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Salomea Genin: Scheindl und Salomea: von Lemberg nach Berlin

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Genin, Salomea. *Scheindl und Salomea: von Lemberg nach Berlin. Lebensbilder: Jüdischer Erinnerungen und Zeugnisse*. Ed. Wolfgang Benz. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992. 150 pp.

The author of this autobiography had previously published a contribution entitled "Wie ich in der DDR aus einer Kommunistin zu einer Jüdin wurde." It appeared in *Das Exil der kleinen Leute. Alltagserfahrungen deutscher Juden in der Emigration* (Munich, 1991, pp. 308-326) edited by Wolfgang Benz, who is also responsible for this series. Illustrated with wonderful copies of old static photographs, the present volume describes the lives of her maternal grandparents, her parents, and then finally events from her own early childhood (1932-1939) in pre-World War II Berlin. It is remarkable that she retains memories from so young an age, but it is these memories which seem to fit most closely the intention of the series.

Salomea's book is theatrical, even a bit sensationalistic, mixing isolated reflections from the present, most of them exculpatory of herself and reproachful of her mother, with events that give an overall collage effect, in which thoughts of female family members alternate, with little reference to external realities. One is actually reading here a family album, combined with a therapeutic art of healing through narration.

Despite instances of ferocious clichés and a few too many boudoir confessions, the text conveys some information about the lives of ordinary, often wretchedly impoverished, Jews during the first decades of the twentieth century. As the editor remarks in the afterword, it is remarkable that people of such slender means, without citizenship or jobs, managed to leave Germany just a few months before the outbreak of World War II. It is also remarkable that Jewish social services in Berlin were able to help support Scheindl after she divorced her husband, and also to pay for all five family members to leave the country.

At the outset, Genin dwells overlong on elements of Jewish religious observance as part of her grandfather's and mother's life in Lemberg, Galicia (Poland). There is not always a discernible reason for describing particular reminiscences. Genin attributes to her maternal grandmother, who had eight children, attitudes which seem modern in an Orthodox context, but the scenes in her small shop are revelatory, if not romanticized. Salomea recounts less than flattering behaviors of both her grandfather and her mother, leading up to Scheindl's marriage to

a Russian Jew. There is reference to the ghetto experience of Jews and to the fervor of Zionism as it affects Scheindl and her brothers, although her father opposes it. But it is precisely the intense desire of Salomea's uncles to leave Poland to assert their identity in freedom that enables her family to survive the Holocaust. Genin portrays her mother's family in black and white terms: older reactionary generation and rebellious youth. It is characteristic that female rebellion is expressed in an unsuitable marriage.

The story of Salomea's parents, which takes up the next third of the book, is less a narrative of political, cultural or social realities, than a "peep-show" which takes the reader inside both the bedroom and the tormented mind of Scheindl and, less often, of her father. Salomea is not fond of Scheindl, whom she repeatedly condemns as undemonstrative, even while portraying her as alternately self-sufficient and clinically depressed. Revelations concerning the criminal behavior of her father, who is sentenced to three years in jail as a counterfeiter and later steals five hundred marks, serve to glorify her mother's ability to support the family, but the reader is not permitted to forget her failure to support its individual members, preeminently Salomea herself, psychologically. Because Salomea is many years younger than her siblings (she reports that her mother underwent eight abortions before deciding to carry her to term), she is distanced from them to such an extent that the reader fails to get a clear impression of them, but autobiography is, after all, a subjective narrative form.

When Genin turns her attention to life in Berlin before the war, she provides sociologically imported examples of her exclusion and persecution at the hands of German children and adults. At the same time she provides more than one quite happy picture of herself with her German kindergarten teacher, her father, and one of her sisters. The most affecting example she gives of alienation from non-Jews is that of a woman abandoned with two children whom her mother finds crying in the street and befriends--a good Samaritan story--giving her food and lodging until she can get back on her feet, only to be later systematically shunned by this same woman.

After the autobiography ends rather arbitrarily with preparations for emigration to Australia when Salomea is only seven, the editor reports on the future lives of Salomea's parents, though not of all the family members. One must read the publisher's summary in order to fill out the picture of Salomea and her family and between the lines to measure her family's loss during the war.

An episodic and intensely introspective book, which does not comment on the broader societal implications of the experiences narrated here, this grey look into the early life of a poor Jewish woman cannot illustrate why societal problems like anti-Semitism occur, but it is an incomparable rendering of the "voice" of one unsettled and displaced person, robbed of security and transcendence at a crucial time in history.

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DeBruyn, Günter. *Jubelschreie, Trauergesänge. Deutsche Befindlichkeiten*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1991.

Auch Günter de Bruyns neue Essaysammlung läßt keinen Zweifel darüber bestehen: für die Literatur bedeutete die Wende keine "Stunde Null". Sie leitete keinen ästhetischen Neuanfang ein, im Gegenteil: was die meisten deutschsprachigen Texte heute zu bieten haben, fällt unter die Kategorie der Besinnung. Traditionslinien und Lebensläufe werden zurückverfolgt, alte Positionen werden erklärt, neue aber noch nicht bestimmt. Auch der Schriftsteller sehnt sich nach einem Leben nach der Wende, wobei dieser es sich offensichtlich leisten kann, sich im sozial-politischen Durcheinander der Erinnerung zu widmen. Wo sonst zum Beispiel soziale Errungenschaften in Ostdeutschland gesamtdeutscher Zukunftsvisionen weichen sollen, mag einem die kulturelle Transformation wie ein Luxus vorkommen. 1992 trat Günter de Bruyn mit seiner Autobiographie *Zwischenbilanz* in die Zunft tagebuch- und memoirenschreibender Vergangenheitsbewältiger ein. Ein Jahr vorher legte er mit seinem Essayband ebenfalls eine Zwischenbilanz vor: die Beiträge stehen im Zeichen der Wende und nehmen größtenteils Bezug auf vergangene Zeiten. Sein Kredo lautet: "Soll die deutsche Einheit, die in der wirtschaftlichen Sphäre so düster begann, in der intellektuellen besser gelingen, muß die vergangene deutsche Trennung kritisch analysiert werden, damit die Vergangenheitsbewältigung nicht wieder einer nächsten Generation überlassen bleibt. Nicht Harmonie ist das Ziel, sondern Klarheit." Klarheit möchte de Bruyn in zwei Zyklen schaffen, in denen er sich "Zur Zeit" und "Zur Literatur" äußert.

Der literaturkritische Teil enthält Beiträge zu den Vorbildern: Theodor Fontane, Thomas Mann, Heinrich Böll und Martin Walser. Sie sind die zeitlosen Begleiter der mittlerweile dreißigjährigen Schriftstellerkarriere von Günter de Bruyn. Die Suche nach den Wahlverwandtschaften erschöpft sich größtenteils in Lobreden. Allenfalls geben die Anekdoten zum "Lehrer-Schüler-Verhältnis" Neues her. So etwa in der "Dankrede zum Heinrich-Böll-Preis", in der der "Schüler" von der ersten Begegnung mit seinem "Lehrer" in der Evangelischen Akademie Berlin-Brandenburg kundtut. Während der ersten öffentlichen Lesung Bölls in der DDR im Jahre 1969 geriet de Bruyn beim Formulieren einer Frage ins Stottern, wo er doch als Kenner und Liebhaber von Bölls Werken von den Kulturfunktionären den Auftrag erhielt, die Diskussion zu eröffnen. Die Erinnerung an diese -