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THE BURDEN OF HISTORY—OR A CHANCE WORTH TAKING?

Siegi Witzany-Durda

Lost traces

Gusen lies close to the river Danube, about 15 km east of the provincial capital Linz. At first sight nothing distinguishes this small village from other such villages in Austria; it has a village store, two inns, a garage, a sports field. In the original settlement, not far from the Danube, cozy farmhouses nestle among old orchards, surrounded by fields and meadows. There is a pleasant postwar development, with the typical rows of neat family houses, well-kept gardens, children playing on quiet streets, riding tricycles, bikes, and skateboards. To the north of this development, the terrain rises steeply.

At second sight, however the attentive observer notices some topographical features that do not quite fit into the overall architectural picture of a housing development and that disturb the original impression of harmlessness. At the northern and eastern edge of the village lie two huge granite quarries, with two more further up the hill, all of them shut down but clearly visible. The impressive ruins of a stonecrusher hide behind the dense foliage of trees for most of the year. A strikingly manorial two-storey building stands beside the main road, surrounded by a high granite wall; despite thorough renovation it clearly shows features of National Socialist architecture. Close to it two flat, gray, extended buildings, embarrassingly shabby, are the homes of Turkish guest workers. Finally, also close to the main road, a big square concrete building bearing the word MEMORIAL, surrounded by a bare concrete wall strikes the eye of the observer. Having read this far, are you in any way surprised that Mauthausen is just a few kilometres away, a name that freezes the blood of people all over the world?

Whoever wants to discover the traces of one of the most horrible concentration camps of the Nazi years behind the peaceful

façade of the small village of Gusen has to look very closely; it takes time and a competent guide because no signs point the way to the historically important sites.

When concentration camp Gusen I (Gusen II and III were to follow) was officially founded in May 1940 as the first of nearly fifty satellite camps of Mauthausen, the land was fields and meadows belonging to the farmers of Gusen. For a small amount of money they quickly passed into the possession of the SS. Groups of Mauthausen inmates were marched to Gusen daily to level the ground and start building the first barracks to accommodate the prisoners, who were at first deported from Poland and then from all over Europe. This is how the village of Gusen became part of a dark chapter of Austrian and European history. Nowadays the dimensions of this camp are more or less unknown, even among historians. For most of its existence the camp had more inmates than Mauthausen; thousands of innocent people were worked to death in four huge granite quarries, and the number of dead (approx. 40,000) exceeded that of the main camp. Sixty years later Gusen remains a synonym of hell on earth for all the victims.

Victims or perpetrators?

Individuals or nations who have gone through a mental or physical trauma are well advised to come to terms with it by thoroughly exploring its causes and by highlighting their personal or national responsibility. This is especially important in the case of my home country, Austria, and its involvement in the Second World War. After all, “truth sets us free.”

Unfortunately, this was done very insufficiently in post-war Austria. In fact, quite the opposite happened: In public discourse the role of Austria as “Hitler’s first victim” was stressed. People

felt they had suffered from deprivation themselves: they had lost property in air raids and their husbands and sons on the war front. The plight of those in the zone of Soviet occupation, north of the Danube, was especially difficult. Many Austrians thought they had already experienced their share of suffering during the war and had paid for their sins, if they had committed any at all. Yes, the war had been terrible, but now there was time to look ahead and rebuild what had been destroyed.

With all the hustle and bustle of the reconstruction, little time was left for an honest and profound reflection on the past. Whenever the thought arose that many Austrians had actually benefited from the Nazi regime, it was quickly dismissed. Besides, it was said, the victims were far away; they had returned to their home countries, had emigrated overseas, or were simply quiet because nobody was willing to listen to them. For some time a guilty conscience can be covered up by a great deal of activity; however, in the long run human memory cannot be denied. One day the bitter truth comes to light.

The consequences for Gusen

The area north of the Danube, where Gusen is situated, was liberated by the Americans in early May 1945. It fell under the sovereignty of the Soviets in July of that year. The Russians continued to exploit the Gusen quarries as compensation for the awful destruction the Germans had left in Russia, and they used the barracks of the liberated camp Gusen in order to accommodate their soldiers as well as the members of a penal squad. When they finally left, in 1955, the area of the former concentration camp passed into the possession of the provincial government of Upper Austria and the granite quarries were returned to their former owners. With many "Volksdeutsche," who had been driven away from their former homes, still staying in provisional homes south of Linz and seeking permanent residence, cheap plots for building were in demand. It seemed logical to split the camp area into lots, sell them, and start construction. Whatever material from the camp barracks or armament production halls that was still useful was taken for building.

Gradually the visible traces of the concentration camps disappeared and, it seemed, their memory also faded away. Why conserve the remains of Gusen? After all Mauthausen, the official memorial, was so close by; this would suffice.

Survivors who kept coming back to Gusen regularly to commemorate their time of suffering and their cruelly murdered comrades were deeply worried about the building activities. Consequently they decided to rescue the last remnants. On the initiative of French, Belgian, and Italian survivors they bought the plot surrounding the still intact crematorium and they had a memorial designed, which was then constructed and inaugurated in 1965. Today it is the center of all commemoration activities at Gusen. At that time no contact existed between survivors and the local population. Many inhabitants preferred to ignore the history of their neighborhood: "Something awful happened here, that's true, but that was ages ago. It is definitely past and it is certainly none of our business."

The Gusen Commemoration Committee— A local initiative

Not until the 1990s did this situation change. In 1995 the Gusen Commemoration Committee was founded, consisting of local people born long after the war, who approached the history

of their home region with critical interest and who started asking questions about what had happened here and what people had witnessed. They started looking for visible traces in the landscape, but also traces in the hearts and minds of people, those precious memories of eye witnesses. The creation of a website, www.gusen.org, quickly helped establish the most amazing contacts with people interested in history, survivors of the camps as well as veterans of the U.S. liberation army, who are scattered all over the world.

In May 1995 the Commemoration Committee organized the first commemoration ceremony in cooperation with survivor organizations. The enormous number of visitors from all over the world exceeded all expectations. Within Austria, Gusen may be an insignificant small village unknown to most people, but in the minds of survivors it is deeply and indelibly engraved as a place of utmost humiliation, as well as unbearable physical suffering and mental anguish. We were confronted with details and names we had never heard before. We asked, listened, and were shocked about what had happened here. We felt with the survivors and cried together when words failed us. This first common commemoration has been followed by many others. It marked the beginning of a deep friendship between our group and survivors and their families, a friendship that deepens and grows more intense every year.

The heritage of the young

As young Austrians, we cannot but feel deep shame at the darkest chapter of Austrian history. The widespread approval that the Hitler regime received from the Austrian population right from the beginning, the relatively small resistance that was shown, and the great number of Austrians taking an active part in the extermination apparatus cannot be denied. If one gets deeper into the matter, numerous questions remain unanswered. How could a whole generation be misled and fall into the trap of a deadly National Socialist ideology that showed so much contempt for certain groups of mankind? Why was there not more resistance? Why was there such willingness to run with the hares? Why were Austrian Jews so willingly handed over and only a few hidden by gentiles?

Despite these bitter truths we love our country and our aim certainly is not to give it a bad name or to run it down. We are confronted with the difficult task of managing the divisions between a deep love of country and a critical examination of the past. It is apparent that nobody can spare us our feeling of shame, as it is an important step toward accepting our historical responsibility.

Much as we wish for it, we cannot undo anything that happened, neither the worldwide atrocities of World War II, nor the gassings at Birkenau, nor the murders at Gusen. However, it is important that we are not paralyzed by the feeling of shame but that we take a step toward understanding that we have an enormous personal responsibility for what is going on today. We cannot change the painful past, but we have to take responsibility for the present and the future so that we never ever repeat the past. Here we can and must become active and shape our world accordingly; this takes much courage and entails a willingness to take be constantly critical of our society. One of the aims of our group is to encourage young people who every year come in great numbers to Gusen to accept this responsibility, to develop an awareness of injustice, and not to remain passive bystanders if things go wrong but to stand up

and act. I am deeply convinced that the values of democracy, freedom, tolerance, and human dignity need to be fostered more and that their defence must be promoted.

“Mauthausen is for the flag, Gusen is for the heart”

The annual commemoration at Gusen attracts great numbers of people from all over the world; this is apparently due to the warm welcome they receive and the atmosphere of togetherness they experience, which once made a Polish survivor spontaneously exclaim: “Mauthausen is for the flag, Gusen is for the heart!” In contrast to the traditional commemoration at Mauthausen, which is scheduled on the Sunday closest to the date of liberation, May 5, and which usually receives media attention, in Gusen there is a parade of separate national groups headed by their flags. There is no monolingual program, but a multilingual presentation of speeches, and translations are provided in a program folder to guarantee a high degree of mutual understanding.

Even in the first years of the Gusen Commemoration Committee’s existence it has become evident that there is not only a need for a language bridge but also for a bridge connecting different generations. On the one hand there are the survivors, all of them of an advanced age, who are the special guests of honor and whose message is of central importance: “Never forget what happened here. Do not fall for political agitators again. Focus on what you have in common and not on what separates you. Live in peace.” On the other hand, there are so many young people from Austria as well as from abroad who show an enormous interest in the event and make a significant contribution to commemoration. Considering the age of the survivors, we have to face the fact that the next generation will soon have to carry on the memory into the future. Involving young people and giving them a chance to express themselves seems advisable.

I teach high school and for years I have invited one of my classes to participate actively in the commemoration ceremony at Gusen. The invitation has always been met with great enthusiasm and an explicit readiness to cooperate. Presenting speeches that have been written by students in German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Polish to such a big international audience and distributing roses to survivors is considered a great honor by these young Austrians.

The following message was prepared for the 2004 commemoration:

Weaving webs

My name is Anna, I am 18, and this is the third time I have taken part in the commemoration at Gusen. I am fascinated by the atmosphere of this event.

I feel that despite our national differences we are connected by our common recollection of a sad chapter of European history. It seems as if together we have woven an invisible web of friendship at this place.

Our web is made of our determination to do everything in order to prevent a repetition of the past.

Our web is made of our promise not to forget.

Our web is made of the memory of righteous people who acted humanely in that hell of hells and even helped others to survive, like the Austrian priest

Johann Gruber. They show clearly that man always has a choice, either to take the path of good or of evil.

In all those years we have met survivors personally. We had the chance to hear their stories. I wonder what it means for you to come back to Gusen? I imagine how, back then, your mothers were deeply worried about Dusan, Max, Josef . . . , not knowing if you were alive at all.

I admire your courage to come back to Gusen and meet us without hatred and in friendship. I am deeply grateful for this experience.

I know you are troubled by the idea that we might one day forget what happened to you and your comrades, and that man can fall into the same fatal trap again. You are right, there is always the danger.

And still, here and now I would like to assure you that we will not forget. The memory of you will accompany us through our lives and we will tell our children and grandchildren about you. I promise.

It would be naïve to believe our efforts could undo the past and heal the wounds. The scars are deep, the family members of Jewish survivors are forever gone, and we are powerless against their recurrent nightmares. However, in the final stage of their lives, survivors tell us they find comfort and peace of mind, realizing that their memory is not lost but will be carried on. This is more than we ever could expect to achieve with our dedicated work.

And how do my students feel about their annual contribution to the commemoration at Gusen?

I strongly disagree if people dismiss our involvement in Gusen as a mere digging in the past. I am convinced that nations that refuse to face their pasts are condemned to repeat the awful blunders of their forefathers. I’d rather avoid them. (Thomas, 18)

An event like the annual commemoration at Gusen strengthens the people of good will and helps us make a net of solidarity and friendship among different nations. (Florian, 18)

When I was standing in front of the microphone and reading my text I saw many people had tears in their eyes. Afterwards my mum, who was also present, told me she was enormously proud of me. (Anna, 18)

The best thing about Gusen is that survivors come up to us, give us a big hug and tell us how much it means to them to hear our statements. (Verena, 17)

I just cannot believe this was our last contribution to a commemoration ceremony as a class. I feel, this year we were at our best and we got such a positive feedback. I was simply overwhelmed. Next year I will

be a freshman at university, but I will certainly come back for the commemoration because Gusen has a special place in my heart. And I really appreciate my parents accompanying me every year. (Kathy, 18)

What I probably cannot convey to the readers of this article is how these young Austrians have matured as personalities in all those years of our co-operation, how much their horizon has widened and how much they have grown in stature. Looking at the global situation, we can easily become deeply pessimistic. However, looking at those wonderful adolescents makes me very hopeful.

NEW CONTRIBUTORS

Jenny L. Bruell and **Theodore J. Patton** are both members of UVM's class of 2005. Bruell has a major in History and a minor in Holocaust Studies. Patton is a History major.

Karin Doerr

Meaghan Emery is Assistant Professor of French in the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Vermont

Katherine Ferriss of Vergennes, Vermont, is a Senior, Class of 2005, at Georgetown University, majoring in European & Pacific History.

Michael Higgins, a member of UVM's class of 2005, majors in History and minors in Holocaust Studies.

Siegi Witzany-Durda, a native of St. Georgen an der Gusen has been a member of the Gusen Commemoration Committee since 1996. She teaches at Stiftsgymnasium Seitenstetten, a private Catholic high school, is married and has two children.

Saint Michael's College

2004 Rabbi Wall Lecture

*"The Myth of Europe
in America's Judaism"*

Susannah Heschel
Dartmouth College

Wednesday, 27 October,
4:00 p.m.

Hoehl Welcome Center

GABRIELLE TYRNAUER

1932-2004

Gabrielle Tyrnauer was a member of the Center's Advisory Board from the outset. She brought a dual perspective to the Center, as a refugee from the Third Reich, driven from her native Vienna following the *Anschluss*, and as a scholar whose research activities involved Sinti and Roma survivors.

Over a period of many years Gabrielle, who received her Ph.D. in anthropology from Cornell, sought out the Sinti who had been persecuted by the Nazi regime and targeted for extinction, but who had somehow managed to survive. Gabrielle was able to gain their trust—not an easy matter—and conduct interviews with them, which were videotaped. Copies of this testimony are now to be found at Living Testimonies in Montreal, at the Fortunoff Videoarchive at Yale, and at UVM. In her article in the Center's *Festschrift* for Raul Hilberg, *Perspectives on the Holocaust*, Gabrielle describes the special circumstances of recording Sinti and Roma survivor testimony.

Gabrielle's capacity for sympathy, her caring nature, came to the fore in the work she did on behalf of refugees. The Auberge Alburg, which she ran with her late husband, Charles Stastny, was no ordinary bed and breakfast. Close to the Canadian border, it was a place of comfort, where refugees could rest and enjoy the advocacy of their hosts as they coped with the bureaucratic process of crossing the border. Gabrielle will be missed.

THE 3RD MILLER SYMPOSIUM

Jenny L. Bruell
Theodore J. Patton

UVM hosted its third Miller Symposium in April 2004, bringing together six distinguished scholars in German history to share their expertise about the arts in Nazi Germany. The event was organized by UVM's Center for Holocaust Studies, directed by Professor David Scrase, and is named for generous donors Leonard (UVM '51) and Carolyn Miller. In 2001 the Millers established an endowment that provides annual financial resources that help to sustain the programming of the Center for Holocaust Studies.

Moderated by Michael Kater, a distinguished German historian at York University in Toronto, the symposium offered UVM faculty, students, and friends the opportunity to listen to lectures about the relationship between the arts and Nazi ideology in twentieth-century Europe and to engage in provocative, complex discussions during the question-and-answer sessions that followed each lecture.

An introduction and overview to the 2004 Miller Symposium, "Anti-Semitism and the Arts in Nazi Ideology and Policy," was given by Alan Steinweis, Professor of History at the University of Nebraska. From the beginning of the National Socialist movement in the 1920s the Nazis introduced a "twenty-five point plan" that called on the party to remove all Jewish cultural influence. The National Socialists advocated the regulation of cultural production. This began at a time when conservatives outraged at Weimar culture were becoming increasingly vocal. The Nazis desired "cultural purification"; this, argued Hitler, would be a large component in producing the desired German *Volk*. During the late 1920s the majority of German artists traditional in outlook, and this only aided the Nazis in targeting Jews as the "corruptors" of German culture. Regardless of how large a rôle Jewish artists played in Weimar society, argued Steinweis, the Jews' fate was sealed, no matter what.

Once in power the National Socialists approached the cleansing of Aryan culture through "positive and negative eugenics." From 1933 on, the party went on two parallel tracks in order to reach cultural purification: the first was censorship of the arts, and second was determining who could participate in the arts. Two key stages emerged: the first came in the form of the Reichstag Fire Decree of February 1933, which gave the government wide-reaching emergency police powers. At this stage only a small percentage of the 8,000 Jewish cultural personnel was removed. The larger purge came with the April 1933 Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service, which along with the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 enabled the Nazis to remove an additional 7,000 Jewish people from positions of cultural influence. The Jewish Cultural League, initially supported by the National Socialists, was created in 1934-35 in order to allow for the segregation of Jewish culture from the whole of Germany. By 1938 it had become clear that the Nazis had decided that the initial purges of 1933 and 1935 had not pro-

duced the desired "purification" of German culture, and within a few years the final cultural purge came in the form of the "Final Solution."

The second lecture was given by Eric Rentschler, who is the Chair of Germanic Studies at Harvard University. Rentschler's talk focused on Nazi film, using *Triumph of the Will* and *Jud Süß* as examples of Nazi culture in the cinema. Before focusing on these two films, he considered the general state of German cinema at that time.

Joseph Goebbels, who after 1929 was in charge of Nazi propaganda, wanted film to be commercially viable and part of the national identity. German movie producers tried to meet his goal in a number of ways. Films produced during the Third Reich contained little nudity and some types of films, such as comedies and biographies, avoided overt political messages. German film technique differed from that of Hollywood in several ways. For example, in 1933, German film clips averaged just over ten seconds, while in Hollywood the average was only five seconds per clip and was strictly script bound.

The number of feature films produced during the Nazi era was an astounding 1,094. However, before 1939 no hate films or anti-Semitic films were made. In fact, over 88 percent of the films produced under the Nazi regime were within what Rentschler called the "accepted culture."

The first example of a propaganda film discussed in the lecture was possibly the most famous film to come out of the Third Reich, *Triumph of the Will*. This film of the Party Congress of 1934 at Nuremberg was directed by Leni Riefenstahl, who was determined to fulfill Hitler's request to portray the "new face of Germany." In order to do this Riefenstahl convinced the producers to cut three-fourths of the total footage. This had the effect of making the seven-day congress appear like three, and made the "actors" seem energized, composed, and consistent. *Triumph of the Will* has for decades provoked three different reactions: criticism of Riefenstahl for participating with the Nazis, sympathy for a Riefenstahl viewed as innocent of wrong-doing, and a distinction between bad politics and good film-making. No matter where one stands on these questions, Riefenstahl's work was revolutionary in its use of sound bites and visual imaging; its legacy in the film industry has lasted seventy years.

By 1939 films in the Third Reich had begun to take on a more political role and soon included productions that are characterized as hate films; this influence only increased after 1939. Rentschler used Veit Harlan's *Jud Süß* as the essential post-1939 example of a film intended to incite hatred toward a specific group of people. The final sequence of *Jud Süß*, where a Jew is hanged in a courtroom not for any crime he committed, but solely because he was Jewish, dramatically illustrated what Rentschler described as a "dissolve technique" that allows the viewer to target and specifically degrade German-Jews. The influence of Nazi film evolved from the period of the takeover in the early 1930s, and by 1940 the cinema had gained considerable influence within German culture in general. As the Nazi regime came to see film as a useful tool for propaganda, so the messages portrayed in films evolved in accordance with the party line.

Pamela Potter, Professor in the School of Music and in the German Department at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, delved into the complicated issue of music and its place in the

Third Reich in her lecture entitled “Music in the Third Reich: The Complex Task of ‘Aryanization.’” Potter’s research confronted preconceived notions of music’s role in the Nazis’ process of “Aryanization.” Assumptions, such as that Hitler made Germans listen to Wagner and that jazz was strictly forbidden, are not accurate. Rather, as Potter described it, during the regime’s twelve years “there was no consistent rubric of German music.” Potter illuminated the complexity of trying to define what German music was, due to the elusiveness of the art form. Visual symbols are absent in music, so no clear message can be extracted.

Despite the absence of definite meaning, the Nazis did try to apply their “Aryan” ideals to music, according to Potter. There certainly was a Nazi effort to “Aryanize” the musicians. There was also a second attempt by the Nazis to try to “Aryanize” the music itself, using sounds and meter to represent the racial ideals. Jazz, for example, was a thriving new genre of music in the United States. The German response to jazz was inconsistent: while the Third Reich rejected the American music as degenerate, Potter pointed to attempts by German composers to take elements of American jazz and interpret it for themselves, although the results were most often unsuccessful. Excerpts from various German compositions of the period accompanied her lecture. “By and large,” she concluded, “‘Aryanization’ put an end to unwelcome musical influence in Germany... Yet, it is still unresolved as to what Nazi music, if any, is.”

The fourth lecture was given by Frank Trommler, who is Professor of German Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. Trommler spoke on literature during the Third Reich. Dr. Trommler opened his lecture by stating that during the Nazi regime there was a tremendous amount of party and state propaganda. By the mid-1930s the Nazi party had firm control over the majority of publications; this only added to the phenomenon of mass production of party leaflets, fliers, etc. Trommler argued that the success or failure of this literature should be shown in the context of the communal atmosphere of the Third Reich, not only in terms of the regime’s brutality. During the Weimar Republic, prior to the Nazi takeover in 1933, authors gained stature when they became more politicized. Especially when the world depression hit in 1929 and cinemas began going bankrupt, authors continued to enjoy fame and high status in German society.

While literature increased in importance in German society during Weimar, after the Nazi takeover in 1933 it began to become less and less important. Hitler, in particular, did not put nearly the emphasis or effort into promoting literature that he did into the promotion of art and architecture. Hitler also thought that radio and cinema were more important in producing effective propaganda than was literature. However, the Nazis did provide federal funding for the comprehensive building of libraries and they advocated for reading groups; both efforts were a way to promote the German *Volk* and culture.

The Nazis wanted the proper respect paid to past written work, especially the classics. Goebbels set out to establish a set curriculum for reading materials in all German schools. This had an adverse effect upon the German authors of the 1930s, because current authors steadily lost the ability to publish new manuscripts as the National Socialists promoted the works of the past. The Nazi approach to literature drained the Third Reich of literary talent. Authors as famous as Thomas Mann were forced into exile in the United States, and the literature produced in Germany during the

1930s became less and less successful. By the end of the Third Reich the production of German literature had been crippled by the Nazis.

Jonathan Petropolous, Professor of European History at Clairmont-McKenna College, concluded this year’s Miller Symposium with his presentation on “The Art World in Nazi Germany: Choices, Justice and Rationalizations.” He focused on three important, yet relatively unassuming, figures in German art circles of the period: Arno Breker, a successful sculptor and beneficiary of Joseph Goebbels’s propaganda. His work, according to Goebbels, was “representative of the regime.” The second figure was Karl Haberstock, who represented Nazi leaders in the art world and was responsible for the sale of plundered art. Petropolous’s third figure, Ernst Büchner, was also an art dealer and the director of various museums in Bavaria. Focusing on the choices, rationalizations, and complicity of the three men and their professional activity during the Nazi period, Petropolous exposed the complexity and broad scope of methods of art exploitation in Nazi Germany.

All three men chose to stay and continue their work in Germany under Hitler’s regime, despite sufficient funds and connections with foreign associates who could have helped them emigrate, as many others had done. Instead, they remained in Germany and their professional status in the art world was enhanced. Breker described his work as an international movement, helping to define Germany’s aesthetic ideals. Haberstock regarded himself as doing good work for Germany: he was “preserving art for humanity.” Büchner, who stressed to Hitler that money must be directed to museums, worked to protect and preserve “Aryan” art. All three men made strenuous efforts to obtain and safeguard art within the Third Reich. The striking component of Petropolous’ presentation was the issue of justice. Despite the three men’s clear roles in the exploitation of Jewish artwork and their promotion of Nazi artistic ideals, they suffered minor repercussions. During the de-Nazification process that followed the Third Reich’s defeat, all three were tried for criminal activity. However, their punishment was the mere payment of small fines. They were able to continue in their professions and remained prominent in their fields.

The Third Miller Symposium lasted one full day and presented the audience with the results of decades of research. Lecturers and listeners alike confronted issues of Nazi ideology and the arts through concise lectures and the lengthy question periods after each presentation. Though many issues and topics in Nazi art and culture remain to be addressed and researched, experts and students alike left with a better understanding of what is known. The UVM community is grateful and better educated because of the efforts and contributions of the Center for Holocaust Studies and the Millers. We all look forward with anticipation to the Fourth Miller Symposium.

SUMMER SEMINAR 2004

Katherine Ferriss

In the academic world, it is rare to have a course that can make you laugh, cry, learn, and examine the value of human life. The weeklong Holocaust seminar at the University of Vermont did all of those things and more. Expecting a week of depression, instead I found hope, perseverance, and forgiveness in the stories and lives of the Holocaust survivors.

When the week began, some students had difficulty finding parking, the building, and the classroom; however, by the end of the week, it was difficult for the group of Holocaust students, scholars, teachers, and survivors to leave the basement classroom of Carrigan 011. The course was led by Robert Bernheim, a member of the Center for Holocaust Studies, ably assisted by David Scrase, Director of the Center for Holocaust Studies. The week utilized the knowledge of both scholars and survivors of the Holocaust. Attendees were a mix of undergraduates from as the National Socialists advocated reading the works of the past, various universities and Vermont middle and high school teachers preparing Holocaust education programs.

After initial introductions and a description of the course requirements Bernheim gave a historical overview of the Nazi rise to power and the implementation of Nazism's destructive program. Though anti-Semitism had existed in Europe since the early Middle Ages, the fertilizer for these seeds of discrimination lay in the despair and anger stemming from perceived injustices inflicted upon Germany by the Allies through the Treaty of Versailles following the First World War. The National Socialist Party played on those feelings and on the economic distress of the Great Depression, gaining popularity and eventually rising to power in 1933. The campaign against the Jews slowly sliced away the legal rights of the Jews. The second lecture established the steps that led to the decision for the "Final Solution," the eradication of the Jews. Plans for German military aggression relied in part upon the incarceration and ultimate extermination of the Jewish population, as the Nazis intended to fund their military actions with Jewish confiscated property. These first two discussions gave a solid historical base for the personal reflections of the Holocaust survivors and witnesses that followed.

The first such survivor was Aranka Siegal, whose story of perseverance, courage, and forgiveness brought the evil of the Holocaust to life. Her pain was palpable. As the first survivor to speak, Siegal served as an exemplary introduction for the men and women who followed; however, her position in the group was much more, as she served as our personal guide to the Holocaust. Born in Hungary, Siegal offered her personal reflections on her experience of the Holocaust in the concentration camps, bringing me to tears as she relived her pain. Of a family of seven, Siegal and her two sisters were the only survivors; Siegal is the only one able to discuss the Holocaust. She was a constant presence during the week, and her comments and questions throughout allowed us to see the multiple perspectives of Holocaust survivors.

Tuesday was filled with the personal reflections of four Holocaust survivors, beginning with Gabe Hartstein, originally from Hungary, whose mother's eccentricities saved his life several times, as she refused to be held back by the restrictions of the Nazis. Just missing being sent to a concentration camp, Hartstein found himself saved indirectly by Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplo-

mat who saved thousands in Hungary. Hartstein was lucky to survive with both parents; many other children, like Michael Bukanc, survived the war years to find that one or both of their parents had died.

Bukanc was a hidden child from Lithuania, secretly removed from his hiding place in the Jewish ghetto and sent to Germany with his uncle's gentile girlfriend. She claimed he was her illegitimate child and Bukanc came to believe she was his mother. After the war, his father returned from a concentration camp to find him. When Bukanc did not want to leave his adopted mother, his father and the woman married—a happy resolution after their experiences of the horrors of the Holocaust.

Henri Weinstock, the next survivor to speak, offered his story through videotape. Weinstock was a hidden child from Belgium, sent to a Catholic school in France; there he was baptized and converted, which was dangerous for the church running the school. Like Bukanc's father, Weinstock's survived the Holocaust; however, his father's reactions to his time of imprisonment created an unhappy relationship for Weinstock. Despite the hardships he has faced throughout his life, Weinstock maintains a peaceful outlook, offering advice useful to all generations: "Do away with convictions that will do harm to others."

Simon Barenbaum offered the final personal perspective of the day, discussing his experiences as a Jew in Paris, where the everyday rights of Jewish people were removed after German troops invaded. Though his brother was picked up and sent to a work camp, and eventually died in Auschwitz, Simon and his parents made it to a village in unoccupied France to avoid the Nazi persecution. Following the Allied advance, Simon joined the Resistance as an interpreter between the Allied forces and the French Resistance.

The Tuesday evening public lecture continued the personal testimonies of the day, as Wulf and Monique Koepke shared her life story. As a young child Monique was sent alone from Berlin to join her Communist art-historian father in Paris, with the idea that she would look after him. Even after her mother joined them, the child continued to take care of many of the necessities of daily life, because she attracted less notice than the adults when in public. Eventually her mother was deported to Gurs, while her father was sent to Le Vernet. At the time of her parents' internment Monique was with a group of scouts; she did, however, visit her mother in Gurs in the summer of 1941, before her mother was deported. With a group of girls disguised as Protestant scouts, Monique managed to escape to Switzerland, where she remained until the end of the war. Her memories of that time have been published in German, under the title: *Nachtzug nach Paris: Ein jüdisches Mädchen überlebt Hitlers Frankreich* (Erkelenz: Altius, 2000).

The following day began with a discussion led by David Scrase about the literature of the Holocaust; he described the books, stories, and films he felt most useful and appropriate for research and for education. Though he indicated that some fiction is useful, some scholars feel that important sources are found most often in personal accounts.

The rest of Wednesday offered three more personal accounts of the Holocaust, beginning with Yehudi Lindeman, a hidden child in Holland. When he went into hiding, he was four years old, so his memories are limited; however, it was clear from his story that even at such a young age he understood the dangers involved. As a hidden child, Lindeman's survival hinged on the constant

awareness and courage of those individuals who took great risks to save Jewish people, officially known as Righteous Among the Nations.

The second speaker of the day was one such person, Marion Pritchard, a woman recognized as Righteous by Israel for helping to hide more than one hundred Jews in her native Netherlands, though she estimates that only twenty managed to survive the war. Her story was one of courage and sacrifice, though Pritchard carefully points to the contributions of the unrecognized Jews who were also involved in the rescue process.

The final personal account of the Nazi persecution was given by Susi Learmonth. A native of Austria, she was in that country when it was annexed by Germany. Through perseverance her parents managed to get their family out of Germany and into the United States before the horrors of Kristallnacht. Though they left the country, Learmonth's family did not forget those left behind, and worked in the United States to get the required paperwork for other Jews still in the grip of the Nazis. Throughout the course, each personal experience offered me a sense of sadness for the lost family members and friends, even as I admired the speaker's bravery in the terrifying face of blind hatred.

It is the language of such hate that Wolfgang Mieder, another member of the Center for Holocaust Studies, addressed when he discussed Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and the role it played in the Holocaust. The prejudices of an ignorant man are clear in Hitler's writings, and other catch phrases of the Holocaust, such as "Arbeit macht frei" over the gates of Auschwitz, indicate the homicidal mentality of the leaders. In addition to the hateful literature and language of the Nazi regime, Mieder also discussed the diaries of Victor Klemperer, a Jewish man able to avoid deportation and death because he was married to a Christian woman. His diaries reveal how painful life was for those Jews left behind in Germany, who had to listen to the lies of Hitler's ruthless regime.

Lois Price also discussed an aspect of survival from the Holocaust. Music, like Klemperer's diaries, allowed continued expression within the oppression of the Holocaust. The history of music during the Holocaust is little known; however, some ghettos found permissive commandants who allowed musicians to perform. Though it could not save the Jews from their fates, the music offered a form of release not found elsewhere in the Holocaust.

In a day filled with scholars, the final speaker was David Scrase, reviewing the art of the Holocaust, which was more abundant than I realized. Though artistic means were limited, many painters found ways to express the experience with whatever materials were available. It is likely that only a small fraction of what was created still exists; however, the importance of what does remain is unparalleled, as it offers an artistic view into the pain of the Jews. After a day of scholarly lectures, the evening offered one more from Oren Stier.

A professor on sabbatical at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., Stier offered a lecture on the phrase "Arbeit macht frei" in his keynote speech of Thursday night and continued a lively discussion on the topic during the class discussion of Friday morning. In the question and answer period after the Thursday lecture Stier, Mieder, and Siegal discussed the significance of "Arbeit macht frei" and its use in society. The Friday morning discussion proved to be quite controversial, as Stier offered strong opinions about educational techniques and the experiences of students, in addition to his own studies in the vocabulary of memory and the symbols of the Holocaust.

Earlier that morning the group heard from Steve Rogers, a historian for the US Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations, which pursues Nazi war criminals who have come to the United States. Although the war ended over fifty years ago, the number of individuals found in the U.S. has been great, and his office deals with deportation proceedings against individuals proven to have committed crimes against humanity. Although it is difficult for some to understand why elderly perpetrators continue to be hunted, it is clear that the United States must make a statement in refusing to harbor the criminals of the past, lest we find our nation overrun with the criminals of the future.

The final lecture of the course was given by Craig Pepin, and it presented the Nuremberg Trials and the search for justice. It is clear from records and Pepin's presentation that few people knew or understood the extent of the Nazi attempts to exterminate the Jewish people until the very end of the first Nuremberg Trials, as persecution of individuals was understood in terms of national citizenship rather than religious, political, or sexual identity. Although some believe that the Nuremberg Trials and the war crimes trials that followed did not sufficiently address the collective guilt or complicity of the German people, it is clear that the trials did bring the actions of the Nazis to the scrutiny of the world.

Throughout the course, time was given for group discussion, which was essential to the experience, as it allowed anyone to ask questions of Bernheim and to discuss the information provided throughout the week. Offering an outlet for emotions and confusions brought everyone in the seminar closer, as we found ourselves sitting during our lunch breaks asking questions and opinions of those around us. A forty-hour week of Holocaust studies may seem difficult for many; however, it is important to realize that the survivors have had to live with their memories for sixty years. We did not live through the Holocaust, but we did learn through the Holocaust. Henri Weinstock's wisdom will stay with me forever. When he said, "I would never be proud of being Jewish, I would never be proud of being an American, as one must always be proud of being a human being," he reminded everyone that it is not our differences that must define our connections, but our similarities that must forge our permanent bonds.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The UVM Center for Holocaust Studies is grateful to Egon and Marge ('62) Berg for their donation of the English translation of *Nowhere in Africa: An Autobiographical Novel* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) by Stefanie Zweig. Egon Berg's parents fled with him from Germany in 1939 to a farm in Kenya, under circumstances similar to those narrated in the novel.

The film based on the original, "Nirgendwo in Afrika" won an Academy Award for best foreign film in 2002. A motion picture of the sequel, "Nirgendwo in Deutschland" (Nowhere in Germany") is scheduled for release in 2005, at which time an English translation will also appear.

A SUMMER AT THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

By
Michael Higgins

During the first week of June 2004 roughly twenty-five summer interns left for Washington, D.C. to work for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. When I applied in March I had no idea that I would be one of these interns. I arrived in Washington and was welcomed with open arms; now, as I look back, it seems to have ended just as soon as it started. I learned so much in a short amount of time and in the future would like to go back and continue to work for the museum.

I interned for the Registry of Holocaust Survivors as the Collections Management intern. My duties varied from week to week depending on coverage in the museum and any immediate needs that arose. However, my more permanent task for the summer was cataloging photographs—re-housing them in archival-quality containers and entering their information into a computerized database. This was an interesting assignment because the pictures varied from portraits to photos taken inside the camps.

Whenever I was not cataloging I staffed the reference desk in the Benjamin and Vladka Meed Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, located on the museum's second floor. The registry is located in the Wexner Learning Center, where three computers provide public access to the survivors' registry. The reference desk is staffed by an employee of the registry, who is there to answer questions, assist the guests in using the registry, and assist with genealogical research using name lists, databases, and websites. This was the most educational part of my internship because it enabled me to interact with many survivors who were very willing to come in and share their stories. Working in this position also enhanced my knowledge of events and places so that I could better serve the visitors of the museum.

I was also able to take advantage of many of the programs offered by the museum, particularly First Person, a public program at the museum where a survivor would sit down and be interviewed in front of an audience. I was present at close to ten of these programs and found them to be quite educational. During these programs I heard many different people speak, including a child survivor, a rabbi, and a survivor who sat on a Jewish Council in a ghetto. However, these were not the only programs that I was able to attend.

The Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies hosted a series of lectures and panel discussions throughout the summer featuring scholars from the center, staff members, and visiting scholars. I went to a number of different lectures on topics ranging from the Holocaust in Romania to the Lodz ghetto. Through the education department I was able sit in on a talk given by Deborah Lipstadt on Holocaust denial and a lecture given to teachers by former University of Vermont faculty member, Doris Bergen, about how to teach the Holocaust. My knowledge in the field of Holocaust studies was expanded due to these lectures. My supervisor kept encouraging me to attend the public programs if I wanted to, but I am not sure if the other interns took advantage of them as much as I did.

I was lucky to be granted an internship with the registry for several reasons. First, I had my own desk and work space. During conversations with other interns assigned to different offices I learned that many did not have these amenities. A few even told me that they spent their first few weeks doing a lot of photocopying before getting involved in larger projects, a task that I was fortunate enough to avoid. I was given my own projects and had the opportunity to work in two different settings. The office I worked from primarily was located in one of the museum's administrative buildings. When I was not working there I was at the museum. By summer's end I did not want to leave, but some of the other interns had reached the point where they were ready to go. I can honestly say that I would work for the museum again in the future, but I am not sure other interns would say the same; I guess that is why internships exist.

I think that internships are a great way to explore the types of career paths you would be interested in. This internship helped me to make some decisions about what type of career I would like to pursue. I was able to learn a lot about museums, their operations, and the types of employment opportunities they offer. I believe that anyone interested in a career involving the Holocaust or Nazi Germany should consider an internship or a fellowship with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. They provide an opportunity to expand your knowledge of the subject and to network with the people in the museum.

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Editor: Professor David Scrase
Associate Editor: Katherine Quimby Johnson

The Center for Holocaust Studies at The University of Vermont was established in 1993 to honor the scholarly and pedagogical legacy of Raul Hilberg, Professor emeritus of Political Science at The University of Vermont. His monumental work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, changed the way historians and students around the world view the Holocaust. Since Dr. Hilberg began his research at the University of Vermont in the late 1950s, what was a reluctance to confront the facts of the Holocaust has given way to a hunger for the truth.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp.

Rochelle G. Sidel. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, xvii + 268 pp. ISBN 0-299-19860-X. Cloth. \$29.95.

Transmitting untold stories of suffering and resistance into the testimonial record on a little researched camp is an essential task for historians of the Shoah. Writing a book on Jewish women's experiences that transcends an overarching narrative of victimization is an admirable feat. Essential with regard to the moral obligation that one must never forget, and admirable for its unblinking insights into the resilience of the human spirit and individual acts of love and courage before the workings of a program of dehumanization and annihilation, Rochelle Sidel's new book is a profound tribute to the "uncounted" Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Beginning in 1980 with a trip to the German Democratic Republic and specifically a visit to the site of the Ravensbrück women's camp, Sidel investigated the largely undocumented history of the camp's Jewish inmates. Under the Soviet regime, the camp memorial had commemorated predominantly the communist prisoners (some of them Jewish, though mention of this facet of their identities was absent) and allotted a prison cell to each of the countries represented among the victims. Sidel rejected this notion of fairness once she learned of the existence of at least one Jewish barrack on her initial visit and set to work on uncovering the specific experiences of these women who had been singled out for their faith. In the end, she has written into history the memories of sixty women. Their testimony survives despite the destroyed or repressed records of Ravensbrück's Jewish inmates, who were deported from twenty-three nations and represented roughly twenty percent of the camp's 132,000 prisoners (Sidel prefers to use these figures to original estimates of 10-13.47 percent Jewish inmates among the total 123,000 registered female prisoners).

Through personal interviews with survivors and with victims' families, published and unpublished memoirs, and historical archives in the United States, Europe, Israel, Brazil, and Canada, Sidel has compiled a cohesive record of the internal organization of the work camp and its satellites, as well as Ravensbrück's place within the network of Nazi camps and programs of slave labor, medical experimentation, sterilization, and extermination. Evidently due to the low survival rate, many of the book's testimonials relate the horrific experiences of the latest transports of Jewish women from Hungary beginning in late spring of 1944, or from other camps, most particularly Auschwitz. The latter were sent on death marches to Ravensbrück in January 1945 before the advancing Soviet army, swelling the camp's overcrowded population to between 32,000 and 43,700, although it was originally conceived for 5,000.

Especially given the insufficient camp records and ledgers from the final disorganized months of the camp, these painful narratives of victimization give way to the awesome historical value of testimony, and while reading this book, I was reminded of Shoshana Felman's written praise of Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah* as "the return of the voice." Through their recorded memories, the women transmit their fears, joys, struggles, personal tragedies, and prejudices. At the same time they tell the specifics of their experience of the *Appells*, work details, soup

lines, latrines, the infirmary, and all the other horrific aspects of the camp. Their voices give contour and volume to stories of incredible stamina, relative good fortune, or mental breakdown, stories also colored by their liberation—by escape, or evacuation in one of the white buses of the Swedish Red Cross, or under the somewhat dreaded guard of the Soviet army—and their lives following. Sidel sees their value to the historical record as such: "When the testimonies of the women in this book are put together, along with writings from non-Jewish survivors, reports on those who did not survive, historically accepted facts, war crime trial transcripts and Nazi documents, they serve to corroborate each other in a way that gives us an overview." Isolated accounts do speak of two previously unknown incidents: one survivor recalls entering a building where a group of young women with their tongues cut out were making sexual gesticulations to her; another remembers Christmas Day, 1944 when only the Jewish women were forced out into the cold naked for inspection. Sidel reports them as "precious information" to be preserved as evidence "until proven otherwise."

In addition to her primary goal, namely the retrieval of the memories of the Jewish women and children who passed through the camp or died there, Sidel identifies the various groups designated by the colored triangles sewn onto their clothing, representing their different "crimes." Notably, she relates the moral strength, courage, and generosity of many of the camp's political prisoners (German, Polish, French, Dutch, Soviet, and British), of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and of two French nuns. She notes the systematic sterilization of Gypsy women, and, in her conclusion, stresses the need for more research and documentation of the experiences of "asocial" lesbian prisoners, whose memories continue to be repressed or tarnished. Despite the ways in which the inmates of Ravensbrück have been described throughout the post-1945 era, Sidel avoids generalizations and, at the end of her book, brings into focus the uniqueness of the women's experience.

The camp's negation of female sensibilities, maternity, and the physical act of love, not to mention the prisoners' fears of nakedness, rape, forced prostitution or abortion, did not, it appears, preclude expressions of human warmth or protectiveness. Camp "sisters" and "mothers," many of them surrogates, assumed the task of caring for their "families."

Acts of resistance are traced through the lives of famously heroic prisoners and others whose daily demonstrations of kindness and individual or communal displays of creativity—from recipe books to foreign language lessons, pictures, plays, songs, poetry, embroidery, and carved trinkets—preserved the human spirit and feeling of community within the camp. Olga Benário Prestes, a German Communist, and Dr. Käthe Pick Leichter, an Austrian Social Democrat, both of them political prisoners and Jewish, are remembered in particular for their heroic resistance activities, including the joint creation of a clandestine newspaper, the smuggling of extra bread and margarine to women in the infirmary, and the lifting of morale through Prestes' insistence on personal hygiene or Leichter's freedom songs. Despite their own suffering, these two women's unflinching moral courage, creativity, and personal dignity made them leaders in the various efforts to sabotage the camp's normal operation or, through song and play, to mock the Nazis. These two women, commemorated

Continued on page 15

Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust. Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg. Eds. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003. 321 pages. Cloth ISBN 0-8143-3062-2 \$39.95. Paper. ISBN 0-8143-3062-2. \$24.95.

This anthology is dedicated to the late Sybil Milton (1941-2000). It grew out of the 1997 Annual Holocaust Scholar's Conference that featured two special panels on women and the Holocaust. The detailed title of this "superbly edited and introduced" (jacket endorsement) book suggests also its range. It is divided into four parts, I) Proposing a Theoretical Framework, II) Women's Experience: Gender, the Nazis, and the Holocaust, III) Gender and Memory: The Uses of Memoirs, IV) Women's Expressions: Postwar Reflections in Art, Fiction, and Film. The sections cover earlier research on the subject, as well as new contributions. Editors Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg have skillfully connected and cross-referenced them. This provides a continuity to the anthology that is often missing in other collected works. Since each article also functions as a separate entity, the occasional overlapping of themes and references is understandable. The varied topics point to the interdisciplinary character of the volume and shed light on the subject from such diverse angles as art, history, literature, nursing, philosophy, and religion.

The Introduction by editors Baer and Goldenberg provides an excellent summary of the existing scholarship on women and the Holocaust. It gives ample credit to its pioneers, such as Joan Ringelheim and, most notably, Carol Rittner and John Roth, who edited the popular anthology, *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* (New York: Paragon House, 1993). Its eleven-page chronology, covering the years 1933-1946, has been reprinted in *Experience and Expression* and is particularly helpful to those using the book as a reader. Danielle de Lucia Brugess must be commended for her fitting cover design with a photo depicting the deportation of Jewish women and children to an unidentified Yugoslavian concentration camp in 1942.

In Part I, John K. Roth surveys how renowned (mainly male) scholars have or have not changed their minds about gendered Holocaust experiences. While Yehuda Bauer and Raul Hilberg now recognize them, Lawrence L. Langer continues to argue a more universalist position. Roth also praises websites dedicated to women and the Holocaust, such as the first site established by Judy Cohen in Toronto, Canada. Pascale Rachel Bos, in her illuminating article on "Analyzing Gender Difference," focuses on the interconnectedness of gendered experience, memory, and narrative and has built on Joan Ringelheim's seminal "A Reconsideration of Research" of 1985 (reprinted in *Different Voices*). Bos criticizes the essentialist over-emphasis of "typical" female survival strategies. Most importantly, she points to the still existing "cycle of neglect" of women's writing in Holocaust studies.

Part II deals with issues that are not always highlighted in Holocaust collections, such as Sybil Milton's important piece, "Hidden Lives: Sinti and Roma Women," and three articles on female perpetrators of crimes against women prisoners. Anna Rosmus presents the largely ignored situation of female prisoners as workers who were brought into Germany during the war from German-occupied countries. She reveals that in cases of pregnancy and/or newborns, German personnel often performed

abortions and/or infanticide. Rosmus mentions the infamous Infants' Homes inside Germany. Also called Children's Camps (*Kinderlager*), they were, from 1943, special birthing and children's camps for Polish and Russian women and generally did not have the welfare of the infants in mind.

Susan Benedict's "Caring While Killing" centers on seemingly sympathetic German women who were in fact complicit perpetrators. They were involved in the euthanasia of what the ideologically infused German experts deemed "life unworthy of life" (*lebensunwertes Leben*). The code name for this extensive murder program of people with disabilities was *Aktion T-4* (Operation T-4), named after the Reich Chancellery's address at Tiergartenstrasse 4 in Berlin. (The male doctors of T-4 subsequently provided the backbone of the trained force of killers at the death camps in occupied Poland.) The German trials took place only in the sixties. The defense stressed two points: these murders were seen as "acts of mercy," and the nurses carried them out while obeying orders.

Still within the area of female perpetrators and mercy killings, Mary D. Lagerwey examines "The Nurses' Trial at Hadamar and the Ethical Implications of Health Care Values." In the German town of Hadamar in Hessen, the State Psychiatric Hospital and Sanitarium was an *Aktion T-4* euthanasia center from 1941 to 1945. More than 11,000 Germans, including over 5,000 children, were murdered there. The central aspect of nursing practice before and during the Third Reich was a person's ability to reflect "the highest ethic." Three nurses faced the United Nations War Crimes Trial in Wiesbaden in 1945 for the (additional) killing of 3,000-3,500 Russian and Polish prisoners of war. The defense emphasized the nurses' "two character traits, duty and selfless service." Lagerwey explains that Nazi ideology had provided the nurses with a morality that was founded on "a shift in focus of care and moral responsibility from the individual to the nation." Thus did the German nurses justify their participation in murder and plead "not guilty" based on reasons of state. The two male nurses were found guilty and hanged.

Part III of the book concentrates on "Uses of Memoirs." Judith Greenberg writes on the involvement of women in "Path of Resistance: French Women Working from the Inside." She discusses "the 'inside' activities of two women, one Jewish and one Protestant, who worked actively as resisters in France—Denise Siekierski and Madeleine Barot." She highlights instances in which "gender affected their roles as resisters" when helping "'undesirable' women such as prostitutes." One could refer here to Simone de Beauvoir's generally neglected socio-historical novels, especially *The Mandarins* (1960), that included women's active role in the Resistance.

Myrna Goldenberg states in "Food Talk: Gendered Responses to Hunger in the Concentration Camps" that, philosophically, the subject of food became public only when its functions became economic or religious, i.e., entering the sphere considered male. She mentions that hunger "often evokes a different kind of response in women," and notes how they remembered absent or dead family members through recipes. In that way, "recipes carry the past" and, within the Holocaust context, were often used as food fantasies that were spoken rather than written. The collection of recipes in *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin* (1996) is a well-known exception.

Also in Part III, Susan Nowak, in "Ruptured Lives and Shattered Beliefs: A Feminist Analysis of Tikkun Atzmi in Holocaust Literature," examines the fear, the intimidation, and the desperate search for a way to continue to live and survive the moment as

well as the aftermath. Nowak addresses important ethical questions that arose during and after experiencing and witnessing victims' vulnerability, assault, and limited or denied agency in the face of Nazi atrocities.

Catherine A. Bernard provides a feminist analysis of Anne Frank and corrects the image of the idealized child victim by locating the voice of Frank the woman concealed behind the distortions of mainstream hagiography. Bernard gives us the history of the famous Diary's publication that had reduced Frank to "a symbol of gentle forgiveness or ... a touchstone for identification with the oppressed of the world." Bernard mentions the omissions and suppressions of some of Frank's significant contemplations as a young woman in a sexist and unjust society and a brutal world.

In Part IV, Stephen C. Feinstein's chapter on "Jewish Women in Time: The Challenge of Feminist Artistic Installations about the Holocaust," provides an excellent and thorough analysis of the art of two renowned female artists: Ellen Rothenberg's "Anne Frank Project" (1990) and Nancy Spero's two installations (1993) about the fate of women during the Nazi era. They represent "Hitler's best known victim" and "lesser known women victims." Both artists base their work on existing texts, *The Diary of Anne Frank* and, in Spero's case, poems by Bertolt Brecht and Nelly Sachs. It brings to mind a contemporary performance piece by artist Ruth Liberman from New York, who fires bullets into German words, thereby fusing text and visual art in a powerful statement about language and memory.

Lillian Kremer's article on American Holocaust fiction finds "gendered suffering" and "coping strategies" of women in "The Shawl" by Cynthia Ozick (1970) and *Anya* by Susan Fromberg Schaeffer (1980). One wishes for an examination of works other than these well-documented ones. The title of the last contribution to the collection, "The Uses of Memory and Abuses of Fiction: Sexuality in Holocaust Film, Fiction, and Memoir" promises more than it delivers because it covers only the frequently analyzed novel *The White Hotel* by D.H. Thomas (1981) and the film *The Night Porter* by Lilian Cavani (1975). Scherr speaks of "numerous works that treat sexual relationships and eroticism as dominant features," yet does not name them. In fact, there are not many such examples. Sherri Szeman's *The Kommandant's Mistress* (1993) and *Sophie's Choice* (1979) by William Styron come to mind as literature (the latter as film in 1982), as well as Hollywood's first exploration of female sexuality and the Holocaust, Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1964). There are also Katzetnik's *The House of Dolls* (1955) and *Piepel* (1961).

Finally, in a volume like this, a bibliography would have been welcome, either after each chapter or as an overall bibliography divided by a categories (such as the ones available on the website *Women and the Holocaust*). This said, the sources mentioned in the footnotes of each contributor are extensive and comprise the available material on the subject. There are, of course, repetitions. A comprehensive section on Holocaust documentaries and fiction films is also missing. In the contemporary world of visual images, it is essential for a volume such as this to highlight this medium, here from a feminist perspective. A good example is text and filmography on Canadian Holocaust film and video in which items by or about women are indicated by an asterisk.¹ Such useful compilations help researchers, teachers, and students.

A more serious omission is a chapter on the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany. It contained women from di-

verse European countries, as well as Germans and Jews. Many of the inmates there fell victim to horrible medical experiments, such as studies of the effects of gases used in combat. Others suffered as forced laborers for the Reich war effort in abominable underground conditions. In addition, Ravensbrück had its share of female perpetrators and survivors like Gemma LaGuardia Glück and others, as mentioned in Rochelle G. Sidel's 2004 book, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, reviewed elsewhere in this Bulletin) or in *The Women's Camp: The History of the Ravensbrück Prisoners* by Kristian Ottosen, trans. Margrit Rosenberg Stenge (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1991).

Experience and Expression does not confront women's art created during the Holocaust, an important chapter that still needs addressing. For example, the varied surviving paintings, drawings, sketches—some on scraps of unlikely material—stand also as valid, visual witnesses to the gendered Holocaust experience, as Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton discuss in their *Art of the Holocaust* (York: Rutledge Press, 1981) and Joseph P. Czarnecki in his *Last Traces: The Lost Art of Auschwitz* (New York: Atheneum, 1989).

Minor quibbles are misspelled German words. However, the contributors' linguistic sensitivity is laudable since they avoid thoughtless repetition of cold and contrived Nazi vocabulary, such as "extermination" (*Vernichtung*) or Final Solution (*Endlösung*) when referring to aspects of human annihilation.

Despite minor shortcomings, *Experience and Expression* takes a giant step toward expanding the knowledge of women and the Holocaust and toward different approaches to this subject. It provides excellent studies as models for further explorations. Susan Nowak's treatment of ethical issues points to original work on women's behavior in the "Gray Zone." In her words from "In a World Shorn of Color: Towards a Feminist Theology of Holocaust Testimonies:" "The tragedy of women informing on one another, the horror of daughters abandoning their mothers, and the violence of 'privileged' female inmates against the 'lesser privileged' graphically brings home the extent of the *Shoah*'s rupture and the odious behavioral consequences that became normative" (In *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation*, Esther Fuchs, ed. New York: University Press of America, 1999). Hence, research needs to be done on women's survival chances based on nationality, education, and political or religious affiliation.

We have to continue to unearth women's voices, as Catherine A. Bernard did in the case of Anne Frank, and to reevaluate feminist interpretations that are based on essentialism and cultural feminism. The focus on exemplary female survival strategies, or glorification of the female victim, some critics argue, is playing women's behavior against that of men. We need to look instead at the effect of gender socialization. Frameworks grounded in feminist philosophy could be helpful, especially those that encompass an ethics of reciprocal care within the micro- and macrocosm of Holocaust experiences and present society. Such an inclusive feminist interpretation may one day provide equality between women's and men's Holocaust narratives.

In conclusion, this wonderful new volume should be included in any library collection, particularly in Holocaust, Feminist, and Social Studies. It makes a fine reader for a university course on women and the Holocaust. Above all, it should find its rightful place in the curriculum because it fills signifi-

cant gaps and points clearly to new directions in our comprehension of gendered Holocaust experiences.

Karin Doerr
Concordia University,
Montreal, Canada

¹See Gary Evans, “Vision and Revision” and “Annotated Filmography,” in *Afterimage/Rémanences: Evocations of the Holocaust in Contemporary Canadian Arts and Literature*, ed. Loren Lerner (Montreal: The Concordia University Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies, 2002); Filmography also available on the website *Women and the Holocaust*.

“Non-Germans” under the Third Reich: The Nazi Judicial and Administrative System in Germany and Occupied Eastern Europe, with Special Regard to Occupied Poland, 1939-1945. Diemut Majer. Transl. Peter Thomas Hill, Edward Vance Humphrey, and Brian Levin. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. 1,033 pp. Cloth \$149.95. ISBN 0-8018-6493-3.

Orwell reminds us that perversion of language and perversion of institutions go hand in hand. One doesn’t necessarily have logical precedence over the other. In his 1943 essay *Politics and the English Language*, he described language as “an instrument which we shape for our own purposes, adding that “if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.” The reciprocal deformation of language and thought is a regular feature of political discourse, by no means confined to a single era, nation, ideology, or party. In politics, language is often used to conceal, rather than reveal, meaning. Catch-phrases such as “pro-life ” “pro-choice ” and “family values” in our own public discourse are contemporary instances.

Whether or not the obfuscation of reality by language reached its historical apex in the Third Reich, that brutal régime surely brought language deformation to the level of high art. Scholars have expended much learning on the abuse of language by the National Socialists. There are lexicons and treatises on the peculiar terminology used by the Nazis to dress up their program of mastery and annihilation. Cornelia Schmitz-Berning’s *Vokabular des National-Sozialismus* (de Gruyter, Berlin: 2000) fills over 700 pages with a comprehensive listing and explanation of words and phrases as used in the Third Reich. Some terms, such as *rassenbewusst* (race-conscious), apparently a back-formation of *Rassenbewusstsein* (race-consciousness), have roots long antedating the Nazi accession to power. Others, such as *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment), a code word for execution, and the sinister *Gleichschaltung* (co-ordination) were inventions or unique usages of the Nazi régime. Victor Klemperer’s *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (“LTI”), is a scholarly study of language filtered through Nazi officialdom.

If all the old institutions and ways are not to be overthrown in a revolution – and the Germans are arguably a conservative nation, as nations go – inventiveness in language is needed. Diemut Majer’s magisterial “*Non-Germans*” under the Third Reich,

strikes the reader with the *nominal* continuity of pre-existing legal institutions, coupled with a redefinition of their content. The Third Reich did not so much abolish existing legal norms as either invest them with new content or redefine them so broadly as to deprive them of any predictable content at all. This second strategy falls under the heading of “unlimited interpretation” (*unbegrenzte Auslegung*), the title of a book by law professor Bernd Rüthers, adopted with attribution by Majer. Interpretation of the law rested ultimately on a single standard: “the National Socialist Spirit,” a category sufficiently Protean to permit judges and administrators to do essentially whatever they wanted, while leaving formal legal structures intact.

If Orwell’s pigs were “more equal” than the other animals, the National Socialist concept of “*völkisch* inequality” served the same purpose. Myth-imbued notions of Germanic superiority were not created by the National Socialists. They were exploited by them to create multiple categories of rights and obligations, defined by race. The liberal notion that all people are born with the same rights becomes a principle that everyone is, by nature, endowed with no rights at all and that the possession of legal rights is a privilege conferred by the *Volk*, as embodied by the National Socialist Party and, more particularly, by the Führer himself. Article 109 of the Weimar Constitution provided that “all Germans are equal before the law” (*Alle Deutschen sind vor dem Gesetze gleich*). It takes little imagination to conceive how “Germans” could be reconceived to identify with a restrictive definition of the *Volk*. For Majer, racial discrimination “represents only an *isolated* instance of the application of the National Socialist policy of special law” to those who were not deemed part of the *Volk*.

Majer identifies three principles as fundamental to Nazi administration and judicature: the Führer principle, the authority of the Party over the state, and the influence of race as the guiding principle in affairs of state. These ground concepts were never presented by Nazi theoreticians as a unified idea; Majer derives them inferentially from an exhaustive analysis of “the pertinent norms, standards, guidelines, judicial rulings, and official pronouncements.” As Majer traces in detail the evolution of National Socialist theory and practice in areas of civil law, criminal law, laws of citizenship, professional and labor law, and commercial and property law, the law in the Third Reich metamorphoses from the normative to the instrumental.

It is no surprise that the judicial apparatus, by nature conservative, was in frequent conflict with the bureaucracy and party leadership over decisions which adhered to the law as norm, while falling short of the Nazi vision of the law as instrument. Gradually the tension between judicial and police authority was resolved by the doctrine that all “political” crimes were the exclusive domain of the police. What was or was not deemed “political” was, of course, determined by the police. The final subordination of the judiciary to the police and the Party occurred after the appointment of Otto Thierack as Minister of Justice in 1942. Majer documents the complicity of the judiciary in its own demise, a sorry tale that would have outraged traditional German legal philosophers such as Rudolf von Ihering – sometimes unjustly cited as a progenitor of Nazi jurisprudence – whose book *Der Kampf ums Recht* (1872) was a rallying cry in the individual struggle for justice.

Legal scholars may be disappointed in the relatively scant attention Majer pays to jurists such as Carl Schmitt, who argu-

ably did play a theoretical rôle in the development of the capricious, authoritarian administration of law and legal norms in the Third Reich. Schmitt is mentioned in several places, *en passant*, but Majer attempts no systematic exposition of his jurisprudential thought or that of any other jurist. The book's endnotes, which consume 350 fine-print pages of this 1,033-page work, show that there was an ample supply of jurisprudential writing during the Third Reich. An additional fifty pages surveying the scholarly antecedents of what evolved into Nazi law would not have added significantly to the already daunting beam and tonnage of this useful work.

"*Non Germans*" under the Third Reich is a translation of Majer's earlier "*Fremdvölkische*" im Dritten Reich, published in 1982. A second, revised German edition appeared in 1993. From the preface to the present English edition and an examination of the apparatus, it is not clear that significant new scholarship postdating the 1993 German edition was included. The translation is highly readable, and the end notes are often independently interesting and hard to ignore.

Orwell's signature year has come and gone, but his cautions about the misuse of language for tyrannical ends are reinforced by Majer's superb survey of law and legal practice in the Third Reich. The book will always be timely, because the tools of language so skillfully used by the Nazis to conceal underlying reality have been used before and since for much the same purpose, and they will be employed in the future. As far removed as we are from the more odious régimes of the twentieth century, the misuse of language in the Third Reich and the perversion of the law, as documented so ably by Majer, admonish us that the eternal vigilance, which is the price of liberty, extends not only to the outright abridgement of liberty by those in power, but as well to a protective regard for our common means of communication, i.e., the language we speak. Victor Klemperer wrote, "*Gegen die Wahrheit der Sprache gibt es kein Mittel*" (there is no defense against the truth of language). Klemperer's *LTI* and Majer's "*Non-Germans*" expose the obverse of that proposition: where language is undefended, it ceases to be an instrument of truth.

Professor Majer has published several books on law and administration, with special reference to the Third Reich. She teaches in the Fachhochschule des Bundes für öffentliche Verwaltung, which has several facilities throughout Germany, and is on the law faculty of the University of Bern.

Robert D. Rachlin

People in Auschwitz, Hermann Langbein, Trans. Harry Zohn (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004). xvi + 549 pp. ISBN 0-8078-2816-5. Cloth. \$39.95.

When Hermann Langbein's *Menschen in Auschwitz* appeared in 1972 it was quickly recognized as a monumental study of the personalities and workings of the Nazi regime's most notorious concentration and extermination camp. Revised in 1995 and ably translated by the late Harry Zohn, Langbein's work has now appeared in English with a foreword by historian and Auschwitz

survivor Henry Friedlander. Readers will quickly recognize that Langbein's lengthy analysis is exceptional in several ways. Neither a historical monograph nor memoir in the conventional sense, *People in Auschwitz* bridges these genres. The author strives for the objectivity of the professional historian, but at the same time offers the immediacy and clarity of an eyewitness description, for Langbein was imprisoned in Auschwitz from August 1942 until August 1944. The work is dispassionate throughout, but nonetheless demonstrates an introspective poignancy from an author who spent most of his adult life attempting to understand Auschwitz, enliven its memory, and bring its criminals to justice.

Born in Vienna in 1912, Hermann Langbein was drawn in his youth to leftist politics, and eventually joined the Communist Party of Austria in 1933. Following the *Anschluss* in 1938, Langbein emigrated to Switzerland, and then to Paris. He then joined the ranks of the International Brigade in the fight against Franco's fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Like many veterans of the Spanish Civil War, Langbein headed home by way of France, where he was interned in a series of prisons and camps. After Germany's defeat of France in 1940, Langbein was sent to the Dachau concentration camp, and transferred to Auschwitz in 1942. Soon after his arrival, he began his work as a clerk to Dr. Eduard Wirths, chief physician of the Auschwitz SS garrison, under whom he had also served in Dachau. Transferred to Neuengamme in August 1944, Langbein escaped from an evacuation transport in April 1945 and returned to Austria. He returned as well to the Communist Party, but was expelled as a critical and dissenting voice in 1958. From 1954 until 1960 Langbein served as the secretary-general of the International Auschwitz Committee, and for several decades was active in helping to bring Auschwitz criminals to justice, especially in the context of the highly publicized Frankfurt Auschwitz trials in the 1960s. Author of several works on the history of National Socialism, the resistance, and trials of Nazi criminals, Hermann Langbein died in 1995.

As its unassuming title suggests, *People in Auschwitz* centers on the personalities and relationships among and between prisoners and captors in the enormous camp complex. The narrative is divided into four main parts: the author's introduction, lengthy analyses of the prisoners and jailers, and a concluding section entitled "Afterward." Even those readers intimately familiar with the history of Auschwitz will find many of the short chapters informative, such as those on camp jargon, the *Muselman*, music and games in the camp, sexuality, and the role of the civilian "bystander." In addition, Langbein provides detailed chapters on the power and personalities of commandants Höss and Liebehenschel, the SS garrison physician Eduard Wirths, and numerous other members of the Auschwitz SS elite and rank-and-file. Other valuable topics addressed in the course of the work include the distinctions and rivalries between "green" (criminal) and "red" (political) prisoners, the anti-Semitism of many Polish prisoners, the varied psychological responses of the inmates, organized resistance, and the changes in camp organization and conditions that corresponded to changes in leadership. The variety of themes analyzed in the course of the book emphasizes and reinforces one of Langbein's overarching claims, namely, that the experiences of registered prisoners in the camp were diverse, and that the regulations and actions of the captors often inconsistent and inscrutable. In short, as Langbein reminds us, "... in Auschwitz everything was incalculable and nothing impossible."

Among registered prisoners, Langbein was in an exceptionally good position to view the chaos and rigors of camp life. As an Austrian “Aryan” (he was, in fact, a *Mischling* according to Nazi definitions, but this remained hidden from the SS), Langbein was classified as a German, which immediately placed him in a position of relative privilege. Clerk to the SS garrison physician Wirths, Langbein enjoyed adequate food, clothing, and shelter, and was not subject to hard labor. Although he worked in the infirmary of the base camp Auschwitz I, and was therefore counted among the *Prominenz* of the base camp, Langbein was not compromised, like the block elder or *Kapo*, with a position of control or authority over other prisoners. Finally, Langbein was among the leaders of the “Combat Group Auschwitz,” an international resistance organization that worked to smuggle information in and out of the camp, aided prisoners in escape and, in general, worked in a variety of ways to improve the conditions of the camp in the interest of the inmates.

In crafting his analysis, Langbein relies on four types of sources. First, he makes extensive use of the testimonies of witnesses and defendants at postwar trials, including those at Nuremberg, Kraków, Lüneburg, Frankfurt, and the Warsaw trial of commandant Rudolf Höss. Second, he relies on published memoirs and the unpublished, archived testimonies of former prisoners. Third, the author incorporates information gleaned from post-liberation interviews with former prisoners. Fourth and not least, Langbein relies on his own personal recollections of the camp. The style and structure of the book reflects the use of sources such as these, for Langbein offers the reader neither a transparent chronological account of the camp’s history nor a history of Auschwitz based on German documents from the Nazi era. The reader may find Langbein’s account excessively anecdotal in spots or may be frustrated by the lack of documentation, but will nonetheless find his narrative gripping, his observations keen, and his generalizations cautious.

Indeed, Langbein is intent throughout on demonstrating the unsettling complexity of Auschwitz. He eschews the all-too-common monochromatic representations of life in Auschwitz that cast prisoner behavior as exclusively brutal, individualistic, and wholly lacking in a moral code. At the same time, however, his account reveals that altruism and solidarity among prisoners was usually the luxury of the privileged. The “jailers” of Auschwitz were, however, also complex, and Langbein warns against a facile “dehumanization” of the SS. Most insightful and informative are, perhaps, Langbein’s extensive analyses of members of the SS garrison, from the commandants to the lowest members of the rank-and-file. In addition to providing biographies of many of the more prominent members of the SS, the author also discusses in detail their responsibilities in the camp, their behavior towards prisoners and other members of the SS, and their postwar reflections on their experience as revealed by courtroom testimonies, memoirs, and interviews.

SS physicians are central to Langbein’s analysis. As a clerk in the Auschwitz I infirmary, he was especially well qualified to describe and evaluate the role of SS doctors in the workings of the camp, whether in “selections” of deportees and inmates for the gas chambers, in medical “experiments,” or in efforts to improve hygienic conditions and confront epidemics. Readers may be somewhat taken aback at the author’s characterization of Dr. Eduard Wirths, the chief medical officer of the Auschwitz camp. Wirths emerges as a complex personality anomalous among mem-

bers of the SS at Auschwitz. A member of the camp’s SS elite who, according to Langbein, “reluctantly served in the machinery of destruction,” Wirths was more inclined to favor “red” prisoners over “green” and appears to have cared deeply for some of the inmates under his charge. Moreover, Langbein credits Wirths with improving conditions in the camp, in effect helping to save tens of thousands of lives. Most surprising is, however, that Wirths appears to have allowed himself to be manipulated somewhat in the service of the camp’s international resistance movement. It is difficult to determine whether Langbein feels sympathy for Wirths, a measure of gratitude, pity, or a combination of the above, for the author makes clear that the SS man, in addition to his actions on behalf of prisoners, undertook medical “experiments” and regularly participated in “selections,” as his responsibilities required.

People in Auschwitz warns against the easy characterizations and black/white analyses common in much of the memoir literature, and the book is concerned primarily “with extremes in human behavior under the conditions of an extermination camp.” To be sure, Langbein devotes more space to a “description of people whose reactions differed from what was expected of them than to an account of standard reactions.” This should not, however, suggest that the work is centered exclusively on the exception rather than the rule, for its lessons are broadly applicable. “I had to learn,” the author recalls, “to avoid fine, big phrases like ‘never again.’ No matter how impressive these may sound, history since 1945 has shown that the possibility of repetitions cannot be easily excluded. For this very reason the study of interpersonal relationships in as extreme a situation as was deliberately created in Auschwitz appears to be especially important. It should serve as a warning by demonstrating what sorts of behavior patterns can be imposed on human beings.”

Jonathan Huener
University of Vermont

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through “larger-than-life photographs” in Ravensbrück’s memorial exhibit, were among the first to be gassed in Bernburg during the deliberate exterminations of early spring 1942.

Significantly, while the Jewish religion brought hope and spiritual guidance into the lives of many of these women, it was concealed and repressed by many others as a matter of survival; those with false papers identifying them as non-Jewish political or asocial prisoners feared anything that might reveal them as Jewish. Saidel strives to transmit their experiences, despite the camp’s systematic program of obliteration and the repression of their memory. And it is their remarkable feat of maintaining their humanity in spite of their devastating experiences that she chronicles with such determination.

Meaghan Emery
University of Vermont

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