

Miriam Intrator. Avenues of Intellectual Resistance in the Ghetto Theresienstadt: Escape Through the Ghetto Central Library, Reading, Storytelling and Lecturing. A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 2003. 97 pages. Advisor: David Carr

The Ghetto Theresienstadt served as a façade behind which the Nazis attempted to hide the atrocities they were committing in other ghettos and concentration camps throughout Europe. As a result of its unusual nature, the Nazis sanctioned certain cultural and intellectual activities in the camp. Consequently, there remains a considerable record of the interior lives and personal perspectives of Theresienstadt inmates. Through a close examination of thirty-one Theresienstadt memoirs, diaries and histories, this paper explores the concept of intellectual resistance as a result of participation in some of the camp's intellectual activities - the library, books, reading, storytelling and lecturing. These activities provided prisoners with a means of keeping their minds and imaginations active and alive, allowing them to temporarily escape from the horror surrounding them, and to maintain hope and strength that would help them to survive. As of yet, no single work in English focuses on this topic. This paper strives to fill that void and to encourage librarians to consider the power of literacy and the significance of their responsibilities, particularly in times of terror or war.

Headings:

Theresienstadt (Concentration camp)

Theresienstadt (Concentration camp) – Literary Collections

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945) – Czechoslovakia – Personal Narratives

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945) – Literary Collections

World War, 1939-1945 – Jewish Resistance

**AVENUES OF INTELLECTUAL RESISTANCE IN THE GHETTO
THERESIENSTADT: ESCAPE THROUGH THE GHETTO
CENTRAL LIBRARY, READING, STORYTELLING AND
LECTURING**

**by
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**A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science**

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April, 2003

Approved by:

Advisor

Acknowledgements

I wish to offer my thanks to the following people for the research assistance, information, support and editing suggestions that they provided me with:

Anita Tarsi, Director of the Terezín Association, Beit Theresienstadt, who readily sent me unpublished materials that I would not otherwise have had access to.

Andrea Braunová, Hebraist and Librarian at the Jewish Museum of Prague Library, who met with me and provided me with materials on the Theresienstadt Library when I was visiting Prague and for continuing to provide me with information over email.

Sarah P. Crouch, Reference Librarian at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, who helped me begin my search for memoirs and diaries.

Phil Smith, who translated from German into English documents that have hitherto yet to be translated and which I felt I could not do without.

Ruth Litwin, Clare Plaut, Eli Lawental, and Joan and Henry Stone, who supported my idea and were willing to help me conduct my research.

Jennifer Sullivan, for reading my first draft and coming up with so many helpful suggestions.

My wonderful family, Edmond, Eleanor, and Jessica Intrator, for their constant support and love, and for their unmatched proofreading abilities!

My Master's Paper advisor Dr. David Carr, who has consistently supported and encouraged me, and allowed me to find ways of incorporating my deep interest in Holocaust research and my passion for museums into the SILS program.

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Introduction

The enormity and severity of the Holocaust is virtually incomprehensible to those of us who did not experience its horrors. No matter how many books we read, memorials we visit, or survivors we speak with, the experience is not one that can be understood, not even through an immersion in its resulting words and images. As a person who was not born until thirty years after the end of World War II, I understand that choosing to study and write about the Holocaust involves taking a risk that honest intentions may be misdirected, misplaced or misinterpreted. For this reason, I wish to state my intentions from the beginning. The aim of this research is to examine particular elements of the Holocaust, specifically from Theresienstadt, as a student of libraries, books, reading and storytelling at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The paper will bring together and discuss aspects of Theresienstadt in order to reinforce an already familiar concept, that of the power and strength of the written and spoken word.

Prisoners in ghettos and concentration camps took advantage of any means possible to avert and resist Nazi attempts to humiliate and dehumanize them.

Before their final ordeal, the Jews everywhere – in ghettos, in camps, in hiding – responded even in the extremity of their suffering with a stubborn determination to outlast their oppressors, with a grim will to live to survive. Whenever they had the least opportunity, they tried to salvage something of their familiar world, to re-create their communal institutions, to devise means of mutual aid and construct islands of culture and civilization that would comfort and hearten them, that would enable them to retain their humanity in a world gone savage. There were makeshift

schools for children and lectures for adults, religious services and religious study groups, books and libraries, and sometimes even theater and music. At times, the Germans permitted these activities, but more often the Jews risked their very lives to carry on clandestinely, turning the pursuit of culture into an underground enterprise, a demonstration of political defiance.¹

Visiting a library, reading books, sharing stories and attending lectures had significant and positive effects on many of the inhabitants of Theresienstadt. Many scholars consider the cultural activities that took place in the ghettos and concentration camps to be manifestations of defiance and resistance, usually referred to as intellectual or spiritual resistance. At the 1968 Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance, Nachman Blumenthal urged that

The historian is therefore called upon to search for new sources, and he may encounter new types of resistance and heroism of which we have no inkling today. We have to talk with persons who lived through the Holocaust, question them, and urge them to tell their experiences. I am certain that even those who have already done so can provide much more information: not only details which they previously did not recall, but also items which are so well known to them and so unforgettable that it did not occur to them to discuss them.²

While the concept of intellectual resistance through books and storytelling is not new, it has yet to be a decisive focus of Holocaust research (or has yet to be conducted in or translated into English). I believe these activities may represent precisely the type of “resistance and heroism of which we have no inkling today,” that Blumenthal spoke of in 1968.

Countless stories can be found from the body of Holocaust personal narratives that seriously undermine the notion that armed resistance is the only true, admirable or heroic form of resistance. This paper seeks to bring to light certain of these stories, by a thorough examination of Theresienstadt diaries, memoirs and histories. The goal of this

research is to gain a better understanding of the role that cultural institutions and intellectual activities -- libraries, books, reading, storytelling and lecturing -- played in providing avenues of resistance in the ghettos and concentration camps. For the purposes of this paper, the selected themes will be examined in thirty-one personal and historical records of the four years that Theresienstadt functioned as a concentration camp. These themes will be referred to as “intellectual activities.” No elitist or exclusionary connotation is intended by the word “intellectual.” This phrase simply best captures the shared nature of the selected activities and separates them from various others which may be suggested or assumed by the use of the broader phrase, “cultural activities,” including education, art, and religious activities. These were beyond the scope of this paper. For the same reason, the phrase “intellectual resistance” will be used over “spiritual resistance.”

The selected activities represent only a portion of the manifestations of cultural and intellectual life that flourished in the camp. Art, music, theater, writing, religious observance, education and sports also thrived, but will not be addressed in any detail here. From the end of 1942 until the end of the war, all sanctioned cultural activities in Theresienstadt took place under the Department for Leisure Activities (*Freizeitgestaltung*).³ For comparative, explanatory and clarification purposes, examples of activities taken from other contexts will be mentioned throughout. This paper does not attempt to provide a detailed or complete history of Theresienstadt, its conditions or its inhabitants, although all those topics will be touched on as necessary.

Terezín – Theresienstadt

The fortress town of Terezín is situated about 63 km from Prague in what is now the Czech Republic. Terezín was constructed in 1780 by the Austrian Emperor Joseph II, who named the town for his mother, the Empress Maria Theresa.⁴ The fortress was very carefully designed and was built in two sections, one on each side of the confluence of the Ohre (Eger) and the Labe (Elbe) Rivers. On one side is the town itself, originally known as the Big or Main Fortress. On the other side is the Small Fortress, which was used as a prison. In 1882, Terezín was abolished as a fortress and became a garrison town, although the Small Fortress continued to serve as a prison. Industry never flourished and the population of Terezín always remained quite small. At the beginning of World War II, its population was about 6,000.⁵

Early in 1941, Nazi officials began to work with Jewish leaders in Prague, encouraging them to choose a location for a ghetto for the Czech Jews. The Jews were eager to aid in this endeavor because they believed that a ghetto would save them from deportation to Poland, a fate they already realized should be avoided at all costs, although most may not have known exactly why. Czech Jews had historically been relatively well assimilated, particularly in Prague, and they hoped to remain in Czechoslovakia. Contrary to what occurred in most other large cities, the Nazis refused to allow the Jewish ghetto to be in Prague itself; the Jews had to find another location. In the end, it was the Nazis who decided where the ghetto would be: in the fortress town of Terezín. In 1941, the Nazis began the transformation of Terezín into the Ghetto Theresienstadt. The first group of Jews from Prague arrived in late November, 1941.⁶ In this paper, the Czech name, Terezín, will be used to refer to the town before and after World War II; the German

name, Theresienstadt, will be used when referring to the town during its incarnation as a Nazi ghetto.

Despite the word “ghetto” in its title, many do not consider Theresienstadt to fit that category because the ghetto subsumed the entire town rather than being “crammed into the oldest and most dilapidated part of town.”⁷ Ordinarily, a ghetto was a section of a town or city that had been isolated and separated from the rest of the town or city, usually by walls the ghetto inhabitants were forced to build. Since Terezín had originally been built as a fortress, the walls were already existent and the prison already built. “The town was encircled by a double layer of embankments, each several yards thick and containing dark, dank chambers (casements).”⁸ Terezín was designed to be easily controlled by military troops. It contained barracks and a small number of wide roads that could easily be patrolled by a small number of soldiers. As a fortress, the primary intent of the design was to keep enemies out. During the Holocaust, the structure made Terezín an ideal location in which the Nazis could imprison people, keeping them in, instead of out.

Rather than a ghetto, Theresienstadt was a concentration camp that served two main purposes for the Nazis. First, it was to be presented to the rest of the world as a “model ghetto,”⁹ (*Paradeisghetto*),¹⁰ which would demonstrate how well the Nazis were treating the Jews, should anyone ask. Second, it was to serve as a transfer point to the “East,”¹¹ mainly to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka, although some transports ended up at various other concentration and extermination camps as well. In June of 1942, the Nazis forced all the Czech inhabitants of Terezín to abandon their homes and the town.¹² At this point, the Nazis took Terezín over completely and turned the entire town into a concentration camp. It remained so until its liberation by the Russians on May 5, 1945.¹³

Theresienstadt was a façade purposefully created by the Nazis in order to have a model to show the world. In contrast to the other concentration camps, in Theresienstadt the Nazis attempted to maintain the illusion of a normal, functioning town. A Council of Elders made up of older, well-known Jews was appointed to run the camp and carry out the wishes and orders of the Nazis. There was a bank which controlled the worthless ghetto currency, the Ghetto *Kronen* (crown), a café where one could only order a coffee substitute, and shops that sold nothing of any use. Theresienstadt was created in order to deceive. After a few strategic days of “embellishment” and “beautification,” the Nazis proved the success of their “model camp” upon the visit of three Red Cross representatives on June 23, 1944, who left relatively pleased and satisfied at the conditions, successfully deluded by the façade. However, the prisoners were by no means free, in control, well treated, healthy or safe from death. In 1945, Himmler was quoted attempting to defend Theresienstadt to the World Jewish Congress: “Terezín is not a camp in the ordinary sense of the word, but a town inhabited by Jews and governed by them and in which every manner of work is to be done. This type of camp was designed by me and my friend Heydrich and so we intended all camps to be.”¹⁴ On the surface, his description of Theresienstadt is accurate, but the terrible truth lived close below the superficiality of Himmler’s words.

The unique and paradoxical nature of Theresienstadt as compared with other ghettos and concentration camps led to it being referred to as a “hoax,”¹⁵ the “anteroom to hell,”¹⁶ the “theater of the absurd,”¹⁷ a “macabre absurdity,”¹⁸ a “town of pretence,”¹⁹ a “sinister scheme,” a “false front,” and “propaganda,” created to “hoodwink,”²⁰ the list goes on and on. A Dutch survivor compared the circumstances in Theresienstadt to

Dante's *Inferno*, an analogy that can be found throughout Theresienstadt literature. "In Theresienstadt squalor and misery had to be depicted as idyllic. It was all a campaign of lies. The whole camp was a scenario such as Dante must have envisaged when writing his *Inferno*."²¹

Another motivation behind the creation of Theresienstadt was the Nazis' concern that the disappearance of famous and renowned people would cause some international questioning. This is how Theresienstadt came to be known as the "privileged camp."²² It was here that the Nazis "sent many of the wealthy and prominent Jews from throughout the Reich. Many residents were famous artists, writers, musicians and scholars."²³ One survivor believed, "It was feared that some were illustrious enough to perhaps warrant some curious inquiries from abroad as to their whereabouts. This fear turned out to be totally unfounded; nobody questioned the Germans about the disappearance of so many Jewish elites."²⁴ However, the disappearance of Rabbi Leo Baeck was apparently a great source of concern throughout the Jewish world as he was such a well-known figure in Reform Judaism. Ironically, this concern dissipated when word got out that Baeck was "safe" in Theresienstadt.²⁵ As the Nazis considered it to be prudent to keep these elite citizens alive, (less so as the war went on), the model camp was the ideal place in which to imprison them. Imprisoning so many outstanding people in such a small space greatly enhanced the cultural and educational possibilities within the camp.

Half Jews, "Children of a mixed marriage in which two grandparents were Jewish,"²⁶ made up another large portion of the Theresienstadt population. These people, many of them children, often had one parent who was Aryan, and one parent who was Jewish. These families were torn apart as those with Jewish blood were sent to camps

while their non-Jewish relatives were not. A large number of these individuals had not been raised Jewish and had a very difficult time fitting into the camp or even understanding what was happening to them as they did not have the cultural or religious context to connect them to the Jews. On December 31, 1944, 3,112 out of 11,474 prisoners were non-Jews.²⁷ Another source says that one eighth of the prisoners in Theresienstadt were non-Jews, and about one third of that number considered themselves to be completely without religion.²⁸ For a time, those with Aryan blood were not killed immediately so as not to raise concerns with their Aryan parents who were free. Ultimately however, having Aryan blood or having been raised a Christian or Catholic did not help save people in those categories.

Literature Review

Numerous works have been written on the Holocaust, the concentration camps, on all aspects of the tragedy and aftermath of World War II. Many Holocaust survivors have written memoirs, published their diaries, or produced other documentation of their experiences during this period. The Holocaust has been studied, researched and deconstructed from virtually every angle imaginable. Research began soon after the end of World War II and continues, showing no signs of abating, to this day.

Several general histories of Theresienstadt were indispensable in the research process for this paper: *Ghetto Theresienstadt* by Zdenek Lederer, *Terezín*, edited by František Ehrmann and *Hitler's Gift: The Story of Theresienstadt*, by George E. Berkley. These works provide detailed information about the creation and governing of Theresienstadt, the realities of day-to-day life, and the numbers and statistics, which speak for themselves, as to the reality of this "model camp."

Five websites provided significant information for my research for this paper: the Terezín Memorial (<http://www.pamatnik-terezin.cz>) in Terezín; the Beit Theresienstadt Institute (<http://www.bterezin.org.il/indexie.html>) in Israel; the Terezín Initiative Institute (<http://www.terezinstudies.cz/eng/main>) in Prague; the Holocaust Memorial Center (<http://www.holocaustcenter.org>) in West Bloomfield, Michigan; and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (<http://www.ushmm.org>) in Washington, D.C.

Much of the published literature about Theresienstadt tends to focus on the extraordinary artistic and musical achievements (those that have survived or that are known about) of the prisoners in the camp. Several articles included in books on Theresienstadt, ghettos or the Holocaust in general, discuss the intellectual activities in

Theresienstadt as well as in other camps and ghettos. The most comprehensive work on this topic is David Shavit's *Hunger for the Printed Word: Books and Libraries in the Jewish Ghettos of Nazi-Occupied Europe*. It includes a chapter on Theresienstadt and appears to be the only book in English solely devoted to this subject. In his introduction, Shavit states that "few people have researched this 'unusual aspect of Nazi Germany': the use of books and libraries in ghettos."²⁹ Other books on this topic exist in German and possibly in Czech as well, although they have yet to be translated into English. Only works that are available in English were read for this paper, the majority of which were translated into English from multiple other languages. British spellings or awkward grammatical structures were retained for authenticity.

The literature on Jewish resistance, including discussions on intellectual and spiritual resistance, is somewhat more abundant. Some of these works overlap with those on art, music and theater in Theresienstadt as well as in other ghettos and concentration camps, such as *Spiritual Resistance: Art from Concentration Camps*, edited by Miriam Novitch, and *Art, Music and Education as Strategies for Survival: 1941-1945 Theresienstadt*, from the 2000 Symposium of the same title. Discussions of resistance are also present in some of the major works of Holocaust literature including, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* by Lucy S. Dawidowicz, and *The Destruction of the European Jews*, the three volume history by Raul Hilberg.

The largest ghettos in Eastern Europe, such as those in Warsaw, Vilna and Theresienstadt, all had libraries, librarians, and even archivists. Some of these "institutions" were permitted to exist by the Nazis; others were entirely clandestine operations, but both practiced, to varying degrees, illegal acts. "In nearly all the ghettos,

the Jews conspired against the Germans to provide themselves with arts, letters and society.”³⁰ Possessing books, reading, studying and praying were all typically banned activities. Choosing to pursue them nonetheless, as many did, constituted an intellectual form of resistance and an avenue of escape. Meir Dworzecki describes these as part of what he calls “the stand” taken against the Nazis:

In recent years the term ‘stand’ has become common in the Holocaust literature. This concept encompasses more facets than such terms as rebellion, revolt and resistance, and embraces active Jewish resistance (Underground, ghetto warfare, partisan activity, fighting in the ranks of regular armies, etc.), as well as resistance which was more of a psychological, moral, spiritual and cultural nature...³¹

There is no single definition delineating what actions count as resistance and which do not. There has been much discussion about whether or not this idea of intellectual or spiritual rebellion can be included.³² This was the topic of discussion at the “Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance,” which took place April 7 – 11, 1968, in Jerusalem. The proceedings of this conference were published in a book edited by Meir Grubsztein, entitled, *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust*. Several definitions of forms of resistance were offered by conference participants and debated by others; these discussions in their entirety are reproduced in the book. Nachman Blumental and Sara Neshamit offered two of the most inclusive definitions, respectively:

By ‘resistance’ I mean not only physical acts, but also the spiritual and moral resistance which Jews displayed under Nazi occupation.³³

We make another kind of distinction: (1) All forms of civil resistance, including: economic resistance in its various forms, such as smuggling food and others; spiritual resistance, such as cultural and artistic creativity, educational activity, and so on; mutual assistance of all kinds – in short, the numerous activities in which the general population participated. (2) Armed resistance.³⁴

In the latter definition, I believe that armed resistance is listed second purposefully. When attempting to define resistance, weapons-gathering and physical fighting may be what first come to mind, but the reality during the Holocaust was that very few Jews actually had access to weapons. “You either have arms or you do not; for the most part, the Jews did not.”³⁵ Generally, armed resistance was simply not even a contemplated option although some truly awe-inspiring and heroic examples of armed resistance during the Holocaust do exist.

How could such a broken group of people revolt, when they were so thoroughly isolated from the rest of the population and from weapons? It was necessary to resist internally, to escape to a place where there was no possibility of persecution, to ideas, desires and hopes, to retreat from the unfavourable outer world and enclose oneself in the barriers of recollections.³⁶

The Holocaust Learning Center website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum describes spiritual resistance as:

Attempts by individuals to maintain their humanity, personal integrity, dignity, and sense of civilization in the face of Nazi attempts to dehumanize and degrade them. Most generally, spiritual resistance may refer to the refusal to have one’s spirit broken in the midst of the most horrible degradation. Cultural and educational activities, maintenance of community documentation, and clandestine religious observances are three examples of spiritual resistance.³⁷

Clearly, many scholars recognize the validity of intellectual resistance. Certainly those who were imprisoned in ghettos and concentration camps and were exposed to cultural activities realized the value that was added to their lives. “People rushed to these activities right after work, as if life depended on them, and in a way perhaps it did. This was the only way available to forget the misery of the camp.”³⁸

World War II and the Nazi formation of Jewish ghettos in Eastern European cities created a situation of “unfreedom,”³⁹ as well as a desperate need for avenues of escape,

comprehension, identification and resistance. It may seem incredible that even during times of unthinkable misery and fear such as existed during the ghettos and concentration camps during World War II, some Jews were doing everything in their power to continue reading and learning. However, they viewed these activities as a crucial means of maintaining a connection with the lives they had known before the horror began, giving them strength and hope.

To this end, during the Holocaust, there were Jews who were documenting these intellectual activities. Emanuel Ringelblum, the archivist in the Warsaw ghetto, is perhaps the best-known example of someone who advocated and documented spiritual and intellectual resistance. Were it not for his archiving and recording efforts, not nearly as much would be known today about the details of daily life in the Warsaw ghetto. He asked a question which librarians are always asking, “What are people reading?” His question planted the seed for the writing of this paper.

What are people reading? This is a subject of general interest; after the war, it will intrigue the world. What, the world will ask, did people think of on Musa Dagh or in the Warsaw Ghetto – people who knew for a certainty that death would no more skip them than it had over the other large Jewish settlements and the small towns. Let it be said that though we have been sentenced to death and know it, we have not lost our human features; our minds are as active as they were before the war.⁴⁰

Contrary to what Ringelblum may have hoped and expected, what ghetto inhabitants were reading does not seem to have attracted the interest of researchers nearly as much as many other facets of life during World War II. This is demonstrated by the paucity of discussion and publication on this topic in English, with the exception of Shavit’s book. I believe that what ghetto inhabitants were reading may be integral to further our understanding of the potency of the written word, the human need to keep the

mind healthy and active, and the role of cultural institutions to do everything within their means to continue to serve the public in whatever capacity possible, even during times of terror.

Victor Nell writes that “Among the mysteries of reading, the greatest is certainly its power to absorb the reader completely, and effortlessly and, on occasion, to change his or her state of consciousness through entrancement.”⁴¹ Just as reading can cause our current surroundings to disappear completely, so can reading cause the passage of time to seem to speed up or slow down. Adjectives used to describe the reading experience such as narcotic, entrancing, transporting and magical, all illustrate the enormous power of the word. Books offer a place of refuge and help us to cope, at least temporarily, with a painful, frightening, or devastating reality. They can comfort, distract and allay fears. It is no wonder that so many ghetto inhabitants were literally desperate for books and, often, for particular titles or certain types of books.

The concept of turning to books to fill a need or an emptiness is thoroughly documented by psychologists, bibliotherapists, librarians, and book lovers themselves who recognize the ways in which the books they read help them, in one way or another, to live their lives well, to be better individuals, or to endure. One definition of bibliotherapy is “an activity which utilizes the strength of literature for the purposes of understanding, insight, and self-growth.”⁴² Whether people experiencing the Holocaust were conscious of the psychological aspects of their choice of reading materials or not, looking back, it appears that when there was a choice to be had, they chose very carefully. Thoughtfully selecting reading materials by taking into consideration the

specific details of your current frame of mind and circumstances is considered to be an aspect of bibliotherapy known as “directed reading.”⁴³

For Jews facing illness, starvation, the “East” and death, being able to identify with others who had undergone similar experiences allowed them to feel a certain level of comfort even when this identification seemed to presage their fate. “Reading was not only narcotic and escape,” Lucy Dawidowicz wrote, “but also a discipline of mind, an attempt to retain the habits of a civilized existence. Reading about past wars and catastrophes involving other peoples and nations universalized the Jewish experience and transcended the misery within the ghetto walls.”⁴⁴

Such habits of civilized existence may be seen, in the words of Joseph Gold, as the life stories which are created as people move along their life paths.

When individuals, couples or families encounter problems that seem insuperable we must think of them as having reached a point in the composition of a life story that makes continuity of composition difficult or impossible.⁴⁵

The life story is like this path, and when it is blocked by grief or loss, unforeseen events such as war, job loss, earthquake or divorce, it may feel to the sufferer that the path or story cannot be continued or recovered.⁴⁶

However, psychologists, therapists, teachers and librarians have all learned that literature can be used as a catalyst to help a person get their life story back in motion, picking up the thread from where it seemed to leave off. This is how literature can be “useful.”⁴⁷

Ending the life story was precisely the goal of the Nazis. It was up to the Jews to discover ways in which they could secretly, perhaps incompletely or haltingly, continue writing their narratives, their stories, and their histories. While giving a sermon during a Theresienstadt wedding ceremony, Rabbi Feder said, “We do the work that we have to do, but in our free time we belong to ourselves and try to uplift our thoughts. We read

beautiful books and learn foreign language. We attend interesting and educational lectures that are being organized here...”⁴⁸

Storytelling can have similar effects on people and goes back much further in history than does the written word. The brochure for the upcoming 2003 National Storytelling Conference states that “stories mend, heal and foster joy. And we need those gifts more than ever as we face the issues of today – violence, terrorism, racism, lack of connection among people and nations.”⁴⁹ Jews during the Holocaust needed stories for exactly the same reasons.

A library is considered by many to be a haven, a refuge, a calm, quiet and peaceful place. A library holds the answers, or a means of finding the answers, to the myriad inquiries that are brought there. It offers a quiet space for reading and reflecting, where the silence is broken only by the rustling of a page being turned, a pencil scratching on paper or the occasional coughing of a reader. A library is structured to foster use, learning and understanding. It is an institution that someone seeking information, knowledge, insight, refuge, and any combination of these, may choose to visit. In times of war and strife, libraries, along with other cultural institutions, often increase in importance and use as the need for what they offer grows. This was demonstrated recently in the United States, after September 11, 2001, when museums and libraries noted an increase in use.⁵⁰ The American Library Association (ALA) recognized this same phenomenon two generations ago, and in December of 1939, published “Libraries and the War in Europe” a statement encouraging libraries and librarians not to neglect their missions, purposes or users during the war. Here is the first paragraph:

The social and intellectual unrest growing out of the present world situation may lead to confusion and hopelessness; or it may lead to

something of a renaissance of critical inquiry and constructive thinking. Whether the result will be the one or the other will depend in no small measure on the ability of libraries and other agencies of enlightenment to supply the facts and materials needed by people for answering their questions.⁵¹

This statement was addressed to American libraries and librarians, but the message would have been just as relevant in Europe at the time. (The full text of this statement, still useful today, can be viewed in Appendix A).

The word “escape” appears over and over throughout all of the literature related to this topic. People who are somehow trapped or imprisoned in situations from which, for one reason or another, they cannot physically free themselves, are in dire need of other methods of escape: emotional and intellectual. The following reflection was written about reading during the communist period in Poland. “Reading became a refuge; great cultural traditions protected the reader in spiritual terms against everyday violence in public life.”⁵² The respite, inspiration and distraction that these types of cultural institutions and intellectual activities provide, can in turn give the partakers added strength, hope and courage, ultimately contributing to their ability to resist, endure and survive.

The significance of the written word and its strong associations with cultural identity and history has long been realized and often exploited or used in order to harm or even destroy people. This explains the innumerable accounts of libraries and archives destroyed as acts of cultural devastation. Jana Renée Friesová wrote in her Theresienstadt memoir, “Even the Germans knew what powers of resistance resided in art.”⁵³ The sentences she wrote surrounding this statement leave no doubt that she is speaking specifically of books. There is perhaps no quicker way to defeat and demoralize people

than by erasing their cultural achievements, their history and thus their entire identity. In Theresienstadt, the Nazis walked a thin line between empowering and strengthening the Jews by allowing them certain privileges, such as the library, while depriving them of basic necessities, like food, fresh water and proper clothing, so that in the end, they would be too weak and ill to revolt.

Methodology

Many questions framed the basis for this research: Did people in the ghettos and concentration camps of World War II read? If so, what did they read? What reading materials were available to them, and, if they had a choice of materials, what did they choose to read, and why? What effects, if any, did reading have on them and their circumstances? What risks were they taking by choosing to read? Did they tell stories? Who told stories and what kinds of stories did they tell? How did libraries come to exist in the ghettos? Where did their collections come from? What policies or structures did they follow? What other intellectual activities were taking place in ghettos and concentration camps during the Holocaust? The questions listed above are general and could be applied to any or all of the ghettos and concentration camps, but for the purposes of this paper, the responses were sought in the records and documents related to Theresienstadt.

Multiple publications exist on theater, music, art, and education in Theresienstadt; as yet no book has been published solely on the library, reading, storytelling or lecturing. One reason for this could be a lack of evidence. For example, artifacts have been found demonstrating the existence of other cultural activities: posters were made announcing musical and theatrical events, musical scores were written, and art was created. As a function of the camp, library activities were relatively well documented, and some of the results survived the Holocaust, even if their creators often did not. Some of these surviving materials were hidden in Theresienstadt and uncovered after the war; others were smuggled out of the camp and kept, or were passed on to another person for safekeeping. While countless unique creations were lost or destroyed, those that did

survive now tell their individual stories. On the other hand, unless prisoners documented what they read, stories they told or heard, or lectures they offered or attended, these activities generally left no physical evidence of ever having occurred. The only physical traces that remain of these particular activities are a few posters advertising lectures that have been recovered, in addition to occasional survivor references.

There may be a second explanation for the few references to books and the usually fleeting mentions of the library throughout Theresienstadt literature. Several sources suggest that it is likely that the existence of the library may have contributed to the spread of the many diseases that infected, incapacitated, and ultimately killed the majority of Theresienstadt inhabitants who died while living in the camp.⁵⁴ An infected person would read a book and either pass it on to someone else or return it to the library. As there was no decontamination process available, whoever next came into contact with the book would have an increased chance of being exposed to disease. The fact that, relatively speaking, the staff of the ghetto library had a higher rate of illness and subsequent death from communicable diseases, as compared with others working in various workshops and offices, supports this argument. “The books were heavily used, and it is speculated that they, unfortunately, contributed to the spread of skin diseases, jaundice, scarlet fever, and lung and intestinal diseases; this is suggested by the higher-than-average sickness rate among the library staff.”⁵⁵

Despite this deeply painful reality, the fact remains that there was a large and active library in Theresienstadt. How was it organized? Who worked in it? Who used it? What types of books were in it? Where did they come from? What became of them after the war? What was the significance of the library in the lives of the prisoners, both those

who worked in the library and those who took advantage of its presence? What power did the library give to prisoners? What risks did the librarians, library staff and library users take? What motivation did the Nazis have to allow for a ghetto library? How did the Nazis use the library to their advantage? How did they fail? How did the prisoners use the library to their advantage?

In order to research this topic, I carefully considered these questions as I read thirty-one diaries, memoirs, and histories written in and about Theresienstadt. In order to find these books, I searched the library catalogs at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as the electronic database WorldCat, using the keywords “Terezín” and “Theresienstadt.” I also consulted the Terezín Bibliography offered on the website of the Holocaust Memorial Center.⁵⁶ Based on the results of these searches, I compiled a list of about forty books, mainly memoirs, about Theresienstadt. I then read the thirty-one I was able to obtain either at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill or through InterLibrary Loan. I combed these records for references to the library, books, reading, stories and lectures. Any mention of a book, of reading alone, out loud or with others, the existence of the library, telling or listening to stories, attending or giving lectures were all noted and counted. Books containing reproductions of art created in Theresienstadt were also searched for images of people reading, in the library, at lectures, or otherwise engaged in similar intellectual activities. Selected quotations and images taken from these thirty-one accounts can be found throughout this paper. Their inclusion offers literary and visual evidence of the historical record and serves to contextualize my text. (For a list of documents consulted, please see Tables I, II, and III).

In addition, I was provided with unpublished documents of and about the Theresienstadt library from the Beit Theresienstadt Institute in Israel. Their support and literary contributions were integral to my research. The Beit Theresienstadt Institute and the Terezín Memorial together hold the majority of the surviving Theresienstadt artifacts and house the major research facilities about the camp. Further documentation about the library came from the book *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (*The Leader Gives the Jews a City*), a book written by Käthe Starke, who worked in the Theresienstadt library, which has not yet been translated into English.⁵⁷

Table I

Theresienstadt Memoirs/Diaries	Author	References to the library, books, reading, storytelling or lectures
<i>Fortress of my Youth: Memoir of a Terezín Survivor</i>	Jana Renée Friesová	5-10
<i>We're Alive and Life Goes On: A Theresienstadt Diary</i>	Eva Roubíčková	15-20
<i>My Lucky Star</i>	Zdenka Fantlová	1-5
<i>Theresienstadt: Survival in Hell</i>	Mélanie Oppenheim	5-10
<i>Theresienstadt: The Town the Nazis Gave to the Jews</i>	Vera Schiff	5-10
<i>My Years in Theresienstadt: How One Woman Survived the Holocaust</i>	Gerty Spies	>20
<i>In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezín</i>	Cara de Silva, Editor	1-5
<i>No Time to Die: A Holocaust Survivor's Story</i>	Karl-Georg Roessler	1-5
<i>Theresienstadt: Hitler's Gift to the Jews</i>	Norbert Troller	10-15
<i>Between Two Worlds: Autobiography of a Child Survivor of the Holocaust</i>	R. Gabriele S. Silten	1-5
<i>The Terezín Diary of Gonda Redlich</i>	Saul S. Friedman, Editor	>20
<i>Fragments of Memory: From Kolin to Jerusalem</i>	Hana Greenfield	0
<i>Two Concentration Camps: Westerbork and</i>	Gabriele Silten	0

<i>Theresienstadt</i>		
<i>We Are Children Just the Same: Vedem, the Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezín</i>	Marie Rút Křížková, Kurt Jiří Kotouč, and Zdeněk Ornest, Editors	>20
<i>Terezín: Recollections of a Survivor</i>	Nina Z. Ebb	5-10
<i>Der Fürher schenkt den Juden eine Stadt: Bilder Impressionen Reportagen Dokumente</i>	Käthe Starke	>20
<i>Women of Theresienstadt</i>	Ruth Schwertfeger	10-15
<i>Terezín</i>	František Ehrmann, Editor	>20
<i>Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the Children of Terezín</i>	Susan Goldman Rubin	1-5
<i>I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezín Concentration Camp 1942-1945</i>	Hana Volavková and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum	1-5

Table II

Theresienstadt Art Books	Author	References and Images of the library, books, reading, storytelling or lectures
<i>Witness in the Anteroom to Hell: the Theresienstadt Drawings of Paul Schwarz and Leo Löwit</i>	Helen Light	1-5
<i>Terezín in the Drawings of the Prisoners, 1941-1945</i>	Markéta Petrášová and Arno Pařík	1-5
<i>Seeing Through Paradise: Artists and the Terezín Concentration Camp</i>	Massachusetts College of Art	1-5
<i>Karel Fleischmann: Life and Work</i>	Markéta Petrášová and Jarmila Kochová	0
<i>Terezín, 1942-1945: Through the Eyes of Norbert Troller, Essays and Catalog of an Exhibition at the Yeshiva University Museum, May 1981-December 1981</i>	Judith Friedman, editor	1-5
<i>The Artists of Terezín</i>	Gerald Green	10-15

Table III

Theresienstadt Histories	Author	References to the library, books, reading, storytelling or lectures
<i>Ghetto Theresienstadt</i>	Zdenek Lederer	>20
<i>Hitler's Gift: The Story of Theresienstadt</i>	George E. Berkley	>20
<i>Theresienstadt: A Guide</i>	Jehuda Huppert and Hana Drori	5-10
<i>Art, Music and Education as Strategies of Survival: Theresienstadt 1941-1945</i>	Anne D. Dutlinger, editor	1-5
<i>Elder of the Jews: Jakob Edelestein of Theresienstadt</i>	Ruth Bondy	5-10

During this process of reading these thirty-one texts, certain patterns and connections emerged which I began to see as important sub-categories. This allowed me to create more focused sections embedded within the larger themes. As I got deeper into the reading and more familiar with the patterns, I was able to organize the findings from my literature survey into three main themes and ten sub-themes, each of which will be addressed in the discussion section of this paper and illustrated with quotations, stories and images taken from the texts. I feel that delineating these sub-themes gave my research a deeper, more comprehensive focus. The themes and sub-themes are:

- Library
 - Ghetto Central Library (herein referred to as GCL)
 - Branch Libraries
- Reading
 - As Solitary Pursuit
 - Out Loud and Together
 - Reading Materials Created in Theresienstadt
- Stories and lectures
 - Myths and Legends
 - Sharing Life Stories and Experiences
 - Lectures
 - General
 - Practical and Moralistic

As this research involved personal memories and very individual experiences and documents, I came across some unexpected and challenging dilemmas. For example,

some of the quotations and stories about Theresienstadt included in this paper may appear to be contradictory. Above all, this is most likely due to the paradoxes inherent in the nature of Theresienstadt itself. It is also a result of the simple fact that different people often had very different experiences in Theresienstadt. These variations depended on when they were in the camp, how old they were, where in the camp they lived and worked, what work they did, whether they were ill or in good health, what type of personality and interests they had, what their profession, position or prominence had been before the war, and what their nationality was. From 1941-1945, close to 140,000 people from at least eight countries passed through Theresienstadt.⁵⁸

For example, not all who may have benefited from the cultural and intellectual life in Theresienstadt had the opportunity to do so. Some never even knew of the existence of these activities. Käthe Starke, a German woman who had worked as an assistant to the SS *Referent* for Jewish emigration in Hamburg, began working in the library after having worked on a Theresienstadt cleaning crew for nine months.⁵⁹ Soon after beginning work at the GCL, she was invited to a lecture. It was automatically assumed that she was aware that lectures were offered and that she was familiar with whom the lecturer was. In this case it was Hugo Friedmann, deputy to the librarian in charge of Aby Warburg's books, which made up a large part of the original GCL collection.⁶⁰ He was, therefore, someone the others in the library and lecture community were very familiar with. Starke explained that, "I was far from the spiritual life of [Theresienstadt] until then and hardly knew anything about it. This changed abruptly as the library was a spiritual center. Until then I neither knew Hugo Friedmann nor heard about him."⁶¹

My readings uncovered further examples of this discrepancy. Some memoirists and diarists claim that no one had the time, interest or energy for books and reading. One woman describes how her friend's books "were in no danger of being stolen, few were interested in printed matters in the camp."⁶² Many more make it clear that books and reading were in fact vital to them. "I was soon to realize how important it had been for me to exchange some food for the body for food for the mind, within the permitted allowance of 50 kilograms per head. Later, I was to discover that hundreds and thousands of others had reasoned likewise..."⁶³ Norbert Frýd, who held a PhD in the history of literature from Charles University in Prague, believed that there was "practically no one who had not brought at least one book in the fifty kilograms allowed him."⁶⁴

Some prisoners seemed unable to get a hold of the books they desperately craved, suggesting either that they did not have access to the library, that they could not find books in their language or to meet their interests, that they had not brought books with them, or that books were not circulating around them. A young boy wrote in a poem addressed to his father, "You promised to bring me books. Because truly, I have nothing to read..."⁶⁵ A woman recalled the Red Cross visitors asking her husband if they needed anything. "He could not very well reply that we were in want of food, of freedom, of absolutely everything; that would have finished him as well as the rest of us. He said that we would like a few books. We had nothing to read in the camp..."⁶⁶ Further, the GCL founding deed lamented the unsolvable problem of "too few readable books for too many people hungry for books."⁶⁷

Discussion

A library is an institution devoted to the collection, preservation and dissemination of information. The Nazis were attempting to exterminate the Jewish people, so the GCL was established for the benefit of the Nazis, of course, not the Jews. The GCL would have aided the Nazi cause in two key ways. As noted, Theresienstadt was a “model” camp, open to the possibility of examination by others. A library would serve as an excellent tool to illustrate how well treated, functional and happy the Jews were, and how they were being allowed to lead a perfectly normal life.

First of all, I think they needed it for their own propaganda, for their own purpose. Secondly, we were in the heart of Europe, we were in the heart of their occupied country, the ‘protectorate.’ They could not make Auschwitz in Theresienstadt. That would leak out, you know, even if they made I don’t know how many fences around, so I have the feeling they gave into the Jews...so they said, ‘The more they do it [participate in cultural activities] the less they know what will happen to them.’⁶⁸

As this quotation intimates, the Nazis hoped the library and other cultural and intellectual activities would simply keep the Jews distracted from the Nazis’ darker purpose. In this, the Nazis were successful. However, they may not have been aware of the elements of resistance and escape that accompanied the distraction. Partially, this may be because the Nazis living and working in Theresienstadt were apparently not readers or otherwise cultural or intellectual individuals themselves. “Once the SS ordered a library to be set up in their main lounge. The Jewish librarians carefully selected works they thought would appeal to the Nazis. An inspection after the war indicated that not one of the books had ever been taken off the shelves.”⁶⁹ This finding deepens the divide that existed between the Jews of Theresienstadt and their captors. The prisoners needed books but often had

great difficulty in gaining access to them. The Nazis had easy access to books and never took advantage of their own library.

Library

The Ghetto Central Library - *Ghettozentralbücherei*



Figure 1⁷⁰

Alfred Bergel, *Ghettozentralbücherei Theresienstadt*, 27. Nov. 1943

Providing sustenance and support for much of the camp's cultural life was the library. It opened in the fall of 1942 at the same time as the bank, coffeehouse, and stores. Unlike these other operations, however, it soon became a vital and popular component of camp life.⁷¹

Ghettozentralbücherei, the Ghetto Central Library in Theresienstadt opened on November 17, 1942.⁷² Dr. Emil Utitz, who had been a professor of philosophy and psychology at Charles University in Prague, was the head of the library from its opening until liberation in 1945.⁷³ Upon opening, the GCL held about 4,000 volumes. In November of 1942 there were 47,693 people in Theresienstadt.⁷⁴ The library staff realized immediately that 4,000 works, housed in one room, could not effectively serve such a large and diverse population, a population which seemed to be in constant flux as transports regularly came and went, bringing new people in and taking others away. As fifteen-year-old Petr Fischl wrote, "We got used to it that from time to time, one thousand unhappy souls would come here and that, from time to time, another thousand unhappy souls would go away..."⁷⁵ The population was made up of people of all ages, backgrounds, interests, education levels and nationalities. The majority were Czech, then German, but also Austrian, Dutch, Danish and Polish.⁷⁶ The first books to be added to the collection came from the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin and the Warburg Library in Hamburg. Consequently, most of the works were theological, philosophical, and otherwise scholarly, and, most were in German and Hebrew.⁷⁷ One survivor recalls having to learn to read German in order to borrow books from the library.

Theresienstadt had a 'library,' consisting of books which inmates had left behind when going on transport or when they died. The books had been put into some order, and the inmates could go to the building where they were kept and borrow them. There were very few, if any, books in Dutch, the language in which I had learned to read; so if I wanted to read, I had to read in German. My parents had continued speaking German at home, both between themselves and to me, and although I generally answered

them in Dutch, I did understand German and could speak it as well. But I had never learned to read or write in German. Since I had learned to read in Dutch, I had learned only the Roman alphabet; the German books in the Theresienstadt library, however, were printed in gothic characters (Fraktur). Like it or not, I had to learn to decipher these if I wanted to read.⁷⁸

Another survivor wrote, “We had nothing to read in the camp other than some old, mainly theological, works written in Czech.”⁷⁹ Most likely, both are referring to books from that original scholarly collection of 4,000 volumes and to the fact that the worst deficiency was in fiction, which was what most people wanted to read. The library needed more books of greater diversity.

In the GCL founding deed, the Council of Elders suggested that “The stock of books could be much expanded if books left by evacuated Jews were given to the disposal of the ghetto Th[eresienstadt] after being checked and sorted out.”⁸⁰ This request could be realized because of the process of stealing from the camp prisoners, known as *šlojs* (Czech) or *schleuse* (German). The English word sluice does not capture the systematic and devastating theft of collective property⁸¹ which occurred and which is connoted by the Czech and German words. Since the Holocaust, these words have been adopted into both languages; the German word will be used in this paper. All arriving and departing transports underwent this process. During the *schleuse*, the guards searched all parcels, suitcases and bags, virtually emptying them of the few belongings (fifty kilograms) each prisoner had been entitled to bring with them. In terms of books, the *schleuse* process seemed to have had a somewhat positive end as the library eventually grew to contain well over 60,000 volumes which the staff worked hard to circulate as widely as possible throughout the camp. (See Appendix B to view the contents of the GCL as of November 17, 1943).

A version of a bookmobile was adopted as the solution for the space problem. Boxes containing thirty books each of “a cross section of the works of which most copies were available”⁸² traveled throughout Theresienstadt according to a specific plan in order to reach the highest number of people possible. As a result of this practice, many more people had access to books than would have been otherwise possible, but many books were also lost. Some were damaged or kept; others were taken “East” with those in the transports. Head librarian Emil Utitz was accepting of this less than ideal reality. He maintained that “a book was serving its purpose as long as it was read, whatever the circumstances.”⁸³

Due to the space limitations of the main library location, there were two requirements to be met before a person could use the library or reading room facilities (the circulating books were available to everyone as were the GCL branches): a deposit of fifty Ghetto *Kronen* had to be paid and the applicant had to show proof of having achieved a higher education. These two requirements did not do much to limit the possible library users as both were relatively simple to meet. The Ghetto *Kronen* were easy for most people to obtain as prisoners were “paid” for their work but had nothing to buy. The higher education criterion was not terribly limiting either since so many in the camp were so highly educated. Utitz and his staff personally interviewed each of the applicants.⁸⁴ Once approved, prisoners were free to borrow books, use the library facilities and take advantage of the reading room, which Starke described as being “always overfilled.”⁸⁵

GCL Branches

The GCL had various subdivisions or branches dispersed throughout the camp. One of the two largest was the Medicine Central Library. “The Nazis also helped the department build a large medical library and even ordered the doctors to hold seminars for each other, allowing Czech doctors to lecture in Czech.”⁸⁶ The other was the New-Hebraistic Library,⁸⁷ more commonly referred to as the Hebrew library. There were also small collections in some of the children’s homes and hospitals. The best-known camp publication, *Vedem (We Lead or In The Lead)*, once published a “short report on the Young People’s Library in L216...Now the library contains around 35,000 volumes and interest among the youth of Terezín is constantly growing.”⁸⁸ Books in poor condition were generally brought to hospitals and sick rooms and were not circulated outside of those areas due to the risk of spreading disease.

The Hebrew library was created as a part of the Nazi plan to open “The Central Museum of the Extinguished Jewish Race,”⁸⁹ in Prague after the war and after the expected successful extermination of the Jews. The Nazis put Jews to work in Prague organizing, preserving and cataloging the materials that were to become a part of the future museum’s collection. The Hebrew works being cataloged in Theresienstadt were to be a part of this museum collection; many of these items now make up the collection of the Jewish Museum of Prague and its library. On June 26, 1943 Gonda Redlich, a young Czech Zionist who headed the Youth Welfare Department (*Jugendfürsorge*)⁹⁰ in Theresienstadt, learned that “People who know Hebrew were ordered to translate and catalog books. It seems they want to send Hebrew books here for cataloging.”⁹¹ One source claims that the Hebrew library was “a pet project of Eichmann”⁹² and that during

his frequent visits to Theresienstadt, “Eichmann liked to drop in on the [Hebrew] library to check on its work and to show off his few words of Hebrew.”⁹³



Figure 2⁹⁴
Otto Ungar, *Hebräisches Zimmer L304* (The Hebrew Room L304)

As a result of Eichmann’s personal attention and in the interest of the envisaged museum, those who worked in the Hebrew library were among those considered necessary to Theresienstadt’s day-to-day operations. People fortunate enough to be included in this category were regularly spared, along with their families, from transports to the “East.” As the war dragged on, this protection became less influential and towards the end, anyone and everyone was in danger of being included in transports, no matter who they were, their prominence in their previous life, or the work they did in

Theresienstadt. In late 1944, for one reason or another, “The Hebrew library...was completely shut down and all of its staff deported,”⁹⁵ although the GCL remained open and in service until liberation.

Reading

Books and Reading

Readers and librarians, in spite of a hopeless fate, clung to books as a respite from the harsh realities and the horrors of everyday life. Books were a source of relief and a means whereby readers could escape to a different realm – at least for a little while.⁹⁶

In May of 1944, the GCL was moved to larger rooms as part of the “beautification” in preparation for the Red Cross visit. It took three days to move the 65,000 volumes about one kilometer, from one end of Theresienstadt to the other. Käthe Starke wrote of the excitement and happiness that accompanied the library’s relocation. “During the removal the weather was fine, the young men’s enthusiasm over being so near the books, even though only to help moving them, was gratifying.”⁹⁷ Similarly, camp elder Jakob Edelstein was known to go into the central book warehouse “to draw strength.”⁹⁸ For these prisoners, not necessarily seeing, or even touching, much less reading the books, but merely being in their presence, was enough to stimulate, motivate and hearten. Books open doors to worlds and realities beyond our own. They provide us with a means of entering another dimension or life, of actively engaging our minds and our imaginations. In Theresienstadt, this in turn allowed the prisoners a sense of freedom for as long as they had books to read, share and discuss, at least their minds and imaginations were alive and free.

Five⁹⁹
 Hanuš Hachenburg

*This morning at seven, so bright and so early
 Five novels lay there, sewn up in a sack
 Sewn up in a sack, like all of our lives,
 They lay there, so silent, so silent all five.*

*Five books that flung back the curtain of silence,
 Calling for freedom, and not for the world,
 They're somebody's novels, someone who loves them...*

*They called out, they cried, they shed tears, and they pleaded
 That they hadn't been finished, the pitiful five.*

*They declared to the world that the state trades in bodies
 Then slowly they vanished and went out of sight.*

*They kept their eyes open, they looked for the world
 But nothing they found. They were silent all five.*

Hanuš Hachenburg was a boy of thirteen or fourteen when he wrote this poem, one of many, while in Theresienstadt. He poignantly compares books to Theresienstadt prisoners; both become abandoned as a result of terrible circumstances. He speaks to the idea that books are nothing but empty words on a page unless someone is reading them and thus infusing them with meaning. The reader gives life to the book just as the book can in turn affirm life in its reader. The two need each other in order to survive. Hanuš died in Auschwitz (where it is believed that he continued to write poems until his death) at the age of fourteen.

Fifty kilograms was the maximum weight of personal belongings allotted to each person coming into Theresienstadt. It is difficult to imagine the situation the people being deported to ghettos and concentration camps found themselves in. While still at home, they were given a few days notice to pack and make preparations. They had to pack for an unknown destination, leave their homes, furnishings and the greater part of their belongings behind, and turn the keys to their homes and a complete and detailed inventory of all items left behind over to the Nazis. In addition, they had no idea when they would return, if they would return, and even if they did, what would be left of their previous lives. It is therefore significant and symbolic that there were people who chose to include books, paper or writing supplies in place of a little more food, another item of clothing, pair of shoes, or extra blanket in those meager fifty kilograms.

Some people had also brought sheet music, opera scores and books. These people chose kilograms of cultural, rather than practical items. Apart from instruments and music, it was possible to find Goethe's *Faust* or the poetry of Rimbaud. With the instruments, paints, brushes, and books, inmates carried an awareness of their own capacity, an awareness of their past and their responsibility to it. It became evident that intrinsic human creativity can endure under any circumstances.¹⁰⁰

The difficult decision would still remain, what books to bring? Eva Friesová believed that “Everyone chose what, at that moment, was closest to his or her heart, and the cases under the bunks in the concentration camp were real treasure chests. These treasures were passed on by those who were deported further east...”¹⁰¹

This last sentence hints at yet another Theresienstadt discrepancy: what people knew and did not know about what lay in store for them to the “East.” This varies as much as anything else in the literature. Some people heard rumors or were told of the ovens and gassings in the “East.” Of those who heard these rumors, some could not

believe the stories as they seemed too outlandish and beyond what human beings could do to one another. Others seemed not to have heard anything and had no idea of what was happening beyond the walls of Theresienstadt. When assigned to a transport leaving Theresienstadt, some (perhaps less as the years dragged on and more and more people were sent “East” and never heard from again) believed they were going to another work camp so they brought all they could with them. Others had less faith in what awaited them, or perhaps they had heard different rumors, and brought very little or even nothing with them for their journey into the unknown, leaving their few belongings behind for the others who were always in need of anything and everything. The following vignette tells of a man, Karel Švenk, a Czech artist who was deeply involved with the theaters and cabarets in Theresienstadt, who brought nothing but one book with him when he was assigned to a transport to the “East.”

Under his arm he carried a large book. From time to time, when the SS guard was out of sight, he took the book in both hands and as if performing a sacrament he raised it before the eyes of those already in the wagons. The book was Dumas’ *Three Musketeers*. It was an old edition and on the cover was a lithograph of ‘three men without fear or blemish.’ Three invincible men who triumphed on every occasion. What was Švenk trying to say?¹⁰²

Perhaps Švenk was attempting to instill a glimmer of hope and strength in people who knew they were in a hopeless situation, crammed and locked into a cattle car pointed East. Or perhaps it was simply one last, courageous theatrical act, conducted in the hopes of lifting the ominous cloud hanging over the transport. This is a heart wrenching and inspiring story which illustrates the possible power of a carefully and specifically chosen text for a particular purpose, here, to send a silent message of life in the face of death.

Reading as Solitary Pursuit

One of the motivations for reading in ghettos and concentration camps was to try to find ways to deal with, comprehend, or come to terms with the trauma of what was happening. For example, a favorite book during World War II for the Jews was *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* by Franz Werfel, which documents the genocide of Armenians by the Turks during World War I, and the heroic resistance and miraculous rescue of one Armenian community. “The idea of total extermination of a racial group, the methods of the annihilation, the helplessness of the victims and the worthlessness of the diplomatic intervention – all of these stood in amazing analogy to the situation in the ghetto, that we read that book with a shiver – like a prophetic vision, of what will our fate unfold for us.”¹⁰³ Sometimes the greatest fear is that of the unknown. The Jews in ghettos and in Theresienstadt were not at all certain of their fate though they had been shown enough to be afraid, terrified, of what was to come. The experience of reading about Musa Dagh, described repeatedly throughout Holocaust diaries and memoirs, seemed to draw its readers in, not so much as a means of escape, but rather as a means of making sense of the awful reality. Musa Dagh may also have served as a symbol of the resistance of an oppressed and persecuted people, and perhaps as an inspiration to the seemingly nonexistent possibility of rescue. The book also offered an avenue for readers who were searching for connections with others who had previously suffered similar plights.

Goethe’s classic work *Faust* was widely read in Theresienstadt and is mentioned over and over in multiple diaries and memoirs. Jana Friesová remembered how “one of my courtiers brought me the second volume of Goethe’s *Faust* when I was able to climb

out of bed and collect it. Inspired, I read for hours and hours. I don't know how far I understood its complicated philosophy. I was proud that I could actually read it and showed off about it for a long time afterwards.”¹⁰⁴ Alice Ehrmann, who was in her twenties at the time of her imprisonment, wrote in her diary on November 1, 1944, “am I afraid? I will read *Faust* and Isaiah and Jeremiah, and I will try to bear witness as best as I can...”¹⁰⁵ She is making a careful and conscious decision as to what to read in order to gain courage and strength. Goethe's *Faust* is a “reflection of the human condition of struggle and hope in any situation.”¹⁰⁶ The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah are two of “the men whose image is our refuge in distress, and whose voice and vision sustain our faith.”¹⁰⁷

Another young Theresienstadt survivor recalled bringing from home and then reading in the camp, “*Thorn Roof*”¹⁰⁸ by Younghill Kang, an inspiring account of people trying to survive Japanese occupation in Korea.”¹⁰⁹ Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was another Warsaw ghetto favorite because, as Ringelblum put it, “Being unable to take revenge on the enemy in reality, we are seeking it in fantasy, in literature.”¹¹⁰



Figure 3¹¹¹
Milan (Marvan) Eisler, untitled
pencil on paper

Petr Ginz¹¹² arrived in Theresienstadt when he was fourteen and was transported at sixteen to Auschwitz where he died. During his time in Theresienstadt, he edited the magazine *Vedem*, which was produced by the boy's house in which Ginz lived. At one point he wrote home to his family (he came from a half-Jewish family), "the magazine I'm editing is still being published. I write some serious stories for it and sometimes I even try my hand at philosophizing."¹¹³ Ginz was determined to keep up with his studies and learn as much as possible while in Theresienstadt. From his arrival in Theresienstadt in October of 1942 until his deportation in September of 1944, Ginz kept a diary of sorts. The entries were irregular, about once a month, and usually consisted of lists of "Plans" and "Reports." These included lists of the books he had read that month as well as his plans for the coming month. Here are some examples:¹¹⁴

December 1943 – Finish reading Plato...finish Ceylon.

June 1944 - I have read: Otáhalová-Polelová: *Seneca's Letters*; Arbes: *A Mad Job, My Friend the Murderer, Satan*; London: *The Lost Face*; Musil: *Desert and Oasis*; H.G. Wells: *Christina Alberta's Father*; part of Descartes' *Discourse on Method*.

September 1944 – I have read: Schweitzer: *From my Life and Work*; Binko Šimonovič: *The Vinčić Family*; de Vries: *Rembrandt*; Thomas Mann: *Mario and the Magician*; Dickens: *A Christmas Carol*; Daneš: *The Origin and Extinction of the Aborigines of Australia and Oceania*; Milli Dondolo: *An Angel Spoke*; Karel May: *The Son of the Bear Hunters*; Oscar Wilde: *De profundis and Other Stories*.

These lists of books exist for virtually every month Ginz was in Theresienstadt. This strikes me as being an astonishing accomplishment for any fourteen-year-old boy, but particularly for one living in a concentration camp, studying, and contributing to and editing a magazine. Although he does not say, it is almost certain that Ginz had access to this diverse mix of books through a library, either the GCL or the branch previously mentioned which was housed in one of the young people's homes, or through the traveling book cartons.

A young Czech woman, Jana Renée Friesová, who had been a student at Charles University in Prague before the war, lived for a time by herself in a small attic space in Theresienstadt. She remembered her joy at being able to read, at having brought books with her, and the two poems that she attached to a beam where she would constantly see them. "The attic window let through just enough light for me to read the books I had smuggled into our luggage. My world was then the world of two Czech writers – Jiří Wolker, Fráňa Šrámek – and French poetry. On the beam above my head, where a splinter had peeled off, I pinned Jiří Wolker's little poem 'At the Palmist's':

*this short line here means a short span of life
and your hand sir, is marked by a short line.
The gods have granted you but a short life
And soon you 'll die.*

But close to this funeral poem hung another, one I had known by heart since I was twelve – the middle stanza of Kipling's 'If':

*If you can dream – and not make dreams your master
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim:
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools.*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'¹¹⁵*

These two poems offer opposing but equally important messages to a young woman in a concentration camp. The first poem speaks of unexpected death and life cut short, unavoidable aspects of living in the camp. The second poem speaks of dreams, hope, willpower and survival. Everyone was facing death before his or her time, and yet many

realized that holding onto hope, pride and courage would be vital to their ability to endure and survive.

Many readers in Theresienstadt were simply searching for a means of temporary escape, for another world to disappear into. Another memoirist noted, “When I am not too ill to do anything at all, I either read in bed or retreat into fantasy, into a better place. Of course, I do have to come back to *this* place, but at least for a little while I am out of the misery.”¹¹⁶ Another wrote of her barracks, “when we were alone, we could read.”¹¹⁷ Due to the high demand for books, the library loan period was short. “I had gotten hold of Keller’s *Romeo and Julia*, and not being able to finish it due to the shortness of the loan period, enjoyed at least a few pages.”¹¹⁸

Elsa Bernstein, a well-known figure in the camp, was an elderly German poet, erudite, blind, and very highly respected. Upon visiting her, it was known what to expect. “Usually she sat next to her bed and her fine-boned, boyish hands followed with the tips of the fingers the Braille script in a huge book, the weight of which she could barely handle. At times she was so deep in thought that one had to ‘wake’ her.”¹¹⁹ One young woman wrote that she would “slowly read my book, word by word, desperately wishing that the remaining pages would not get fewer.”¹²⁰ The following description of an evening in the Warsaw ghetto illustrates people’s pursuit of both escape and character identification. “The neighbor girl pulls out a book of her own, and while the grown-ups listen to the gruesome details of the massacres the girl plugs her ears with her fingers and takes flight into the romantic world of de Amicis’ *The Heart*. It is a tale of the life and struggle of Italian children in the 19th century.”¹²¹ These examples illustrate the readers’

retreat out of their reality into another. The inevitable mental return to painful reality was achieved slowly and reluctantly, and at times had to be forced by another person or event.

Attempting to maintain a semblance of normalcy, a continuation of daily life as it was lived before arriving in the ghetto, was an additional motivation for participating and leading cultural activities. “One of the expressions of spiritual endurance was the desire of each and every individual to ‘preserve his identity,’ and to ‘continue to be in the ghettos and camps what he had done before.’ ...As a result, the Jews of the ghettos and camps desired, in spite of everything, to remain as they had been.”¹²² Succeeding in this was considered to be a symbol of strength and above all, of hope. Hope that one day there would be a return to normalcy, and that people would be able to return to their previous lives. “A woman from an exclusive Hamburg suburb...had sat down at our table. There she sat, shriveled up from hunger and every kind of deprivation, reading with the same kind of matter-of-fact behaviour, as if she still were in the Alster pavilion.”¹²³ This image can be interpreted as being both heartbreaking and inspiring. Was it the pleasurable, everyday act of reading that allowed this woman to behave as though nothing in her life was different? As though she was comfortably seated in the Alster pavilion reading, rather than at the Theresienstadt “café” where one could order nothing but brown water? Whether she was aware of her pitiful surroundings and chose to ignore them, or even if she was delusional about her changed circumstances, we can hope that she received some comfort by participating in this normal act: sitting down to read in a café.

Being able to continue to read and reflect on reading was considered by many to be symbolic of their ability to survive. On December 1, 1942, Gonda wrote, “Reading papers is not merely a pleasure but also work, a subject for debate, *the basic substance of*

life (my emphasis).”¹²⁴ A young woman remembered the moment she realized that her friend, who would become her husband after the war, would survive. “Arthur had taken the grave risk and led away electricity from the bulb of the hall, which gave out only dim light, suspended high from the ceiling. His illegal source of light allowed him to read. Arthur brought with him to camp a few of his favourite books. Right then and there I knew that if anybody had the mettle to survive the war, it had to be Arthur.”¹²⁵

On the other hand, becoming too ill, weak, exhausted or distracted to read was very distressing to many. The event was significant enough that individuals took note of its onset in their diaries. On Oct. 6, 1942 Gonda wrote, “I love studying, but I do not have enough time to study.”¹²⁶ On October 8, 1943 Eva Roubíčková, who was twenty at the time of her arrival in Theresienstadt at the end of 1941, wrote, “I’m so tired all the time, I can’t get any reading or writing done.”¹²⁷ Then on July 17, 1944 she wrote, “I can hardly get any reading or studying done.”¹²⁸ For some, this seemed to signal the beginning of the end. It was a sign that they were beginning to fail in their struggle to resist and therefore, to survive. Janusz Korczak, the Polish teacher and director of the Jewish orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto wrote, “Reading as relaxation begins to fail. A dangerous symptom. I am distracted and that itself worries me.”¹²⁹ His no longer being able to read for pleasure signified to him a disturbing turning point in his personal struggle to hold out against the Nazis.

As so many educated people populated Theresienstadt, and as Jews have historically considered education to be highly important, the loss of mental activity, intellectual stimulation and use of imagination were acutely felt by the prisoners and significantly affected their well-being. Norbert Troller, a scholar and artist, wrote:

I was well acquainted with a problem that was prevalent among even very sophisticated prisoners; that is, after a relatively short time you ran out of topics of conversation...in spite of the interval of twenty years in which I had accumulated (supposedly) a large amount of experiences and had read hundreds of books and completed five years of university studies, in spite of a good memory, there comes a time when one begins to repeat oneself. You lose the spontaneity, the sense of humor; however, you do not lose the need for conversation, to be amused, to see others laugh, to impress other with how intelligent, worldly, wise and humorous you are. Without new stimuli, without new experiences, new books, the day arrives when you feel that sterility has set in, like impotence; it is a traumatic shock.¹³⁰

In the following painfully beautiful description of a woman who feels she is beginning to lose her battle with death, we catch a glimpse of what Bruno Bettelheim calls “the point of no return.”¹³¹ This was often the fatal turning point desperately fought against by all means possible, including taking risks and using precious energy and strength to participate in and observe intellectual activities, anything that would affirm their hope, confidence, imagination, and sense of identity.

I become more and more withdrawn...Mostly I just look at the adults around me, observing how they too become grayer and grayer, thinner and thinner. They seem to dissolve into wisps of smoke – talking, moving smoke, smoke with arms and legs like ghosts – but not real people. I do not feel real anymore either. I have a pain inside of me which has become part of me and without which I don’t know how to exist. Most of the time I’m not sure I exist at all. Probably I am not real anymore. Yes, I can see myself; I can feel it if I pinch myself; but even that sort of pain is not real. My imagination has died; I can no longer imagine what life was like ‘before,’ how I used to be, what I used to do, where I used to go...¹³²

Reading Out Loud and Together

Exhaustion combined with starvation and illness led to the hospitalization and subsequent death of many prisoners. For those who were not too ill, being hospitalized allowed them the time to simply lie in bed and read. Many others were rendered

physically or mentally unable to read on their own. In response, some who did have the strength took to reading out loud. Being read to is a pleasure generally associated with childhood. However, in Theresienstadt, these traditional roles were often reversed as with youth came strength, health, agility and adaptability. Many adults could not tolerate the drastic transformation their lives underwent upon their arrival in Theresienstadt, so children were caring for, feeding and nursing, and sometimes reading to their parents, grandparents and aunts and uncles as well as strangers who were older and weaker than they were. Healthy and able adults read to other prisoners as well. Hannah Steiner led a group of Zionist Jewish women while in Theresienstadt. In the evenings, they often visited “the elderly or read and sang to sick children.”¹³³

We had to bring the old men food, read to them – from novels and religious books; and all these old people were so touched by this that they wept, and very often it happened that in the midst of this reading these sick and old people would die – the boy would sit and read and the old man would die.¹³⁴

My listeners, often seriously ill, lay pale against the pillow and listened, sometimes making an observation or expressing a special request...I read in the Bodenback Barrack for almost a year, mostly to the same patients. I started with ‘Memories of Women’ and followed with the *Novellen* of Pentzold, Fontane and anything I could lay my hands on, Heine’s ‘Rabbi von Bacharach’ from the *Buch der Lieder*, etc...¹³⁵

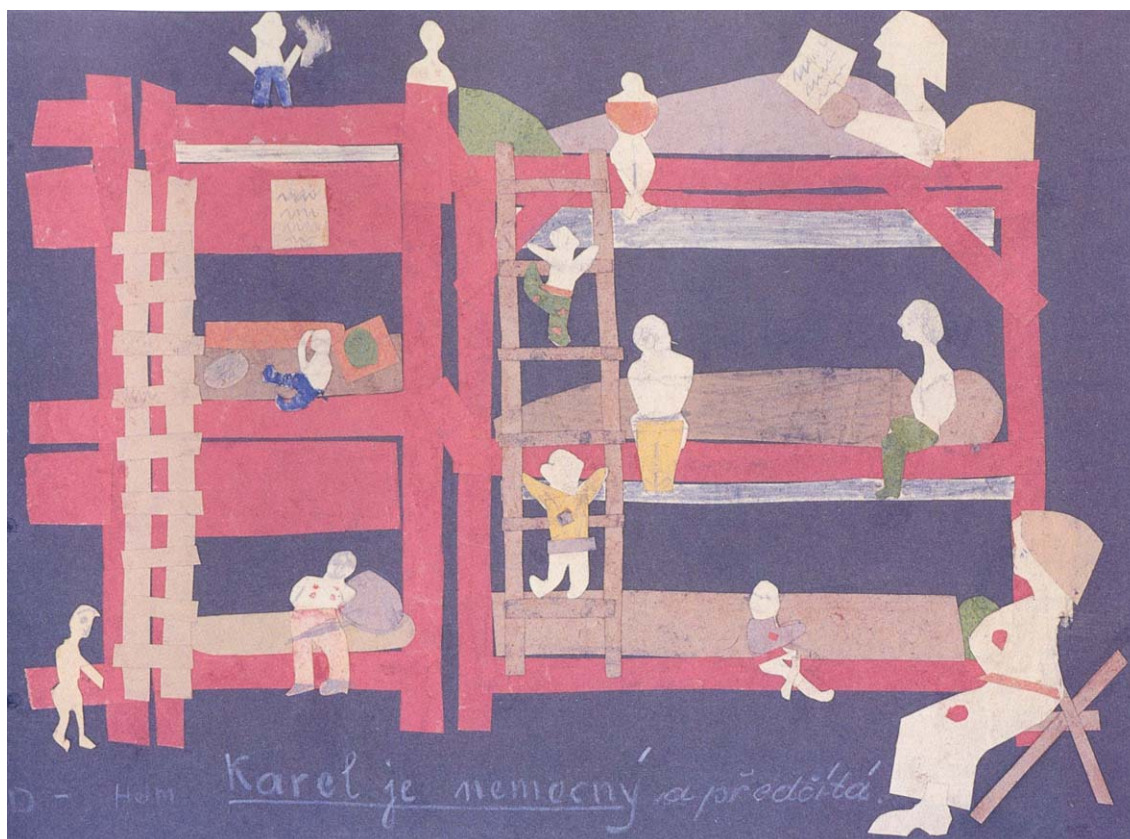


Figure 4¹³⁶

Unknown child artist, *Karel je nemocný a předčítá* (Karel is Sick and Reads Out Loud)

Reading together and discussing books was another stimulating outlet for prisoners. For some it was a preferred activity, for others it was the only way to gain access to books. Due to the library's great lack of fiction, Hugo Friedmann suggested that:

By reading aloud (collective reading) each book should be made accessible to the largest reader-circle possible. This collective reading is an order of necessity...It is clear that this procedure can't satisfy the reading-hunger of the individual and can hardly fulfill their reading-demands. But in opposite it has an advantage: the reader is obliged to read the book slowly, to digest it spiritually and to think about it.¹³⁷



Figure 5¹³⁸
Norbert Troller, *My Fellow Patient, a rabbi from Bohemia*, 1943

Two elderly Theresienstadt inhabitants had scheduled a “reading hour, which they had made a regular event, wresting it away in defiance of all powers of despair inherent in our condition.”¹³⁹ On May 14, 1943, Roubíčková recounts meeting with her friend Egon. “We talk about everything, often very serious things, and we read good books together.”¹⁴⁰

As the transitory situation of Theresienstadt necessitated, she was forced to move from one study partner to another. Some were sent “East,” others fell ill, or the friendships simply faded. April 10, 1944, “I go to the citadel with Otto every morning from six to seven. We’re studying world literature. These are wonderful hours, and even though I’m missing sleep, I wouldn’t give it up at any price.”¹⁴¹ Giving up sleep in

Theresienstadt was no small matter. Like most other young people who were relatively healthy and able, Roubíčková worked long, hard hours. She was lucky to work outdoors in a garden but the long hours, the constant exposure to the elements year-round, and the physical labor were all extreme. Not getting enough sleep risked becoming weaker and thus more susceptible to illness. But she and so many others did not even think twice about taking this risk. They seemed to feel that the energy lost by missing sleep was replenished by the stimulation provided through intellectual activities.

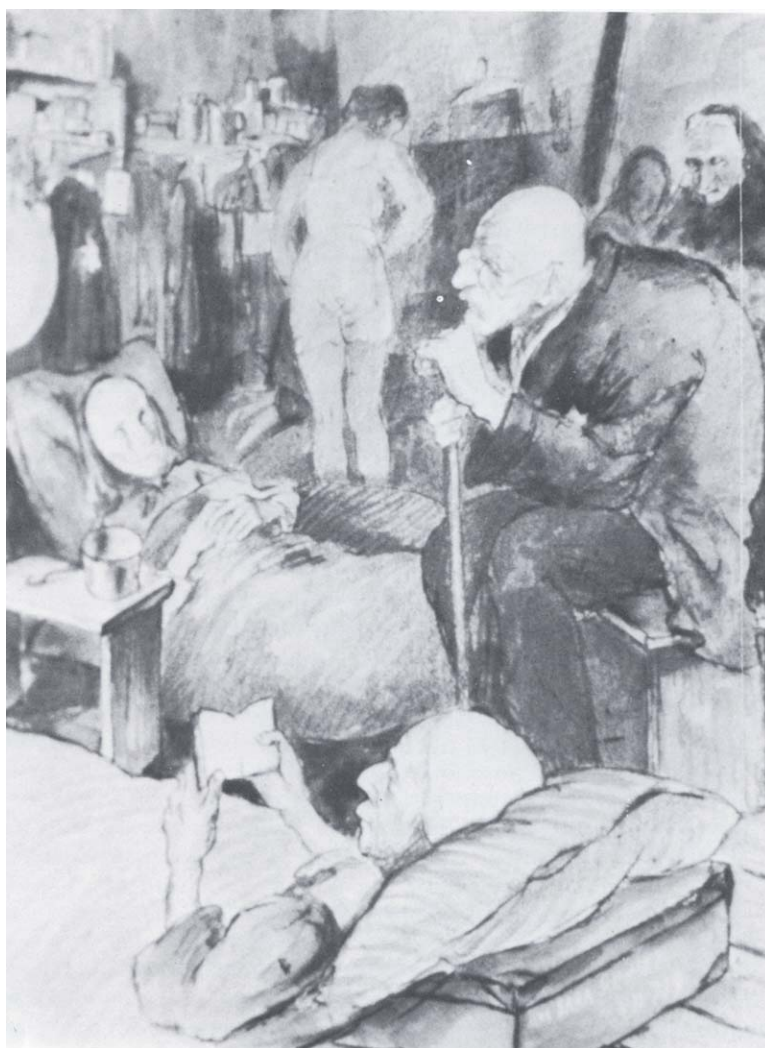


Figure 6¹⁴²
Moritz Nagel, *Terezin Camp*

Reading Materials Created in Theresienstadt

Some prisoners in Theresienstadt created reading material which they shared with one another. Poetry was the most common form of expression, followed by underground newsletter or magazine publications, most created by various children's homes. *Vedem* is the best known of these as about 800 pages survived the war, and its literary quality was very high. Others included *Bonako*, *Rim Rim Rim*, and *Kamarád*.¹⁴³ Many articles and drawings from *Vedem* have been reproduced in the book *We Are Children Just the Same: Vedem, the Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezín*. *Vedem* included poetry, drawings and regular columns such as "One of Us" (describing the boys in the house), "News" (about Theresienstadt), "Quote of the Week" (and other notable quotes and dialogues), "Rambles Through Terezín" (recounting visits to locations all over the camp with detailed descriptions and interview notes –including the crematorium, kitchens, bakeries and sick rooms), "Culture Reports" (about various cultural activities), editorials and other articles covering a wide variety of subjects.

Vedem was produced every week beginning in December of 1942 and ending in September of 1944 and was "read aloud on Friday evenings."¹⁴⁴ One contributor wrote a fascinating column entitled "Negroes and Us." In it, he recalled having read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. He analyzed the text and evaluated the lot of the slaves in relation to what he saw happening all around him. He asked, "How do we differ from those slaves, and how do our times differ from those times?"¹⁴⁵ He compared the camp guards to the slave masters, both of whom treated their prisoners as less-than-human, worse than animals. He noted how both slaves and Jews were torn from their homes, separated from their families and forced to work in despicable conditions and subjected

to horrible treatment.¹⁴⁶ He wondered if one day, after the war was over, someone would write a parallel book about Theresienstadt entitled “Mr. Kohn’s Garret.”¹⁴⁷

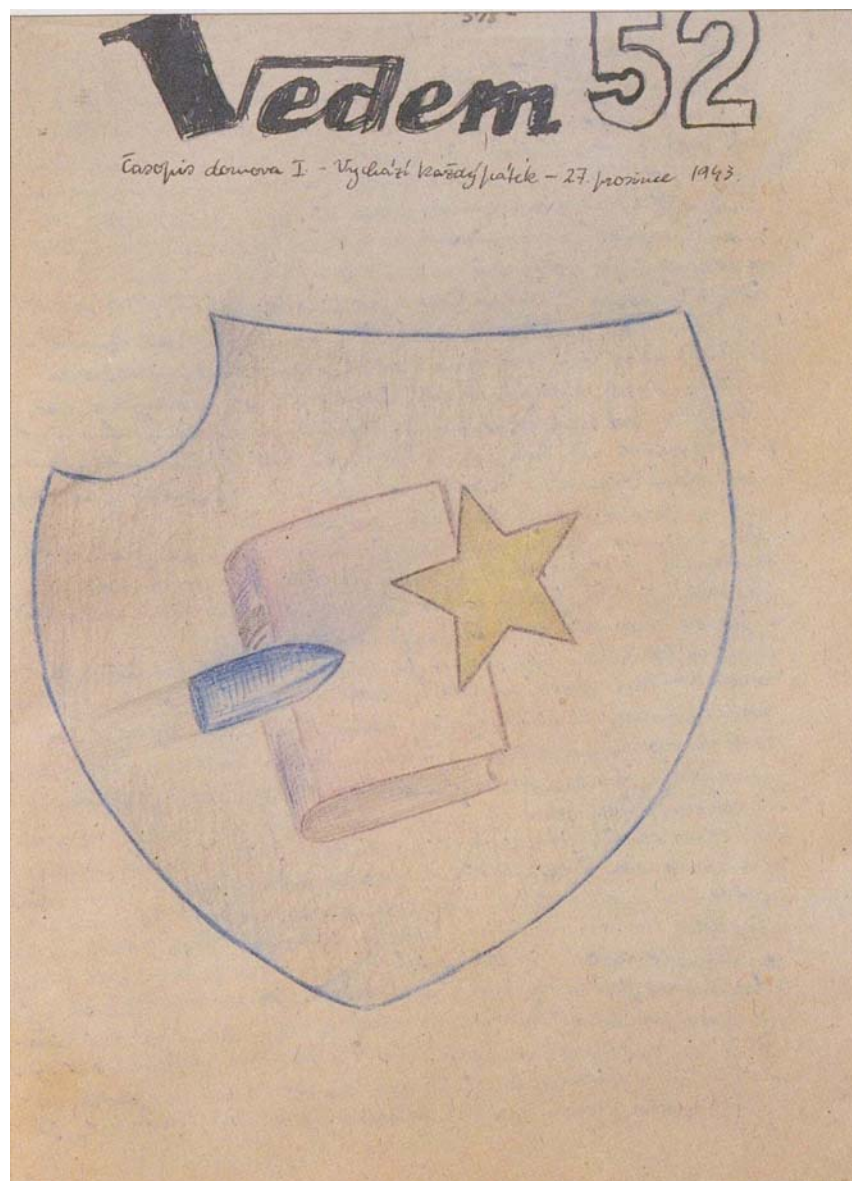


Figure 7¹⁴⁸

Cover of *Vedem* issue 52, 27 December 1943, showing a book as a symbol of learning

Valtr Eisinger was the counselor for boys' home Number One. He wrote an article in *Vedem* as the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, approached. In the article, he observed the activity in Theresienstadt in preparation for the holiday, the first of ten days during which Jews are to reflect on their actions of the past year, confess, repent, ask and give forgiveness. Eisinger wrote, "I am not praying for a long life, or an easy death, or forgiveness for all my sins. I am more interested in knowing what attitude I should take to the sins of the world around me. The world is swimming in a sea of war crimes. Its depths are immeasurable. So I ask myself: how should I behave towards the perpetrators of that war?"¹⁴⁹ He went on to ask more questions in the same vein, but instead of attempting to respond to any of them, he quoted from a notebook of his in which he had recorded parts of a conversation between Eckermann and Goethe. He encouraged *Vedem* readers to read the quotations and form their own conclusions to their difficult questions. Here are two of the quotations he included in the article:

He who would act justly, need never condemn, need never consider what perversity is, but must only act well. It is not a question of tearing down, but of building up, what could become a source of joy to humanity.

I often think of my novel *Wilhelm Meister* where the idea is expressed that all people make up the sum total of mankind and that we are worthy of respect only insofar as we respect mankind as a whole.¹⁵⁰

Gerty Spies, who survived Theresienstadt to become a published poet, first began seriously writing poetry while in the camp. In her first weeks in Theresienstadt she recalled despairing endlessly over her situation, until she thought about writing.

Try writing...What could happen? Your thoughts will not again and again grope along this tortuous path of suffering this homesickness. They will have to concentrate – each minute, each second – so that perhaps you can bend your pain into an expression of your imagination. You will not hear any longer what happens and what is talked about around you. Only your body will still be here.¹⁵¹

She shared her poetry with many of the camp elders and scholars and was strongly influenced by the memorable effects her poetry had on her listeners. She learned that her listeners gained as much from the experience as she did from reading to them.

‘Here, sit down, read your poems to my husband.’ And I sat down on the edge of the rough bed and started. When the face of poor Mr. Mahler, distorted by illness and deprivation, suddenly took on a little color, and when with stiff lips he ponderously tried to form words: ‘Please, one more time – please, read it again,’ then for half a day my doubts disappeared...and I was as grateful to him as he was to me.¹⁵²

I sat down, started to read – and then was startled by that blessed little experience, which I would receive as a gift every time I read to her: Mrs. Elsa bowed her head in an inimitable gesture – never before and never again has ever a person listened to me like that...¹⁵³

A poetry contest took place on August 3, 1944. The rules of the contest were that the poems had to be in German and their content had to be approved by the SS. About 3,000 poems were submitted from the 37,000 or so people who were in the camp at the time.¹⁵⁴ Gerty Spies recalled the large crowd that had gathered to hear the ten winners read their submissions.

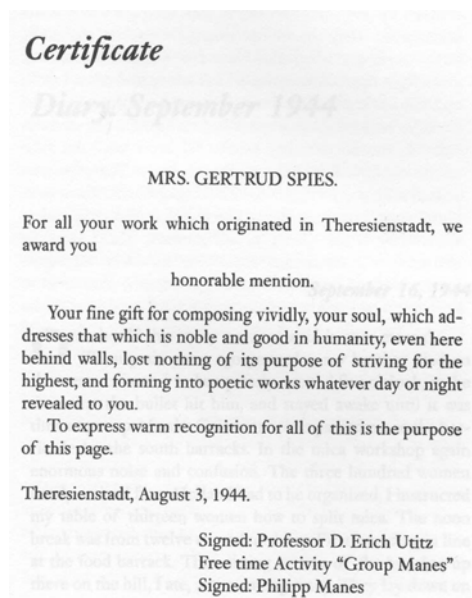


Figure 8¹⁵⁵

A translation of the honorable mention presented to Gerty Spies at the poetry contest.

Each of us received a book with a dedication and a diploma signed personally by the highest judge, Professor Utitz, and by our patron and friend, Manes. Even today I can still feel the solemn excitement with which I climbed the few steps when it was my turn, and the emotion with which I accepted the book. Mane's handshake accompanying it was an expression of his friendship, across all the horrors of the times, a spiritual bond over which death has no power.¹⁵⁶

The friend Manes she repeatedly refers to is "Philipp Manes, whose whole being in the camp was devoted to our salvation through intellectual activity, was sent with his wife to Auschwitz. They ended there."¹⁵⁷

While in Theresienstadt, the artist Bedřich Fritta wrote and illustrated a children's book for his son Tomáš on the occasion of his son's third birthday on January 22, 1944. In the book, Fritta illustrated career possibilities for young Tomáš with bright, vivacious drawings and clear, bold lettering. The drawings showed Tomáš that he could grow up to be an engineer, boxer, painter or detective, but please, not a general or a businessman! "From this lovely book, little Tomáš learned to read and write."¹⁵⁸ Tomáš survived the

Holocaust although his parents did not, and he managed to keep the hopeful little book his father had created for him in a time of hopelessness.



Figure 9¹⁵⁹

A page from Bedřich Fritta's illustrated book for his son. The caption translation reads, "This is not a fairy tale. It's true!" showing a young boy happily playing in a field of flowers on a beautiful day.

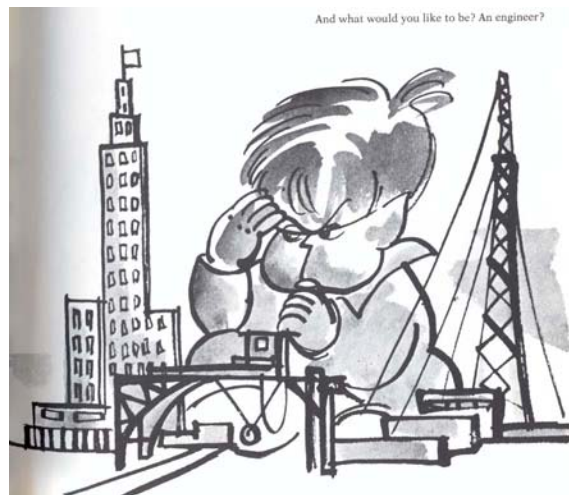


Figure 10¹⁶⁰

Another page from Fritta's story. The translated caption reads, "And what would you like to be? An engineer?"

Older women were often among the worst off in the camp, receiving the least amount of food, housed in the least desirable quarters and generally isolated both physically and emotionally from the rest of the camp population. What most of these older women knew best was homemaking and raising a family. They shared their stories through the recipes they knew. “While written recipes might not feed the hungers of the body, they might temporarily quell the hungers of the soul.”¹⁶¹ Recipes that represented their cultures and nationalities, recipes that they discussed, argued over, and wrote down on any scrap of paper they could find. These they saved and compiled in the hopes that what they knew, the stories of who they had been, told through what they cooked for their loved ones, would one day be passed on.

An Evening in Terezín¹⁶²
- Eva Schulzová

*Ten o'clock strikes suddenly,
And the windows of Dresden's barrack's darken.
The women have a lot to talk about;
They remember their homes,
And dinners they made.*

Mina Pächter, a grandmother alone in Theresienstadt, without her family, was among those women. The recipes reveal both their histories as well as the strain that they were under. The latter is illustrated by the many grammatical and spelling errors, the shaky writing and the omitted ingredients, all of which have since been attributed to malnutrition and illness. These women who were starving and dying alone talked about food, talked about the cooking they knew and went one step further to ensure that others might learn from them someday. Their cookbook eventually found its way into the hands

of Mina's daughter who had it translated and published as *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin*.¹⁶³ These women found a way to maintain their identity, share their stories with one another and with future generations.

Stories and Lectures

Storytelling

In addition to reading and writing, prisoners also told each other stories. Reading out loud and storytelling may have been attractive as a result of yet another paradox of Theresienstadt. Conditions were horribly overcrowded; hundreds lived in rooms designed for tens. It was impossible to keep anything clean or to have any privacy. It was never quiet, and there were very few havens from the chaos. People simply had no personal space and often felt physically overwhelmed by the crowding. At the same time, many prisoners in Theresienstadt felt very emotionally alone, isolated and abandoned, particularly those who were without any family in the camp. Reading out loud, discussing books, learning together and telling stories are all activities that require the interaction of at least two people, and can accommodate a group of almost any number. These activities may have provided avenues for temporary escape from the chaos and despair as well as a form of intimacy, and a way of connecting with another person.

“And we would all tell stories, just to take our minds off reality.”¹⁶⁴

“We sat together in a circle and there were songs and story readings.”¹⁶⁵

Storytelling is one of the fundamental elements of Judaism, and a story exists for every circumstance or event imaginable, and if one does not exist, a new one will quickly be created. Many stories are told because of the morals or lessons that the storyteller

wishes to impart to the listeners. These stories are used to teach and promote thought, discussion and understanding. Stories told orally are often relatively short and memorable and therefore easy for others to learn and tell in their turn. In this way, stories are passed on and on, remaining alive and relevant. By being adapted to fit different situations, their lessons are shared with more and more people. The situation in Theresienstadt may have encouraged the proliferation of sharing whatever stories the prisoners knew and could remember. Since the Holocaust was an unprecedented and unimaginable situation, it allowed for the cultivation of many new stories as well.

Myths and Legends

A Dutch woman recalled being told the legends of Jewish Prague while in Theresienstadt. “One of the party used to be an old man of seventy, also from Prague, who used to be a teacher. To keep himself awake he would tell us stories about Rabbi Loew who, in the sixteenth century, had created an artificial being, the so-called Golem.”¹⁶⁶ The tale of the Golem is replete with meaning, particularly for Jews. Made out of clay, formed into the image of man, with sacred words inscribed on his forehead, the Golem, created, given “life” to, and controlled by the famous Rabbi Loew, was to act as the protector and deliverer of Prague Jews when they were harassed, harmed and otherwise terrorized by the non-Jewish residents of the city. The selection of this particular legend would have been made to offer hope and to affirm to Jews their strength, connection with their past and their ancestors, and perhaps even the importance of keeping their faith in Judaism and in God.

Similarly, the story of Judah and the Maccabees, which is normally recounted and commemorated on the Jewish holiday Chanukah, was frequently lectured on and discussed in Theresienstadt, particularly by Zionists in the camp. The Maccabees fought a holy war during the second century, B.C.E. They defeated the Syrians using guerilla warfare and succeeded in returning to Jerusalem, to the holy Temple, which is where the miracle of light occurred that has since been celebrated by observing Chanukah.¹⁶⁷ However, in Theresienstadt, the draw towards relating this story may not have been to commemorate the miracle of light, but to illustrate a time in history when the few triumphed over the many, when the weak prevailed over the strong. The feats of the Maccabees undoubtedly resonated with and moved the prisoners in Theresienstadt, members of a minority being brutally persecuted and destroyed by an enemy that vastly outnumbered them. The story may also have been used to affirm the strength and resolve of the Jewish people and their faith in God and Judaism, while providing Zionists with the hope that they would be able to defeat their enemies, survive, and live to see Israel.

The Czechs use the famous Czech story *Good Soldier Švejk* by Jaroslav Hašek to describe “their own ability to make light of...absurdities, to confront violence with humour and utterly passive resistance.”¹⁶⁸ For the Czechs, Švejk, who is a complete failure as a soldier, symbolizes everyman, helplessly caught up in the absurdities of modern times, totalitarianism and war. Pepek Taussig was a young Communist leader and frequent lecturer in Theresienstadt. He was reportedly writing a new adaptation of the story of Švejk which would tell what happened to “an innocent Pragueite who got in the wrong queue when he went to pay his dog tax at the municipal offices, had a J (for Jew)

stamped on his identity card and from then on had to swim along in the stream of Jews through all the difficulties in the Terezín ghetto.”¹⁶⁹

Sharing Life Stories and Experiences

In addition to telling myths and legends, prisoners recounted stories about their previous lives and experiences to one another. A young girl recalled being alone and terrified in a transport going to Theresienstadt when she met a young man who “did not speak about the future, he showed no anxiety or fear, I remember he talked to me about books and his games as a child...”¹⁷⁰ His calm countenance and storytelling abilities stayed with her throughout her life. Gerty Spies remembered a short friendship with another young woman who was ill and who had “suggested that we should meet at the bank of the moat whenever I had even one free hour and tell each other about our past lives.”¹⁷¹ Another young girl remembered how “evening after evening Francka and I recall things in Prague far into the night and often we dream of it in our sleep.”¹⁷²

Arriving transports were usually split up when they arrived in Theresienstadt: men from women, elderly from adults, adults from children, and boys from girls. This resulted in a situation where people shared very close quarters, with almost no privacy, usually with complete strangers. These people who knew very little about one another exchanged both real and imagined stories and experiences. This type of biographical storytelling helped pass the time, entertain and amuse, teach lessons, but also quickly increased the level of comfort, friendship and intimacy between those large groups of strangers.

We got to know each other, we knew about our former lives, each other's thoughts, each other's weaknesses, and especially about ourselves. You simply cannot scream in agony when colleague Glaser would start for the twelfth time to recount his adventures on his trip to Venice in detail. If we were in a good mood, and he began [to relate the story of his journey to] Venice, for instance..., we would repeat the whole story back to him in chorus.¹⁷³

As a form of collective punishment, the Nazis would at times order a lights-out by four o'clock in the afternoon. In the winter, it would be dark by this time and many found it difficult to pass the long hours trapped in their barracks. In one girl's home, "Nava Shan, an actress by profession...recited from memory dramatical pieces and poems. This helped us to endure those long hours."¹⁷⁴ A woman remembered staying up all night distracting and comforting children with stories. "In the evenings I used to sit with them and often I didn't even go home. I used to tell them stories..."¹⁷⁵

Philipp Manes was one of the best storytellers I have ever heard. He sat there, the old gentleman, shadowed by the darkness of his room, and spread the pictures of his extended travels out before us, the varied experiences – perhaps not more varied than the experiences of other people, but seen with such insightful eyes, kept alive in his mind, and brought to life again so vividly for us that it could only be *his* experiences – the hours then carried us away on broad wings.¹⁷⁶

Here, an older man recounting the tales of his travels, allows the listeners to see those places, to visit them also in their minds' eye. This can happen to anyone who is being told an intriguing story by a gifted storyteller, but how much more meaningful it must have been under the circumstances.

Elsa Bernstein was another gifted storyteller: "She told me about her life, about books and meetings with remarkable people. And because of her power of language and her remarkable memory and original point of view, it all took on a life of its own."¹⁷⁷ Similarly, Valtr Eisinger was remembered as being "a wonderful storyteller. We could

have listened to him for hours.”¹⁷⁸ The boys in this house would lie in their bunks talking, telling stories and listening to Eisinger late into the night. A gifted storyteller is a person who has the special talent to make words come to life, to instill clear images into the mind of listeners, transporting them to another place and time, to become a part of that story. We can understand why these storytellers must have been revered in Theresienstadt.

Acting can be considered another form of storytelling. In Theresienstadt, actors played out stories and scenes from books, poems and plays. “One Czech group dramatized a series of Yiddish stories, which included Sholem Aleichem’s *Tales of Tevya, the Milkman*. In this way, a precursor of the world-famous musical *Fiddler on the Roof* had its premiere in Theresienstadt.”¹⁷⁹ Gonda recalled bringing children to watch a puppet show on March 18, 1943. “A simple Czech story without meaning, in spite of this, the children enjoyed it. They applauded.”¹⁸⁰ Does it matter that the story seemed to have no meaning? It succeeded in distracting and bringing joy to children who were being bombarded by a reality that no adult should ever be faced with, much less any child. In this case, the goal was less to convey a meaning or moral than it was to distract, amuse and entertain.

General Lectures

Among the inmates who lectured there were famous professors and scholars. They talked about German poetry or the latest discoveries in chemistry; about French art or Roman law. And the audience enjoyed taking part in activities reminiscent of the outside world. In that way, they could escape their misery for an hour or so. Other speakers might include actors, lawyers, painters and musicians – talking on anything that came to mind. The lecturers delivered their material with great attention to detail and at inordinate length. And the people squatted on the floor in the

darkness and listened patiently. It was as if they derived strength from hearing about matters extraneous to their troubles.¹⁸¹

If poetry became Theresienstadt's most common medium of artistic expression, lecturing became its most frequent cultural event. There could be as many as 70 to 80 lectures in a single week with subjects ranging from food chemistry to the philosophy of Nietzsche, from how to explore for oil to the history of the Catholic Church. One could hear a lecture in French on the writings of Andre Gide or a recitation of selections from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in ancient Greek, with commentaries in German and Czech.¹⁸²

Lecturing was another form of storytelling used by the inhabitants of Theresienstadt to retain their knowledge and expertise, as well as to pass it onto others, particularly young people. At one point a short report entitled "The New Cultural Program in our Home," was published in *Vedem*. "At the beginning of this week, a great change took place in the cultural program of our Home...all existing circles are to be cancelled and replaced every evening by a lecture (on literature, natural science, etc.). Furthermore there will be amusing evening programs given by our comedian, H. Beck."¹⁸³ In a diary entry dated November 7, 1943, Eva Roubíčková described the lectures that she was aware of. "There are daily concerts, lectures, opera, comedy, etc. I regularly go to them. There's some sort of lecture every night, mostly for young people, sometimes about politics, sometimes about art."¹⁸⁴ On December 20, 1943 she wrote, "I went to a lecture almost every night."¹⁸⁵

In fact, "There was an overabundance of commemorative lectures, the more than ten a *day* in the official program testified to this fact; these people would have become ill if they had not been allowed to tell about what they had been in a former life."¹⁸⁶ Again, an example of prisoners telling their stories and sharing their knowledge in order to maintain a hold on who they had been and what they had done in their previous lives.

While helping themselves, they were in turn helping their listeners who received some distraction and learning. Hugo Friedmann, a frequent lecturer said “One has to create an oasis in this joyless environment where one can breathe.”¹⁸⁷



Figure 11¹⁸⁸
Karel Fleischmann, *Cultural Lecture*, 1943
colored pen and India ink wash, paper

The Czech writer Karl Poláček “could quote entire chapters of works of world literature by heart.”¹⁸⁹ Berthold Ordner, a blind Austrian artist who shaped various materials into animal forms came one day to lecture in boys’ home Number One, where *Vedem* was based. An account of the lecture was written up in a subsequent “Culture Report” section of the publication. “Boys from other homes, and even their parents, attended the lecture. Mr. Ordner spoke German but even so everybody understood him,

for he spoke slowly and clearly...his lecture was surely one of the best and most interesting ever held in Home Number One.”¹⁹⁰

In the following descriptions of some lecturers and lectures, I have italicized words and phrases that epitomize the power and influence that these lecturers had on their audiences. Using their knowledge and storytelling gifts, they had the ability to transport their listeners to another time and place, to strengthen their audiences mentally, even as their bodies weakened.

Kurt Singer, whose music history talks let us *forget time and place and ourselves*...¹⁹¹

Rabbi Leo Baeck is giving one of his *wise and brilliant lectures*; we play cards, *we try to forget where we are*.¹⁹²

Gustave Schorsch [was someone] whom the young people could listen to, *by the hour, fascinated*. He illustrated his speeches with various texts, Czech translations of the verse of Jehan Rictu, passages from Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homewards, Angel*, or recited in an especially moving way Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, together with the best of the new Czech poetry (such as Halas).¹⁹³

Theresienstadt, in Baeck’s words, became to resemble a small university...Baeck himself became the most popular lecturer. A series of talks he initiated entitled ‘Philosophical Thinkers from Plato to Kant’ regularly *drew several hundred*. Standing in a drafty attic with a biting late fall wind blowing through its many crevices, they would listen to his words in *rapt attention*.¹⁹⁴

Also there were lectures on Plato and Aristotle. Some scholars remembered and recited page after page of the writings of famous historians, such as Thucydides and Herodotus. The actors played Molnar’s *Liliom*, read Goethe’s *Faust*, and recited Villon’s poetry. In this compulsory community (*Zwangsgemeinschaft*) intellectual and artistic efforts helped us to *overcome the fear of the next day’s transports*.¹⁹⁵

In this setting the Czech writer and translator Auredniček held her fascinating lectures. Anybody who heard her even only once will never forget her. She had experienced great suffering, and she mustered heroic strength to ignite her spirit for two poor but *rich hours of oblivion* – and recount to her *spellbound* audience her literary remembrances from works

of Czech writers and about her encounters with them. She stood up there on the shaky podium, her beautiful white hair in a knot, a wide scarf around her shoulders, her eyes like two fiery fountains, and her warm voice drew everything from her memory that could *radiate joy and courage*.¹⁹⁶

It is necessary to emphasize that people would attend these lectures after working a very long day, eating next to nothing and certainly nothing with any nutritional value, and having gotten very little sleep. Living under those circumstances, day in and day out and yet being not just willing, but eager, to stand or squat in an overcrowded drafty attic in silence and stillness for hours on end, seems remarkable but is nonetheless repeated in one Theresienstadt account after another.

Figure 12¹⁹⁷

A flyer advertising lectures by Dr. Paul Eppstein, a member of the Council of Elders

The handwritten text reads:

Lectures

Jewish Elder

Dr. Paul Eppstein

Subjects:

Theresienstadt as an Assignment

The Maccabees

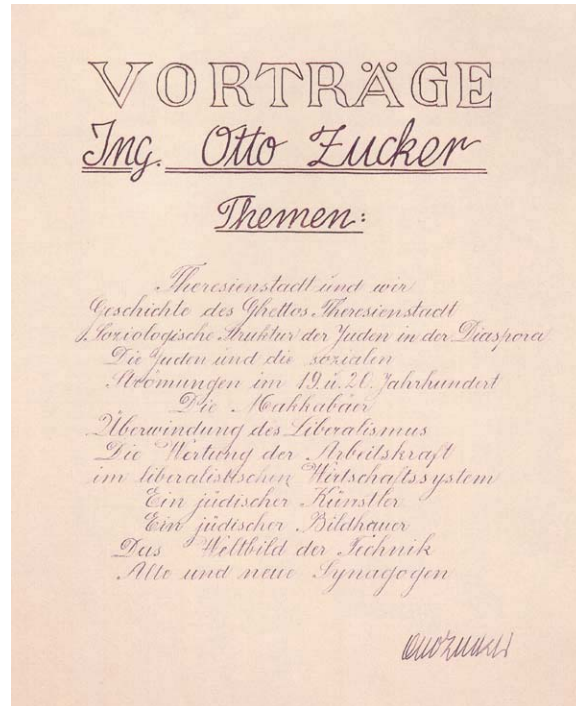
Jewish Self-Government

The Problem of the Laborer

Sociology of the Present Day

Religion and the Economy

Understanding

Figure 13¹⁹⁸

A flyer advertising lectures by Engineer Otto Zucker

The handwritten text reads:

Lectures

Ing. (Engineer) Otto Zucker

Subjects:

Theresienstadt and Us

History of the Theresienstadt Ghetto

Sociological Structure of Jews in the Diaspora

Jews and Social Trends in the 19th and 20th Centuries

The Maccabees

Overcoming Liberalism

The Appreciation of Labor in Liberal Economic Systems

Jewish Artist Sculptor

The World View of Technology

Old and New Synagogues

Practical and Moralistic Lectures

Lectures related to events and circumstances in Theresienstadt were presented as well. Hugo Friedmann conducted “Excursions Through Theresienstadt.” These were tours that he led through the town, describing its history, architecture and art history.¹⁹⁹ One young woman who worked in a garden (considered to be one of the better jobs as it was outdoors in the fresh air and there was always the possibility of being given or “organizing” extra food)²⁰⁰ recalled attending lectures related to farming and gardening and appreciating their relevancy to her life. “Every Wednesday there are lectures on agriculture, agricultural machines, botany, and soil cultivation. It’s very interesting to hear something theoretical after learning through practice.”²⁰¹ Subject specific lectures and seminars were also offered for the counselors and teachers who looked after the children.²⁰² Learning about the work everyone in Theresienstadt was forced to do, except for the very young, very old and very ill, may also have helped to add meaning to the long, difficult hours. The exhaustion was constant as was the frustration and anger that all the products of the labor efforts went to the Nazis and the German population, when they in Theresienstadt were in such dire need.

Thematic or celebratory lectures were offered on special occasions or on the anniversaries of particular events. “The birthdays of other prominent Jews, along with a few highly regarded non-Jews such as Goethe and Schiller, were also observed. Franz Kafka’s 60th birthday was commemorated with a talk by his sister Ottilie followed by remarks by some of his cousins and two of his former schoolmates.”²⁰³

Petr Ginz wrote in his diary on February 9, 1944 that “At eight o’clock we had an evening of Chinese Poetry. The speaker was Zdeněk Jelínek. The most important idea in

his introduction: People are the same everywhere, Chinese poetry is people's poetry."²⁰⁴

This takes us back to Eisinger's article on Goethe. Both Eisinger and Jelinek were attempting to instill in the young people of the camp the belief that all people everywhere are the same and should be treated equally. This lesson could not have been easy for prisoners to teach, nor for other prisoners to accept at a time when they were being subjected to brutal treatment, precisely because of who they were, because they were being viewed as being different and lesser people.

On May 10, 1942 Gonda wrote about attending "An interesting Hebrew circle: a lecture on [Shmuel] Agnon and his writings. Contents of his book: *Maalot v'yeridot*...It's the fate of man alternately to suffer and be happy. Man's lot is like a ladder: he rises to the highest level and then falls to the bottom. There, he has to get back on his feet in order to climb again."²⁰⁵ In this case, the study of a Hebrew text and its moral could clearly have been applied to Gonda's current imprisonment. The lesson gave hope that it is possible to fall, hit bottom, and yet survive and return to where you were before. The Maccabees were a popular lecture topic as they symbolize Jewish resistance, strength and ultimate domination over their enemies. Norbert Frýd recalled one lecture given on the topic of "Human Tolerance." From this lecture, one story in particular stayed with him:

Once I saw an old bible picture. The Antichrist was about to pierce a saint through with his lance. The saint was sitting comfortable there, as if it had nothing to do with him. Formerly I used to think that the medieval painters were incapable of presenting feelings like fear, astonishment or pain, so it looked as if the saints had shown no interest in their own martyrdom. Now I understand the saints better; what could they do?²⁰⁶

This story returns to the idea of resistance and to the arguments about armed versus intellectual resistance. Once in a concentration camp, isolated from the outside world, kept in an extremely weakened and deprived state, what could the prisoners do? How

could they resist? They could read, tell stories, and share knowledge to keep their minds, thoughts and imaginations active, to keep from being devastated by the circumstances, and to maintain hope that there would be an end to the horror.



Figure 14²⁰⁷
Arnošt Klein, *Three-Tier Bunk in a Barracks Room*

Conclusions

It has always been essential for an effective librarian to understand what people read, where they read, how they read, why they read, how people learn and exchange stories and knowledge, and that these factors are in a constant state of flux and evolution. I believe that one central lesson can be learned from the topic of this paper: during trying times, even those as extreme as the Holocaust, libraries, books, reading, sharing knowledge and experiences through storytelling and lecturing can be fundamental elements for the survival of the affected people. Unfortunately, even today, people all over the world continue to live in fear and deprivation. Even in the midst of these circumstances, as during the Holocaust, many people participate in intellectual and cultural activities if the possibility exists, and many are stronger because of it.

Librarians are the guardians of certain tools of civilization and survival, and it is their responsibility to understand how they contribute during times of crisis or extraordinary duress. Consider the following two examples from current events, which illustrate how a library can serve as a precious space offering peace and refuge:

Even under the constant threats of war, the library became an icon and central meeting point for Afghan scholars. Spending the days teaching or in the library, Pedram fondly remembers this time of peace. ‘Pol-e-Khomri and this cultural center were the only light in Afghanistan. When one entered the city you would not have known that there was a war. There was freedom, there was life, cultural life, music, and events. Literary evenings were organized in the library. The best writers, researchers, and poets were gathering there from all different parts of the country to escape. We sometimes had weeks organized around cultural activities.’²⁰⁸

Once I was visiting some terrific kids in a Cairo library during the middle of a dramatic sandstorm. Large tree branches were crashing onto the library roof. The wind was howling ferociously. The Egyptian newspapers next day would describe it as the worst sandstorm to hit Cairo in the twentieth century. Much to my surprise, none of the kids were trembling

or crying or crawling beneath the tables. I said nervously, ‘What should we do?’ The kids said, ‘Just keep reading.’²⁰⁹

Periods of challenge and persecution - such as the Holocaust or postwar Eastern Europe, or in the restricted lives of soldiers and prisoners, or amid current events like the war in Iraq, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and even in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 in the United States - all leave people searching for answers, feelings of power and hope, and temporary escape from the pain or chaos. A clear and strong grasp of the experiences of World War II concentration camp prisoners and victims can teach librarians and others enormous lessons about the ways in which people seek understanding, achieve temporary mental refuge, and gather strength through leading, encouraging and partaking in intellectual activities. Perhaps what we can learn from the diaries, memoirs and personal narratives of those who experienced the most traumatic event in recent history, will help us face future adversity in the most effective, powerful and meaningful way possible.

The editor of *In Memory's Kitchen* writes in her introduction, “this work – unlike conventional cookbooks – is not to be savored for its culinary offerings but for the insight it gives us in understanding the extraordinary capacity of the human spirit to transcend its surroundings, to defy dehumanization, and to dream of the past and of the future.”²¹⁰ It is my hope that this paper serves a similar purpose, that it provides insight into the ability of people, specifically prisoners in the Ghetto Theresienstadt from 1941 to 1945, to use books and storytelling as forms of intellectual resistance and tools of survival. Survivor Nina Ebb wrote, “These cultural offerings kept us intellectually involved in an inhumane surrounding. Our very participation in culture constituted a certain rebellion against the inhumanity of our captors, an assertion of our own humanity.”²¹¹

Franta Bass arrived in Theresienstadt at the age of eleven and died in Auschwitz at thirteen. The following poem, one of many he wrote, seems to tie together several of the themes covered by this paper in a remarkable manner. Within its short lines, Bass addresses the enormous capacity that books, reading, reading out loud, and telling stories through poetry, all hold to empower, strengthen, and heal, no matter what the surrounding circumstances may be.

Illness²¹²
-Franta Bass

*Sadness, stillness in the room.
In the middle, a table and a bed.
In the bed, a feverish boy.
His mother sits next to him
with a little book.
She reads him his favorite story
and immediately, the fever subsides.*

Notes

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- ⁴ Zdenek Lederer, Ghetto Theresienstadt (London: Edward Goldston & Son, Ltd., 1953), 2.
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- ⁷ Novitch 30.
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- ⁹ David Shavit, Hunger for the Printed Word: Books and Libraries in the Jewish Ghettos of Nazi-Occupied Europe (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1997), 114.
- ¹⁰ Gerald Green, The Artists of Terezin (New York: Hawthron Books, Inc., 1978), 20.
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- ²⁴ Vera Schiff, Theresienstadt: The Town the Nazis Gave to the Jews (Toronto: Lugus Publications, 1996), 51.
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- ²⁹ Shavit 1.
- ³⁰ Lucy Dawidowicz, The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945 (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 242.
- ³¹ Grubsztein 152-153.
- ³² Hermann Langbein, Against All Hope: Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps 1933-1945 (London: Constable, 1994), 51-55. and Yehuda Bauer, The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 26-40.
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- ³⁶ Ehrmann 132. From an essay by Jifi Diamant.

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- ³⁷ “Spiritual Resistance in the Ghettos.” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Learning Center, 3 March 2003. <<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/>>
- ³⁸ Schiff 97.
- ³⁹ Ivan Klíma, “Literature and Memory” The Spirit of Prague and Other Essays (New York: Granta Books, 1993), 36. Czech writer and Holocaust survivor Ivan Klíma uses the word “unfreedom” to describe a time of being “bombarded by lies, when it seemed that everything real, everything that aimed higher than man, did not in fact exist and was condemned to nothingness and forgetting.”
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- ⁴⁷ Ibid xviii.
- ⁴⁸ Ehrmann 69. From an essay by Richard Feder.
- ⁴⁹ Linda Gorham et.al. Storytelling at the Crossroads (Jonesborough, TN: National Storytelling Network, 2003), 1.
- ⁵⁰ Michael Kimmelman, “The Solace in Sharing the Beauty of Great Art and Music” The New York Times on the Web 17 September, 2001. 8 April 2003
<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F50810FE3C5F0C748DDDA00894D9404482>> In this article, Kimmelman reports that on Wednesday, September 12, 2001, 300 people visited the Brooklyn Museum of Art and on Thursday, September 13, 8,200 visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These figures are significant not so much for their size but for the fact that in the days immediately following September 11, 2001, most people were afraid to leave their homes for any reason. Yet these numbers demonstrate that hundreds, even thousands, ventured out seeking solace, safe haven, and symbols of culture, beauty, knowledge and understanding in cultural institutions.
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<<http://www.holocaustcenter.org/terezinbib.shtml>>
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- ⁵⁸ Lederer 248.
- ⁵⁹ Berkley 41.
- ⁶⁰ Käthe Starke-Goldschmidt, The Ghetto Central Library at Terezín Ts. (Prague: The State Jewish Museum in Prague), 171.
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- ⁶³ Friesová 86-87.
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- ¹¹¹ Anne D. Dutlinger, ed., Art, Music and Education as Strategies for Survival: Theresienstadt 1942-1945 (New York: Herodias, 2001), 30.
- ¹¹² Petr Ginz drew the drawing of the moon, *Moon Landscape*, which Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon selected to bring with him into space in January of 2003, as a symbol of Jewish struggles and successes.
- ¹¹³ Křížková 69.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid 67.
- ¹¹⁵ Friesová 86-87.
- ¹¹⁶ Silten 146.
- ¹¹⁷ Eva Roubíčková, We're Alive and Life Goes On: A Theresienstadt Diary trans. Zaia Alexander (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 74.
- ¹¹⁸ Spies 138.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid 198.
- ¹²⁰ Friesová 91.
- ¹²¹ Shavit, 137.
- ¹²² Grubsztajn 159
- ¹²³ Ruth Schwerteger, Women of Theresienstadt: Voices from a Concentration Camp (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 58.
- ¹²⁴ Friedman 88.
- ¹²⁵ Schiff 130.
- ¹²⁶ Friedman 76. Studying and learning are key elements of Judaism, and Gonda was not only a Zionist but also a devoted Jew. Studying here does not refer to general schoolwork, but to reading, learning and discussing Judaism.
- ¹²⁷ Roubíčková 102.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid 150.
- ¹²⁹ Shavit 153.
- ¹³⁰ Norbert Troller, Theresienstadt: Hitler's Gift to the Jews trans. Susan E. Cernyak-Spatz (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 98.
- ¹³¹ Bruno Bettelheim, The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age (New York: Avon Books, 1960), 157.
- ¹³² Silton 170.
- ¹³³ Bondy 366.
- ¹³⁴ Berkley 115.
- ¹³⁵ Schwertfeger 74.
- ¹³⁶ Susan Goldman Rubin, Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the Children of Terezín. (New York: Holiday House, 2000), 13.
- ¹³⁷ Hugo Friedmann, Art Excursion Through Theresienstadt Ts. Beit-Theresienstadt Institute, Givat-Chaim Ichud, Israel.
- ¹³⁸ Judith Friedman, ed., Terezín 1942-1945: Through the Eyes of Norbert Troller (New York: Yeshiva University Museum, 1981), 35.
- ¹³⁹ Spies 93-94.
- ¹⁴⁰ Roubíčková 79.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid 137-138.
- ¹⁴² Mary S. Costanza, The Living Witness: Art in the Concentration Camps and Ghettos (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 143.
- ¹⁴³ Huppert 3.
- ¹⁴⁴ Zapruder 165.
- ¹⁴⁵ Křížková 159-160.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁷ Kohn being a very common Jewish last name and a garret being small closets and corners which were turned into private, illegal lodgings.
- ¹⁴⁸ Rubin, Fireflies in the Dark, 27.
- ¹⁴⁹ Křížková 160.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid 161.
- ¹⁵¹ Spies 64.
- ¹⁵² Ibid 84.
- ¹⁵³ Ibid 197.

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- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid 21.
- ¹⁵⁵ Ibid 125.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid 105.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid 119.
- ¹⁵⁸ Green, 44.
- ¹⁵⁹ Ibid 48.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid 49.
- ¹⁶¹ Cara De Silva, ed., In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezín (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), xxxi-xxxii.
- ¹⁶² Ibid v.
- ¹⁶³ Ibid xxv.
- ¹⁶⁴ Oppenheim 52.
- ¹⁶⁵ Huppert, 70.
- ¹⁶⁶ Oppenheim 52.
- ¹⁶⁷ The miracle of Chanukah: "A small cruse of holy oil was found in the ruined precincts of the Temple, only enough to light the lamps of the sanctuary for a single day, but the meager supply of oil then burned for eight whole days."
- Jonathan Kirsch, The Woman Who Laughed at God: The Untold History of the Jewish People (New York: Viking Compass, 2001), 98.
- ¹⁶⁸ Klíma 46.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ehrmann 211. From an essay by Norbert Frýd.
- ¹⁷⁰ Ibid 247. From an essay by Alena Synková.
- ¹⁷¹ Spies 104.
- ¹⁷² Ehrmann, 105. An excerpt from the diary of Helga Wiessová-Hošková.
- ¹⁷³ Troller 98.
- ¹⁷⁴ Huppert 79.
- ¹⁷⁵ Schwertfeger 67.
- ¹⁷⁶ Spies 83.
- ¹⁷⁷ Ibid 40.
- ¹⁷⁸ Křížková 40.
- ¹⁷⁹ Berkley 133.
- ¹⁸⁰ Friedman 108.
- ¹⁸¹ Oppenheim 49.
- ¹⁸² Berkley 135.
- ¹⁸³ Křížková 150.
- ¹⁸⁴ Roubíčková 108.
- ¹⁸⁵ Ibid 112.
- ¹⁸⁶ Ehrmann 210. From an essay by Norbert Frýd.
- ¹⁸⁷ Starke, The Ghetto – Library, 1.
- ¹⁸⁸ Massachusetts College of Art, Boston Seeing Through "Paradise": Artists and the Terezín Concentration Camp (Boston: Massachusetts College of Art, 1991), 29.
- ¹⁸⁹ Bondy 307.
- ¹⁹⁰ Křížková 144.
- ¹⁹¹ Spies 119.
- ¹⁹² Troller 47.
- ¹⁹³ Ehrmann, 211. From an essay by Norbert Frýd.
- ¹⁹⁴ Berkley, 135.
- ¹⁹⁵ Nina Z. Ebb, Terezín: Recollections of a Survivor thesis University of New Haven (West Haven, CT: University of New Haven Graduate School, 1983), 59.
- ¹⁹⁶ Spies 79.
- ¹⁹⁷ Rudolf M. Wlaschek, ed., Kunst und Kultur in Theresienstadt : eine Dokumentation in Bildern (Gerlingen : Bleicher, 2001), 73.
- ¹⁹⁸ Wlaschek 75.
- ¹⁹⁹ Friedmann.

²⁰⁰ “Organizing” was the commonly used word for what many would call stealing. Prisoners did not consider it to be stealing as they were receiving far less than they could live on and needed whatever they “organized” for the survival of themselves, family and friends.

²⁰¹ Roubíčková 105. Entry dated October 24, 1943.

²⁰² Friedman 77.

²⁰³ Berkley 136.

²⁰⁴ Křížková 65.

²⁰⁵ Friedman 41.

²⁰⁶ Ehrmann 217. From an essay by Norbert Frýd.

²⁰⁷ Marketá Petrášová, and Arno Pařík, eds., Terezín in the Drawings of Prisoners Trans. Olga Berntová (Prague: The State Jewish Museum in Prague, 1983), cat. # 83.

²⁰⁸ Matthew Loving, “The War on Terror: darkest days” American Libraries 33.5 (May 2002): 71.

²⁰⁹ Naomi Shihab Nye, “Where Would I Be Without Reading?” Knowledge Quest 30.33 (January/February 2002):29.

²¹⁰ Silva xvi.

²¹¹ Ebb 61.

²¹² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 30.

APPENDIX A

"Libraries and the War in Europe," a statement adopted by the Council of the American Library Association, December 29, 1939, republished in Foster, Connie. "Looking Back." *Kentucky Libraries* 62, no.3 (Summer 1998):11-12.

Libraries and the War in Europe

The social and intellectual unrest growing out of the present world situation may lead to confusion and hopelessness; or it may lead to something of a renaissance of critical inquiry and constructive thinking. Whether the result will be the one or the other will depend in no small measure on the ability of libraries and other agencies of enlightenment to supply the facts and materials needed by people for answering their questions.

Democracy may or may not be at stake, but it cannot now be taken for granted. An unusual opportunity exists to increase understanding of what democracy is in its political, economic and cultural aspects, and how it can be perfected. Because some knowledge of the governmental systems with which it is or may be in competition is essential to such understanding, reading should be encouraged and facilitated not only on democracy, but on other ideologies. Propaganda should not so much be feared and avoided as confronted with evidence and informed interpretation.

The essential internationalism of intellectual materials should lead every librarian and library trustee to assist in maintaining respect for the cultural achievements of all peoples, and to advocate continuing cultural relations with all nations, in spite of difficulties.

The war, the peace to follow, disarmament, the many proposals for continental or world union, our own governmental policies -- these and scores of other war-time subjects need public consideration and discussion in the light of factual materials which libraries can best provide. So also do our domestic problems, the prompt solution of which may perhaps assure the continuation of democracy in this nation.

The present situation calls for a positive program of stimulation and leadership. Libraries have an opportunity to make possible the reading of thought-provoking books on socially significant questions; they have an obligation to make it difficult for people to escape the influence of such books. Librarians do not tell people what to think; they do give their readers, in books, the facts and ideas which are the food of thought. A generous provision of books and services on all aspects of current problems and their historical antecedents is a first obligation of the library in times like these.

The library can not work alone, but must work with all other agencies concerned with education and the diffusion of ideas. Schools, colleges, debating clubs, forums, organized groups of many kinds -- all will need to an unusual degree the materials and services of the library in fields related to society's present problems. The library must not fail them.

A vigorous emphasis on issues which are of importance to American citizens can be used to strengthen the library's grip on its long-time objectives. Reading and study may be vitalized by being related to events and ideas which are stirring men's minds at the moment; the diffusion of knowledge was never more important to the welfare of mankind.

When, as now, it becomes necessary to mobilize all educational and cultural resources for the preservation and improvement of American democracy, it must be deplored that millions of Americans do not have library service. Until such service is everywhere available, a first objective of the American Library Association must be the extension and betterment of libraries with local, state or provincial, and national support.

Intellectual freedom is never permanently assured. It is especially endangered by war. The right of the citizen to find in his library the best material on all sides of controversial public questions must be protected at any cost.

Appendix B

Contents of the GCL as of 17 November 1943

Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt, p. 196

	Volumes
Hebraica.....	10,810
Hebrew Periodicals.....	270
Judaica (Zionist).....	10,930
Jewish Periodicals.....	1,900
Yiddish Literature.....	100
Philosophy (General and Religious).....	1,550
History (Art and Music).....	1,300
Ancient Languages.....	600
Modern Languages.....	500
Natural Sciences.....	600
Publications.....	2,100
Reports of Activities.....	7,000
Belles Lettres.....	5,300
Classics.....	3,000
Juvenile Literature.....	250
Miscellaneous.....	2,500

	48,710

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