



MAX KADE CENTER FOR GERMAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

MAY 2001

Irmela von der Luehe at the Max Kade Center

Irmela von der Luehe, visiting Max Kade professor from the University of Göttingen, whose students at the University of Kansas unanimously declared her an inspiring teacher, was in turn inspired by her experiences on our campus. During her stay she became intensely involved in departmental routines. Besides teaching courses, she participated in one master's examination and two dissertation defenses. She gave a public lecture on Klaus and Erika Mann

("Die schlimmen, instinktslosen Kinder"), and she delivered the featured talk, "Kabarett gegen Hitler—Kabarett im Exil—Erika Manns "Pfeffermühle,"" at the German

Graduate Students Conference. Professor von der Luehe took part actively in the discussions of the conference during which Mark

Luehe commented: "I profited considerably from my participation in the graduate student conference at the Max Kade Center. The high

standards, the wide range of topics, the lively discussions, and the extremely positive atmosphere demonstrated to me once again how much the German university system could profit through a greater interaction with its American counterpart. Conferences such as this are not cus-

tomary in Germany. And yet it is clear how useful such conferences could be for German students in their professional, social, and intellectual development."



Professor Irmela von der Luehe addressing the Graduate Student Conference

Nesbitt-Daly, Max Maximov, Monika Moyrer, Karl Magnuson, Doris Dippold, Thorsten Huth, Sean Henry, and John Littlejohn made presentations. Professor von der

Ruth Klüger's Return Visit

With Professor von der Luehe's support, the German Department was able to persuade Ruth Klüger to consider returning for a lecture visit to KU, where she taught in the German Department in the seventies. Klüger, still teaching at the University of Göttingen, has had a distinguished career. For a number of years she was the editor of the *German Quarterly*, the most important literary journal in our field. She has written numerous books and articles on modern German and comparative literature. She is most well known for her autobiography, which became a best-seller in Germany. On January 14, 1993 Marcel Reich-Ranicki, a famous critic in Germany, reviewed *weiter leben* on German television: "Ruth Klüger describes her experience as a child in Vienna. She was deported when she was twelve years old to Theresienstadt and from there to Auschwitz. . . As I was reading this

book, with increasing interest, I suddenly realized that finally, at long last, we have before us a work of



literature about [the Holocaust]. This is a book in which a woman describes what she experienced as a child in a language that is extraordinary, intellectual, and literary. My opinion is that it is the best book that has appeared in recent years. It is a

book that attempts to combine two things: the perspective of a child and that of a mature author. It is a book that avoids reporting dreadful details without minimizing what had happened There is a sentence that critics in the last thirty years have used over and over. I have never used it, but now I am going to: This book is one that should be required reading in German schools." Klüger's book has been translated into many languages. This fall it will appear in English.

Klüger's wide knowledge of German literature and European cultural history was evident during her brief visit. She was here February 20-21 to present a talk on the image of women in the life and works of Arthur Schnitzler. In the context of the Western Civilization program, she also explored the concept of truth and readers' expectations in modern fiction and nonfiction ("History and Literature: Facts, Myths, and Lies").



Rudolf Vrba to Speak

On Tuesday, October 16, Rudolf Vrba, professor emeritus at the University of British Columbia, will be on campus to deliver a public talk on "War, Morality, and Deception: An Auschwitz Perspective." He will also participate in a Hall Center faculty seminar that will treat the Auschwitz Report (of which he was a coauthor). In the context of a course offered in the fall semester about Hungarian Language, History, and Culture Vrba will discuss a documentary film that was made about him and answer questions about the impact of the Auschwitz report in Hungary.

Born in Czechoslovakia, Vrba was expelled at the age of fifteen from school as a result of the Slovak State's anti-Jewish laws. In 1942 he was deported to Maidanek and then to Auschwitz on June 30. He remained Auschwitz Prisoner No. 44070 for almost two years. Under dramatic circumstances he escaped, and the report that resulted from that escape was the earliest account to contain a precise description of the geography of the Auschwitz annihilation camp and the mass murders in gas chambers in Auschwitz. The report eventually reached the Allied governments and became a catalyst for breaking a conspiracy of silence about the Holocaust. The Allies, impelled to act by the report, warned Hungary to halt the deportations. Although by that time over 400,000 persons had been transported to

Auschwitz, the halting of the deportation in response to these warnings saved the lives of many hundreds of thousands still threatened. The Vrba-Wetzler Auschwitz Report became the most significant instrument of rescue in World War II.



Vrba joined the Czechoslovak Partisan Units in September 1944 and fought until the end of the war. He received the Czechoslovak Medal for Bravery, the Order of Slovak National Insurrection award, and the Medal of Meritorious Fighter. After the war he studied chemistry in Prague, where he received his doctorate in 1951. After holding positions in Israel, England, and the United States, Vrba joined the faculty of medicine at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of more than fifty re-

search papers on the chemistry of the brain, as well as on topics relating to diabetes and cancer.

In collaboration with A. Bestic he published a book of personal recollections on Auschwitz (*I Cannot Forgive*, London, 1964; New York, 1964 and Vancouver, 1997). The

volume has also appeared in German (Munich, 1964), French (Paris, 1988), Dutch (Kempen, 1996), Czech (Prague, 1998) and Hebrew (Haifa, 1998). In 1998 the University of Haifa conferred on Vrba an honorary doctorate in philosophy. At the recent international film festival in Prague, under the auspices of the UN High Commission for Human Rights and the Czech Republic, one category of prizes for documentary films was named the "Rudolf Vrba Award." By highlighting Vrba's name, the organizers of the film festival, keenly aware of

the symbolism of Vrba's life and actions, hope to remind the world of the importance of being informed about human rights abuses. In a recent interview with Peter Adler of *The Vancouver Sun*, Vrba observed:

The modern Holocausts of the twentieth century didn't begin with the Nazis, and they didn't end with them. The Armenian Christian minority in Turkey was stripped of their rights and belongings during the First World War. During a death march toward Syria, the Arme-



Rudolf Vrba in the Czechoslovak partisan army (1945)

nians, including children, women, and old people, were brutally murdered by the Turks. More than a million Armenians died in terrible circumstances. The writer Franz Werfel described the events in his novel *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. He wrote about a German pastor who went to Turkey to try to help the Armenian victims. When he saw the horrors of the massacre, the pastor said he was happy to be a German because things like that couldn't happen in his civilized country. Well, it did happen in the civilized Germany only twenty-five years later, only on a much bigger scale, using more modern methods for mass murder and robbery. And the Holocausts of various shades continued after the Second World War, also. Just remem-

ber the hundreds of thousands murdered quite recently in Rwanda or Cambodia. If a proof was needed that the mentality and danger of the Holocaust are still with us, it's right there. We must study the circumstances that make such tragedies possible. . . . The history of our Auschwitz report shows that when there is no sufficient information about secret and inhuman actions, even political leaders of the free world remain in limbo, until and unless they are confronted by a massive protest sparked by an outraged public opinion.



Vrba and Soros: Alternatives to the Holocaust in Hungary?

Frank Baron

I believe the tragedy of the Hungarian Jewry is a severe indictment. Why didn't we know? I could tell you many stories because, after all, I am a Hungarian Jew. And to this day I try to understand what happened. If ever there was a tragedy that could have been prevented, it was that one. (Elie Wiesel)¹

It is a widely held view that the fate of the Hungarian Jewry at the end of World War II was an unavoidable tragedy. The Vrba-Wetzler Report was calculated to warn the Hungarians about the impending deportation threat. Vrba believed and continues to believe that the deaths of many could have been avoided if Jewish citizens had have known what the deportations

really meant. The Vrba-Wetzler report remained secret, however, during the crucial early phase of the deportation process, and the resistance that Vrba hoped for did not materialize.

In a recently published account of the crucial events during the Nazi occupation of Hungary in 1944, Tivadar Soros, father of the prominent investment banker George Soros, asserts that the decisions by key Jewish leaders to cooperate with the Nazi authorities had tragic consequences. In a book first published in English in 2000 (*Maskerado.: Dancing around Death in Nazi Hungary*, Conongate: Edinburgh), Soros shows that the Jewish Council had received the information that Vrba and Wetzler had made available, but because it

was pressured to cooperate with the Nazi authorities, it felt obliged to keep silent about Auschwitz. In effect, the Council offered cooperation in return for saving lives. Rudolf Kastner, a leading member of the Jewish Council, who had received the Vrba-Wetzler report immediately after it was written, negotiated with Adolf Eichmann and hoped to save lives as a reward for cooperation.. This strategy was successful; a considerable number of Jews gained freedom through such negotiations. According to Soros, however, the negative consequences far outweighed the successes. He says that "the Jewish Council's voluntary collaboration with the authorities with the ignorance of the Jews themselves, facilitated and indeed enabled the deportation of sev-

eral hundred thousand Jews from Hungary to Germany. None of this could have happened without the voluntary collaboration on the part of the Jewish Council.” (*Masquerado*, p. 136)

Alternatives to the council’s policies were conceivable, to be sure, only at great risk, and they required extraordinary presence of mind and leadership. Nevertheless, Soros’s account and actions in these difficult months reveal the evolution of collaborationist policies of the Jewish Council and the dangerous decisions they entailed. Soon after the occupation of Hungary by German troops, Soros discovered that his son George, at that time sixteen years old, had unwittingly become a party to the questionable operations of the Jewish Council:

The children were enlisted as couriers under the command of their teacher. My younger son, George, also became a courier. On the second day he returned home at seven in the evening.

‘What did you do all day?’

‘Mostly nothing. But this afternoon I was given some notices to deliver to various addresses.’

‘Did you read what they said?’

‘I even brought one home.’

He handed me a small slip of paper, with a typewritten message:

SUMMONS

You are requested to report tomorrow morning at 9 o’clock at the Rabbinical Seminary in Rökk Szilárd Street. Please bring with you a blanket, and food for two days.

The Jewish Council

‘Do you know what this means?’ I asked him.

‘I can guess,’ he replied with great seriousness. ‘They’ll be interned.’

Children are often good guessers. I wondered whether he knew what being *interned* meant. Did this child of mine realize that these people would be deported to Germany and very possibly murdered? I felt too ashamed of the world I had brought him into to enlighten him.

‘The Jewish Council has no right to give people orders like that,’ I told him. ‘You are not to work there any more.’ (p. 18)

Soon after the deportations began, Soros learned about Auschwitz from two women who had close contacts with the Jewish Council: “They explained to me, in confidence, that someone had succeeded in getting out of the death camp at Auschwitz and had told the whole story. There was a copy of his statement at the Council office with the details of the German atrocities.” This was undoubtedly the Auschwitz report of Vrba and Wetzler, which Rudolf Kastner had brought with him from Bratislava. As this narrative by Soros indicates, it was a report that was being kept secret.

Soros relates a discussion with the president of the Jewish community in Győr, a city in eastern Hungary, where the deportations were about to be carried out. Soros totally disapproved of the policies that the Jewish Council pursued. He told the Jewish leader, “The Jewish Council should resign and disappear. In fact, the leaders of the Jewish congregations should have gone underground long since. If they had, there would have been no responsible people on whom the Germans could rely to tyrannize over the Jews.” This argument did not change the determination to cooperate with the directives from the Budapest Jewish Council and the Nazis; the Jewish leader insisted: “The shepherd cannot abandon his

flock.” Thus, Soros noted that “everything continued to go just as the Germans ordained it. The inertia that prevents people from accepting new ideas worked much as it usually does.”

These excerpts from Soros’s memoirs show that the Nazis operated at a great advantage. The victims did not know the destination of the transports; most believed that their justification was the need of workers in Germany. The Jewish Council helped to enforce secrecy about their real meaning, and that secrecy was a prerequisite for the smooth implementation of the deportations. If the Jewish leaders had gone into hiding, as Soros himself had done and helped others to do, they would undoubtedly have invited brutal reprisals from the Nazis. The net result, however, would have been damage to the progress of the Final Solution. Efforts on their part to transmit the Vrba-Wetzler report immediately to secular and church leaders within Hungary and in the West could have resulted in increasing pressure to halt the deportations. Such pressures did in fact halt the deportations at the beginning of July of 1944, but by that time the operations from areas outside Budapest were completed. Now only Budapest remained. If the information about the death camps had been circulated more widely and earlier—within Hungary and in places accessible to the Allies—the swift implementation of the deportation program might have been significantly undermined.

When a catastrophe occurs, a search for scapegoats often follows. In response to the tragedy of the Holocaust, honorable and well-meaning people have often been accused of participating in conspiracies of silence or inaction. In most cases it is less a question of guilt than an inability to adapt to new,

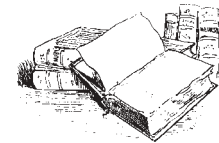
“If ever there was a tragedy that could have been prevented, it was that one.”

Elie Wiesel

risk-laden options. Debates of this nature tend to shift to personalities rather than to processes. The potential lesson for future generations, however, might be in learning more about the problems that hindered effective rescue. In the face of entrenched traditions and policies, only a radical reversal, brought about by the immediate communication of new information, can produce significant results. If it is not productive, in retrospect, to accuse political or church leaders for failing to undertake actions that did not

appear to be their own interests, there is perhaps merit in determining times when alternative courses of action were available.

1. In Elie Wiesel’s introduction to Randolph L. Braham and Bela Vago (eds.), *The Holocaust in Hungary: Forty Years Later* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. xiv. Cf. Elie Wiesel, *Night* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1960).



International Dialect Conference



Professor Keel addressing the Dialect Conference

In conjunction with the project treating the linguistic atlas of German dialects in Kansas, scholars gathered at the Max Kade Center March 29-April 1 to discuss German speech islands (*Sprachinseln*) in Europe and the Americas. Topics included current theoretical and practical issues of dialect research, such as grammatical variation and change, assimilation and acculturation, language death, digital documentation, and preservation of dialects.

William Roba, who came to the conference from Scott Community College, Iowa, observed: “In my

opinion it was an outstanding event for three reasons. First, the content was varied, detailed, controversial, and very much “state of the art.” I appreciated that so many of the presenters were able to relate their research to broader implications and ramifications. Second, the composition of the symposium members was outstanding. I particularly liked the juxtaposition of the two gentlemen who were members of the Society of Germans from Russia, the friendly and interesting couple from Hungary, Peter Rosenberg and his clear use of the speech island concept, the

comparative work of Kaufmann in Brazil and the concise descriptions of Wagener. Thirdly, the center and the staff were outstanding: friendly greeters at the door, wonderful color photos on the e-mail connection, superb atmosphere and the continuing commitment of the Center to the KU principles of quality educational opportunities of a varied and innovative manner. Congratulations!”

News in Brief

2001 Summer Internships

Cooperation between with the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) and the German Department has made it possible for the following students to work in Germany as interns: Daniel Barrientos (Civil Engineering), Siemens, Berlin; Valery Fiscus (Fine Arts), Avery Dennison, Holzkirchen; Keith Knickerbacker (German and Business), Avery Dennison, Holz-

kirchen; Rolf Snyder (Business and Law), Sparkasse Eutin; and Christy Welles (Chemistry), Siemens, Braunschweig.

Visiting Research Scholar from Hungary

Professor György Szönyi of the University of Szeged, Hungary, is this year's guest at the Max Kade Center from May to July. His current research deals with the legacy of Aby Warburg, an exile from Nazi Germany, whose famous library attracts scholars to London from all parts of the world. In the Hall Center's seminar series on literature and philosophy, Szönyi gave a lecture about Warburg's impact on contemporary iconography, literature, and postmodern thought. Szönyi's publications include several books on numerous aspects of early modern European cultural history. He has written extensively on the life and works of the Renaissance magus John Dee. In June Prof. Szönyi will be joined by his wife, Dr. Ildikó Kristóf-Szönyi, who works at the Institute of Ethnography in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and also teaches at the University of Szeged. She has published widely on early modern social, anthropological, and religious history. Her books include studies of the witch trials in Hungary.

Johnson Receives Award

Chris Johnson, research scholar on German dialects at the Max Kade Center and associate director of Student Financial Aid, recently received the Kansas Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Meritorious Service Award for 2000-2001 at the association's annual conference.



On April 18 Dr. Hans G. Hachmann, president of the Max Kade Foundation, and his wife, Eve, visited the Max Kade Center.

Humboldt Award

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has announced an award of DM 60,000 to Frank Baron, Max Kade Center, and Ulrike Leitner, Berlin Humboldt Research Center, Akademie der Wissenschaften, for a Humboldt Digital Library of the works of Alexander von Humboldt. The partnership builds on the proposals by Rex Clark (see the March 2000 newsletter) and will focus on editing the texts of Humboldt's travel reports from Venezuela, in combination with the explorer's geographical and scientific observations.

Dissertation Fellowship Awards

This year's recipients of the Max Kade dissertation fellowship are Rachel Epp Buller, "Fractured Identities in Faceted Imagery: Collage by Women in the Weimar Republic;" Matthew Lindaman, "Heimat in the Heartland: A Nineteenth-Century Trans-Atlantic German Migration;" Nina Sakun, "The Scientific and Nonscientific Function of Metaphors in Goethe's Works;" and Andrea Weis, "German/American Relations and World War Two: German Prisoners of War in America."

Advisory Board to Meet

The first meeting of the Max Kade Center Advisory Board will take place on May 12. Participants in this meeting will be Diane Fourny, Graham Kreicker, Wolfram Martinsen, Breon Mitchell, Jim Morrison, Richard Schowen, James R. (Pete) Shortridge, Willard Snyder, and Carl Strikwerda. They will also include the executive committee of the center: Frank Baron, Helmut Huelsbergen, and William Keel. As part of the program the Lawrence Camerata will perform music by Ernest Manheim, Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, and Duke Ellington.

Sudlow in Eutin

Robert Sudlow, professor emeritus of art, traveled to Eutin for the opening of his show of twenty-four landscape paintings. Frank Baron accompanied Sudlow and introduced him at the opening of the show with a talk on the significance of Sudlow's work in representing the legacy of Albert Bloch and the literary and spiritual aims of the *Blaue Reiter*. The Eutin Art Museum now has paintings by Bloch and Sudlow on permanent display.



Photograph by Achim Krauskopf, Ostholsteiner Anzeiger

Hans Schirmmacher, deputy mayor of Eutin, introduced Frank Baron and Robert Sudlow at the opening of Sudlow's exhibition.

Hungarian Language and Culture

Monika Pacziga, graduate student in American studies at the University of Budapest, will be joining the departmental staff as a teaching assistant during the fall semester. She will begin a program of Hungarian instruction.

Dissertations Reach Final Stage

During the course of the year three graduate students completed their dissertations and defended them successfully: Paul Gebhardt, "Paul Celans Gedichtband *Mohn und*

Gedächtnis: Allegorien an der Grenze des Sprechens;" Sean Henry, "August von Platen in the Discourse of Homosexuality: From the Age of Goethe to Thomas Mann (1821-1936);" and Enno Lohmeyer, "Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach als Sozialreformerin."

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