legend. The Sarrasani name would need a greater venue. In the meantime it would be called the "European Circus".

An amusing anecdote took place during this period. From the road, Trude thought that she recognized three of her old ponies grazing in a field. In answer to her inquiry, the farmer explained that he had bought them in good faith almost a year before. The director responded that she understood the situation and asked if she could approach the horses for a moment. A sound was enough to bring the three ponies trotting towards her. Then, a slight gesture made them sit in unison. The spectators watched in amazement. The farmer, nobly offered a quick and reasonable negotiation. A new act was added to the small circus

tour.

The European Circus survived enthusiastically in the small cities of “Allied Germany”. Given the times and the scarcity of resources, the show was more than decent. In spite of its precarious, rudimentary beginnings, the presence of an experienced hand could be spied in its management. And not only the press and public recognized their talent. A tempting proposal arrived from distant Buenos Aires, the producers Ismael Pace and José Lectoure, owners of the Luna Park auditorium, invited the couple to revive Sarrasani’s legend in the Rio de la Plata. They offered a fantastic space in the center of the city and would absorb all expenses. Trude and Némedy had only to be responsible for hiring the acts and handling the artistic direction. After one year they could keep the company, if they wished. It was January 1948. Almost three years had passed since the catastrophe in Dresden. The Sarrasani Circus, like a Phoenix, was rising from the ashes.

Evita dignifies (“Argentinean National Circus”)

In February 1948, Trude and Némedy boarded a plane for the first time. Travel by ship and zeppelin had become a thing of the past. Technological evolution had also affected their port of destination. Old Buenos Aires had become a major metropolis, with fluid automobile traffic, high-rise buildings and huge masses of people. And there was another significant detail: the historic city of European features showed a new physiognomy. New faces were visible on the streets. *Mestizo*, mixed faces. The interior of the country, which Trude had visited on tour, had filtered into the capital landscape.

The look of the circus was unusual, too: a tent with four poles erected on a huge concrete base (which contained dressing rooms and stables). Press brochures spread the word about the opening: “SARRASANI, The Monumental Circus of Great Shows”, re-opens its doors at 551 Bouchard St., the corner of Tucumán St., 100 meters from the main Buenos Aires Post Office. Expectations were international.

The grand opening was held on April 28th. A euphoric audience rose to its feet clapping and cheering long before the show began. For the guests of honor, Perón and Evita, waved to the crowds from the main box.

Trude entered the arena and dedicated the show to them. Another gigantic applause made the stands tremble. In the midst of such fervent enthusiasm, the distinctive circus

march (composed by César Sesso, a fellow countryman of the audience) was heard once again under the tent. The rebirth of Sarrasani did not keep anyone waiting. The old splendor had resumed its path.

When the show concluded, the president and his wife approached the center of the ring to greet the director and then the three of them turned to face the audience:

“Mrs. Sarrasani”, the General said, “I would like you to know that it is an honor for the Argentine people to have such a distinguished guest, and the Peronista government is at your disposal to ensure that the greatness of your circus continues to shine in our country.”

Relationships between the circus and the Peronista government remained cordial for reasons that transcended mere artistic concerns. On the one hand, during General Farrell’s presidency (1944-46), a government in which Perón held – among other positions – that of Minister of War, the Argentine military attaché to Germany sent continuous reports which revealed that, as before, “the management of the Sarrasani Circus, evidencing their friendship with Argentina, provides information of interest for our government’s international policy”. This was not a minor detail, and clearly alluded to the historic bonds that united the circus and the military and political authorities of Argentina; an affinity that went back to the relationships created by Senior on his very first visit to the country in 1924, and later consolidated by Junior during the tour of 1933.

On the other hand, it is important to remember that both for General Perón and the entire military hierarchy, the German military system had almost cast a spell, represented a kind of muse for their dreams of grandeur. A suggestive deity imported for a patriotic cause, as well as curious, this veneration for an army that had suffered two of the most transcendental defeats of the century. That is to say, an army that failed in any war it dared to enter.

Although to be honest, this particular and deep-rooted devotion (verging on fetishism) had its roots in the distant past. Born in the previous century, in 1870, when the victory of the Franco-Prussian war became the base for the formation of the Second Reich. Of course, this distant triumph shone dimly next to the two military catastrophes suffered by Germany in the 20th century.

Argentina, therefore, debating between military tradition and political *praxis*, had remained cautiously neutral during the entire conflict, although a few days before the Allied victory, it hurriedly declared war on the Axis countries. However, many Germans linked to the Nazi regime found tranquility and a discreet asylum in Argentina. This was not the case of the circus, of course; but doubtless both the historical bond and this devote

fascination for Germany played a role when one year after of the re-opening in Buenos Aires (term after which, as agreed, Trude recovered control of the circus) the first lady, Evita, suggested that the director add a thought-provoking inscription “The National Circus of Argentina” to the name Sarrasani.

Raised to this new status, the circus caused a great stir at each performance on the new tour. The main cities of Argentina welcomed with approval the surprising addition. A new family had been added to the immigrant land. Sarrasani, now the “National Circus”, traveled the territory of its country to return triumphant to its new Home Office on the banks of the Río de la Plata. While the building could not match the grandiosity of the old palace demolished in Dresden, it could boast of being the biggest circus building in all of South America. An enormously dignified residence for an exceptional revival.

The new immigrant family was completed by the director’s relatives, for whom she bought a house in El Palomar, in the province of Buenos Aires. They, too, had arrived after an exhausting flight. They had escaped from Radebeul on foot, when the Russian army entered Saxony, and after several days of walking, arrived in the city of Saulgau, West Germany. They had remained there for three years, attempting to resume their routine while Trude and Némedy roamed with the circus; and now, the family was reunited again in a new country due to their youngest daughter’s success.

Trude’s celebrity truly amazed her parents. One day, for example, Trude received a phone call from Evita, the first lady, inviting her over for tea. It was not the first time that this happened, either. It was an encounter they held sporadically in order to talk about daily matters and plan charity performances for institutions, homes for the elderly, orphanages or low-income schools in Buenos Aires or other inland cities.

However, after a friendly conversation about jewels, fashion and other female issues in the first lady’s luxurious office, the hostess paused, took Trude’s hands in hers and asked that she be understanding: due to urban requirements the circus had to be transferred to another site. However and as fair compensation, she offered a wide variety of new possible sites, while all infrastructure expenses would be covered by the Foundation Eva Perón.

Unexpectedly, the director thanked the first lady for her kindness and declared to understand the situation perfectly, but explained that, in her modest opinion, none of the sites offered an adequate location for the circus. This fact, while not a definite response, made it difficult for her to consider accepting such a generous offer.

Opinions were divided in the internal debate. Némedy considered it an advantageous

proposal. While it was true that the sites did not possess such a central location, they were not contemptible options; especially considering that their stay in Bouchard Street (where the newspaper “La Nación” would later be established) had been almost a miracle in such a growing city. Trude, however, almost on a whim or perhaps out of nostalgia for the traveling life, opted to create a roving company and try their luck in Brazil. A decision – as she admits to this day – that she would regret for the rest of her life.

Finally, after having presented their decision to the first lady with apologies and thanks, the director received a consolation prize: a late model Mercedes Benz and their best wishes for the new enterprise, signed: Perón and Evita.

The aluminum palace

An aluminum dome glowed between the “Sugar Loaf” and “Christ the Redeemer”. Sarrasani’s new tent, installed in Rio de Janeiro, returned to its founder’s historic interest for state-of-the-art technology. Trude surprised the world in her Brazilian adventure by presenting a new alloy to the circus world. The “aluminum palace”, as the media called it, had been installed on Rio Branco Avenue, radiating light and causing amazement in Brazil’s tourist capital. People approached to inspect the strange object as if it were a recently landed alien spaceship. An ambiguous aesthetic effect that fit wonderfully with Brazilian sensitivity. It was an object alien to their tradition, but at the same time a reflection of their own pompous idiosyncrasy. And in both meanings of the word, because the glossy aluminum sphere perfectly reflected the passage of time in the city of Rio. It was gray on gray days, radiant on sunny days and a lighthouse at night.

Regarding the show’s acts, they repeated the same spectacles as in Argentina, with some minor local variation. They also experienced the same populous crowds. However, the show failed as far as income was concerned. The full house every evening was not reflected in their incomes. This incomprehensible fact, which baffled the director, was only revealed by chance.

A couple of friends had gone to see the show without asking for the usual complimentary tickets, out of a question of ethics or simply because they did not wish to impose. Trude, as she later told them, would have gladly given them the tickets, but the truth is that the couple did her a favor when they commented how they had entered the

show. To their surprise, after paying they had not been given the classic ticket with the circus inscription and seat number. Instead, they received a suspicious number to be handed in at the entrance from an ordinary ticket book. It soon became obvious that the employees at the ticket windows, the entrance and the ushers were all conspiring in the fraud. The result was that only half of the audience usually paid for the legal ticket, and the rest, unawares, financed the scam. The result was immediate and conclusive: the termination and replacement of the entire administrative staff.

The tour continued on to Sao Paulo. The aluminum dome now reflected the concrete mass of a great urban center. The population density in the city was such that the circus could remain there for months and constantly renew their audience. At least that was the initial plan. Unfortunately, some time before the contract expired, the director received the sad news from Buenos Aires that her father, as confirmed by her friend Ismael Pace, had been taken to the German Hospital in the city. The disease evolved unfavorably. The tumor had spread and was eating away at his entire body. The Doctors gave him a few days, perhaps a week of life.

Disconsolate, Trude succumbed to an attack of mysticism. She asked her chauffeur to take her to a nearby church of his choice. In the solitary abbey, the lady gave herself over to prayer. Before leaving she approached the altar and made the sign of the cross for the last time. Curiosity made her detour towards a wooden annex: a gleaming *boisserie* and a wooden dome. She contemplated the buttresses in surprise and amazement and asked the priest to clear up an existential doubt. Her suspicion was confirmed: the church had built the annex using circus material auctioned out of an old warehouse. It was, without a doubt, the warehouse on Glyceiro Street where Junior, at the end of 1934, had deposited part of the circus in order to remain agile while on tour, and which, according to the night watchmen had fallen victim to fire while he was in Buenos Aires.

The anecdote did not do much to affect the director's discouraged state. Only the slightest wince of pain appeared in her face. The details of the fraud were soon forgotten: the following day she would face her father's illness in the Argentine capital. She would leave the circus in Némédý's hands, with the order to dismantle it as soon as possible, and to send the artists back to their respective countries. She would wait for him in Buenos Aires.

Trude went straight to hospital from the airport. Unfortunately, her father had died just a few hours before. She remained impassive for an instant. And then she broke into uncontrollable sobs.

“He had never wanted me to see him suffer...”, she confessed to her loved ones. “He always wanted to appear invincible to me.”

After the wake, the entire family retired to their country home in Quilino, in the hills of Córdoba. It was a house they had bought years ago to which they used to escape when they wanted a bit of peace. Trude, her mother and her sister decided to endure a period of mourning there together far from social commitments. Sometime thereafter Némedy joined them, having arrived from Brazil with his job complete.

The directors, together again, planned a respite and a period of peace before resuming their activities. Days began with golden dawns by the lake and extinguished in a wash of reddish color behind the hills. In the meantime, the exotic aluminum tent, leased to another show company, reverberated under other skies. Although not for long. News of the fire brutally invaded the restful landscape of the country house. Like Icarus’ wings, the alloy had succumbed to the flames. Only that, this time, in contrast to the fable, the fury of the fire came from the inside. The dome slowly vanished in the ground. The entire circus had melted.

It was later proven that the event had been an act of arson. Although the effort had been useless. The insurance certificates presented by the tenant were decidedly false. The circus was completely lost. Worn out with sorrow, the director decided to postpone indefinitely her return to the arena and retire to rural life.

A conspirator who looked for redemption

One morning, a handsome, tall, blond young man of slender form jumped over the fence. The dogs rushed out to scare the intruder, who stood still, immobilized by the threat. From afar, the director’s voice calmed the dogs. The boy recovered his calm, but do not move; he stood rigid on the spot. Trude approached, scrutinizing the stranger who appeared somewhat familiar.

“What do you want?”, she asked distrustfully, with a slight German accent to her Spanish.

“I came to visit you”, answered the young man in perfect German. “I’m Hans..., your nephew, aunt Trude.”

To the surprise of the canines, the two relatives melted into a warm embrace.

Hedwig's son (the one who bore his uncle and his grandfather's name) had come to Argentina from Hamburg as the first official on a ship and with the intention of taking a day off to visit his distant family in South America. They celebrated the meeting with a local ritual: *asado* (barbecue) and red wine. The nephew observed in amazement as huge, juicy pieces of meat filled the plates. In the afternoon, they made him try an unknown native infusion: *mate*; although it was accompanied by pastry dear to their memory and specially prepared by his aunt: apple *strudel*. In the midst of this gastronomic syncretism, the anecdotes from childhood, loving memories of Uncle Junior and some old circus tricks, the chords of "Justo el 31", a tango by Discépolo could be heard. The boy left at twilight overloaded with presents, leaving good wishes and expressing his gratitude for such a pleasant gathering.

A couple of years had passed since the director's voluntary retirement. In the country, political assaults continued. Evita, her friend, had died of cancer and a year before, the coup d'état of the "Liberating Revolution" had overthrown Perón's government, who, in turn, had managed to escape safely in a Paraguayan battle ship. But now, halfway through 1956, other news disturbed her placid country seclusion: a diversity of Sarrasani circuses proliferated with impunity around the world. Two or three wandered through Brazil, another pair in Germany, one improvised a tour through Europe and a last one, pathetic and rudimentary, had begun a painful journey through South America. All of them boasted to be "the authentic", "the genuine" or "the only" Sarrasani circus. Of course, all of them were false.

Prosecution, considering the vastness of territory, would have been as difficult as fruitless a task. However, there was one usurper that particularly bothered the director: one operating from the city of Mannheim. The name of its creator infuriated her as much as that of his surprising accomplice. It was Fritz Mey (the maintenance chief who, together with two other employees, had sent the letter to Goebbels conspiring against the director) and her sister-in-law, Hedwig, Junior's younger sister and the mother of Hans, her recent guest. Hedwig, invoking her condition as heiress and encouraged by Mey with the argument of Sarrasani's triumphant revival, had negotiated the concession of the name created by her father without consulting the legal possessor of the rights. The unilateral and underhanded manner in which it had been done was what irritated Trude the most. She could have expected that from Mey, but she would never have suspected such a betrayal from Hedwig. While it was true that she had never participated in the company – because of her personal lack of interest, her responsibilities as a mother and wife or to elude her

father's considerable debts - she had even declined the inheritance in favor of her brother; there was nothing to stop her, in the case of her having developed a sudden passion for the circus, from exchanging opinions with a member of the family.

The fact is that after three years of arduous legal dispute, justice finally decided in favor of Trude. And then a most unexpected event occurs. The conspirator, faced with the irreversible decision, sent an urgent telegram to the director in order to apologize and request a private meeting to discuss past events, which – he affirmed – he thoroughly regretted.

The meeting never took place. Instead, they held a long telephone conversation in which the director mentioned an even older and more painful betrayal, given her young age and the delicate political situation at the time. Mey answered that in those days he, too, was young and ambitious, but he truly believed that the most prestigious circus of the time would not have been safe in the hands of such a young and inexperienced girl. He added that his undeniable personal aspirations – to which he did not renounce – had increased and grown stronger when faced with the possibility of acting as a kind of redeemer: he would have liked to be the one who saved the circus from the crisis; a fact which was true. And Trude did not question his passion and love for Sarrasani, having seen him at work during the days of Senior and Junior.

“Time has proven me wrong and I can do nothing but admit it, Mrs. Stosch”, Mey recognized. “But consider the situation as an outsider and tell me frankly if you would have bet on that young girl. I do not reproach myself for being suspicious but I do regret my methods, for which I apologize. Although I still have to live with this on my conscience. I beg you – he concluded – please accept my apology and free me from this load.”

The explanation sounded convincing. Mey did not deny the charges and answered with sincerity. It was true he had been an employee highly praised by Senior and even by Junior, though in the latter case, certain personal differences had caused his dismissal from the company. That is to say, even though his dedication to the company had been real, his personal outbursts had finally marginalized him. This was his weak point. Although the unexpected acceptance of his defect on his part softened the director. She heard him speak frankly for the first time.

The dialogue continued in a relaxed manner. Trude answered that she bore him no ill will for the past, but that she still did not understand the recent, failed scheme with her sister-in-law.

“It is due to the same clumsy behavior”, admits Mey, “I have no other explanation. You had retired, the circus had disappeared and my desires, therefore, resurfaced. I didn’t dare call you because of our personal history. Instead, I searched for a more accessible possibility. I failed once again. It is the only explanation that I can offer. Fortunately, the only one harmed by this has been me. I apologize for all the unpleasantness I have caused you and I beg you, once again, to forgive me.”

A cold silence was heard on the line. Trude vacillated between commiseration and rejection. The man who had conspired most against her success, had bared his miseries to her and pleaded for forgiveness. The final answer from Trude’s lips was predictable.

“I would like to,” she says, “but it is not in me to forgive you. There is only one person who can do that. If you are a believer, turn to him. If not, try to deal with yourself. As far as I am concerned, if this makes you feel any better, I do not bear you ill.”

They said goodbye on good terms. Mey declared himself to be at her disposal for any job the director might need performed in Europe and Trude thanked him and answered in kind.

Not even two weeks had passed when a letter arrived. The sender: the same man the director had recently spoken with by phone. The written contact, in this case – stated the letter – was due to a need to be precise and clear, given the delicacy of the subject. Thereafter, he detailed his economic situation after the loss of the trial, his imminent bankruptcy and the quantity and range of employees that would be left unemployed and with no possibility of recovering the money he owed them. He placed no blame whatsoever, of course, on the addressee, and he also considered it fair that this be happening; although he had thought of a possibility for avoiding disaster. A possibility he considered remote, but not inaccessible as he explained below, because it consisted specifically in a gesture from the director. The petition was the following: if she planned to remain out of the business, and if she considered him capable of running a circus, he proposed that she grant him a temporary license in a limited territory to manage the Sarrasani Circus in Germany, in exchange for a monthly payment and a percentage of the enterprise. At the same time, he extended an invitation to visit the circus premises personally and make all pertinent comments. If the company prospered, and the director decided to re-launch Sarrasani in South America in the future, it could be an auspicious circumstance that would revive the historic longing of Senior turned slogan: “The most fabulous show between two worlds”.

In this point, once again, opinions within the couple were divided. Each responded in

accordance with their respective personalities. Némedy believed that they were not responsible for Mey's mismanagement and that the telephone declaration of guilt was too closely related to the letter, a very suspicious thing. Trude, in contrast, was more optimistic and interpreted the gesture as an unusually virtuous event in Mey's history and perhaps, an indication of the future. She did not see anything wrong in giving him an opportunity. A license limited in terms of time and territory seemed a low risk solution that, perhaps, would lead to the restoration of the relationship and, who knows, to a union of forces that would allow the Sarrasani to recover its old glory.

Disappointment arrived shortly thereafter. References received about the quality of the show offered by Mey were not very encouraging. The payments agreed upon, incidentally, did not appear either, and the controversy, rather than diminishing, continued. It was not so much the money that affected the director, but the disappointment. It was personal frustration and a sense of exhaustion that finally discouraged her completely and left her secluded in her country house for years. Her only enjoyment, since the event, was to be found in the delights of rural life with her companion. In their peaceful shelter in the province of Córdoba, they raised sheep and hens, milked their cows and sold their products on a small scale: eggs, milk and wool. They also grew vegetables for their own consumption. Some time later they opened a tavern that became very popular among the villagers; entire families would go for lunch on weekends and spend the whole day. Women brought their handicrafts, men spent the afternoon playing cards and children climbed the trees or ran around the park.

***Mathematics are rather imprecise
(or the circus requires an act of faith)***

Plastic. All plastic. Made entirely of plastic. An exotic idyll manufactured out of fiberglass and polyester. A gigantic semi-sphere with a capacity to that of the mythic building of Dresden. Such would be the new "Sarrasani" tent. Another technical innovation to feed the legend.

An Argentine engineer, Professor Martin Santiago, was in charge of the project. It was 1968. After fifteen years of her placid country routine, the director had decided to go back into battle. The peaceful countryside of Córdoba had not succeeded in extinguishing the fire. An insistent nostalgia grew in her soul. She missed, or so she said, the smell of the

ring and sawdust hanging from her shoes.

News of the prodigy spread around the world. Innumerable photographs of the scale model filled the front pages of the press. Newspapers closely followed the evolution of the phenomenon. It was not merely an eccentricity of the director, they said. With this futuristic move, paradoxically, Sarrasani returned to its roots: the circus was once more situated amidst the *avant-garde* of technology.

Times of political difficulty ruled the country. Its president, General Onganía had become the new military leader through the *coup d'état* that overthrew Arturo Illia in 1966 (whose government, in turn, had come to power with a fragile 23% of the voters and a majority of null votes as a result of the prohibition of Peronism). The strong anti-Peronista attitude of the government did not help the director's project, as she had been closely associated to the presidential couple. It was Dr. Luitpold Werz, German ambassador and personal friend of Trude's, who interceded on her behalf with the new president; obtaining a fantastic site near the Retiro train station, where the exotic building could be installed. In the meantime, the immense *troupe* of artists was already on its way to Buenos Aires. They came, as usual, from the most diverse and remote locations in the world. A substantial shipment of animals was on its way, as well: elephants, camels, lions, tigers, panthers and, of course, Lipizzane horses, the director's favorite race of equines.

Completion of the magnificent building, however, was delayed. Its designer invoked industrial issues involved in the complex development. Then he used the massive strikes and other political convulsions of the country as an excuse. The fact was that months passed, the investment increased and the expected circus comeback was repeatedly postponed.

Tired of excuses, Gabor Némely ordered the designer to install the tent immediately, regardless of the state of its construction. He then discovered the truth: in spite of the technical advancements, the pieces could not be assembled. The 36 pieces rose together from the base, but separated before reaching the top, leaving the peak of the dome open and crossed with sharp edges. At that point, nothing could be done. The new design was, in practice, a complete failure. Errors in calculation had completely undermined the plan. They could take legal actions in the future, but the situation was irreversible.

There was no time for regrets. The hand was dealt, as they say in gambling jargon. The arc of animals and the group of artists were already disembarking on the coast of Buenos Aires. Exotic happy faces descended from the ships. They stopped on the gangway and took in the immense urban horizon. They had come to resurrect the Sarrasani legend.

Trude and Némedy, imperturbable, stood stoically on the docks, and greeted them one-by-one. After the cordial welcome and pertinent procedures, they gathered the cast and, without much introduction, explained the situation. They were clear, however, in that they would not be canceling the contracts or the promoted return of the circus. Though delayed, the debut would proceed. They asked only for patience and good will. The artists would stay temporarily in a hostel, and a bell tent had been hired for the animals in Ezeiza, province of Buenos Aires. It only remained for the creditors to accept postponement on repayment of the debt, at least until performances began somewhere.

Without delay, the director designed an emergency plan: until the matter of the tent was resolved, she decided to rent a theater of considerable standing to begin the show. Thus, thanks to the partial solution and with slight variations from the original program, the “Sarrasani Music Hall” debuted on September 9th 1970 with a luxurious gala show for the benefit of Children’s Hospital. Among the influential spectators attending the show, was the new first lady of the country: Mrs. Beatriz Andrés de Levingston, wife of the general who had assumed the presidency the previous June.

The changes were caused primarily by the rectangular shape of the stage, so different from the oval perspective created by the round arena with its surrounding audience. For that reason they chose the name “music hall” instead of “circus” for the new show. The acts preserved the old circus spirit and the usual Sarrasani quality. Newspapers described the comeback with grandiose headlines: “Three continuous hours of the best German circus tradition”, “Sarrasani, a permanent institution in cosmopolitan Buenos Aires”, “Applause for the delicate woman in white crinoline who guides her stallions with whispers and soft movements in a dream dance”.

Fifteen years had passed. She had not returned to the ring since her father’s sudden death. In the meantime, some personal frustrations were added and, ten years later her mother passed away, as well. It was evident that the resurrection of the circus involved a personal renaissance. Although evidence of past years and sorrows could be read in her face. She was no longer the lively fairy godmother blessed by destiny, but she had grown older keeping intact that aura, that charm that emanated from her being. Maturity even appeared to have refined it. She led her troop with infinite tenderness, as if she and the horses shared a strange communion. From the center of the ring, at age 57, her legendary charisma still captivated the audience.

Financial success soon followed artistic recognition. And then, another stroke of luck: after three months of full house performances, Trude received a business proposal

that more than satisfied her. It came from Nino Segura, descendant of an old Spanish circus family that had been closely related to Sarrasani since 1921, when the family *troupe* was hired by Senior. Since then, they had joined the cast for successive seasons and in 1924, even took part in the South American tour. Now, in addition to their famous “rides”, they would provide a tent and infrastructure for the summer tour in Mar del Plata, the country’s most important seaside resort.

The summer season continued in March, in the cities of Rosario, Córdoba and Mendoza, before returning to Buenos Aires for the winter holidays. This time the circus offered a renewed show, both in its program and image. A renovated tent had been added to the renovation of the artists. The useless plastic segments were used as decoration, creating a shiny façade of pointy arcs that lent a certain mediaeval air to the circus. In the center, in a huge sign glowed with the letters of the mythical name. “Sarrasani, a stunning cathedral in Retiro”, read the headline in *La Plata Ruf*, the monthly German newspaper edited by Hans Wöler.

In the midst of the circus euphoria that had burst out across the country, a group of movie producers decided to shoot a film alluding to the subject using television stars. The protagonists were Andrea del Boca, the child prodigy soap opera actress and Gaby, Fofó and Miliki, a threesome of clowns adored by Argentine television viewers. The name of the film was “Once upon a circus”.

They were to shoot the interior takes in Sarrasani’s tent. The circus’s diverse animal species would also participate in the film. They would appear in the circus’ own ring, except for the wild animals that, for reasons of continuity, would act in a special cage assembled by the producers in a country house in Castelar, province of Buenos Aires.

Trude arrived the morning of the shoot with her lions and other felines and congratulated the producers for their beautiful staging. After inspecting the interior of the cage, she allowed them to start. Gabor Némedy, himself, who over the years had left air acrobatics to specialize in animal taming, would introduce the wild beasts.

The shooting began with the tricks of a black panther. But something seemed not to satisfy the film director. Shots were repeated time after time. There was always some detail to correct or a new variation to introduce. Némedy was calm and repeated the scenes. The panther, on the contrary, started to become impatient. Suddenly, after the umpteenth identical pirouette, the wild animal reacted furiously and rushed for its tamer. Némedy moved to one side with agility and snapped the whip in the air. The two scrutinized each other and, suddenly, inexplicably, the panther slipped through two loose bars and escaped

from the cage. Terrified, the entire production staff entered the cage and locked the door. Trude and Némedy went after the wild animal, but their calls mixed with the frantic shouts of the filmmakers. Meanwhile, the panther ran freely around the property, threatening repeatedly to attack the cage, only to be dissuaded by the tamer's whip. The humans, terrified, watched the scene while holding onto the bars. Finally, Némedy stood in front of an open trailer and called the panther with his whip. When it spied him, the panther turned and ran for the tamer; at the cry of "hop!" Némedy moved aside and the wild beast jumped into the vehicle. Némedy closed the door and the unusual episode was over. Then, like a mocking child, he grabbed the camera and filmed a panoramic shot of the imprisoned filmmakers, immersed in the wild, exuberant natural landscape.

Goodbye my love, goodbye

In early 1972 the complete circuit was renewed for another year: the summer season in Mar del Plata, a tour through inland cities and the winter season in Buenos Aires. The show was performed repeatedly with unsurpassed success; sold-out tents and constant recognition from the critics. After two years of hard work, the Sarrasani name had once again been installed in the collective consciousness of a new generation.

But Trude was exhausted. The daily clamor of such an enterprise and the usual inconveniences of the employees, resolved with enviable efficiency and tact in the past, had slowly begun to affect her. Her own daily routine seemed exhausting. In repeated conversations with friends, she reminisced about the quiet life she had led during her years in Quilino. The same thing happened to Némedy, her faithful life partner, who had supported and accompanied her in every challenge she chose to attempt. Of course, their passion for the circus did not diminish, but the essential desire to be in business seemed to recede from their lives. The time seemed right. So did the place. At the summit of their success, after a consecrated return and having succeeded in installing Sarrasani once again in the collective memory of the circus, the sexagenarian director retired definitively from the ring. She said her good byes in Buenos Aires, the city that had allowed her renaissance when post-war Europe would have denied her, the city that had engraved the name Sarrasani in its *tango* ideology: the most authentic of its artistic expressions.

Buenos Aires, an immigrant nation in and of itself, home of unpredictable

expressions, would be the last homeland for the most prestigious of circus dynasties. Trude said goodbye in tears, turning around one last time in the very center of the arena, while her winged horses moved in circles around her.

Nightmares for a sleeping beauty

Once again at their home in Quilino, the couple resumed their old farming life. Fresh eggs, milk from their own cows and the vegetable garden filled their days once more. They soon reopened their famous tavern and spent the weekends among families of customers. They visited the city only occasionally. Curiosity about a film or some theatrical show could barely move them from the country house.

Between numerous letters from their fans, they received news from time to time of Nino Segura, who had founded the Real Madrid Circus with his brothers. Trude and Némedy, enthusiastic about the new business, sent him their best wishes and recommended that they hire of a series of artists. One day, after three years of retirement, a surprising letter arrived from Germany. A man called Claus Wagner, 35 years of age and manager of a successful transportation company, had realized his childhood dream: he had bought a secluded farm in Höheischweiler, near Pirmasens, and turned it into a stud farm for the training of horses. The businessman expressed his understanding about the couple's definitive retirement and invited them to join him in an enterprise that would keep them involved in their passion without disturbing their peace. He offered them the management of the farm and the instruction of young trainers. To seduce Trude, he had also brought 12 Lipizzane stallions – her favorite horses – from the Yugoslavian Djakovo. And as if this were not enough to convince them, he added one last detail. Franz Althoff, her close personal friend - with whom she had shared so many experiences including her moderate transgressions during the Nazi regime, and who had hired both Trude and Némedy in post-war times when the bombings destroyed the Dresden building (and who, incidentally, received a medal from the State of Israel) - looked forward to including the first horses trained by Trude in his circus.

Other rhythms, other chords began to beat in Trude's chest. The blood began to flow more rapidly through her veins. This would not mean just another trip. She had not stepped foot on Germany soil since 1948. It was to be her first return after almost 30 years. As

described in the famous tango by Gardel, “...*a faded forehead, the snows of time, and an ambiguous blink of the eye marked her return*”. On one side waited the shining lights of circus success; on the other, the fatal, tragic flames of 1945. The undeniable allegory with Gardel, so distant to the Saxon collective consciousness, stressed another difference, as well: for the first time, Trude would pass through customs carrying an Argentine passport.

The unexpected presence of the legendary lady in the Federal Republic of Germany caused a great stir in the media. As usually happens, the news of her arrival had filtered through a strict pact of discretion. What was supposed to have been a secret comeback turned into an improvised press conference. The director responded again and again to the insistent question, her return was only related to her personal life. Perhaps – she specified – she would exhibit some Lipizzane horses, but nothing else. She considered herself retired and would not be starting another circus company. She made no comment about the less than decorous way in which Mey had treated the Sarrasani name, or about the repeated lack of payment for his use of the license. She simply stated that she would see the state of the circus first and then make any decisions. Finally, she thanked everyone for their genuine interest, but made it very clear that she would not be giving other interviews.

The expectation that the return of “the great lady of circus”, as she used to be called, would pass unnoticed was an act of naiveté. So was the idea that she could keep herself separate from the world by training horses and their trainers. And although she initially enjoyed an emotional and peaceful period of re-encounters with old friends and habits, and dedicated her afternoons to teaching, immersed in the protection and enthusiasm of younger generations, Mey’s invitation would inevitably arrive. And arrive it did, one year later, removing her from the idyllic, timeless state that is often created by those affections that inhabit the soul. In his letter he made no reference to the debt, but did state that he would be glad to welcome her in Mannheim to discuss about all – he underlined – pending subjects. Trude briefly responded that she would travel in due time, when she had finished her work on the stud farm.

The day finally arrived and the director could not believe her eyes. The image was more depressing than the entire collection of references she had heard. She clearly understood why she had not received any payment. Némédý, by her side, observed without saying a word. Mey guided them with an attitude more akin to justification than narration. In other words, he verbalized more excuses than facts.

That evening, the couple attended a show they would term pathetic; and the following morning conclusions followed: they both agreed that Mey was simply an

incompetent. His noncompliance with their agreement was less a result of will than of his lack of ability. And here opinions were divided once again. Némedy believed that the best thing to do was to start legal actions and revoke the license immediately, even if it was to expire soon. For Trude, one last effort would be worthwhile.

“There is a name to defend”, she repeated. “I made a mistake... At least I can try to repair it. Nothing can be lost by trying.”

“Time, we waste time”, answered Némedy. “There is a sort of fatal attraction in negative things, that in your case, is incarnated in the figure of this man. As if you always find an excuse not to rid yourself of him”.

“Gabor, darling”, Trude replied, “Give me a chance. If it doesn’t work, I promise, we will go back to Argentina”.

In order to revitalize the circus, Trude proposed to take her exhibition of Lipizzane horses to the arena as a means of seducing new artists to join. Regarding the artistic direction, it would be left in Némedy’s hands. Finally, Mey would only be in charge of administrative issues. And she would consider the debt, paid.

The re-appearance of the director, who everyone believed retired, caused an unusual stir. All eyes were fixed on her every move. The comments of old about her sense of class, her unique presence, her refinement and her strange communion with horses, appeared again in the media. She was once more in Germany, facing the public that had observed her birth in the ring, as well as new generations, for which she was a mythical name mentioned in stories told by their parents.

Némedy, at the same time, had managed to add new acts to improve the show, not an easy job at first. Artists accepted with more mistrust than conviction and with their only hope residing in the glorious histories of the people who had hired them. In the end, it was Némedy who answered the phone calls and responses with uncertainty. With true uncertainty, because, although the initial plan was contrary, success would invite them to continue. For Trude’s presence ensured that the Sarrasani Circus resumed its success and was called to different German cities, forcing them to improvise a sudden tour that later widened to include a number of cities in the Netherlands.

Except for physical exhaustion, everything went wonderfully well in the new circus adventure. The director was welcomed with renewed veneration in every port the circus visited, although she took every opportunity to declare that, on her part, the trip was an exception, a farewell to the German public. They were there, with Némedy, only to add their contribution to the enterprise. Once back in Mannheim, she would complete her

cycle.

However, the outcome was delayed. An unexpected situation held her back. Mey's lover, an extremely solicitous young woman named Ingrid Wimmer, had managed to ingratiate herself in the director's affection. She presented herself to Trude as a helpless creature ignored by her man, with whom three years ago she had given birth to a child. She continuously preached about her condition as a single mother and a rejected mistress, and accused Mey of emotional and material neglect. The situation aimed straight at Trude's heart. Her relegated maternal instinct appeared to have found a channel in this girl looking for shelter and protection. To the extent that Trude, so moved by a petition from the young mother, even considered the possibility of adopting the child. A possibility that, incidentally, due to a series of legal impediments and the director's subsequent regrets would never be realized.

Némedy understood the situation very well, but observed with suspicion. The couple had spoken many times about the maternal vocation that events had prevented Trude from satisfying with children of her own. He had also seen her stroll the streets of Buenos Aires, pushing a baby carriage with a doll inside. An act of mischief that he believed hid a certain deficiency. Therefore, he made only cautious comments. He did not ignore that it was a delicate subject for Trude, but he perceived, at least on the young woman's side, a speculative plan managed by someone else in the background. The goal was evident and even more so given the circumstances; the circus had recovered its good name. Little by little, with great tact and extreme delicacy, he began to call attention to questionable behaviors and acts. It was useless. The director was blinded by the possibility of having a child of her own and found excuses for everything. Némedy finally had to use force. During an evening debate, he exposed the situation coldly and directly to Trude, shaking and kissing her at the same time, to make her react once and for all. The method, between premeditated and visceral, acted as a sort of *satori* that restored her clarity of vision and broke the vicious cycle that had absorbed her. Trude burst into tears. Some time later she would remember that period as a sort of nightmare from which she awoke thanks to the lucidity of her companion, though she added a touch of romanticism typical of her personality:

"I was like sleeping beauty in a trance"- she liked to repeat. "And my Gabor, the valiant prince who came to my rescue."

While Némedy considered Mey and Ingrid a pair of swindlers, he did not like to blame third parties. He attributed the origin of the confusion to an almost esoteric issue

embedded in his lover's soul. In his explanations, he alluded to a type of frightfulness in the two characters that had exercised an irresistible fascination on the angelic director.

For Mey and his mistress, needless to say, the outcome was not propitious. Without the director and given the subsequent departure of a number of artists, the circus would quickly succumb. However, for Trude and Némedy, the entangled scheme brought favorable results, the unpleasant episode had a happy ending. An old communion was revived between the couple; as if destiny had reserved these events to revive a sleeping passion, as if the tortuous labyrinth were an indispensable path towards a resurgent love.

The snows of time

The “honeymoon” took place calmly in Rothenburg, a picturesque village by the Tauber River that is part of the famous “*Romantische Strasse*”. Trude and Némedy granted themselves a vacation after the previous months of excitement. There they resumed private ceremonies and made plans for the future. Their subsequent realization was surprising, but not for that any less agreeable. They had fulfilled their initial purpose - the tamed horses were already an attraction in several circuses and students continued their tasks on the stud farm – and successfully performed for audiences that had not seen Trude since her exodus. They had even considered and rejected several proposals (the most tempting among them came from the Althoff family, inviting them for a season). Only to discover, given that they had no other commitments or desires to continue in public life, to their amazement that they did not wish to remain in Germany. Only one place could have made them stay, but it was denied to them. The return of “the great lady of the circus” to Dresden, that city so dear to them both, would not have been well looked upon by the Communist regime, even though no official objection had been manifested, given that the director had worked during the government of the Third Reich. Even the positive pronunciation of the word “Sarrasani” there was banned under severe punishment. Under those circumstances, the director was obviously not interested in returning, in spite of her desires. If she were to return, it would be under calm, harmonious circumstances, to reunite with an old love, not to confront political situations in which she was a mere victim. She had paid a high enough price to keep the legacy afloat in the midst of that horror, to feel obligated to justify herself again to a new group of marionettes. Just thinking about reviving the controversy was discouraging to her. As a result, and in the meantime, only one port claimed her soul. Her heart directed its course. The north of the compass turned

whimsically to the south, to those constellations that had accompanied her for the last 30 years. Whimsically, of course, because as usually occurs, the reasons themselves held no logic, though it was precisely that vagueness, that fragility of reason, which attributed her feelings with an unobjectionable sense of truth. She missed her soil just because, and the smallest details made her nostalgic. That was all. Untenable, but irreproachable. Only one thing was clear: after 20 years in Switzerland and 15 in Germany, Argentina had lodged the director for the longest period of time. And it was also the last. And perhaps, it was the one that had renewed her hope when all appeared lost. It was not so illogical, then, that they longed with such impetus to return.

Remembrances and tributes

The following years were passed once again in Quilino, in complete seclusion. Times of peace and introspection. Walks through the countryside, strolls by the bank of the river and afternoons spent napping in the shade of a tree. The circus lady and the handsome athlete returned in the evenings, hand-in-hand. Sunset found them at home, resting in their rocking chairs by the warm glow of a fire. From time to time, they relived moments of glory through the sepia tones of old photographs. The burning flames reflected on the images and lent a sacred sheen to their memories. There appeared Senior, dressed as a Maharajah, conducting his eternal elephants; and there, the early poster of him embracing the tent; and that legendary Moorish façade glowing in the night; or the construction of the mythical Dresden building; and the succession of artists from distant lands, with their exotic costumes and habits; and the “Wild West” posters painted by Friedländer; and the Sioux Indians on parade through the streets of Dresden; and Chinese acrobats hanging from their hair; and the lion who performed acrobatics between two ropes; and children riding the hippopotamus; and the Watussi ornaments; and the elephants and camels carrying provisions during the First World War; and the shrouded elephant from the crisis of 1930; and the first trip to South America; and travel by zeppelin; and life in the caravans; and the lion-megaphone that roared; and the aerostatic balloon; and the strongmen destroying the bar; and the endless tours around Europe; and Junior’s sense of humor; and Bamdas’s loyalty; and the show for the newspaper boys in Montevideo; and Junior walking the streets of Buenos Aires with his chimpanzee; and his jokes; and the

unusual marriage; and the huge sapphire surrounded by diamonds; and the flash of jugglers and tamers, contortionists and riders; and Trubka with his bears; and the Wallendas walking the tightrope; and clown Rocasimi with his lions; and the Fratelli Francesco; and Némedy flying through the air; and Cesar Sesso conducting the orchestra; and Alf Jeffa revising the circus march; and the patriotic parade of Argentine soldiers; and the Nazi banners in Berlin stadium; and the “Hail Hitler” sign; and the German soldiers attending the show; and Billy Jenkins rushing into an elegant restaurant firing his gun; and Goebbels’ almost-smile; and the fairy godmother in the center of the ring; and her beloved Lipizzane horses; and the requiem in tribute to her husband; and the bombings; and the circus engulfed in flames; and the dome falling to the ground; and the morning they escaped in the carriage; and the following nights of anguish; and their triumphant return to Argentina; and the night Perón and Evita waved from the theater box; and the church where she prayed for her father; and the aluminum tent; and the failed plastic tent; and the escape of the black panther; and the return to Germany with her Argentine passport; and an endless collection of adventures, anecdotes, and life stories.

Thus, the couple spent their last years together in that rural tranquillity filled with memories, in the softness of remembrances and tributes. On March 31st 1981, Gabor Némedy, almost 73 years old, peacefully left this world in his sleep. His remains were buried in the German Cemetery of the Argentine capital and his entire wardrobe, which had adorned his acrobatic figure all over the world, was donated to the Berlin Circus Museum. On his gravestone Trude inscribed a posthumous recognition: Gabor Némedy-Sarrasani.

One last desire

From that moment, Trude’s life changed dramatically. She left Quilino behind in her memory. She did not want that shared time and space to be invaded by loneliness. She moved back to Buenos Aires, to an apartment in the center of the city, close to San Martin Square, perhaps to live surrounded by the rapid pace of the multitudes. In autumn and winter, she stays in the capital; in spring, she heads to the coast, to San Clemente del Tuyú, a seaside resort on the Atlantic Coast. Thus, all year long, her days are spent between the crowds of Florida St. and the deserted sands of the Atlantic Ocean, between the sounds of the city and the immensity of the ocean. Wherever she goes, a new faithful friend follows:

Kiki, a little stray dog she found on the street.

But destiny still held a surprise for Trude. It occurred in 1991. The Berlin Wall had been demolished two years before and a divided Germany, after a long, difficult process, was reunited. The fact not only denoted a question of borders. For better or for worse, one concept of the world was being imposed on another. The city of Dresden, now free from indoctrinated prejudices and other vestiges of Stalinism, decided to pay tribute to the spirit that had given life to the city during the first half of the century. The forbidden word was resurrected full of vigor. A resolution of the Councilors Committee baptized the street where the demolished “Palace of Circus” had been built, with the new name “Sarrasani”. At the same time, the family vault in Tolkewitz Cemetery was declared a National Historical Monument.

It was not just another tribute, among the many she had received in her career. For Trude, the director, “the great lady of the circus”, the honors came from a people close to her heart, from the place where Sarrasani had projected its future to the world, from the people who had shared its successes and its failures, from the place where she had become an equestrian artist with her Lipizzane horses. But it also represented an emotional tribute: the possibility to recover a beloved land that political circumstances had denied to her. After 47 years of an exile, half-voluntary and half-forced, after almost half a century of absence, Trude Stosch-Sarrasani returned to Dresden for the first time. To say that she was moved is not sufficient. Her last images of the city came from the tragic night of the bombing. Debris, blood and pain filled the final landscape imprinted on her retina. To her joyful surprise, she discovered a tidy, elegant city that, without being the romantic princely village of her memories, still retained the graceful spirit of past times. Although post-war renewal had prepared another detail for her and it was not small: a new, modern cement apartment building, lacking all beauty, had been built on the historic site of “Sarrasani Circus Theater”.

Nevertheless, the testimony of gratitude continued. In 1996, April 2nd, Hans Stosch Sarrasani’s birthday, was declared Official Sarrasani’s Day in Dresden. Trude, as guest of honor, donated the bronze busts of Hans Stosch-Sarrasani and Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr. that had been miraculously saved from the circus foyer during the bombings of 1945 to the city of Dresden. And in Carola Square, facing the site where the famous building had been constructed, the first monument devoted to the circus was uncovered: a commemorative stone carved by sculptor Vinzenz Wanitschke.

Hundreds of people attended the ceremony. Some adults, with tears in their eyes,

asked her for autographs on old, torn circus programs or on sepia photographs of the young director with her beloved Lipizzane horses. Children approached the legendary “fairy godmother” with their cheeks ready to be kissed and a pen in their hands, perhaps only aware of her through the images that had remained in the memories of others generation after generation.

In march 1999, lucid and vivacious as in her best times the legendary director has suddenly returned to Dresden. The stir caused by her visit has not lessened since previous trips. A party of city authorities was expecting her just down the airplane stairway. Behind them, a large congregation of journalists. Between welcome gestures, protocol presents and colorful bunches of flowers, emerged the insistent camera flashes. Trude thanked the effusive reception and explained the reason of this new visit: the Stosch-Sarrasani Strasse Foundation in the city of Radebeul, germinal seed of the circus.

At night, in the television screens, besides rose petals, appeared an unequalled and sweet face, a peaceful face plowed by the story of near a century, a face that suddenly, before the general amazement, was illuminated by a new illusion: the re-launching the Sarrasani Circus in its two historical capitals: Dresden and Buenos Aires; to bring to reality once more the legendary slogan of its founder: “The most fabulous show between two worlds”.

With luminous eyes, she confessed her intimate dream, a new challenge, one last desire she would like to be fulfilled.

“I have dreamt –she concluded– with one hundred more years of circus projecting into the new millennium.”

EPILOGUE

The image of the circus appears somewhat devalued today. It seems to be an art devoted to nostalgia, to invoke the tender illusions of childhood. Today, the thought of a circus, invokes a world of melancholy, of languid memories and fantasies faded by time. A large part of that feeling is a consequence, in recent decades, of the rapid development of the television and film industries. That microcosm of the world shining under the sky of the circus tent, that splendor of fantasy that disembarked with its baggage in different cities around the world, that exoticism of races and animals from the most remote landscapes of the universe made accessible to the citizen of the most hidden village, today arrives straight to our homes through optical fiber and coaxial cable.

The circus has given its place over to new rituals from which to view the universe. A present-day comparison of the high point of Hans Stosch-Sarrasani at the beginning of the century could be perhaps, one of the *popes* of the film industry. Watussi oxen, hippopotami, Bengal tigers or African elephants cause little amazement when compared to the interruption of cybernetic dinosaurs or other modern discoveries of computer animation. The “Wild West” has also been overused and overly promoted by those same Hollywood productions. In this new globalized world, a parade of Chinese, Hindus, Sioux Indians, Moroccans or *gauchos* from the Pampas can hardly be considered surprising. It is not unlikely that members of these races, in addition to appearing daily in the media, live in the spectator’s very neighborhood.

Therefore, modern circus has had to update itself. It has even been forced to submit to several moral objections in term of the relationship between man and animal. What once would have been celebrated in an animal tamer, today provokes a frequent reproach. Whether or not this represents advancement or reverse evolution is a debate for another occasion and would require, in any event, an ontological discussion that exceeds the scope of this book. Nevertheless, what have become tangible are the effects of this phenomenon; and these have resulted in two opposite extremes between which circus’s art oscillates today.

The first one tends toward the nostalgic approach, the reworking of the circus in the old style, although without the polemic elements previously mentioned and limited to the lavish scale of other periods. That is to say, this tendency maintains the aesthetic glamour of the old circus, although without considering it a show for the masses, rather a private

ceremony designed to cultivate the past. Which does not necessarily imply a miniature copy of the old circus, a *bonsai* of great success, rather the recovery of certain features by removing layers of dust, by means of modern lighting, from that patina of ancient memories.

The other tendency relies on technology, on the movement of complex hydraulic machinery and strident light and sound effects. In this case, the circus is transformed into an act of staging and choreography in which the artists become anonymous behind various temporary masks. Their figure is as relevant as any other stage element, and can be replaced by any other athlete of similar characteristics that can wear his/her costume or mask. In this case, in order to give priority to the scene, the historical relationship between artist and spectator is definitively banished from the arena.

Both doctrines, in and of themselves, guarantee nothing. Both can yield wonderful or pitiful shows. The curious thing (this digression focuses on this aspect) is that both, paradoxically, have a common origin: The Sarrasani Circus. What a merit has this circus, to serve as an aesthetic seed for the two most prolific circus world-views present today.

In this respect, it is worth remembering that an essential precept of the creator of the Sarrasani Circus was based on the application of the most modern technological advances, while maintaining an extreme respect for the individuality of the artist. The essence of the show: man, complemented by constantly renewed, state-of-the-art technology, which, far from overshadowing him, specifically highlight his value. And this is, to my understanding, the greatest aesthetic legacy of Sarrasani.

The other essential precept is perhaps ethical: to turn the arena into a meeting place of different cultures, a privileged site where races and creeds from all five continents can mix and live, together. Something not of little value considering the historical evidence of this last century.

CHRONOLOGY

1873. April 2nd. Hans Stosch is born in Lomnitz/Posen, son of Albert Stosch, a well-established glass manufacturer.

1888. At the age of 15 he runs away from home and finds a job as a stablehand in the “Itinerant Show”, directed by Oscar Kolzer.

1892. First appearance on stage as a clown-tamer with his poodle Polka.

1893. Hans Stosch marries Maria Ballhorn in Stuttgart. He is already known by the name “Clown Sarrasani and his animal family”. He becomes an artist required by the most important circus and variety shows of St. Petersburg and Madrid.

1896. March 1st. Hedwig, his daughter is born in Berlin.

1897. April 15th. Hans, his son, is born in Sorau.

1901. April. Hans Stosch-Sarrasani rents a house in Radebeul, near Dresden, a site considered to be the birthplace of the Sarrasani Circus concept.

1902. World debut of Sarrasani Circus in Meissen as “the most modern circus in present times”, in a comfortably furnished tent – including, for the first time in Germany, electric lighting – with a capacity to hold 3,600 people.

1904. First extraordinary show in Berlin.

1906. Sarrasani becomes the most technically advanced circus, with two reheated steam engines and two turbines that produce electricity. 30 arc lamps illuminate the façade and another 20 illuminate the arena.

1907-1910. Extraordinary shows in Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Basle, Amsterdam, Brussels

and Paris.

1910. May 27th. Sarrasani buys the land where he would establish the stationary circus.

1911. The construction of the “Palace of Circus” begins, designed by Heimann & Litman Company; later revised by the architects Rohde & Beschoren.

1912. First extraordinary show of a German circus in a theater, presented by Sarrasani in the Convention Room in Frankfurt Main. He would repeat these huge shows later in theaters in several cities.

December 22nd. In Carolaplatz, Dresden, they inaugurate “Sarrasani Circus Theater”, the biggest and most modern circus building of Europe, with the presence of the royal family.

The circus is at the height of its success. Aside from goods and employees, artists arrive from the most remote places in the world (Moroccan, Chinese, Japanese, Javanese, Turkish, Hindu, etc) and it is said that the circus possesses 400 animals.

1913. March 14th. The first Sioux Indians come from the U.S.A.. Their chief is the legendary Edward Two-Two, who dies in 1914 during the extraordinary performance of Essen, and is buried, according to his own wish, in the catholic cemetery in Dresden.

1914. August 1st. Germany declares war on Russia: The First World War. Confiscation of tractors, horses, wagons, etc. About 450 artists and employees are either obliged to enlist or deported for being from “enemy nations”. Circus elephants and camels are confiscated by the army to carry provisions and supplies of war.

November 12th. The first emergency program debuts in the Dresden building: the show “Europe in flames”, later to be followed by others.

1915. Last performance abroad, in Denmark. The Animal Protection Society starts legal action to return the circus to its home country after two lions that brutally attacked each other were shot to death during a show. Return to Dresden.

1917. Food rationing prevents them from feeding the animals. Some die of starvation. Others, weakened, are attacked by a virus. A last elephant dies and is sold in small portions for food.

1922. With Russian artists fleeing from the Bolshevik Revolution, Sarrasani reorganizes a tent-less circus. He starts a tour through German theaters.

1923. November 4th. 230 men, 180 animals and 120 wagons set sail. First South American tour around cities of Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina that lasts approximately two years. The President of the Third Reich, Friedrich Ebert, gives Sarrasani the mission of representing German culture, and he is welcomed with deference by the political authorities of the host countries. Before returning, he receives recognition from Argentine president Dr. M.T. de Alvear.

1926-1927. Systematic modernization and technological update of the company. The evolution of cars allows him to enlarge and renew his transport system and become independent of railroad transport. He incorporates 175 vehicles. The personnel staff grows to 500 employees. The animal collection reaches 250 horses, 100 wild animals, 27 elephants, etc. Acquisition of two gigantic tents with a capacity for 10,000 spectators each. Enlargement of the traditional arena diameter from 13m to 17m allows the staging of more impressive shows.

1928. January 24th. They inaugurate “the wonder of circus construction” in Chemnitz: the first and only transportable winter building. As a tribute to the success experienced in Argentina, it takes the name of president Yrigoyen.

1929. October 24th. The Crash of the New York Stock Exchange. Economic crisis places the circus in a troubled situation. Sarrasani starts a tax war with the Saxon government and obtains a tax reduction for considering the company “a national cause”. At the same time, the director tries to mitigate the crisis with extraordinary shows overseas. He tries in Switzerland and then continues through the Netherlands and Belgium, where he encounters a hostile attitude towards Germany.

1932. January 1st. Major fire in Antwerp with severe damages. Lost possessions are

replaced through significant investments in order to face the crisis with a gigantic show, initially in Düsseldorf, but financial results are catastrophic.

August 31st. Suspension of the travelling company, and soon after, suspension of the circus.

In Dresden, prominent citizens start the “Society of Friends of the Sarrasani Circus”, in order to obtain donations which would allow the circus, at least, to remain in its permanent building.

1933. First problems with Hitler’s government. The rise of Nazism worries Sarrasani, who decides to emigrate. The circus is established in Rotterdam until funds can be gathered to set sail for South America.

1934-1936. Second South American tour through Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina.

1934. September 21st. Hans Stosch-Sarrasani dies in Sao Paulo. His embalmed body is sent to Dresden. A multitude attends his funeral and he is buried in the family vault at Tolkewitz Cemetery. His son, Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr. assumes management of the circus and continues the tour through the inland cities of Brazil, Montevideo and finally Buenos Aires, as well as other main Argentine cities, with the support and financing of the governments in power. Dr. Terra, the president of Uruguay, even sends him armed escort to travel through his conflict wrought territory.

First contact with Goebbels, Reich’s Minister of Propaganda, to re-establish a relationship.

1935. April 13th. In Buenos Aires, Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr. marries Gertrude Helene Kunz (Trude), born on January 18th 1913 in Zurich, daughter of Robert Kunz (cellist in the Symphonic Orchestra of Tonhalle) and Aulda Esche, and younger sister to Erna.

July 9th. Celebratory show for Argentine Independence Day. Military and ecclesiastical authorities (among them, bishop Pacelli, future Pope Pious XII) are the guests of honor. On August 17th, they would return the courtesy, inviting the director to the official box during the military parade.

November 13th. The circus divides into two companies. One of them goes back to Hamburg to continue with the tour through Europe and receives honors from Argentine president General Agustín P. Justo before leaving. Jewish employees of the company remain in South America; some of them settle in Brazil and others in Argentina.

1936. For the first time the slogan “The most fabulous show between two worlds” becomes literally true: while one company travels around Argentina under the direction of Josef Bamdas, the other travels through Germany under the management of Junior. The latter is present at the Olympic Games in Berlin.

1937. Anniversary celebrations for 25 years of the Circus Theater of Dresden, introducing the “Program of 25 world sensations”. Later known as the: “Dresden Winter Festival”.

1939. September 1st. The Second World War breaks out, which again causes serious consequences to the circus, though not as extreme in the beginning as occurred in 1914. The number of countries available for touring is increasingly reduced. The Third Reich “suggests” themes “to keep German spirits high”. In the Circus-Theater of Dresden they put on “Baby Sahib”, a play for the ring that includes magicians, snake charmers, elephants and camels, narrating the story of Hindu rebellion against English domination.

1940. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani appears for the first time as an equestrian artist with her Lipizzane horses. Trude meets with Goebbels, due to Junior’s illness, where she requests authorization for a tour through Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

1941. German invasion of the USSR, on June 22nd. Conditions for German circuses become considerably worse. Regulations increase, having been expanded since 1933 and strengthened in 1939; from the “Aryan certificate” to the banning of music or artists’ names related to “enemy countries”.

July 9th. Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr. dies a few days before the extraordinary show in Berlin. His widow, Trude Stosch-Sarrasani, assumes the management of the circus and continues as planned. At the end of the show she offers him a requiem in the circus arena. First tour around Hungary under Trude’s direction.

1944. April 2nd. In spite of scarcities, “the first musical circus of the world” debuts in the Circus Theater of Dresden; Trude Sarrasani’s first original show with the name “Around the world in a circus tent”. The Imperial Chamber of Theater offers enthusiastic praise for “the elevated political-cultural mission promoted by Sarrasani for the grandeur of Germany”.

In November, the Gestapo arrests and imprisons Gabor Némedy in Müncher Platz Prison accused of “anti-German conduct”. Trude is also held in Schiessgasse Prison, but she is freed a couple of weeks later.

1945. February 13th. The bombing of Dresden destroys the city and reduces the Sarrasani Circus to rubble. The director flees to the circus warehouse in Prossen. Shortly before war ends and faced with the imminent arrival of Stalin’s army, Trude Stosch-Sarrasani and Gabor Némedy (having escaped from prison) travel of southern Germany through Görkau/Czechoslovakia.

May 8th. Germany surrenders.

Having lost all of her possessions, Trude Stosch-Sarrasani starts her artistic career over from scratch. After presenting the “Persil” certificate of “de-nazification” required by the American occupation forces, she accepts a position as an equestrian artist in the circuses of Schulte, Max Holzmüller, Franz Althoff, Hermann Schickler and Adolf Fischer. Gabor Némedy creates new acts. During that time, Trude manages to gather some of her old artists in order to create a circus of her own again.

1946. First program of her own circus on an open-air stage in Dinslaken.

1947. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani and Gabor Némedy create a new circus called the “European Circus”, because they did not consider it to be at the level of a “Sarrasani”, yet.

1948. April 28th. World re-opening of the Sarrasani Circus in Buenos Aires produced by Ismael Pace and with the presence of the presidential couple Perón and Evita.

1949. One year later, as agreed by contract, Pace hands over the management of the permanent circus to Trude and she names it the “Sarrasani, Monumental Circus of Great Shows”.

1950. By initiative of Eva Perón, the circus receives the honorable title of “The National Circus of Argentina”.

1951-1952. As the government needs the site in the center of the city for development, the circus building is to be demolished. Evita offers several alternative sites and the full financial support of the “Eva Perón Foundation”. Trude does not accept as she considers the sites inadequate, and with Gabor Némedy, together they recreate the travelling circus and start a tour of Brazil. They surprise the world with an “aluminum palace”, the first tent made of an alloy, and establish it in Rio de Janeiro.

1953. Trude returns to Argentina due to the death of her father. The tent that had been rented out in Brazil is the victim of arson. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani retires to her farm in Quilino, in the province of Córdoba, to devote herself to rural life.

1956. Illegal “Sarrasani” circuses begin to proliferate around the world. In Germany, Fritz Mey, in collusion with Hedwig Stosch-Brandt and without the approval of Trude, legal possessor of all rights, illegally starts a German Sarrasani circus. After three years of legal dispute, Trude wins the case. Both contenders, however, reconcile and the director grants Mey a license limited in time and territory. Mey never fulfils the contractual obligations and the controversy continues.

1968-1969. They start the construction of the first plastic circus in the world, as designed by Professor Martín Santiago, manufactured in reinforced polyester and fiberglass. The project, complicated and expensive, fails as a consequence of bad calculations, when the hired performers are already on their way to Buenos Aires.

1970. September 9th. Gala debut in Buenos Aires in a theater, with the presence of dictator/president General Levingston’s wife. Three months of huge success. Afterwards, they associate with Nino Segura and prepare a tent circus for the summer season in Mar del Plata.

1971-1972. Winter seasons in Capital Federal, summer seasons in Mar del Plata and tour around the country during the year until finishing the contractual relationship with the

Segura Brothers.

1973. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani and Gabor Némedy retire again to their farm in Quilino, Córdoba.

1975-1977. After 30 years Trude and Némedy return to Germany contracted by a stud near Pirmasens to train horses and prepare trainers.

1981. March 31st. Gabor Némedy dies. He is buried in the German Cemetery of Buenos Aires. His entire wardrobe is donated to Berlin Circus Museum. Trude moves to Buenos Aires where she spends her winters. In the beginning of each spring, she goes to San Clemente, a town on the Atlantic coast.

1991. Two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and German unification, a resolution by the Councilors Committee of Dresden creates “Sarrasani” Street in the neighborhood where the Circus-Theater had been located. Sarrasani’s family vault in Tolkewitz Cemetery is declared a National Historical Monument.

1992. After 47 years of exile, Trude Stosch-Sarrasani visits Dresden for the first time.

1996. April 2nd. Hans Stosch-Sarrasani’s birthday is declared Official Sarrasani Day in Dresden. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani donates the bronze busts of Hans Stosch-Sarrasani and Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr., saved from the bombings of 1945 to the City Museum. In Carolaplatz (Carola Square) they uncover the first monument devoted to the circus: a commemorative stone carving by sculptor Vinzenz Wanitschke.

1999. March 17th. Foundation of the street named “Stosch-Sarrasani Strasse” in Radebeul, circus germinal city. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani, godmother of the ceremony, declares in a television interview her illusion of re-launching the Sarrasani Circus in its two historical capitals: Dresden and Buenos Aires, to realize once more the legendary slogan of its founder: “The most fabulous show between two worlds”. At the same time, she confesses an intimate dream, one last desire she would like to be fulfilled: “a hundred more years of circus projecting into the new millennium”.

FINAL NOTE

The preceding book was based on diverse resources. Primarily on invaluable oral histories, profuse photographic documentation and several issues of the Sarrasani Magazine, provided by Mrs. Trude Stosch-Sarrasani, the last director of the circus. Also, on a vast bibliography of diverse character. In this case, it becomes important to make privileged mention of Ernst Günther's book "Sarrasani, As It Really Was", perhaps the most complete compilation of documents on the history of the Sarrasani Circus. Other consulted works include: "Around the World with a Circus Tent" and "Journeys and Adventures", by Hans Stosch-Sarrasani, Jr. and "Sarrasani, Circus King" and "Sarrasani Circus, Behind the Scenes of a World Show", by Gustav Von Hahnke (Sarrasani's press manager). The books by Herbert Fleischer "Sarrasani without a Mask" and "Sarrasani, the Essence and Outcome of the Show", by Karl Arthur Vollrath, have also been of great value; as well as an infinite number of publications from the German, Argentine and Brazilian press. Lastly, it is worth citing the film material of the Film Archive of the Federal Republic of Germany, the photographic documentation from the Märkisches Museum of Berlin, the Circus and Clown Museum of Vienna and the National General Archives of Argentina.