

Introduction, *The University Over the Abyss*

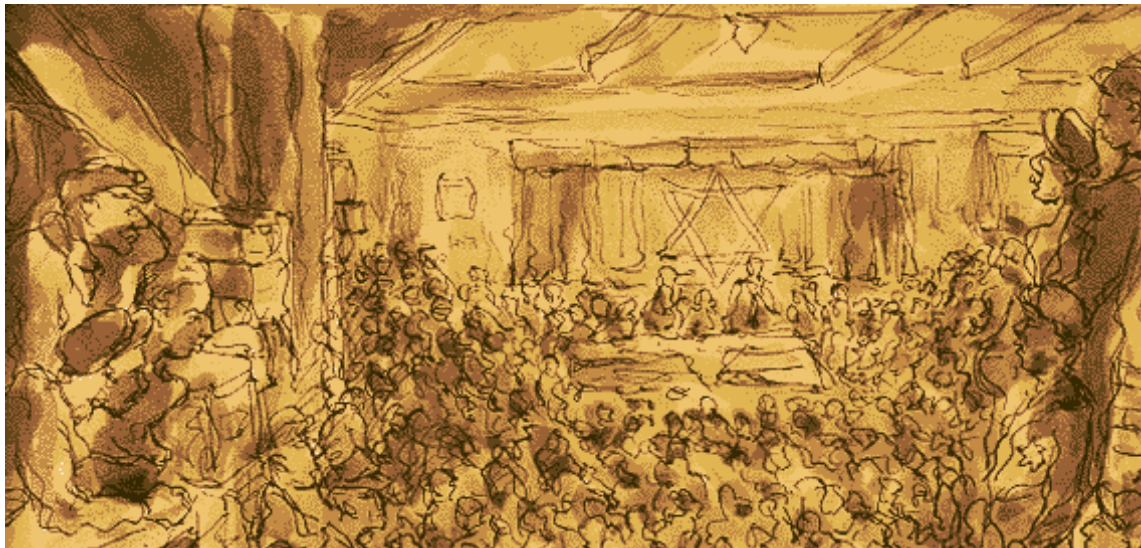
"It is great here, so many interesting people. One could live here quite decently, if not for the constant fear of being sent to the East" -- Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, artist, designer, art teacher, and Holocaust martyr, wrote in a postcard sent from Ghetto Theresienstadt, in 1943.

Theresienstadt (Terezin), an 18th century fortress near Prague, was converted by the Nazis into a transit point, where deported Jews were interned, sometimes as long as two years, and then sent to the extermination camps. The prisoners were mainly professional people from Czechoslovakia, Germany, Austria, Holland and Denmark, many of them a part of the European cultural elite. But the clichéd image of a 'pitiful Jew', crushed by a 'demonic force', didn't hold in Terezin. Despite miserable conditions and numerous deaths from starvation and diseases, the prisoners never gave in. In this surrealistic world on the edge of life and death, exhausted by hunger and severe conditions, they stubbornly clung to their cultural values - books, art, music, intellectual debate, humor and irony.

Volumes have been written about the culture in Theresienstadt. Inspired operas and musical pieces that originated there are widely performed. Drawings by children and adult artists, camp magazines and poems have been published.

The children in Terezin were educated and cared for by excellent teachers and social workers. They regained their will to live and hope for the future, but, with few exceptions, were ruthlessly exterminated.

In addition to that, hundreds of professionals and academics gave thousands of lectures on all imaginable cultural and scientific subjects. In the documents that survived the war, many of them explain the main motivation for this work - first, to prepare and educate the youth for the post-war life; and second - to revive their own professional self-esteem and replace the misery of physical existence with the richness of spiritual life.



Detail from: Karel Fleischmann, *Cultural Lecture*, 1943, colored pen and India ink wash, paper, (State Jewish Museum, Prague)

Lectures substituted teaching forbidden by the Nazis. Delivered in scattered miserable attics and cellars, however cold or hot the weather, the lectures took the shape of full courses in history, philosophy, art, literature, medicine, science, Judaism and other fields. They attracted tens of thousands of young people and adults, hungry and exhausted after their day's work - the triumph of human dignity and integrity in the face of death.

The inmates had to report to the Nazis of all cultural activities that took place in the camp. Ironically, the survived reports proved a precious source to recover data for thousands of lectures - including their titles, time and locations.

Some of the speakers were well-known before the war in their own right, for example, Dr. Leo Baeck, Chief Rabbi of Germany, Alfred Meissner, Minister of Masaryk Government in Czechoslovakia, and composer Viktor Ullmann. Others survived the Holocaust and found wider recognition afterwards, like psychologist Viktor Frankl, historian Miroslav Karny, writer Josef Bor (Bondy), and author Norbert Fried. But the majority perished. Their careers stopped short, together with their lives; they were simply forgotten. They were such fascinating people as the Jewish philosopher Jehuda Palache, the psychologist Max Brahn, the art historian Max Bohm, the classical philologist Maximillian Adler, the psychologist Gertrude Boeml, the art collector Hugo Friedmann, the journalist Philipp Manes, and the semitologist Moizis Woskin.

Below just a tiny fragment of their exuberant intellectual world is reproduced:

Jewish Studies

Zucker Otto	Sociological Structure of the Jews in the Diaspora
Baeck Leo	The Jewish Religious Philosophy of the Middle Ages
Jonas Regina	What Is Power Nowadays Jewish Religion, the Power Source for Our Ego Ethics and Religion
Englander Arthur	Impressions of Jerusalem Cities in Palestine
Woskin Moizis	Jews in Babylone and Egypt in the 5th Century Literary Sources of the Return from Babylon

Humanities

Blum Paul	About Grotesque Humour German Humor, French Esprit, Jewish Witz Funny Verses of My Own Pen
Baeck Leo	Typology and Method in Spiritual Science and Philosophy The Messianic Idea The Problem of Body and Soul
Adler Maximilian	The Hellenic and the Hellinistic Introduction to Cicero's Speeches against Catalina Alexander the Great

Sochacsewer Ludwig	A Journalist's Meetings With Great Europeans
Aurednickova Anna	Romeo and Juliet Contemporary English Authors
Bohm Max, Weil Franz	The Way of Development of Modern Oil Painting
Bloemendahl Alice	Contemporary Belgian Artists Prominent English Jews under Victoria (Montefiore, Rotschild, Disraeli)
Friedmann Hugo	The Artistic Experience Verses to the History of Art Austrian Rococo
Utitz Emil	About Theatre The Art of Playwriting
Goetz Oskar	From the Field of Journalism The Image of Shylock
Klement Otto	The Magic Cure in Fairy-Tales
Social Studies	
Rischawa Hedwika	The Relationship Between Social Service and Medicine
Bauml Gertruda	Neglected Youth and Labour Education
Taussig Maria	The Origin of Scientific Graphology The Graphology of Children's Writing
Science	
Klausner Erich	About Animals that I Love
Stern Erich	Applied Mathematics
Fischer Otto	Methods of Modern Statistics
Simon Erich	Modern and Old Statistics
Ungar Hermann	The Relativity Theory
Hirschfeld Willi	From the Early Years of Flying Machines (2 lectures)
Legal Studies	
Klang Heinrich	Recollections of an Austrian Military Judge Right and Justice Fashion in the Law Strong and Weak Points of Modern Law Theories
Medicine	
Pick Erwin	Diseases As the Consequence of Bad Skin Care
Schapira David	The Blind and Their World
Terezin Studies	
Grabower Rolf	Making Sense of Our Existence Here

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Zucker Otto	The History of the Theresienstadt Ghetto
Eppstein Paul	Theresienstadt As a Task
Utitz Emil	Lectures in the Theresienstadt Library
Fischerova Irma	How a Wife Perceives her Husband in Terezin
Klang Heinrich	Legal Life in Theresienstadt (The Science Society) The Theresienstadt Law and Order
Friedmann Hugo	A Guided Art Tour through Theresienstadt
Jonas Regina	Between Saving the Body and Soul: The Responsibilities of Jews to Each Other in Terezin

Artwork and Poem by Petr Ginz, age 15, Terezin



Petr Ginz, Rooftops and Towers of Prague, 1942–1944, watercolor and India ink on paper. (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel.)

Memories of Prague

How long since I saw the sun fade behind the Petrin Hill
with tearful eyes I gazed at you, Prague, enveloped in your evening
shadows
How long since I heard the rush over the weir in the river
I have long since forgotten those hidden corners in the old town, those
shady nooks, those sleepy canals.
How are they?
They cannot be grieving for me as I do for them
For almost a year I have huddled in this awful hole, a few poor streets
replace your priceless beauty.
Like a beast, I am imprisoned in a tiny cage
Prague, your fairy tale in stone, how well I remember!

Excerpted from Marie Rút Křížková, Kurt Jiří Kotouč, and Zdeněk Ornest, We Are Children Just the Same: Vedem, the Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezín. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995)





US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Edgar and Hana Krasa

1943 STILL LIFE OF A VIOLIN AND SHEET OF MUSIC BEHIND PRISON BARS BY BEDRICH FRITTA

1943 still life of a violin and sheet of music behind prison bars by Bedrich Fritta (1909–1945). Fritta was a Czech Jewish artist who created drawings and paintings depicting conditions in the Theresienstadt camp-ghetto. He was deported to Auschwitz in October 1944; he died there a week after his arrival.

Self Portrait in a Car by Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, 1940, pastel on paper, Jewish Museum Prague





Bedřich Fritta, *Vaudeville Theater*, 1943/44
Ink, pen and brush, wash, 55,7 x 83,5 cm