The Hungarian Quarterly

HOLOCAUST SPECIAL ISSUE

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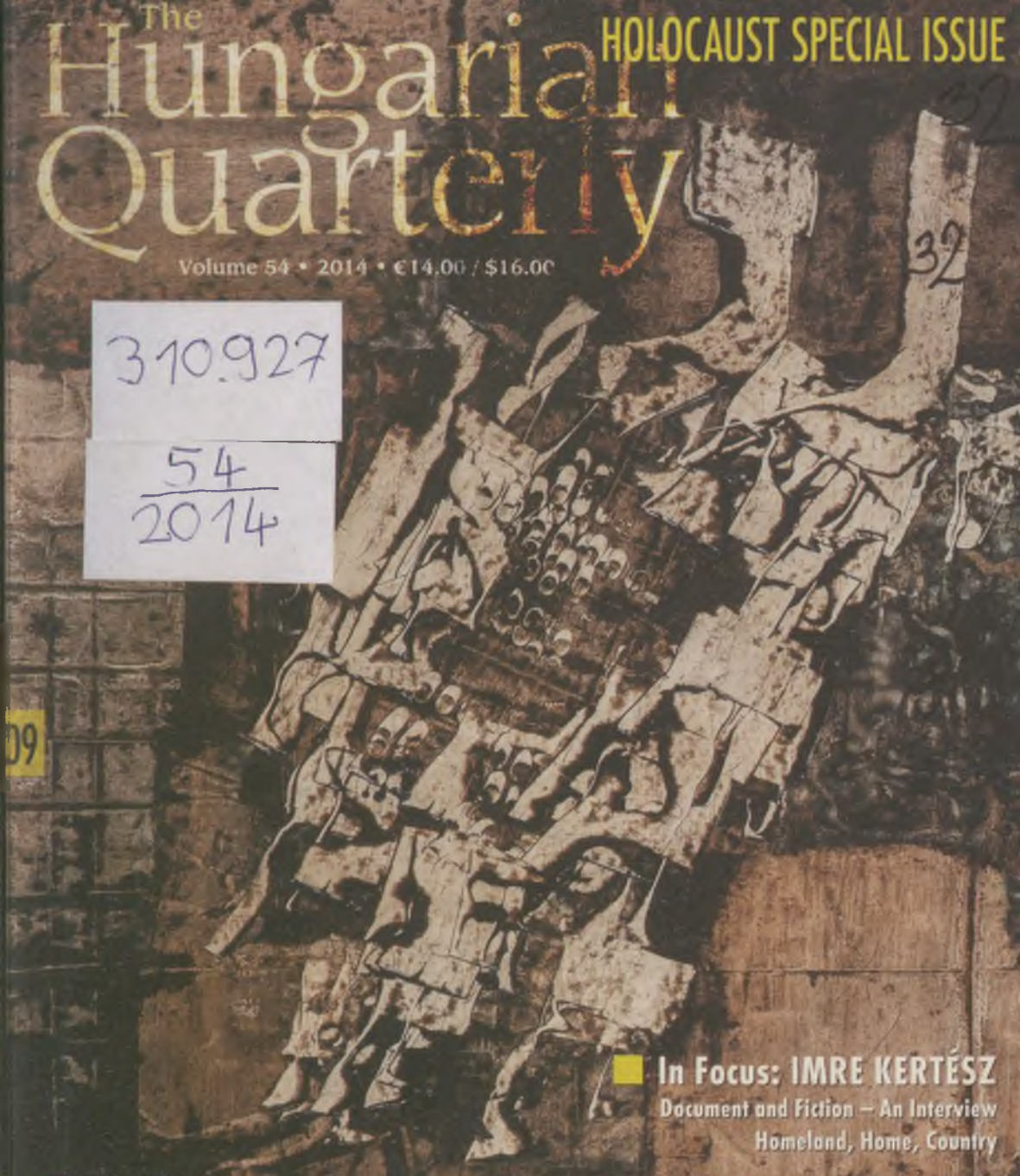

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***On the cover**: Lili Ország.* Scream *(1969)*
Oil on fibreboard. Photograph by Gábor Nagy (MODEM). Courtesy of the Flóris Rómer Museum of Art and History, Vasilescu Collection, Győr

***On the back cover**: The doorway of one of the yellow-star houses (2014)*
Photograph by Szilárd Lipcsei. With the generous permission of the artist

Editor-in-Chief's Note

It is hard not to falter as one types the words "Holocaust Special Issue." Can anything concerning the Holocaust be modified with the adjective "special"? Is this not trivializing or, worse, commodifying? How can one make a respectful gesture of commemoration at a moment in history when, with the passing of time, living memory is gradually yielding its place to artifacts of culture, memory is giving way to monument? Is it not presumptuous even to try?

Yet as the contributions to this special issue of The Hungarian Quarterly *remind us, the Holocaust is as much a part of our present as it is a part of our past. As Nobel Prize-winning author Imre Kertész remarks in his essay "Homeland, Home, Country," the Holocaust was a traumatic event of Western civilization, an event that, he wonders, may someday come to be understood as the beginning of a new era. The historical essays included in this issue attempt to further our knowledge of this event by exploring questions of context and causes and examining episodes that have evaded thorough discussion, while the personal remembrances further our understanding by offering first-person accounts of survivors. Other contributions examine the consequences the Holocaust has had for culture and the ways in which artists and writers have grappled with its legacy. We offer one example with the image here, a photograph of the memorial by Hungarian film director Can Togay and sculptor Gyula Pauer (1941–2012). It honors the Jews who were killed by members of the Arrow Cross in Budapest in the last months of the Second World War. The victims were ordered to take off their shoes and were then shot into the Danube River.*

Can Togay and Gyula Pauer. Shoes on the Danube Bank *(2005)*
Photograph by Nikodem Nijaki

Not surprisingly, the events of the Second World War touched the history of this journal as well. In 1943, József Balogh, the first editor-in-chief of The Hungarian Quarterly, *was compelled to go into hiding. The son of a rabbi and a convert to Christianity (and a man of exceptional erudition), Balogh managed to keep the journal afloat in the first years of the war. As the situation in Hungary worsened, he was given refuge by Jesuits in Szeged. Eventually, however, he was denounced to the authorities. He was apprehended and never seen again. With this issue* The Hungarian Quarterly *hopes to pay modest tribute to his memory.*

Thomas Cooper

Document and Fiction

Imre Kertész Interviewed by Thomas Cooper

On an afternoon in April 2014, Nobel Prize-winning author Imre Kertész was kind enough to set aside a few hours to speak with me about his work, his life, and an array of ideas, ranging from the role of fictional and historical narratives to the significance of Auschwitz in human history. Kertész is not in the best of health, and it was generous of him, to say the least, to find time to meet with me, especially given that he was working assiduously on the Hungarian text of a novel forthcoming in September 2014. He spoke with characteristic warmth and openness. At times he was visibly tired, no doubt in part because he had been working much of the day on textual revisions, but he remained animated as our conversation touched on questions about which he clearly felt strongly. I would like to take this chance to extend my personal thanks to him for having given us the opportunity to include his reflections in this special issue. I would also like to thank Magda Kertész, his wife, for her kind hospitality and for having welcomed me into their home.

Thomas Cooper: *Thank you for finding time to get together. I would begin by asking, in part since I see you have an array of papers here, what you are working on now.*

Imre Kertész: I want to finish my novel, my new novel, *A végső kocsma* ("The Last Tavern"). It has been published in German, as I suppose you know, *Letzte Einkehr*, translated by Kristin Schwamm. But in September it will be published in Hungarian, and I have to go over the text and make all the final revisions. It's about a writer who wants to write his last novel, he manages to write a chapter, but then he dies. It is about the process of composition, in a way. The writer's struggle for clean writing, pure writing. And he manages to write part of it, but dies without being able to finish.

T. C.: *This reminds me a bit of* Fiasco. *I think I mentioned to you once that, of your novels,* Fiasco *is my favorite, if it makes sense to speak of a favorite, because it is the most devastating. Does your new novel touch on similar themes?*[1]

I. K.: Yes, very much so. To be honest I always write about the same thing, the process of composition. I often think everything is fiction. We have the idea that there is documentation on the one hand and fiction on the other, but sometimes I am skeptical. Even a first person narrative, an attempt at objectivity or at least an honest perspective, becomes fictive because one imagines oneself. One tries to find a suitable language in which to narrate one's experiences, but in doing so one really narrates oneself and transforms all the real experiences into language, which is always fictive.

T. C.: *This strikes me as a recurring theme in your work.*

I. K.: Yes, I write about it in *Fiasco*, and also in *Dossier K*,[2] of course, *Dossier K* is very much about this, the debate, if you will, between the writer and his works. The writer is always holding a kind of interview with himself, or an interrogation. A debate. It's frustrating, you know, your works come to supplant you, and it's almost as if that were what people wanted. I have often been asked whether or not my works are auto-biographical, and it became aggravating. I have wanted to answer with a clever paradox, no work is auto-biographical since all works are invented, or all works are auto-biographical since the writing of the work is part of the writer's life. I wrote this once about Auschwitz, you could say there is no such thing as a Holocaust novel or Holocaust literature, as Elie Wiesel famously did, but you could also say there is no such thing as literature that is not about the Holocaust, since how can anyone deny the effect the Holocaust has had on every aspect of our understanding of the world. You cannot write anymore without writing in some way about Auschwitz, or reflecting in some way on Auschwitz. But then you can keep enumerating the paradoxes and language begins to run away with you. And it all becomes fiction. And this always happens with writing. Writing is always document, but it is always fiction.

T. C.: *You say that the Holocaust has affected every aspect of our understanding of the world.*

I. K.: Well, I don't want to overstate, and language always tempts you to overstate, but yes, after Auschwitz humankind is different. After Auschwitz life is different than it was before, and what came before is different than it was before. Look, you see that book over there, to the left of the stack of papers, *Das Glück des atonalen Erzählens*.[3] This is an idea I introduced, and there was a two-day conference on the topic. Atonality, we live in a time of cultural atonality, there is no fundamental tone to which all other tones are clearly

1 ■ *Kudarc*. Translated into English by Tim Wilkinson.
2 ■ *K. dosszié*. Translated into English by Tim Wilkinson.
3 ■ *Glück des atonalen Erzählens* ("The Joy of Atonal Narrative"). AZUR, November 2010.

related. Atonality in music, twelve-tone music, if you had played an atonal composition, say something by [Anton] Webern, for [Johann Sebastian] Bach, he probably wouldn't have understood a note of it. Perhaps he would have found it laughable.

T. C.: *And this is our culture today, an atonal culture with no harmony?*

I. K.: Yes, and imagine, like in the case of Bach and Webern, how would our culture seem to an earlier era? Incomprehensible and maybe terrifying. It has no clear vision or direction. No consensus. Not even a reliable language. Language is so saturated with ideology.

T. C.: *And this is a consequence of Auschwitz?*

I. K.: After Auschwitz, culture disintegrated. People are not what they were before, humanity had to rewrite its autobiography. It had to rethink its visions of itself. The culture of Europe had so many directions, so many impulses, and they each seemed to suggest progress, or maybe more clarity. But after Auschwitz? Can Humanism be regarded as Humanism after the Holocaust? Can the Enlightenment be seen as the Enlightenment after the Holocaust? The nation state, which made its first appearance on the European stage as the apogee of democracy, of equality, even before the Holocaust this image had begun to fray. After the Holocaust? One no longer reads even Nietzsche without thinking of the Holocaust, though I remain convinced that he would have been one of the first people to be deported.

T. C.: *So with this metaphor of atonality you are suggesting that there are no shared values that might constitute common points of reference in culture?*

I. K.: I don't want to be so philosophical about it, it is more a question of style in a sense, atonal narrative, style that is seeking but uncertain.

T. C.: *Is the Holocaust not a tonal center for our culture, a point of comparison or relation? Is Auschwitz not the "key," in the tonal sense, of our culture?*

I. K.: Yes, I understand what you are saying, and yes, in a sense I agree, the Holocaust as a negative experience creates value. But here we get into the tendency of language to manufacture itself. The Holocaust destroys value, the Holocaust creates value.

T. C.: *You have written that the Holocaust destroyed language. Can you clarify this?*

I. K.: Language was a tool of the total dictatorship, and it was the most important tool of this dictatorship. Somehow it made a horrifying ideology a palatable part of everyday life. After all, it's not the deranged madman who kills millions of people. You can't entrust a task like mass murder to a madman, you need efficient, reliable workers, a good assembly line.

T. C.: *I am reminded of a comment you made in the essay "Holocaust as Culture," you remarked that at his trial Eichmann had said that he had never been an anti-Semite, and the people present burst out laughing, but you said that you found it perfectly plausible.*

I. K.: Absolutely, the totalitarian state relies on efficient organizers. Hannah Arendt touches on this in *Banality of Evil*.[4] You can imagine what it was like for me, in Hungary, when we finally got access to these kinds of works! There I was, writing my novels and feeling as if I were in complete isolation, which I was, as you know initially *Fatelessness* was rejected for publication partly because it didn't have villains in it. That's a long story, let's just say it didn't fit the official narrative. And in the meantime someone else in the West was writing something very similar. And many others too, [Tadeusz] Borowski, Primo [Michele] Levi.

T. C.: *I recall a passage in* Fiasco *in which the narrator makes the observation that mass murder must have been tedious work.*

I. K.: Yes, and this is the question I ask, how did perfectly normal people become murderers? How did a bookkeeping clerk become a torturer? I am thinking in this case of Ilse Koch, the witch of Buchenwald, as people have called her. [Jorge] Semprun made her the embodiment of evil, cruelty, but that's just a caricature. And even if it weren't, she's still only one case, one person. What about the others? How were people made part of the machinery of the Holocaust? I ask this question, and this may be one of the reasons why my works are read in Germany, people are interested in this question. Indeed I have gotten letters, to be honest thousands of letters, from Germans thanking me for having helped them understand what happened to them. They were always written on as if they were brutes, but they were humans. Auschwitz was a human creation, so if we want to understand it we must understand the humans who created it.

T. C.: *And you feel this effort is appreciated in Germany?*

I. K.: I do, but I don't want to overstate again. I don't want to say that I am understood in one place and not in another. But yes, I have the impression that my works are read in Germany. I was asked not too long ago to open a conference in Germany, and I declined for health reasons, but I would have liked to, because yes, I feel that my ideas are received with interest.

T. C.: *I understand you have given the material of your oeuvre, manuscripts and such, to the German Academy of Sciences. Is this because you felt that there was more interest in your work in Germany than in Hungary?*

4 ■ *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 1963.

I. K.: There may be more interest in my work in Germany, but I wish to emphasize, I turned my corpus over to the German Academy for two reasons, one, because they asked for it, indeed they had been asking for it for a decade, but the second and perhaps most important, because I knew it would be in good hands. It's not that I didn't want to leave my work here in Hungary, Hungarian institutions simply never asked for it. Had they, perhaps I might have, but in the case of Germany I know that it will be treated with the proper care. It will be available for research, for study.

T. C.: *So it was not that you did not wish to turn the materials over to the Hungarian Academy, for instance?*

I. K.: No, they didn't ask. Had they asked, and had I been confident that it would have been in the hands of properly equipped professionals, I would have left it here, in Hungary. Last summer a reporter came from the *New York Times* to do an interview with me. He asked what I thought of the situation in Hungary. I replied that situation was fine, that I felt fine, and he was surprised. He seemed to have the impression that I felt threatened, given the political mood. He asked why I had given my work to the German Academy, and when I told him why, well, he didn't seem to like the answer. He had interpreted this as some kind of expression of my misgivings about Hungary, which it emphatically was not.

T. C.: *It was not a symbolic gesture?*

I. K.: Not at all. And the question was not sincere. He thought I was going to speak out against Hungary, or Hungary today or something. And I didn't. He had come with the intention of getting me to say that Hungary is a dictatorship today, which it isn't. That only means that he has no idea what a dictatorship is. If you can write, speak openly, openly disagree, even leave the country, it is absurd to speak of a dictatorship. And this is what I said. I am not pleased with everything happening in Hungary today, I do not think there was ever a time when I was pleased with everything happening here, but certainly Hungary is no dictatorship. This is empty, ideological language, to call Hungary a dictatorship today! And the interview was never published. Which a friend of mine very accurately said is a kind of censorship, if someone gives an answer you don't expect, then you don't publish it.

T. C.: *Do you feel that there are attempts to politicize your works?*

I. K.: That is a complex question, I'd rather not go into it because anything I would say could be politicized. When Viktor Orbán held a speech at the Konrad Adenaur Foundation, I attended. I had been invited. I was perhaps the only Hungarian who went. I have held presentations there myself and it was an honor to be given an invitation. So I went. And of course it was an important

moment for him before the elections, and people criticized me, Hungarians criticized me, for attending this speech.

T. C.: *People who do not share his political views?*

I. K.: Yes, people on the left. Well, one of them was very critical, but he himself had worked in the service of the Kádár regime for years. He himself had attended all kinds of speeches held by representatives of that regime, which was a totalitarian regime, make no mistake about it, and he criticized me for attending a speech held by an elected prime minister. Which is absurd. I am not saying with this that I support the government, nor am I saying that I don't, not at all. But I didn't go to support him, I went to listen to him.

T. C.: *And this is interpreted as an endorsement?*

I. K.: Yes, or by some at least. But regarding my works and the German Academy, this was not a symbolic gesture. I have never spoken out against Hungary. Of course all kinds of things happen and are happening that I do not necessarily look on favorably, but I do not speak out in condemnation, nor have I ever spoken out in condemnation Hungary. The political dialogue on important questions simply isn't a dialogue. There are unresolved parts of our history that we haven't managed to confront. In Germany there was a revolution from this perspective in 1968, when children began to ask their parents about the war. In Hungary there was never open discussion because the regime didn't tolerate it. Open discussion would have threatened its narrative.

T. C.: *Is this an example of how language is saturated with ideology?*

I. K.: Yes, the Holocaust became part of a strategic narrative, a tool of communist ideology. This is one of the reasons I chose a child as the narrator of *Fatelessness*, I was trying to find the appropriate language with which to tell the story, to show how language becomes the tool of the totalitarian dictatorship. You know, it is hard to trade in your experiences for words on paper, to know that the words on paper will supersede the experiences. The words on paper will be cited, interpreted, debated, the experiences will be forgotten, only the language will remain. So you have to fashion the right language. What is the right language after Auschwitz? Well, I tried to create one.

T. C.: *A language free of ideology?*

I. K.: A langauge that retold the experiences, as they were experienced. Not a language of outrage, a language of living, of living through. Because that was how I had experienced the Holocaust. I had lived through it. And I wanted to document, but of course the process of composition became fiction.

T. C.: *So when you took pen in hand there was a desire to document the past?*

I. K.: Of course, to write down what I had experienced. But of course on paper the words seem different, distant. They become fiction, and you do not recreate the experience, you create a narrative.

T. C.: *A work that is inevitably fiction?*

I. K.: Fiction and document. You can document the past, but what is this documentation worth? What is its function? How does it enrich our understanding of the past, or the present? Inevitably it becomes a tool of some narrative, and so it becomes part of fiction. And fiction can become distortion. We need documentation in order to interrogate fiction. We use life and reality to hold fiction to account. But we use fiction to hold life and reality to account as well. But now I feel language running away with us again, maybe this would be the place to conclude. ❧

English Title

Imre Kertész and Thomas Cooper:
THE HOLOCAUST AS CULTURE

Hungarian Nobel Prize recipient Imre Kertész speaks with Thomas Cooper about his experiences as a child in Buchenwald and Auschwitz and a writer living under the so-called "soft dictatorship" of communist Hungary. Reflecting on his experiences of the Holocaust and the Soviet occupation of Hungary following the war, Kertész likens the ideological machinery of National Socialism to the routines of life under communism. The book includes, in addition to their conversation, an introductory essay by Thomas Cooper and Kertész's essay "The Holocaust as Culture."

Imre Kertész

Homeland, Home, Country

One year ago, in November 1995, four talks were held in this room. Two of the four presenters, Fritz Beer and George Tabori, began their talks about "their own countries" by saying that there was no place that they could think of as "their" country. These two authors, however, had the good fortune of leaving (or perhaps the foresight to leave) the countries of their birth quite early, before they might have been imprisoned, dragged off to a camp, or killed because of their ancestry or their way of thinking, or perhaps both. At the moment, you are seated before a presenter who was delivered within an entirely legal framework by the legal authorities of his own country, Hungary, as a sealed shipment of goods to a foreign great power with the express purpose of murdering him, since this power, Nazi Germany,

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Imre Kertész

is an author who emerged from relative obscurity to become one of the most widely recognized writers of post-war Hungarian literature. In 2002, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the only Hungarian author to be given this distinction. Perhaps best known for his novel Fatelessness *(Sorstalanság), in which the protagonist, a 14-year old boy, narrates the experiences of his deportation to Auschwitz and Buchenwald, Kertész has written numerous other novels and several collections of essays. His works have been translated into several languages and in 2005 a film based on* Fatelessness, *for which Kertész wrote the script, was released in Hungary. In April 2014, a stage adaptation of the novel was held at the HERE Arts Center in New York. A 75-minute dramatic monologue performed by Hungarian actor Adam Boncz, the production is a collaborative work of renowned international artists, including Romanian dramaturge András Visky and New York director Gia Forakis. The essay included here is the English translation of a talk that was held by Kertész on 10 November, 1996 in the Munich Kammerspiele. The talk was part of a lecture series entitled "Reden über das eigene Land" ("Talks on One's Own Country").*

Photograph by unknown artist. Courtesy of Petofi Literary Museum

implemented the extermination of Jews with far more developed methods. Having survived the concentration camp, he returned to this country, who knows why anymore, perhaps it was the instinct of a stray dog, but maybe because at the time, in his sixteen-year-old mind, he considered it home. Later, during the period of Soviet occupation to which we refer as Socialism, he spent forty years here in a kind of de facto internal exile, only to recognize at last, after the first euphoria of the turn in 1989, his unalterable foreignness, like the last stop of a long journey, at which he arrived without having moved geographically at all.

Perhaps even a journey like this, taken in one place, has lessons. If I didn't think it did, I wouldn't be standing here in front of you. Not long ago I was given the honor of reading Sándor Márai's novel *Memoir of Hungary* on the radio in Budapest. In 1948, Sándor Márai, one of the best, most interesting modern Hungarian writers, emigrated before the complete Stalinization of the country had taken place, and for forty years it was in practice forbidden in his "own country" to write his name down. He lived long enough to be invited back from the United States to Hungary following the turn in 1989, though he understood this return home very differently from the Hungarian cultural authorities of the time, who had rapidly become very complaisant towards him. At eighty-nine years of age he shot himself in the head in the solitude of his apartment in San Diego. In his novel, he mentions the preparations he made before emigrating, and he describes the last weeks that he spent in Budapest. I read his weighty deliberations into the microphone with particular earnestness, what kind of future would await him if he were to stay, fear of entirely predictable physical and mental intimidation, "brainwashing," the "loss of self," and all the while I could not help but think that I, a fellow writer born some thirty years later, somehow had gotten stuck here, they had not brainwashed me (either they failed to or they just forgot to bother with my brain), and I had not lost my so-called self either (if perhaps it is often a heavy load to bear). Am I to blame? Am I cowardly? Lazy? I don't think so. To use Sándor Márai's style, someone had to live through that too.

It's worth noting that Sándor Márai was one of the first people not living in a German-speaking area to recognize the significance of Franz Kafka, and in 1922 he translated the best stories into Hungarian. When Kafka learned of this, he immediately protested to his publisher, Kurt Wolff. In a letter, he wrote that he reserved the right to translate his works into Hungarian exclusively for his friend and acquaintance Robert Klopstock. This Robert Klopstock was an amateur writer of Hungarian descent. By training he was a doctor. His name later surfaced from time to time in German émigré literary circles. The story is a bit as if the real flesh-and-blood Kafka had suddenly stepped into the fictive world of a Kafka story. To make clear what I mean, it's a bit as if, say, after having found out that Thomas Mann was translating one of my books into

German, I were to tell my publisher that I have more trust in my family doctor, who also happens to know a bit of German.

I am not quite sure why I recount this anecdote. Perhaps to cast light on the simple fact that the law of our world is error, misunderstanding, and failure to recognize one another. How readily we select a poor interpreter, and how readily we err in language, which presents only a caricature of our thoughts. In any event, I appreciate the cautiousness with which the title of this lecture series was chosen: Reden über das eigene Land [Talks on One's Own Country], yes indeed, I believe I discern in this title an expression of the sense of tact that rests on profound modern learning. Other titles could have been chosen, say "A Talk on Your Own Homeland," since as a title it is more engaging, more sonorous, more popular. But of course it is precisely this, these features, that today would make this title, if not unthinkable, then at least a little dubious. There are words that one can no longer utter with the same detachment or impartiality as one used to. Indeed there are words that, while they appear to mean the same thing in every language, nonetheless are uttered in every language with different feelings, different associations. In my view, one of the most weighty and perhaps not adequately recognized events of our century was that ideologies infected language and made it extremely dangerous. In his notes, published under the title *Vermischte Bemerkungen*,[1] [Ludwig Josef Johann] Wittgenstein writes of how from time to time expressions have to be taken out of language and "cleaned" before we can put them to use again. In the speech he gave at his acceptance of the Bremen Prize, Paul Celan also noted the fall of language: "it had to go through ... the thousand darknesses of murderous speech." Viktor Klemperer wrote a book on the use of language by the National Socialists, and George Orwell created the fictional language of totalitarianism, "newspeak." Everywhere the matter at hand is that the terms we use are no longer valid in the sense in which we used to use them. And thus the peculiar situation arises, I am asked to say something about my own country and instead I enmesh myself in musings on the philosophy of language.

And a side note, the word "home" is indeed worth pondering for a moment. I for instance happen to fear it. But this is clearly just the result of bad habits. Since my childhood I was taught that I can best serve my homeland by doing forced labor, after which I will be exterminated. Do not think that I am being ironic. During the drills of the obligatory paramilitary youth movement, the so-called "leventék,"[2] we had to sing patriotic songs while wearing a yellow ribbon on our sleeves. Today of course I have less difficulty finding my way in the

1 ■ Published in English translation by Peter Winch under the title *Culture and Value*, 1980.
2 ■ The "leventeszerveketek" were organizations that existed from 1920 to 1945. They were responsible for providing youths between the ages of twelve and twenty-one with a kind of preliminary military training.

mazes of these kinds of perversities, though even as a child I sensed the absurdity of the situation. This can all be experienced very differently, however. Allow me to refer to the example of Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti, who with his last ten poems unquestionably entered the ranks of world literature. This great soul, who was born a Jew but who for aesthetic reasons and out of deep inner conviction converted to Catholicism in his early youth,[3] never flinched in his unshakeable patriotism. He spent years in forced labor battalions, guarded by Hungarian and German henchmen in the camps, until in the end, driven along with the other inmates towards Germany in retreat before the advancing Allied troops, he weakened, the horse-drawn wagon onto which the sick were tossed fell behind, the draymen wanted to spare their valuable horses, the Hungarian guards had to report to their unit in the evening, so they put their heads together to ponder what to do with the undesirable consignment, and the only solution, it seems, was to shoot the twenty-two indisposed men then and there, by the side of the road. And they did just that. When the mass grave was exhumed two years later, they found the dead body of the poet and, in the pocket of his jacket, a notebook, in the notebook the ten great poems written in the camps. A bit earlier this same man had chosen a remarkably original perspective for the poetic expression of his love of his homeland, the perspective of the enemy (English, American) bomber pilot, who from above sees the landscape as little more than terrain and target, a landscape that to the poet means something completely different, his homeland, the soil, the familiar paths, childhood memories, friendships, and his wife, whom he loves...

There is, however, a hitch here. Poets do not always know how to live, they almost always know, however, how they should die. How would the heroism of this devotion have seemed if the poet had not sealed it with his fate? In camps and prisons the desire to survive casts unusual mirages onto the indifferent sky. Without this mirage, how could one explain the concept of homeland? Renan, the French historian, who had great insight into this question, says that the nation is defined not by race nor even by language. People sense in their hearts that their thoughts, their emotions are shared, as are their memories and their hopes. I, however, experienced quite early on that my thoughts about everything were different, my interests different, I remembered everything differently, and my hopes were completely different from what the homeland would have required of me. This dissimilarity, which I regarded as shameful, burned like a secret that excluded me from the resounding consensus around me, the world of people in agreement. I bore my own self as a kind of guilty conscience and with a feeling of schizophrenia until, much later, I came to understand that this was not a sickness, but rather health, and to the extent that

3 ■ Radnóti formally converted to Catholicism in 1943.

it was a loss, this loss was compensated by clarity of vision, an intellectual and spiritual gain. To live with the sense of loss, probably today this is the moral state in which we can be enduringly faithful to our era. Does art still have a place, a role, an influence? Does religion? Does culture? What we refer to as culture, the universal creativity of a larger community and the human striving to be better and more perfect, seems to be defunct. The absence of the spirit, of the mind is mirrored by the horrible absence of joy, humankind's mute wailing, which then finds its voice in raging excesses. I am one of the people who partook of the most terrible historical and human experiences of the century, and as a party to these experiences, no matter what I speak about, I can only offer a necrology. Our modern mythology begins with a gigantic negative: God created the world, man created Auschwitz.

I do not know if the psychosis that I characterized a moment ago as guilty conscience and schizophrenia has been studied with sufficient thoroughness. For sixty years I lived in a country in which, apart from the two bright weeks of the 1956 Revolution, I was always on the side of the declared enemy. When my own country fought on the side of Nazi Germany, I put all my hopes in the weapons of the Allied powers. Later, in the era of so-called Socialism, I wished for the triumph of so-called Capitalism, in other words the victory of democracy over the one-party state. How effortlessly I uttered the phrase "internal exile" at the beginning of this talk. But perhaps I myself forgot the chasms of depression, the anxieties, and perhaps even the rare and short moments of secret triumph. "Do you know what solitude means in a country that is celebrating itself, that is always bubbling with ceaseless intoxication? Well, I will tell you..." I wrote these words in my book *Gályanapló* ("Galley Diary"). And perhaps my novels really do say something, if not everything, about all this. Imagine for instance a fourteen-year-old child with a healthy build, as I must have been in the summer of 1944. It was a hot summer day, but I was wearing a light jacket because the yellow star had been sewn onto it. I worked for a tradesman who manufactured and repaired machines used in viticulture, and the boss had just sent me into the city to collect some outstanding debt from a customer. When I stepped out of the building and towards the tram, the newsboys (at the time there was still such a thing as a newsboy) were just rushing out of the nearby printing office with the freshly printed newspapers stacked on their arms and folded under their elbows, shouting the most recent headline: "The invasion has begun, the invasion has begun!" It was 6 June, D-day, as I learned over a year later. I quickly bought one of the papers, I spread it out immediately, there on the street, and read with a broad grin of how the Allies had landed on the beaches of Normandy and how, according to the newspaper, "they seem to be strengthening their beach-heads." Suddenly I looked up, because I sensed that the passers-by were looking at me as I demonstratively (let's say) rejoiced, with the yellow star on my jacket, in the successes of the enemy. The feeling that

came over me as I suddenly grasped the situation, my circumstances, is indescribable. It was like an unexpected plunge into the bottomless depths of defenselessness, fear, contempt, foreignness, disgust, and exclusion. I experienced something similar more than twenty years later, though I was much more seasoned by then, when in 1967 the radio and press of my own country described how [Abu] Nasser would march into Tel Aviv.

So as you see, since birth I have always been and continue to be the strange being that the authorities (mostly totalitarian) of my own country have defined as an "internal enemy." And when the cultural trustees of these authorities mention some cosmopolitan, displaced, rootless intellectual with an eclectic style, with a certain smile (which has become a reflex), I always readily recognize myself. To speak bluntly and clearly of my "own country": there is a country where I was born, of which I am a citizen, and above all, a country the beautiful language of which I speak, read, and use to write my books. This country, however, was never my own, rather I was its own, and for four decades it was more of a prison than my homeland. If I sought to refer by its real name to this colossus, which was the form in which the country always appeared when I found myself face to face with it, I would call it the state. And the state can never be one's own.

The state is nothing but power, a power that conceals within itself mysterious and terrific possibilities, pure power, nothing else, power, sometimes well concealed or restrained, sometimes less so, power which, as an unusual exception, can even play a beneficial role for a fleeting moment, but first and foremost, first and uppermost it is power, to which we must place ourselves in opposition, power which, if the political circumstances permit, we must refine, curb, scrutinize, and always prevent from becoming what, given its nature, it will become: pure power, state power, total power. Not long ago, on the occasion of her acceptance of the Austrian State Prize for European Literature, Ilse Aichinger began her speech with the following words: "Distrust of the state, of every state, of public elections, bureaus, distrust of the remarkably aloof classicist buildings in which the ministries, the authorities, the competent secretaryships and offices—in the case of war clearly the offices of staff as well—take up lodging, this distrust awoke in me very early. Like almost every child, I was always asking questions. But never in connection with the state. I felt that the state wore too many faces, and one face merely covered another, and every organ of the state would vigilantly stand its ground for another. So here one cannot hope to prosper." Yes, I think all of us begin to recognize and to experience the state like this, and as far as how these experiences later transform or possibly deform us, in this, I concede, there may be differences, and not differences in nuance alone. However, someone like me, who was raised by the total and totalitarian state, cannot sidestep the totality of this experience, since his entire life takes place within the frameworks of these

experiences. As I wrote in *Gályanapló*, "I was saved from suicide (from following the example set by [Tadeusz] Borowski, [Paul] Celan, [Jean] Améry, Primo [Michele] Levi and others) by the "society" which, following the concentration camp experience, demonstrated in the mien of so-called "Stalinism" that here there could be no talk of freedom, liberation, catharsis, etc., everything that in more fortunate parts of the world intellectuals, thinkers, and philosophers not only voted on but clearly also believed in. This guaranteed me the continued life of a prisoner and thus excluded even the possibility of erring. This is why I was not touched by the flood of disappointments that overwhelmed people who had had similar experiences but lived in freer societies, first lapping at their feet as they ran to escape the tide, but then, no matter how they quickened their pace, slowly reaching their throats.

Then as one can see, actually I have a great deal for which to thank my country, and if, in light of what I have said, it sounds as if I am being ironic, it is not I who is being ironic, rather the truth is ironic. For while I grew up in this nihil, and with pure reason, or rather with my practical sense of reason, from early childhood I learned to adapt to this nihil, to move and navigate in this nihil, since to me this nihil meant the life in which I had to get to know myself, and this was not much more difficult than learning a language is for a child. If my naïve faith in original, one might say originary, values had not remained intact, I never would have been able to create anything. But where do these values come from, I have often asked myself, if everyone around me denies them, and where does our faith in these values come from if in everyday life we only encounter their refutation? And by faith I mean that one stakes his life on these values and then is left alone with them, like a prisoner in solitary confinement who is waiting not for the hearing, but by now only for the verdict. Moreover, let's ponder for a moment, a favorable verdict would mean the refutation of all our strivings.

I grew up in this country, then, in this country I came to know myself. In this country I recognized the true nature of my experiences, which in a freer world might have remained concealed from me. In this country I became a writer. This country compelled me, as a writer, to separate truth from language, expressions from their content, ideology from experience. It is a cardinal question for a writer, simply from the perspective of the trade, of literary technique, since the writer must work with an enduring medium, simply because of the peculiarities of artistic forms. If nothing else, sooner or later this obligation will certainly turn him against the reality of the world around him. And he will be compelled to observe that this reality is unsuitable both for artistic molding and for artistic mediation, for many reasons, but first and foremost because it is more phantasm than reality. Its values are false, its terms incomprehensible, its existence arbitrary, its survival the product of inscrutable power relations, and while it completely dominates life, there is nothing life-like about it. A discovery

like this can easily upset one's spiritual balance. Over and over again the writer sets about writing, but he cannot free himself of this feeling of want. First he thinks the flaw is in the medium, but he soon realizes that he must seek the flaw in himself. He simply sees things from a false perspective, and this compels him to examine himself. He slowly realizes that he thinks compulsively, to use the psychiatric term, and for the most part this compulsion is forced on him from the outside. He realizes that he lives in an ideological world.

Ideological totalitarianism deals its most weighty blow to creative force, and on the other hand it is precisely in the light of creative force that its absurd nature is the most clearly revealed. In truth I don't know of any truly credible and significant work that was conceived in or speaks of the totalitarian world, whether Nazi or hammer-and-sickle totalitarianism, that does not portray this world from the perspective of its absurdity when seen from the outside and the perspective of the victim when seen from the inside. Because these are the only two attitudes, the Utopia that rejects and repudiates, but even more so the state of existence as victim, that go beyond the closed world of totalitarianism and bind this mute and irredeemable world to the eternal world of man.

The path to this realization, however, is a difficult one, and anyone who decides to tread this path pays a high price for it. Let's confess that a closed world of thought has a certain captivating charm, and sometimes mere doubt is not enough to persuade us to try to wrest ourselves from this world, especially when this involves physical dangers. One of humankind's peculiar habits is that we like to furnish the world in which we live in order to make it homey. We tame our objects and terms just as we tame our domestic animals. The essential thing is to be able to cling to something that helps us forget our solitude and our mortality. If one is willing to negotiate, ideology offers an entire world suitable to this purpose. This world is artificial, of course, but it protects us from the greatest danger lurking in our midst: freedom. I do not know who the first person was to use the phrase "closed society," but it would be difficult to characterize this world more precisely, a world that in its own relativity presents itself as the absolute and only truth. Anyone who steps out of this world loses his home. He loses his hiding place, his menaced protection, he loses the safety that has been encircled with barbed wire. He sets out, if perhaps only in a metaphorical sense, down the wanderer's path without knowing where it will lead. Only one thing is certain, it leads farther and farther from every possible home and shelter. The moment—some forty years ago—when my literary ambitions found expression in me (with painful clarity, but at the same time as an incontestable plan for life) I understood that with this decision I had indeed chosen a kind of voluntary intellectual and spiritual exile.

But had I not simply chosen what was unavoidable, what united me with the fate of man, of the intellectual man the world over? Albert Camus explains that the word "royaume" in *L'Exil et le Royaume (Exile and the Kingdom)*, the title of

a collection of short stories, corresponds to "a certain stark, free life that we have to rediscover in order to be reborn. Exile in its own way shows us the path on the condition that we are able to refuse at the same time both servitude and possession." I have never had much to do with possession, but in order to be able to refuse servitude I first had to experience it in its absolute form, with all the consequences.

I imagine it has slowly begun to become clear that, speaking of my country, I am holding a laudatory oration. Instead of platitudes of patriotic allocutions delivered with passionate intensity, why should I not laud what I actually did receive from my own country: negative experience. Last year in this room, George Tabori, or, if you prefer, György Tábor, said that to be a stranger is "not bad." Indeed. And not only is it not bad, it is inevitable. Inevitable because whether we stay at home or set out to see the world, sooner or later we are compelled to recognize our homelessness in the world in which we happen to find ourselves. I live in a voluntarily chosen and accepted state of a minority, I might say a minority in the world, and if I wanted to define this minority state more precisely, I would not use racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic terms. I would characterize my minority state as a spiritual form of existence that is based on the negative experience. True, I acquired this negative experience through my Jewishness, or I could say I won initiation into the universal world of the negative experience through my Jewishness; because I regard everything that I had to experience because of my Jewish birth as initiation, initiation into the most profound understanding of humankind and the human condition of our era. And thus, since I experienced my Jewishness as a negative experience, in other words radically, in the end this led to my liberation.

As I approach the end of my talk, I wonder if perhaps my audience wishes to raise the question, so far I have spoken only of the past, but did the political turn that took place six years ago change anything with regards to my experiences of my own country? I confess, this is a question I myself have pondered for six years now. Indeed this talk is one of the modest products of this brooding. It is a fortunate, if extremely rare, constellation of circumstances when the work that we devote to our own spiritual liberation is of use to a larger community, perchance even the nation. In my case, I feel that I can hardly make this claim. I feel that the moment is yet far from us when the nation will feel the many hundreds of thousands of victims of the Hungarian Endlösung as a loss torn from its own body. It will be a long time before it is realized that Auschwitz is by no means the private affair of the Jews scattered across the world, but rather a traumatic event of Western civilization, an event that someday will perhaps be regarded as the beginning of a new era in human history. We will have to wait a long time before the importance of this negative experience and its power to create value will be recognized in my own country, and, more importantly, this negative experience will be changed into positive acts, an

understanding that we must create a solidarity in our private lives that penetrates to the roots, a solidarity that is able to give structure to and sustain life independent of power, all kinds of power, "refusing at the same time both servitude and possession."

And let me note that in my view Hungary has not chosen the most favorable moment, to the extent that the decision was ours of course, to join the ranks of democratic countries. It is a moment at which, it seems, democracy has become problematic even in countries that have long traditions of democracy. Who fails to see that democracy cannot or does not want to live up to the value system it itself established, that nowhere are new ideals being delineated for which it would be worth living? Now that the last totalitarian empire has fallen, a general feeling of collapse, reluctance and impotence dominates. It seems almost as if the nausea of a kind of hung-over frame of mind had permeated Europe, as if one gray morning the continent had awoken to discover that instead of two possible worlds suddenly only one real one remained, the world of economism, capitalism, and the pragmatic absence of ideals, victorious, but without any alternative. It seems that the two great principles that were the driving forces behind European creativity, freedom and individualism, are no longer unshakeable values. Auschwitz has shown that we must radically alter the vision of mankind that was fashioned by the Humanism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The production dynamics of our world, which sweep everything along with them, and the implements and methods of crowd control that come with them seem to be sweeping away the remains of individual liberty.

What can a writer do? He can write and try simply not to concern himself with whether what he does is useful or useless. It is only natural that he be in a state of profound conflict with the country that surrounds him. But could this be otherwise? Is the narrow space in which we spend our everydays not the symbol of every space, of the world, of life itself? If I can claim nothing else as mine, then can I not at least claim my foreignness on this earth, beneath this sky? Homeland? Home? Country? One of these days perhaps it will be possible to speak of all this differently, or perhaps we will no longer speak of it at all. Perhaps someday people will realize that these are abstract concepts, and what we actually need in order to live is simply a habitable place. Such a place would probably be worth all our exertions. But this is a question for the future, or from my perspective, Utopia. "Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr," writes [Rainer Maria] Rilke in one of his poems.[4] "Who has not yet built never will build a house." Sometimes I have the feeling that he wrote this specifically for me. ❧

Translated by Thomas Cooper

4 ■ "Herbsttag" ("Autumn Day")

Adam Boncz

Becoming Gyuri: A Stage Adaptation of Fatelessness

A few hours before my last performance of *Fatelessness* this spring in New York, I called Imre Kertész at his home. Over the course of the few months before this final performance I had called him from time to time, just to chat or to ask his advice on something. But this afternoon I didn't have anything in particular to say, I just felt the urge to hear his voice. We talked a little, his quiet voice was comforting and reassuring. We talked about New York, about his health and God knows what else. The important thing was that we talked. That night, while I was uttering the final thoughts of the character, Gyuri, the short form of the name György or "George," I somehow heard Imre's quiet, soothing voice reciting the lines with me. It wasn't the first time I had felt this way. I had had this sensation many times on the strange and beautiful journey to *Fatelessness*.

About four years ago, after I had reread the novel on a peaceful summer weekend, I began to grasp the real genius of this wonderful piece of literature, something that I had been unable to understand fully in 2002, when Imre Kertész was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and, like every last one of my friends, I suddenly became eager to read this novel I had barely heard of before. I first took the book in my hands as a young teenager. At the time, I was simply too young to see the real depth or appreciate the razor sharp language of the work.

I don't quite remember why I picked up the book once again almost ten years later, but reading it with much more mature eyes, I was struck by

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Adam Boncz

began his career in the theater as a member of the Szeged National Theater in Hungary. He pursued studies at LAMDA and graduated from the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute in New York. He is a founding member of Gia Forakis & Company. He is also an arts manager who has participated in projects for the Louvre Museum, the Lincoln Center, and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. He is Artistic Director of SceneHouse Productions. In April 2014 he performed in the world premiere of the stage adaptation of Imre Kertész's novel Fatelessness.

Kertész's world. His approach to the depiction of the world around us resonated within me. I could hardly explain why, but *Fatelessness* spoke to me about life on a level I had never really experienced before. I was drawn in by the mystery of getting so much life and wisdom from a "Holocaust novel" (Kertész has commented many times that he never liked this label, and neither do I). Countless ideas were welling inside me after I read the last lines of the book, and I could sense a strange and compelling urge to tell this story, to share these thoughts with an audience, so that more people would be able to feel what I had felt and experience what I had experienced.

At the time, I had just completed studies at an acting school in New York, and I was ready to take on new adventures as a young Hungarian actor in the big city. Suddenly everything was so obvious. Since having arrived in the United States, I had always wanted to create something on stage that drew on my Hungarian heritage. I passionately wanted to be a representative of my culture, and I wanted to raise issues that I felt were important. And here was the solution, Gyuri, talking to me from the page. And I wasn't sure exactly how, but I knew right away that Gyuri's memories must be shared with an audience. I always believed that theater is nothing more (and nothing less) than a beautiful, almost transcendent form of storytelling, and I passionately wanted to invite the audience to this curious place where I would be able to share Gyuri's story with anyone willing to listen. Of course at first the whole idea seemed impossible, which made it even more appealing. Nothing worth doing is easy, I thought. And staging *Fatelessness* seemed like anything but an easy task.

Knowing that no one has ever done a stage adaptation of the novel before, I had no clue how Kertész would respond to this far-fetched idea. It took months of e-mails and phone calls, the intercession of good friends, and "luck, plenty of luck" (as Citrom Bandi, one of the characters in the novel, says), but finally, on a dull winter evening, my phone rang, and on the other end of the line I heard a lively voice: "This is Imre. I've heard about your plans. Let's talk about it." And a long, wonderful conversation followed, over the course of which we got to know each other a little better. I still don't quite remember what I said while trying to fight my nerves and muffle the excitement of talking to the author himself, but I think it was my honest passion for his masterpiece that convinced him to allow me continue to tell the story of Gyuri Köves in a new genre. I was overwhelmed with joy when we hung up, but a couple of minutes later I became terrified of the journey that I knew lay in front of me. But I felt I had Imre's trust, so I needed to move forward.

Adapting a prose narrative for the stage is always a tedious and, to be frank, quite depressing task. With every line you cross out, you feel you lose something important, with every character you cut, you feel like you've eliminated a soul. These feelings are even more intense when you are dealing with material

that is very close to you. At one point in this process, I suddenly remembered a sentence I had read in the program of one of the readings of *Fatelessness* (legendary Hungarian actor Iván Darvas did a stage reading of the novel in 2003). The program reminded the audience that, "the event is not, on any level, a substitute for the experience of reading the novel." From that moment on, this became my motto, and this was extremely liberating. I no longer wanted to recreate the book on stage (that's simply not possible and would have been a foolish objective). I wanted to recreate Gyuri. He was the essence of the story. His view on life was the one I had to seek, and to embody. I felt that if I were able to capture it, I would be able to capture his fatelessness.

Adam Boncz in the role of Gyuri.
Photograph by Jonathan Slaff

With the help of playwright Andras Visky, a Kertész expert who supervised the adaptation, I managed to create a twenty-five-page monologue. The sentences come verbatim from the book, not altered in any way (something on which Kertész insisted, and I completely agreed). All this so that I would be able to interpret Gyuri's journey to the camps and back faithfully and remain true to the original novel.

In the spring of 2013, I organized a free event, a staged reading of the script to see how it would be received and to feel out who would be interested in listening to it. It was heartwarming to see that the event was sold out almost two weeks in advance and on the night of the performance there was not a single empty chair in the house. The reception was more than welcoming, and this helped motivate me to pursue my vision of a full production.

But I still faced what was perhaps my biggest challenge. How could the camps be recreated on stage? And should one even attempt to do such thing? As always, Imre came to my rescue. I quickly realized that if I put my trust in the words he had written, if I trusted Gyuri's point of view, if I trusted the material itself, it would work. Once again, I had to remind myself, I was dealing with a novel by Imre Kertész, a powerful and carefully thought-out work of art. If I trust the words, the audience will hear them, and they will conjure the rest, the horrors, the camps, the happiness, the old Budapest. No gimmicks were necessary, only the words of Imre's narrative.

I was lucky, during this journey, to have not only Visky by my side, but also the Hungarian producer Dorottya Mathe and American director Gia Forakis. Forakis and I came up with a theatrical concept (a simple one, that wouldn't distract the audience from the words) in which Gyuri relives the events of the year he spent in the camps. Together we created a psychological space for Gyuri in which he attempts to understand everything step by step. Of course I am not fourteen anymore, but this step-by-step understanding, Gyuri's attempt to find rational explanations for each of the events of his deportation and imprisonment, helped me find the voice of a fourteen-year-old. And I realized, it was Imre again, his words, and the way he used them to write not about the camps, but about how he had experienced the camps.

The production met with tremendous interest, and we had full houses. But for me the most rewarding success was neither the applause nor the reviews. It came rather on a night when I was sitting among friends after the show, mostly American friends who had not read the book at the time, and listening to them talking about their experience of the show. One of them mentioned how he was touched by the concept of the "steps," the choices we make in our lives. Another remarked that the piece portrayed how the individual adapts to a totalitarian system. Another said that the last sentences struck him, the ones about the happiness in the camps. I could not help but feel both satisfied and privileged to have exposed them to these ideas and the work of one of Hungary's many fine contemporary writers. ❧

Randolph L. Braham

A Post-Mortem Of The Holocaust In Hungary: A Probing Interpretation Of The Causes

The destruction of Hungarian Jewry in 1944 constitutes one of the most controversial chapters in the history of the Holocaust. These particular events, arguably, need not have occurred. By the time the Jews of Hungary were subjected to the Final Solution, the leaders of the world, including the national and Jewish leaders of Hungary, were fully aware of the realities of Auschwitz. It was by then also generally believed that the Third Reich would lose the war: Italy had successfully extricated itself from the Axis alliance in the summer of 1943; the Red Army, having liberated almost all the territory of the Soviet Union, was fast approaching the Romanian border; and the Western Allies, following their military successes in Northern Africa, the Pacific, and Italy, were completing their plans for D-Day. These military realities were recognized by many among the Nazis themselves. Precisely because of this, these Nazis became more determined than ever to win at least what they claimed was their parallel war against the Jews.

The Jews of Hungary survived the first four and a half years of the Second World War relatively intact and almost oblivious to what was happening to the

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Randolph L. Braham

is a historian and political scientist whose work has been both groundbreaking and standard-setting in the scholarship on the Holocaust. He has authored more than sixty books and innumerable articles focusing for the most part on the Holocaust in Hungary. He himself was born in the town of Dej in Transylvania. In 1943–45, he served in a Hungarian forced labor battalion, and he was later held in a Soviet prisoner of war camp. After going to the United States in 1948, he completed a doctorate in political science at The New School for Social Research. He has held numerous important positions and been the recipient of many awards, including the Jewish National Book Award for his three-volume The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary *(2013). He is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the City University of New York and the director of the Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies at the Graduate Center, CUNY.*

other Jewish communities in Nazi-dominated Europe. By early 1944, the Jews of Hungary—patriotic citizens who had identified themselves with the cause of the Magyars since the anti-Habsburg Revolution of 1848-49—had become convinced that under the protection of the conservative-aristocratic leadership of Hungary they would emerge from the war relatively unscathed.

These convictions were largely shattered following the beginning of the German occupation of Hungary on 19 March, 1944. It is a tragic irony of history that this large and generally self-assured Jewish community was subjected to the swiftest process of destruction on the eve of Allied victory. In contrast to Poland, for example, where the Nazis took five years to accomplish their murderous designs, in Hungary they and their Hungarian accomplices required less than four months.

The Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust is a historical puzzle that has perplexed many scholars and laypersons since the end of the Second World War. How and why was the destruction of Hungarian Jewry possible on the eve of Allied victory? Let us look first at the historical antecedents and the processes of destruction. Then we'll attempt to solve the historical puzzle by identifying and analyzing four of its several parts.

The Historical Antecedents and Processes of Destruction

Hungary was the first country to adopt an anti-Jewish law in Europe following the First World War. For many Jews, the adoption of the so-called *Numerus Clausus* Law of 1920 was a wake-up call, undermining their deeply held belief—in retrospect an illusion—that a veritable Magyar-Jewish symbiosis had developed during the lifespan of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918). Their belief was further undermined by the pogrom-like terror that was unleashed by the counterrevolutionaries in the early 1920s and by increasingly prevalent pro-Nazi and anti-Jewish sentiments in the mid-1930 and the discourses of extremist political parties. In the interwar period, Hungarian society was preoccupied with the urgent need to solve two basic issues: revisionism and the "Jewish question." The successive Hungarian governments dedicated themselves to undoing the "punitive" consequences of the Trianon Treaty (1920).[1] To this end, they aligned Hungary's revisionist foreign policy with that of Nazi Germany, which as of 1933 was committed to the dismantling of the European order that was based on the Versailles Treaty of 1919.

1 ■ Under the terms of the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary had lost two-thirds of its historic territory, one-third of its which as of 1933 was committed to, and three-fifths of its total population. See Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 23-28. (Cited hereafter as Braham, Politics.)

Hungary's alignment with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy proved highly successful: between 1938 and 1941 it led to the reacquisition of large chunks of territory from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. In pursuing its revisionist ambitions with the aid of the Axis alliance, Hungary felt compelled to "solve" its own Jewish question. Almost concurrently with each territorial reacquisition, Hungary adopted a series of increasingly severe anti-Jewish laws and a large number of decrees implementing them. By the time Hungary joined the other Axis powers by declaring war against the Soviet Union on 27 June, 1941 and against the Western Allies six months later, most Hungarian Jews already had been deprived of many of their basic rights. Many thousands of Jewish men of military age were drafted into labor service; approximately 18,000 so-called "alien" Jews were rounded up and deported to the area near the city of Kamianets-Podilskyi (Kőrösmező in Hungarian, today Yasina in the Ukraine), where most of them were murdered in late August, 1941. By the time the Germans occupied Hungary, Hungarian Jewry had suffered approximately 60,000 casualties: in addition to the 18,000 "alien" Jews, approximately 1,000 Jews had been murdered by Hungarian soldiers and gendarmes in and around Újvidék (today Novi Sad in Serbia) in January-February 1942, and approximately 42,000 labor servicemen had died or been murdered, most of them along the Soviet fronts around Voronezh, in Russia.

Nevertheless, most of Hungarian Jewry survived under the relative protection of the successive Hungarian governments. Most of the conservative-aristocratic members of these governments were "civilized anti-Semites," who abhorred the Nazi Party and its local followers, supporters and members of the "Nyilaskeresztes Párt," or Arrow Cross Party, even more than they hated Jews. While they were eager to diminish and eventually eliminate the influence of Jews in the Hungarian economy and culture, they consistently rejected the Nazis' demands to mark, expropriate, and deport them.

As the tide of the war began to change in favor of the Allies in early 1943, the Jews of Hungary became increasingly convinced that they would survive the war. In contrast to prominent Jewish leaders and the leading members of the government, the Jewish masses had no inkling about Auschwitz and were almost oblivious to what had happened and was happening elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe.

Their conviction and sense of optimism were shattered almost immediately after the beginning of the German occupation. Most Jews could not possibly know that the occupation was largely due to Germany's resolve to protect its military and strategic interests by preventing Hungary from following Italy's example and extricating itself from the Axis alliance.

With the occupation, the Jews were trapped. They were abandoned by the Hungarians, upon whom they had counted for their survival. The new Hungarian government, constitutionally appointed by Miklós Horthy, the Regent who

continued as head of state, outdid even the Nazis in its eagerness to bring about the "solution to the Jewish question" in the shortest possible time. It placed the instruments of state power, the police, gendarmerie, and civil service, at the disposal of those in charge of the Final Solution. While most Hungarians were passive or simply intoxicated by decades of anti-Semitic propaganda, the relatively few members of the so-called Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*, acting mostly as advisors, succeeded with the enthusiastic help of their Hungarian accomplices in implementing the Final Solution at lightning speed. Within the first fifty-four days of the occupation the Jews of Hungary were isolated, marked, and expropriated. In the provinces they were first placed into local ghettos and then concentrated in entrainment centers. During the next fifty-four days, between 15 May and 8 July, 1944, approximately 440,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 147 freight trains. By 9 July, when Raoul Wallenberg arrived on his rescue mission, all of Hungary (with the notable exception of Budapest) was *judenrein*.

The bibliography relating to the antecedents and the processes of the destruction of the Hungarian Jewry is one of the richest in Holocaust studies.[2] The question as to *why* it was possible for the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices to destroy the large and relatively intact Jewish community on the eve of Allied victory (the historical puzzle noted above) has not yet been adequately answered. Here are the four parts of that puzzle that I will analyze in an attempt to solve it: the attitudes and policies of the Jewish leaders, the calculations and policies of Hungary after the First World War, the military and racial policy considerations of the Germans, and the relationship between the Jewish leaders of Slovakia and Hungary before and after the beginning of the occupation.

The Attitudes and Policies of the Jewish Leaders

Throughout most of the Second World War, the Hungarian Jews based their hopes for survival on the conservative-aristocratic national leaders of Hungary. Their wartime trust in the Hungarians can be traced to the attitudes and perceptions they had formed during the so-called "Golden Era," which coincided with the lifespan of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918). During this period, the Jews of Hungary became increasingly patriotic, and—to the chagrin of the other nationalities living in the Kingdom—they came to identify themselves proudly with the cause of the Magyars. They were among the most ardent supporters of the Hungarian Revolution against the Habsburgs

2 ■ *The Bibliography of the Holocaust in Hungary*. Randolph L. Braham, comp. and ed. (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2011; distrib. by Columbia University Press).

in 1848-49, having assumed a disproportionate share of the military and economic burdens of the Revolution, which held out the promise of their emancipation. According to Lajos Kossuth, the enlightened leader of the Revolution, approximately 20,000 (11.1%) of his army of 180,000 was Jewish at a time when Jews, numbering 340,000, were but 3.7 percent of the total population of 9.2 million. Mór Jókai, one of Hungary's most celebrated authors, also praised the Jews' contribution to the cause. According to Jókai, "no ethnic-national group contributed as much in terms of their lives and wealth to the Hungarian struggle of independence as the Jews did."

After the Revolution was crushed in 1849, Hungarians and Jews were severely penalized by the victorious Habsburgs. Partially as a reward for their pro-Magyar stance, the Jews of Hungary were emancipated concurrently with the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867. Most of the Hungarian leaders of the Revolution were nationalist statesmen who were not guided solely by the principles of pluralism and tolerance. Accepting the preferences of those Hungarian leaders, many of the Jews—especially those living in Budapest and in the western part of the country—assimilated, gradually acculturated, and sometimes even converted to Christianity. In the course of time, many of them magyarized their names and referred to themselves as "Magyars of the Israelite faith." They had come to believe that a genuine symbiosis had been forged between them and the Magyars.

With newly acquired access to the institutions of higher learning and the opening of many economic and cultural opportunities, Jews soon came to play a leading role in the modernization of Hungary. Many took full advantage of the legislative and administrative support of the aristocratic-conservative elements of the country, who were themselves beneficiaries of the modernization process. Within a generation or two, Jews had come to hold leading, if not dominant, positions in business, banking, industry, and the professions. They also distinguished themselves in the fields of science, culture, and the arts. Jews also played an important role in Hungary's political life by providing the slim majority needed by the Magyars in order to maintain their claim to rule over the national minorities of Hungary.

Motivated not only by gratitude but also by conviction, many Jews became almost chauvinistic in their patriotism. According to Paul Ignotus, a noted Hungarian writer, "the Jews became... more fervently Magyar than the Magyars themselves." Under the euphoric conditions of this era, few Hungarian Jews envisioned the possibility of a disaster looming in the future.

There was one notable exception: the Budapest-born Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism. Herzl shared his misgivings about a possible ominous future for the Hungarian Jewry with his friend and fellow parliamentarian Ernő Mezei. In a 1903 letter, Herzl wrote, "[t]he hand of fate shall also seize Hungarian Jewry. And the later this occurs, and the stronger this Jewry

becomes, the more cruel and hard shall be the blow, which shall be delivered with greater savagery. There is no escape."[3] Clearly, the ardent champions of assimilation and magyarization failed to see or minimized the manifestations of the anti-Jewish sentiment about which Herzl must have been concerned. It was during the Golden Era, for example, that the notorious Tiszaeszlár ritual murder case (1882-83) took place, as did the anti-Semitic agitations by politically and ideologically motivated politicians and clerical forces.[4]

After the end of the First World War and the consequent disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Hungarian Jewry began to feel the blows Herzl had foretold. The postwar revolutions virtually destroyed the euphoria felt by many, mostly unassimilated, Jews. Hungary became the first country in interwar Europe to adopt an anti-Jewish law. In retrospect, this so-called Numerus Clausus Law (1920), which limited access to higher education by Jewish students, was an early sign of anti-Jewish sentiment, the spread of which during the interwar period paved the way to the Holocaust. The many socioeconomic problems that arose following the losses incurred by Hungary under the Treaty of Trianon (1920), coupled with those caused by the Great Depression, fueled the flames of anti-Semitism in the 1930s. As in Nazi Germany, the Jews were used as convenient scapegoats.

Despite the anti-Jewish tendencies of the Hungarian governments in the 1930s, the loyalty of the Jews to the Hungarian state remained basically unchanged. Like the Magyars, most Jews also lamented the losses Hungary had had to endure under the terms of the Trianon Treaty. In the territories acquired by the successor states—Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia—the Jews, to the dismay of the respective governments, by and large continued to cling to their Hungarian language and culture. Notwithstanding the many anti-Jewish incidents that took place in the early 1920s and the pro-Reich policies that were adopted by the successive Hungarian governments after 1935, Jews continued to cling to the perceptions they had formed during the Golden Era. They continued to believe that the leaders of Hungary, their pro-German foreign and domestic policies notwithstanding, would continue to protect the basic interests of their fellow "Magyars of the Israelite faith." Even after the adoption of major anti-Jewish laws beginning in May 1938, most Jews remained steadfast in their views. Many among their leaders even rationalized the "need" for the adoption of some anti-Jewish measures as reflections of the "spirit of the times," i.e. they tolerated them as allegedly prudent measures designed to appease right-wing extremists at home and Nazis abroad. Hungarian Jews continued to feel secure under the protection of the successive conservative-aristocratic governments, members of which hated the Nazis and feared the

3 ■ Cited in Randolph L. Braham. The Nazis' Last Victims: The Holocaust in Hungary. 37
4 ■ For details on the "Golden Era" of Hungarian Jewry, see Braham, Politics, 2–12.

local extremists almost as much as the Jews did. Many of these governmental figures had close and lucrative relations with Jewish bankers, business magnates, and industrialists. While most Jews suffered under the impact of the anti-Jewish laws, many of the economic moguls—most of them converts to Christianity with close social and personal ties to the Magyar conservative-aristocratic elite—continued to prosper during the war.

Despite the many draconian anti-Jewish measures, including the adoption of a military-related labor service system and Nuremberg-type racial legislation, the Jews of Hungary felt relatively secure during the first four and a half years of the Second World War. While they suffered approximately 60,000 casualties in this period, they continued to convince themselves that they would survive the war, albeit economically much worse off. Hungary, they rationalized, was after all a member of the Axis alliance; what happened in anti-Semitic Poland and elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe could not possibly happen in civilized and chivalrous Hungary; the Hungarians would never forget the great contributions that their fellow citizens of the Jewish faith had made to the advancement of the political interests and the modernization of the nation; and, finally, the war itself was bound to end soon with the victory of the Allies.

While the Final Solution was in full swing in Nazi-dominated Europe, the Jewish leaders continued their rationalizations, insisting that Hungarian Jewry was "fully amalgamated with the Hungarian nation in language, spirit, culture, and feeling." "Hungarian Jewry," they argued, "is Hungarian, and it is understood that in its heart and soul it forms an integral part of the Hungarian nation."[5]

The rationalizations of the Jewish leaders had some basis in fact until the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. Hungary was the only country in Nazi-dominated Europe that still had a relatively large, intact Jewish community. Its Jewish population numbered nearly 800,000, including the approximately 100,000 converts to Christianity and other Christians who were identified as Jews under the racial laws then in effect. The many anti-Jewish laws and decrees notwithstanding, the Jews felt physically secure under the protection of the conservative-aristocratic government that ruled the country. "Civilized anti-Semites" that they were, the members of this government adopted a series of measures calculated to curtail drastically the influence of Jews in the economic and cultural life of Hungary, but consistently rejected the Nazis' demands to subject them to a Final Solution program.

In contrast to the top national and Jewish leaders of Hungary, the masses—Christian and Jewish alike—were largely unaware of the realities of the Final Solution in Nazi-dominated Europe. The Jews of Hungary were, of course, familiar with the suffering endured by the labor servicemen deployed

5 ■ Ibid., 101.

in the Ukraine and in Serbia, as well as with the plight of the thousands of "alien" Jews who were rounded up and deported in the summer of 1941. Many of them heard horrific accounts of persecution and of the horrible conditions in ghettos—accounts by Polish, Slovak, and other refugees who had found haven in Hungary. But few, if any, had actual information regarding the realities of the Final Solution. Virtually none of the Jews had ever heard of Auschwitz or the other death and concentration camps that were operated by the Nazis in occupied Poland.[6]

The optimism of the Jews was reinforced in the seven months prior to the German occupation, when Hungary was secretly searching for an "honorable" way out of the Axis alliance. Although the anti-Jewish laws still were in effect, they were less rigorously enforced, considerably easing the lot of many Jews. To the dismay of the Nazis and the domestic extremists, in mid-December 1943 the Hungarian government also put on trial fifteen top military and gendarmerie officers for war crimes that they had committed against Serbs and Jews in and around Újvidék in early 1942. The Jews were aware of these positive developments, and their leaders—Orthodox, Neolog, and Zionist—became increasingly convinced that their communities would survive the war under the protective umbrella of the Hungarian government. The political and military developments of this period reinforced in these leaders the attitudes and perceptions they had acquired during the Golden Era.

The Calculations and Policies of Hungary after the First World War

The protective umbrella upon which the Jewish leaders relied for survival collapsed immediately after the beginning of the "unexpected" German occupation of Hungary on 19 March, 1944. The occupation shattered these hopes—in retrospect the illusions and rationalizations—of the Jews and the political and military calculations of the conservative-aristocratic leaders upon whom they had depended for survival.

The chain of events that led to the German occupation was triggered by the unrealistic maneuverings of the conservative-aristocratic government in the second half of 1943, when it concluded that the Axis would lose the war. Hungary embraced the Third Reich in the mid-1930s and joined it in the war against the Allies in June 1941, when the Axis appeared invincible. It did so largely in order to erase the dire consequences of the Trianon Treaty and—because the Romanians, Slovaks, and Croats, Hungary's traditional enemies, now were its allies in the war against the Soviet Union—to retain the territories it had acquired between 1938 and 1941.

6 ■ Ibid., 806–849.

Hungary's decision to enter the war was the culmination of the revisionist policies the Horthy-led counterrevolutionary regime had pursued in tandem with the Third Reich, which was committed to destroying the world order based on the Peace Treaty of Versailles. The synchronization of Hungary's foreign policies with those of the Third Reich was solidified in 1935, when Gyula Gömbös, who had become prime minister in 1932, began to shift increasingly towards Germany. With the increase in the economic and political penetration of Hungary by the Reich, the power of the Right extremists grew rapidly. The virulently anti-Semitic campaign that was fueled by the many Nazi-financed extremist political parties and movements prepared the ground for the adoption of ever harsher measures against the Jews. In the public dialogue of the period, the "solution to the Jewish question" soon acquired the same importance as the issue of revisionism. The two issues became intertwined to such an extent that the political elite, like the masses at large, came to be convinced that the success of their revisionist ambitions depended on the speedy solution of the Jewish question.

Hungary's revisionist foreign policy yielded its first positive result soon after the September 1938 signing of the Munich Pact, which led to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. With the aid of the Reich, in early November Hungary reacquired territories in the southern part of Czechoslovakia (an east-west strip of land in what today is Slovakia, where at the time the majority of the population spoke Hungarian as its mother tongue) and, in March 1939, Carpatho-Ruthenia (*Kárpátalja*) from Czechoslovakia. In August–September, 1940, it acquired Northern Transylvania from Romania and in April, 1941 the Bácska area from Yugoslavia. It was largely to hang on to the newly acquired territories that Hungary joined Nazi Germany in its war, first against the Soviet Union in late June, 1941 and then against the Western Allies at the end of the year. Convinced at the time that the Axis would ultimately win, Hungary had hoped that it would be abled to reacquire the other territories it had lost under the Trianon Treaty.

The euphoric hopes of the Hungarians would soon fade. The military debacles of 1943 made it increasingly clear that the Axis would lose the war. The Hungarian Second Army suffered a crushing defeat at Voronezh, followed shortly by the disaster met by the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad in early 1943. That summer Italy—the Fascist ally to which the Hungarian leadership felt politically and ideologically closer than they did to Nazi Germany—extricated itself from the Axis alliance, though it did lead to German "occupation" of territories in Italy that the Allies had not yet conquered.

During the second half of 1943, Hungary became increasingly eager to follow the example of Italy, but by finding an "honorable" way to extricate itself from the Axis without sacrificing its basic interests. Ignoring the geographic location of their country and its strategic importance for the Germans, the

conservative-aristocratic leaders developed a "secret" plan that proved fundamentally quixotic—their scheme was to surrender to the Western Allies exclusively. They feared the Soviets, against whom they had launched an aggressive war, and they abhorred Bolshevism even more than they disliked Nazism. With little regard for the military realities that fused together the Allies, the Hungarians rationalized that the Western Allies, who also were anti-Bolshevik, would open the long-awaited second front by invading Nazi-dominated Europe through the Balkans. By moving northward toward the Baltic States, they rationalized, the Western Allies not only would crush the Nazis, but also would prevent the western penetration of Bolshevism. Under these circumstances, they falsely believed, they would be able to surrender exclusively to the Western Allies. In gratitude for their surrender, they secretly hoped, the Western democracies might even allow Hungary to retain the territories it had gained with the aid of the Nazis and perhaps allow of the antiquated but fiercely anti-communist regime to remain in power this end, Hungarian emissaries established contact with representatives of the Western Allies in Turkey and Italy.

However, the Germans, through their many spies and informers, were well aware of the Hungarians' plans. While these "secret" negotiations were going on in late 1943 and early 1944, the Hungarian government, led by Miklós Kállay, eased the severity of the anti-Jewish drive and adopted a series of political and military measures that clearly irritated the Germans. In addition to putting on trial top pro-German military and gendarmerie officers, the Hungarians also sought the withdrawal of the remnant of the Hungarian Second Army "for the defense of Hungary along the Carpathians."

To defend their national interests, the Germans decided not to allow Hungary to follow the example of Italy. Such a step, in their assessment, not only would deprive the Reich of the economic and military resources of Hungary, but also would interfere with the free flow of Romanian oil, on which the German war machine depended. It would also cut off a vital escape route for German forces deployed in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. While the decision to occupy Hungary was based primarily on military-strategic considerations, the Nazis never lost sight of the "unsolved" Jewish question in the country.

Hitler completed his plans for the occupation of Hungary in February 1944. He presented the Hungarian leaders with a fait accompli at a meeting in Schloss Klessheim on March 17-18. Fearing the possible involvement of Romanian, Slovak, and Serbian forces in the occupation of Hungary—and thereby the possible loss of the territories acquired between 1938 and 1941—as Hitler had threatened in case of non-compliance, Miklós Horthy and the members of his delegation accepted the German terms. Fearful of Bolshevism, they decided against resisting the occupation, even though such a move might have enabled Hungary to retain its territorial gains after the anticipated Allied

victory. Horthy, as he later revealed, also agreed to the delivery of 300,000 Jewish "workers" to the Reich.

While the German occupation of Hungary of 19 March proved disastrous for most of the anti-Nazi conservative-aristocratic leaders, it proved fatal for most of the Jews. "In retrospect," to quote from an earlier study, "it appears that had Hungary continued to remain a militarily passive but politically vocal ally of the Third Reich instead of provocatively engaging in essentially fruitless, if not merely alibi establishing, diplomatic maneuvers, the Jews of Hungary might possibly have survived the war relatively unscathed."[7]

The Military and Racial Considerations of the Germans

In contrast to the Hungarians, the Germans—realistic and in possession of overwhelming power—did not vacillate in protecting their political and military interests. While the determining factor underlying their decision to occupy Hungary was military, the planned "solution" of the Jewish question also played a crucial part. At first the Germans were not absolutely sure that the new government they planned to install in replacement of the "pro-Jewish" Kállay government would be ready to implement a Final Solution program. Some among the Nazis feared that, given the fragile military and international situation at the time, Horthy and his new pro-German Hungarian government might decide to emulate Marshal Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, in dealing with the Jewish question and treat it as a domestic issue. These Nazis were aware that while Antonescu was responsible for the death of approximately 300,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews in 1940–43, he nevertheless eventually decided not fully to embrace the Final Solution, thereby "saving" most of the Jews of Old Romania and Southern Transylvania. That the increasing prospect of an Allied victory and Soviet occupation figured in Antonescu's calculations is not in serious doubt.

The hundred-member Eichmann-Sonderkommando arrived in Hungary with contingency plans. To their pleasant surprise, members of the newly established government of Döme Sztójay—all constitutionally appointed by Horthy—outdid the SS in their eagerness to "solve" the Jewish question. Aware of the fast-approaching Soviet forces, the new government placed the instruments of state power—the police, gendarmerie, and the civil service—at the disposal of the Germans and Hungarians in charge of the Final Solution. Since time was of the essence, the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices acted swiftly and decisively. Resolved to implement the Final Solution before the arrival of the Red Army, they subjected the Jews not only to the fastest but

7 ■ Ibid., 230-262.

also the most barbaric process of destruction in the history of the Holocaust.

The German occupation of Hungary caught the Jews as well as most Hungarians by surprise. Stunned and bewildered, the Jews suddenly realized that all their assumptions and calculations were about to go awry. At first, they continued to hope against hope that the new Hungarian government, which included many members of the previous conservative governments, would consider the Jewish question a domestic issue and prevent the Nazis from implementing their plans. They also found solace in the fact that Horthy had resolved to continue as head of state, without knowing, of course, that the Regent not only had committed Hungary to the delivery of 300,000 Jewish "workers" to Germany but also had decided not to become involved in Jewish matters. But even if the Nazis were adamant, the Jews rationalized, the Hungarians would resist because of the essential role the Jews were playing in the economy—an economy that was in the service of both the German and the Hungarian war effort. Finally, the Jews also tended to believe that, given the "imminent and inevitable" victory of the Allies, the new Hungarian leaders would not expose themselves to possible criminal prosecution for war crimes after the war.

These assumptions and rationalizations dissipated almost immediately after the Jewish leaders approached the heads of various governmental agencies only to be told in unequivocal terms that the handling of the Jewish question had become the exclusive responsibility of the Germans. Despite these ominous developments some top Jewish leaders continued to cling to their patriotic posture in advising the community. In April 1944, when the Jews of Hungary already had been subjected to many draconic anti-Jewish measures, including the wearing of the Yellow Star of David, Dr. Ferenc Hevesi, the Neolog Chief Rabbi, urged the Jews "to pray to God for yourself, your family, your children, but primarily and above all for your Hungarian Homeland! Love of Homeland, fulfillment of duty, and prayer should be your guiding light."[8] This obsequious appeal to patriotism also was heard while Jews were already in ghettos. In the ghetto of Szeged, for example, in a sermon read just before the deportations started, the Rabbi of Mohács stated, "[i]n spite of all persecution, we must love our country, as it is not the country that has repudiated us, but wicked men."[9]

These messages by the rabbis had no influence on the Hungarians. They also left many of the lay leaders of Hungarian Jewry, especially the Zionists, unmoved. In their desperate effort to save the community after the Hungarians had abandoned them, they felt they had no alternative but to negotiate with the SS representatives in Hungary.

8 ■ Ibid., 101.
9 ■ Ibid.

The Impact of the Jewish Leaders of Slovakia

The leaders of Hungarian Jewry had a long history of close relationships with the Jewish leaders of Slovakia, many of whom—like many of the Jews of the country—were Hungarian-speaking. The relationship was especially close between the leaders of the Zionist-oriented Relief and Rescue Committee of Budapest (*Vaadah*)[10] and the so-called Working Group (*Pracovná Skupina*) of Bratislava, which operated within the framework of the Jewish Council.[11] Contacts between the two organizations became especially close after early 1943, when the Vaadah emerged as a major vehicle for the rescue and support of refugees fleeing persecution in Nazi-dominated Europe. Most of the refugees who found haven in Hungary were from Poland and Slovakia. By the time the *Vaadah* was established, the Slovakian puppet government, acting in close cooperation with Dieter Wisliceny (the Nazis' expert on the solution of the Jewish question), had deported approximately 60,000 or two-thirds of Slovakia's original Jewish population of 88,000.

The Jews of Slovakia were the first to be deported to Auschwitz after the death camp began its operations in March 1942. The deportations were halted in June 1942 for many reasons, including the Slovak national leaders' request to visit the new "Jewish settlements in the East," which, if granted, would have exposed the realities of the "final solution." Other basic reasons included Jews' successful bribing of local Hlinka leaders; remaining Jews' receipt of "protective letters" certifying that they were essential to the nation's economy, and pressure from the Catholic Church and the Vatican.

The leaders of the Jewish community of Slovakia were under the impression, falsely in retrospect, that it was their bribing of Wisliceny that had halted the deportations in 1942. These leaders, especially Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, one of the leading figures of the Working Group, had convinced themselves that by bribing the SS they could save Jewish lives.[12]

Emboldened by their presumed success in halting the deportations, the leaders of the Slovak Jewry again contacted Wisliceny, using the informer Karel

10 ■ The Relief and Rescue Committee of Budapest was established in early 1943 under the leadership of Otto Komoly, its nominal head, and Rezsö Kasztner, its real head. For details on the Committee's activities, see ibid., 1069–1073.

11 ■ On the tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia and the activities of the Working Group, see ibid., 1048–1053, 1073–1075.

12 ■ According to currently available evidence, Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel did not contact Wisliceny until the early summer of 1942, that is, when the first phase of the deportations already had been completed. Even this contact was indirect: he had approached and dealt with Wisliceny only through Karel Hochberg, a Jewish traitor who worked for the SS. Wisliceny played along and took two payments of $25,000 for his "services." For some details on this and other aspects of the tragedy that befell the Jews of Slovakia, see Yehuda Bauer. *Jews for Sale? Negotiations Between Jews and Nazis, 1933-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), chapters 5 and 6, and Braham, *Politics*, 1048-1053.

Hochberg as an intermediary, in October 1942. They offered a grandiose "Europa Plan," according to which the SS would suspend the deportations of Jews to occupied Poland from all over Europe in exchange for the payment of two-million dollars.[13] These Jewish leaders operated on the mistaken assumption that bribing the top officers of the *Sonderkommando* would prevent, or at least delay, the Nazis' anti-Jewish drive. They did not—and perhaps could not—realize that these SS officers operated under the command of the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*—RSHA), Heinrich Himmler's agency in Berlin, and that their independent decision-making power with regard to excluding Jews from the "final solution" was in fact limited.[14] Operating under the guidelines of the RSHA, Wisliceny cunningly played along with the suggestions of the Jewish leaders, laying his hands on Jewish-owned wealth, arousing false hopes in the Jews, and lulling them into submission while he and his associates continued to implement the Final Solution in Nazi-dominated Europe.

The Hungarian Jewish leaders were kept abreast of the Slovak Jewish leaders' "successful" negotiations with the SS.[15] They also received periodic reports on the Nazis' anti-Jewish drive in Europe, especially in Poland and Slovakia. These reports reinforced the communications they had received from other sources, including the many national and international Jewish organizations in Palestine, Switzerland, and Turkey—all enhancing their awareness of the realities of the Final Solution.[16] By the time they received copies of the Auschwitz Reports at the end of April or sometime in May 1944, they already were familiar with the Nazis' war against the Jews; the reports provided them with additional specific details about the operations of the death camp.[17] By that time, however, most of the Jews of Hungary were already in ghettos and many of them already had been deported to Auschwitz.

13 ■ For some details on the "Europa Plan," see Braham, *Politics*, 1074-1076.

14 ■ The SS, including members of the Eichmann-Sonderkommando, were authorized to barter with individual or small groups of Jews in accordance with a directive given by Hitler to Himmler. A memo by Himmler, dated 10 December, 1942, reads as follows: "I have asked the Führer with regard to letting Jews go in return for ransom. He gave me full powers to approve cases like that, if they really bring in foreign currency in appreciable quantities from abroad." Bauer, *Jews for Sale?*, 103. Himmler's own instructions were: "Take whatever you can from the Jews. Promise them whatever you want. What we will keep is another matter." Ibid., 167

15 ■ Gisi Fleischmann, one of the top leaders of the Working Group, was among those who complained bitterly about the failure of the official leaders of Hungarian Jewry to heed their pleas for financial support for the advancement of what they believed were serious rescue plans. Braham, *Politics*, 816.

16 ■ For details, see ibid., 806–849.

17 ■ The reports were based on the accounts by Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, two Slovakian Jews who miraculously had escaped from Auschwitz on 7 April, 1944. For the text of the reports see Rudolf Vrba, I *Escaped from Auschwitz* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2002), 327–363. For further details, see Braham, *Politics*, 824–832. See also *The Auschwitz Reports and the Holocaust in Hungary*. Randolph L. Braham and William J. vanden Heuvel, eds. (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs 2011; distrib. by Columbia University Press).

As elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe, the Jews of German-occupied Hungary were helpless and defenseless. Rebuffed by the Hungarians upon whom they had counted for support, the leaders of the Hungarian Jewry felt compelled to deal with the SS. As in Slovakia, Wisliceny, at least at first, played the leading role in the negotiations between the SS and the Hungarian Jewish leaders. A few days after the beginning of the occupation of Hungary, he handed Fülöp Freudiger, the head of the Orthodox Jewish Community, a letter of recommendation from Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, one of the architects of the Europa Plan. The rabbi identified Wisliceny as a venal SS officer with whom the Jewish leaders could do business and as a "reliable" negotiating partner.[18] While Freudiger continued to maintain contact with Wisliceny until his own escape to Romania in August 1944, the negotiations with the SS soon were taken over by Rezsö (Rudolph) Kasztner and other leaders of the Zionist-oriented *Vaadah*.[19] In his capacity as the de facto head of the *Vaadah*, Kasztner was perhaps the most informed about the Nazis' campaign against the Jews. Appearing as a witness for the prosecution in Veesenmayer's trial (the Ministries Trial) on 19 March, 1948, he stated:

> I was, I think, one of the most informed in Hungary about the situation of the Jews at the time... We had, as early as 1942, a complete picture of what had happened in the east to the Jews deported to Auschwitz and the other concentration camps.[20]

Samu Stern, the head of the Neolog Jewish community of Pest and later president of the Central Jewish Council, also admitted awareness of the Nazis' onslaught against the Jews. In his memoirs, he stated, among other things, "I knew what they had done in all German-occupied states of Europe... And the others knew as much as I did when they joined the Council as members."[21]

The SS preferred to deal with the Zionists rather than the leaders of the Neolog and Orthodox communities, many of whom continued to pin their hopes on the Hungarians. The Nazis worked on the assumption that the Zionist leaders had many international connections that could be exploited not only for the acquisition of foreign currency and war-related materials, but also for

18 ■ According to some sources, Wisliceny forced Rabbi Weissmandel to give him the "recommendation letter." Wisliceny demonstrated his "power to deliver" to Freudiger by freeing his brother; he had been among the first influential Jews in Budapest to be arrested by the Gestapo immediately after the beginning of the occupation.

19 ■ During his debriefing on 17 May, 1945 by the FBI, Kasztner provided a succinct description of the "SS organization in Hungary responsible for Jewish persecution." He claimed that "with the exception of von Wisliceny, who accepted bribes, [...] all these SS men were completely incorruptible"; FBI Intelligence Report.

20 ■ Braham, *Politics*, 822. Edmund Veesenmayer was the Führer's plenipotentiary in Hungary during the occupation.

21 ■ Ibid., 820.

the advancement of the Reich's political interests abroad, including a possible rupture in the US-British-Soviet alliance.

The first meeting between the Zionists and the SS took place on 5 April, the day the Jews first were required to wear the Yellow Star. Relying on the well-meant but in retrospect fatal advice of the Slovak Jewish leaders, the Zionist leaders of Hungary began the negotiations by raising the question of the possible rescue of Hungarian Jewry on the basis of the Europa Plan. The SS agreed to the negotiations without hesitation, inducing the Zionists to deliver large amounts of cash and valuables in return for the promise of help, which the Nazis never intended to keep.[22]

Although aware of the realities of the Final Solution program and of the tactics and strategies the SS had employed elsewhere in their war against the Jews, the Hungarian Jewish negotiators had a basic strategy of their own: they tried to safeguard the interests of the Jewish community by winning a desperate race with time. With an eye on the military victories of the Allies and especially the rapid advance of the Red Army, they hoped that they could win this race with bribery and by dragging out the negotiations with the SS as long as possible. Each day that passed while the Jews still were in their homes, even though marked, isolated, and impoverished, was a gain in that race.

The SS negotiators were fully aware of this tactic and played along. Their basic bargaining objectives were as clear as they were ruthless. By negotiating with the Hungarian Jewish leaders and freeing a limited number of Jews, they would pocket a large amount of cash and valuables and lull the Jewish masses into submission, distracting them from the possibility of resistance. The SS had all the trump cards and continued to "negotiate," while proceeding with the implementation of the Final Solution according to their own well-planned schedule, part of a master plan they worked out in cooperation with their Hungarian accomplices.

The master plan called for the implementation of the Final Solution in Hungary in two distinct phases, each of which turned out to last for fifty-four days. During the first phase, lasting from the 22 March appointment of the Sztójay government until May 15, the victims were subjected to an avalanche of anti-Jewish laws and decrees. They were totally isolated; they were deprived of their right to travel and to own or use any means of transportation or communi-

22 ■ Following up on the Europa Plan offer made by the Slovak Jewish leaders, Wisliceny demanded a total of $2,000,000, insisting that $200,000 be paid immediately in Hungarian pengő as "proof of the Zionists' goodwill and financial liquidity." The first installment of three million pengő was delivered shortly thereafter to Hermann Krumey and Otto Hunsche, two leading figures of the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*. The second installment of 2.5 million pengő was delivered to the same officers on 21 April, while the ghettoization in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary already was in full swing; Braham, *Politics*, 1076-1077.

cation, including bicycles, cars, radios, and telephones; they were forced to wear the Yellow Star and robbed what remained of their belongings. Then they were rounded up, placed into ghettos, and concentrated in entrainment centers. Few if any of the Jews had any inkling of the ultimate fate that was awaiting them.

During the second phase, lasting from 15 May through 9 July, approximately 440,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where most of them were murdered soon after their arrival. By 9 July, when Horthy's decision three days earlier to halt the deportations took effect and Raoul Wallenberg arrived on his rescue mission, all of Hungary (with the notable exception of Budapest) had become judenrein.

It was in late April or early May 1944 that the Zionist negotiators realized that their negotiating tactics had failed. The advance of the Red Army had stalled; the SS "reneged" on their promises—promises that, under the desperate conditions in which they found themselves, the Jewish negotiators failed to realize the SS could not and never had intended to keep. They complained to their SS negotiating partners, who were eager to maintain "good relations" with the Jewish leaders to assure that their own objectives—the continued acquisition of Jewish wealth and the maintenance of a calm, revolt-free climate that was required for the smooth implementation of the deportations—were met. To soothe the anger of the disappointed Zionists, the SS offered them two distinct but interrelated consolation prizes: a conditional plan to save over a million European Jews; and a more concrete plan for the rescue of a limited number of Hungarian Jews. The first came to be known as the "blood for trucks" offer;[23] the second as the SS-Kasztner deal.[24] While the two plans were being "seriously considered" by the Jewish leaders, the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices continued to deport approximately 12,000 Jews daily. The former plan turned out to be primarily a Nazi attempt to try to split the Allies; the second ended up in the rescue of 1,684 Jews. The negotiations relating to the rescue of these relatively few Jews in the so-called Kasztner-transport emerged as one of the most controversial issues in the history of the Holocaust.[25]

When the Second World War ended in Europe on 8 May, 1945, the four historical *dramatis personae* discussed in this study—the Third Reich, Hungary, and the Jews of Hungary and of Slovakia—all lost. The Third Reich, trumpeted to last for a thousand years, was crushed. Hungary was forced to give up the territories it had gained with the aid of the Nazis and once again was compelled to accept the boundaries set at Trianon. And the histories of both countries have forever been marred by the indelible, shameful chapter on the Holocaust.

The Jews of Hungary suffered approximately 560,000 (70%) casualties, those of Slovakia approximately 70,000 (87%). Many among the surviving Jews in

23 ■ For details, see ibid., 1078–1088.
24 ■ For details, see ibid., 1088–1104.
25 ■ For details, see ibid., 1104–1112.

these countries eventually emigrated to the newly established State of Israel—the one positive development in the otherwise tragic history of European Jewry during the Nazi era.

After the war, unlike the Federal Republic of Germany and several other states, Hungary failed to come to grips with its past. It failed to assume responsibility—let alone apologize—for its involvement in the murder of nearly 600,000 citizens of the Jewish faith. During the communist era, the issue of the Holocaust and the Jewish question in general was sunk in the Orwellian black hole of history. Since the establishment of a democratic system in 1989, there have been history-cleansing campaigns in Hungary calculated to bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy era by pinning exclusive responsibility for the Holocaust on the Germans and a few "misguided" Hungarian pro-Nazis, the so-called Nyilas.

The campaign has recently acquired an ominous tone as efforts have been made by local government bodies led by a newly emerged neo-Fascist party or independents to reshape the public face of Hungary, for instance by renaming public buildings after Horthy. In general, there has been a shift towards the national-Christian principles that characterized the Horthy era. In this political and cultural climate, anti-Semitism has again emerged as a major scourge poisoning the social fabric. Concurrent with the dedication of new statues and the unveiling of plaques honoring Horthy and other officials of the counterrevolutionary era by various political and social groups, one sees manifestations of increasingly brazen anti-Jewish sentiment reminiscent of the climate of the prewar era. At the moment plans are still afoot, despite numerous protests, to build a museum, the "House of Fates—European Education Center," under the guidance of the controversial founder and director of the House of Terror and to erect a monument to the German occupation of Hungary in 1944 on Liberation Square in the center of Budapest. This monument, allegedly to the victims of the Holocaust, seems to imply that the deportations that took place in the spring and summer of 1944 were the work of the occupying forces, which is simply not the case. It represents an effort to turn away from, rather than confront, the history of the Holocaust in Hungary. For the moment these plans are still plans only, and protests against the monument continue.

Following the policies of the Hungarian government, one is reminded of the party slogan in George Orwell's 1984: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." "Patriotic historians" and their political supporters are desperately trying to control the past in order to build their kind of future, a future that uses the Horthy model of the past.

One must hope that the Hungarians will not fail to heed the warning by George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." ❧

András Schweitzer

Kőrösmező: The First Deportation of the Hungarian Holocaust, 1941

However soothing it may be, the widely held view that the Hungarian Holocaust began after German occupation in the spring of 1944 is simply incorrect. In July and August of 1941, Jews living in Hungary were transported by train to a concentration camp near the city of Kőrösmező (Kamianets-Podilskyi, today Yasina in the Ukraine) and then on trucks to empty roadside fields near Ukrainian villages in occupied Poland. Less than three years later, in May, June, and July of 1944, Jews living in Hungary were transported by train to Auschwitz, also in occupied Poland. While there are significant differences between the deportations of 1941 and 1944, they are linked by two essential facts: in both instances they were carried out by the Hungarian police and the gendarmerie acting on decisions of the Hungarian government, members of which could have been quite certain about the impending fate of the victims had they cared to know[1], and in both instances the victims were deported and the vast majority of them killed specifically because they were Jewish.

Perhaps the simplest difference between the two deportations is one of numbers. Just under 20,000 people were sent to their deaths in 1941 (19,426 according to a police report). This is a large number, even when one is

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1 ■ The disinterest of the government was eloquently summarized at a meeting of the Hungarian government on the question of deportations on 24 June, 1944. According to the official record the minister of internal affairs Andor Jaross said: "In the end we are not interested where the Jews are going. The interest of the country is that the Jews be removed quickly." Jegyzőkönyve az 1944. évi június hó 24-én Budapesten tartott rendkívüli Minisztertanácsnak. See: Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek, 24 June, 1944 at <wwww.digitarchiv.hu>.

speaking of genocide, yet it may well have come to seem small in comparison by May, June, and July of 1944, when the Hungarian authorities oversaw the deportation of some 437,000 people. This difference, however, is merely one of quantity. In contrast, a qualitative difference is that in 1941 the deportations were not carried out at German request. On the contrary, in the end of July, 1941, the German military commanders even pleaded with the Hungarian government to stop deporting undesired civilians to the occupied zone, where food was scarce and they constituted a health risk to ongoing military operations. According to a parliamentary speech held on 21 November by László Bárdossy, the Hungarian Prime Minister at the time, it was German intervention that prompted the Hungarian authorities to end the deportations on 12 August. Responding to members urging him to do more on the Jewish question, he said, "after the occupation of Ukrainian territories, we deported significant numbers of Jews of Galician origin. We intended to relocate more of them, but our friend, the German empire, warned us not to continue. We certainly had to bow to this demand."[2]

In its initial rejections of the German request to bring the deportations to a halt, the Hungarian government claimed that the policy was directed against recently arrived immigrants from the east who were being repatriated. This constituted an acceptable pretext and it served to appease the consciences of more moderate members of the Hungarian government and others who learned of the deportation, which was to be kept secret by the press. However, not all of the victims were immigrants from Poland or the Soviet Union. Indeed they probably constituted a small minority. Some of them in fact had come from the opposite direction, from Austria, where after the Anschluss in 1938 the authorities had tried to force Jews to emigrate, which many of them had done, fleeing in any possible direction.

But crucially, the notion that the victims of the Kőrösmező deportation were non-Hungarian immigrants of Galician origin—a contention implicitly voiced by historian Sándor Szakály, who caused outrage in early 2014 by calling the deportation a police action against aliens,[3] and found in many works on history (even in a brief summary of the Hungarian Holocaust on the Yad Vashem

2 ■ Az országgyűlés képviselőházának 223. ülése 1941. évi november hó 21-én, pénteken. In: *Az 1939. évi június hó 10-re hirdetett Országgyűlés képviselőházának naplója.* Tizenegyedik kötet. Athenaeum, Budapest, 1941. 537 . See the searchable database of the parliamentary sessions from the XI. volume: <http://www3.arcanum.hu/onap/a110616.htm?v=pdf&a=pdfdata&id=KN-1939_11&pg=0&l=hun> Last accessed: 7 May, 2014.

3 ■ Szakály said this in an interview to the MTI news agency that was quoted on 17 January, 2014 by major Hungarian news outlets, see for example: <http://index.hu/belfold/2014/01/17/idegenrendeszeti_problema_a_zsidok_deportalasa/> and: <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20140117-idegenrendeszeti-eljaras-volt-a-zsidok-deportalasa-kamenyec-podolszkba.html> He later apologized to anyone offended saying he may have been wrong.

portal[4])—is simply not correct. The wording of the official resolution of the Hungarian Ministry for Home Affairs, dated 12 July, 1941, refers to non-Hungarian citizens:

> Considering the current foreign policy circumstances, the opportunity has arisen soon to remove from the territory of the country unsuitable foreigners [...] and foreign citizens against whom legally binding decisions regarding expulsion or the rejection of permission to reside have not yet been effectively implemented.[5]

Strictly confidential resolutions of the coming days detailing the required execution of the original resolution, all signed by Sándor Siménfalvy, counselor of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and leader of the National Central Authority for Controlling Foreigners (Külföldieket Ellenőrző Országos Központi Hatóság, KEOKH), further specify who was to be apprehended by the police: "Polish and Russian Jews who have recently infiltrated the country."[6] Nevertheless, the instructions were still far from clear, as one of the resolutions dated 30 July, 1941 demonstrates:

> Referring to my earlier resolutions... about the removal of foreign Jews I call upon the police offices of the highest order to remove only those foreigners of the Jewish race whose Polish or Russian origin can be rendered probable either by earlier obtained data or examinations to be made in the future [...] Their removal is to be executed immediately.[7]

In practice, the police and the gendarmerie apprehended Jews who could not immediately prove their Hungarian citizenship. In Carpatho-Ukraine, parts of villages the inhabitants of which were Jewish were sometimes emptied completely, a telltale sign that the authorities were not simply looking for recently arrived refugees. Indeed, the deportations were not a matter of removing "foreign" elements, but as Timothy Snyder has observed, rather a clear instance of ethnic cleansing of a recently occupied territory. "Hungary," he writes, "a German ally, had been allowed to annex subcarpathian Ruthenia [i. e. Carpatho-Ukraine], the far eastern district of Czechoslovakia. Rather than grant the native Jews of this region Hungarian citizenship, Hungary expelled 'stateless' Jews to the east, to German-occupied Ukraine."[8] It must be noted

4 ■ "When Hungary joined the war against the Allies, nearly 20,000 Jews from Kamenetz-Podolsk who held Polish or Soviet citizenship were turned over to the Germans and murdered." <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/09/hungary.asp> Last accessed on 6 May, 2014.
5 ■ The document is available here: <http://www.holokausztmagyarorszagon.hu/index.php?section=1&chapter=2_2_3&type=doc>.
6 ■ Cited in Braham 1997, 199-202.
7 ■ Zoltán Szirtes: Temetetlen halottaink. 1941. Kőrösmező, Kamenyec-Podolszk. Szirtes Z., Budapest, 1996, 15.
8 ■ Timothy Synder. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin.* Basic Books (October 2, 2012). 61.

however that the operation affected not only Carpatho-Ukraine, even if the majority of the deportees were indeed from this region.

Proving one's citizenship was far from simple at a time when people were not carrying identification cards in their pockets. This was especially problematic in Carpatho-Ukraine (essentially the western region of what today is the Ukraine), which had been part of Czechoslovakia and had only fallen under the control of the Hungarian authorities in 1939. Indeed it was almost impossible, as the third paragraph of the so-called second anti-Jewish law (1939/IV) explicitly excluded Jews from obtaining Hungarian citizenship through naturalization, marriage or legalization. (The law even entitled the Minister of Internal Affairs in certain loosely defined cases to revoke the citizenship of Jews who had acquired citizenship after 1 July, 1914.)[9] This meant that anyone who could not prove that he or she had been a citizen in Hungary before the First World War (when Carpatho-Ukraine had been part of the Hungarian Kingdom) was in immediate danger.

But sometimes even documents could not help. According to the contention of a local Jewish leader of Huszt county, the chief administrative officer there requested that all Jews submit whatever documents they had, which they did in the hope that they would obtain certification of their citizenship. Instead, when deportations began and they stormed the office in panic in order to be given back the original documents, the officer "did not have the time to handle their request," so they were taken away empty-handed. This is just one of the many abuses recorded in the travel report of a group led by Margit Slachta, the founder of the Roman Catholic Sisters of Social Service (which included some liberal-minded Hungarian aristocrats), which traveled to the Eastern frontier of Hungary, to verify reports of the brutality of the deportations.[10] The report also describes the group's meeting with police chief Arisztid Meskó, supervisor of the deportations in Carpatho-Ukraine, who explained that he found it appropriate to apprehend families by surprise at night in order to catch everyone, that six months earlier he had ordered Jews to obtain, if they could, proof of citizenship

9 ■ See for example: *Magyarországi zsidótörvények és rendeletek. 1938–1945* [Hungarian Jewish Laws and Decrees. 1938–1945]. (Összeállította: Vértes Róbert). Polgár Kiadó, Budapest, 1997, 47.

10 ■ Gróf Apponyi György, Slachta Margit, Dr. Szabó Imre és Gróf Szapáry Erzsébet úti beszámolója a kárpátaljai deportálás körülményeiről, Budapest, 1941. augusztus 20 [Travel Report of Count György Apponyi, Margit Slachta, Dr Imre Szabó and Countess Erzsébet Szapáry on the Circumstances of the Kárpátalja Deportation, Budapest, 20 August, 1941]. The document is published in: Majsai Tamás: Iratok a kőrösmezei zsidódeportálás történetéhez. 1941 [Documents on the History of the Deportation of Jews to Kőrösmező. 1941]. In: Ráday Gyűjtemény Évkönyve IV-V. (1984-1985) (ed. Kálmán Benda, Angéla Beliczay, György Erdős, Edit Nagy, Julianna Szabó.), Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület, Budapest, 1986, 224. The travel report can also be found in an updated online version of Majsai's article here (without page numbers): <http://www.korosmezo1941.netai.net/files/Korosmezo_dokumentumok.pdf>. Last accessed: 6 May, 2014

from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but the Jews had knowingly "sabotaged" ("tudatosan szabotálták") his efforts because at that time they had thought that they could not be removed anywhere, and that "he is not interested in personal tragedies."[11] Not only did the deportations specifically target Jews (not newly arrived immigrants), the mother tongue of many of the deportees was Hungarian. Slachta and her fellow travelers were not allowed to enter the detention camps or cross the border to follow the deportees, but they nevertheless came into contact with deportees through the fences of the concentration camp at Kőrösmező. "We talked to many," she wrote, "but we came across no one who even by chance could have been mistaken as having come from Galicia or Russia."[12] Instead, among the deportees "we have seen people holding their citizenship documents in their hands, a one-handed war cripple, an old man who could barely shuffle along, a little child with measles who, after the two-day journey, was waiting for hours with a mass of people on an open truck in the rain to be transported further."[13]

Letters written in Hungarian by the desperate deportees and sent back from the Ukraine to Hungarian relatives offer further testimony to the fact that many of the deportees were, at least by native tongue, Hungarians. In 1986, these letters, together with other documents such as the abovementioned travel report or a desperate plea for help to feed 2,300 Jews from Hungary written in German by the Judenrat (Jewish Council) of Stanislau on 28 August, 1941, were published along with a detailed study[14] by Tamás Majsai, a theologian and historian. "Dear Rezső," writes one of the deportees, "we have gone through suffering that cannot be imagined in Budapest. Had I known just five percent of it I don't know what I would have done.... We are starving, and if nothing changes we are going to die because we have no food. There are fifty to sixty corpses floating down the Dnester [River] daily, they buried fifty here yesterday." Another deportee emphasized his Hungarian identity: "It is as if the world had turned upside down, people have become so barbarous. [...] My Little Szidi, don't be sad that I wrote all this, but I needed to lighten my soul, and maybe this could be reported to a higher forum, so that they don't let someone, born in Budapest and Hungarian in feeling, perish." Another deportee made a similar plea: "Mother, please compose an appeal in good Hungarian in my name. Write that father was born in Hungary, that you

11 ■ Travel report... in Majsai, *Iratok*... [see above], 225-226. Meskó also said that the operation was not conducted on the resolution of the minister of internal affairs in Carpatho-Ukraine, where it had no legal effect, but on a resolution drafted by him and given out by the governor, Miklós Kozma.

12 ■ Travel report... in Majsai, *Iratok*..., 222.

13 ■ Letter of Margit Slachta to Mrs. Miklós Horthy [Slachta Margit levele Horthy Miklósnénak] 13 August, 1941. In: Majsai, *Iratok*... 217

14 ■ Majsai, *Iratok*... 59-86.

stayed behind, but write it in good Hungarian as if I were writing it. Send it here, and I shall send it by post to Horthy."

In addition, there are more than a dozen testimonies in perfect Hungarian by people who were deported in 1941 but somehow managed to sneak back. They are held at the archive of the National Committee to Care for the Deportees (Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság, Degob), an organization that was set up immediately after the war to help the displaced and to document their accounts.[15] In 2011, I myself spoke to one of the few people to survive the deportation, a man named László Zobel. He was ninety-three years-old at the time, clear of mind, and he remembered the events preceding the deportation of a group from Budapest in the summer of 1941 vividly: "At the detention center in Rumbach Sebestyén Street, I was made the clerk, I had to write down the names of those who were being brought in. There were about 200 of them, men, women, children, elderly. They all spoke Hungarian."

There is a tragic irony to the fact that in the Carpatho-Ukraine, as in Northern Transylvania or the southern part of former Czechoslovakia, Jews whose native language was Hungarian (roughly one-fourth of the 116,000 Jews) were registered as Hungarian in the national census in early 1941 in order to inflate that number. Later, in the course of the war, when the statistics had already been published, these people were no longer regarded as Hungarians or for that matter desirable.

And yet, even if not Galician refugees, at least in Budapest the victims were not selected at random. I have looked at the stories of a number of victims and talked to relatives of some of them. They all seem to have had someone in the family who was born in Galicia decades before the deportation of 1941, usually before the First World War, when both Galicia and Hungary had been part of the same empire, Austria-Hungary. Children of men who had moved to Hungary before World War I or in the interwar period, children who indeed had been born in Hungary, like Zobel, were deported, as were their wives (usually women who had several generations of Hungarian ancestors) and on several occasions their children, who in 1941 were still very young. This suggests that KEOKH had an initial list of Jews who had been born in Galicia even before the First World War and of their descendants and spouses, and the authorities came to apprehend them all, irrespective of place of birth, residence, or mother tongue.

Once gathered together by the authorities, the deportees had sometimes only a few hours or less to collect their belongings. The deportations were done rapidly, and absent family members sometimes arrived home to discover their dwellings empty and never again to see their closest relatives. The deportees were sometimes tricked by the authorities into believing that

15 ■ A searchable online database of more than 3500 records can be found at www.degob.hu.

Eastern Poland they would be able to find work and lodging in houses that had been lived in by people who had fled eastward with the Soviet army. It was the same lie of emptied houses and opportunities for agricultural work, propagated by the top echelon of the army, notably defense minister Károly Bartha and chief of staff Henrik Werth, which initially helped convince hesitant members of the Hungarian government about the whole operation.[16] The desperate messages of the deportees illustrate clearly that there were no such opportunities. Members of the Hungarian government could have discovered this. Margit Slachta did not have a chance to get firsthand information regarding the situation on the other side of the border, yet she knew enough about the deportees' chances of survival in the occupied zone: "in the best case scenario they are going to be beaten to death at once by Ukrainian peasants, in the worst case scenario they are going to starve to death in slow and painful suffering."[17] This was indeed the fate of many of the deportees, but most of them were killed in the mass executions committed by German police and SS units, something Margit Slachta could not have foreseen.

After having been on the run for weeks, terrorized by unfriendly locals, and robbed of their best cloths or having had to exchange them for food, most of the deported Jews from Hungary ended up in the ghettos of major towns, like Kamianets-Podilskyi. Hungarian soldiers described what they had seen during their journey from Horodenka to Kamianets-Podilskyi on 18 August:

> The civilian population is penniless poor, dirty and hungry. There are lots of Jews, especially women, in rags but also wearing jewelry and with lips painted red. They for bread in Hungarian and they are ready to pay any price for it. Some count their steps with visible final desperation on their faces, others writhe on the road, having collapsed in exhaustion and hunger. Others cover the wounds on their legs with pieces of cloth torn from their clothing. Little children cry and collapse in fatigue.[18]

And the scene in Kamianets-Podilskyi the next day:

> The Jewish quarter of the ghetto is full of interned Jews, many of them from Budapest. They live in indescribable filth, they move around in inadequate clothing, the streets stink, there are unburied corpses stinking in some of the houses. The water of the Dnester [River] is infected, human corpses lie on the banks here and there.[19]

16 ■ This conclusion, based mainly on post-war testimonies of leading government officials, was drawn by Ádám and János Gellért. See: Az 1941. évi kőrösmezői deportálások. A kitoloncolásokat jóváhagyó minisztertanácsi döntés háttere. 2012/2 [The 1941 Kőrösmező Deportations. The Background of the Decision of the Council of Ministers Regarding the Expulsions. An Overview]. <http://betekinto.hu/sites/default/ files/2012_2_gellert_gellert.pdf>.

17 ■ Majsai, *Iratok*..., 226.

18 ■ Krisztián Ungváry (ed.): A második világháború. Budapest, 2005, Osiris. 177.

19 ■ Ibid., 178.

Aware of the situation, on 25 August German military leaders accepted the offer made by SS-commander Friedrich Jeckeln, who pledged to execute the Jews by 1 September.[20]

On 27-29 August, altogether 23,600 people, men, women, and children (about half of whom were from Hungary), were escorted out of the city. Rumors had been spread beforehand that they were going to be relocated, and so they were allowed to carry belongings.[21] The testimony given by Karl Raddatz, a German policeman, offers a description brutal in its details of what actually happened:

> The victims were forced to run through a line of guards made up of regular police from Police Battalion 320, the so-called 'hosepipe', to the craters; there they had to throw their possessions to one side, and some were also ordered to disrobe. Finally, they were compelled to climb down into the crater, lie down on top of the bodies of those who had already been murdered, and were then killed instantaneously by a shot to the base of the skull. 'Forbearance' was only shown for the riflemen: if any marksman was unable (or no longer able) to kill small children, he could ask to be relieved, drink some schnapps, take a break, and then return if possible to resume work at the pit.[22]

The testimony of Hermann K., part of the SS force in the region, provides a similar account:

> In the large execution at the end of August 1941 in Kamenets-Podolsk I took part... In total I was shooting there for one or two hours. Then we were relieved by a police detachment. If I'm asked how many Jews I shot, I cannot tell exactly. Maybe fifty or one-hundred. I don't know.[23]

The liquidation of the Kamianets-Podilskyi ghetto was the largest massacre at the time and an important milestone in the history of the Holocaust. It was

20 ■ Massimo Arico: "Seht euch diesen Mann an." Kamenec Podolski 27-29 August 1941, 5. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/18282882/Seht-euch-diesen-Mann-an-Kamenec-Podolski-2729-August-1941>.

21 ■ Massimo Arico: "Seht euch..." 7. On the same page and on page 4 the essay also includes photos taken by Gyula Spitz, a Hungarian Jewish truck driver, of the column of people driven out of the city to their deaths.

22 ■ Testimony of Karl Raddatz, given on 11 November, 1960. Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg (German Federal Archives, Ludwigsburg Branch). Formerly Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen (Central Office of the [Federal] State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes), 204 AR-Z 48/58, Vol. 23, 3774-77. Cited in Andrej Angrick, "The Escalation of German-Romanian Anti-Jewish Policy after the Attack on the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941." *Yad Vashem Studies* 16 (1996): 203-38. 24-5.

23 ■ Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg (German Federal Archives, Ludwigsburg Branch). 204 AR-Z 13/60, Vol. 1, 403-404. Cited in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944. Ausstellungskatalog*. 135. Translated into English by Roberto Muehlenkamp. <http://holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.hu/2013/02/the-kamenets-podolsky-massacre_12.html>. Accessed on 1 May, 2014.

the first mass-murder of over ten thousand people. It was followed by a similar killing spree at the Babi Yar ravine near Kiev a month later, and then by a massacre on 30 November in the Rumbula forest near Riga (the hometown of Jeckeln). But the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre was a milestone also in that it set a new pattern for international mass murder in death camps. Jews from one country were killed on the territory of another by gunmen of a third. It should certainly be noted that alongside Hungary, Romania also attempted to deport Jews from its recently occupied territories (roughly what is Moldova today) to the same area at roughly the same time, but the Germans hampered their efforts by blocking the bridges at the Southern flow of the Dnester River.[24] The events surrounding the Kőrösmező deportation were known to historians immediately after the Second World War. They were mentioned, admittedly in an endnote, in a widely read (at least in Hungary) essay by István Bibó entitled "A zsidókérdés Magyarországon 1944 után" ("The Jewish Question in Hungary after 1944"),[25] an honest account and a starting point for future reconciliation. In the early postwar accounts of the tragic episode of Kamianets-Podilskyi authors frequently mention a Hungarian unit that allegedly also participated in the killing spree, but these contentions have been proven false by the post-war testimonies of members of the German SS and police units. There were indications that the German police even tried to keep Hungarian forces away from the massacres so that they wouldn't obstruct the liquidations. On the other hand, the Hungarian government made every effort even after the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre to fortify the "defense" of the border in order to hamper the attempts of survivors still in the region to sneak back into Hungary.[26]

In the later decades of state socialism, accounts of the Kőrösmező deportation and the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre disappeared completely from mainstream historiography. Lexicons of Hungarian history (including the grandiose so-called "ten-volume edition") do not say a word about it (according to its geographical index the name of Kamianets-Podilskyi is only mentioned once in the volume covering post-1918 history,[27] in connection with the futile effort of the Russian Red Army to advance westward to help the short-lived Hungarian Soviet government in 1919). Another work, a historical

24 ■ Massimo Arico: "Seht euch diesen Mann an." 3.

25 ■ István Bibó, "The Jewish Question in Hungary After 1944" in István Bibó, *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings* (edited by Károly Nagy, translated by András Boros-Kazai) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

26 ■ Gellért Ádám – Gellért János: Menekülés a népirtás elől. Az 1941-es deportáltak hazatérési kísérletei és a Magyar állam ellenintézkedései. Betekintő, 2013/3 [Flight from Genocide. Attempts by the Deportees of 1941 to Return Home and the Countermeasures of the Hungarian State. An Overview]. <http://betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2013_3_gellert_gellert.pdf>.

27 ■ Magyarország története 1918-1919, 1919-1945. (editor-in-chief.: György Ránki) Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1976.

chronology, deals extensively with the new antifascist policy line of the Communist Workers Party, which was decided at two meetings of its Central Committee on 28 June and 1 September, 1941, but there is no indication of anything having taken place between these two dates. The book makes no mention of the Kőrösmező deportation nor the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre.[28] Even Majsai's aforementioned groundbreaking work of 1986 has remained largely sidelined. The John Wesley Theological College, where Tamás Majsai is a member of the faculty, organizes annual commemorations and field trips to the Ukraine, and on the 70th anniversary of the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre in 2011 a conference was held on the subject and a memorial tablet was unveiled. These efforts notwithstanding, the victims of the first wave of the Hungarian Holocaust are largely forgotten. To this day there is no public monument in Hungary to the massacre that would resemble, for instance, the monument to the victims of the Katyn massacre by Soviet forces unveiled in Budapest in 2011.

Apart from high-level leaders, no one was held responsible for the mass murder, neither the German perpetrators who did the actual shooting nor the Hungarian officials who took an active part in organizing the deportations. In Germany there was a formal investigation between 1958 and 1962, but the prosecutors did not make any legal charges because of the principle of "Befehlsnotstand," which roughly translated means "emergency stemming from an order." At the time this constituted a legally exonerating explanation when someone in uniform was ordered to commit a crime by a superior.[29]

In 1993 an investigation into the deportations and massacres of 1941 was launched by the Ministry of Justice in Hungary in response to a complaint made by Zoltán Szirtes. Szirtes, who strove to compel the state to acknowledge the role and responsibility of the Hungarian government and authorities in the atrocities, died one year before the final verdict of the investigation was delivered (the investigation took some five years). The verdict, which Szirtes would surely have seen as a victory, was unambiguous:

> On the basis of the data of the investigation, with their resolutions and their acts the people who decided to have carried out and then implemented the deportation of Jews in the summer of 1941 forced the deportees, as members of the Jewry, into conditions beyond the Dnester River in which they were threatened with certain death.[30]

28 ■ Magyar történelmi kronológia. Az őskortól 1970-ig [Hungarian Historical Chronology. From Ancient Times to 1970]. Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1984, 526-527.
29 ■ Massimo Arico: "Seht euch..." 10-11.
30 ■ Zsuzsa Korn Horváth: "Adalékok a magyar holokauszt első szakaszának történetéhez és a Bárdossy-kormány felelősségéhez" [Data on the History of the First Phase of the Hungarian Holocaust and the Responsibility of the Bárdossy Government]. In Élet és Irodalom 2009. 3 February. Available also at: <http://www.szombat.org/hirek-lapszemle/974-adalek-a-magyar-holokauszt-elso-szakaszanak-tortenetehez-es-a-bardossykormany-felelossegehez>.

The investigation, however, led to no indictments. The last surviving individual determined on the basis of archival research to have born responsibility in the atrocities died in the course of the investigation.

The extensive and invaluable documentation of the investigation, which included archival research, testimonies, and expert opinions of historians, would have made an excellent collection of primary source materials for the study of this first tragedy of the Holocaust in Hungary. However, due to a lamentable procedural error, it was destroyed by the National Bureau Investigation in early 2009. As Ádám Gellért, a scholar on the subject, determined, although according to law the files should have been kept indefinitely since the investigation involved genocide, because of a mistake in classification they were accidentally disposed of after ten years, as records of investigations are in less serious cases.

While this blunder may constitute a lamentable loss to historians, the documents that were destroyed in fact may well have done little to answer an essential question regarding Kőrösmező. Little doubt remains, at this point, regarding the extent of the deportation or the subsequent massacre. What is difficult to understand about Kőrösmező is why it has not become part of common knowledge regarding the Holocaust in Hungary. How is it that one still hears repeated the contention that until March 1944 no deportations of Jews took place in Hungary? The Kőrösmező deportation was less systematically planned and less devastating in its extent than the deportations of 1944, but it was the first deportation of Jews from Hungarian territory and arguably the beginning of the Holocaust in Hungary. ❧

András Koerner

Personal Remembrances

Varieties of Memory

"This is Mishi, my baby son." That was how I introduced my doll in 1944, whenever I got inquisitive looks. The attention I received was not only at the sight of a little boy holding a doll or due to the nakedness of Mishi (diminutive of Michael), whose clothes I had lost sometime earlier; it had mainly to do with a special feature of that plaything: he was sporting a bright yellow six-pointed star, a Mogen David, on his soiled, canvas chest.

Like all Jews in Hungary, since April of that year, my parents had to wear those stars stitched to the left breast of their outerwear whenever they appeared in public so that the police and other authorities, indeed everyone, would be able to see at a glance that they were Jews. We were marked with a badge of "shame," and my parents were understandably reluctant to make that clear to a child three and a half years-old. So to me, the striking stars were a badge of distinction, something to be proud of, and my little son deserved that privilege as much as anyone in the family. My mother was not at all enthusiastic about my idea and tried to explain that it was meant only for real people, but I wouldn't budge in my determination to have her sew one on my doll. I explained to her that if we all had stars, Mishi had to have

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András Koerner

was born in Budapest, Hungary, where he completed a degree in architecture and worked as an architect. In 1968, he moved to the United States, where he continued to pursue his profession. Since his retirement in 2000, he has written several books and essays, mainly about the everyday lives of Hungarian Jews before the Holocaust. His books include A Taste of the Past: The Daily Life and Cooking of a Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Jewish Homemaker, Egy vonakodó zsidó: Esszék és történetek *("A Reluctant Jew. Essays and Stories"), and* Hogyan éltek? A magyar zsidók hétköznapi élete, 1867–1970 *("How They Lived: The Daily Lives of Hungarian Jews, 1867–1970").*

one too. "After all, he's my baby, and he deserves it as much as the rest of us." So she finally gave in.

I must have received the doll shortly before June, when we were forced to move from our apartment to one of the Yellow-Star Houses, specially marked buildings designated for the Jews of Budapest. I remember having him with me in the Swiss Protected House, where we moved from the Yellow-Star House in the hope of finding greater protection, and later in the Budapest Ghetto, to which we were forcibly transferred from the Swiss House.

I was so young during the war that, unlike this anecdote about Mishi, most of my memories of it don't coalesce into stories, but remain disconnected images. They are like snapshots in a photo album, some of them sharp, others out of focus. I recall, for example, the pulsating, ear-splitting sound of the air-raid sirens, which sent everyone in the building scrambling down to the cellar to seek shelter. I remember the terror I felt on one such occasion, when there was a thunderous noise and our cellar started to shake as if in an earthquake. At first everyone around me thought that our building had been hit, but when we ran out at the end of the air-raid, we realized that the building next to us had been hit instead, probably by a misfired anti-aircraft cannon shell, destroying part of its third floor. I also recall the feeling of anger and confusion at my mother's sudden disappearance from my life when she was deported. My next recollection is a rather blurred image of our room in either the Swiss House or the Ghetto, I am not sure which, because the rooms were similar: the floor was covered with mattresses, my father's, maternal grandmother's, and mine were adjacent, and a cupboard stood between the two windows. I remember seeing how the single warm meal of the day, often a thin soup, was delivered in a large kettle set on a cart and ladled into our bowls. For me, the highlight of each day was in mid-afternoon when Grandma went to the cupboard, took out a jar of jam she had brought from home, and ceremoniously gave me a teaspoonful. She kept telling me that by the time the jar was empty, the war would be over. And as it turned out, she was right.

But how much of what I recall of the daily spoonful of jam or Mishi is actual first-hand memory? Before emigrating to the United States in December 1946, Grandma frequently reminded me of the jam. During that initial postwar period I also heard stories about Mishi, mostly from my aunt Juci, who along with her mother had taken refuge in late November 1944 in the same Swiss Protected House where we were staying. As Juci often related, I would visit her almost daily in the Protected House, carrying Mishi, and proudly showing him off to everyone around. Looking back now, I can't untangle my true memories from the stories my relatives later told me about the same events. This is not surprising, after all, no more than a year or two could have separated the actual occurrences from when I was told about them, and all this was happening to me in early childhood. Either way,

however, first-hand or received, they are my memories. To this day they have an impact on who I am, but their most obvious effect manifested itself in the first two years after the war.

The first signs of the scars my wartime experiences left on me didn't appear immediately at the end of the war, but about a year later, in early 1946. I dreaded going to sleep because night after night I found myself in the same place. It was a dingy room filled with people lying on mattresses set next to one another on the floor. I was lying next to my father. Suddenly, an armed man burst into the room and stepped in front of him.

"How come you're still here? Don't you see you're the only middle-aged man in here? Get up and come with me," the guy barked.

"I can't. I'm too sick and weak," my father responded.

The thug pointed his machine gun at my father."Get up or I'll shoot!"

"Shoot if you must. I'm too sick to go."

The man pulled the trigger, a staccato burst of machine-gun fire rang out, and I woke up in a cold sweat, my heart pounding as if trying to jump out of my chest.

Every night for weeks, perhaps even months I had that same nightmare, but was too embarrassed to mention it to anyone. My parents and maternal grandmother, who lived with us until her emigration, had repeatedly told me to be happy the war was over and not to think about it. I didn't want to admit to them that just when I really did think the whole thing was behind me, these horrors started haunting me. To me the nightmares were a sign of weakness, worsened by my failure to stop them no matter how I tried.

The dream probably echoed incidents I'd witnessed, possibly reinforced by stories I heard later. It may have been based on something that happened when armed men forced us to move from the Protected House to the Ghetto, or an incident in the Ghetto a day or two before our liberation, when armed men forced my severely ill, emaciated father to go with them to clear rubble in the streets, just as Soviet troops were battling their way closer. In either case, a thug could well have made a threat and raised his gun. It is likely that my dream combined and exaggerated several experiences. But beyond specific events, the whole atmosphere of fear and existential terror left lasting scars in me, and my recurring nightmare reflected this angst.

Memories have a way of brewing in our minds without our being conscious of them, and surfacing when we least expect it. This must be the reason why these nightmares didn't start disrupting my sleep immediately after the end of the war, but erupted with a vengeance much later, so vividly that they have supplanted the memories they were based on.

Probably because I was slightly older by then, I can recall the first months after the war in greater detail than the wartime events. Also, I have no doubt that these memories are first-hand ones, hardly colored by stories I heard later.

For example, I remember receiving a loaf of bread from a Soviet soldier on the first or second day after our return from the Ghetto to our now-permanent apartment in the former Yellow-Star House. I was just coming back from a visit to a nice elderly couple on our floor when this soldier emerged from the staircase, patted my shoulder, said something in Russian, and with a friendly smile handed me the loaf. He had a bagful of them and was going from floor to floor to hand them out. I took my present home, and my father and grandmother greeted me as a hero, since this was the first loaf of bread we had seen in many weeks.

This little story reminds me of our joyful, almost euphoric mood during the first days after our liberation from the Ghetto. Never mind that we could hear artillery fire coming from the other side of the Danube, where there were still pitched battles between the Germans and the Soviets, and never mind that, as was the case everywhere in the city, there was no electricity, gas, or running water in our apartment. In spite of these problems, we were ecstatic to be alive and at home. The city lay in ruins, heaps of rubble blocked the sidewalks, frequently spilling deep into the streets, and there were abandoned artillery guns and overturned cars on the main boulevards. In spite these obstacles, however, the avenues were full of people hurrying home, carrying bags, and pulling carts, like a latter-day Great Migration. Many of them had been bombed out of their former homes and were now taking their belongings, or what remained of them, to a new place. All this left a deep impression on me, and one of my first surviving drawings, from age six, depicts a city street with a person pulling a cart loaded with his furniture and other items.

Some of our family members were still missing. My mother and her brother had been deported to concentration camps, but since we had only spotty knowledge of the true horrors of the camps, we let ourselves be optimistic about their quick return. The Soviets who had liberated us from the Ghetto and who gave me bread soon turned out to be a mixed blessing, to say the least. My father seldom ventured out in the evenings, because of the danger of being robbed of his valuables by Soviet soldiers or common criminals brandishing guns or knives, a common occurrence. This was how Apu (daddy in Hungarian) was once confronted by Soviets near the Western Railway Station. They demanded his wedding ring and watch, but managed to take only the ring, because he had hidden his pocket watch in his laced boots. A person could consider himself lucky if the soldiers only took his watch or if the *malénkaya rabóta* (little work) that they demanded from him meant only a few hours clearing rubble somewhere in the city, because in some cases these randomly seized people were taken by train to Russia, and the "little work" turned out to be years of forced labor in captivity. Rapes committed by the Soviets were also common. My aunt Klári, for example, was raped by a group of about six soldiers in the final days of hostilities, after the neighborhood in Buda where

she had been hiding to avoid deportation had been captured by the Soviets, but she couldn't return to her family in Pest, where there were still raging battles. Rapes and robberies notwithstanding, Jews, like my father and even Klári, were grateful to the Russians for saving their lives by liberating them from the Arrow Cross terror, a feeling that even fear of the Red Army's frequent lawlessness and brutality couldn't completely override.

While receiving that loaf of bread evokes a number of associations, of all my memories of those initial months after our liberation, my mother's return from the concentration camp stands out the most starkly. One day in mid-May, 1945, I was at home with Grandma, my father having gone to collect fire wood from ruined buildings. The door to our apartment was open, and I was sitting in front of it on a footstool on the open walkway that wrapped around an interior courtyard, one walkway per floor. I was playing with my wooden building blocks, enjoying the nice spring weather, when I noticed Juci, the wife of my mother's brother, coming toward me, followed by a strange woman wearing a trench coat and a kerchief over her crew-cut hair. I greeted Juci, but had no idea who the other person was. "Andris, don't you recognize me?" she said, reaching out to embrace me. In my confusion, I jumped up and bolted into the apartment, "Grandma, aunt Juci is here with a stranger who says she knows me." Grandma went out to investigate. "Kató, I can't believe my eyes!" she shrieked with joy, throwing her arms around my mother.

Back in November, no one had ever explained my mother's disappearance to me. All I knew was that one evening she tucked me in, and the next morning she was gone. My father and grandmother knew only that generally deportees were assembled at a brick factory on the northern outskirts of the city, and from there taken to destinations unknown. Beyond that, they didn't know where my mother could be or, indeed, whether she was even alive. All they ever told me was that she had left to do some work, and would be back "soon." Of course, as that "soon" stretched to weeks and months, I became increasingly puzzled by her absence. Although I have no doubt that my mother's troubled personality was the main reason for our lack of closeness in later life, it is possible that some residual resentment over her disappearance in 1944 contributed to it.

As much as the events I had directly witnessed during the war affected me, the psychological impact of my relatives' wartime sufferings was no less real, especially my mother's. This is not to say that I had a detailed knowledge of the specifics. Indeed, my family did its best to keep a blanket of silence over what had happened to us, but from time to time hints, references, and anecdotes inevitably got out from under that blanket. Even the anecdotes, though, were never about the most horrible things, but about survival, how they'd overcome the odds.

My family was not alone in this. Like most Jews in Hungary, probably like

most persecuted Jews in Europe, my parents tried to look forward instead of backward. But our memories of 1944 were inescapable, no matter how much silence surrounded them. Those memories were so ingrained in us that they seemed to emanate from our bodies. Indeed, I didn't have to know all the specifics of what had happened to my mother to be affected by the awareness that she'd been in a concentration camp. As it turns out, I finally learned what she'd been through in great detail some forty years later, when I recorded her recollections.

Compared to most Jewish families, we had been lucky: everyone in my immediate family survived. In my extended family, though, my maternal grandmother's two brothers were murdered in Auschwitz, and the husband of my mother's younger sister perished in a horrible Ukrainian labor camp. "Only" three deaths how sad that a family should consider that lucky.

I was born during the war, and most of my first memories are related to it. It is almost the starting point for me, the primeval chaos from which I emerged. As much as other influences have affected my inner world over the course of my life, it has remained a crucial reference point that informed my opinions and decisions. For long periods I rebelled against this influence, and tried to convince myself that it had ceased to be important to me, but eventually I came to realize that it is as much a part of my makeup as my genes.

During the war and its immediate aftermath, we regarded the events of our persecution as concrete and specific, devoid of the generalization and historical labels they later acquired as personal experiences evolved into collective memory, and reportage into historiography. On those rare occasions when the Yellow-Star House, labor service, deportation, and concentration camp came up in conversation, we talked about them as specific places and events, not as parts of the "Holocaust" or "Shoah," terms that wouldn't come into use in this context for many years. We didn't even refer to ourselves as survivors, a term that as far as I can recall was also not used at the time.

Not until around 1980 was it recognized that the trauma of the Holocaust experience affected the children of the survivors as well. Perhaps the first book devoted to this subject was Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust. Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*, an account of a series of personal encounters, published in 1979. It didn't yet refer to those children as "second generation survivors," but subsequent literature about the Holocaust did in order to distinguish them from their parents, the "first generation," for whom persecution was a personal experience. Several of those books focused on the effects of the traumatic past on the second generation, and that generation's responsibility to its received memories.

Even today, when the term "survivor" is common usage in the context of the Holocaust, I have trouble applying it to my parents, let alone myself. For one thing, I don't consider myself a survivor, because my life was never in serious

danger, not even in the Ghetto. I have an even greater problem thinking of myself as a "second generation survivor," which not only seems to me too generalized and abstract to cover my concrete experience, but intellectually suspect as well. Do the children of Holocaust survivors possess a sufficient number of shared features and problems to constitute a distinct social group? This is an especially relevant question considering that members of this group come from various countries with substantially different Holocaust histories. If they can be considered a social group at all, they certainly present a less well-defined one than the "first generation," whose experience was, after all, based on events they themselves had lived through. The second-generation experience, on the other hand, is primarily internal, and displays problems that are hard to pin down and categorize.

Strictly speaking, I belong to the first generation, since I was born during the war and the worst persecution of my family occurred within my lifetime. Although I witnessed certain aspects of that persecution, I belong at least as much to the second generation, since the rest of my family's trials especially my mother's I know only through stories told to me. In reading about that generation, I realized that while some of my responses to my Holocaust inheritance are typical of them, other shared features mentioned in the literature seem alien to my experience. For example, I've never displayed signs of a transmission of trauma, the effect of the parents' psychological scars on their children, even though, according to the literature, it is one of the common problems afflicting people like me. I have my share of psychological scars, as I mentioned, but they're related to my own experience, and hardly to stories heard from my parents.

On the other hand, my need to try to make sense of my parents' experience, to understand it, decode it, interpret it, and contemplate its significance is apparently typical of this group. And my difficult relationship with my mother might also be in part a shared feature. Of course, shifting balances of attachment and autonomy dominate all people's relationships to their parents, but the tensions resulting from such opposing forces are generally more painful for the children of Holocaust survivors. They certainly have been extremely painful for me.

It is probably also typical that I tend to be more self-reflective and psychologically oriented than my parents were. I know from other relatives that even before the war my mother was as impulsive, argumentative, easily offended, and prone to temper tantrums as in the postwar period. She was never given to introspection or self-analysis. But then, there was not much psychological awareness in prewar Hungarian society in general, even among the educated.

I suspect that my parents, like so many other survivors, never gave much thought to the interpretive implications of their experiences in 1944. According

to the literature, it is equally common that children of the survivors begin to be preoccupied with these issues only when they reach middle age. This was certainly the case with me, although this might also reflect a tendency typical of everyone: people generally start developing an interest in their past at 40 or 50 years of age.

Even before 1944, my parents, like all Hungarian Jews, had to cope with anti-Semitic prejudice and increasingly severe anti-Jewish laws; nevertheless, the stories they told me about their prewar lives, such as the accounts of their frequent hiking, skiing, and rowing trips, registered in me as wonderful fables of a Paradise lost. On the other hand, the stories about the fatal year of 1944 were not at all fables for me, but almost like reality experienced by myself. I was especially struck by the innumerable indignities of their daily lives, such as the prohibition against owning a telephone, a radio, a bicycle, a boat (previously rowing had been one of their favorite recreational activities), using a cab and public pools, and entering most coffeehouses and restaurants, to mention a few. Even more than the obviously dramatic events, these seemingly less significant details amaze me. How could a civilized country in the middle of Europe do this to its citizens?

Although my parents told me few details of their wartime persecution, I seem to have been instinctively drawn to the subject already in my youth. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain why those stories stayed with me, and so much else did not. It is almost as if I had been preparing for a time when reconstructing the past would become a major project in my life. As is typical for children of survivors, however, my thought process evolved in the opposite direction from that of my parents: while they first experienced the particulars and then the feelings those events elicited, in me the feelings came first and the curiosity about the particulars only later.

My goal in trying to decode my personal and received memories of 1944 is not to perpetuate a trauma or to suggest that the sufferings of my parents' generation of Jews in any way justifies special consideration for their descendants. I don't even wish to argue whether or not the Holocaust was unique among genocides, although I can't think of another example of its scale, industrial efficiency, its spread to a substantial part of supposedly "cultured" Europe, and its near "success." Even the greatest epidemics and natural disasters eventually become merely history, as those affected give rise to successive generations. So will it inevitably be with the Holocaust, which is still very real to me, is still relevant to my children, and perhaps even to my grandchildren, although by then only as a very distant part of their family heritage. After that, the personal strands connecting my descendants to those long-ago events will probably be no longer felt.

My personal experience with the Holocaust pales in comparison to the sufferings of others. Even so, I feel an obligation to pass on to future

generations the insight my experience has given me, in the hope that what I have learned might advance an understanding of prevailing problems, and by no means only Jewish ones, which in turn might lead to solutions to those problems. I'm here referring mainly to problems arising from prejudice, exclusionary attitudes toward minorities, and the transformation of minorities into scapegoats allegedly to blame for traumas of national history, frustrations, and all kinds of other griefs (again allegedly) afflicting the nation. Also, I hope to make it clearer that words have real consequences. Although it is untrue that anti-Semitic demagoguery during the decades preceding the Holocaust in Hungary led directly to that cataclysm, it is clear that without the prevalence of such rhetoric, the general population would not have been so receptive to the deprivation of the basic rights of its Jewish fellow citizens, their deportations and murder.

Christmas

In December 1944, I was in the Ghetto with my father and maternal grandmother, sharing a crowded room with a bunch of strangers. Long after our liberation, Grandma reminded me of when I had heard some of the adults in that room mention the approach of Christmas and had asked her whether we would have a tree and receive presents. The previous Christmas must have made a great impression on me, because otherwise, at four years of age, I certainly wouldn't have been able to recall it after the passage of a year. Apu and Grandma did their best to reassure me that, while we couldn't celebrate Christmas here in the Ghetto, we'd soon be going home, and next year everything would be back to normal: tree, presents, and all. On the eve of the holiday, Grandma gave me two spoonsful of jam as opposed to my usual daily treat, a single spoonful, and Apu made a drawing of a nicely decorated Christmas tree with lots of presents under it.

In the U.S. very few Jews celebrate Christmas; the rare exceptions can be found mostly among immigrants like me and my German-born parents-in-law, for whom it is a family tradition. Some of their children, like my own daughters, continue this custom, but this is even rarer. In Hungary, however, especially in Budapest, the celebration of Christmas and even Easter by assimilated Jews in a quasi-secular way, without Church attendance of course, was anything but unusual. Nearly all my parents' Jewish friends observed these holidays, as did we. Even my maternal grandmother, who had grown up in a highly religious household in Moson and held on to vestiges of Jewish religious practices all her life, began celebrating Christmas after she moved to Budapest in 1911. The gathering of Jewish families around Christmas trees became an increasingly common custom by the beginning of the twentieth century, and

represented a step in the assimilation process. In most cases, however, it didn't mean that those families were about to give up their Jewish identity and convert to one of the Christian denominations. Indeed, in many families the observance of some of the Jewish holidays in fact peacefully coexisted with the celebration of Christmas. My grandmother, for example, fasted on Yom Kippur and prepared for a simplified Passover Seder (which she was hard put to convince family members to participate in), but when Christmas rolled around, she decorated a tree, baked *bejgli* (a filled pastry roulade—a Hungarian Christmas tradition), and joined the rest of the family singing *Mennyből az angyal* (The angel has descended from heaven), a song about the three wise men on their way to Bethlehem. She even prepared jellied fish every year for the Christmas Eve dinner, a custom of Gentiles for whom it is a fasting day.

For Jews to feel deprived of their traditional Christmas celebrations in the Ghetto, where it was impossible to ignore the simple fact of their Jewish lineage, is paradoxical enough. Even more telling of this deep emotional attachment is a story I heard from my aunt Margit, the wife of Pali Körner, Apu's younger brother.

In the fall of 1944, while Pali was away at a series of labor camps, Margit, faced with increasingly life-threatening persecution, had to come up with a survival strategy, which was complicated by the fact that she also had to take care of her elderly mother and four-month-old daughter. Her Jewish friend Kató Neumann, who was in less danger because of her Gentile husband, had been trying for several months to convince Margit to move to her villa near Pasarét, an outlying section of the city, where she had been courageously hiding several Jews. Margit initially considered this too risky, but in November, after acquiring forged documents "proving" her and her mother's Christian origins, she accepted the offer.

By that time, thousands upon thousands of Gentiles from all over the country had crowded the capital to escape from the fighting and the approaching Soviet Army. In mid-December, when the Soviets had already surrounded half of the city and a complete blockade was a matter of days, a new law was passed aimed at separating legitimate refugees from army deserters and others staying in the capital unlawfully. It required all refugees to present their documents for authorization. According to Margit's forged papers, she was from Kunmadaras, a small town in a remote part of the country, so she went to the *elöljáróság* (District Magistrate) on Böszörményi Road to present the documents. She was well aware of the danger of being found out, but she knew that, with Budapest largely cut off from the rest of the country, her claim would be nearly impossible to check. She decided to take the risk because a stamp of authorization would make her much safer. She even took her daughter Mari, hoping that the sight of a bundled-up baby would make her refugee status seem more convincing. It was very hot in the

Magistrate's office, so she placed Mari on a table and undid the scarf in which the baby was wrapped. While the secretaries were playing with Mari, the supervising official questioned Margit about Kunmadaras to test the veracity of her claim of being a refugee from there.

"You're from Kunmadaras?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You know, my dear, I used to hunt there some years ago, but I can no longer recall the name of the landowner on whose property we hunted."

"I don't know which landowner you mean: Mr. Ménesi or Mr. Csávás," answered Margit, suspecting that the fellow had never hunted in Kunmadaras and was merely bluffing to test her.

"You're right, my dear" he said, "I hunted on the property of Csávás." And without further ado he stamped and signed Margit's documents.

By the final weeks of December, the fighting had reached the outskirts of the city. On the morning of the twenty-fourth, the eight Jews hiding in Kató's villa were commenting on how loud and more frequent the sounds of canon fire were getting, a noise punctuated at times by ear-splitting explosions.

"This is music to my ears! It can only mean our plight will be over soon," one of them said.

"Right, provided some busy-body neighbor doesn't get suspicious about so many people living here. And what if we're raided by Arrow-cross thugs?"

"Hey, guys, let me change the subject: do you realize it's Christmas Eve, and we don't even have a tree. That's just awful," another of the eight piped in.

There was a long silence, then Margit said: "As long as the artillery's not right on top of us, I'll try getting a tree."

The others, especially Margit's mother, begged her not to take such a crazy risk, but she was determined. "I'll be all right; after all, I have excellent documents."

From the front yard gate she could survey the entire length of the very short *Napraforgó* (Sunflower) Street. It was completely deserted, there wasn't a soul anywhere in sight. Clearly, no one dared to go out unless absolutely necessary. The only sign of life was the smoke rising from the chimneys of the elegant, modern villas lining the street.

Margit pulled her scarf to cover her mouth from the biting cold, and she hurried to Pasaréti Road, the nearest wide street. There, she looked around again. All she saw were Hungarian and German military vehicles periodically racing by and a few people anxiously hurrying along the sidewalks, but no Christmas tree vendor. She walked a few blocks, but when she noticed a group of armed Arrow Cross guards coming in her direction, she quickly turned into a side street leading to Hidegkúti (today, Hűvösvölgyi) Road, a roughly parallel thoroughfare.

There she eventually did find a tree vendor who was also selling chestnuts

roasting on a cylinder stove, over which she was rubbing her hands to keep warm. The trees were a bit shabby, so Margit examined them until she found one to her liking.

"Fine, fine, it's a deal. I might as well be giving it away," the vendor grudgingly responded to Margit's attempt at bargaining. "I'm packing it in soon anyway, even if I have some trees left. I heard the Russians already occupied Budakeszi [a town just past the city limits], and supposedly some of them are even closer," she said as she fastened the branches against the trunk with a string. "I'm not hanging around here, it's getting too dangerous. I'm not risking my neck for whatever I could get for these last few trees. Besides I've got to get ready for mass. You heard on the radio, didn't you? No midnight mass. Christmas mass in all the churches is in the afternoon. You better get going too, if you want to set up the tree before mass." She handed Margit the tree. "Here, take this small bag of chestnuts. No charge. I hope this war is over soon, because the way things are... What kind of a life is this? Maybe God will give us a Christmas present: peace."

The icy wind was becoming more and more unpleasant. With one arm wrapped around the tree and her other hand clasping her collar to keep out the wind, Margit hurried back to Kató's villa. There she was greeted with loud cheers. Two of the men made an improvised tree stand out of some scraps of wood, while Kató retrieved the box of decorations she would store after each Christmas. Everyone wanted to participate in decorating the tree. In the meantime, a friend of Kató phoned to tell her that Soviet soldiers were spotted as close as the Szépilona streetcar depot. The artillery noise was getting louder and more frequent, but the eight Jews in the villa ignored it. Their attention was focused on the Christmas tree, its glittering decorations and the flickering flames of the candles. They sang some Christmas carols and embraced one another. As they stood surrounding the tree, silently staring at its candles and thinking of family members, many of them deported or hiding elsewhere, the tears made the images of the flames fragment into innumerable dancing spots of light.

Margit had her share of worries too, about Pali and other family members, but she appeared satisfied, almost happy. She was convinced that having a Christmas tree and commemorating the birth of a Jew who lived nearly 2,000 years ago was something worth risking her life for.

In Hitler's Berlin

An invitation from Frida néni (Auntie Frida) for lunch or afternoon tea always meant an adventure. She was my maternal grandmother's roughly eighty-year-old first cousin, a tiny woman with a never-smiling face and bulging, thick

glasses. By this time, around 1960, she lived in a studio apartment subdivided from her large one for privacy, when she and her husband were forced by the Communist system to accommodate lodgers. She probably never could cook very well—before the war she had servants to do the cooking—but by the early sixties her poor eyesight made it difficult for her to follow recipes and perhaps even to select the right ingredients from the cupboard. Be that as it may, whatever she prepared for us was well-nigh inedible. At the dining table, she usually talked to my mother (my father, who was bored by these family gatherings, usually stayed home, claiming that he had to work to meet some deadline), and since she paid little attention to me and my two siblings we would stuff the cookies into our pockets to make it appear is if we had eaten them. It was harder to make warm lunch courses or the dessert pudding, to which Frida occasionally treated us, disappear, and only my brother had the courage to carry his plate in secret to the bathroom and flush its contents down the toilet. Of course we three youngsters were constantly grimacing, whispering to each other, and stifling laughter when we knew that Frida néni wouldn't notice.

Although my siblings and I knew that both of Frida's children had perished in labor camps during the Second World War, we had trouble fully comprehending what this meant for her. We had little patience for her dour demeanor and constant complaining about all aspects of daily life, both during the relatively rare lunches at her place and her more frequent, typically weekly or biweekly, visits to our mother. Had she shown the slightest interest in us perhaps we would have felt more empathy for her, but after perfunctorily greeting us, she merely chatted with Anyu (mommy in Hungarian). So I occupied myself with other things but now and then I noticed her start crying, probably when the conversation turned to her children or her general loneliness. The sight of that only increased my discomfort with her.

Of the millions whose lives were spared but devastated by the war, few were as affected by that cataclysm as Frida and her husband. Before the war they were the only wealthy members of my family. He not only inherited 100,000 Pengős from his father, which was an incredibly large sum of money at the time, he also drew a large pension from a bank where he had been the director of stock trading. In addition to losing their children in the war, they also lost all their wealth, including their large, elegant villa, which was confiscated by the Gestapo during the German occupation of Hungary. They were given two hours to vacate, and were allowed to take no more than personal belongings that could fit in two small suitcases. As a final blow, the villa was partially destroyed by artillery fire in the battle for Budapest. Their misery continued during the Communist dictatorship. Not only did the stocks and bonds of his inheritance become worthless, they, as former members of the bourgeoisie, also had to worry constantly about *kitelepítés*, the forced

exile of "class enemies" to remote villages. No wonder they were such bitter and frightened people.

One day, about three years after Frida's husband died, her neighbor realized she hadn't seen Frida for several days and noticed a strange smell coming from the apartment. She called the police and when they opened the entrance door they found her lying dead on the floor. According to the doctor whom they called to verify the death, she had been dead for three or four days.

It fell mostly to my mother to sort through Frida's possessions and decide what to keep, what to sell, and what to throw out. I went with Anyu to the apartment to help her, and one of the things we found was a big box full of old newspapers, mostly news reports from Berlin that Feri, her younger son, a journalist, had written in the 1930s. Most of the articles were reports about everyday life under Hitler, written in a cheerful, appreciative way. Of the many articles, I best recall one about the "strong, handsome, young Aryan people, wonderful representatives of a new Germany" marching in a stadium during the Berlin Olympics, while a benignly smiling Hitler waved to them from his elevated grandstand. It would be an exaggeration to call the articles Nazi propaganda, but certainly they included not a word of criticism about Hitler's Germany. The strange articles piqued my curiosity, and since I knew practically nothing about Feri except that he had died in a labor camp, I asked Anyu to tell me what she knew about him.

"We were good friends; he was my favorite cousin," she started. "Feri was short like his parents, a gentle, goodhearted kid, whose delicate, handsome face was only marred by being cross-eyed. He studied engineering in Germany, but instead of pursuing engineering, he became a journalist, the correspondent of a German-language paper published in Budapest. At the time I didn't know that he was a homosexual. People kept those things private; in fact I only learned about it a few years ago from Susie. [Susie was Feri's Romanian-born sister-in-law who preferred to use the German version of her given name.] Feri frequently talked about his girlfriends: he was invited to a party by *this* woman, he was going to the theater with *that* woman, and so on. But they were just friends he used as alibis to keep his homosexuality secret from the family. His parents never, not even after his death, admitted that he was gay. You know how prejudiced most people in Hungary were against homosexuals even at the time you were growing up; it was even worse before the war. No wonder gays and their immediate families tried to hide these things.

"Whether he had homosexual relationships already in Hungary I don't know, but according to Susie in Berlin he was definitely part of a circle of gay friends, many of them Nazis. Those friends protected him, so, amazingly enough, he was able to remain in Berlin until 1938 or even early 1939, years after Hitler came to power in 1933. Feri was still officially Jewish during his Berlin years; he converted only later, in 1942 or so. Finally, perhaps after

seeing the pogrom of the November 1938 *Kristallnacht*, Feri realized it was too dangerous for him to remain in Berlin any longer. So he returned to Budapest, but stayed there only for a short time. Since he spoke French just as fluently as German, the *8 órai újság* ("Eight O'clock Newspaper") sent him to Paris as their correspondent in 1940. In 1943, however, he returned to Hungary at the request of his father, who wanted him to be nearby. Although by that time the pro-German Vichy government had adopted an anti-Semitic policy in the part of France controlled by them, Hungary was no paradise either. Feri's parents must have known that he, a recently converted Jew, would be unlikely to find work in Hungary. They also must have known that probably he would have to serve in a labor camp, as his older brother had already been forced to do. By that time, they may even have been notified of the brother's death in a horrible labor camp in Ukraine, where he froze to death in the winter of 1942/1943. Seeing the awful situation in Hungary, Feri wanted to go to Spain as a correspondent, but he was no longer allowed to go, even though he had a Spanish visa. Some time after the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, he contacted Councilor Wolf, one of his secretly gay acquaintances from his Berlin days. Wolf was now working in the German headquarters on Budapest's Castle Hill. Feri asked for his help so that he would be able to leave Hungary. Although they were good friends, Wolf refused, perhaps because by that time it was no longer possible to help or it would have been too risky even for him.

"Finally, during the fall of 1944, he was called up for labor service. Perhaps he first served at another place, I'm not sure of this, but by early December he was certainly in the Ágfalva camp, very near the Austrian border, where they had to dig trenches in bitter cold winter weather, working in deep snow, to keep the Soviet tanks from advancing west. They got very little food, only two cups of thin vegetable soup and a little bread for a whole day. They were half-frozen, starved, and broken in spirit due to frequent beatings and other mistreatment by the guards. Feri didn't have a robust constitution. He'd never been interested in sports. He couldn't keep up with the strain of the work and the circumstances for long. By January a typhoid epidemic was raging among the run-down, badly clothed camp inmates. He contracted the disease and died of it in the first days of February 1945. A surviving campmate later told Susie that Feri had suffered terribly, and his comrades in the camp could hardly endure listening night after night to his nonstop delirious screaming of 'mommy, my mommy.' Like all the others, more than 800 people, who had died in that camp, he was buried in a mass grave, but was exhumed in early 1947 and reburied in Budapest."

I was stunned listening to my mother's story. Although aware that gays had been persecuted in Nazi Germany, many of them sent to concentration camps, even executed, I knew nothing about the secret gay life in Hitler's Berlin or the participation of some Nazis and SS members in it. I found it amazing that Feri,

a Jew and a foreign citizen, had been able to remain in Berlin not only after Hitler had become chancellor, but also after the 1935 introduction of the Nurnberg laws (although they probably didn't apply to a Hungarian citizen), and perhaps even after the Kristallnacht. Although I had read about the "Night of the Long Knives," also known as the Röhm-putsch, when Hitler ordered the murder of Ernst Röhm, one of the earliest Nazi leaders and an open homosexual, and his supporters, many of them also gays, I would have assumed that it was impossible for a gay Jew, like Feri, to live in Berlin following that massacre. But clearly I was wrong: his friends were able protect him and he was able to continue earning a living, since he worked for a Hungarian newspaper and not a German one.

Of course, in addition to the box of newspapers, my mother and I found many photos of Feri himself among Frida néni's belongings. Perhaps the most interesting and certainly the strangest picture, however, was not one of Feri. It depicts the profile of a bearded man in front of the head of a sculpture of Jesus, similarly in profile, with the crown of thorns on his head. The two profiles clearly resemble each other, and obviously the photo was intended to highlight this resemblance. The fellow in the photo must have played Jesus in some of the famous Passion Play performances held once every ten years at Oberammergau, a small town in Bavaria, Germany, because on the back was written, "Alois Lang, the Jesus of Oberammergau. Property of Ferenc Doros [Feri's full name], Berlin W. 15. Schaperstrasse 22." He clearly treasured the photo, since he had kept it up to his death. Knowing what I know about Feri, I wouldn't be surprised if he had a crush on this guy. What a paradox: a gay Jew having a crush on Jesus or at least on his impersonator on stage.

I have another old photo, this one inherited from my mother decades later, taken in 1927 and showing the huge courtyard at the center of the Moson house that Riza néni, my great-grandmother, shared with her sisters. Riza is surrounded in the picture by four of her grandchildren: my mother and her siblings. Feri, the grandson of Riza's sister, is also there, affectionately embracing one of my aunts. It is such a peaceful scene. Clearly, all of them felt that nothing could threaten their world. Riza néni, who died in peace in 1938, just in time to miss the anti-Jewish laws in Hungary, would have been horrified to know the things that were to come. Although her grandchildren survived the Holocaust, an accomplishment in itself considering the circumstances, their lives were turned upside down by persecution. They all went through things they were reluctant to reveal even in front of close family members. Feri was the only one to die, but what a paradoxical life he had lived before his horrible death. Life doesn't get much stranger than that.

Thinking of my mother, her siblings, and Feri always brings to my mind some of the lines from Bertolt Brecht's poem "An die Nachgeborenen" ("To Those Born After"), which he wrote in Danish exile, probably in 1939:

Ihr, die ihr auftauchen werdet aus der Flut
In der wir untergegangen sind
Gedenkt
Wenn ihr von unseren Schwächen sprecht
Auch der finsteren Zeit
Der ihr entronnen seid.

In Scott Horton's translation:

You, who shall resurface following the flood
In which we have perished,
Contemplate,
When you speak of our weaknesses,
Also the dark time
That you have escaped.

We Lutherans...

"I see you have the necessary doctor's certificate for your son to start school a few months before his sixth birthday," the clerk at my neighborhood elementary school told my mother when she took me to register in August 1946. "Now, would you hand me your son's birth certificate? Well, it says here that your son is Lutheran," she continued, pointing at the document, "so for his weekly religion class András will be in the Lutheran group." This was common procedure at the time when compulsory religious education, called *hit- és erkölcstan* (study of religion and morals), was still part of the curriculum. According to this recent copy of my birth certificate my current religion was indeed Lutheran, but had my mother shown the original of the document from 1940, it would have been immediately clear that I had been born Jewish.

"Welcome to our school András," the woman said. "This is a big milestone in your life: you have become a schoolboy! I am sure you will like Mrs. Koppány, your general teacher. Make sure you are in school at least ten minutes before eight every morning on schooldays. Don't be late! Here is a list of the things you will have to bring on the first day: schoolbag, ruler, copybook, and the like. Your mother will help you buy them. It has been a pleasure meeting you, and I am looking forward to seeing you again in a few days."

My mother kept diligently nodding at everything the woman said. She didn't mention that she, my father, and I had only become Lutherans in 1944, and not out of any religious conviction, but in the hope that this could help us at the time of anti-Jewish persecution. Although I had memories of the Ghetto and

knew perfectly well what kind of a Lutheran I was, it would have been inappropriate for me, a small child, to contradict my mother. But it probably didn't even occur to me to go into such explanations. I was Lutheran now, I thought, so it was only natural that I would attend that class.

From my conversations with other members of the Lutheran group, it soon became obvious to me that quite a few of them were of Jewish descent. This was not surprising since there were many converted Jewish families in my school district, which was in a neighborhood in which Jews represented slightly more than a third of the population. Some of them had converted to other religions out of conviction, but most of them, like us, because they thought this would make their lives easier and help them survive the hard times of the recent war. I wouldn't be surprised if even the minister who taught us had suspected the background of many of his students. Probably the proportion of kids of Jewish descent was lower in the Roman Catholic group, since fewer converting Jews chose Catholicism, perhaps because it had been generally easier to convert to Lutheranism and the Reformed Church than to Catholicism. But be that as it may, there I was diligently learning about Martin Luther and singing Evangelical Lutheran hymns. To this day, I can recite *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* and a few other hymns in Hungarian.

Everything went well for me in the Lutheran class until I stupidly repeated to the minister my father's comment that it would be better if I went hiking on Sunday instead to religious service, which, like religious education, was mandatory. Our school reports even included the number of religious services missed, and whether or not our parents had sent notes to the teacher to justify the particular absence. The minister sent a written complaint to my parents and asked my father to come in to discuss the matter. My atheist father, who wasn't enthusiastic about the idea of compulsory religious education in the first place and wasn't looking forward to meeting with the minister, kept postponing it until finally everyone involved seemed to have forgotten the problem. Three years later, when religion classes became elective, my parents did not sign me up for them.

For the time being, however, I continued attending the Lutheran group, and sure enough soon I ran into another conflict concerning those studies. This time it happened at home. One day I came home from school and, as usual, my mother asked me about the events in class. "We Lutherans got candy, but the Jews didn't," I reported what seemed the most important event for me, a candy addict. "You rotten kid, I'll teach you what kind of a Lutheran you are, so you never say something like that again, ever!" screamed my mother, giving me a quick slap across the face for added emphasis. "Don't you remember the Ghetto and the yellow star?" she yelled. Of course I remembered, but now I was going to Lutheran class, so I had trouble understanding what got her so excited. After all, she was the one who sent me there in the first place.

Naturally, had my mother been so determined for me to study in the Jewish group, she could have suggested to my father that we should officially return to the Jewish faith or, if that seemed too much trouble, she at the very least could have told the school administrator that we were in fact Jewish and our conversion had been merely a wartime attempt to improve our lot. Decades later, I asked my mother why she agreed to have me go to the Lutheran group. "The war had only recently ended, and I felt that it was better for you if you weren't known as a Jew, because, who knows, the whole anti-Jewish hysteria could start all over again," she answered. Of course there was residual anti-Semitism in Hungary, and there were even dozens of isolated cases of anti-Jewish violence in the provinces in 1945 and 46, a few of which even resulted in killings. Nevertheless, these were local aberrations, since government-sponsored anti-Jewish measures had been totally discredited in the recent war. There was virtually no chance that anti-Semitism could return in any organized form in the foreseeable future, since the new government not only strongly condemned it, but, for the first time in Hungarian history, made it unlawful. My mother's fear therefore had little to do with external reality and a lot with the deep psychological wounds left by her recent persecution.

Looking back, however, I find my own choice of words and their underlying sentiment just as revealing as my mother's violent reaction to what I said. By saying "we Lutherans" I tried to ally myself with Hungary's Christian majority, and by referring to Jews as "them" I instinctively tried to disassociate myself from them. That Jews represented a rather substantial minority in my school, about a third of the kids or perhaps even a bit more, didn't alter my feelings. In my view, reinforced by my memories of the war, Jews were a group that tended to be excluded by the majority and beaten up by them, both literally and figuratively. I doubt that my way of putting the issue had anything to do with Jewish self-hatred; it was simply a reflection of a child's desire to fit in: no kid enjoys being the odd man out. In a way, my naïve pretense that I indeed belonged in the Lutheran class was, like my mother's decision to send me there, a response, perhaps self-deluding, but nevertheless a response, to our recent traumatic experiences.

Such an instinctive desire to be part of the majority could have smoldered in me even earlier, at least this is what an anecdote told to me by my mother about our wartime experiences appears to suggest. In the Yellow-Star House where we lived between June and late November in 1944, Jews and Gentiles sat in separate corners of the air-raid shelter, an arrangement suggested by a government decree. The Christians set up an improvised altar in their section: a table adorned with a crucifix and candles. People were kneeling in front of it, praying for God's protection against the bombs. Of course, if people in the shelters of other houses prayed the same way, God must have had a hard time

deciding what to do, because the bombs did, after all, destroy lots of apartment houses and killed many of their inhabitants.

I had no idea what praying was, but the strange sight of people kneeling, pressing their palms together, and mumbling what sounded like magical incantations to themselves in the flickering candlelight appealed to me. When I looked around and saw a bunch of sullen people huddled in the dark on one side and this candle-lit ritual on the other, I couldn't resist. I went over and knelt down, palms together, mumbling nonsense syllables alongside the praying Christians. My parents, as my mother later confessed to me, hadn't been pleased with me for doing that, but they had never tried to stop me, because they had been concerned that this would offend the Christians' religious sensitivities.

But getting back to the story about candy-distribution at school: although the way I reported it to my mother wasn't outright anti-Semitic, its exclusionary implication of "we" versus "them" was not so far from it. This makes me realize how easy it is to make such comments, or even worse ones, if we simply follow our instincts in what we say without thinking of its thrust. And if lots of people make such seemingly innocuous comments, it can eventually even lead to real exclusion. ❧

Kati Gartner – Irma Hollander – Nomi Gur

On the Holocaust: In Three Tonalities

1.
Zsuzsi
Kati Gartner

There were five of us, I was many years younger than my sisters. One of my sisters, Zsuzsi, was pregnant when she arrived in Auschwitz.

The four of us did everything we could to save her from the selection. The first time we pulled it off too. During the endless *Appells*, where we had to

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Kati Gartner, Irma Hollander** and **Nomi Gur
are Hungarian Holocaust survivors. In 2013, excerpts from interviews with them were published in Lányok, anyák: Elmeséletlen női történetek *("Daughters, Mothers: Untold Stories by Jewish Women"), a collection of accounts of the Holocaust from women's perspectives. Kati Gartner and three of her four sisters survived the camps. Immediately after the war Gartner resolved to leave Europe for Palestine, and she has been living in Israel since 1948. Irma Hollander survived the camps and the death march with her two close friends at her side. She returned to Budapest to see if any other members of her family had survived. She soon joined a Zionist group and left for Palestine. She studied to become a pre-school teacher in Tel Aviv. Today she lives on the Kfar Glykson Kibbutz. Nomi Gur was in the Budapest ghetto with her mother when the city was liberated. Soon after the war she joined a left-wing Zionist youth group. She helped rear and educate children in a children's home in Lilllafüred. In the spring of 1949 she left Hungary illegally. She lived on a kibbutz in Israel for a time and later studied psychology at various universities in Israel. Today she lives in Ramat Gan near Tel Aviv, where she works as a psychologist, teaches at a university, and writes. Katalin Pécsi is a literary historian and editor. She is one of the founders of the Esztertáska Foundation and the EszterHáz Society, civil organizations that deal with problems faced by Jewish women. In 2007,* Sós kávé: Elmeséletlen női történetek *(*Salty Coffee: Untold Stories by Jewish Women*, 2007) was published, a collection of accounts compiled by Pécsi that attempts to compensate for the relative lack of women's voices in Jewish literature.* Lányok, anyák *is a continuation of this effort.*

stand naked for hours, we sisters always remained together and tried to hide Zsuzsi's belly with our bodies. But as it grew, it was harder and harder to keep her pregnancy secret, and at the next selection poor Zsuzsi was sent to the hospital barrack.

When the selection had ended, the four of us immediately ran to the hospital barrack, and we told the Polish nurse—she was a prisoner too, like us—to help us get Zsuzsi out. She didn't want to help, at which, without a moment's hesitation, we pressed her against the wall and threatened her, "we'll kill you here and now if you don't help!"

So she helped. We managed to squeeze Zsuzsi, with her big belly, through the bathroom window. One of us pulled from the outside, the others pushed from the inside. Zsuzsi survived that selection. She came back to our barrack, we were together again.

Then at the next selection they sent her to the gas chamber.

2.
Gróf, Gerő and Hollander
Irma Hollander

The happiest period of my life was the six months in Birkenau, from May to October, when I slept on a plank-bed with my mother, and every night we would talk about all sorts of things, whispering to each other.

At home my mother worked too much, and she carried too big a burden on her shoulders to be able to chit-chat with me. She was the only breadwinner. She had a cosmetics salon, and perhaps she had cosmetics to thank for the fact that she looked younger than forty and at the first selection she was able to remain with the younger women who could work...

But then, at the next selection, they pulled her out and sent her to the gas chamber.

I howled and thrashed on the ground from the pain. After losing my mother I did not want to go on living. I just lay on the ground and cried and cried.

Then a girl, Kati Gerő, approached me, a little bit older than I was, and she complimented my eyes. Said that she had noticed before how beautiful they were. She told me to "stand in line" with her, that is, that we should be together in the fifth line. Mari Gróf joined us too, a girl my age. She said that her mother had also died here, in the camp, just like mine.

The three of us, Gróf, Gerő, and Hollander, became inseparable. We remained together until the liberation, and for quite some time after the liberation, on the long road home. My "camp sisters" kept me alive. We cared for one another, we supported one another. Mari Gróf was good at telling stories, and she could make you laugh, we even forgot about our hunger at

such times. But Mari could also cry every bit as well as I, each of us as silly as the other! Kati Gerő, she became our "mother." She told us to go bathe, even in the cold, in the snow.

In January '45, we tied pieces of wood to the soles of Mari's feet. Gerő and I pulled her behind us, cause she didn't have shoes anymore and no strength to walk.

And somehow all three of us arrived home.

3.
The Inscrutable Paths of Fate
Nomi Gur

My father was taken to do forced labor. I remained behind with my mother, my sibling, and my grand-parents. My father's boss got us letters of safe passage and we moved into a Swiss protected house on Pozsonyi Street. Our family, what remained of it, was given a corner of a room. The first evening it was terribly cold, I took off the yellow star and snuck back home to get my feather quilt, and I even managed to make it back with it.

The next day Arrow Cross men broke into the building. They said all our family's letters of safe passage were forgeries except for mine. They took all the others with them, leaving me in the apartment alone. I was barely eleven years old. In my desperation I ran into the street after my mother, the Arrow Cross men were already herding the crowd who knows where, and in my desperation I cried out, "mama, mama!" My mother turned to the Arrow Cross men and said, in a calm voice, "This crazy little girl thinks I am her mother, but I have never seen her before in my life." The men dragged me back to the empty building. It was horrible to be left alone, but I was not angry at my mother.

The next day they came again, and my letter of safe passage was no good either and they made me go with them. They drove the group to the bank of the Danube River. It was terribly chaotic, we had to wait. A little truck came, a "gentleman" got out, later it turned out he was Raoul Wallenberg. Using a megaphone, he announced that anyone with a Swedish letter of safe conduct should come forward.

I knew that one of my aunts lived in one of the Swiss protected houses. Without thinking I said her name instead of mine, to this day I do not know where I got this sudden idea and sudden courage. The "gentleman" took my paper, which of course did not have any of my aunt's personal information on it, and it wasn't a Swedish letter either, and he asked, "And this is you?" I answered with a definite yes, but then the Arrow Cross men asked for the paper, and I knew that was it. But before they had a chance to discover that I didn't have a Swedish letter of safe passage, the Arrow Cross man was called

off somewhere, perhaps there had been a telephone call for him, and Wallenberg grabbed my hand and ran with me to the truck.

They took me to an office, probably the Red Cross, where I confessed: I wasn't who I had said I was, and I didn't have a Swedish letter of safe passage. The Red Cross was overcrowded, I wouldn't be able to stay there, so they sent me to the protected house where my aunt lived, on Pozsonyi Street. But there wasn't an inch of space there either, not even for a skinny little girl like me.

In the end, as there was nowhere else to go, I walked to the ghetto to look for what remained of my family. I immediately ran into my mother on Klauzál Street. They had taken them to the ghetto too, and not to the bank of the Danube, where they had taken me.

It was a miracle! My mother had wanted to save me from the bank of the Danube, that was why she had shooed me back to the apartment. And the next day they took me to the Danube after all, and they just about shot me into it. Her group had ended up in the ghetto, and so we all survived...

So who's to say which is the good decision and which the bad. ❧

English Title

A collection of over 30 stories, Salty Coffee *offers glimpses from women's perspectives into life in Jewish communities in Hungary. Translated by Anikó Bakonyi, Ágnes Merényi, Bea Sándor.*

Anna Lengyel Nagy

Everything about My Mother

Etelka Böhm waxed the wooden floor exasperatedly. That week it was her turn to clean up. "This is simply not possible," she thought to herself, enraged. "It's absurd to try to keep this place clean! Look at this apartment! Doesn't matter what you do... they litter, they bring in dirt..."

And she had a point. There were thirty-six people living in the three-bedroom apartment on the second floor of the yellow-star house on Hollán Street, women, the elderly, and children, in total seven different families consisting of several people each shared the mattresses spread out on the floors. The kids were rowdy, the women quarreled over pots and counter space in the kitchen, then returning to their little corners they would pray for news of their husbands or sons, who had been assigned to forced labor service.

"It's not healthy, this cohabitation," Etelka Böhm mumbled as she brushed an unruly curl of hair from her forehead with the back of her hand and continued to shine the floor. She was an attractive young woman, thirty-two years old. Her obsession with cleanliness and orderliness had begun to show itself in her childhood, though it's possible that the workers' housing project on Haller Street where she had grown up had proven even more hopeless than the Hollán Street apartment. She had shared the single room with her parents and her four adult siblings, sleeping on a narrow bed and two couches that completely filled the place. The only thing that was worse than the crowdedness of life in a one-room apartment was the

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Anna Lengyel Nagy

studied English and Hungarian at university and worked as an English instructor before obtaining a position at Magyar Rádió. She has traveled extensively and lived in the United States and Australia. In 2005 her novel Fehér ember a lyukban *("White Person in the Hole") was published. The narrative included here of her mother's defiant, life-saving act of sensible practicality was first published in Hungarian in* Lányok, anyák: Elmeséletlen női történetek *("Daughters, Mothers: Untold Stories of Women").*

bedbugs and cockroaches hiding on the gray floor of the kitchen and in the old couches, and the inextirpable stench of cabbage coming off the walls and even the sheets.

At fifteen years of age, Etelka Böhm had managed to drive her parents from the room once a week. With her brothers' help, she had pushed the furniture to the side and then set about scrubbing the wooden floor with a disinfectant and a scrubbing brush that she had bought with the little bits of money she had managed to set aside.

She did this sedulously for years, but she never gained the upper hand in the struggle against the cockroaches. But she did not give up.

As far back as she could remember, she had always longed to have a separate apartment with its own bathroom, the kind in which everything shimmers, the kind that even has, dear Lord, a foyer!

And she had even gotten one some five years earlier, when she had married András Fekete. Little Anna had been born in the little one-bedroom apartment, which had heating and plumbing, in Nürnberg Street, and this combination-wardrobe-chest-of-drawers bliss might well have lasted until the end of time, but the Germans came, then Szálasi[1] and his men, and, confound it all, they had to move here, into the yellow-star house, though you could easily call it a crazy house too, into this chaos, and all the while... God knows where her husband is, she hasn't gotten news of him for months either.

But you got word of some things. Allegedly an escaped forced labor inmate had told the people in the building next to ours that the Jews from the countryside who had been taken off in cattle cars in the summer had been taken not to work camps but to extermination camps, to Poland and Germany, and they had been killed in gas chambers, and their bodies had been incinerated. And Etelka Böhm had heard from Mór Schwarz, the butcher, that here in Budapest they were gathering the Jews together, driving them down to the Danube and shooting them into it one by one.

Etelka Böhm didn't fall for these kinds of accounts. Of course all kinds of horrors take place in a time of war, and she herself had seen no small share, but that here, in the city of her birth, where there are movies in the movie theaters, everyone is slowly getting ready to buy Christmas presents, the trams and buses are running, the telephones in the telephone booths work, where you can still get food, even detergents, so where basically there is peace, that such a thing would happen, in full view of the pedestrians, innocent people, children shot in the back of the head on the banks of the Danube, it was simply inconceivable. "Nonsense, not possible, not even the Arrow Cross men are

1 ■ Ferenc Szálasi was the leader of the fascist Arrow Cross Party. He was imprisoned by the Hungarian police in 1938 and his party was later banned by Prime Minister Pál Teleki; but in the fall of 1944, following the abdication of Regent Miklós Horthy, he was installed as Prime Minster.

capable of that," Etelka told the butcher, abiding no protest to the contrary. "Quite clearly brazen exaggerations or just hysteria."

In general she did not handle nonsensical things well, she rejected them with her whole being. The yellow star she regarded as nonsensical, but you had to wear that, she wasn't so foolish as not to wear it and in doing so to risk her very life! "This circus will come to an end eventually," she kept repeating to her parents, whom she had brought with her to the Hollán Street apartment, of course, lest they end up among strangers in another yellow-star house. After having lived in Haller Street for thirty-seven years, Igác and Regina Bõhm, confused and stunned, bore the forced change of lodgings, which visibly strained them more than the whole war.

They had just taken Anna over to the neighbor's place, so at least she had time to cook something. She took out the little hotplate, like hell she's going to jostle and shove and quarrel in this kitchen, she can cook a meal for the four of them here, no need to make such a big fuss about it. "I'll make pasta with flour and eggs today," she thought, "I even have some onion and some fat and red paprika. We'll just pretend there's meat."

Her heart sank. How she loved her husband. He adored her paprika dishes, her stews, everything she cooked. Where could he be now? Possibly in the Ukraine, or possibly... The smell of the onion browning in the fat began to fill the room. Etelka shook her head involuntarily. No, nothing bad could happen to her András. He will come back and until then she and little Anna would just have to wait patiently for him. Galvanized, she reached for the box of paprika.

Then she heard the noise. The rumbling sounds of footfalls, boots, on the stairs. The sounds grew stronger, there were shouts, commands, in German and Hungarian, then they burst into the apartment.

There must have been about ten of them, Nazi striplings, gendarmes, and they rounded up everyone in the building. In his alarm, Ignác Bõhm threw on the wrong winter jacket. She quickly dressed Anna, then threw a warm scarf around her neck and they were already being driven down the stairs, everyone from every floor, out the gate, to the end of the street, to Saint István Park.

The people, who had been brought from every direction, were separated into groups. Then the waiting began.

It was cold, there was a light sleet. The people from their building who knew one another well, Igác Bõhm among them, huddled together and shivered, awaiting their fate. Sometimes they thought they heard shots in the distance. Hours passed. In the afternoon it grew dark and wet, a thick fog covered the park. Anna was cold and frightened. She began to cry in her mother's arms.

Etelka Bõhm had never had a sense of danger or fear. Just as she had never had the ability to think through a dangerous plan methodically, weighing all the risks. Heroic bravery was also not part of her nature.

She simply saw, and very clearly at that, that this waiting in the cold had gone on too long and was utterly senseless.

"Excuse me," she turned to the gendarme who was watching them from behind the trees, "we have been here since morning and nothing has happened. Look, my daughter is only two years old, she is crying, she has almost certainly caught a cold. And we have not had anything to eat since morning. Please take us home, we do not live far from here."

"You fucking Jewish whore!" the gendarme shouted. "You want me to caress you too?" And with all his strength he swung the butt of his rifle at her, she was barely able to dodge the blow. She ran back to take refuge among the others. When she felt herself a safe distance from him, she looked back with alarm and noticed that in the increasingly thick fog and darkness she could not make him out, even from only a few meters away.

The idea came from her gut. With a single determined motion, she tore the yellow star from her chest and, quickly ordering her parents and some ten other familiar people from the building to line up behind her, she led the group back to Hollán Street in mute silence. They didn't encounter anyone on the short trip back.

One hour later the others were shot into the Danube. ❧

Translated by Thomas Cooper

Zsuzsa Hetényi

"The mind has no knowledge"

The Child's Eye Narrative Technique in Hungarian Literature on the Shoah before 1990

In fact, it is only unconsciously that Clio can repeat herself. Because her memory is too short. As with so many phenomena of time, recurrent combinations are perceptible as such only when they cannot affect us anymore.[1]

As Vladimir Nabokov points out, the memory of nations and individuals is powerful enough to shape and define their futures. Confronting the traumatic experiences of the Shoah is of particular importance in this respect. Since literature performs a central role in our understanding of the past, the theme of the Shoah turns up in different ways in various periods of literature.

In this essay I provide an overview of Hungarian works of literature on the Holocaust that use the child's eye narrative technique. I focus on works that were written before 1990 in order to give an impression of the limited image of Hungarian Jewish literature that readers had before the fall of the Socialist regime. While writing this study, I drew on my own childhood experiences of the 1960s, as well as observations I made while translating Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness*[2] into Russian in collaboration with Shimon Markish in 2000-2001.[3] My basic theoretical points originate in my analyses of novels of

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1 ■ Vladimir Nabokov. *Bend Sinister.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, 46.

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian-Jewish literature that use similar narrative devices.[4] Following the publication of the Russian translation and Kertész's receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002, several noteworthy studies have analyzed *Fatelessness*,[5] but they fail to pay attention to the narrative force of the child's eye technique. Interestingly, there was only one work, an essay by Sándor Radnóti, before 2002 that made mention of the fact that the first-person narrator is not an adult, and even Sándor Radnóti transfers the question of the child narrator into a Bildungsroman context.[6]

I offer here some insights into how the memory of the Shoah became part of Hungarian historical and literary heritage before 1990. Although the course of events in Hungary was uncharacteristic in the general history of the Shoah, the typical and the general are comprised of particularities. The child's eye view in narrative is perhaps particularly apt as a method for depicting the damage that brutalities may do to the human mind and soul.

The first Hungarian literary narratives on the Second World War and the Shoah appeared as early as 1945. They belong to genres on the borderline of fiction and documentary prose. The most typical genres include autobiography, such as Béla Zsolt's *Nine Suitcases* (*Kilenc koffer*, 1946-48),[7] and diaries that are set either in Russian prison camps, such as István Örkény's *Lágerek népe* ("People of Lagers," 1947), or in forced-labor camps, such as Ernő Szép's *The Smell of Humans* (*Emberszag*, 1945) and Pál Királyhegyi's *Mindenki nem halt meg* ("Not everyone died," 1947). As these autobiographies record the events immediately after the Second World War, when the haunting memory of

2 ■ Imre Kertész. *Fatelessness* [*Sorstalanság*]. New York: Vintage, 2004. The novel was translated into English as *Fateless* by Christopher C. Wilson and Katharina M. Wilson in 1992 and as *Fatelessness* by Tim Wilkinson in 2004. In this essay I use the latter translation.

3 ■ Zsuzsa Hetényi. "Poriadok khaosa: Imre Kertes i ego roman *Obezdolennost*." *Yerusalimskii Zhurnal*, 18, 2004, 84–89.

4 ■ Actually, the child's eye narrative technique lies at the very core of the literature of Jewish assimilation—Grigory Bogrov, Aleksandr Kipen, and, above all, Isaac Babel use this device, as do Michael Gold and Henry Roth. Cf. Zsuzsa Hetényi. *In a Maelstrom: The History of Russian-Jewish Prose (1860–1940)*. New York–Budapest: CEU-Press, 2008, 229–254. Naomi B. Sokoloff has also made some important observations on the same phenomenon in her analyses of texts by Jewish poet Hayim Nahman Bialik and Jewish writers Sholem Aleichem, Henry Roth, and Ahron Appelfeld. See Naomi B. Sokoloff. *Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction*. Baltimore-London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

5 ■ See for instance Peter Szirák. *Kertész Imre*. Budapest: Kalligram Kiadó, 2003, György Vári. *Kertész Imre: Buchenwald fölött az ég* ["Imre Kertész: The Sky over Buchenwald"]. Budapest: Kijárat, 2003, and Paul Várnai. "Holocaust Literature and Imre Kertész." *Imre Kertész and Holocaust Literature*. Edited by Louise O. Vasvári and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005, 247–257.

6 ■ Sándor Radnóti. "Auschwitz mint szellemi életforma" ["Auschwitz as a Spiritual Way of Life"]. *Holmi*, 3, 1991, 373.

7 ■ The publication dates of the originals of the literary works are given in parentheses within the body of the text, whereas the publication dates of the translations, if any, are listed in the Bibliography.

what had happened was still vivid, they are not characterized by the calmness of the memoires that were written from a historical distance. Instead, the authors' intention seems to have been to show the world what took place during the genocide and to document the years of horror. The author here is witness. However, one could contend that these first person narrations of the Shoah should not be regarded as literature, but rather as works of history. The discourse of fiction, one could argue, requires distance, which can be achieved by de-familiarizing the object through the introduction of a mediator, a narrator who does not coincide with the author. One might think for instance of David Albahari's *The Uprising in the Nazi Camp in Shtulne* (1975), a pseudo-documentary narrative of the Shoah.

When analyzing literature on the Shoah, one should always keep this dichotomy of factual versus fictive narrative in mind. A dry account of the Shoah is always shocking, but a faltering narrative is even more so, as it expresses the loss of the power of speech. The author cannot find words to express the meanings of the Shoah, an unprecedented experience of genocide, which is inexpressible simply because language does not possess the vocabulary necessary for its narration. But literature is inalienably intertwined with writing: with the construction of a fictitious reality out of words and sentences. This paradoxical nature of the Shoah literature, however, entails another problem as well: literature should not limit itself to the documentation of facts. Another question concerns the ideological weight literature may carry. Someone writing about the Shoah may feel a moral obligation to shock the readership and represent "the horror of horrors." However, literature with ideological content always runs the risk of becoming didactic.

This contradictory aspect of Shoah literature raises more general theoretical questions. How should personal memories, information, and historical data be included in fiction without destroying literary forms and genres, and which narratological methods are the most appropriate in order to evoke the response the author intends to awaken in his or her readers? Another question pertains to the role of the writer: is it his or her moral duty to convey the essence of a given historical era, or should an author invent a new artistic language, and how should he or she attempt to move the reader, emotionally or intellectually?

One of the great strengths of the first Hungarian works written on the Shoah was that they could convey almost directly the impressions and experiences of those who had survived before the falsifications that were later introduced by the official propaganda machine of the communist era could gain traction and become part of the political strategies of the regime. Strange as it may sound, parallel with the official concealment of certain aspects of the Shoah, there was a second danger as well. Soon after the Communist Party took power in 1948, official and fashionable publications proliferated that gave rise to what I would call a "culture of the Shoah," namely, a simplified and,

consequently, more superficial discourse on the Shoah, in which the coexistence of grotesque and ironic, tragic and comic elements (characteristic of the early period) gradually disappeared.

Zsolt's *Nine Suitcases* provides one of the most striking examples of the irony that characterizes this early period. The autobiography depicts how the Jews fall victim to their own middle-class upbringing, their tendency to submit, and their respect for the law, the police, and anyone wearing a uniform: "[w]e stood [...] pitifully and awkwardly in a row like penguins [...]. They used the victims' own respect for the law as a leash with which to lead them."[8] Hungarian Jews who pursued an education abroad (many had no other choice but to study abroad because of the quota system that limited their numbers at universities in Hungary) were devoted followers of European (primarily German) cultural values, and on returning to Hungary they were law-abiding citizens. These assimilated Jews acknowledged themselves as Hungarians, and their orthodox, religious Jewish brethren were sometimes a source of embarrassment for them.

Zsolt realizes with horror that he regards the policeman in the ghetto as culturally closer to him than another Jew standing next to him, who wears a traditional kaftan and has side curls, and whom Zsolt associates with some kind of "exotic Filipino."[9] And when a good-natured policeman pretends that he does not see the Jews and tells them to run away, none of them moves. There is only one Jew who escapes, but even he returns in an hour, partly because of his submissiveness and respect for the law, but even more so because of his fear that he has nowhere to go. Later a police officer stops a Gypsy wagon and sends a Jewish boy with the group of Gypsies across the border. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that only the Gypsies (outcasts themselves) agree to help the Jews, and even they have to be ordered by a policeman to do so.

Something similar happens on the Ukrainian front. The partisans free the Jewish forced laborers during a battle, supply them with weapons, and in return ask them to become affiliated with the Communist Party. The Jews reply that they are tired and they do not intend to fight, especially not against their own Hungarian (that is, German ally) units. This makes it inevitable that they will die. The novel narrates the transformation of Hungary (Europe) into a war-stricken place:

> [t]omorrow morning a scene that was unique in civilisation would begin. White people with fixed addresses carrying documents of domicile and nationality, and wearing European clothes, would be crammed into cattle wagons—as many as the wagons would take—and transported to some region inhabited by other white people

8 ■ Bela Zsolt. *Nine Suitcases: A Memoir*. Translated by Ladislaus Lob. New York: Schocken Books, 2004, 20.
9 ■ Bela Zsolt. *Nine Suitcases: A Memoir*, 60.

where, not long ago, if somebody had been hit by the tram, voluntary ambulance men sped through the streets, sirens blaring, in cars marked with red crosses and financed through the contributions of good people, and where the government awarded a medal to anyone who rescued a ragged traveling journeyman caught in a current while bathing in the Bug or the Vistula. They would be taken to some place in Europe, where at every hundred steps along the road there were notices of the International Automobile Club warning about gradients and bends and fast trains.[10]

Zsolt's autobiographical novel, which was published in his journal *Haladás* ("Progress") in 1946-47, takes place in the ghetto of Nagyvárad (today Oradea in Romania). In terms of size, in Hungary this ghetto was second only to the ghetto of Budapest. Since Zsolt died in 1949, the novel remained unfinished and was published only in 1980.

The second wave of literature on the Shoah appeared after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Most of the works were published only after 1963, when the Communist regime softened its tone and Hungary started to be referred to as "the happiest barrack in the Socialist camp." Due to cautious economic reforms and a less repressive political climate, from the early 1960s onwards the Hungarian standard of living was higher than in other Eastern Bloc countries. Moreover, in order to avoid another revolution, Hungarian Communist Party leaders made significant cultural concessions.

A prominent work of this era is the first Hungarian musical, *Egy szerelem három éjszakája* ("Three Nights of a Love," 1960), which was the work of three outstanding Hungarian authors: playwright Miklós Hubay, poet, writer, and literary translator István Vas (who wrote the song lyrics), and composer György Ránki. The musical, which features songs written in the style of French chansons, centers around the life of Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944), a famous Hungarian poet and translator. Miklós Radnóti was a Jewish man, who (unlike many Hungarian Jews) converted not because of the severity of the anti-Jewish legislation and the anti-Semitic political climate, but because of his attachment to the Christian and Hungarian cultural and intellectual mentality. Nevertheless, he was killed in 1944 because of his Jewish origins in a forced march between two labor camps. The play shows the brutality of war with a hint of tragic irony, but it is about fate as well. With poignant lyricism, it depicts those whose lives were destroyed by the war, while sarcastically also touching on the impossibility of leading a private life in a historically charged era. The play uses distinctive figurative language, a certain kind of double talk, which was acquired and used by every Hungarian and, for that matter, every Soviet Bloc citizen in the Socialist era. Through the use of this deliberately ambiguous and evasive language, the word Jew is not uttered a single time in the course of the play.

10 ■ Béla Zsolt. *Nine Suitcases: A Memoir*, 92.

I would tentatively venture the contention that the first Hungarian novel on the Shoah that can be regarded as more literature than history was Imre Keszi's *Elysium*, published in 1958. In this novel, the first non-autobiographical Hungarian novel on the Shoah, the protagonist is a child. By using the child's eye narrative technique, the author avoids the three aforementioned traps. First, the choice of a child as a narrator eliminates the dangers of writing a documentary and listing a plethora of factual details. Second, as the novel narrates a situation that is particularly difficult to express, a child's limited vocabulary, together with a child's highly metaphorical language and ignorance of taboos, lends itself much more easily to the expression of the unprecedented experience of genocide than the more self-conscious language of an adult. Keszi uses the revelatory effect generated by the unexpectedly apposite remarks of a child in a way that reminds one of Hans Christian Andersen's well-known tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes" (1837). Only a child is brave enough to express what is evident to everyone: the king is naked. Finally, an innocent child as the main character is a particularly apt way of emphasizing (if it needs emphasis) that the victims of the Shoah were innocent.

The novel tells the story of Gyuri, a Jewish boy who is sent to the concentration camp, and his parents' attempt to find and rescue him. The scenes in Budapest depict the sufferings (starvation and death) of those who lived in Budapest basements during the siege of the Red Army and the bombings. The novel ends with the appearance of the first "liberating" Russian soldier. Throughout the novel the boy's monologues dominate, although every now and then there is a switch to the perspective of an omniscient third-person narrator, but even these passages keep some of the elements of a child's point of view. In contrast to the parallel storyline of the family in Budapest, which consists primarily of dialogues, the monologue form conveys loneliness in itself.

Two aspects of the monologues are particularly worth mentioning, as they are essential to the novel's representation of the child's view of the world. The first is the child's insistent attempt to interpret the events that befall him as if they were normal, in spite of the fact that the world depicted in the novel is far from normal. The second is his candor. Ingenuous in his use of language, he makes blunt statements of truths that adults hardly dare to mention.

At the beginning of the novel, the boy makes the following guileless remark, "[i]t would not be so bad here, in the end, if only father and mother were here."[11] This strikes one as a common thought on the part of a child, but there is a stern irony to the remark. The boy misses his parents, but the parents are

10 ■ Béla Zsolt. *Nine Suitcases: A Memoir*, 92.

11 ■ Imre Keszi. *Elysium*. Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1958, 121. Unless otherwise stated in the Bibliography, all the quotations are translated by the author of this essay.

perhaps fortunate not to be where he is. On his way to the railway station, the boy thinks to himself: "[i]t would be nice to be at home now, but if it is not possible, well, traveling is interesting, too."[12] The words "traveling" and "interesting" capture the child's complete ignorance of the fate that awaits him, an ignorance that, as has often been observed, was one of the most important instruments in the Holocaust.

As it becomes apparent that Germany is losing the war, the Germans have to destroy the concentration camp, where the children have been subjected to medical experiments, so they gather them together and march them to the gas chambers. The children play and sing as they walk, "[w]hen they told us that we have to get out of here in the morning, because there is a war, the other children shouted 'Hurrah!' and raised their hands towards the sky, because no matter how nice it has been to be here, going somewhere else is always interesting."[13] The child also thinks in terms of analogies: "[p]eople go back and forth like lions in a cage. No, more like polar bears, they shake their heads to the right and to the left, nodding as if they were mad... So does this mean that I live in slavery as well?"[14]

The boy is daydreaming about what he would say to a young woman who took his hand on the first day, but then disappeared.

> We could have a conversation, she would ask me, "[a]nd what do you want to be when you grow up?" Because that is what adults always ask. But it's a stupid question, you can't know. Small children want to be tram conductors or soldiers, aviators or teachers, so that they can sit in front of the class and command the children. I am big enough to know that I cannot know what I want to be. Perhaps a composer or a scientist, like my dad, or maybe a mechanic or a pediatrician, saving lives. And I would answer: "I don't know, maybe a pediatrician." "That's fine," she would say. "Doctors save lives." "The only problem is, how could I become a doctor if in fact they kill me?" And then she would become sad, because this would remind her that they will kill her, too.[15]

The ambition to save lives stands in striking opposition to the fact that this imagined dialogue takes place in a death camp, while the fact that the imaginary dialogue narrated in indirect speech in reality is a monologue—the imagined partner may already have been killed—further amplifies the loneliness that permeates the novel.

The abnormality of the circumstances is also shown in the futility and impossibility of the most common acts. This leads the reader to the second narrative device: the child's directness, as the boy utters what most of Europe

12 ■ Imre Keszi. *Elysium*, 167.
13 ■ Imre Keszi. *Elysium*, 441.
14 ■ Imre Keszi. *Elysium*, 121.
15 ■ Imre Keszi. *Elysium*, 127.

during the Second World War did not even dare to imagine. He says: "I will be killed by people who are not guided by superstitions. This is not the time for 'saving lives,' but the time for losing them."[16] The boy's attempt to maintain a grasp of the circumstances is psychologically convincing, as is his desire to think like adults, mimicking their logic (this method becomes a key feature of Kertész's *Fatelessness*).

In Keszi's novel, when the inmates are gathered together in the concentration camp for their departure for Germany, the boy conjures up another paradox in his daydreams: a summer trip on a train to Lake Balaton. He imagines that he can see a blue lake through the windows of the train: "[t]he lake is blue, because it reflects the sky, otherwise it would not be blue, and neither is the sky really blue, it just seems to be. And the clouds do not hang from the sky, they float. Things are not at all as we people see them."[17] The boy fails to extend his reflections on misleading appearances in nature to the world of people. This remains the responsibility of the reader.

The chasm between his naïve perceptions and the reader's knowledge of the camps is expressive of the utter guilelessness of the child victims and the appalling cruelty of their executioners:

> [h]e felt at home. He found the forest familiar, as if he had always lived there. The water in the lake seemed to have been created for him, for his quiet, long swim of hope. The grass had never been so soft and close. He had never had such good food. Never ever! He was full of gratitude. He wanted to live here, on the shore of the lake in the woods, in Camp Elysium. He wanted to get all the presents that the chosen, the lucky ones get once they have earned them with their courage. He had earned them, and he would live here in white clothes, like the blessed souls of the already saved, with a number on his cap, a yellow triangle on his chest, in the uniform of the immortal soldiers of kindliness, sincerity, and courage, forever.[18]

Here the text is written in the style of a prayer. However, the elevated and emotionally charged tone is marred by the images and turns of phrase of Nazi propaganda. The shocking conclusion of the novel *Fatelessness*, which I discuss below, also draws on this paradoxical situation.[19]

The third phase of literature on the Shoah is marked by the publication of Kertész's *Fatelessness* in 1975. The main novelty of Kertész's work lies in its narrative technique. The plot shares common points with the writer's life. Like

16 ■ Imre Keszi. *Elysium*, 128.
17 ■ Imre Keszi. *Elysium*, 124.
18 ■ Imre Keszi. *Elysium*, 298.
19 ■ The forest and the lake (*Wald* and *See* in German) of the novel, where the children's concentration camp is situated, refer to the real toponym of Waldsee, which is also evoked by Imre Kertész's novel, as *Fatelessness* directly alludes to Imre Keszi's text. Their relationship is to be discussed in detail.

his protagonist, Gyuri Köves (who has the same first name as Keszi's main character), Kertész was also taken to Auschwitz and Buchenwald at the age of fourteen. Although the novel is narrated in the first person, this work is by no means a historiography or a work of documentary prose in the sense that the first Hungarian works written on the Shoah are. Instead, it is a work of realistic and objective prose. Seen in this way, the novel resembles works of objective lyrical poetry that make non-autobiographical use of the first person.

Although the novel depicts many of the horrors of the Shoah, the action proper takes place in the boy's mind. The reader bears witness to a terrifying experience—the destruction of a human soul. As Sándor Radnóti suggests, the novel is undoubtedly a *Bildungsroman*, since it centers around the development of the young narrator's character.[20] At the beginning, Gyuri's soul is like a tabula rasa, a litmus paper ready to absorb practically any influences. The peculiarity of the novel lies in the fact that the young protagonist takes pains to observe and record the events that happen to him from an outsider's viewpoint—he watches over the lice living on his body, trying to understand them, much in the same way as he relates to the German soldiers. His impartiality becomes the most evident when he describes the rare occasions on which he becomes emotionally involved: immediately after giving himself away he reverts to his condescending attitude towards the world around him and smiles at himself. In terms of language, one of the most shocking parts of the novel is perhaps the beginning: the cold and refined language of the school essays, their typical mistakes and their false, empty turns of phrase and figures of speech all have a de-familiarizing and estranging effect. (It is worth noting that the translation of these "mistakes" constitutes a particularly difficult task for translators). The boy's use of language almost indirectly unveils the hypocrisy of the world, and in this it resembles the *skaz* device[21] widely employed by writers of the Russian Avant-Garde, such as Russian-Jewish Isaac Emmanuilovich Babel and Russian Boris Pilniak. For Gyuri, this world was Hungary in the late 1930s and the years of the war, whereas for Kertész this hypocrisy was also the doubletalk of the totalitarian Socialist system of the 1950s and 1960s.

One of Gyuri's main aims is to behave like the adults around him. He tries to understand everything; thus, the key phrases of the novel are: I knew, I understood, I realized. Even as he practically loses his human shape in the concentration camp and becomes a smelly piece of meat, he maintains the perspective of an outside observer. Kertész uses the highly provocative descriptions of Gyuri's thoughts in order to call the reader's attention to the absurdity of the situation: the boy's thinking is based on tolerance and

20 ■ Sándor Radnóti. "Auschwitz mint szellemi életforma" ["Auschwitz as a Spiritual Way of Life"], 372-378.

21 ■ Stylization of spoken language.

empathy. Even in the darkest horrors of the concentration camp, he never forgets what his parents and teachers taught him at home and at school. The novel provides a narrative twist: when Gyuri repeats "it is understandable" several times, for the reader it is clear that the boy is deceived, consequently, he cannot understand, only passively accept what is going on around him. His attitude, however, is not unique; instead, it is deeply rooted in the traditionally obedient behavior of assimilated Jews all over Europe. Assimilated Jews have always avoided pushing themselves to the forefront or rebelling against authorities, and have preferred giving way to others.

In the course of the novel, not only the words "understand" and "accept," but words in general gradually lose their meaning. Kertész constructs the childish logic of his protagonist using roughly the same elements as Imre Keszi does in *Elysium*. In *Fatelessness*, the teenager Gyuri asserts that traveling is interesting, and he volunteers for work in a Hungarian camp in Germany. Having been taught a middle-class respect for German culture at home, initially the boy admires the serenity of the German soldiers and the complacency with which they perform their tasks without a hitch. He is glad that the German who selects who is able to work and who should be sent directly to the gas chambers seems to like him. And he also likes the place itself, the houses with the football field; as he says: "it was all very clean, tidy, and pretty."[22] His attitude gradually leads him to the stunning confession: "it is fair to say that I too soon came to like Buchenwald."[23]

Gyuri goes through a mental change only towards the end of the novel, when, together with others, he is put on a carriage. There, among the dying bodies pressed against one another, he experiences a change of attitude, which begins with the peaceful feeling of indifference towards those who previously had filled him with irritation, and which finally evolves into the intimacy of the fellowship that he shares with his Jewish brethren. He realizes that he has finally gotten rid of the nervous irritability he had always felt towards them; what is more, he is even glad that the others are there with him, since they are so similar to him, and "an unwanted, anomalous, shy, I might even say clumsy feeling toward them came over me for the first time—I believe it may, perhaps, have been affection."[24] Gyuri's inner transformation is accompanied by a change of tone in his speech, for the former "I knew, I understood, I realized" gives way, to "I must admit, there are certain things I would never be able to explain, not precisely, no, not if I were to consider them from the angle of my expectations, of rule, of reason—from the angle of life, in sum, the order of things, at least insofar as I am acquainted with it."[25]

22 ■ Imre Kertesz. *Fatelessness*, 90.
23 ■ Imre Kertesz. *Fatelessness*, 127.
24 ■ Imre Kertesz. *Fatelessness*, 185.
25 ■ Imre Kertesz. *Fatelessness*, 190.

Rational thinking is entrapped, as the novel paradoxically suggests that concentration camps represent the utmost manifestation of a perfect and rationally organized human society, first conceived in detail by the thinkers of the French Revolution. At the same time, the sheer existence of the concentration camps also means that European civilization as such has arrived at a dead end, as neither its ecclesiastic nor its secular institutions are able to enforce the basic commandment: love thy neighbor.

The Shoah also appears in a number of works by later writers who tried to portray the uncertain place of Jews in Hungarian society after the Second World War. The main themes of these books are the protagonists' search for a home and their attempts to determine their attitude towards other Jews and their own undefined identities.

In Hungary as in other Soviet-type socialist European countries, one find numerous manifestations of a well-known psychological reaction to the Shoah—encapsulation. This concept, introduced by Bruno Bettelheim in 1988, means that one suppresses problematic memories into the subconscious in order to isolate them from the everyday self in order (one hopes) to fashion a healthier persona. But the psychological taboo of the Shoah, which was present both on a personal and on a social level, became harmful to those who paid it mind. The word "Jew" soon became unutterable. As a woman born in 1946 remembers: "[t]he word Jew was not uttered, neither when we defined ourselves nor when we spoke about others. I did not understand what my parents meant when they used such strange expressions as *unsereiner, nostras,* Indians... and other such absurd terms."[26] As this example also shows, for the children of the survivors of the Shoah, the Holocaust was transformed into a terrible secret, and accordingly, the lack of information led to incredible explanations.

This experience can again be traced in literature in works that are told from the perspective of a child. Children are ideal narrators in the sense that they can break taboos respected by adults. Moreover, their logic is based on cause-and-effect relations and they have not yet learned to use double talk. Instead, children constantly ask questions and seek answers, and their utterances may also contain spontaneous remarks that violate social norms. These child narrators try to understand and interpret the catastrophe which for their parents is taboo. These narratives suggest that the Shoah created psychological problems that influenced the lives of several generations even many decades after the Shoah itself had been brought to an end.

26 ■ Pető Katalin. "Engem az antiszemitizmus sodort a zsidók közé ... : Az identitástudat változásai" ["I Have Been Led to the Jews by Anti-Semitism...: Changes in Identity"]. *Zsidóság, identitástudat, történelem* ["Jewishness, Sense of Identity, and History"]. Budapest: T-Twins, 1992, 134. The literary form of "we" is *unsereiner* in German, whereas *nostras* means "our" in Latin.

Péter Nádas's novel *The End of a Family Story* (*Egy családregény vége*, 1977) is a stream-of-consciousness narrative. The first-person narrator is a traumatized child brought up by his grandparents in the late 1940s and early 1950s, at a time when (for example) the show trial of László Rajk (1909-1949, former Minister of Interior and Minister of Foreign Affairs) took place. This was also the time when the narrator's father served as an agent of the State Protection Authority (Államvédelmi Hatóság, ÁVH), the secret police force of Hungary between 1945 and 1956. Because of a head injury, the child experiences what is happening around him without making logical connections that would be necessary in order to understand the course of events. Only towards the end of the novel does one learn that he was injured when he fell from the top of a bunk to the stone floor in the orphanage where he was put together with other children whose parents were accused of being traitors and whose relatives also became the victims of the purges in the Party. The boy remembers only some rare instances when his father was at home, often arriving in the middle of the night. His grandfather, a Shoah survivor, has a strong influence on him, and the two of them often converse. The grandfather shares his strange philosophy of life with the boy. This philosophy is based on the (metaphorically) six-thousand years of family history, beginning with Simon, the son of Jacob and Leah. The grandfather tells his grandson the myth of the eternal suffering of the Jews, which has seven eras. According to him, the seventh era of Jewish history—the present, the circle of death—will eventually kill the myth of the Jews and reconnect the threads of Judaism and Christianity, which split some two-thousand years ago. The grandfather's story is one of the possible reactions to the Shoah, one of the many solutions proposed by the second generation. Jewish culture, he seems to suggest, should become a thing of the past and should give way to Christianity.

Miklós Vámos's novel, *Zenga zének* ("Sing a Song," 1983),[27] takes place in another tragic moment in the history of Hungary, the failed Revolution of 1956. The Revolution began with a mass demonstration on 23 October, 1956 (today a national holiday in Hungary), when demonstrators demanded the immediate withdrawal of all Soviet troops, free elections, and freedom of the press. More general demands were political freedom from Soviet oppression and social and economic reforms. By 4 November, 1956, the Revolution had been brutally crushed by Soviet troops. It brought about changes in degree only, as the new leaders of the Party represented a new generation of Communists only in terms of age, but not in terms of ideology.

27 ■ The title imitates the title of a pioneers' song, but in a mocking, distorted way, as the correct spelling would be "Zeng az ének." Pioneers are members of a Socialist organization established primarily for children.

The young protagonist of Vámos' novel, Ócsi (Kid), is a converted Jewish boy who is a naïve observer of the ideological chaos. His parents have him enrolled illegally in a course on Catechism (illegally because the regime was against religious study), and he learns only there that he is of Jewish origin. The child's monologue reveals a psychological situation that one could even call typical: the bully of the school calls his attention to the fact that he is Jewish, after which other boys of Jewish origin befriend him. When he confronts his parents with the fact that he already knows about his origin, they admit the truth, but the boy rebels against them, saying that he does not want to be a Jew. At school, however, he fights with those who mock him and finally, triumphantly joins a Jewish classmate whose grandparents died in Auschwitz.

This novel offers much more than a narrative of one boy's experiences: it depicts the entire history of Hungarian Jewry's behavior after the Shoah in a nutshell. After the Shoah, the fear of another catastrophe led to the denial of a Jewish way of life. Children were baptized, their origins were concealed from them, and the word "Jew" ceased to be used. Nevertheless, the self-censorship of those with Jewish ancestry was a reasonable consequence of the general atmosphere of Soviet-type socialism, since according to its ideology, any talk about Jewish affairs implied a distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish people and thus, was regarded as a crime against the Communist dogma of "equality." Consequently, those who uttered the word "Jew" could be (and were) accused of being anti-Semitic.

Although the Jewish faith and Jewish traditions were deliberately forgotten by many of the members of the generation of the parents, they were preserved and kept alive in secret by the generation of the grandparents. In the first chapter (entitled "Cemetery") of Mihály Kornis's *Napkönyv* ("Daybook," 1994), the child narrator (only his surname, Tábor, is mentioned, which means—oddly in this context—camp) expresses a paradoxical situation: "since I was not a Jew, only my parents were Jewish. I was not even circumcised, ha-ha, and I have not been seen by a rabbi, given a Hebrew name, or recorded in the book of the community. My parents told me that I have no religion, especially after 1956 they were repeating it all the time, '[i]f somebody asks you about it, tell them that you are not a believer'."[28] The chapter narrates a visit to the cemetery, or rather to the Wall of Death, which the victims of the Shoah recognize as the largest Jewish cemetery of Budapest. Here the boy thinks to himself:

> I look at the survivors, wondering how to act in compliance with Jewish traditions; I've already seen my grandfather doing stupid things, and the Jews have terribly intricate rituals, or rather they had them in the time of Judaism, but do they still have

28 ■ Kornis Mihály. *Napkönyv* ["Daybook"]. Budapest: Pesti Szalon Könyvkiadó, 1994, 11.

them? It's so great that all this has already been stopped and is forbidden, otherwise the whole family would be busy all day, as my grandfather used to be behind the curtains.[29]

The child narrator's point of view is that of an unbiased outsider. He describes Jewish people as "frail bird people with long necks, Jewish cranes."[30] He also says: "oh we are all poor and disgusting"[31] , and he uses the highly pejorative terms "yids" and "kikes" as well.

The sentiments he feels during his second visit to the cemetery, which takes place years later, are in sharp contrast to the childish hatred of the first. At this point, the adult narrator finds the most appropriate way of expressing his mourning by jotting down the names of the Jewish victims one after another, while also trying to remember their images. The duality of the protagonist's identity is also accentuated by the fact that often within the same paragraph or even the same sentence the text alternates between first-person and third-person narration.

Although members of the second generation had no direct experience of the Shoah and their parents did not inform them of what they had undergone, they inherited the fear of persecution, even without understanding what the term "Jew" meant. Their fear was intensified by post-war anti-Semitism, but the silence of the first generation about the Shoah and Jewish tradition eventually had an effect that was quite the opposite of the parents' intentions. The shared experience of the taboos in connection with their families' pasts created closely-knit communities. Children, adolescents, and young adults of Jewish origin formed friendships often without realizing (and understanding only later) the power of the bond that brought them together. The second generation felt only vaguely that they were different from the others of their time. Yet even without knowing that their "otherness" was a consequence of the Shoah and without any specific knowledge about the history of the Jews, they managed to create a sense of community consciousness, a concept of "us." These children, who did not even know what the word "Jew" meant, were deprived both of a conscious Jewish identity and a continuous family tradition. Therefore, the new wave of Jewish consciousness of the 1980s and beyond, in which the Shoah became a major element of Jewish identity, can be considered somewhat rootless. In my view, the reason for this lies in the fact that for this generation it was not the Shoah that was important, but the consequences of its suppression: the taboo, the confusion, the hatred, and the fear of not surviving in the atmosphere of hidden anti-Semitism.

29 ■ Kornis Mihály. *Napkönyv* ["Daybook"], 13.
30 ■ Kornis Mihály. *Napkönyv* ["Daybook"], 12.
31 ■ Kornis Mihály. *Napkönyv* ["Daybook"], 13.

Every national literature is distinctive and has its own peculiarities, shaped by the eddies of history, yet often one is surprised more by the similarities than the differences between national literatures. One comes across works on the Shoah that were written in other languages but nonetheless bear strong thematic and stylistic affinities with the works of Hungarian literature discussed above. In the French novelist Georges Perec's 1975 novel, *W, or the Memory of Childhood (W ou le Souvenir d'enfance)*, for instance, one finds many parallels with Hungarian works on the Shoah, even in some of the smaller details, such as a young man's visit to a cemetery (one thinks of Kornis) or a childish enthusiasm about Catholicism (one thinks of Vámos). Perec lost both of his parents in the Second World War, and one storyline of the novel is devoted to the narrator's search for his childhood memories. As a child, the narrator was not aware of his Jewish origin at all, but he was quite certain that he was distinctively different from those around him. One could also mention the works of Agota Kristof, a Swiss writer of Hungarian origin. Her 1986 *The Notebook (Le grand cahier)*, for instance, the first part of a trilogy, shows how the horrors of war reach even the most remote places and distort the human mind and soul. The entire trilogy draws its expressive power in part from the fact that the first-person narrative presents written accounts of children in an objective, cruelly dry style. (The book was adapted for the cinema in 2013 by Hungarian director János Szász.) As these examples indicate, the child's eye narrative technique is used not only in literary works that treat the Shoah as a historical experience, but also in novels that interpret the Shoah as a contemporary and permanent experience. This perspective enables authors to offer depictions of the events of the Holocaust not as they happened, but as they were experienced. ❧

Translated by Eszter Krakkó in collaboration with the author

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Gábor T. Szántó

Kafka's Cats

Excerpts from the novel[1]

I got a call from the information desk at the university's Museum Boulevard entrance that someone was here to see me. I had a class that evening: I was conducting a seminar in modern Jewish literature. Besides writing, I teach twentieth-century American literature, the seminar was my private project, I didn't get paid for it; you might say it was an obsession of mine. In these parts the subject is not taken very seriously at universities; professors question the viability of modern Jewish literature as a discipline, as if they were reluctant to admit that there are still Jews around, and would rather avoid using the discomfiting word itself.

I had no choice but to ask the clerk to put the visitor on, but he wanted to speak with me in person and was not willing to divulge the purpose of his visit unless he could see me.

He spoke Hungarian slowly but articulately, with a Hebrew accent; his voice, however, was agitated.

Gábor T. Szántó

began his career as a writer with the publication of a volume of poems entitled Idill *("Idyll"). He has since published numerous volumes of poetry and works of prose, including novels and novellas. Jewish identity, the loss of identity, and the legacy of the Holocaust are all important topics in his writings. Since 1991, he has served as editor-in-chief of Szombat ("Saturday"), a journal that focuses on topics relevant to contemporary Jewish culture and politics. Several of his short stories have been published in English translation, including for instance "The Tenth Man," translated by John Batki, in* Contemporary Jewish Writing in Hungary *(2003) and "Let the Survivors Check in First, Please!" translated by Peter Sherwood, in* The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization. Volume 10: 1973-2005 *(2012).*

PHOTOGRAPH BY LÁSZLÓ DOBÓ

1 ■ The novel will be published in June 2014 by Noran Libro Kiadó, Budapest.

A few minutes later a Hasidic man around 80 with a tangled white beard and a long black coat entered my office. I was flabbergasted by the sight. Never before had I had such a visitor at the university. I got embarrassed and all I could think of was what the guard downstairs must have thought, or anyone else who overheard this man saying that he wanted to see me.

The old man's drawn face bespoke pain and sternness, and also a degree of suspicion and alarm on account of the surroundings, which for him must have seemed strange. His watery gray eyes appeared to be tearing continuously; he kept looking around as if sensing danger. But when I returned his greeting with a respectful *sholem aleichem*[2] and politely pointed to an armchair while asking him if would drink a glass of water here, he relaxed a bit.

I let the water run until it was nice and cold. I filled a glass, pulled out the rolling swivel chair from under my desk and sat down facing him.

"I am listening."

He held the glass with both hands, as if he were grasping it for support. The skin on the back of his hand was yellowish, translucent almost, resembling old and brittle parchment. He crouched in that chair like a humpback. He saw I was looking.

"Osteoporosis. It started in the camps."

He pulled out a magazine from the inside pocket of his caftan and slid it toward me. I knew it well: it was a special issue of a Budapest Jewish periodical, of which I happened to be the guest editor. My name along with a biographical sketch was listed in the issue; that's how he got to me. I kept wondering how he came across the magazine. The religious public doesn't go for such stuff. I looked at him questioningly.

"They handed it to me on the plane. A Jew is a Jew, they must have thought. I never read such things, only *sifrei kodesh*... how do you say it?"

"Holy books."

"That's right. I don't read these things, and not literature either. That is, literature written by goyim, I mean non-Jews, though by Jews as well. They also write all sorts of things.

"I see." I nodded and was sorry that I did. He seemed to be aiming his reproaches at me personally, except he chose his words tactfully. I had no idea that El-Al was handing out this magazine on its flights to Hungary. My back was itching, but it would have been awkward to start scratching myself. I felt as if I were sitting at attention.

"They let me have this journal on the airplane on the way to Budapest. I speak Hungarian and it says on the cover: Jewish journal, so they thought here's a bearded Jew and handed me a copy."

"Excuse me, but didn't they know that this kind of material..."

2 ■ Peace be with you.

"No need for excuses. It wasn't you who gave it to me."

"Of course," I said and nervously cleared my throat.

"A thin little man was on the cover," he continued, as if the journal in question wasn't right there in front of us. "With the face of a bird. A crow maybe... or a thrush. On account of his black hair and pointy nose. Or maybe like a bat. You know, the one that flies around all night..."

I nodded, but thought it odd that he, a pious man, should make these comparisons with animals.

"He said this about himself. He constantly compared himself to animals. As he did everyone else. To dogs, moles, bugs."

"Who did?" I asked, somewhat bewildered.

"The man who was on the cover." And he motioned with his head toward the magazine. "A writer. Jewish. From Prague."

"Ah." I responded rather incredulously, if only because just moments ago he said he didn't read secular literature. But then how does he know? I didn't remember this being discussed in the journal. Or was he just imagining things and happened to get them right? I've met interesting people who told me strange tales that were obviously made up, but as I live off words and stories, my curiosity overcomes my skepticism. I am practiced enough to be able to listen to such people and not be too surprised, or if they expect it, I could be very surprised and listen with great curiosity to the rest of what they have to say.

"And where did you get this information?" I inquired.

"From him."

"You read him then after all?" I asked him, quite surprised.

"No way."

"What then?"

"I met him."

"You met him?" I asked dumbfounded. "Where was that?"

"In Auschwitz."

"Where?" I said, raising my voice.

"I just said: Auschwitz." He raised his left arm and rolled up both his coat sleeve and his unbuttoned white shirt sleeve, showing the five-digit number.

I suddenly felt flushed, I couldn't open my mouth.

"That's why I came here," he went on. "To tell you all this. They handed me that journal, I saw him on the cover and began reading some of the contents. Some pieces were about his writings... I remember him talking about it. He wrote them down in different versions, but didn't publish them. For he was the kind of writer who did not want to publish what he wrote." He was looking straight ahead as if in a trance. "Like our masters, may their memory be blessed, who taught only by word of mouth. They could never be certain whether they were precise enough. He, too, seemed to be afraid of something. Of his father, the Creator, who knows... He had premonitions about the false

accusations brought against Jews. And about the tortures. He insisted that he foresaw the deportations, and how clearly he saw it, how very clearly..."

"Did that take its toll on him? Did it shake him up?"

"Oh yes, he was so shocked by his own visions, he couldn't write them down. He just told his friend about it. The one he took long walks with in Prague. I can't recall his name."

"What language did you use?" I asked warily.

At home in Sighet we spoke Yiddish; but I spoke German too. Because of the business we had. Merchants came to us even from Czernowitz, and other places where they didn't speak Yiddish."

"And you maintain that you met him in Auschwitz?"

"I recognized him from that picture," he said and pointed to the magazine cover. "He got older, but his face... his face remained the same. By that time of course his hair grew back. But then they shaved us again. Bald once more."

I felt I was losing my patience.

"Tell me, aren't you mixing up things you've read in the journal with your memories?"

"What are you talking about? You take me for a *meshugeneh*?"[3]

"No, I don't. But this man died a long time ago."

"I know," he said, nodding his head. "He contracted typhoid fever. He turned into a *Muselmann*. Are you familiar with the term? They were the ones who just lay down and couldn't move anymore. Some of them were thrown into the crematorium while still alive. These people didn't have to be gassed."

"I did not mean in the camp, but long before." I stood up, stepped behind my swivel chair and held fast to the back of the chair. "I meant the nineteen-twenties."

"He didn't die," said the white-haired old man while shaking his head and stroking his beard.

"What do you mean he didn't die?" In my nervousness I gave my chair a push, it rolled away, I had to pull it back quickly. "Explain yourself!"

"That's why I am here. I checked into the hotel where I stay every year, asked them at the desk to look up your phone number, and came here, as you can see."

"Yes, yes, I can, but go on."

"They write that he died in 1924. Well, they are wrong."

"Stop joking," I said, raising my voice again, "Everyone agrees on this." And though a sense of uncertainty filled me with fear, I went on: "The whole world knows it; it's in every biography and encyclopedia and textbook. His grave is there in Prague next his father's and mother's. They buried him, and a few years later the parents also died. Only his sisters were deported and perished in death camps. Will you tell me finally what you know?"

"What I know," said the old man unwaveringly, while twiddling his thumbs,

3 ■ A crazy person.

"is that this man did not die in '24. I can attest to it because I was able to recognize him. I was with him. We worked together in the carpentry shop."

"But then how..." I heard my voice turn reedy from the tension, the strain.

"To the very end he wrote. As soon as he had a little free time he was at it. He wanted to relate the whole story. Describe how it all happened. He wrote all the time—as long as he found a scrap of paper, a piece of a rag, a pencil stub, a lump of coal. I was on friendly terms with him because he studied, and also talked about, a work called *Reshit Chochma*, 'The Beginning of Wisdom,' by Eliyahu de Vidas. Does that title mean anything to you? It so happens, if it makes any sense to put it this way," and for a moment he broke into a smile, "I did hear about this work from my master, back in Sighet. It's this book that brought us together. That is the truth and nothing but. The two of us were raised very differently. I began really to pay attention to him when he told me this aspect of his life. Because this man from Prague also had a master, a *bal t'shuva*, a man who re-embraced religion, a Belzer Hasid, with whom..."

"Oh come on, how could he have still been alive, how could you have met him when everyone knows that in 1924, after a long bout with tuberculosis..." I kept rattling off more facts, while racking my brain if there was any mention in that journal about religious studies.

"He did have trouble with his lungs, that's true. It's hard to fathom how he made it all those years before we got there." The old man kept shaking his head in wonderment. "It must have taken incredible spiritual strength. It was as if he were dangling on a thread that had been lowered from the sky... Or he himself was the thread," he added and looked at me with some surprise.

"Enough!" I cried and pushed the chair away, then hastily pulled it back. "If you don't want to tell me how it was possible for this man to be there, when you arrived in 1944, then..."

"I don't know how it was possible, all I know is that he was there," he said in a loud, measured voice. Please sit down. And let me finish what I have to say. And don't be angry with me. After all, eighty years... I will tell you everything, but believe me, it's not easy. After all those years, I had no idea who this man was!"

"Will you tell me or not?"

"I will," he said with sigh. "He was going to write everything down, and wanted to entrust it all to me. I was also weak. Skin and bones. Still, because of the piety perhaps, he sensed strength in me. I held out as long as I could... I studied with him. But he couldn't write down everything he wanted to. Or he tore it up. Or he hid it so well, nobody could find it... I don't know. In any case, during the last night—they were going to take him away the next morning—he told me everything. What I read here," and he gave the magazine on the table a rap with his fist, "is all true. He didn't get along with his father; he was troubled by that even there. His father had already given up religion. He was hard on his son. The two couldn't abide each other. And then the illness set in. Sanatoriums followed.

When he was released, it all started again. His father couldn't cope with the fact that he was not interested in the business, all he did was write, didn't want to get married... He was incapable of it, he said, even though he would have liked to please his father. Then at one point he just couldn't bear it anymore."

I couldn't breathe. I searched for paper and pen on my desk. I must write down everything he says, word for word, lest I forget it.

"Are you quite sure that you are not confusing him with someone else?"

"What was his mother's name?"

"Löwy."

"It's possible that in the records he is listed as Franz Löwy," he said with a shrug. "Such errors did occur. But he told me his original name."

It's interesting, I thought, that it didn't occur to me until now that Kafka's mother and his actor friend had the same name.

"Did you see him again? Or his body?"

"How could I?" he asked testily. Only the members of the Sonderkommando could see the bodies. The death brigade. In a few weeks or months they would end up there. They were the ones who piled the corpses on carts and took them away, from the gas chambers to the crematoria. Also the ones still alive who could no longer move."

"Then you did not seem him. You don't know for sure..."

"You don't need much imagination," he interrupted me harshly. "The same happened to him that happened to all the others."

He stood up, groaned, tried to straighten out as much as he could, and was ready to leave.

"The one thing I know is that there is this custom: sacred books or writings that contain the name of our Creator, or any kind of sacred text must not be discarded."

He stopped, leaned forward, but it wasn't me he was looking at. And what he was saying was said very quietly, as though he was afraid that somebody would hear it.

"This man may have been a fool or a prophet—I don't know which. I didn't read his books. It wasn't my fault that I didn't believe him. I thought he was crazy, an apikores,[4] even if he did study the *Reshit Chochma*. But now that I read about him... well, he was no lunatic..." He stepped closer to me and lowered his voice: "He spoke the truth from beginning to end. He saw into the future. And yet I had no idea who this man was."

He looked at me as if he were hoping for some kind of acquittal.

"I brought this back to you," and he pushed the journal, still on the table, toward me. "Ordinarily, I am not supposed to read such things."

[...]

4 ■ Atheist.

In Berlin Dora was waiting for Kafka. Despite his sallow complexion and cough, he was in considerably better shape than at their last meeting. His spittle was no longer red and his appetite was back. On his face there were still traces of the past months' torments, but physical labor seemed to strengthen him, his disposition was sunnier, and in general he made a more masculine impression. The day after his arrival he was all set to look for employment. Dora was amazed at his eagerness to get going.

When she found out that he no longer wrote, and at most exchanged letters with her and his sister Ottla, strictly limiting the length of those letters lest he deceive himself by concealing real writings in his correspondence, she was astounded by his self-discipline. The next day she took him to a carpentry shop, where he was hired and given odd jobs that, with the rudimentary skills already acquired in Vienna, he could handle easily. He also attended a few lectures on horticulture, studied the fundamentals of grain production, the methods of cross-breeding fruit trees, but work in these areas was available only in Wannsee, so they waited for opportunities that were closer by and more favorable. Dora found work too; she went back to the Berlin Jewish Center, where she gave Hebrew lessons to young children, though she did not give up on her acting ambitions.

Kafka stopped writing, with the result that his condition improved steadily, his nights were peaceful. He missed having people around him but didn't want to risk being recognized. So rather than attend popular lectures on Jewish subjects, he had Dora bring home books. From time to time Ottla sent them small sums of money, as well as fruits and sweets, but they knew that while he may have gained weight, and he did breathe more easily, a longer time must elapse before they could be sure that his sickly constitution had indeed become strong, and that this wasn't just a temporary improvement.

Because he no longer wrote, and in the shop they spoke mostly about ordinary, trivial things, or now and then about politics, which didn't interest him that much, by the end of the day his desire to communicate became intense. Thus, they spent the evenings walking arm-in-arm in snowbound Steglitz, in the park in front of City Hall.

On the weekends they ventured even farther, to Grünewald, and they talked, rather Kafka did and Dora listened. Franz kept going back to Yosef Haim Brenner's book, though he was still struggling with it. Besides the Brenner, he read many other books, but only a page at a time, so it was rather slow going. He became so impatient, he asked Dora to read a few pages and summarize the storyline. What she related disheartened Franz, but also galvanized him.

"Real, flesh-and-blood people will populate the Land; perhaps they'll draw strength from one another," Kafka mused during these walks, and he watched with envy children on sleds. He had the feeling that he and Dora would be going not just to a country, but straight for the Bible. And for this move, he will have to grow strong not only physically and spiritually but intellectually as

well. "To others the books of Moses, the Prophets, the Kings, the Chronicles are metaphors infused with symbolic meaning, but for Jews these tomes are their history, even if they don't take everything in it literally. Whoever goes to Jerusalem to pray at the Western Wall must know that it is the remains of Solomon's Temple. If there is a good reason to learn, it is to surmount the gap between the ruins and time." As he went on talking, his face was flushed.

Dora looked at him with a smile, though she was also fearful that he might get overexcited and catch a cold. Kafka, however, stopped suddenly, fell silent, stared at nothing in particular, then turned to Dora, but still as though he weren't even there.

"What is it?" she asked, terrified. They had to sit down on a bench. "Crowds," Kafka said. "I see crowds of people. Unfortunate, miserable masses setting off in the hope of reaching the Land. But before they do, they are... hauled away. The whole thing is like a... pogrom."

"Calm down, Franz, please," Dora pleaded as she embraced him. She could feel him trembling; his brow was hot and in a sweat. "Let's go home, Franz!" she said, even more alarmed, afraid that with this attack of fever the tubercular condition had returned with a vengeance.

Dora didn't understand what had just happened, what had caused this trance-like state. She put him to bed, gave him fever reducing medication, had him drink plenty of liquids, then put her arms around him, held him tight, trying hard to drive away his evil thoughts. Still, Franz was shivering all evening; but then, from one minute to the next, he fell into a deep asleep.

By morning his fever was gone, and though his spirits were still low, it seemed as if he didn't even recall the attack he had the night before. He insisted on going to work. During the day he became totally absorbed in burnishing a tabletop and mortising and gluing table legs. When he went home in the evening, there was no trace of illness.

"If it were up to me," Franz said during supper, "I would establish not a Jewish but a children's state. They would receive the kind of education that would make sure that when those children grow up they will hate nobody. There should be no need for borders, not for a Jewish or any other state. The League of Nations," he explained, "introduced all kinds of regulations after the First World War, with an aim toward protecting minorities. But no one has ever thought of the state-sanctioned protection of children. Even though they are the ones who are in the minority always, everywhere, and at the mercy of grownups. If they won't be taken care of, they'll end up just like their parents. They will wage wars and ruin their children, who, too, will go to war and ruin theirs," Kafka expounded all flushed. "It's this vicious cycle that must be broken, so that violence stop once and for all. It's our only salvation."

"This is so good," Dora replied. "Why not enlarge on it, in writing?"

"I won't write again," he said, shaking his head. "The important things will

happen anyway, and the less important will simply pass. But we must talk about them, aloud, one on one."

During the months of self-abnegation Franz experienced the joys of the quotidian: the varied colors and fragrance of flowers and plants, the feel of ordinary materials, the taste of hearty food, the freedom inherent in the regularity and profundity of closed-eye breathing, the kind of freedom that evokes sunlit, open meadows and misty, luxuriant forests; and there was the tactile pleasure of brushing against the surface and curve of objects created by one's own hands; and the intellectual satisfaction derived from the study of biblical and Talmudic commentaries, as well as the perusal of other writers' books; and the new-found bodily harmony with Dora, and the fullness of his own happiness, which—now that he was back from Vienna—he felt intensely, in his vitals... All this was enough for him to do without writing. He was now capable of not jotting down his every thought, or recording incessantly stories whirling about in his head, and none of this caused him unbearable suffering anymore; the knockdown compulsion was on the wane. Surprisingly, the more he distanced himself from his former reflexes, the less he missed writing. He felt as if something had been removed from his body and around the remaining lacuna the soul's fabric had died away.

He was determined to grow stronger in body and soul, expel everything belonging to his past, and prepare for the journey and their new life in Palestine.

But Dora couldn't acquiesce; she ran off to the nearest well-stocked bookstore on the Kurfürstendamm, where she found the volume she was looking for. Upon her return, Kafka watched with an ambivalent smile her excited movements, taking off the wrapping paper and placing the new-smelling book before him.

He wasn't crazy about the green cloth binding, and not about the layout either. He would have preferred wider margins and more space between the lines. Of course, the publisher wanted to save money. He leafed through the book rather reluctantly, but then with a sudden move lifted the open volume and smelled it, enjoying the fresh printing press smell. Then he made himself comfortable in an armchair and began reading Max Brod's introductory essay. He was worried that he might find things in it that would cause him disappointment. Every now and then he would shake his head or bury his face in his hands. But then there were moments when he nodded approvingly. Dora, who was chopping vegetable in preparation for dinner, suddenly noticed that there were tears in his eyes.

"What is the matter, Franz?" she said and tried to comfort him.

"This is the hardest part," he replied and shook his head. "I miss Max! Even his wiseacre self. Klopstock doesn't come around much anymore. I miss Prague. I even miss its anti-Semites." At this he burst out laughing and soon his nose began to drip. He kept searching his pockets for a handkerchief until Dora handed him one.

"Why don't you look up Max?" Dora asked. "What would happen if you talked to him?"

Franz shook his head. "It wouldn't work. With them it just wouldn't. If I were to see Max... he'd try to persuade me to start writing again. And return to Prague. And after a while I wouldn't be able to say no... Then again, if I began to write... it's possible I couldn't anymore. Or at least not the way I used to. It could be the end of me. To write or to live. It's the only chance I've got, Dora. Do you see it now?"

He squeezed her hand so hard, she felt a painful twinge in her fingers. She placed her other hand on his wrist and withdrew her fingers.

"If it upsets you so... I shouldn't show you the later volumes when they come out?"

"They'll publish everything?" Franz inquired.

Dora saw him at this moment as an overtired, lost child.

"Your books are what we'll be living on, Franz, at least in part."

Kafka was laughing again, but Dora sensed that he was suffering. When he spoke, he was serious again.

"One has to croak to get people's attention. Though that's not the reason I wrote. I wanted to blend in rather than stand out. There is nothing personal in any of my writings. But to endure all this is a little easier if I don't have to explain what I'd written, or listen to how others interpret or misinterpret it. I am sorry if you wanted a different life."

"You are a fool," Dora admonished him, then gently cradled his face in her two hands. "I never asked for a life that you didn't want."

During his walks in Berlin on the way home from work, Kafka often thought about the image of the head held high. And while he tried hard not to use metaphors in his writings, this image and its meaning worked their way into his thoughts. Lately he had become more aware of the decorative façades of buildings, the balconies on each floor, the graceful curves of the plaster work, and the winding ivy under the roofs. He tried to straighten his back so as not to walk like Jews in some cartoons. The constant impression that he was being watched was fading but did not go away, and wouldn't as long as he stayed in Europe, if it mattered at all where he was. Because this gaze was trained on him from the very depth of his being; it was inseparable from his person. And the pair of eyes searching out other prying eyes was itself snooping around conspicuously, thus calling attention to itself. Franz was hoping that once he lived among his own, the suspicion based on his fears wouldn't bother him that much, though he knew well that this, too, was part of his neurosis. It wasn't only Czechs and Germans or women whose stare he felt, but also his father's, his unceasingly critical stare. It was with the father's scornful look that the son sized up his own gangly body, his hollow cheeks and jug ears; it was with his eyes that he looked over and judged his every act. What was

most painful to him, regardless of how strongly he wanted to free himself from this obsession, was the realization that if he didn't keep observing himself, he would see the whole world with his father's eyes.

He did have an inkling that every individual finds himself in this state, even if he is not fully aware of it. He wasn't sure it was worth going ahead and trying to give shape to all these phenomena. Isn't art itself corrupt, since in the final analysis it provides entertainment, even if it does make one realize ultimately that there is no way out of one's sorry state? And aren't all great works self-serving fripperies, going over the same old lessons without offering any help? And isn't it tragicomic to rely on mere words which, for want of something better, also keep repeating the same hackneyed teachings? Next to religion and philosophy, art can be a consolation of sorts, if, at best, one can articulate it, and with that extend one's miserable existence.

Dora accepted Franz's decision to give up literature and not to have anything more to do with his published books, except to acknowledge that to cover their living expenses the reissuing of some of his older works was indispensable. But she wasn't ready to give up her own ambition to be an actress. Besides looking for opportunities to study acting, something else preoccupied her. The longer they lived together, the more positively she felt that she wanted to have a child with Franz Kafka.

[...]

Taking the Jaffa Road, we walked back to downtown Jerusalem, turned onto Ben Yehuda Street, now a pedestrian mall, and at Rachel's suggestion, stopped in a café and ordered coffee and cake. When Rachel went to the washroom, I sat there alone, and for a moment felt very uncomfortable. In the last few years there had been two bombings not far from here: one in the Mahane Yehuda market and another in a nearby pizzeria. I knew that ever since the security wall was built separating the country from Jordan, there was practically no terrorist infiltration, yet for a moment I was gripped with fear.

I tried to distract myself and listen in on conversations around me, or at least try to guess, from gestures and intonations, what they were talking about. Next to me a heavily made-up and bejeweled middle-aged woman was angrily explaining something to another woman, who was glumly silent. Not only was this one not made up, her hair wasn't even combed. Perhaps her husband cheated on her and her friend was trying to convince her not to forgive him, for surely, it wasn't the first time he had fooled around. At a corner table sat an aging, neat-looking gentleman in an old-fashioned checkered jacket. His cane and straw hat he had hung on the back of the empty chair next to him. He is an engineer and a widower, I decided. Perhaps he was responding to a personal, in which a lady was seeking a proper gentleman to share evenings

with at the theater or at concerts. Or perhaps he placed the ad and was waiting excitedly for the correspondent who had described herself as youngish and with whom he'd already chatted on the phone. To the left of the shop entrance a handsome-looking man was busy working on his iPad. He wore a pair of beige slacks, hand-stitched brown shoes, and under his taupe linen jacket, a blue shirt. He looked American to me, a diplomat on his day off, or a businessman. Rachel was still not back.

When our coffee was brought out and I took a sip, a woman who had to be with the American entered. She wore a black miniskirt, stockings, high-heel shoes and a white, tight-fitting sleeveless turtleneck. With a blazer flung over her shoulder, she looked as smart and attractive as her partner. She didn't seem like an Israeli, and certainly not like a denizen of Jerusalem, and not so much because of her blonde hair but because of the conspicuously Western clothes she was wearing. They shook hands, and she also took out her tablet. They looked as though they were playing a new electronic game on a checkerboard, the kind Arabs play on old wooden boards propped up on low tables in the bazaars or tearooms of the old city. As the two of them leaned closer and laughed at each other, I had the feeling there'll be more between them than simply a work relationship.

Rachel came back, refreshed. You could tell she had adjusted her make-up. She bit into her cheese cake with gusto, then took a sip of her coffee. Soon her phone rang. It was one of her children. She took another bite of the cake while talking, and the powdered sugar stuck to her nose. I reached across the table to wipe it off. I kept looking around while she was on the phone. A black hat and umbrella caught my eye; they were hung on the rack closest to the counter. Had someone left them there by accident? Or was it an "installation" by the shop's decorator, evoking a distant, nostalgic, European atmosphere? I was struggling with myself, trying to make sure that I would not conflate different time frames and locations, or take them for a sign, or let my attention be diverted and get carried away with reveries, yet I couldn't get such imaginings out of my head. The thought that I had things to do struck me painfully. I couldn't fritter away my time here, just because I enjoyed lolling about with Rachel. The buzz in the café, the hiss of the espresso machine, the smell of freshly roasted coffee beans, and the fact that I was here and was part of something captivated me; yet another sound kept rattling in me and gave me no rest. I began tapping my fingers on the table. Rachel moved her hand closer and placed it on mine.

"Why don't you come here?" she asked casually. "At least for a time."

"You mean to live here? And what would I do? I mean besides being with you. I write in a foreign language. I teach American literature. Do you think I could do all this in Hebrew?" I shook my head in resignation.

"Why don't you apply for a fellowship? Or you might want to work and write besides."

"Work at what, for instance?"

"For instance..." You could see she was giving this some thought. "You might work in a moshav.[5] Like Kafka did in that gardening school, which you told me about. It's possible that that is what you really aspire to, but you take a circuitous route to achieve your goal. " She said this with a smile.

I didn't know what to say. But something stirred in me, as when drilling for oil hundreds of feet deep and suddenly there's movement. I had to laugh.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing. A long, long time ago, I wished for something like this."

"How long ago?"

"Thirty years, half a year, one day?"

"I don't get it." She shook her head and looked at me seriously.

"When I was a romantic and a happy-go-lucky fella."

"And you're no longer that? Or you don't think you could be that again? You could work four hours a day, you know; give English lessons to the children. Besides that you could write and learn Hebrew. You wouldn't have money problems," she added reassuringly.

"Because?"

"Because you wouldn't arrive here in a total void. You could live at my place. Let's just say as a rent-free lodger," she smiled. Provided you and my kids could tolerate one another. Room, board, sex. The latter only when the kids are with their father. At night they sometimes come to my room and sleep there." She stretched out her arms in a conciliatory way. "You could commute to a settlement near Tel Aviv and work there, and devote your afternoons to writing."

"And who would be interested here in Israel in what I write? Even if it's translated."

"And who is interested there?"

That hurt. I didn't say anything.

"These are your words," she said defensively.

Suddenly I felt like a tightrope walker balancing with a pole. But I hover over a great void, balancing with a pen in my hand. There is no table, no paper, no rope either. It's as if I were treading and tottering on continually moving and dissolving letters, words and lines.

"It's true," I said despondently. "Who is interested in literature nowadays? Or in the Jewish people, for that matter. To say nothing of Jewish literature. Whoever is interested in one couldn't care less about the other, and vice versa. It's like falling between two chairs."

"Stop moaning. And don't wallow in your suffering. Every artist biography's conclusion is that uncertainty stimulates creativity."

"Maybe we should look for a gardening school after all."

5 ■ A communal settlement offering agricultural work.

Her eyes lit up.

"Now that you mention it... I also had a dream about a garden... an orchard. Maybe because when I was little, every summer at Lake Balaton... there were other kids in the neighbor's house, and fruit trees galore in their garden: apple, pear, plum, walnut, sour cherry, and also strawberry, raspberry and currant bushes. Plus tomato and paprika stems. I saw daily how everything in the garden was ripening. And the people seemed friendly, free and easy. The whole thing was a little unusual... But you should write that Kafka story. People here might be interested.

Her enthusiasm galvanized me. I tried to imagine myself working in the orchard in the morning and sitting at a desk in the afternoon, but all of a sudden I thought of something entirely different.

"You are ashamed of watching porn, right? Even though to watch, alone or with a partner, two people screwing, who know they are being filmed and get a kick out of it, is nothing compared to showing off a writer's torments, desires and fears; we revel collectively in them at conferences, in books, at parties... Our culture wants to conceal what is uniform and expose what is personal," I went on complaining. "Everyone screws more or less the same way but is anxious very differently. Which makes that condition most intimate. And to expose it is most despicable. Literary history is the most perverse profession... Biographers have been known to track down and publicize writers' laundry lists, their correspondence with insurance people, or titles they jotted down in a second-hand bookshop. Graphologists analyze their handwriting or look up which porn magazines they subscribed to. They uncover their subjects' most dreadful traumas, their secret-most feelings and thoughts. This is real perversion and pornography..." I raised my up-to-now muffled voice. I also realized I was bathed in sweat.

Rachel listened in awe to my speech, but she also looked around as though she were concerned that somebody would understand what I had just said. I spoke louder than the others; they leaned closer to one another and, it seemed, put their heads together. I, on the other hand, had flailed my arms while holding forth.

I motioned to the waiter: "Check, please."

It felt good to leave the air conditioned café and step into the early evening twilight. I didn't even notice it, but I might have caught a chill in there. I was still shivering and quickly put on my leather jacket.

"I'd be a stranger here," I said when we sat in the car. "It doesn't make me happy, I don't want to theorize about it or draw far-reaching conclusions, but I can't very well ignore it."

"But this is not about Judaism or about you not speaking Hebrew... And you know it."

"What is it about then?"

"Why don't you ever speak about your parents?"

I shrugged my shoulder.

"What was your relationship with them like?"

"Stop being the analyst."

"It's my profession."

"I have few memories of childhood. And even those are not very good. And my parents didn't talk about their childhoods either."

"What could they have said about them?"

"They never talked about their feelings. They didn't talk about anything, except studying, work, duty. All they wanted to do is prepare me for future trials and tribulations. Life as joy, as adventure... life as life never came up. I remember very little from my childhood. Only the duties and punishments. And the emptiness."

"You once told me that both your parents lost their fathers; their mothers worked for two. That was the model they saw, and that's what they kept up. They didn't know what two parents meant, let alone a complete family. They couldn't communicate how it feels to be missing someone; so they enacted it in your life. In these circumstances it's hard for a child to feel at home. Your alienation and what you said about language may stem from this condition." Rachel placed the palm of her hand on my face. "Your mother tongue is the language of strangeness."

I pulled my head away.

"You're more understanding with other people than with your own parents," I remarked, but before she could answer I thought of something: "Do we have time to stop at the National Library?"

"What would you like to do there?" Rachel asked with a smile. "Look at Kafka manuscripts? I read that those are only photocopies there. And you can't get to them right away, either." She glanced at her watch.

"I just want to look around."

"At the Givat Ram campus there are no open shelves, only on Mount Scopus."

"Do we have enough time?"

She nodded.

Once in the car, she keyed our destination into the GPS. From the city center to the Mount Scopus campus we had to proceed north. The road was uphill all the way. Rachel called an acquaintance in the Psychology Department, who then left my name at the guard house, so we got in without a hitch. The university's buildings with their tight, narrow windows looked like fortresses, and not accidentally, either. Mount Scopus, when these buildings went up, was considered a strategic point.

Rachel walked me to the building and before waving goodbye, said that the woman she knew was still in her office, so she'd visit her while I did my searching, and when she went down to the main gate, she'd send me a text message.

The librarian on duty on the fifth floor was a large, slow-moving young man in frayed jeans and worn-down Crocs. When I asked him where I could find the

modern Jewish literature collection, and also Kafka criticism, he sent me to the German section.

"You'll find the authors in alphabetical order next to books by Kafka. Israeli literature is also shelved according to the authors' names, in alphabetical order." He even showed me on a little map where exactly I could find what I was looking for.

"I was thinking not of Israeli but Diaspora Jewish literature."

"I'm afraid," he said pensively, "there are no books shelved under that heading."

"How about anthologies, essays, studies?" I tried bargaining with him.

For a moment he seemed unsure of himself.

"You might want to look for individual authors under the given language; the works are shelved in alphabetical order. The secondary literature on each author can be found right next to their books."

"You mean there is no such category or heading as Jewish literature?" I raised my voice in total surprise, which he may have interpreted as a rebuke.

"Who or what are you actually looking for," he asked rather skeptically. Then, having had enough of my shilly-shallying, he excused himself and went on his way.

I felt extremely uncomfortable at this point, and the feeling became even stronger when I remained alone among the rows of bookshelves.

In the section devoted to Israeli literature, I found only Hebrew material. Not even English and German translations of Israeli writers were kept there. I went back to the information desk and nearby, where various handbooks were displayed, I found a few new and much-touted novels in English that I had read, or at least I had read something else by the same author. I knew that I didn't have much time, but was confident that in the American literature section I would find specialized reference books that I had already come across somewhere, on Amazon and AbeBooks, and some of the titles I'd already ordered.

After looking over display cases filled with the latest American and European fiction, and finding no trace of collected thematic material, only a few scattered specialized monographs, I felt utterly depressed. If I can't even find what I am looking for here, then where? If the various European literatures do not recognize Jewish literature as a legitimate, independent subject, and not even here in Jerusalem do I find any trace of it, what's left? America perhaps?

My phone stirred. A message from Rachel. She was waiting for me at the exit. I left the building, still down in the dumps.

"So, did you find what you were looking for?"

I nodded my head. I didn't have the strength to share with her what I didn't find.

She turned on the ignition and we headed back to Tel Aviv. ❧

Translated by Ivan Sanders

Iván Bächer

Three Short Stories

Translated by Szabolcs László

How to be a Hungarian Poet

Be born in Budapest with the simple name Glattner. Mother and twin-brother should die during delivery.

At the age of thirteen be left an orphan.

Attend university in Szeged, in part because of the numerus clausus law. Here finally find some friends. Find a role-model in the person of a Catholic priest-professor with Jewish origins.

Learn everything there is to be learned.

Request a name change during the comprehensive exams.

The office, invoking the regulation regarding protected names, should allow only "Radnóczi."

Photograph by Miklós Tekkós

Iván Bächer (1957–2013)

was a Hungarian writer, playwright, and journalist. His father was a renowned pianist (Mihály Bächer), his mother an architect, and his great-grandfather the famous nineteenth-century writer Zoltán Thury. In 1981, Bächer began publishing in prominent literary journals such as Élet és Irodalom, *and later he worked as a journalist at one of the leading dailies,* Népszabadság. *Following the literary tradition pioneered by his great-grandfather, Bächer became one of the contemporary masters of the short story and the feuilleton. The first of the three stories published here is about Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944), who perished in the Holocaust. The child of an assimilated Jewish family, Radnóti fervently identified himself as a Hungarian. Because he was regarded by the authorities as Jewish, he was assigned to an unarmed forced labor battalion during the war. In August 1944 he was murdered in the course of a forced march and buried in a mass grave. We include in this issue "How Others See," an English translation by Thomas Ország-Land of one of Radnóti's poems on his love for his homeland.*

Take the name of your Jewish grandfather's hometown nonetheless.

In the second half of the 1930s, start preparing carefully for death.

Be perfect. Live and write flawlessly.

Don't really write newspaper articles, weekly reviews or novels.

Do not bother with anything apart from completing the task perfectly. The task is not to live. Life does not matter. There is only one task that matters anymore, be a Hungarian poet.

As this becomes more and more difficult, it also should become more and more self-evident.

When your city is in the hands of your eventual murderers, those who (would have) made you an outcast from the heart of the Hungarian people, and so is being bombed, defy the outrage of friends and write a poem entitled "How Others See."

With all due apologies, decline to submit a poem for the anthology of Hungarian Jewish poets.

Love the small things: walnuts, your spouse, apple trees, peace.

In May 1944, report for labor service. For the third time.

Work in the Heidenau labor camp in Bor, where there will be not a single French, Polish, loud Italian or separatist Serbian prisoner, only pensive Jews and Hungarians classified as Jews.

Pick a lot of blackberries and write in the small notebook with beautiful, unflinching, neat handwriting, so that it will still be legible after the pages have been soaked with mud and the blood and various fluids of your body.

Don't worry about corrections at this stage.

For a fleeting second, you may remember with a smile the lovely desk you had made for your room on Pozsonyi Road, but then get back to writing in the black notebook you hold in your palm.

Attend the afternoon Zionist cultural gatherings, but you regret you must decline to take an active part. Somewhere else, on a different occasion, recite your favorite ballad, "The Two Pages of Szondi," mostly because it's what you happen to like best at the time.

In August 1944, start your journey "homeward." Homeward.

Before and during the journey, try whenever possible to hand out copies of your poems to every friend and acquaintance, in case the small notebook is destroyed or lost.

The unit should be made up of sappers from Szeged.

Watch as they kill off your fellow servicemen.

Watch as they forbid the Serbs to give you food.

Watch as the guards beat to death those who start to hum the Hungarian anthem at Titel, near the border.

Step over the dead bodies of your fellow servicemen.

Suffer everything there is to be suffered.

Observe in the end that there are two humane people in the unit, the two German cooks. There should be no other Germans around you.

Put German words in the mouths of your killers.[1]

Watch, since you no longer have the strength to help, as your fellow serviceman digs your grave.

Wear britches, a light grey jacket, and a ragged trench coat.

Be calm: you will be found.

Dance of Death

A story that is not about death, at least to the extent that there is anything in this life that is not about death.

Mihály Gold rose from the black leather armchair.

It was 21 September, 1956, a Friday, nine o'clock in the evening.

He was up next. The fourth contender to play in the final round of the piano competition. *Danse macabre*, by Franz Liszt. While heading towards the podium, his rivals, a Soviet boy, a young Chinese man, and a French woman, shook his hand and patted him on the back.

He even got a comradely hug and kiss from the Chinese youngster. They had developed a close friendship. The pianist from China was seventeen at the time, and already a genius, only to have his fingers crushed by the Red Guards fifteen years later so that he'd stop playing all that imperialist music.

Danse macabre. Totentanz. Dance of death

As a matter of fact, Mihály Gold never particularly liked this piano composition by Liszt.

One-dimensional, he would say, on those very rare occasions when he commented on something related to music. It was simple music. Not like Mozart, or Beethoven. It did not have everything. It had only one thing. Though there was plenty of that.

Dance of death.

Cruel, monotonous, wrathful music. Ruthless, cragged, frantic, sorrowful, maddening music. Nothing uplifting in it, nothing consoling.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Liszt was already composing the music of the twentieth century. It is not by chance that Danse macabre regularly figured as a prominent piece in Bartók's repertoire.

Of course, this too was a variation. Mihály Gold was particularly drawn to the variation as a form: Beethoven's *Eroica Variations*, his Sonata no. 32, Brahms' *Händel Variations*, or Liszt's Sonata in B-minor, all of them variations, "simple" music.

Dance of death.

Years later, in Pisa, Mihály Gold saw the magnificent fresco of the Camposanto, *The Triumph of Death*, which served as the inspiration for Liszt's opus and which for a long time was thought to be the work of either Andrea Orcagna, Francesco Traini or Bonamico Buffalmacco and which was pretty much destroyed by a bomb. Mihály Gold even read some Goethe and Hoffman in the sanatorium, yet his essential knowledge of the theme did not come from this.

After all, the real teacher of death is life itself.

Gold contracted tuberculosis in 1947.

He received his discharge report from the Jewish Hospital on 17 August, 1950. Mihály Gold learned a lot while there. He read extensively and of course he had to witness a great many things. The whole experience turned out to be a nice little postgraduate training after forced labor service. Mihály Gold got his PhD in death, with honors.

After a three-year hiatus, he stepped up on the podium of the concert hall in the spring of 1951. The program included Beethoven's Sonata no. 27 in E minor, the *Appassionata*, and the Sonata no. 31 in A-flat major. The show was a success, but what made it legendary was grandmother Gojszi. At the end of the concert she sprang up from her seat in the first row, where she would usually sit since she was nearly deaf, turned to face the applauding audience and shouted at the top of her voice, "And my other grandson is a Stakhanovite!"

Dance of death.

Mihály Gold first played Liszt's *Danse macabre* on 12 November, 1951, with the State Orchestra and then again in August of the following year, and after playing it in Bucharest in 1953 he earned a studio recording. Then before the competition, on 19 July, 1956, a Thursday, he had the chance to rehearse *Danse macabre* in the Károlyi Garden under French conductor Georges Tzipine.

No other piece had he performed so many times up to that day.

It was a grand competition.

The breathtaking competition of a breathtaking year.

Among the fifty-one contenders from twenty-one countries there were about a dozen great pianists. Not simply good. Or skillful. Or talented. But great. It was also a historical competition. Budapest had not held such an event since 1933. And for most of the participants this was the first occasion, after long years, to travel abroad in a world divided by the Iron Curtain.

Dance of death.

Gold stepped out of the green room. In the hallway, standing beside a small table was Feri Rudas. His elimination from the final round was one of the jury's biggest mistakes. He also patted Misi on the back. For the following forty years, the two of them would go on to represent two distinct schools at the conservatory. One day, upon hearing that Feri forbade his students to use the pedals when they played Mozart, Misi started shouting at him in front of

dozens of pupils: "You are leading these kids astray, you moron!" To which Rudas replied with honest rage: "And you can't even play the notes, you blithering idiot!"

Yet on that night, all of the notes of the *Danse macabre* were flawlessly played.

Mihály Gold had his share of troubles at the time.

It was a hectic period, full of troubling events, even before September. Misi's mother, Böske Romlay, had become asthmatic in the spring of 1955, she struggled for air, and she continued to struggle for air for the next thirty years. She was listening to the radio broadcast of the competition concerts in the Kékestető sanatorium. In April uncle Náci got out of prison thank the lord, where he had ended up for embezzlement, but in May Gold's in-laws, Gyula Sprentzl and Aranka Malovecz, moved back from war-torn Algeria to Tolbuhin Boulevard in Budapest. On 13 October, Aranka had surgery because of a tumor, and everybody thought it was grave, they couldn't have known it wasn't that grave, at least not then. On 15 May, 1956, Béla Malovecz, the count's tailor, died, and that had to be handled somehow, too. In the meantime, there was work to be done, on 6 June Gold performed Brahms' Piano Concerto no. 2 in B-flat major. And above all, he had to prepare for the competition.

It was hard, everything was hard. And of course, it was also beautiful, full of life.

The competition unfolded in a strange and tense atmosphere, a month later shooting would start on the streets after all. It was not just a simple international competition, it was a national cause. Four finalists out of the total eight were Soviet, so one can imagine the skirmishes that ensued. Only one out of the eight was Hungarian, Mihály Gold, and according to the scoring he had been eighth, barely making it into the finals.

He was now on his way to play a grand piano piece in a grand competition, walking through the corridor towards the concert hall, which still shook with applause for the Soviet contender, Lazarij. This Lazarij became a world-famous pianist afterwards, under the name Lazar. Yet on that night, even his performance of the concerto in E-flat major failed to surpass Gold's *Danse macabre*.

When, following the conductor, Mihály Gold stepped on the stage and, with one hand on the instrument, made his characteristically awkward and nervous bow, the ladies in the front rows all raised their hands to their mouths.

Mihály Gold was thirty-two at the time, and a very handsome young man.

Dance of death.

In the back of the main hall, his unborn son Jenő Gold was already present. Even he heard the *Danse macabre*. Although he probably didn't yet have any ears.

Mrs. Gold, Erika, was somewhat irritable in those days. She really couldn't stand the Danse macabre. Because of the endless rehearsals at home, naturally. It was maddening to have to hear it for hours and hours, every day. But she didn't complain, because how could she. She never said a thing, except

once, but even then she spoke softly, just noting that she couldn't endure any more death, from morning to evening, nothing but agonizing, shrieking, whispering, and thundering death.

It is worth mentioning that in the middle of May 1956, Erika visited the clinic on Bakáts Square, where they fixed something inside her, the previously abnormal position of which, it turned out, had been the underlying reason for the childlessness of the first seven years of their marriage.

Three months before the competition, on 11 June, 1956, at around five in the afternoon, after Misi had played the same part of *Danse macabre* for the fiftieth time, Erika had gone over to him, stood close to the back of the chair, and hugged his neck:

"I beg you, rest for a while..."

And that is how Jenő Gold came to be. From a little break in the dance.

Dance of death.

This piece of music put its mark retrospectively upon the ancestors, and upon the descendants to the seventh generation. That particular *Danse macabre*, without doubt, determined the lives and deaths of four or five generations. That *Danse macabre*, after all, contained everything. Alcoholic great-grandfathers and pious old ladies, unrelenting aunts and kind mothers, wasted talents, washed-up lives, being called Jewish, being real Communists, sickness, love, faithfulness, betrayal and loyalty-in-spite-of-it-all, it contained everything, everything that happened until then, and everything that would happen afterwards.

Dance of death. Dance of death. Dance of death. These words became as regular in the Gold family as football, wine, or bread. Dance of death. Nothing could be more ordinary. Dance of death. That's what they were playing, that's what they were dancing, nothing but that. No other dance came into fashion.

Mihály Gold stood there for a while, as if isolated in infinite solitude, waiting for the loud welcoming applause to die away. He made a last bow, shook hands with the conductor and sat down in front of the piano, but had to rise quickly to adjust the piano stool. After resuming his seat, he looked at the keyboard and up at the conductor, who ceremoniously tapped his baton a few times on the rostrum, took a hurried glance at the orchestra, then looked down at him, at Misi that is, and gave him an encouraging smile, because conductors have this idiotic habit of smiling supportively at colleagues, but this time he was met by a stony, ash-grey expression which at once froze the smile on his face.

They nodded to each other, Misi raised his hands above the keyboard, and came crashing down on the piano.

And that's when the revolution broke out.

Which of course he never referred to by that name.

He came in second in the competition, by the way.

The award was accompanied by a prize of 20,000 forints.

That was quite a sum at the time, and it was certainly well received.

The Certificate

It happened in 1990, sometime in autumn.

They met in front of the Film Museum.

Mihály Gold got there a bit early, Bárdy, the economist, arrived on time, and Maxi, the linguist, was late.

They did not exchange any formal greetings, just a nod of the head, as if they had seen one another the previous day. In fact, they hadn't met for years.

"Well, let's go!" said Misi, and he started walking with firm determination towards the Utas wine bar on Dohány Street.

This particular wine bar sold spirits too.

They asked for three shots of cherry brandy, two bottles of beer, and three glasses. Misi pushed his spectacles to the top of his head, propped his neck on his left hand, and downed the shot in one swift move. Maxi, the most elegant of the three and also the baldest, was suspiciously examining the little shot glass in his hand, yet for the sake of his friends, he did his best to hide his repulsion.

Bárdy drank in a calm, cheerful and off-handed manner.

"So, what's new?" grumbled Misi.

"I'm getting a divorce," shrugged the linguist.

"Oy vey, that costs a lot," said the economist, shaking his head.

"She cost a lot anyway."

"Otherwise she seems nice."

"Otherwise, yes, otherwise she is nice, beautiful and smart, otherwise, but, you know, it's not enough that she spends like crazy..."

"She's also being used by someone else," the economist nodded, who only had to use complex language in professional circles.

"Well, yes, but..."

"Anyway, it was about time you got another divorce."

"It seems like it was just yesterday..."

"If only it were today."

"Is this your fifth?"

"Silly bastard! It's you who had five."

"Oh, yeah..."

"Doesn't matter anyway."

"They all cost a lot."

"At least this is a one-time expense."

"So, what else is new?"

"They've appointed me university professor again," Bárdy told them, "New Delhi or Luanda, I don't remember... Anyway, that they allow, that much is permitted. They want me 3,000 kilometers away from Dimitrov Square.[2] How about you? Concerts?"

"Just last week I had twelve in two days... I played in every gym of every technical college in BAZ[3] County... One of them even had a piano. The kids had carved a beautiful swastika on its side with a pocket knife. But the gym teacher had tactfully painted over it. With blue oil paint, cause that's the only kind he found in the workroom."

"That'll do..."

They ordered another round of shots, spoke of their children, listed their ailments, and then walked down Dohány towards Síp Street.

"And what if they make us pull down our pants?" wondered Misi.

The labor service battalion they had served in was specifically reserved for young Christian men who had been ruled to be Jewish by the Hungarian Parliament because of the religious persuasion of their grandparents back in the days of the monarchy. As it so happened, it had been a fortunate battalion. More than a third of the men had survived.

"First the problem is you're Jewish, then the problem is you're not Jewish."

"That reminds me," said the economist in a more lively tone, "two weeks ago I was at the urologist's, my prostate was acting up again. These two guys were sitting next to me, so we started to chat. Both of them were there for a follow-up after a serious operation. The guy on my left, well, in moment of blind passion his woman accidentally bit it off..."

"Oh Lord, lovely," sighed the linguist.

"Now the guy on my right, he was attacked by his wife with a razor blade, while she was screaming:, 'I'll show you! Take this to your whores!'"

"Well..."

"Tough..."

All three of them turned and passed through the gate of the large building.

The economist had been warned in his institute:

"Andris, you won't get a pension because there's a gap in your résumé. What did you do in '44 and '45?"

Of course, the economist had told them what he had done, but it turned out that you needed a paper issued by the confessional board. Because back then the state had only provided for assembly and transportation, and sometimes dispatch to the mine fields, but registration was entrusted to those directly affected. In the Síp Street office you had to have two witnesses to prove how you had passed the time.

On the first floor they were greeted by a nice, older woman. Her desk, covered in papers, was dominated by a shiny, 80-year old Remington.

They told her the number of their battalion and she immediately identified the case from memory:

"Jolsva, Diósgyőr, Ládi Lumberyard, Mexikói Meadow... How long were you there?"

"We were called up in July '44 and they..."

"I don't need a certificate," snapped Misi. "For those assholes?! Certificate! Hah! I hope they all curl up and die! Just give one to these two idiots. I'm just here as a witness."

"So the two of us," continued the linguist, "escaped into the Bükk Mountains..."

At this point the economist, who was generally cheerful, off-handed and cynical, gave a sigh, and his eyes, which of course were always sad, grew dim with tears behind his giant spectacles.

"They didn't even tell me."

"You didn't want to come!" Mihály Gold shouted.

"Not there, in the Bükk Mountains... That was your obsession ... like it was the only place to slip away... and then you almost froze to death... in the fucking Bükk."

"Don't shout at me!"

"Let's stop this."

"Bükk... Bükk..."

For a while the old lady watched the three professors yell at one another, then she put a blank page into the old Remington and started typing away.

The three brothers-in-arms went silent.

"Just out of curiosity," asked Misi after a while, "what if, right after us, three former Arrow Cross guards were to show up to ask for certificates?"

"I don't know. None of them has shown up yet," the old woman shrugged her shoulders and continued typing. Then she suddenly stopped and looked up at the three men.

"My dears... this little desertion, and you not serving the full time, let's leave it out, alright? It might cause trouble. We are heading towards troubled times. Trust me, I've seen a lot in my life. I wasn't in the labor service..."[4] she added, with a sad smile in her large, gray eyes. "Troubled times are coming. I'd better write that the battalion was disbanded in Hatvan."

Without even waiting for their response, she finished typing and issued the certificates.

The three professors walked silently down the worn steps of the building.

"Our little escape, our little act of bravery, they took that away from us too," sighed Bárdy.

"Typical."

"Let's go to the Kiskacsa," said Misi. And so the three of them, grey-haired and bald, strolled leisurely to the bistro on the corner of Dob street, bought a round of cherry shots, and said goodbye, and they never saw one another again. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ This is a reference to a line in one of the poems in the notebook found on Radnóti's exhumed body. The last lines of the poem, "Razglednicák 4" ("Fourth Postcard"), *razglednica* meaning "postcard" in Serbian, are, in the translation by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner,

> I fell beside him and his corpse turned over,
> tight already as a snapping string.
> Shot in the neck. "And that's how you'll end too,"
> I whispered to myself; "lie still; no moving.
> Now patience flowers into death." Then I could hear
> "Der springt noch auf," above, and very near.
> Blood mixed with mud was drying on my ear.

Radnóti was in a Hungarian forced labor battalion. This apparent attempt to absolve the Hungarian guards who murdered him can be read as the most tragic expression of his attachment to his identity as a Hungarian.

2 ■ Fővám Square in Budapest, where the Corvinus (formerly Carl Marx) University is located, was called Dimitrov Square between 1949 and 1991.

3 ■ Short for Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén. It is one of the poorest counties in Hungary.

4 ■ The original Hungarian text contains the word "muszos," which is an abbreviation for "munkaszolgálatos," the word used to designate an inmate of the forced labor camps. Many Jewish men were sent to these camps, while women were deported.

Film in English

Diana Groó: REGINA

A documentary film on the life of Regina Jonas (1902-1944), the first properly ordained female rabbi in the world. In the Nazi era, Jonas gave solace to persecuted Jews in Germany with her sermons and her devotion to her community. Even after her deportation to Theresienstadt, she continued her work as a rabbi. She was deported to Auschwitz in October 1944 and murdered two months later. The film examines her struggle to be ordained as a rabbi and her legacy as a pioneering figure of Jewish and European history. Directed by Hungarian film director Diana Groó.

Miklós Radnóti

How others see...

Translated by Thomas Ország-Land

How others see this region, I cannot understand:
to me, this little country is menaced motherland
engulfed by flames, the world of my childhood swaying far,
and I am grown from this land as tender branches are
from trees. And may my body sink into this soil in the end.
When plants reach out towards me, I greet them as a friend
and know their names and flowers. I am at home here, knowing
the people on the road and I know where they are going—
and how I know the meaning when, by a summer lane,
the sunset paints the walls with a liquid flame of pain!
The pilot can't help viewing a war map from the sky,
and even Vörösmarty's[1] old house escapes his eye;
what can he identify here? grim barracks and factories,
but I see steeples, oxen, and grasshoppers, farms and bees;
his lens spies out the vital production plants, the fields,
but I can see the worker, afraid below, who shields

Miklós Radnóti (1909–1944)

was a Hungarian poet who perished in the Holocaust. The child of an assimilated Jewish family, Radnóti always identified himself in his poetry as a Hungarian. With the outbreak of war, Radnóti was conscripted into the Hungarian Army, but because he was regarded as Jewish by the authorities (though he had converted to Catholicism), he was assigned to an unarmed forced labor battalion.

In August 1944 he was murdered in the course of a forced march and buried in a mass grave. Eighteen months after his death, his body was exhumed and a small notebook containing his last poems was found in the front pocket of his overcoat. The notebook includes poems that today are regarded as some of his finest works and some of the finest works of twentieth-century Hungarian literature.

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1 ■ Mihály Vörösmarty (1800–1855), one of the great Hungarian poets of the Reform Era.

his labour, a singing orchard, a vineyard and a wood,
among the graves a granny still mourning her widowhood;
and what may seem a plant or a rail line that must be wrecked
is just a signal-house with the keeper standing erect
and waving his red flag, lots of children around the guard;
a shepherd dog might roll in the dust in a factory yard;
and there's the park with the footprints of past loves and the flavour
of childhood kisses—the honey, the cranberry I still savour,
and on my way to school, by the kerbside, to postpone
a spot-test one certain morning, I stepped upon a stone:
look! There's the stone whose magic the pilot cannot see...
No instrument could merge them in his topography.

True, most of us are guilty, our people as the rest.
We know our faults. We know how and when we have transgressed.
But blameless lives are among us, of toil and poetry and passion,
and infants with an infinite capacity for compassion—
they will protect its glow down in gloomy bomb shelters, till
our land is marked out again by the finger of peace... then they will
respond to our muffled words with new voices fresh and bright.

Extend your vast wings above us, protective cloud of night.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ESZTER KRAKKO

A statue of Miklós Radnóti in front of the theater that was named after him

István Örkény

One-Minute Stories

Translated by Judith Sollosy

Appetite

Far, far away, beyond the double barbed wire fence, a sled came into view. Like in a fairy tale, it was drawn by two small hairy horses, and it was driven by a small man in a big hairy hat. It was laden with round-backed loaves of black bread that made our mouths water, even from a distance.

It came three times a week, but every time it came, all eight-thousand of us watched it approach. Sometimes it brought skinned horses heads grinning, yellow toothed, at us from a distance. Sometimes it brought salted fish or millet or tinned food. It felt good to watch it, even if watching it did us no good, because as soon as it reached the camp gate, the sled turned in the direction

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István Örkény (1912–1979)

was a playwright, short story writer, and novelist whose works are often regarded as the finest examples of Hungarian literature of the Grotesque. As a young man he first studied to be a pharmacist, but by the late 1930s he had begun to pursue a career as a writer. In 1941, he published a collection of short stories entitled Tengertánc *("Miny, Moe"), the eponymous story of which was originally published in 1937 under the title "Forradalom" ("Revolution"). In 1942 he was sent to the Russian front, where as a Jew he served in a forced labor battalion. He was captured and held in a labor camp in the Soviet Union, but was able to return to Hungary in 1946. He eventually emerged as one of the most distinctive voices of post-war Hungarian literature. He is particularly well known for his so-called one-minute stories, in which elements of the Grotesque are often used as a means of veiling, sometimes only thinly, his criticism of the communist regime. One section of the Autumn 2013 issue of* The Hungarian Quarterly *was devoted to a commemoration of Örkény's work. It contained several previously unpublished translations of works by Örkény and a collection of essays on his oeuvre and legacy.*

Photograph by Larry Morris. With the generous permission of Zsuzsa Radnóti

of the warehouses, where a hefty portion of the food was invariably stolen.

That day, though, things took a different turn. A miracle, but the gate opened up, and the small man in the hairy hat made for the *lagerstrasse*, the main road of the camp. Instantly, the camp came alive with a great rumble, as if the earth had split in two.

The camp had four streets. The barracks squatted in eight rows sunk deep in the snow. The doors opened, and the roads filled up with people, an army of black ants teaming towards the open gate.

It didn't take long.

The army of black ants swarmed around the sled, billowing and surging on top, like the waves of a sea of worms. For a minute or two they crawled, trampling each other under foot, then they headed back over the main road in droves, dispersed along the side streets, and disappeared inside the barracks. Only the sled remained.

The sled remained, but the bread was gone, and so were the two little hairy horses, and the little driver in the hairy hat. Only the empty sled, the whip handle, and the parts of the horse gear not made of leather, this is all that remained—a couple of chains and buckles and rings. Oh, and a cluster of keys.

In Memoriam Dr. H. G. K.

"Hölderlin ist ihnen unbekannt."[1] Dr. H. G. K. asked as he dug the pit for the horse's carcass.

"Who is that?" the German guard growled.

"The author of Hyperion," said Dr. H. G. K., who had a positive passion for explanations. "The greatest figure of German Romanticism. How about Heine?" he tried again.

"Who're them guys?" the guard growled, louder than before.

"Poets," Dr. H. G. K. said. "But Schiller. Surely you have heard of Schiller?"

"That goes without saying," the German guard nodded.

"And Rilke?" Dr. H. G. K. insisted.

"Him, too," the German guard said and, turning the color of paprika, shot Dr. H. G. K. in the back of the head.

1 ■ "You're not familiar with Hölderlin?"

Home Sweet Home

The little girl was only four and her memories were correspondingly vague. In order to refresh them, her mother took her up to the barbed wire fence and pointed to the wagons standing at a distance.

"Can you see?" she said. "That train is going to take us home."

"Is that good?" the little girl asked.

"Yes, it's good," her mother said. "We'll see our home again."

"What's home?" the little girl asked.

"The place where we used to live," her mother said.

"So what?" the little girl asked.

"You remember your Teddy bear? And your dolls? Maybe you still have your dolls."

"Mommy," the little girl asked, "will we have guards there, too?"

"No, dear," her mother said, "no guards."

"Does that mean," the little girl asked, "that we'll be able to escape?"

English Title

THE INVISIBLE BRIDGE
by Julie Orringer

◆

MY BROTHER'S VOICE:
HOW A YOUNG HUNGARIAN BOY SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST (A TRUE STORY)
by Stephen Nasser

◆

SWIMMING ACROSS: A MEMOIR
by Andrew S. Grove

◆

NINE SUITCASES: A MEMOIR
by Béla Zsolt

1. Lili Ország. *Woman in front of a Wall* (1956)
Oil on canvas. Photograph by Gabor Nagy (MODEM, Debrecen). King Saint Stephen Museum, Székesfehérvár

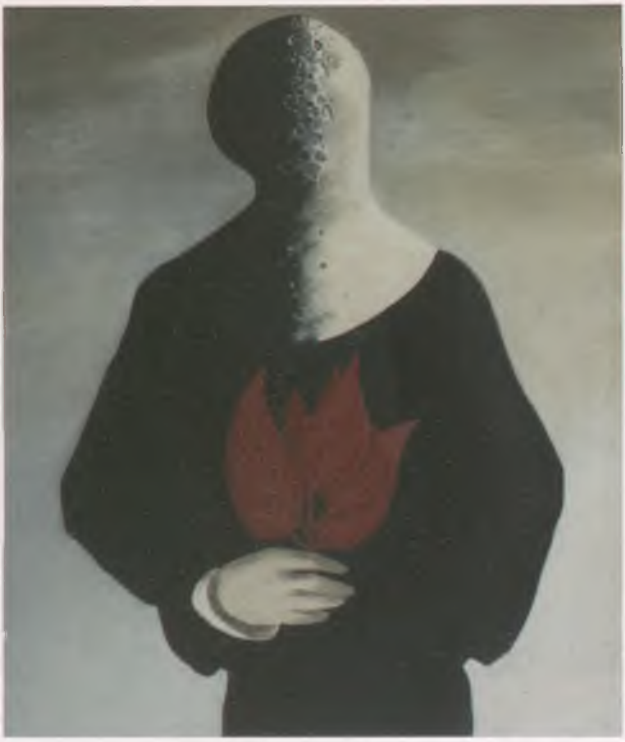
2. Lili Ország. *Young Girl in front of a Wall* (1955) Oil on canvas. Photograph by Gábor Nagy (MODEM, Debrecen). Flóris Rómer Museum of Art and History, Vasilescu Collection, Győr

3. Lili Ország. *Huge Wall II* (1955)
Oil on canvas. Photograph by Gábor Nagy (MODEM, Debrecen). MODEM, Antal-Lusztig Collection, Debrecen. In deposit

4. Lili Ország. *Distress* (1955)
Oil on canvas. Photograph by Gábor Nagy (MODEM, Debrecen). Kolozsvary Collection, Győr

6. Lili Ország.
Shoes (1955)
Oil on canvas.
Photograph by Gabor Nagy
(MODEM, Debrecen).
Kolozsvary Collection, Győr

< 5. Lili Ország.
Crucified (1957)
Paper; collage.
Hungarian National Gallery
and the Museum of Fine Arts,
Budapest



7. Lili Ország.
Tobacco Leafed (1956)
Oil on canvas.
Photograph by Gabor Nagy
(MODEM, Debrecen).
King Saint Stephen Museum,
Székesfehérvár

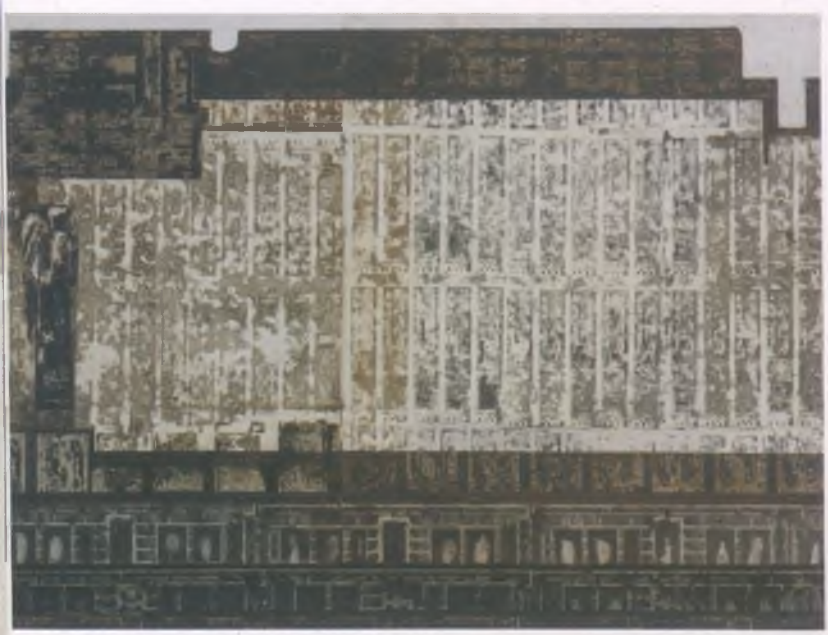
8. Lili Ország. *Vision (The Jewish Cemetery of Prague),* (1968)
Oil, tempera on fibreboard. Budapest History Museum, Museum Kiscell Municipal Picture Gallery

9. Lili Ország. *Lamentation* (1967)
Oil on fibreboard. Kieselbach Gallery and Auction House. Property of Tamás Kieselbach

10. Lili Ország. *Romanesque Christ* (1969)
Oil on fibreboard. Photograph by Gábor Nagy (MODEM, Debrecen). Kolozsváry Collection, Győr

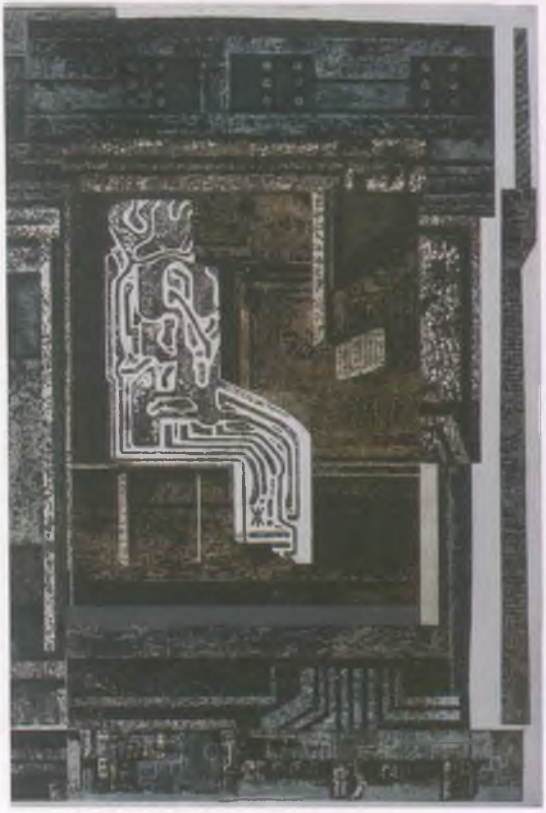
11. Lili Ország. *City with Arcades / Closed Gates* (1964)
Oil on cardboard. Photograph by Gábor Nagy (MODEM, Debrecen). MODEM, Antal-Lusztig Collection, Debrecen

Lili Ország. *Labyrinth with Orans Figure L IX* (1974)
Oil on fibreboard. Budapest History Museum, Museum Kiscell-Municipal Picture Gallery



Lili Orszag. *Icarus with His Remains L XXIII* (1975)
Oil on fibreboard. Budapest History Museum, Museum Kiscell-Municipal Picture Gallery

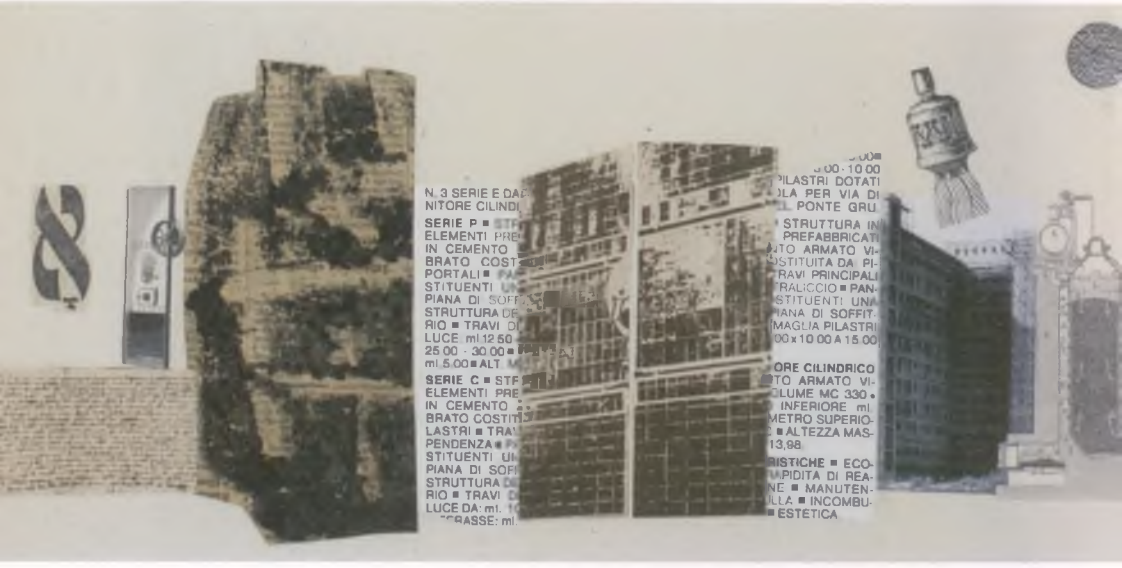
Lili Orszag. *The Guard of the Castle* (1977)
Oil on fibreboard. Budapest History Museum, Museum Kiscell-Municipal Picture Gallery



Lili Orszag. *Brown Waiting Figure L XXXIV* (1978)
Oil on fibreboard. Budapest History Museum, Museum Kiscell-Municipal Picture Gallery

Lili Ország. *Engram* (1957)
Paper; collage. Hungarian National Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

Lili Ország. *The House of Law* (1956)
Paper; collage. Hungarian National Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest



Zsófia Farkas

Circular Ruins: The Walls of Lili Ország

Lili Ország (1926-1978) was born as Lívia Éva Oestereicher in Ungvár (today Uzhorod in Ukraine). Her father, Manó Oestereicher, was a wine-merchant of Jewish origin, and her uncle, Aladár Oestereicher, was a doctor with a thorough knowledge of Jewish cabbalism. Together with the Jewish community of the city, the family was sent first to the ghetto and then to the brickworks in Ungvár in 1944. Using her father's connections, they managed to escape from the transport to Auschwitz, and the family survived the Second World War hiding in Budapest.

Ország was admitted to the College of Fine Arts in 1945, where she studied under the tutelage of painter and graphic artist István Szőnyi. Her first watercolours are reminiscent of the *plein air* tradition of Post-Impressionism. After graduating, Ország worked at the Hungarian Puppet Theatre (Budapest Puppet Theatre today) until her death, where she worked with painter and graphic artist Endre Bálint, among others. Ország regarded Bálint as her master, and in the course of their work together at the Puppet Theatre they became life-long friends. Upon seeing her early paintings, Bálint immediately recognized "the genuine 'self' of the artist [...], her pictures emanated such a unique atmosphere."[1] Encouraged by Bálint, Ország continued to paint, and her art was gradually pervaded by images and features used by Surrealist

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Zsófia Farkas

completed a degree in art history at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. She currently works at MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts in Debrecen. Her research focuses on post-war Hungarian art and, more specifically, the memory of the Holocaust in the oeuvres of female artists.

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painters. As a close look at her paintings of the 1950s reveals, she transformed the ideas and the formal repertoire of the artists whose works she studied and gave birth to a Surrealism that presents itself in a distinctively Eastern-European way. Two of her most significant sources of inspiration were German Dada and Surrealist painter and graphic artist Max Ernst and Italian Metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico.[2] From this period on, Ország's paintings gradually become devoid of landscapes. In their place brick walls (reminiscences of childhood experiences) appear. In the foreground of some of her paintings one notices children, who look tiny next to the walls, while in other pictures faceless and petrified female figures resembling those in Belgian Surrealist painter René Magritte's paintings wander between the walls. Already in this period one recognizes the image of the labyrinth (although sometimes only in a rudimentary from) in pictures such as *Nő fal előtt* ("Woman in front of a Wall," 1956, Image 1) and *Hóember* ("Snowman," 1955).

Yet, Ország's Surrealism is far removed from Surrealism-founder André Breton's concept, who defined the movement as "pure psychic automatism" (*Surrealist Manifesto*, 1924), and from the sexual connotations, the repressed id, and the world of dreams it evokes. Instead, her paintings "had a certain Metaphysical touch already at the beginning."[3] It may have been precisely her interest in Metaphysics and in a literary and psychological approach that drew her to the stage-like spaces of Chirico, who found his "purely internal model" in the colors and perspectives of Quattrocento artists and in the timeless atmosphere of Italian towns.[4] Seeing these paintings, one gets the impression that in these works the sinister shadows and the walls that seem to block the air have a double effect: they imply a sense of infinity as well as the inability to step out of it, which is due mostly to the immense depth of the picture and its lack of human figures. However, while Chirico's mannequins, which replace

1 ■ Endre Bálint. "Ország Lili." *Magyar Műhely*, 3, 1969, 47.

2 ■ "I used to feel inclined to those who rendered their themes with a certain kind of plasticity: [Tivadar] Csontváry [Kosztka], [Lajos] Gulácsy, [Marc] Chagall, [Pablo] Picasso (his rose and blue periods, respectively), and [Giorgio de] Chirico; and, in fact, plasticity used to characterize my painting as well. But last year I began to experiment with montages, which was very much to my liking, since it enabled me to accomplish my ideas within a relatively short period of time, and I did not have to spend weeks painting the same part of the painting. I acquired a great self-assurance in montages, since I felt that this was the field for me, and I still feel this way, as I can often compose montages with a surety that I have not been able to attain in painting, not even through working on the same thing for long weeks ... . Once I showed Andy [Endre Bálint] my first series of montages, who (although usually being overly critical with me) declared on the spot that he was quite enraptured and that they met the standard of Max Ernst." Lili Ország. *A Holdfestőnő* ["The Moon Painter"]. Budapest: The Arnolfini Archives and The István Farkas Foundation, 2003, 17.

3 ■ Endre Bálint. "Ország Lili." *Magyar Műhely*, 48.

4 ■ "I started to paint themes that helped me express the strong and mystical feeling I had discovered in [Friedrich] Nietzsche's works: the melancholy of beautiful autumn days and afternoons in Italian cities." See Krisztina Passuth. *De Chirico*. Budapest: Corvina, 1973, 7.

the standing and lying sculptures (figures that appear in the desolate space of the early paintings), resemble the figures of French painter and sculptor Fernand Léger (put together out of tubular items) and contemporary mechanical puppets, Ország's spaces are inhabited by tiny children and petrified and lifeless female figures that appear in front of her unique décors. As she mentions in an interview, "I have never represented human beings as active, but rather as defenseless creatures: impersonal and unprotected, contemplating, dreamy, and lonely." [5] In *Visszapillantó* ("Looking Back," mid-1950s), a painting that is devoid both of a sense of time and of depth, the arrangement of the walls and the horizon resembles the composition of Chirico's 1912 *La Meditazione del Mattino*, but she replaces the sea and the Greek sculptures wearing togas with an old lady who is similar to the figure that later often appears in the films of influential Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski.[6] Similarly, while Chirico's figures evoke the characters of Italian writer Dino Buzzati-Traverso's Magic-Realistic short stories, Ország's figures wandering between the walls conjure the experience of suffocation that one also finds in the works of Franz Kafka.

Ország, however, is not the only artist who was inspired by Chirico's works in representations of scenes that she finds terrifying. The German-Jewish Surrealist painter Felix Nussbaum, who was eventually killed in Auschwitz in 1944, also used a Metaphysical space to indicate "the peculiar interdependence of the human soul and the world"[7] in his works, for instance in *Destruction II* (1933). According to aesthete and literary historian László Földényi, "the space portrayed [in this picture] is both open and airy, and enclosed and gloomy. Although the background opens up a space that seems to be infinite, the painting as a whole still creates the impression of a prison."[8] In *Jacqui in the Street* (1944), another painting by Nussbaum, one sees a small boy with a yellow star exposed to hostile walls, much in the same way as the child figure is positioned in Ország's *Kislány fal előtt* ("Young Girl in front of a Wall," 1955, Image 2). But Nussbaum's walls, compared to Ország's, seem to be less infinite: both the surroundings and the boy's age are specified. Furthermore, the boy is not insignificantly small and the walls in the background are not disproportionately vast. Conversely, the minute-looking girl figure of Ország's painting is almost grotesque in the white dress and the hat, which is large enough for adults, all the more so, since the mighty force represented by the

5 ■ Iván Rozgonyi. *Párbeszéd művekkel: Interjúk, 1955-1981* ["In Conversation with Works: Interviews (1955-1981)"]. Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1988.

6 ■ The spaces of Ország's paintings produced in this period were inspired primarily by Attila Street, Budapest and the streets of the Buda Castle. See Katalin S. Nagy. *Ország Lili*. Budapest: The Arthis Foundation, 1993, 14.

7 ■ László Földényi F. "A falak festészete" ["Painting Walls"]. *Múlt és Jövő*, 1-2, 2004, 151.

8 ■ László Földényi F. "A falak festészete" ["Painting Walls"]. *Múlt és Jövő*, 151.

immense wall bereaves the precocious child both of her present and her future, as well as of a specific age. Földényi's statement about Nussbaum's walls is even more true of the art of Ország: "one cannot climb over [them], since they enclose one not only from the outside, but from the inside as well."[9]

Ország positions the central figure of *Nagy fal II* ("Huge Wall II," 1955, Image 3) similarly: he is eclipsed by the huge partition wall, the size of which makes it look unreal. In this painting, the ominous object suspended above the boy's head, which is like a ponderous bomb or a ball coming to a halt in the air, seems to be a classical Surrealist device in its apparent weightlessness. However, if one compares Ország's work with Magritte's *The Glass Key* (1959), one notices immediately that Ország's painting has no trace of the playfulness and virtuosity that is characteristic of the Surrealist Magritte, who violated the rules of reality and logic.

It is very likely that Magritte's *The Lovers* (1928) also provided an inspiration for Ország, but while in Magritte's painting a world of latent allusions and riddles prevails, Ország's *Szorongás* ("Distress," 1955, Image 4) concentrates on the concealment of the face, which in turn transforms itself into a death mask.

Ország's female figures seem to move and stand still at the same time. The figures of *Nő fal előtt* and *Fekete ruhás nő* ("Woman in Black," 1955) use their forefingers in vain to find the right course or to make a motion; the blocks of their bodies and their nun-like frocks impede their moves. While in the first picture the figure's features express her desire to follow the direction in which her finger is pointing, her paralyzed body prevents her from escaping from the labyrinth. The other female's advance is hindered by an arrow placed on the wall of the labyrinth that points in the opposite direction. In *Szorongás* the third such female figure does not even attempt to stride over the brick wall that surrounds her. Her abnormally wrung body is seated in a contemplative, strange pose of praying in its own prison. She becomes transfigured in her grief. However, one is deceived by an unusually great force after finding a rat represented as a domestic animal on the left-hand side of the apparently simple picture (which resembles icons in its tranquility), as well as the image of the atomic cloud of Hiroshima. Ország's art thus represents an imaginary world that helps her visualize her identity as a female, as well as her geographical isolation, her confinement in the present, and her deprivation of past and future.

9 ■ As Földényi writes about Nussbaum, "from the outset, he had been interested in the walls that are erected within the human soul. His art was one great, unique attempt to scrutinize what is inside the walls from outside the walls. His fate was that while he wanted to batter down the walls, they became ever more solid and ever higher about him. The inner walls of the soul uncannily coincided with those that history raised around him." Földényi could well have written these lines about Ország, since "what [Ország] sought was also a threat for her, as she was pursuing something that was also chasing her [...]. Her art is a constant attempt to find a balance." See both in László Földényi F. "A falak festészete" ["Painting Walls"]. *Múlt és Jövő*, 151.

In Ország's early works one frequently finds the concealment or the lack of faces and human gestures: the faces of the females wandering between the infinitely high walls and the girl figure in front of the wall are all mask-like and statuesque. Yet, the individuality provided by faces and gazes is not the only thing that is absent from Ország's paintings, as they are often devoid of human presence as such. For instance the montage-like composition of the aforementioned *Fekete ruhás nő* makes one wonder whether it depicts the moment when body and soul part from each other. In other cases, human beings are symbolized by inanimate matter, such as in *Hóember*.

Collages were present in Ország's oeuvre from the outset. Bálint also called Ország's attention to Ernst's 1919 collage novel, *La femme 100 têtes (The Hundred Headless Woman)*.[10] The "100 têtes" in the title of the collage novel means "one hundred heads," but when pronounced in French, it sounds similar to "without a head" ("sans tête"). This word play, which is characteristic of the whole novel, refers to a common feature of Surrealist paintings, photographs, collages, and novels, in which, according to art historian Agnieska Taborska, "women are, either literally or figuratively, deprived of their faces (and often also of their heads)," and are described as creatures filled with sexual excitement, whose fate is to be gazed at without any chance of glancing back.[11]

Although both artists shape their figures by substituting parts of other pictures for them, Ernst uses collage "to match two seemingly irreconcilable realities in a seemingly inappropriate space,"[12] while Ország's methods are less playful; they have a more menacing content. Perhaps these early works on paper are the most striking examples of the subtle system of composition Ország uses to "adorn" living human bodies with the attributes of death. For instance, the trunk of the baby Christ's "body" in the collage *Megfeszített* ("Crucified," 1957, Image 5) is cut out of one block of (grave)stone, while the venous network of his internal organs, like a mold chiseled into a printing stamp, branches out in every direction like dead cells, the negative image of life.

Despite its formal connection to the leading figures of the movement, Ország's Surrealism is unique. Her works, due mostly to the lack of human gestures, show a closer relationship with the faceless figures of Hungarian painter István Farkas than with those of Magritte, and her walls resemble more

10 ■ Max Ernst. *The Hundred Headless Woman [La femme 100 têtes]*. Translated by Dorothea Tanning. New York: George Braziller, 1981.

11 ■ Agnieszka Taborska. "Suntanned Girls as the Muses of Surrealists?" Translated into Hungarian by Gáspár Keresztes. *Balkon*, 6-7, 2003, <http://www.balkon.hu/balkon03_06-07/00 Taborska.html>, 13 November 2013. The first generation of Surrealists depicts females as unfathomable creatures, manifestations of the *femme fatale*, and, as descendants of Salome, vamps replete with eroticism; the faceless projections of masculine desires, as it were.

12 ■ Marianna Kolozsvary. *Ország Lili kollázsai, 1953-1972* ["The Collages of Lili Ország (1953-1972)"]. Exhibition Catalogue. Budapest: Kassák Museum, 1995, n. p.

the prison-like spaces created by Hungarian sculptor Erzsébet Schaár using doors and windows than the walls made by Chirico. Ország's early works remind one of a Kafkaesque world, as they evoke the feeling of getting stuck somewhere in a rationally inexplicable way, and they conjure the image of obstacles that cannot be surmounted. An emblematic picture of the early period, *Cipők* ("Shoes," 1955, Image 6), which features orthopedic shoes for children, centers on the absence of their little owners and the uncertainty or impossibility of the children's future—a theme far from the symbolic content of Magritte's shoes (see for instance *The Red Model*, 1937). Hungarian sculptor Gyula Pauer's 2005 *Cipők a Duna-parton* ("Shoes on the Danube Promenade," in collaboration with Hungarian film director Can Togay) elaborates on the same theme half a century later, while Margit Anna's *Az elkésett Messiás* ("The Late Messiah," 1975) provides an earlier depiction of shoes in a somewhat similar context.

Although Anna's incorporation of Hungarian folklore motifs distances her art from Ország's, surprisingly, one can also find resemblances between the two artists. Concealment, the motif of the child, and the use of mannequins and masks are only some of the shared elements. Both artists play a kind of game of hide-and-seek with their (Jewish and female) identities. I regard their connection as further proof of Ország's divergence from Western-European Surrealism: although she makes use of the formal characteristics of Surrealism, thematically her art has more in common with her Hungarian contemporaries, with whom she shared the same quest for identity and the same feeling of confinement.

In her early works, Ország provides an uncannily close examination of her feelings and childhood memories. At the same time, she begins to perceive the tenets of Surrealism as mere shackles, nothing more than a set of technical devices she uses to express personal content. She finds Surrealism's colors, the spaces composed on the basis of Renaissance ideas of perspective, and the psychological connotations of Surrealist works too restrictive and artificial. Therefore, she breaks down the walls of formality and consciously embarks on the creation of abstract compositions. The works of this period have no central perspective. Instead, "the figures cast to the wall increasingly become one with it."[13] Consequently, the detachment from the psychological content of the early

13 ■ As Ország spoke about this in an interview with Iván Rozgonyi: "I ceased to follow the Surrealist depiction of space practically overnight, at the very moment when I first composed a more abstract surface. I descended into the earth, I buried myself, I painted the layers of the soil, but obviously, one intends to break out from that place as well; I did not want to remain buried for long. In the pictures that followed, I break up the walls, one cannot see walls anywhere, as they are replaced by figures. Walls inspired these paintings, too, but now it was me who painted the saints on the walls. I had no intention of illustrating anything, but I wanted to be relieved, to escape into another world that offers some kind of faith, something that is more comforting than a brick wall." See in Iván Rozgonyi. *Párbeszéd művekkel: Interjúk, 1955-1981* ["In Conversation with Works: Interviews (1955-1981)"], 203.

paintings also brings forth a change in the formal characteristics of the paintings. However, her basic motifs (the stone and the walls and cities erected from it, the accumulation of planes and layers, together with a constant analysis and examination of themes) remain the same, and they reinforce the presence of the archaeological attitude in Ország's oeuvre. At this time, she becomes increasingly interested in the stratification of the world around her, whether we are speaking of memory, archaeology, and geology, or the levels of transcendental worlds. Parallel with this, she makes liminal pictures that one can interpret both as figural and as abstract representations, a striking example of which is the recurring image, in paintings such as *Dohánylevelű* ("Tobacco Leafed," 1956, Image 7), of a face that resembles Lunar craters and conjures the masks used in her earlier works. In this picture, the face represents the subtle borderline that exists between organic and inorganic formations and between life and death. As Ország describes them, "[s]ome sorts of creatures convey mementos, they express a fear of warfare and similar dreadful apparitions. This is a human face with the terror of Hiroshima on it."[14] In this painting she gives the figure of the Moon human characteristics, then in a later work she transforms the same celestial body into an icon. Towards the end of this phase of her oeuvre the motif of the small crescent becomes the sole comforting element.

At the turn of the 1960s, Ország buried herself in the earth (to quote her own words) and populated her pictures with mummies, bones, and motifs found in Early Christian catacombs and on Early Christian gravestones.

A distinctive experience of this period was Ország's encounter with Pravoslavic icons during her journeys to Bulgaria. The works she produced at this time, however, do not have specifically religious connotations, as Ország's aim in using transcendental elements—as was the case in previous pictures—was rather to depict an unworldly experience. However, her figures do not appear in front of walls anymore. Rather, they are projected on them, and in the end the figural representations disappear entirely from the pictures.

After depicting images of the Moon and subterranean places, she started to paint horizontal plans of cities from a bird's-eye view. These works represent landscapes and cities as geographical maps of abstract signs.

By the end of the 1960s Ország had more opportunities to travel. She transformed her journeys into art: the gravestones of the cemetery in Prague appear in *Vízió (Prágai zsidó temető)*, ("Vision: The Jewish Cemetery of Prague," 1968, Image 8), the horizontal and vertical orderliness of Eastern icons is represented in *Keleti ikonosztáz* ("Eastern Iconostasis," 1968), the sculptures of Gothic cathedrals are depicted in *Románkori Krisztus* ("Romanesque Christ,"

14 ■ "István Rácz's typewritten presentation on Lili Ország." Documentation Department, The Hungarian National Gallery, 2130/1981/7.

1969, Image 10), and Antique cities and frescos are transformed into the images of *Pompeji fejek II* ("Pompeian Heads II," without date), *Pompeji IV* ("Pompeian IV," without date), and *Pompeji fal* ("Pompeian Wall," 1968). She found the motifs and patterns she then painted on the walls of her pictures in the walls of Pompeii, Naples, and Jerusalem, in the accumulated stones and layers of bygone eras and civilizations. In the course of her journeys she had the impression that she had already visited the cities, that she had already encountered their motifs and their walls. Later, when she spoke about her journeys to visit acquaintances and friends, she noted that motifs always sprang up in her head and then she encountered the same images in the streets or on the walls of churches and houses with a feeling of *déjà vu*. The walls, which until then had been menacing, were transformed into defenses, refuges, since the motifs no longer threatened Ország from the outside, but rather she herself invented them.

Ország molded the stones that became the most essential elements of her pictures one by one, like the stone carvers of the Middle Ages. The images of stones gradually took the shape of abstract signs and letters, and since the calligraphic motifs form patterns in the pictures, the works acquire a distinctive rhythm characteristic of orchestral scores. The surfaces of the paintings, however, are far from ornamental. In *Lamentáció* ("Lamentation," 1967, Image 9), for instance, the patterning of punctuation marks resembles the modelling of the phases of movement in Marcel Duchamp's 1912 *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2.* The cutting of the paintings seems to be incidental, as if one could extend them in any direction.

Ország's works simultaneously depict worldly and transcendental contents, material and immaterial substances. She uses earthly colors: white, brown, and red, but Madonna figures and scripts resembling prayers figure on the walls of her pictures. Another dichotomy of her art is that Ország represents rationality, science, stone-carved writings, and the Tablets of the Law as the most imperishable signs of civilization, while personally she was drawn to the tenets of numerology, superstitions, and occultism—her immersion in which was mostly due to the influence of her uncle, a doctor interested in cabbalism and spiritualism.

For a relatively long time, she did not deal with her Jewish origins or the traumas suffered by the Jews in her art, but later she began to transcribe words and letters from her father's prayer book into her paintings, which thereby became her own Wailing Walls. While her earlier paintings were inspired by her nostalgia for the ruined cities of the past and depict horizontal plans of decaying and destroyed cities, crumbling stones, and disintegrating walls, the writings in her scripture paintings prove that she produced a repository of uniquely shaped forms.

The most common Hebrew letters in her scripture paintings are "S" (*Shin*), meaning teeth, and "H" (*He*), which has two meanings: it means gate, but it can also refer to the presence of God.[15] The motif of the gate appears in various forms in her works; sometimes it takes the form of a horizontal plan of a city, other times it is depicted like a stone, whereas in *Város árkádokkal / Bezárt kapuk* ("City with Arcades / Closed Gates," 1964, Image 11) it represents Moses's Tablets of the Law. Thanks in large part to the efforts of Israeli ambassador David Giladi, in 1966 an exhibition was organized in Tel-Aviv presenting her works. Still under the influence of the journey, Ország commented that she found it "alarming that I have been painting Jerusalem for ten years, and now that I have finally encountered it face to face, I am skeptical as to whether I would ever have the courage to paint it again."[16]

Perhaps Kafka's writings and correspondence provided the most distinctive intellectual influence on Ország, an influence one can discern in her use of the gate motif. As Georges Didi-Huberman writes in his essay on the symbolic use of the gate in Kafka's "Before the Law" (1915), a parable also contained in *The Trial* (1925), one is generally afraid to step over the threshold of the gate, which evokes Biblical connotations or Dante's inferno. Therefore, one tries to postpone making decisions again and again and hesitates "between the desire to step over and achieve one's aims" and "the incessantly imagined sorrow over the endless waiting to be touched."[17] One becomes disorientated when experiencing something that is uncanny (or, in Freudian terms, *unheimlich*), yet one has no other choice but to go through the labyrinth in which one has to suffer disorientation in front of each door that separates "outside" and "inside" until "nothing else remains, only the searching self."[18]

Is art able to accomplish the work of mourning induced by the trauma of historical memory? Lisa Saltzman raises this question in her essay on German painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer.[19] According to Saltzman, the work of mourning is a process of constant recurrence—digging into the deepest layers of the past. Once the layers are uncovered, the leveling of the debris follows. Therefore, the process comprises both exhumation and burying, uncovering and concealment, oblivion and remembrance, and repression and preserva-

15 ■ Katalin S. Nagy. "Zsidó motívumok Ország Lili festeszetében" ["Jewish Motifs in Lili Ország's Art"]. *Múlt és Jövő*, 2, 1989, 98.

16 ■ Katalin S. Nagy. *Emlékkavicsok: Holocaust a magyar képzőművészetben,* 1938-1945. ["Pebbles of Memory: The Holocaust in the Hungarian Fine Arts (1938-1945)"]. Budapest: Glória Kiadó, 2006, 290.

17 ■ Georges Didi-Huberman. "The Endless Threshold of Sight" ["L'interminable seuil du regard"]. Translated into Hungarian by Nikoletta Házas. *Enigma*, 18-19, 1998 / 1999, 102.

18 ■ Georges Didi-Huberman. "The Endless Threshold of Sight" ["L'interminable seuil du regard"]. *Enigma*, 109.

19 ■ Lisa Saltzman. "The Sons of Lilith: Mourning and Melancholia, Trauma and Painting." *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz.* Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1999.

tion. Ország's oeuvre is permeated by distress, which is accompanied by a constant work of mourning, remembrance, nostalgia, and the Freudian concept of melancholy, that is, impeded mourning. Ország's paintings reflect on this therapeutic process.

The commemoration of historical tragedies becomes the most pronounced in the plates of "Requiem for Perished People and Desolate Cities in Seven Plates," in which "she connects notions of life and death, parallel with notions of construction and destruction."[20] Therefore, one can interpret "Requiem" as the consummation and the epitome of the city pictures Ország painted at the beginning of the 1960s.

In the last years of her life, Ország started to paint her series of labyrinths, consisting of 48 plates.[21] In the last phase of her oeuvre, Ország reverted to the wall motif of the early years, but this time it appeared as a more complex form that was part of a larger interpretative system. In this sense, the labyrinth metaphor resembles the last item in a logical game: it unites and summarizes the contents and the formal elements of her previous periods. One can identify the enlarged, statuesque figures of the early, Surrealist period, the punctuation marks and the alternating viewpoints and scales, but all within the same painting. The suffocation of the Kafkaesque world is represented by the motif of the gate of Law, while egg-shaped oval forms symbolize the Genesis of the World and rebirth—further references to the presence of transcendence. The constantly recurring, sitting or standing, seemingly waiting figures that resemble images of Egyptian art remind one of the petrified characters of her early paintings, but the figures of the labyrinth series are tranquilly waiting for something—perhaps for death, but unquestionably stuck in the timeless loneliness of the past. It is worth noting that titles of the works in the series often contain expressions such as "waiting figure" or "departing figure." The paintings depict illusory spaces: the elliptically constructed planes, which remind one of the frescoes of Pompeii, suggest that the figures have been immured there forever. The apparent proximity of death is also reinforced by the transformation of the walls into gates that lead to the next world.

In ancient times the concept of the labyrinth was closely connected to the cult of the dead, as going through the maze was like a kind of initiation into spirituality. Ország first encountered this metaphor in Italian writer, poet, and literary scholar Paolo Santarcangeli's 1968 *The Book of Labyrinths: History of a Myth and of a Symbol.* The book was published in Hungarian translation in

20 ■ Iván Rozgonyi. *Párbeszéd művekkel: Interjúk, 1955-1981* ["In Conversation with Works: Interviews (1955-1981)"], 207.

21 ■ "The next destination of my journey was Pompeii. I spent eleven days there, staring at the remaining frescos and the excavations almost all day. I am working on a huge composition ... , the theme of which is a labyrinth, but it could be an ancient city or a palace as well." Lili Ország. *A Holdfestőnő* ["The Moon Painter"], 45.

1970 and instantly became a major source of inspiration for her. In the volume, Ország found her new "cycle of legends," which consisted of stories about the thread of Ariadne, Icarus, and the enigmatic Sphinx. However, the image of the labyrinth had already been present in her art: the printed circuit used as a printing stamp, a recurring element of her pictures, appears in her earlier paintings as well. Ország was interested in this motif, which resembles both horizontal plans of cities and labyrinths, because she regarded it as an allegorical imprint of the twentieth century. The photographs she took during her journeys deal almost exclusively with the structure and the materiality of walls. One can trace the effect of the frescoes of Pompeii both in the division of the planes into stripes and in the coloring of her later pictures. The preparatory materials for these paintings were the collages of the earlier period, but the figural motifs of the newspaper cuttings were gradually transformed into abstract surfaces and labyrinth-like spaces. Ország, however, never broke fully with this genre: the paper cuttings of later collages alternate between various viewpoints in the labyrinths, the basic motifs being stones, horizontal plans, and machine-like structures.

The labyrinth series provides a summary of the previous phases of Ország's art, parallel with a recurrence of earlier forms, a simplification, and a homogenization of themes and contents. Although each picture depicts different patterns, the relative similarity of their sizes and shapes makes them analogous to illustrations when compared to the great thematic variety of the early works. However, the simplified formal framework makes the hushed silence of the labyrinths even more unsettling. The labyrinth series gives Ország's oeuvre a touch of coherence and unity: the Surrealist walls of the early period, the disintegrating walls of the later years, and the distinctively unique walls that she "built" out of the debris reach their completion through the enclosing, confining walls of the labyrinth pictures.

Although the theme of the Holocaust appears much less explicitly in the oeuvre of Lili Ország than for instance in the Holocaust-related works of the later phase of the art of Anna, her paintings still bear allusions to her Jewish origins and the ways in which she related to her Jewish identity—an identity that immediately positioned her as an "Other." However, in most of the paintings the subject of her Jewish identity remains largely unpronounced, as was "natural" in the atmosphere of post-war Hungarian society and the art scene. Her compositions are interesting not merely as distinctive experiments in style that bear the traces of both local and international influences, but also as parts of an oeuvre that was shaped by the vicissitudes and traumas of the twentieth century. ❧

Translated by Eszter Krakkó

Zsófia Bán

Negatives of Absence: A Private Investigation

"A beautiful, serious woman, a stranger to me, is standing in the picture; she has on a hat with white roses, a white dress with flounces, and is looking to one side thoughtfully. I just stare without touching it."

These words are from *Under Gemini*, the only prose work by Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti.[1] This is the moment in the autobiographically inspired book when the child learns that the woman he had known as his mother is, in fact, his stepmother, and that he is an "acquired" child, as his real mother had died while giving birth, and his father had remarried soon thereafter. A few years later he also learns that his mother died while giving birth to twins and that he had had a twin brother who had lived no more than a few minutes. "And no one'll ever know whether it was I or my brother who died. With twins, how can

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1 ■ *Under Gemini—A Prose Memoir and Selected Poetry*, trans. Kenneth and Zita McRobbie and Jascha Kessler, prose trans. Kenneth and Zita McRobbie (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1985) 56.

people tell?" exclaims the desperate, bewildered child in the book.[2] This work, published in 1940 and written by a poet who was to die in 1944 while part of a forced labor unit, offers itself as a point of departure, as it touches on a number of motifs that I explore here, such as image and reality, the search for the mother or mothers, repressed narratives, adoption, twin fates, and the search for identity. For I myself made a discovery similar if not identical to that of the child in Radnóti's book. Unlike Radnóti's character, however, I don't just look at the picture/pictures. I also attempt, in my own way, to touch them and to touch those they represent.

As it so happened, my first visit to the Czech town of Terezin, or Theresienstadt as it was called in German, where my mother and her family had been deported during the war, coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust in 2004. I don't know exactly how much time they spent there, nor do I know much of what they experienced. My mother treated the subject with deep and conspicuous silence throughout her life. I gathered bits and pieces of information from other members of our family, mostly from my grandmother and my mother's sister, but these are so scant that no coherent story or picture ever emerged. Even the single, tangible, material memory (or should I call it a souvenir?), the lager money used in Terezin that I had found sometime earlier slipped between two pages of a family photo album, mysteriously vanished at some point, as if to demonstrate that the whole affair cannot be grasped or possessed in any way. I made the journey to Terezin to seek out the place of absence, the absence of a narrative.

1 A street in the city of Terezin

From the perspective of locating or placing the Holocaust, Terezin is a special case, as it was and is to this day a tidily kept and more or less functioning small town, rather than a camp that was built specifically to receive (or exterminate) deportees. Instead of finding a forest or bushes and clearings, as do so many who visit the original sites of the vanished camps, instead of finding a landscape representing the site of nothingness,[3]

2 ■ ibid. 58.

3 ■ On this see Ulrich Baer: "To Give Place a Memory: Holocaust Photography and the Landscape Tradition." *Representations* 69, Winter 2000. See also: Ulrich Baer: *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*. Cambridge, Mass, 2002.

one is confronted with an—at least seemingly—very much existing, materially present place, complete with buildings, streets, and local residents. However, this concrete place with its concrete life is full of a practically tangible, ghostly emptiness (Image 1). Moreover, this emptiness, emanating from an apparent fullness, prevents even more forcefully the remembrance of events known only second-hand, because the imagination is blocked by objective reality. An empty landscape, the locus of nothingness, which is "at once inaccessible and yet profusely documented,"[4] facilitates remembrance more readily for those who have only second-hand knowledge at their disposal and who are thus able to draw only on what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory.[5] While one is in Terezin, apparent fullness is transformed into emptiness. The factual emptiness of Holocaust sites set in natural landscapes is filled in with private and/or public memory. While the existence of material proofs of the Holocaust is of fundamental importance for historical memory, they encumber the workings of private memory, because in the face of the incomprehensible, the presence of objective proof is a bewildering paradox, and eventually this very bewilderment becomes similarly uninterpretable and irresolvable. Naturally, we are in no position to say that we'd rather not have material proof or that we'd rather not be confronted with it. Still, if the story, the narrative, is not available first-hand, this is what we secretly say.

Allow me to mention an example. In Terezin I visited the museum, where the materials on exhibit include photographs portraying life in the camp. Compared to photos taken in other concentration camps, these images are far from shocking, given that Terezin was the Nazi "show camp," which members of the Red Cross were invited to inspect, and the photos served as propaganda material representing the jolly lives of those held in this show camp. While looking at these photographs, I suddenly realized that I was terrified of them. More specifically, I was terrified of possibly spotting my mother or another member of my family in them. This, I assume, is a perfectly natural feeling, as confrontation with such an image could be extremely taxing emotionally. But the more I thought of the possible source of my fear of the photos, the less I understood it. Given that I knew that my mother and her family had been there, the photo merely would have confirmed this knowledge. It would have offered visual proof of something that I knew, if only in tiny, disparate fragments. Finally, it was the very concept of the fragment that led me to a solution. The reason I feared being confronted with such pictures, I concluded, was that unlike other family photographs in my possession, I would know

4 ■ Baer, "To Give Place a Memory," 47.

5 ■ Hirsch first introduced the term in an article entitled "Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning and Post-Memory," *Discourse* 15, No. 2, Winter 1992-93 (Special Issue: *The Emotions, Gender, and the Politics of Subjectivity:* Wayne State University Press) 3-29.

nothing of *the story belonging to the picture*, and thus the picture would start leading its own life, it would run wild, it would become uncontrollable, and I would start imagining things about it and prompted by it that presumably would have a rather tenuous connection with reality. In short, the picture would have humiliated me in my ignorance. I would have stood helpless before it. Because of the *silence* of the first generation, all of us who do not have these memories at our disposal are unable to practice the kind of postmemory that transforms their memories into our memories as well. In other words, instead of working with "original" first-hand memories, in this case *projected memory* is forced to operate with *produced memories*. Here I examine the relationships between image, projection, and the production of memory. The images represent memories I have striven to produce.

My mother's non-existent narrative has a twin narrative about my father's first wife, who perished in Auschwitz. In this case, it was my father's turn to fall into deep silence, so I only learned about this by chance, when at one point I wanted to know exactly how we were related to certain people we had often visited in my childhood. This was when I learned that these people were, in fact, relatives of my father's first wife. This answer affected me so profoundly that I never dared ask any further questions, and my father was in no hurry to help me out by offering any information. I managed to find out his first wife's name some time later from certain family documents, but I was unable to find a single picture in our collection of photographs that I could safely assume was an image of her. This state of affairs gradually made me more and more uneasy, since after all this was a person who easily could have been my mother. Or rather, the mother of someone else, who would have been half me, and thus, if she perished, half of "me" would have perished along with her (here Radnóti's twin motif). I was also disturbed by this, because my father, who had always been an enthusiastic and talented amateur photographer, had taken countless photos of my mother, and I could not imagine that he hadn't taken any of his first wife, or that at the very least he hadn't had pictures of her in his possession. Since our family albums are full of photographs from before the war, it seemed extremely unlikely that all the photos of her could have been destroyed, down to the very last one. I could not but assume that my father had stored them somewhere, or perhaps had destroyed them himself.

I finally decided to put an end to this state of affairs and went to visit the nephew of my father's first wife (her sister's son) in order to ask him to show me a picture of her from his own collection of family photographs. Together with my *relative* (for what more specific familial designation could I use? what word is there for such a relation?), who was born after the war and thus had never known his aunt in person, we pored over the photographs, trying to find a picture that was, beyond any doubt, an image of her. In the end, we found only two pictures. One is a family studio portrait depicting my relative's mother

2. Studio portrait, relative's mother with siblings

3. Snapshot of relative's family members as adults

with all her brothers and sisters as children with their parents (Image 2). What my relative knew for a fact was that my father's first wife was his mother's youngest sibling, thus it was not difficult to identify her in the group portrait. We found only one snapshot of a group of adults, in which, presumably but not

certainly, my father's first wife can also be seen (Image 3). The group photo shows a young woman whose face, as far as one can tell on the basis of the amateur photo, resembles the child in the studio portrait. The fact that my father is standing directly behind her also suggests that this was her (his head, like a half-concealed clue, hardly showing above the shoulders). No wonder I was the only one able to discover him in the diminutive, original photo, having seen countless pictures of him as a young man. I base this conjecture on the assumption that when people are photographed in such an obviously non-spontaneous way, they tend to arrange themselves (possibly even unconsciously) so that spouses or members of couples are standing close to each other. This is all the evidence I found in the course of my visual investigation. It is complemented by the information offered by my relative, according to which three of the five siblings in the studio portrait died during the war: the boy in forced labor service and my father's first wife in Auschwitz, while another girl disappeared. Those who survived the war (whom I knew in person) have also died in the meantime, and hence there is no one left to confirm our conclusions for certain.

What is undoubtedly true, however, is that the two different kinds of found photograph, the studio portrait and the amateur photo, have a radically different effect. Thierry de Duve draws a distinction between two kinds of images: *picture* and *event*.[6] According to his categories, the studio portrait (or *photo-portrait*, to use his term), which belongs to the category of "picture," differs from the amateur photo (the *snapshot*, which belongs to the category of "event") in that the former represents the "zero degree of time," since it "does not limit its reference to the particular time when it was taken but allows the imaginary reconstruction of any moment of the life of the portrayed person to be imagined." The two found pictures fit perfectly into these two categories, and this is why the found snapshot awakens in me the same anxiety that I felt in Terezin. For this picture refers to a very specific situation, a particular moment in time with very specific people. Unlike the studio portrait, this picture has a story, a narrative, in the face of which I stand ignorant and helpless, unable to unravel it. At the same time, this feeling of ignorance is reproduced when perceiving the studio portrait as well, even though these do not carry narratives. I am unable to set my imagination free, because this specific studio portrait leads nowhere except to this single snapshot. The life of the child portrayed in the studio portrait is condensed here into a single moment of adulthood. For me, her whole life will be represented by this single snapshot. Hence, this picture blocks any other imaginary picture.

6 ■ "Time Exposure and the Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox." October 5 - Summer 1978, quoted in Meir Wigoder: "History Begins at Home: Photography and Memory in the Writings of Siegfried Kracauer and Roland Barthes." *History and Memory* 13.1 (2001) 19-59.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes of the search for an essential image of his mother, an image which, beyond a likeness, grasps the essence of her character. Eventually, he found this desired essence in an image of his mother as a child. The essence found here relies on the classical referential quality of the photograph, in that it functions as the signifier of a known thing (in this case, of a person), a relation which, in turn, is based on resemblance. We recognize the person portrayed and, ideally, also the essence of this person's character. All this is simultaneously linked to the question of presence as well. First, there is the presence of the person portrayed at the time the photograph was taken. Then there is the presence of our knowledge of the person portrayed, thanks to which the act of recognition can occur. According to Barthes, this process of recognition is reciprocal. Not only do I recognize the person portrayed, that person "looks" at and recognizes me. Furthermore, writes Barthes, a photo portrays history, the time that existed "before" us, when we had not yet been born.

Were I to add that a photo usually serves memory as well, I should note that the picture of my father's first wife works against all these statements. For how could one remember someone one has never known? Undoubtedly, the picture has its referential, indexical quality, in that it refers to the past existence, past presence of a person, but given my lack of any knowledge of her, the (reciprocal) act of recognition cannot take place, neither in terms of the likeness nor in terms of the essence of this person. For me, this essence is precisely her absence, and not just because she is already dead, but because for me she was never alive, she was never present. Thus the loss represented by this picture is based not on a past presence (and hence on death), but on *total absence*, on a metaphysical void. As for the historical time evoked by the picture, it represents not a time that existed before me, but rather a time that existed *instead* of me, not the time when we had not yet been born, but the time when we were not born *at all*, since that *other me* who I could have been could not be born. Hence, this specific "mother image" is both referential and non-referential. One could say it is an *icon of absence, of loss*. And this absence or loss is simultaneously related to the potential other mother and other self.

In an essay entitled "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," Hirsch writes of *overly familiar*, iconic pictures related to the Holocaust,[7] such as the image of the little boy in a cap walking with his arms held up in the Warsaw ghetto,[8] images that have become symbolic of the Holocaust as a whole, while concealing their individual narratives. In contrast, there are other types of images which, far from being overly familiar, I would

7 ■ "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy." *In Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1999).

Composition by Judit Hersko, detail

8 ■ The image, now owned by the United States Holocaust Museum, is generally thought to have been taken by Franz Konrad, who served as photographer for Jürgen Stroop, a high-ranking member of the SS who ordered the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. The photograph is reproduced in full and alongside two smaller details on the cover of Dan Porát's *The Boy: A Holocaust Story* (2011).

4. The author's mother, photograph taken by the author's father

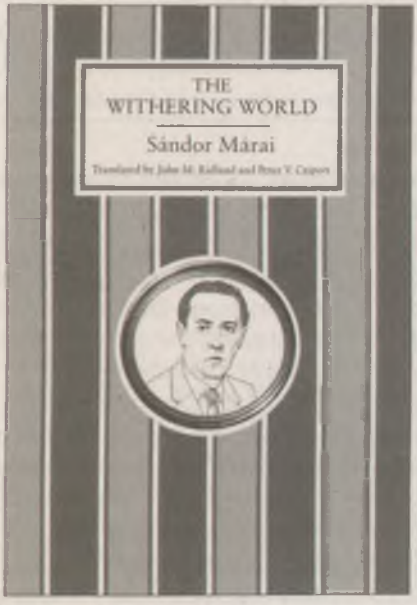
5. Composition by Judit Hersko, based on the photograph of the author's mother

call *overly unfamiliar*. Their radical unfamiliarity is caused by the fact that they have been radically silenced. They are unknown even to those whom they concern. Only reconstruction can refill the empty referentiality of such images with content. The core of this process of reconstruction is an act of adoption. As Hirsch points out, working from postmemory, members of the second and third generations integrate Holocaust narratives by way of adoption, thus creating a kind of extended family. During the process of identification, the characters in these narratives become, to a certain extent, family members (*"quasi-familial"*). We claim them as our own. Naturally, this process of reconstruction is heavily obstructed if there is no material with which to construct, i.e. if there is nothing or no one to remember. In such cases the only material at one's disposal is the sense of loss surging from absence, from a void. We lose something that was never ours. The image of my father's first wife represents a highly specific and literal case of family extension through postmemory. Here too, the act of adoption is carried out, except that for lack of a narrative, what is adopted is a mother rather than a story. This is the inverse of the usual act, with the child adopting a mother.

Thus, I now have two kinds of mother images, which represent an adopted and a real mother, respectively (Image 4). The two kinds of mother images represent two kinds

of losses. The adopted mother is a case of the absence of a life story. The real mother is a case of the absence of a private narrative of the Holocaust, an absence which casts a shadow on the whole of her life story. Hungarian-American artist Judit Hersko's works often deal with the Holocaust, time, and family photographs. She has a series based on photographs of mothers (silk screen on glass with silver powder). As part of this series, she created her own variant of the photograph of my mother (taken by my father; Images 5). When the shadow of the lit image is cast on the wall, it is the shadow rather than the original image that becomes sharp in its contrast. This creates a beautiful and effective visual rendering of the process of remembrance. Applying this shadow metaphorically to the two images of the woman who I have concluded was my father's first wife, I venture the notion that there is, on the one hand, a kind of picture that can cast a shadow, because the person portrayed has a body and a story, while on the other there is a kind of picture which, for lack of a body and a story, is unable to cast a shadow. In such cases we must provide the shadow ourselves. And this is what produces that exceptionally rare phenomenon of light, in which the shadow cast by our own body actually becomes someone else's shadow. ❧

English Title



Sándor Márai:
THE WITHERING WORLD

Though best known as a novelist, Sándor Márai was also a fine poet and translator of poems into Hungarian. The Withering World *is the first collection of poems by Márai in English translation. They offer a glimpse of a less familiar side of the oeuvre of one of Hungary's most prominent authors of the twentieth century.*

Translated by John M. Ridland and Peter V. Czipott

Judit Frigyesi

Scholarship on East European Jewish Music after the Holocaust

Mr. Friedmann never invited me to his apartment. As for Mr. Kertész, he agreed to meet me once, at the rabbinical seminary; he sang a few songs and then postponed any further meeting indefinitely. Like most of them, Mr. Láng refused to tell me where he lived: "some town, what does it matter to you!" He came to Budapest on Fridays and stayed till Sunday because he had been hired as the Torah-reader at one of the synagogues. We recorded the music of the Jewish liturgy half-secretly in the prayer room on the Sabbath. He said this was all right and it was unnecessary for me to visit him in his hometown. One day I found the door to the room closed. "He has been hospitalized, but will be back soon. No need to search for him, in any case, he did not leave an address," so I was told. I never saw him again.

This was the late 1970s. In later years, I recorded Mr. Herskovics. They were

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Judit Frigyesi

is a scholar and professor, musicologist and ethno-musicologist. Her research focuses on avant-garde trends and forms in the music, literature and film of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the music of Béla Bartók, East-Ashkenazi liturgical and para-liturgical music, and the expression of Jewish existence in the music and literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her book Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest *(California University Press, 1998, 2000) is one of the first studies to demonstrate an aesthetic through in-depth analysis of literature and music. She is the only scholar to have systematically collected Jewish prayer music in Communist Eastern Europe after the Holocaust. Over the past ten years, she has been active as a writer, poet, photographer, and creator of projects in various media. Her theatrical montage* Fleeting Resonances, *which combines field research, poetry, film, audio, and live performance, has been performed in Germany, Hungary, and Israel. A shorter version of this article was published in* The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later, *eds. Randolph L. Braham and Attila Pók, (New York – Budapest: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Graduate Center of the City University of New York, The Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1997), 629-639.*

different times. He immediately invited me to his home. He was waiting for me in the living room, together with his wife. She asked me: "Do you want to record something? Well, record this." They told the story of their suffering and escape during the Holocaust. It was a tale of helplessness, evil and darkness. I did not dare to ask anything; it suddenly seemed superfluous, even immoral, to speak of music. But the next week, Mr. Herskovics was alone and we worked together wonderfully. The immediateness of his speech-singing had a magical effect on me. It was not music, but a mysterious journey to the original past, when words were music and melody was meaning. A sonorous silver spring was pouring out from the source, filling the air with fragrance. The undulation of the uniform waves of melody seduced the mind into a trance.

The next summer I returned to Budapest full of enthusiasm and questions. I called Mr. Herskovics immediately upon arrival. A woman's voice, perhaps his daughter's, informed me that he had passed away a few weeks earlier.

The decades during which I made an attempt almost singlehandedly to document the oral musical tradition of the Hungarian Orthodox Jews were replete with frustration and embarrassment of the kind I have tried to exemplify with the stories above.[1] My experiences are not merely of personal interest. They capture, in small, what happened to the study of Ashkenazi Jewish music in general, and also to other social and ethnographic fields of inquiry the focus of which was the lives of the millions East-Ashkenazi Jews.[2] There are libraries filled with literature on the Holocaust telling us how these people died but there is precious little about how they lived. There is not a single comprehensive book on their music.

This is an irreparable loss. The intellectual and artistic achievements of the East-Ashkenazi Jews were often not recorded in writing. They were expressed,

1 ■ All the stories presented in the opening paragraph are true, except for the names which had been changed. The ideas presented in this paper were formed in the course of the many years during which I carried out fieldwork and archival research regarding the musical traditions of the East-Ashkenazi Jews (the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe), primarily the Jews of the Hungarian territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. My deepest gratitude goes to my informants for their invaluable help and patience in working with me. I am especially indebted to Emerich Deutsch, Hermann (Avrohom Tzvi) Erbst, Márton Fóti, Emil Goitein, Dezső Gärtner, Ervin Klein, Dr. László Mészáros, Viktor Feuerlicht, Jenő Roth, Sándor Zelmanovics, Mr. Ehrmann and Éva Oberländer. May the memory of those among them who are no longer among us be blessed.

2 ■ Ashkenazi (from the word Ashkenaz, meaning in old Hebrew: Germany) is the term for the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe who migrated to the East from the medieval German centers. Although some of the communities in Eastern Europe came from other regions (called "Sephardi" or "Oriental" Jews), the vast majority of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe was Ashkenazi. The Ashkenazi cultural sphere has generally been divided into two branches corresponding roughly to two territories: Germany and Austria (and to some degree the Czech lands) and the territories east of them. The first is called "Ashkenaz I" or "West-Ashkenaz," the second is "Ashkenaz II" or "East-Ashkenaz." The majority of the Jews of Europe lived in the regions of East-Ashkenazi and spoke Yiddish. Hungary is an intermediate territory. My research, however, focused on aspects within the Hungarian territories that belong more to the East-Ashkenazi tradition.

rather, in the oral culture, in the living practices of the people. With the destruction of the people, the Holocaust largely destroyed the historical record of this culture as a whole.

Since the culture of the East-Ashkenazim was largely oral (a statement which I will clarify later in this essay) the documentation of their fading culture was urgent, much more urgent than the study of archival and written historical material. It could have been carried out only as long as there were still people among us who remembered. Paradoxically, this might have been one of the reasons why scholars shied away from such research; because it involved face-to-face interaction with the survivors. The traumatic experience of the Holocaust was stronger than the call for the preservation of a culture. In the eyes of survivors and children of survivors, it seemed almost frivolous to speak of a "life before" without speaking about how this life had come to an end. The frustration I felt when I concentrated purely on music during my fieldwork mirrored the communal experience of the Jewish scholarly world as a whole. And by the time the tension had been released somewhat, so that we could speak of the sufferings more deeply and there would perhaps also have been a willingness to examine and understand the life that preceded the Holocaust, it was almost too late.

In fact, much of the frustration has not diminished with the passing of the years. The Holocaust instantly turned a living and everyday present into a past and even into oblivion. Recording Jewish prayers or a wedding among the Orthodox communities in a village in Hungary would have been easy in 1939, and it would have been considered, at that time, a documentation of flourishing, contemporary practice. A few years later there was no trace of this culture. For instance, in order to reconstruct the rituals and the music of the Jewish wedding, something that in the 1930s one could have seen every week, the scholar has to peruse thousands of dusty documents and piece together a hypothetical reconstruction like a giant puzzle most of the parts of which are missing. It is almost absurd to deal with a musical tradition that we know was an everyday commodity at the time of our grandparents but that now seems to have belonged to some legendary past. We know that this culture really existed: my informants had seen it with their own eyes. At the same time, all of this is somehow distant and, in a sense, unreal. There were villages that were completely destroyed with the exception of a single survivor. And when this survivor speaks of a musical practice that disappeared without a trace and that only she has seen, both the scholar and informant hesitates for a moment. My tape preserved these sentences of Aunt Anni: "You are sweet, my dear, but there's no point. Nobody is left from my village. How will those scholars in the city know I'm telling the truth? Perhaps I really don't remember anymore. Perhaps this is all a dream; perhaps it never happened. Perhaps I have gone mad and all this is fantasy."

I do not want to suggest that I doubt the credibility of memory or that I do not consider oral information an important form of historical evidence. On the contrary, I believe that the only way to access the life and culture that went up in flames is through interviews that offer insights into a world and a "Weltanschauung" that one could never understand on the basis of printed books and newspapers alone. I wish merely to emphasize the frustration of the scholar who has to piece together the history of a period that came to an abrupt end a few decades ago as if it had been dead for centuries. Also I wish to emphasize that by trying to understand this life, one is constantly reminded of how it disappeared.

Yet in spite of all of these problems, I feel that we, members of the Jewish and non-Jewish scholarly community, have done a great wrong by not being able to overcome our frustration. It is commonly known that one result of the traumatic experience of the Holocaust was a sense of shame and self-denial. The Jews who were humiliated and literally expelled from society felt as if their culture had no value for mankind. This was even more painful after the Holocaust, when the general population seemed to forget the horrors only too rapidly and showed little sincere remorse. But not only were their sufferings forgotten, their Jewish existence, the possibility of something inherently Jewish in culture, continued to be ignored. I believe that the failure to interview these people about their lives only contributed to their sufferings. We failed to assure them that they were the creators of a unique culture and not just a victimized mass. The old stereotypes of the Jew were perhaps suppressed, but there was nothing that would have defined the past of this group in a positive manner.

In most European countries, there has been virtually no attempt on the part of the leading cultural and scholarly institutions to document the remnants of Jewish oral culture. The little work that was accomplished was done very late and usually either focused on material aspects, such as architecture, or remained an isolated attempt at a case-study. There was absolutely no question of giving Jewish folk culture the kind of place that the folk cultures of other ethnicities had been given in the institutional framework. In this environment, the survivors came to doubt whether they had an autonomous culture at all. I met many people, even Orthodox Jews, who tried to convince me that the Jews had no music. At the same time, those who had the inner strength to believe in the importance of their culture became deeply depressed and bitter. The tension between their faith in the value of the cultural treasure they possessed and the indifference of society toward it could not be resolved. Almost without exception, my informants were suspicious of me at the beginning. They could not possibly believe that a young, modern-minded woman wanted to hear old melodies of Jewish prayer.

Ironically, the Jewish community at large showed the same indifference toward the culture of the East European Jews, and this indifference cannot be

explained away as a result of the emotional difficulty of research alone. Simply, the basic character of this culture was incongruous with the image of group identity that the developing new Jewish societies were striving to propagate. There were three particularly important characteristics of East European traditional Jewish culture that contradicted the idea of modern Jewish nationalism; first, it was expressed in the oral practice; second, it presented itself in the multiplicity of local customs; and third, it was a testament to the beauty and harmony of their lives. The thought of a beautiful, whole and spiritual culture within the traditional East-Ashkenazi milieu, which existed in spite of the terrible economic circumstances and constant danger of death in many territories, was an uncomfortable if not outright unacceptable thought for the new generation of Jews, whether in Israel or America. This generation proclaimed and believed that their lives and ideologies brought about the Golden Era of Jewish culture, compared with which pre-war Jewish life in Europe amounted to little more than a shameful history of ongoing misery and failure, something best forgotten.

There is some truth in this opinion, but only if we judge the achievements of the East-Ashkenazi culture by the standards and framework of modern and post-modern intellectual life. Most of the Jews of Eastern Europe were practically illiterate, meaning that although they could read the prayers and the sacred texts in Hebrew, they could not (and mostly did not want to) read in any secular language. The kind of intellectual life that is vital for the survival of a nation as an entity in the modern world did not exist in the East-European Jewish milieu, or existed only sporadically. Modern Hebrew was taught at surprisingly many gymnasiums; still the majority of the population did not learn it. Judaic studies and Jewish history and philosophy existed as scholarly disciplines, and they produced great scholars; nevertheless, this had little influence on the lives of the millions of poor Jews. Printed prayer books were found everywhere, but in many villages two or more people used one old book which, as one of my informants told me, was often little more than a collection of yellowed and disintegrating loose leafs. There were Torah and prayer book publications with explanations, but the kind of proliferation of magnificently printed prayer books with superb explanations and translations that one sees today did not exist.

This leads back to my earlier point, namely, that the Jewish culture of these territories was primarily oral. When in today's modern communities one asks a learned person why one is supposed to pray in one manner or another, or why one is supposed to do one thing and not do another during a holiday, the answer always begins, "because it is written," and, normally, continues with the explanation of some sacred written text. When I posed such questions in the old communities, the answer began, "this is how we did it at my father's table" or "this is how I learned in my village." Men of learning were able to give

a "because it is written" explanation as well, but the emphasis was always on the power of the oral tradition, often also acknowledging contradictions: "My father used to do it this way, but as a matter of fact, in the *Hassidic yeshiva* where I studied, our *Rebbe* did it differently." Most often, however, the answer to the question of why was: "Hmm, interesting. I have never thought about this. I am not sure, now that you ask, well, I will think about it."

Among the East-Ashkenazi Jews culture emerged and was created continually and in a spontaneous manner. One could say that it was a culture on the borderline of the conscious and the subconscious, like the pronunciation of a language is somewhere on the borderline of the conscious and the subconscious. One simply speaks, developing an intonation as if from the inside of one's personality, yet at the same time within the framework of what one hears. This oral nature of Jewish culture has been largely lost in the modern era, or at least it no longer has the prestige and importance it used to have. It is no longer the central defining force in the shaping of Jewish culture. This radical change in culture and in the outlook on life from the centrality of an oral transmission to the centrality of the official and written text has been observed by many scholars. There are several among them who consider it a great loss. Of its critics, Joseph Soloveitchik is perhaps the best known.[3]

As representatives of a culture rich in oral tradition, the East-Ashkenazi communities placed great emphasis on the idiosyncratic and personal expression of religious life. In terms of music this meant that, within a common framework, every person had his own style of praying and, with regards to the individuals' personal styles, every community had its unique musical form for the services. There were certain general regional features, but the final form of the music was created by the individual "in dialogue" with his or her community. People had great sensitivity to and interest in nuances of musical expression. Each person expressed himself or herself in his or her personal articulation of the text, melody, motives, tempo, accentuation, and musical gestures. This emphasis on individuality was regarded as the cornerstone of the tradition and was explained to me as the foundation of prayer: "the prayer belongs to the individual, everyone has to create his or her personal prayer, if you want to learn the melodies, *you* must be in the prayer." The focus on individuality required that the tradition remain oral, since it had to be re-created with each religious act of each individual person.[4]

3 ■ A collection of his articles could be found here: <http://text.rcarabbis.org/rav-soloveitchiks-tradition-articles/>.

4 ■ I explain this individuality in several of my articles, most importantly: "The unbearable lightness of ethnomusicological complete editions: the style of the *ba'al tefillah* in the East European Jewish service," *Studies in the Sources and the Interpretation of Music. Essays in Honor of László Somfai on His 70th Birthday*, ed. László Vikárius and Vera Lampert (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 7-18.

We see, thus, a strong emphasis on the duty of the individual to create his or her personal musical style, but at the same time there was an equally strong tendency to shape a unique style that characterized a particular community. All this, of course, formed part of the larger cultural milieu. Again, the analogue of language illuminates this tradition best: every person speaks his or her native language differently. Often small groups of people develop a special speaking style (in slang, usage of connecting words, accents, etc.). This forms part of the language of a given region, and on a higher level, of the totality of the language. To establish the rules according to which this actually took place in the prayer music of the East-Ashkenazim is as difficult as it would be to describe in exact terms how the pronunciation and accentuation of a spoken language develops in the case of each individual and group.

Obviously, this emphasis on adherence to local practice could not be maintained after immigration to Israel and the United States. Indeed, it would have been suicidal for the future of Jewish existence. After all, the lives of these new communities depended on the belief in a common Jewish culture. But Israeli society's fixation on the idea of Jewish unity was perhaps exaggerated. Shulamit Hareven wrote about the post-war Israeli society:

> [In the first era of Zionism], there was a tremendous desire to submerge the "I." Individuation was nearly tantamount to a sin. For a time, in the first kibbutzim, it was thought desirable for a child not to know who its biological parents were, the better to enable the group framework to succeed the individual family and its role... [This situation] creates group stereotypes regarding everything that is strange and foreign. In the 1950s and 1960s it was the stereotype of the "Poles," "the Yekkes" (German Hews), "the Maroccans," "the Iraqis," followed by the "Anglo-Saxons" (Americans and other English speakers), "the Russians," "the Georgians," "the Persians."[5]

Similar stereotypes were a substitute for scholarly study of the local varieties of East European Jewish music. It was agreed in the scholarly milieu that there existed, for instance, specific Lithuanian and specific Hassidic traditions, and that these could still be found in Israel. But no one asked or examined in a scholarly manner whether such Israeli and American categorizations were valid to the pre-Holocaust East European situation, or whether they merely reflected the prestige of certain immigrant communities in their new homes. It has become a scholarly myth that Ashkenazi liturgical music is unified and, as a result, today's religious communities and cantorial schools in Israel and the United States teach the Ashkenazi tradition as if it were a set of more or less fixed melodies.

5 ■ Shulamit Hareven, *The Vocabulary of Peace: Life, Culture, Politics in the Middle East* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1995), 108-109, 103.

In fact, music was among the least codified and most individualistic aspects of traditional Jewish life. What Jews shared all over the world was not music, but the monumental body of sacred texts, sacred language, certain basic religious and moral practices, and a more or less commonly accepted narrative of ancient Jewish history. All of these aspects of Judaism were intimately tied to writing. One could almost say that in the Jewish societies, writing, the Hebrew language, sacred texts and a memory of an ancient history were the aspects that emphasized a global communal consciousness, while music, local customs, pronunciation—that is, everything that was oral—emphasized the uniqueness of the individual and his or her immediate small local community. In well-functioning traditional communities, there was a balance between these two—the global-communal and the individual—aspects of the culture. But with the trauma of the Holocaust, the balance was disturbed. The written word, which has always been a primary vessel of global Jewish identity, acquired value as the national uniting force.

This ideology did not encourage respect for the fading traditions of the East European Jews. To look at Eastern Europe meant not only to look at the past and at suffering, it also meant to value autonomous local practices and oral tradition, in short, everything that hinders the future of the Jews as a unified nation. Moreover, much of the philosophical, moral and artistic achievements of the core East-Ashkenazi culture had a character that defied a modern intellectual approach because it presented itself not only and not even primarily in the verbal-intellectual domain. However, as explained above, the revival of Jewish culture was led largely, although not exclusively, by an intelligentsia that could relate more easily to cultural products that were written and could be interpreted verbally.

Furthermore, the notion that music could express philosophical ideas was largely suspect in the eyes of the post-modern intelligentsia. Of course, this attitude is not peculiar to Jewish culture, but rather is a general tendency today. The more we proceed into the post-modern era (if indeed that is the era in which we live), the more economic success is valued over spirituality and the more intellect is associated exclusively with mathematic talent and verbal expression. As a non-verbal framework of thought and emotional expression, music has become and is becoming ever more marginalized. It is possible to write scholarly books about the mystical relationship and the tension between speech and spiritual thought or about the *Hassidic* idea of a spirit transcending verbal knowledge (Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer's book *Hasidism as Mysticism* is a good example).[6] But for the scholarly community, it is still unthinkable to take the ideas of such books seriously and regard non-verbal expressions of Jewish culture as an integral part of Jewish thought.

6 ■ Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

In the 1980s, one could have hoped that the Holocaust was sufficiently distant to make the time ripe for the launch of scholarly projects investigating the oral culture, musical and other, of the surviving East European Jews. At the time, I worked out project plans and wrote numerous proposals for team research focusing on the oral tradition and daily lives of the Jews of Eastern Europe. I approached various institutions in Europe, the United States and in Israel. But surprisingly, the opening up in the 1980s and 1990s brought an even stronger focus on the Holocaust. There was a sense that we had to catch the last survivors who remember their sufferings. To my plea asking that we deal not only with suffering but also with the beauty of the "life before," these institutions seemed to be deaf. In the past few decades the field of Jewish oral history has been dominated by what I would call an obsession with the Holocaust and only the Holocaust. For all the amazing accomplishments of these institutions, they have erected a record of the perpetration and the perpetrators, and failed to serve the memory of the very Jews who perished.

One may well ask why it is important to document the lives and the music of the East-Ashkenazi Jews? Is it worthwhile to tear open the wounds merely in order to learn something about the life (the "folklore," as it had been deemed) of Jewish history? After all, why should we dwell on the past when there is an opportunity to build a brighter future? Many cultures have disappeared, many musical traditions have died out, why should we not let this chapter of human history die as well?

These questions were frequently answered in the negative even by Jews. In his lecture at the World Congress of Jewish Music in 1978, Bruno Nettl said the following:

> Music has always been changing, humans have always been moved around, we now have more rapid change and different technology for bringing it about, but I don't know whether there has really been a change in essence, perhaps it is only one of degree. And while we may wish indeed to preserve whatever we can, I wonder whether a great deal of emphasis should be placed on the specifically preservative aspects of ethnomusicological field research. That it is found in so much of ethnomusicological activity is no doubt related to a feeling that the cultural norm of human beings is stability, that change is exceptional and the result of undesirable events.[7]

Even if Nettl was not specifically speaking about the change in the life of the East European Jews, it is astonishing that at a meeting on Jewish music, a scholar could say coolly that "humans have always been moved around, we

7 ■ Bruno Nettl, "The Concept of Preservation in Ethnomusicology," *Proceedings of the World Congress on Jewish Music, Jerusalem, 1978* (Tel-Aviv: The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature Ltd., 1982), 49.

now have more rapid change and different technology" and that we should not think that "change is...the result of undesirable events." This attitude would seem utterly cynical if we do not assume that the author merely forgot what his words meant in the context of the Holocaust. But the basic attitude expressed by Nettl is representative of the general atmosphere of the time and, to some extent, of our era. Many Jews see no virtue in the preservation of the local variants of East-Ashkenazi culture. I was reproached by Israeli scholars for transcribing, in my musical examples, the particular Hebrew pronunciation of my informants, and scholarly journals in Israel and the United States, demanded that I "correct" the text according to "standard Hebrew." To this day, it is not customary to record the local variants of pronunciation in musical transcription. The text should appear standardized, written with Hebrew characters (which do not signal pronunciation) or with the local transliteration of mainstream modern pronunciation.

I was also asked many times why I focused on the few old communities of Hungary and the surrounding countries instead of documenting the flourishing new developments among the Orthodox communities in Israel. The Orthodox students in one of my courses on Jewish music in the United States criticized me for playing certain pieces of East European prayer melodies in class because, according to them, the melody did not follow correct Hebrew phrasing. The thought that "those Jews before the Second World War" looked at the world completely differently and that they had preoccupations utterly different from those of an American freshman at an Ivy league University was something unacceptable to them. For the East-Ashkenazim before the Second World War, meticulous grammatical correctness was not the heart of the prayer. They had something completely different at stake when they prayed. These freshmen were not alone in this opinion. An Orthodox Jew and well-known musicologist in the United States criticized my recordings for the same reason, because my informants did not articulate the text according the rules of literary Hebrew (at least, as he had learned it). He considered my entire collection a document of the corruption of the core Jewish style. In Israel too, according to some scholars, the main merit of my archive lay in its value as an interesting document of *corruption*.

We have to keep in mind that up to the present day it has not been considered worthwhile by any major institution to invest mental resources, let alone money, in the creation of a comprehensive research project on the oral culture of the East European Jews. Of course, this is not to say that nothing has been done, but there has been no research that would have aimed to reconstruct the global system of local variants of the Ashkenazi tradition. Apart from the little I was able to collect, there has been no systematic documentation of entire musical repertoires (complete services of complete holidays in their continuity and integrity), entire communities and entire continuous

geographical areas of Eastern Europe. Even in Israel, where, by now, there exists a monumental collection of melodies, the recordings of liturgical chants were collected in a rather arbitrary manner.

This is not a new problem. Since its inception, Jewish ethnomusicology has considered the European traditions of secondary importance. Serious scholarly ethnographic research was carried out only in Czarist Russia and later in the Soviet Union. The reasons for this are manifold, and it is not possible to explain them here. It is enough to note that on the eve of the Second World War, the oral tradition of the East-Ashkenazi Jews had been largely unexplored and its value and wealth were almost entirely unknown to the enlightened, modernized Jews. And for reasons I noted above, no such study was carried out after the Holocaust either. As a result, we have little knowledge of this tradition today.

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I regard the life, and within it, the music of the East European Jews as a unique tradition of great value. The fading of the practice of the East-Ashkenazi chant, which by now is probably irrevocable, is an enormous loss. It is true that many of the melodies are carried on by various Jewish communities. But *music as culture* is something other than the sum total of melodies. It is the manner of performance, the voice quality, the sense of tempo, the manner of transmission and variation, the framework for individuality, and emotional expression. What matters most in music is an atmosphere, the totality of an experience of sound.

The sound-culture—the practice of prayer chant—of the pre-Second-World-War traditional East European Jews was an entirely original phenomenon that represented one of the peaks of spiritual culture within the history of Judaism and arguably all cultures. Beyond its importance for Jewish thought and history, it has universal significance. First, it was one of the few orally and communally practiced religious chant traditions to survive into the twentieth century. Second, it was a spiritual, social and acoustic-artistic phenomenon the knowledge of which belonged not to some professional elite, but to the community as a whole.

For the millions of traditional Jews who lived in Eastern Europe before the war, the acoustic experience of the synagogue ritual served as the primary occasion for spirituality. These Jews were able to "make real"—live through and comprehend—the words of teachings and prayers with the help of the *sound* of the prayer. The ritual, with its sound, was the primary and most fundamental religious act, and it addressed multitudes of spiritual, communal and emotional needs.

At the center of this sound culture is what could be called the communal and daily practice of *the art of speech-music*. I use here the expression "speech music" only for lack of a better term. The phenomenon to which I am referring is not the combination of speech and melody. It is a kind of sonorous utterance

that makes audible personal emotional-spiritual movements, as if coming from a consciousness that does not recognize the separation of music and speech. What Gaston Bachelard writes in his *Poetics of Space* about the poetic image, that it "places us at the origin of the speaking being," would be an apt characterization of this culture: it takes place at and takes us to the origin of the speaking being. The practice of daily prayer chant is like continuous experimentation with the realization of fundamental emotional gestures in sound.

This speech-music (which for lack of better terms is also referred to, alternately, as melodic reading, recitation, or chanting) is a well-known phenomenon in many cultures and forms the basis for the liturgies of the Mediterranean: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Whether the East European practice preserved anything of the chanting styles of antiquity or is an internal development in response to the particular socio-historical context (or both) is impossible to determine with certainty. It is certain, however, that none of the other religions seems to have developed an art of chanting in such a manner, namely: considering it the center of spiritual expression and not merely an art of professionals, but *the vehicle of spiritual expression for the entire community*, which is continually renewed by even the simplest individual in a spontaneous and creative manner.

The simple member of the congregation and the "professional performers" of the prayer—the cantor or *hazzan*—have the same fundamental attitude: to internalize the prayers and reach an utmost ease in their chanted performance in order, as members of these communities say, "to be in the prayer." The deep knowledge of and intimate relationship with the prayer texts and the utmost skill and ease in the chanting of the words allow for the *privilege of individuality* within a ritualized situation.

At least since the eighteenth century in Europe, individuality in musical expression was praised in descriptions of professional Jewish cantors. But to the present day there is no recognition, neither in Jewish scholarship nor in intellectual consciousness in general, of the fact that in the East-Ashkenazi milieu a sound-environment developed in which *every person* was allowed and indeed expected to practice the creative art of chant improvisation.

When I wrote earlier that there is not a single comprehensive book on the music of the East-Ashkenazim, I meant that there is no book about this tradition. There exists an impressive number of books explaining the rules of the melodies of Jewish cantors, mostly based on notated cantorial handbooks. Apart from the rather problematic "revival" of what is called "klezmer music," the cantorial melodies are the only genre known to the general public, and often also to scholars of Jewish music. Even an otherwise excellent recent encyclopedia article is oblivious to the phenomenon of the unique musical practice described above and equates the history of East-Ashkenazi liturgical music with the development of the styles and compositions of cantors.

As far as I could judge from what I had collected, the level of individuality in the musical styles of the non-professional prayer leaders and even the simple people of the congregation was astonishing. Each person had a personal version using original solutions in the musical structure to create a unique overall effect. The differences concerned much more than melodic variation, they meant sometimes completely different overall structures, performances, tempi—a whole unique and personal sound and atmosphere. Like the compositional style of a composer, the musical style of the praying individual had to reflect his life experience and character. In the eyes of the members of a traditional community, it is precisely this aspect that made the prayer chant *authentic*: that it conveyed a personality—it was a personal outcry to God. Music in this milieu was more than an "addition" to beautify the service. It *was life per se*, and it revealed, often better than words could have, the spiritual orientation of the community and the individual.

For the traditional East European Jews, sacred and secular, practice and teaching, intellect and emotion, meaning and sound-forms, words and music were not separable. Together they all meant the practice of daily life. This attitude was the main strength in Hasidism, and it was this aspect that Buber regarded as "the greatest phenomenon in the history of spirit." It is worth quoting Buber's assessment of the Baal-Shem's achievement. In reality, his description characterizes less the Baal-Shem's aspirations than those of his followers, and, more importantly, traditional pre-Second-World-War East-Ashkenazi life in general:

> [t]he Baal-Shem belongs to those central figures of the history of religion whose effect on others has arisen through the fact that they *lived* in a certain way. These men did not proceed *from* a teaching, but moved *to* a teaching, in such a way that their life worked as a teaching not yet grasped in words... Within [their] community...arise a series of men with the same kind of life... In an otherwise not very productive century... the "un-enlightened" Polish and Ukrainian Jewry brought forth the greatest phenomenon in the history of the spirit, greater than any individual genius in art and in thought: a society that lives by faith.[8]

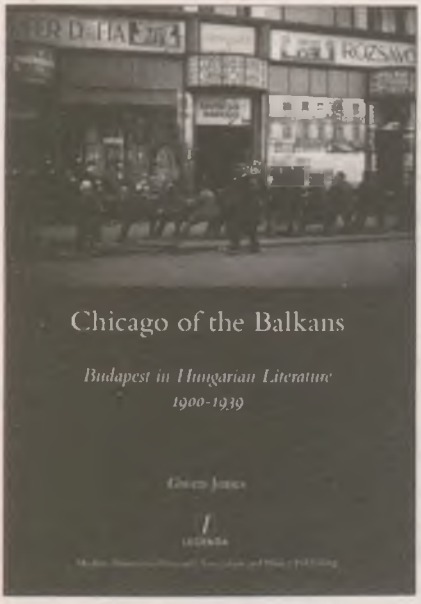
The logic of this paragraph is significant. It is not simply that religious consciousness found expression in the life of a great man. What Buber is suggesting is that religious consciousness was derived from a way of life. Even though this life was obviously saturated with an already existing religious tradition, it developed its particular teachings from practice. Within this

8 ■ Martin Buber, *The Origins and Meaning of Hasidism*, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), 35-37. It is also interesting to consider Scholem's explanation for the popular appeal of mystical thought in Hasidism. See Gershom Scholem, *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 36-37 and much of the "Ninth Lecture: Hasidism: The Latest Phase," 325-350.

practice, music had paramount significance. Music was entrusted to express philosophical ideas embedded in the text in a more direct manner than the words themselves. As an example, I would mention the musical approach to transcendental prayer. When East-Ashkenazi Jews pray in an extremely fast manner that renders the words of the prayer virtually unrecognizable, they express, through this musical performance, a thought deeper than the immediate meaning of the words themselves. The inarticulate continuity of chanted speech embodies a kind of transcendental timelessness, the ultimate spiritual state sought both in religion and music. Reading the theoretical writings of the Hasidim and other Orthodox scholars, we understand that this practice of prayer did not come about incidentally, but was the result of deep thinking on the part of the spiritual leaders of the community.

The greatest achievement of the East European Jewish culture was that it could transfer the philosophical knowledge of an intellectual elite to the practice of the community at large, and it transferred this knowledge in such a manner that it did not remain exclusively in the domain of the verbal arts. Unfortunately, precisely because of its inherently oral and often non-verbal nature, this culture was almost impossible to preserve or even study after the Holocaust. ❧

English Title



Gwen Jones:
CHICAGO OF THE BALKANS

An examination of the ways in which Hungarian intellectuals characterized and described the city of Budapest in the first half of the twentieth century, Chicago of the Balkans *offers fascinating insights into the contrasting perceptions of the rapidly changing capital. Drawing on a wealth of fiction and non-fiction written between 1900 and 1939, Gwen Jones examines the various images that have been used to characterize the city, which has been compared to Babel, Babylon, but also Paris and the bustling center of immigrant culture, Chicago. The book provides a captivating, kaleidoscopic portrait of Budapest as it was seen by Hungarian society in some of the formative moments of its history.*

Agnes Kory

Remembering Seven Murdered Hungarian Jewish Composers[1]

Unlike the so-called Terezín composers—Viktor Ullman, Gideon Klein, Pavel Haas and Hans Krása—whose names and works have become relatively well known in recent years, the Hungarian Jewish composers who were murdered during the Holocaust remain nearly unknown. All seven of those who have been rediscovered so far died young, before they had fulfilled their potential. Yet, in spite of adverse circumstances, all had produced work of value. The amount of work that appears to have survived varies; what they shared was an untimely, tragic end, followed by artistic oblivion. The following information about the seven Hungarian Jewish composers (presented here in alphabetical order) is the fruit of my attempts, so far, to rectify this situation.

Pál Budai

Budapest Music Academy yearbooks show that Pál Budai was a student of violin and composition there from 1922 to 1928. During the last two years, his composition teacher was Zoltán Kodály. In the 1930s Budai spent three and half years in Paris, where he led the orchestra faculty at the École Normale Supérieure. In 1940 the highly respected Hungarian musicologist Antal Molnár

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1 ■ A version of this article first appeared on the website of The OREL Foundation.

briefly analyzed Budai's early Rondino for piano (published in Paris) and forecast a great future for the composer. Fifteen years later, Molnár wrote that Budai had been particularly suited for the comic opera and ballet genres; he analyzed and praised the music for the ballet *Babadoktor* ("Doll Doctor"), the Two Pieces for violin, the Burlesque for piano and what was apparently Budai's most popular composition, the Elegy and Scherzo for string orchestra. According to Molnár, Budai's sense of comic opera style was effectively manifested in his Divertimento cycle for string orchestra. His desire to keep on studying, as well as his artistic integrity, would have ensured Budai's progress, which came to an end with his early death.

Although I met and interviewed Budai's widow over forty-five years ago, I have not yet found further information about him, and I have discovered only two short compositions by him: the early Rondino and a set of six short pieces for children—both published in Paris in the early 1930s—as well as excerpts from the piano version of the ballet *Babadoktor*, published in Budapest in 1966. The music analyzed by Antal Molnár in 1955 has yet to be rediscovered.

Budai made use of Jewish melodies in the children's pieces (meant, most likely, to be listened to by children rather than played by them) and dedicated the set to Albert Neuburger, whose firm, Edition Senart, published it in 1933.

Jenő Deutsch

Deutsch was Bartók's gifted piano pupil, copyist and occasional music transcriber. He copied Bartók's twenty-seven choruses for children's and female voices, the collection of Turkish folk music and most of the monumental Rumanian Folk Music; he also transcribed recorded folk music for Bartók's 1939 Pátria records. One week before the ultra-fascist Szálasi (of the Arrow Cross) seized control in Hungary, Kodály—who taught composition at the Music Academy— wrote in support of Jenő Deutsch who, however, was murdered:

> Budapest, 8 October, 1944
>
> My ex-student Jenő Deutsch is one of the most outstanding and most versatile Hungarian musicians. His disappearance, should it prove to be final, would be the most painful loss to our musical life. Not only is he an excellent pianist and organist (in this respect I can speak on behalf of Béla Bartók, Deutsch's professor who is currently abroad but whose opinion I know well) but owing to his exceptional musical intelligence and to his skills in all branches of composition, Jenő Deutsch is an outstanding teacher, original thinker and author.
>
> He also worked as an ethnomusicologist and has gained valuable experience in transcribing melodies from the phonograph. We badly miss the expertise of our colleague Jenő Deutsch. Bearing in mind that his humanity, character, modesty and

unconditional reliability surpass standards which are usually considered at such requests, I warmly recommend the favorable consideration of his application.

Zoltán Kodály

It is not clear whether this letter ever reached the forced labor camp, or even whether Deutsch was still alive.

Kodály had attempted to save Jenő Deutsch and László Weiner, another of his excellent students, in time. In 1939 he had tried in vain to secure positions for them at the Conservatorium in Melbourne, Australia.

Although, as the Budapest Music Academy's relevant year books (1928-34) demonstrate, Deutsch studied piano and organ with Bartók and Aladár Zalánfy, respectively, it is possible that he also studied composition, as Kodály's letter seems to indicate, and was good at it. Sadly, very little information about Deutsch is available. In spite of his important work for Bartók, he does not seem to appear in any biographical lexicons, nor have I yet found any composition by him.

There may now be only one person alive who knew Deutsch, although not very well. In November 2007, Peter Bartók, the eighty-four-year-old son of Béla Bartók, sent me the following information:

> Jenő was employed by my father for a long time, copying music with his fine calligraphy. I believe the Rumanian and Turkish folksong collections, as published, had the handwritten music notes by Deutsch. It is sad to know his fate. I have never met him face-to-face; my awareness of his presence in the house was when, while we were eating lunch, we heard outside on the staircase someone "roll down the stairs," like a machine gun; he had very fast moving legs and, when he was leaving, he never interrupted us. This was the stairway that the Hungarians removed from the house on Csalán út.

György Justus (Jusztus)

György Justus (or Jusztusz) (Budapest, 24 April, 1898—Budapest, January 1945) was a composer, musicologist and choir master. He was impoverished throughout his life and had to struggle exceptionally hard to survive. Justus studied violin and composition, the latter in Berlin during the 1920s; he returned home in 1927. He published almost thirty substantial papers on music, dance and theatre in Hungarian journals but was mostly interested in folksong research and comparative folklore and in establishing folksong choirs, which he conducted and for which he composed. His choirs also staged works like the Brecht/Weill *Threepenny Opera*, in which Justus often sang with

great success. He played the violin, when one was needed, in the accompanying band. His orchestra regularly performed compositions by many contemporary Hungarian composers.

Justus was impoverished all his adult life. Although he worked all the time, he did not have a regular income. Indeed, he was very rarely paid for any of his work. For many years he had no home, slept wherever he could, and wrote his essays and compositions on park benches and in coffee houses. He composed in his head, although the Korda brothers (music publishers, not to be confused with the film moguls) allowed him to use the piano in their storeroom, helped him as much as they could and published his early *Jazz Suite* for piano. Justus had a large group of friends, all of whom supported him as best they could, even if only with warm meals.

Although choral works account for most of Justus's compositional output, he also wrote songs, instrumental and orchestral works and musical plays. His Burlesque for violin and orchestra (1925) was played by two leading Hungarian violinists of the day, Ödön Pártos and György Garai, and in 1939 the prestigious Budapest Philharmonic performed some of his works. Justus and his wife, the writer Kató Ács, created a children's oratorio that was given favorable consideration by the Hungarian National Theater—but by then anti-Jewish discriminatory laws were in force, and the theater wanted to put an "Aryan" name on it instead of Justus's name. He and his "Aryan" wife refused the offer, and the oratorio was not performed.

Justus was assigned to forced labor in the autumn of 1943. In 1944 he escaped from Transylvania and went into hiding in Budapest. In November the Hungarian Nazis (Arrow Cross) caught him, after which he disappeared. According to some sources he was killed in Budapest in January 1945.

Writing in 1955, Antal Molnár declared that in the slightly undisciplined yet interesting *Jazz Suite* (1928) Justus had not yet found his own voice. More individual is the song "Struggling with Sorrow" (1930, a setting of a poem by Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, "A búkkal küszködő," 1792), with which Justus won first prize at a national song competition. His mature style can be heard in several piano-accompanied songs for children and in the "Villon Ballade" (1935) for baritone or mezzo-soprano and orchestra. Molnár also mentions Justus's very effective choral work, "No". I have inspected over forty of Justus's music manuscripts and have found many of his compositions to be more than worthy of performance. I also discovered old editions of two of Justus's works—the *Jazz Suite* and the lighthearted waltz-song, "Sometimes in the Evening." Justus wrote the song's text as well as its music, dedicated the song to his mother and—as per the title page—arranged for its publication. But the address printed on the title page, given as that of the composer, was really the address of Sándor Vándor, another composer, because Justus was homeless. The song's words express Justus's longing for his mother and for Pest (the Pest

section of Budapest). Three verses address the mother, and the refrain, heard three times, is about Pest. Although this song is apparently in a light vein, in retrospect there is nothing light about it. Justus escaped from forced labor in Transylvania because he was homesick for Budapest. Perhaps he would have survived the labor camp instead of being killed by Budapest's fascists.

Sándor Kuti

From Kuti's autobiography, written in 1944, shortly before he perished in a German concentration camp:

> I was born in 1908, in a dilapidated block of flats in the Óbuda district of Budapest. My parents were poor, permanently struggling. From the age of three my favorite pastime was to invent various scenes and to add music to them. My first notated compositions date from my ninth year. But I started serious music studies only after my matriculation, at the age of eighteen. I studied at the Budapest Academy of Music. I obtained my highest degree, the artist diploma, under the supervision of Ernő Dohnányi. Since then I have taught private pupils and worked as a choral répétiteur. My artistic credo: to serve truth, freedom and human dignity. My piano compositions have been performed in Budapest, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Vienna, Paris and overseas; my chamber music and choral compositions have been performed in Budapest.

Although Kuti does not mention it, he was disadvantaged and poor throughout his life. At the end of this short autobiography Kuti provides a list of his compositions, including his two string quartets (1928, 1934), three string trios (1929, 1932, 1933), Rondo for symphony orchestra (1933), Sonata for two violins (1933), Piano Suite (1935), Sonatina for piano (1936), fifteen songs on poems by Lajos Hollós-Korvin, several choral works, pieces for children and songs on poems by Attila József. Although Kuti wrote this memoir shortly before he was murdered, he had yet to compose his last work, a solo sonata for violin.

Antal Molnár describes Kuti's music as "sincere in emotions and disciplined in form." He calls the three-movement solo violin sonata one of Kuti's best works; it was "written on self-lined pages in a forced labor camp in the summer of 1944 and sent to his wife 'with lots of love and longing'." The sonata is "heartbreakingly expressive," Molnár says, "but it is also an example of cyclic relationships. The closing movement incorporates main ingredients from the previous movements."

Kuti's compositions were well received by national and international critics as early as his Music Academy diploma concert, which he shared with his fellow student and close friend György (later Sir Georg) Solti. (Solti, towards

the end of his life, described Kuti as having been "exceptionally gifted" and wrote: "I used to visit him at his family's desperately poor little catacomb of a home. I am convinced that had he lived, he would have become one of Hungary's greatest composers....") Kuti's other close friends included the poet Hollós-Korvin, the pianist Andor Földes—who premiered Kuti's Piano Suite, with great success, in Amsterdam in 1935—and the composer Endre Szervánszky. During the war, the non-Jewish Szervánszky tried to protect Jews; his courage was acknowledged by the Yad Vashem organization, which, in 1998—twenty-one years after his death—described him as one of the "righteous among the nations." One of Kuti's string quartets and one of his string trios were published posthumously in 1965 and 1966, respectively; a choral work was included in a collection of Jewish Folk Choruses in 1948, but other Kuti works remain in manuscript, and some may be lost.

Walter Lajthai-Lazarus

OMIKE (Országos Magyar Izraelita Közművelődési Egyesület—Hungarian Jewish Educational Association) was the wartime Hungarian Jewish organization that provided work, as long as it could, to Jewish artists who were banned from employment elsewhere. Walter Lajthai-Lazarus was an OMIKE composer and also an OMIKE conductor. On 11 and 13 May, 1942, his one-act "comic opera scene" "Szerencse" ("Fortune") was premiered. I have not yet found any other information about him.

Sándor Vándor

Thanks to the choir named after him, Vándor is not entirely unknown. He even merited twelve lines in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. But his work as a composer and educator is largely forgotten. From 1920 on, Vándor (originally Venetianer; Miskolc, 28 July, 1901—Sopronbánfalva, 14 January, 1945) studied in Berlin and then as Paul Graener's composition student at the Leipzig Music Academy, from which he graduated. He worked as an opera répétiteur in Italy from 1924 until he returned to Hungary in 1932, after which he worked as an opera conductor and répétiteur and led several workers' choirs without payment. He conducted the choir that eventually took his name from 1936 until November 1944, when he was taken to Sopronbánfalva by the Hungarian Nazis and died under torture.

As a conductor, Vándor consistently promoted works by Bartók and Kodály, and he published articles about Bartók, Kodály, Mussorgsky and Shostakovich. In addition to Hungarian, he was fluent in German, Russian, English, French,

Italian and Spanish. In 1940, during his three-month Ruthenian forced labor period, he learned Ruthenian and collected Ruthenian folksongs. Although as a composer Vándor was best known for his choral works, he was prolific in many genres and was well received by audiences and critics alike. Distinguished artists, such as the pianist György Sándor and the singer Vera Rózsa, performed at concerts of Vándor's compositions, which include instrumental, chamber, orchestral, vocal/choral and stage works. Only one of Vándor's compositions was published during his lifetime: *The Machine*, for piano solo, won the silver medal at an international competition for piano compositions in Eastern Europe in 1934. His second opera was left unfinished at the time of his death.

Many of Vándor's forty or more compositions were published posthumously, but they are not easy to come by. Many—perhaps all—of his manuscripts survive.

Molnár writes that some of Vándor's songs are among the treasures of Hungarian Lieder, and Fejes (1967) analyzes the String Quartet, the Sonatina for solo viola, First Sonata for violin and piano, other instrumental and chamber works, several songs, choral works and Vándor's only completed opera, which was written in the Brecht/Weill mode. Fejes emphasizes what he describes as Vándor's revolutionary choral chansons, the best of which—"Mondd, mit érlel" ("What Will Become of Him")—combines Hungarian folksong elements with twentieth-century workers' songs à la Hanns Eisler. Vándor arranged folksongs of many nations; his most substantial Hungarian folksong arrangement was The Ballad of Anna Fehér for solo female voice, mixed choir and piano (1941).

László Weiner

With the possible exception of Lajthai-Lazarus, about whom I have yet to find data, Weiner (Szombathely, April 9, 1916—Lukov, 25 July, 1944) was the youngest of the seven Hungarian Jewish composers who perished in the Holocaust. The Budapest Music Academy yearbooks show that Weiner was Kodály's composition pupil from 1934 until 1940 and that he also studied piano and conducting there.

As was mentioned in connection with Jenő Deutsch, Kodály tried to save Weiner as well as Deutsch as early as 1939, when he attempted to find positions for these two gifted Jewish musicians in Melbourne, Australia. In 1943, he again made an effort on Weiner's behalf:

To The Major General
12 July, 1943, Budapest

Dear Sir,

Please allow me to draw your attention to my ex-student László Weiner. He is expected to become an outstanding composer and pianist. Two years ago a composition of his won the national competition. Weiner already spent 13 months in forced labor, partly with heavy manual work. I believe that the continuation of such work will put his future at risk: he will be unable to carry out the cultural work for which he studied and obtained qualifications. I would appreciate it if, circumstances allowing, future work assignments would take into consideration Weiner's profession and individual abilities so that his future should not be jeopardized. I am sure that, as far as possible, we can rely on your good will.

With much appreciation,

Yours very sincerely: Zoltán Kodály

Endre Gaál, music critic for the important daily newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* ("Hungarian Nation"), attended two of Weiner's premieres—both in 1942—and reported favorably on them.

Weiner dedicated most of his compositions to his wife, the excellent singer Vera Rózsa. They had met as students at the Music Academy, married in 1942 and continued to make music together at OMIKE's concerts whenever they had the chance. OMIKE gave as many opportunities as possible to Jewish artists, but the fact that the young Weiner had to be accommodated alongside well-known mature artists limited his opportunities. He conducted, accompanied and taught—and had some of his works performed—there from 1941 until 7 December, 1942. He was scheduled to conduct a Beethoven evening in February 1943, but by then he was in a forced labor camp. He was twenty-five or twenty-six when he composed his last works and twenty-eight when he was murdered at the Lukov forced labor camp on 25 July, 1944.

Vera Rózsa survived the Holocaust and became a well-known singing teacher in England. She taught at The Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and privately.

Molnár writes: "In spite of his youth, Weiner developed a musical style that would have been unimaginable without Kodály, but Weiner was no epigone. His ideas were melodic, well-formed and rich in harmonies."

On 2 May, 1994, fifty years after he was murdered, a memorial concert was arranged for Weiner in the Goldmark Hall, which was the OMIKE concert venue. The concert included four of Weiner's compositions, and the performers —including cellist Janos Starker—had personal links to László Weiner. Thanks mostly to the violist Pál Lukács, Weiner's Violin and Viola duo, Viola Sonata and Triple Concerto were published by Editio Musica in 1958, 1961 and 1965, respectively; the Three Songs in 1994; the Overture in 1995; and the four-part chorus in 2001. Yet his works are still little known, and he is often confused with the much older Leó Weiner. ❧

Anna Manchin

Gyula Kabos and "Jewish Difference"

Reconstructing Interwar Jewish History through Film

Why Kabos's Jewishness Matters

Gyula Kabos (1887, Budapest–1941, New York), a short, portly, balding middle-aged Jewish actor known in the 1930s as the "Hungarian Chaplin," was Hungary's first film star and remains one of the most important comedians of twentieth-century Hungary.[1] His film career began with his brilliant portrayal of a nouveau riche entrepreneur in *Hyppolit, a lakaj* ("Hyppolit, the Butler"; István Székely, 1931; Székely fled pre-war Hungary for the United States, and he changed his name to Steve Sekely) Hungary's first hit "talkie," which became, through its success, the blueprint for the genre and style of Hungarian film comedies until 1938 (Image 1). From 1931 until his departure for the United States in 1939, Kabos appeared in close to every third film produced in Hungary. Although he played mostly minor characters, people went to the movies just to see him perform: directors and producers trusted his name to sell films.[2] Kabos's witty remarks and turns of phrase were incorporated into

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1 ■ A collection of essays on Kabos was published in 1987, Mihály Cenner, et al. *Kabos Gyula, 1887-1941. Születésének századik évfordulójára.* [On the 100th anniversary of his birth] Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1987. The only biography of Kabos is Tibor Bános's *Kabos Gyula*. Budapest: Athenaeum, 2000. While probably well researched, it is an impressionistic account and of limited value to scholars because of its lacks of cited references.

2 ■ See, for example, a 1934 interview with Kabos (which also refers to him as "the Hungarian Chaplin.") Ádám László. "Ha két napig nem játszom, a harmadik napon nincs egy vasam se! Mondja a "milliomos" Kabos, a Magyar Chaplin" in *Esti Kurir*. 1934, December 25. 28.

Kabos as nouveau riche businessman with his new butler. Gyula Kabos and Gyula Csortos in Hyppolit, a Lakáj. *Courtesy of Hungarian National Film Archives Photo Collection*

everyday language in the 1930s, and his popularity survived the communist decades, when his films could be seen only on rare occasions. People still quote his punch lines ("I'll eat onions with onions!") and sing his ditties. How should we understand Kabos's appeal and his seemingly central importance in interwar Hungarian popular culture?

Kabos was called the "Hungarian Chaplin" not only because he was an immensely popular entertainer, but because he played a character reminiscent of Chaplin: a modern anti-hero, an excluded outsider, a schlemiel. "His figure appeared, with slight variations, in film after film: a stuttering-cluttering speech and the same gestures."[3] Or, as another critic put it, Kabos played "timid, awkward petit-bourgeois characters anxious about the threats facing

3 ■ István Nemeskürty's appraisal of Kabos in Cenner, et al. Ibid. Kabos, much like Chaplin, or as Ernst Lubitsch in his German "Jewish milieu" films, played the same character with slight variations. Valerie Weinstein offers a compelling interpretation of Lubitsch's comedies as parodies of "Jewishness." "Anti-Semitism or Jewish 'Camp'? Ernst Lubitsch's Schuhpalast Pinkus (1916) and Meyer Aus Berlin (1918)." German Life and Letters. 59.1. (2006) 101-121.

them" in the turmoil of the 1930s. Kabos played the "little man," pushed around by forces larger than himself and marginalized by an elite culture to which he did not and could not belong.[4] If Chaplin was the antithesis of the petit-bourgeois, constantly battling with the dehumanizing forces of modernity, Kabos was the archetype of the skeptical petit-bourgeois, battling with the heroic ideals of an anachronistic society (Image 2).[5]

In stark contrast with his anti-heroic antics, Kabos's remains were returned, more than fifty years after his death in New York, to Budapest's Farkasréti cemetery in 1996. It is part of Hungary's tradition of symbolic politics to repatriate the bodies of important national figures who died abroad. Post-communist Hungary performed dozens of reburials of individuals whose memory was repressed or maligned by the communist regime but who were deemed to be of symbolic importance for democratic Hungary. At Kabos's ceremony, the actor József Székhelyi delivered a eulogy emphasizing Kabos's continued influence and contributions to twentieth century Hungarian culture:

> Although Gyula Kabos's body is no more, his legacy and his spirit is still among us; it shuffles around theater people, filmmakers and film audiences, around all of us. [Kabos was] the greatest of "little men," the giant of humanism and humor, his entire oeuvre and even death is an indictment against exclusion, belittlement and humiliation.[6]

The memory of Kabos, as the eulogy illustrates (even in its emphasis on the actor's "humanism" and his "indictment against exclusion"), remains rather opaque on the terms of his exclusion and humiliation. It remains silent on the specific ways in which Kabos's Jewish background influenced the exclusions and humiliations he portrayed in his performance and that he himself faced as a Jew in interwar Hungary.

In this article I argue that Kabos's success was based on his performance of "Jewishness." Kabos not only advocated for the dignity of the "oppressed little man," he did so by articulating, in a positive, optimistic and inclusive way, truths about "Jewish difference" and Hungarian national identity in Hungary.

4 ■ This is more or less the interpretation of Gyöngyi Balogh and Jenő Király in Gyöngyi Balogh and Jenő Király. *Csak Egy Nap a Világ—A Magyar Film Műfaj és Stilustörténete 1929-1936.* [The World is Just a Day—A History of Hungarian Film Genre and Style 1929-1936]. Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 2000.

5 ■ Though Chaplin was not Jewish, he was seen by both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences as quintessentially Jewish. Hannah Arendt argued that Chaplin's Jewishness was the source of his universal appeal: Standing outside the pale, suspected by all the world, the pariah—as Chaplin portrays him—could not fail to arouse the sympathy of the common people, who recognized in him the image of what society had done to them." Hannah Arendt. "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition" Jewish Social Studies, 6.2.

6 ■ The reburial took place on November 30th, 1996 at the largest cemetery in Buda, the resting place of many of Hungary's most prominent public figures, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

Kabos's performance in his film roles can give us insight into the experience and perspective of "assimilated" Jews in interwar Hungary, into how "Jewish difference" functioned in interwar Hungarian (popular) culture, and finally, into how Jewish reinterpretations of "Jewish difference," such as Kabos's parodies, helped create the mainstream vision of modern Hungary in a time of cultural and political crisis.

Kabos and his "little man" posture. Gyula Kabos and Gyula Csortos in Hyppolit, a Lakáj.
Courtesy of Hungarian National Film Archives Photo Collection

Silence on Kabos's Jewishness

Despite Kabos's popularity, there have been few scholarly studies of his work. Communist history writing generally dismissed interwar popular culture as jingoistic and/or debased "petit-bourgeois" commercial entertainment. Some critics even argued that it was impossible to write about Kabos, meaning that his art could not be described in words, noting that even his contemporaries had failed to offer their critical assessment.[7] But what was it about Kabos that made critical work on his art so difficult? I argue that it was the taboo on the existence of a separate "Jewish culture," already in place in the interwar years, that continued, with added layers of repression and silence, until the late 1980s. The reason critics and scholars found it so difficult to talk about Kabos in the interwar years, and subsequently, during the communist decades, was that any meaningful discussion of Kabos's impact would have called for an analysis of the "invisible Jewish culture" of assimilated Hungarian Jews that remained "below the threshold of articulation" in Hungarian public discourse until the mid-1990s.[8]

On the one hand, this silence is not surprising given the general lack of attention Jewish history has received from both Hungarian and international scholars. In the international context, this neglect has to do partly with linguistic isolation and partly with Hungarian Jewry's "anomalous" history as "a Western-style Jewry in an East European setting," which has blinded scholars to Hungary's relevance for Jewish history in general.[9] As Kati Vörös explains, the challenge was of a different nature in Hungarian history writing, where writing about Jewish history and culture were taboo until the late 1980s. This does not mean that Jewish contributions to Hungary have been ignored, but that they have been framed within narratives of Jewish identification with and loyalty to Hungary. As Vörös put it, the "crucial role of Jews in Hungarian economic and cultural life has been amply demonstrated and discussed by historians, mostly in the framework of modernization and 'assimilation.'"[10]

7 ■ This attitude is apparent in the above mentioned collection of essays edited by Cenner, which clearly wished to celebrate the actor's great talent but was struggled to make sense of his contribution.

8 ■ In the words of Michael Steinberg, "European culture and Jewish culture exist and exist centrally and overwhelmingly as bearers of consciousness. ... These existences are material and palpable, but reside below the threshold of articulation." See also Darcy Buerkle and Lisa Silverman, discussed below. Steinberg, Michael. Judaism Musical and Unmusical. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

9 ■ The classic formulation of this idea is by Ezra Mendelsohn. *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. 7. This problem has been raised in historiographical essays by Kati Vörös. For example, in her review of the book *Jewish Budapest*, Vörös notes that "Hungarian Jewry has been a neglected and isolated chapter in general Central and East European Jewish history." Vörös, Kati. "How Jewish is Jewish Budapest?" *Jewish Social Studies* 8.1. (Fall 2001) 88.

10 ■ Ibid., 91.

That is to say, most interpretations of Hungarian Jewish history from the early twentieth century have emphasized the importance of assimilating Jews in Hungary's modernization, without addressing how "Jewishness" or "assimilation" shaped the ways in which modernity and modernization unfolded in Hungary.

This situation is slowly changing. A recent book, *Jewish Budapest*, represents a new attempt to address Hungarian Jewish experience by examining Jewish contributions to urban culture and modernity.[11] As the authors put it, "After the late nineteenth century, the artistic contribution of Jews to Hungarian literature, scholarship, and the arts or even music, had become more or less invisible, identical with it." Therefore, historians are presented with a difficult, even "impossible" task: "To describe that which is not visible, and to write about that which is not Jewish; yet which we still see....and which is still Jewish although those who built, shaped and formed it did not do so as Jews."[12] In this essay I take up the challenge Vörös has outlined for cultural historians: "historians should look for the hidden and ignored 'Jewish' aspect of assimilated lives to reveal the ambivalence of assimilation and how it influenced Jewish identity in different periods of history."[13] Equally crucial, I argue, is how the "Jewish" aspect, including the "ambivalence of assimilation," shaped mainstream Hungarian culture. My goal is not to separate "Jewish culture" from "Hungarian culture," which would be impossible in any case. Rather, I want to understand how the idea of what is "Jewish" and what is "non-Jewish" has influenced what it means to be Hungarian. If we are able to include, within "Jewish subject matter" the concerns of assimilated, secular Jewish Hungarians as they relate to their "invisible" difference, in other words subtle forms of prejudice, stereotypes, and questions of inclusion and exclusion, then our notion of "Jewish subject matter" is greatly expanded.

In a broader sense, of course, the problem is not unique to Hungary, only more pronounced because of the unusually large role Jews have played in

11 ■ Ibid., 92.

12 ■ Kinga Frojimovics, Géza Komoróczy et al. *Jewish Budapest: Monuments, Rites, History*. New York: Central European University Press, 1999. 468. See also Vörös. Several scholars have since published excellent work on early 20th century Hungarian Jewish cultural history in English, including Kati Vörös, Miklós Konrád, Judit Frigyesi and Mary Gluck, mentioned below, among others.

13 ■ Vörös, "How Jewish is Jewish Budapest?" 116.

14 ■ This is precisely what Lisa Silverman's excellent recent volume on interwar Austria accomplishes. Silverman, Lisa. *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture between the World Wars*. Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Also helpful are many of the essays on Jewish artists in Weimar culture in Jeanette R. Malkin's *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theater*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010. These point out ways in which Jews used these cultural arenas for self-presentation and to create and promote liberal, inclusive and pluralistic visions of their nations in Austria, Germany and the US, arguing that Jews working in high culture as well as in popular culture used these forums to speak about "Jewish concerns."

Hungarian intellectual, cultural and economic life. But assimilated secular Jews, as Germans, Austrians and Americans, have also shaped Imperial and Weimar Germany, fin-de-siècle and interwar Austria, and twentieth-century America in important ways. Historians working in these settings also face the issue of how to make sense of cultural products created for mainstream audiences, with no apparent Jewish subjects or themes, created by Jews from a variety of different Jewish identity positions.[14] Writing about Weimar political theater created by Jews, Otto Teller emphasized the difficulty of interpreting cultural products that, "apart from the origin" of their authors, "have nothing Jewish about them."[15] But as Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer's work on Weimar political cabaret suggests, if we want to investigate the range of Jewish self-expression and positioning made possible in interwar culture, we cannot reject everything that lies outside of officially "Jewish" perspectives, within the preconceived categories of Zionist, religious, and official assimilationist Jewish positions.[16]

As other scholars have pointed out, emphasizing the Jewish background of secular, assimilated individuals who felt no personal connection to Judaism as a religion and insisted on being part of the Hungarian (or German, Austrian, etc.) cultural community is problematic in that it can essentialize Jewishness.[17] This was precisely the historian András Gerő's response to the suggestion put forth in *Jewish Budapest* that it is possible to read works by Jewish authors retrospectively as part of Jewish culture, even if the authors did not intend their work to be read that way. Gerő rejects the approach as one resting on the racial and anti-Semitic logic employed by the Nazis.[18] Obviously, my goal is not to assign any common "Jewish identity," even less any essential Jewish qualities, to individuals whose identities were highly individualized, fragmented and shifting. Rather, it is to understand the possibilities for articulating the meaning of "Jewish difference" in the context of Hungarian nationalist culture, where it could not be explicitly expressed

15 ■ Quoted by Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer in "Jewish Cabaret Artists before 1933" In Jeanette R. Malkin, Ibid. This question is explored from three different angles in a collection of essays in the Journal of Modern Jewish Studies. See for example, Leora Auslander. "The Boundaries of Jewishness, or when is a cultural practice Jewish?" *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 8.1. (2009) And Darcy Buerkle. "Caught in the Act: Norbert Elias, emotion and *The Ancient Law*" in *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 8.1 (2009) 83-102.

16 ■ Bayerdörfer, 136. For a recent comparative look at interwar Jewish approaches in three different cultural and national contexts including Hungary, see Guy Miron's *The Waning of Emancipation: Jewish History, Memory, and the Rise of Fascism in Germany, France, and Hungary*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 2011. The limitations of these categories and sources is highlighted in David Sorkin's review of it in *Central European History* 46.2. (2013) 430-432.

17 ■ Lisa Silverman and Leora Auslander, in their articles quoted above, have discussed debates surrounding this practice.

18 ■ Andras Gerő. "Új Zsidó Múlt" in his *Utódok Kora: Történeti tanulmányok*, esszék. Budapest: Új Mandátum, 1996. 119. See also Kati Vörös's take, (Ibid) who argues with Gerő on the issue.

lest it be understood as an argument for dissimilation. What I am arguing is that in trying to understand the logic and the forces shaping the culture's understanding of Jewishness in this context, we need to also examine why and how individuals with a Jewish background chose to self-identify in the manner in which they did, with the goal of outlining the limits of discussing "Jewish difference" in popular culture.[19]

I define this, based on Lisa Silverman's work on interwar Austrian culture, as culture that engages, either explicitly or implicitly, with "Jewish difference." As Silverman explains, "Jewish difference" refers to the "dialectical, hierarchical framework that encompasses the relationship between the socially constructed category of 'Jew' and 'non-Jew'."[20] It thus denotes the relationship between the socially constructed categories of "Jew" and "non-Jew," which were mutually constitutive ideals. Silverman argues that these categories became especially pronounced in interwar Vienna. This meant not only that individuals from Jewish backgrounds, no matter if they were assimilated, baptized and had Hungarianized their names, were considered by both Jews and non-Jews as Jewish Hungarians. In fact, to be viewed as "Jewish" one did not actually have to be Jewish, only to dress, speak, act, read or write in a way that was coded as "Jewish."[21] Clothing, foods, restaurants, books and places were coded as "Jewish" or "non-Jewish." As Silverman notes, "[a]nyone immersed in interwar public life had to be aware of the significance of this social and symbolic order" in which "Jewish difference served as a crucial interpretive lens."[22] This was just as true in Hungary as it was in Austria, as was actually widely recognized and decried by Jewish contemporaries. Ignotus, a leading liberal Jewish intellectual, made this point as early as 1908, while also pointing out that what was coded "Jewish" could usually only be referred to in polite company as "not Hungarian," but this polite surface quickly shows its cracks when "non-Hungarians" are encouraged to leave the country if they are dissatisfied.

19 ■ Silverman, Ibid., 175

20 ■ Silverman uses "the term "Jewish difference" to refer to the dialectical, hierarchical framework that encompasses the relationship between the socially constructed categories of "Jew" and "non-Jew." This term, which, like gender, refers to the relationship between two cultural ideals, allows us to avoid essentializing our understanding of what is "Jewish" and automatically implies that its definition is necessarily subject to change. Ibid, 7.

21 ■ Recent work on communist Hungary suggests that this practice by no means ended with the Holocaust but continued throughout the communist decades. See for example Unvgáry, Krisztian "Társadalmi Ellenállás a Kádár-Rendszerben és az Állambiztonság "Jobboldali" Ellenségei" in Ungváry Krisztian, ed. *Büvópatakok: a Jobboldal és az Állambiztonság 1945-1989.* [The Political Right and the State Security Service 1945-1989] Budapest: 1956-os Intézet Alapitvány- Jaffa Kiadó, 2013. 15-80. Especially 50-53.

22 ■ Silverman, Ibid, 172.

It would be useful to collect how many things were deemed non-Hungarian in the past decade. Budapest is not Hungarian. The dialect of Pest is not Hungarian. The stock exchange is not Hungarian. Socialism is not Hungarian. Internationalism is not Hungarian. The organization of agricultural workers is not Hungarian. Capital is not Hungarian. Secession and symbolism are not Hungarian. It is not a Hungarian idea to exclude the religious institutions from public education, or to eliminate religion from the curriculum. Caricature is not Hungarian. Greater tolerance towards love is also not Hungarian. General suffrage is not Hungarian. Materialism is not Hungarian and it is not Hungarian to suppose that people may change their institutions... rationally, according to their needs. But most of all, whoever is not satisfied with the existing situation is certainly not Hungarian and such a person should have the good sense to leave the country with which he is unsatisfied.[23]

What makes the Hungarian case so interesting is the immense success and prominence of Hungary's assimilated Jewish middle class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, combined with the lack of cultural and political language to account for Jewish particularity. Jewish assimilation in Hungary had been unusually rapid and remarkably successful, due to the fact that Hungary, more perhaps than any other country, needed the Jews and until World War I, encouraged assimilation and suppressed anti-Semitism.[24] Hungarian Jews gained equal rights as citizens in 1867, but had begun to play a crucial role in economic modernization even before then. Though Jews made up only five percent of the country's population, by the 1920s, fifty-one percent of lawyers, forty-six percent of physicians, thirty-nine percent of self-employed engineers and eighty-nine percent of self-employed in the financial services in Hungary were Jewish; these numbers were often even higher in less established fields, including the film industry.[25] This situation changed after World War I, when the new conservative nationalist government embraced anti-Semitic political rhetoric and, arguing that Jewish success stood in the way of "authentic" Hungarian development, starting in 1920, gradually reversed emancipation. And yet, as historians have argued, non-Zionist Jewish intellectuals and religious leaders continued, until the early 1940s, to think and argue in the same, mostly optimistic, liberal, integrationist terms, that defined political discourse before World War I.[26]

23 ■ Ignotus (Alias Hugo Veigelsberg) "A Magyar Kultúra és a Nemzetiségek" Nyugat 1.4. (1908) Translation by Judit Frigyesi, quoted in Judit Frigyesi. *Béla Bartók and Turn of the Century Budapest.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

24 ■ Konrád Miklós. "Jews and Politics in Hungary in the Dualist Era." *East European Jewish Affairs* 39.2. (2009) 167-186.

25 ■ Kovács Mária M. *Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics: Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 63.

26 ■ Most recently in Guy Miron, Ibid.

As Miklós Konrád puts it,

> [i]n an age of homogenizing nationalism that theoretically condemned all forms of Jewish particularism, other than the strictly religious one, in a context where the opposition of "Jewish" versus "Hungarian" interests were voiced by the anti-Semites, it was understandably not in the Jewish interest to appear as a corpus separatum in political life.[27]

In the absence of pluralistic multiculturalism, Jews had to be considered Hungarians like all other Hungarians; questioning their assimilation or allowing for Jewish cultural difference would have undermined claims that Jews were Hungarians, and citizens with equal rights. Jews were, according to this logic, a religious group, but they could have no other common group interests outside of religious ones. In fact, any suggestion that Jews were a separate cultural group was tantamount to anti-Semitism. Looking at different and non-traditional sources such as film can shed new light on the way in which assimilated Jews in interwar Hungary interpreted Hungarian history and the place of Jews within it.

Popular culture and "Jewish difference"

Turning to Hungary's successful entertainment film industry, created mainly by assimilated Jewish directors, writers, producers and production companies, we find very different representations both of "Hungary" and "Jewish"/"non-Jewish" relations. The circa 120 romantic comedy films created between 1931 and 1938 present optimistic visions of an inclusive, democratic Hungary.[28] A brief general overview of them is useful because they represent the context in which Kabos's performance was interpreted. Most of the films can be understood as "modernization comedies" in which the culture of traditional rural Hungary clashes with the culture of the modern, capitalist urban middle class; in the end, the modern prevails, though some elements of tradition are incorporated. In the films as well as in interwar Hungarian culture more generally, modernization, urbanization and the middle class was symbolically coded as "Jewish." The films can also be understood as a clash between the culture of the "Jewish middle class" and the "traditional Hungarian nobility," both ideal types that are parodied in the films. Much of the films' humor comes from highlighting the contradiction between the official pro-assimilation position held by both liberals and conservatives, Jews and non-Jews, in

27 ■ Konrád Miklós. Ibid. 168.

28 ■ Especially those by directors István Székely and Béla Gaál, who together directed over a third of all films in the period.

political and intellectual debates, and everyday experience in which "Jewish difference" matters.

Film is an extremely valuable source for understanding the way in which "Jewishness" and "Hungarianness" were conceptualized without being explicitly invoked in popular culture. Like most of popular culture, entertainment film was dismissed by intellectuals and by the leaders of Jewish institutions as inconsequential entertainment, with no relevant ideological or political message.[29] While political rhetoric spoke in abstract terms about "Jewishness" and the "Hungarian community," film, like literature, was concerned with stories about private, subjective experiences of individuals. Films, unlike literature, however, did not have to rely exclusively on words to create meaning. Using a much wider array of non-verbal tools, including visual, formal and symbolic aural channels, films were able to convey compelling, although not entirely unambiguous, messages that did not necessarily conform to political ideology. They were able to tap into complex beliefs and traditions through visual stereotypes, the sound of accents and intonation, music, acting style, and genre, among other things, in order to shape the way in which spectators experienced and interpreted their narratives.

In the decade's more than 130 films, only one mentioned "Jews" explicitly; in no other films could anyone be unambiguously identified as "Jewish."[30] Traditional Jewish culture is entirely absent, and unlike in earlier Jewish visual stereotypes in satirical newspaper comics or the cabaret stage, which depicted Jews with exaggerated racial physiognomies, including hooked noses and dark curly hair, Jews were not visually distinct in their looks. Neither was "Jewishness" represented as linguistic: no characters share the Yiddish-inflected or German-accented speech of earlier caricatures: they speak perfect Hungarian. Rather, in the films, as in everyday life in interwar Hungary, Jewishness was signaled and read through a complex matrix of signs and symbols which included status markers such as occupation, wealth and self-presentation, including fashion, language use, gestures, and behavior. Significantly, the Jewish characters could also be interpreted as generic modern urban types, members of the middle and upper middle class: office

29 ■ For a similar argument and the analysis of Jewish popular culture and stereotypes in the pre-WWI period, see Mary Gluck. "Jewish Humor and Popular Culture in Fin-de-Siecle Budapest" *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (2008) 1-21.

30 ■ The only film to deal explicitly with antisemitism was *Torockói Menyasszony* (Márton Keleti, 1937), discussed below.

31 ■ Although these occupations were in keeping both with stereotypes about Jewish participation in the economy and reflected many people's personal experiences because they were based in social reality, they did not unambiguously mark the characters as Jewish. After all, although 50% of Hungarian lawyers were Jewish in 1920, the other half were not. In other words, in the modern urban context, there was nothing that clearly marked these "modern urban types" as Jewish. As I have been arguing, in terms of the narrative it mattered little whether they were "actually Jewish"—because as a modern urban middle class, they were interpreted as Jewish regardless.

workers, doctors, lawyers, craftsmen, factory owners, small merchants, bankers.[31] Kabos stood out by adding another layer to his characters that other "Jewish" actors playing "Jewish" characters did not.

Kabos and bourgeois ceremonies of dining. Gyula Kabos and Gyula Csortos in Hyppolit, a Lakáj. *Courtesy of Hungarian National Film Archives Photo Collection.*

As critics have pointed out, the continuity in the various characters played by Kabos comes from their demeanor: they are all ill-at-ease, nervous, confused. Since Kabos's characters were not confined to petit-bourgeois family men but just as frequently included eccentric millionaires, factory owners and industrialists—parvenus, but hardly liminal figures—calling them down-trodden petit-bourgeois is inaccurate at best, an awkward attempt to interpret all interwar social tensions in terms of class struggle. The reason these characters share the "typical embarrassed cluttering-stuttering, studiedly awkward posture" and a "sentimental, stubborn sense of dignity" is not social

class, but their implicit Jewishness.[32] Kabos's roles were linked by the Jewish subjectivity he portrayed through body language and mimicry, suggesting that he was a skeptical and wary outsider. He felt (and acted) like an interloper, especially in traditional elite society. In situations in which Kabos's character lacked power, he responded to challenges not by directly confronting them but by making faces, shrugging his shoulders, rolling his eyes, or turning the situation into a joke, safe ways of letting his perspective and opinion be known and maintaining his dignity. Kabos was performing, in stylized, exaggerated parodies, the emotional experience of being a Jew in a non-Jewish society. His performance brought to light what everyone understood about "Jewish difference" but no one could discuss: that Jews continued to be seen as "Jews", even if they spoke only Hungarian, changed their names to more Hungarian sounding ones, and converted; being "Jewish" remained a liability.

Kabos's performances suggested—albeit tongue-in-cheek—that "Jews" had a specific and different subjective experience that showed in their demeanor. They raised the possibility that there was an emotional component to belonging to Hungarian society beyond the political, and that Jews could not feel at ease.[33] Darcy Buerkle has argued in her discussion of cinema spectatorship in Weimar Berlin, spectators watched from the subject position of the Jewish outsider, which was informed by the "anxiety that accompanied the lived experience of being a Jew."[34]

But even more important is that the films were optimistic comedies. They were about the possibility of integration, about living in an imperfect but tolerable society, and pointed confidently towards its imminent and inevitable modernization. In addition to making visible the "invisibility" of "Jewish difference" through Kabos's trembling body, the films actually went further in exposing the false dichotomy of "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" ideals. As an "outsider," Kabos was able to shed comic light on the absurdity of the ideals, presumptions, and self-delusions of traditional Hungarian culture.

A brilliant example that gives an indication of how this worked is a scene from the 1934 movie *Emmy*, also directed by István Székely, the screenplay for which was written by István Mihály on the basis of the play by József Lengyel and the novel by Viktor Rákosi. Kabos (who plays a lawyer named Jakab) is dispatched to a reserve officers' army base by a family whose gentry scion is

32 ■ This description of Kabos's acting comes from a theater review of a Béla Zsolt play by Ignotus starring Kabos. Ignotus. "Erzsébetváros: Zsolt Béla Szinmüve a Fővárosi Művész Szinházban" *Nyugat*. 21.4. (1929).

33 ■ Joel Rosenberg, Stephen Whitfield and Darcy Buerkle have begun to explore spectatorship from the perspective of the history of affect specific to the Jewish experience. See Rosenberg, Joel and Stephen J. Whitfield. "The Cinema of Jewish Experience: Introduction." *Prooftexts* 22 (2002). 1-10.

34 ■ Buerkle, Darcy. "Caught in the Act: Norber Elias, Emotion and The Ancient Law." Journal of Modern Jewish Studies 8.1 (2009). 83-102. 94

wasting too much money on women, cards, and drinking. Kabos, who prefers catching butterflies to performing military drills, finds the whole setting foreign, and his intervention is unsuccessful. Frustrated, he follows his ward into a pub, where the gentry boy drinks to forget his sadness, and Kabos drinks to forget his failure to stop him. But Kabos's pragmatism prevents him from fully enjoying this traditional gentry pastime. Imitating others at the pub, Kabos lifts his glass and considers smashing it behind his back. On second thought, he decides to spare the glass, and substitutes it with a metal toothpick holder, but only after he has carefully removed all the toothpicks, lest they scatter all over the floor. The joke, of course, is that Kabos misses the essence of the gesture, which is the dramatic performance of a deep unhappiness in which nothing matters, especially not mundane considerations about the impracticality of broken glass and the waste of a handful of perfectly good toothpicks. But Kabos also mocks the gentry custom as clichéd and frivolous from a petit-bourgeois perspective, revealing it as a lack of self-discipline, rationality and sound judgment. On another level, in all of the films, Kabos was also offering a parody of the romantic comedy genre itself by mocking the improbable wild and fiery masculinity it inevitably required of the romantic male lead.

In contrast with—traditional Hungarian masculinity's chivalric displays of generosity, courage, and recklessness, Kabos's "Jewish" masculinity was defined by frugalness, caution, and pragmatic skepticism. The movie *A kölcsönkért kastély* ("The Borrowed Castle," Ladislao Vajda, 1937) provides a good illustration, mustering (and questioning) an astonishing amalgam of clichés about "Jewish difference." In *A kölcsönkért kastély*, Kabos plays a Brazilian insurance magnate who returns to Hungary with his adult daughter. The daughter soon meets the dashing son of an impoverished landowner, who, in a bid to win her hand in marriage, invites them to the rural mansion he borrows from his cousin.

The film portrays the gentry father and son as struggling to keep up appearances of wealth and status, pawning their last heirlooms to live lavishly. It portrays Kabos (as the insurance magnate Gruber) as having an utterly pragmatic relationship with money, and being constantly confused in the foreign world of the landed nobility. The film continues to emphasize the stereotype of Jews and money: despite his immense wealth, Kabos cannot help selling insurance policies to his friends, relatives and acquaintances at every opportunity, usually under the most outlandish and inappropriate circumstances. For instance, he sells a life insurance policy to his future father-in-law before he agrees to go hunting with him, explaining, in complete disregard of gentry masculine ideals, that he has never hunted before in his life, and would rather not, as he has little faith in his own abilities. Kabos doesn't ride, play cards, drink or party with Gypsy musicians either, and he

lacks a nationalist sense of attachment to rural Hungary, where he feels ill-at-ease. He's terrified of dogs and bees and annoyed by chirping birds and peasant accents. Convinced that his Budapest accent is the only proper way to speak Hungarian, he scolds the property manager, who uses peasant and agricultural expressions and a country drawl, exhorting him to "speak proper Hungarian." Kabos's interest in the country estate is limited to the yield and profitability of the crops, and he is unaware of its nostalgic and symbolic importance to his future in-laws.

The movie cleverly calls attention to the way in which the same preoccupation with money is interpreted in very different ways for "Jews" and "non-Jews." Kabos's emphasis on the need to protect his money and his matter-of-fact business dealings are in contrast to the secretive schemes of the gentry. But the narrative suggests that money is just as, if not more, important to the gentry family as it is to Kabos. The movie also intimates that the elite's social exclusivity, replete with expressions of gentry masculinity, work as an elaborate act propagated with the goal of trading status for money on the "marriage market." Finally, however, the moral of the story is that in the modern world the gentry, like everyone else, must join the market and support themselves through work. In the end, the two families are not that different; both need money but long for respect and true love, and both reject hierarchical divisions. Their different styles of self-presentation are, ultimately, beside the point and they are united in one family based on shared values.

Of course Kabos's performance was not created or understood to be an accurate representation of the actual assimilated Jewish middle or upper middle class. Nor should we conflate the bumbling, nervous character played by Kabos with either the filmmakers or the audiences themselves. The creators of *A kölcsönkért kastély*, including the Jewish screenwriters István Békeffy, Dezső Kellér and Adorján Stella, the director Ladislao Vajda, and Gyula Kabos himself, were successful, celebrated stars creating films for a national, and often international, audience, based, in large part, on such parodies of "Jewishness."[35] The idea of "Jews" not being familiar with elite culture is a parody of anti-Semitic fears. In actual fact, the films can only be successful as comedies because audiences (Jewish and non-Jewish alike) were familiar with the logic of traditional Hungarian culture (which the Kabos character didn't understand) and modern urban culture, to which most of them, with few exceptions, belonged.

Both filmmakers and audiences had to make use of widely accepted codes

35 ■ But their success was based, in large part, on films that brought attention to and made light of the widely felt sentiment that despite Jewish assimilation and social mobility, Hungarian society continued to regard Jews as outsiders.

about what was "Jewish" and what was "non-Jewish" to describe and interpret the Kabos figure and to enjoy the humor in his clash with elite culture. But Kabos also parodied the everyday acts of self-presentation through which Hungarianness and Jewishness were communicated. He made clear the ways in which the ideal of traditional Hungary was predicated on being different from everything seen as "Jewish" to the point of absurdity. Through his exaggeration of the Jewish stereotype, which cast him as an outsider to traditional Hungarian culture and the elite, he poked fun at the anachronistic notions of Hungarianness; he pointed to their impracticality by calling attention to the absurd theatrics required for performing, in particular, Hungarian masculinity.

Attempting to clarify how exactly contemporaries understood Kabos is made difficult by the fact that critics did not write explicitly about the "Jewishness" of the Kabos character and did not discuss the implications the film narratives had for social and political debates, even when the films explicitly addressed them. This is strikingly obvious in the case of the 1937 film *Torockói Menyasszony* ("The Torockó Bride," Márton Keleti). It is the only film in which Kabos played an explicitly Jewish character, and the only film that openly discusses anti-Semitism, Jewish identity, and the problem of state-imposed categories. The film was reviewed and praised in both the liberal and conservative press without any mention of its political message or its relevance to public debates at a time when the 1938 anti-Semitic law was being drafted in parliament.[36] While the liberal, Jewish-owned *Szinházi Élet* ("Theater Life") praised the film and called it "Kabos's best performance yet," the right-wing *Magyarság* (Literally something like "Hungarian-ness") pplauded the film and its portrayal of "beautiful Transylvania," in spite of Kabos's "bad acting."[37] My point is not that contemporary reviewers were unsophisticated critics, but rather that they respected the limits of acceptable public discourse. Radical right-wing groups were much more blunt in openly dismissing the films, their worldview and the filmmakers as "Jewish," and they sought to expel "Jewish" filmmakers and their "dangerous" culture from "national cinema."[38]

Interestingly, this same reluctance extended to Kabos himself, the brilliantly perceptive comedian of "Jewish difference." In writing, Kabos struggled, like other critics, to articulate his critique and to carve out a position for himself as a Hungarian and a secular Jew. Kabos's book, *Pesten Kezdődött* ("It Started in

36 ■ 1938:XV. Vertes Robert *Magyarországi zsidótörvények és rendeletek 1938-1945*. Budapest: PolgArt, 2002.

37 ■ M.L. "Review of Torockó Bride" in *Magyarság* 1937, September 23, 11. And Endre Nagy. "Review of Torockó Bride" Szinhazi Élet 1937, October 3. 34.

38 ■ Based on the collection of documents in Sándor Tibor. *Őrségváltás: A Magyar Film és a Szélsőjobboldal a Harmincas- Negyvenes Években* Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1992. For example, an anonymous pamphlet printed in 1937 by Centrum Press, likely by the Turul Association. 93-94.

Pest"), was published in the United States in 1940. It featured a mix of short stories, vignettes and travel notes.[39] Though it shows little of the critical, pessimistic humor that made Kabos's persona so iconic, it is nevertheless important because it encapsulates the dilemmas he faced as a Hungarian Jew in the early 1940s. Kabos's letters from New York to his family in Hungary indicate that he hoped to return as soon as possible to what he felt was an easier life, and to an audience that appreciated him.[40] The book never so much as mentions anti-Semitism; rather, it recounts stories of Jewish loyalty and patriotism (without letting slip the word Jew) and Kabos's own nostalgia for Transylvania (a part of Austria-Hungary that Hungary hoped to regain with the help of Nazi Germany) and hopes for its swift return "to us" (meaning that Kabos firmly believed that he belonged to the nationalist Hungarian community).[41] But the book nevertheless reflects an intense preoccupation with ethnicity, class and race, and an implicit condemnation of prejudice, including the story about a poor Transylvanian Jewish family that adopts an outcast Gypsy child, and one about an émigré who comes to accept that Jesus Christ may have been black.[43]

On the one hand, the book illustrates that "Jewishness" often remained a taboo topic for those who had been personally persecuted, even in exile. Kabos's book is in many ways similar to those published in the late 1930s and early 1940s by Jewish actors who were barred from working, but longed to remain connected to their audience and also needed the income from the book sales.[44] Most of these books remain vague or silent on their authors' plights, glossing over their Jewishness. This can be understood as a conscious strategy, partly based on the actors' desire to maintain their public presence by reinforcing their public image, which meant that they had to reinforce what made them familiar and popular, and partly based on the hope for their future career in Hungarian public life, which most believed they would continue at some point. Since there was no blueprint for being both "openly" Jewish and participating as a Jew in non-Jewish cultural life, it was difficult to imagine what such a coming-out would have meant for a return to the stage. Yet thinking about it as deliberate strategy can be misleading; despite all

39 ■ Kabos Gyula. *Pesten Kezdődött...! Kabos Gyula filmregénye.* [It Started in Pest...! Kabos Gyula's Film Novel] Cleveland: Royal Print, 1940.

40 ■ Peregi Tamás. "Kabos Gyula amerikai levelei—A Filmarchivum Könyvtárából" published on the Magyar Nemzeti Digitalis Archivum es Filmintezet website.
http://mandarchiv.hu/cikk/293/Kabos_Gyula_amerikai_levelei__A_Filmarchivum_konyvtarabol.

41 ■ Kabos, Ibid., 100-103.

42 ■ Ibid.

43 ■ Dozens of such works were published in Budapest in the early 1940s, including Vidor Ferike: Vidor Ferike: *Kezitcsókolom* (1940), Komlós Vilmos: *Hol volt, hol nem volt...* (1942), Gárdonyi Lajos: *Véletlenül történt* (1942), Rott Sándor "A Kis Rott"-rol" (1941).

apparent irony, it was inconceivable in interwar Hungary to be both publicly Jewish and speak in the name of all Hungarians.

Conclusion

Assimilated, secular Jewish Hungarians continued to participate in Hungarian public life until the late 1930s and contributed to shaping a popular vision of modern Hungary through film. But integrationist, liberal discourse continued to struggle with the problem created by the historical conditions of Jewish assimilation into the Hungarian nation. Cultural history can offer unique insight into important aspects of the Jewish experience. The study of popular culture yields important insights into the ways in which "Jewish difference" was coded in interwar Hungarian culture, and how it helped construct an ideal image of "authentic," i.e. non-Jewish, rural, traditional, Hungary. Popular films, as the above examples demonstrate, parodied both the way in which "Jewish difference" permeated all aspects of private life and the outdated ideal of Hungarianness that excluded Jews. Kabos was universally appealing not despite but because of the "Jewishness" he portrayed, and his true importance cannot be understood outside of the context of Jewish history. ❧

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Gwen Jones

The Yellow-Star Houses of Budapest, 1944–2014

"At least today I can make my voice heard and I think that's something. That's all for the moment. Ask away!"
Mrs Endre Horváth, former resident of the yellow-star house at Népszínház Street 30, February 2014.[1]

Seventy years on, it is nigh impossible to imagine the spectacle of 220,000 people wearing the yellow star, trudging through the streets of Budapest at the height of mid-summer, taking their belongings with them in handcarts, being forcibly moved into one of the 1,944 houses designated as compulsory residences for Jews. Per the Budapest mayoral decree of 14 June, 1944:

> All buildings listed in (A) above must mark all their street entrances with a yellow star which must be kept permanently in tact and clean. The sign shall be a six-pointed canary-yellow star measuring 30 centimetres in diameter, on a 51×36 centimetre black background. This notice will be displayed at all street entrances to every house on the list.[2]

For almost half a year until the establishment of the Pest ghetto, all residents of Budapest who qualified as Jewish under the 1941 race law—

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1 ■ <http://www.yellowstarhouses.org/#overlay=reflections>
2 ■ Budapest mayoral decree on the designation of buildings in which Jews may reside, June 14 1944, *Fővárosi Közlöny*, no. 30. <http://www.yellowstarhouses.org/#overlay=historical_background/decrees>

An original yellow star which marked a house in the 8th district and was preserved by a family that still lives in the building

187,000 Jews plus 35,000 converts to Christianity—were, in the words of poet Ernő Szép, "ordered by law to move into designated buildings (no doubt to encourage their notorious solidarity)."[3] These "yellow-star houses" were unique in the history of the Holocaust: while houses reserved for Jews were occasionally marked in Germany, France and the Netherlands, only in Hungary did a legal prescription exist to mark the buildings in which Jews were obliged to reside. The purpose behind creating this network of yellow-star houses was to relocate and concentrate the Jewish population of Budapest, the deportation of which was scheduled for 25 August.

3 ■ Ernő Szép. *The Smell of Humans: A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary*. Translated by John Bátki. Budapest: Corvina and Central European University Press, 1994, 11.

Until relatively recently, most historical scholarship on the Holocaust in Hungary has focused on the deportation of almost half a million Hungarian Jews from the countryside in under seven weeks, from mid-May to early July, 1944. While eighty-seven percent of rural Jewry was destroyed, Jews in Budapest stood a much higher chance of survival. Notwithstanding the tens of thousands killed during forced marches or by Arrow Cross detachments, the majority of Budapest Jews survived. While the history of the ghetto in the 7th district and the "protected houses" of the 13th have been researched and documented, the history of the yellow-star houses, into which many Jews were forcefully moved in the summer of 1944, has largely been overlooked.[4]

In January 2014, the Open Society Archives (OSA) in Budapest launched a year-long public history project presenting this neglected chapter of Budapest, Hungarian and Holocaust history, and exploring the public reception of the history of the "yellow-star houses" today, seventy years after the Holocaust in Hungary. Yellow stars were placed on the doorways of buildings that were yellow-star houses in 1944. These stars include the following text explaining to passers-by: "Did you know that in 1944 this building was one of the yellow star houses? Let us remember our past together, here, on 21 June, 2014" ("Tudta-e Ön, hogy ez az épület 1944-ben csillagos ház volt? Emlékezzünk együtt ugyanitt 2014. június 21-én"). In part, the inspiration for this came in April 2013 during the annual Budapest100 festival of one-hundred-year-old houses in the city, when dozens of centenary buildings open their gates to the public for one weekend (a project also initiated by OSA in 2011). The residents of Teleki Square 1-2 in the 8th district welcomed visitors with balloons, access to the rooftop panoramas, a jumble sale and a home-made exhibition on the history of the Jews in Józsefváros and the building itself, a former yellow-star house.[5] A long-term resident explained to visitors that the Jews had been forced to live in the house and many were deported, calmly noting "this is our history."

Not far away, on Népszínház Street in another participating centenary house, one of Béla Lajta's masterpieces, now in an advanced state of disrepair, a very glamorous woman well into her 80s poked her head through her front-door window to ask me and my mother whether we knew what sort of house this was. We replied that it was one-hundred years old. She said, yes, but it was also a yellow-star house, and then went on to explain that it had later been a safe-house for underground fighters in 1956.

4 ■ Recent studies on Budapest include Tim Cole. *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003; and Máté Rigó. "Ordinary Women and Men: Superintendents and Jews in the Budapest Yellow-Star Houses in 1944-1945." *Urban History*, 40, 2013. See also the illustrated handbook by Krisztián Ungváry and Gábor Tabajdi. *Budapest a diktatúrák árnyékában: Titkos helyszínek, szimbolikus terek és emlékhelyek a fővárosban*. Budapest: Jaffa, 2012.

5 ■ A vivid portrayal of Jewish life in early twentieth-century Józsefváros is Giorgio and Nicola Pressburger. *Homage to the Eighth District: Tales from Budapest*. London: Readers International, 1990.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SZILÁRD LIPCSEI

The doorway of one of the former yellow-star houses.

It is a rare occasion when a complete stranger welcomes you into their house, keen to tell you the story of their life, home and city. At OSA, we decided to initiate a city-wide yellow-star houses public history project along somewhat similar lines, focusing on the houses and inviting residents to take part. But we can assume that, for varying reasons, not everyone is happy to talk about the Holocaust. Moreover, while fifty-sixty buildings take part every year in Budapest100, we discovered that almost 2,000 buildings had been designated yellow-star houses, of which roughly 1,600 still stand today. Using the list of buildings designated by the second and final yellow-star houses mayoral decree of 24 June, 1944 and various products provided by a well-known search engine firm, we created an interactive map of the city that reveals the sheer scale of the yellow-star houses network: this was in effect a ghetto of city-wide proportions (see the images on <csillagoshazak.hu> and the English-language sister site, <yellowstarhouses.org>).

We invited members of the public to submit their memories, stories, photographs and documents about the houses and the families who lived there, and we were overwhelmed by the response. In under three months, we received and published online over 160 stories and documents relating to 125 former yellow-star houses. A selection of the "reflections" have been translated and published on our English-language website, from which at least two things stand out: (1) the total assault on the family, which had begun in earnest in 1942, when Jewish men were called up for forced labor service as part of the war effort, and (2) the arbitrariness and role of sheer chance in whether one survived or not.

First, the yellow-star houses were home mostly to children, women, and the elderly, and thus visits from male relatives on leave represented joyful occasions that were always over too soon. Each family was legally entitled to one room, which often led to acute overcrowding, with up to forty or fifty people in one flat. The larger the flat and the higher the number of rooms, the greater the number of people squeezed together, sharing basic amenities. However, on the basis of the reflections provided by people who were children or in their very early teens at the time, the overwhelming consensus is that families were only too happy to be able to remain together: one story mentions a pair of adolescent cousins who smuggled themselves out of Slovakia in a hearse to be with family in Budapest.

The curfew and other regulations in force meant that Jews were only allowed to buy a limited number of provisions during certain times of day, and children were soon prohibited from attending school as well. Left to their own devices, youngsters played amongst themselves, wrote and performed plays in the stairwell, and tended to steer clear of long-standing residents they did not know: "Aryans" who had refused to move out and who, by law, were obliged

to post a sign by their front door, complete with the Budapest Metropolitan Council seal, which read, "Itt nem laknak zsidók," "no Jews live here."

Many of the reflections concerning the summer of 1944 in the yellow-star houses mention the concierge and his or her political persuasion. Arrow Cross sympathisers made a point of making the residents' lives even more miserable, while a minority did their best to extend protection to the people in the house and their belongings. Other stories detail feats of daring, such as tearing the yellow star from one's coat and pretending to be an Aryan who happened to be moving into a flat freshly vacated by Jews, or arranging for an ambulance driven by underground activists to take elderly relatives "to hospital."

Second, any remaining shred of normality was banished on 15 October. Although Jews had already had to hand their wireless sets over to the authorities much earlier, Horthy's radio proclamation on the morning of the 15, that Hungary was pulling out of the war, caused much elation, which lasted, however, only a few hours. On the basis of the reflections, it is unclear whether the Arrow Cross had any other aims apart from rounding up, publicly humiliating, and murdering Jews. Stories recount sneaking out of forced marches, handing forged papers over to police officers while steadily holding their gaze, fooling the concierge by ringing the bell from the outside and then taking flight, and posing as an Arrow Cross officer in order to smuggle family members—indeed all former residents of one of the yellow-star houses on Király Street—out of the Óbuda brick factory, a makeshift holding camp and the last stage before deportation or death march.

A number of similar community projects have sprung up this year in Hungary, including an open Facebook group where members share family stories of the Holocaust. Our aim, however, is for the history of the yellow-star houses to reach not only those whose relatives were murdered because they were Jews, but everyone in Budapest, whether they live in a former yellow-star house or not. This is not a "Jewish" story, but a part of the city's shared history. For this reason, we are currently working together with residents, artists, cultural organisations and all interested parties in Budapest to organise commemorations outside every remaining former yellow-star house on 21 June, the seventieth anniversary of the forced relocation, and a day which also coincides with this year's Night of the Museums festival.

Today, Hungarian public discourse is dominated by a number of historical events that were, for decades, off-limits for public discussion: the Treaty of Trianon, defeat in World Wars I and II, participation in the genocide of the Jews, and 1956. The ongoing controversies surrounding the official Holocaust Memorial Year in Hungary, for example, and the numerous attempts to rewrite Hungarian history, would suggest that even more open, honest discussion of these questions is necessary. ❧

Based on the internationally acclaimed novel by
Ágota Kristóf
LE GRAND CAHIER
a film by János Szász
Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Official Selection – Competition
HALT!
a film by JÁNOS SZÁSZ cast ANDRÁS GYÉMÁNT, LÁSZLÓ GYÉMÁNT, PIROSKA MOLNÁR, ULRICH THOMSEN, ULRICH MATTHES, GYÖNGYVÉR BOGNÁR casting VIKTOR OSZKAR NAGY, HETA MANTSCHEFF make-up ANNA KRISKÓ
costume design JÁNOS BRECKL set design ISTVÁN GALAMBOS VFX supervisor JEAN-MICHEL BOUBLIL original sound ISTVÁN SIPOS sound design MANUEL LAVAL music JÓHANN JÓHANNSSON sound mix MATHIAS SCHWAB
editing SZILVIA RUSZEV director of photography CHRISTIAN BERGER line producer ERIKA TARR, MARCOS KANTIS, KARIN BERGHAMMER, ALFIE LANG-KRÁL executive producer ALBERT KITZLER, GYÖRGY SUCH, JÁNOS SZÁSZ
co-producer ALEXANDER DUMRECHER-IVANCEANU, BADY MINCK, MARC IRMER screenplay by ANDRÁS SZÉKÉR, JÁNOS SZÁSZ based on the novel Le grand cahier by AGOTA KRISTOF © Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1986
produced by SÁNDOR SÖTH, PÁL SÁNDOR directed by JÁNOS SZÁSZ
MEDIA

Notwithstanding the tens of thousands killed during forced marches or by Arrow Cross detachments, the majority of Budapest Jews survived. While the history of the ghetto in the 7th district and the "protected houses" of the 13th have been researched and documented, the history of the yellow-star houses, into which many Jews were forcefully moved in the summer of 1944, has largely been overlooked. In January 2014, the Open Society Archives (OSA) in Budapest launched a project presenting this neglected chapter of Budapest, Hungarian, and Holocaust history, and exploring the public reception of the history of the "yellow-star houses" today, 70 years after the Holocaust in Hungary. Yellow stars were placed on the doorways of buildings that were yellow-star houses in 1944. These stars include the following text explaining to passers-by: "Did you know that in 1944 this building was one of the yellow star houses? Let us remember our past together, here, on 21 June, 2014." Our aim is for the history of the yellow-star houses to reach not only those whose relatives were murdered because they were Jews, but everyone in Budapest. This is not a "Jewish" story, but a part of the city's shared history.

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