Nisko: Die ersten Judendeportationen by Jonny Moser (review)

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(Sofia Coppola's decision to bypass Zweig's biography for her 2006 movie about Marie Antoinette might point to a similar skepticism in the contemporary United States.)

Stefan Zweig und Europa offers a well-balanced overview of the various ways in which this author's work and life intersect with the idea of Europe. It will be of value to Zweig scholars as well as to those working in the renewed political-philosophical debate over European identity, a debate from which Zweig's works have thus far been strikingly absent.

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Jonny Moser, ***Nisko: Die ersten Judendeportationen.*** Edited by Joseph W. Moser and James R. Moser. Vienna: Steinbauer Verlag, 2012. 206 pp.

On September 10, 1939, in Prague, Adolf Eichmann met with his friend and associate Oberführer Dr. Franz Stahlecker, head of the Security Police in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Over breakfast the two SS officers concocted a scheme to deport all German and Austrian Jews unable or unwilling to emigrate abroad to eastern Poland. Once implemented, the Greater German Reich could be "cleansed" of Jews by removing them to a "Jewish reservation" from which they would be shipped permanently to Madagascar. Two days later Reinhard Heydrich, soon to be appointed head of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA), eagerly embraced the proposal, not least because he was aware that Hitler, Alfred Rosenberg, and Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller were discussing a "territorial solution to the Jewish question." On September 21 Heydrich authorized the expulsion of the Jews of Mährisch-Ostrau and Vienna across the Vistula by means of the main railroad line in Poland.

Although Eichmann applied his ruthless administrative talents to registering Jews and organizing railroad transports, he was unable to act until Hitler and Stalin had signed a demarcation line transferring the region between the San and Bug rivers to German jurisdiction. Shortly thereafter Eichmann met with Gestapo chief Müller, who ordered him to include as many as 80,000 additional Jews from Kattowitz. Even so, it was not until October 12 that Eichmann and Stahlecker found a location for their Jewish reservation in a swampy area near Nisko, an insalubrious town on the San river. Here, between October 18 and early November 1939, over 5,000 able-bodied men and

a few hundred women and children arrived by train. Most were immediately marched across the flooded San to construct a camp in tiny Zarzecze in Poland. Others, however, were leÈ in open fields or chased into the woods to be shot by ss snipers. Still others later managed to escape across the frontier to the Soviet Union. No sooner had the Nisko project gotten under way, however, than Eichmann received orders from Berlin to suspend deportations from Mährisch-Ostrau and Vienna. During the exceptionally cold winter of 1939–40, the surviving Jewish deportees labored in Zarzecze and other sub-camps. On April 12, 1940, the camps were closed down and the remaining 516 prisoners were released, of whom 198 managed to return to Vienna.

The Nisko episode has long confounded historians seeking to understand Nazi intentions and the evolution of the Holocaust. Were the 1939 deportations a sincere attempt by local authorities to fulfill Hitler's policies of expulsion or a prelude to the Holocaust? Why did they cease as suddenly as they had begun? AÈer decades spent collecting thousands of documents and interviewing a handful of survivors, Jonny Moser believed that he had resolved the major issues. Moser begins his outstanding study by explaining how Eichmann and his Austrian associates persuaded the head of the Jewish Religious Community (ikg) in Vienna, Dr. Josef Löwenherz, to cooperate in his "colonization" project. Faced with a moral dilemma, the much-maligned Löwenherz sought to square the circle by calling for able-bodied volunteers. An astonishing 830 individuals obliged, including carpenters, artisans, engineers, and even physicians. Because most were either too impoverished to move abroad or as former concentration inmates forbidden to emigrate, a great many glimpsed a chance to carve out a new life in the East. Once Löwenherz learned of the brutalities imposed on the deportees upon their arrival on October 23, however, he shrewdly manipulated ss guidelines to exempt countless congregants from subsequent transports, most notably the sick and unfit, pensioners, and those in receipt of foreign visas—including 187 from the United States—as well as others receiving money from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Even so, an additional 672 individuals were shipped oå on a second transport three days later. Moser suggests that Jewish officials in Mährish-Ostrau, Kattowitz, and Prague might have succeeded in limiting the more numerous deportations from their communities had they not distrusted the advice of Löwenherz and his deputy, Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein.

On October 29, 1939, the last trainload of deportees arrived in Nisko,

followed some days later by a handful of stragglers. Eichmann, Hans Günther, and Alois Brunner tried desperately to organize additional transports, but their efforts were blocked by a stop order from Heinrich Himmler, who in mid-October had been charged with expelling "injurious elements" from newly annexed territories and repatriating ethnic Germans from the Baltic states. As Christopher Browning has noted in his book *The Origins of the Final Solution*, these were "not complementary but competing goals." This meant that after acrimonious exchanges involving Himmler, Göring, and Hans Frank, the Nisko project had to be abandoned in order to accommodate the Baltic German immigrants.

At this point Moser modulates to reconstruct the lives of Jews confined to the Nisko region in 1939–40. Based almost entirely on documents from Moser's private archives, this section constitutes the most detailed, original, and substantial part of his study. The account is not a happy one. Although free to come and go in the local countryside, most of the deported Jews lived in barracks at Zarzecze, an infirmary in Pysnica, or outlying squalid huts. Without identity papers, they were regularly harassed, beaten, or robbed by Polish farmers; forced to dig wells by the ss; or simply driven into the woods. If there was a hero in this lugubrious tale, it was Ernst Kohn, a Jewish official charged with construction projects by the ss. As a former Habsburg officer, Kohn knew how to maintain discipline and order. He thus managed to procure food and other necessities such as blankets, underwear, and shoes in local villages; to resume contact with the ikg in Vienna; and to establish a local courier service. Kohn also relied on his military experience in negotiating with the ss to restore stolen baggage and other items in order to prevent chaos. Most significantly, he mastered various escape routes that enabled no fewer than 1,350 Nisko deportees to escape over the demarcation line into the Soviet Union.

In mid-December the Soviets sealed the frontier, leaving the Nisko Jews trapped in a no man's land controlled by confused and competing Nazi elites. Eichmann now realized that his project had to be liquidated in order to dissociate himself from a failed experiment. At the same time, he was reluctant to entrust the fate of the deported Jews to Hans Frank, the recently appointed governor general of the Polish *Reststaat*. Yet Eichmann also saw an opportunity to extort additional funds from both the American Jewish Distribution Committee and the Viennese ikg. All in all, Moser calculates, Eichmann managed to press Löwenherz to raise US$75,000 from the ajdc 200,000 Reichsmarks in "transportation costs" from the Viennese ikg and on March

7, 1940, an additional 300,000 Reichsmarks in stolen jewelry and personal belongings to underwrite the return to Vienna of the surviving Jews. Ironically, Löwenherz himself was able to take advantage of Eichmann's rapacity by securing supplemental assistance to facilitate the continued emigration of Austrian Jews abroad.

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Silvio Vietta and Roberto Rizzo, eds., ***"Sich an den Tod heranpürschen . . . ": Hermann Broch und Egon Vietta im Briefwechsel, 1933–1951***. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012. 373 pp.

This volume publishes for the first time the epistolary exchange between the Austrian novelist and literary critic Herman Broch (1886–1951) and the German travel writer and dramaturge Egon Vietta (1903–1959). Edited by Silvio Vietta, Egon Vietta's son, and Roberto Rizzo, the collection includes the 88 letters between the two men (and their proxies) not destroyed in Broch's flight from post-*Anschluss* Austria and also adds extensive supplemental materials. The primary source material covers a breadth of topics from the personal to the arcanely academic, touching on their health, brushes with death at the hands of the Nazi regime, insecurities and struggles as writers, and postwar geopolitics. Nevertheless, the discourse revolves around both authors' common interests in literature and philosophy. The nearly two-decade-long dialogue displays how each man saw the literary text as a new basis for philosophical knowledge in the face of nihilistic modernity. To this end, Broch found in Vietta—a lifelong adherent of Heidegger—an apt interlocutor for his own existentialist tendencies, and Vietta realized in Broch's aesthetic project an extension of his own philosophical inclinations. Together, the two men developed a theoretical rapprochement that frames the rest of their dialogue. Indeed, in the last letter before his flight from Austria and a nearly eight-year break in their exchange, Broch directly expounds his near-death experience in terms of literary production: As the volume's title alludes, death itself becomes a window into the "Wesen des Dichterischen" (47), a sentiment they resume upon their reunion.

In addition to the letters, supplemental materials comprise over half of the volume. The editors provide thorough annotations to the individual let-