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**„Wanderer Between the Worlds“**

Laudatio for Ruth Weiss

on the occasion of the presentation of a Festschrift in her honor

July 5, 2022, Nuremberg, Palace of Justice, Room 600

Ladies and gentlemen, dear Ruth,

You cannot imagine how honoured I am to be able to address you on this occasion and in this room.

Let us start with a major admission of ignorance: namely mine! I have to admit that before Frederick Lubich included me in the great ‘Festschrift’ (commemorative publication) for RUTH WEISS, which Frederick devotedly edited untiringly, I had practically known little of and about Ruth.

**PROFESSOR DR. GOOGLE TO THE RESCUE!**

Wow, what an enlightenment for me, but also a sense of shame of my ignorance of a remarkable personality, who with her writing and thus her voice opened worlds for thousands in different countries in at least two continents, worlds that would otherwise have remained closed to them.

To come to the point: Ruth Weiss’s writing have changed my world in the course of the past four months and have incredibly enriched me, a pathetic fiction philistine, who had regularly devoured political and social sciences technical literature during the past 50 years, with hardly any time for true literature.

Ruth achieved this in two of the languages, which apart from Hungarian, my mother tongue, were the two most important languages with which I conducted my professional as well as my private life. If I was to appreciate Ruth’s work and do it justice, I had to use both English and German for this short Laudation – and somehow mix it massively to create a new language like ESPERANTO. I tried to do this shortly before I clearly recognized my artistic limitations to create a new language. I am far removed from the brilliant ability of a J.R.R. Tolkien who famously created new languages from scratch!

Just this! In the course of the past four months Ruth became a real friend, a trusted companion in English as well as German, though only yesterday did we come face to face for the first time! And yesterday became a unique Fourth of July, a holiday that will always remain special for me: eight hours conversation with Ruth about God and the world, in the truest sense of the word! South African and American and Israeli politics; and a good deal that was personal, let alone historic and above all Jewish!

Of course our shared Judaism tied us together, in all its emotional and intellectual complexity. We had both been members of the left-Zionist worker organisation Hashomer Hatzair!!!

I have decided to present my Laudation for Ruth in the sequence in which I encountered her work: with the same chronology and the same books, which I read for today's task with great enthusiasm and with even greater gain!

MY SISTER SARA: The idea to examine forty years of South African history since the Boer War between Great Britain and the Boers and the bourgeois world of the West in general with the help of a Jewish orphan born during the Nazi era, to say the least can best be described and characterized with a fitting word: it is simply CHUTZPE! Incredible!

Apart from the great themes of the book – the love, which the Leroux family offer the new arrival Sara, whom they take to be a racially pure German girl before the news of Sara's Jewish background turns this within seconds into a hate-filled hell for Sara; the twists, that this revelation affects the family for life; Sara's development into a political activist, who links herself with the black civil rights movement, for which she finally perishes; and all these developments described in the words of the main narrator, Sara's brother JO – on top of all the important details that we learn in passing such as: South African politics, the role of the Huguenots in the history of the Boers - see the French family name - the hatred of Boers for the British and therefore their affinity with the Nazis; South African Universities such as Witwatersrand and Stellenbosch; South African dishes; South African landscape and geography. It is precisely the presentation of these tiny details that proves the geniality of Ruth Weiss.

I'll give you only one example, in which Ruth described brilliantly the ethos of Oxford students of the 50ties and 60ties of the last century: one could NEVER admit to be a workaholic, a striver, somebody who worked hard at being a student. Instead, one had to display a LAISSEZ FAIRE demeanor and appear to be relaxed, while in actual fact one worked extremely hard and crammed for the exams. (The famous GENTLEMAN C of the IVY LEAGUE, discriminated culturally against Jews because THEY WERE TRYING TOO HARD, they were precisely THE STRIVERS whom one had to avoid appearing were one to be counted as a true insider. Strivers and workaholics were outsiders, as were Jews.)

Only one of the thousand scenes that make this book worth reading. And the scene is unforgettable soon after hearing that Sara is a Jewess, in which the PATERFAMILIAS loses his nerves at breakfast and tosses the fried eggs to the floor, terrifying poor little Sara.

But all that is simply nothing compared with the LIFELONG SILENCE of the father towards Sara – this complete silence as far as she was concerned became truly hell for this young person. Simply terrific!!!!

And terrific is an understatement of the way Ruth's MITZIS WEDDING gripped and still occupies my mind today. The manner in which Ruth links an East Prussian estate with Melbourne through half a century of the most turbulent European and Western history is ingenious. The book is a true PAGE TURNER! I couldn't put it down. The THICK DESCRIPTION of Berlin during the Weimar years from a Berlin accent and dialect to street scenes, the Bavarian Alps with glorious names such as Stetlmeier and the apt SERVUS, Prague coffee bars, Basle's Old City, the Cornish landscape is great.

And the fate of the characters moving. The contrasts and shades within Judaism – between orthodox Eastern Jews and assimilated JEKKES as German Jews are beautifully named – are fabulous.

Ruth's description of different ways of celebrating BAR MITZVAH not only shows detailed inside knowledge of the ritual and the art of observation. I was touched by this passage and totally identified with my own Bar Mitzvah experience.

The world of Prussian Junker and the Berlin Bohemian scene is as brilliantly described as the world of the Jews.

#### A PATH THROUGH HARD GRASS and also A SONG WITHOUT MUSIC

These two books present Ruth's memories of her life –somewhat detailed in English and in German a little shortened!

Ruth's memories of Fuerth are moving. She describes her family with love and with interesting historical, indeed scholarly perspective. I was surprised at her very Jewish almost orthodox education, which reminded me more of an Eastern European Jew than that of the German Jewish middle class. She lived in a kosher household, knew about SHEITEL, attended Synagogue every SHABBAT and talks of HASHEM. I know and knew few German Jews, who did so.

(And when Ruth in her book THE DOWNTURN mentions the KADDISH – the prayer in memory of the dead with the words: OSE SHALOMBIMROMAV HU YASEH SHALOM ALEINU VE AL KOL ISRAEL (He who provides peace in his high sky for us and all Israel, I was moved to tears. Someone wrote this, who truly understands Judaism!)

The story, that she once saw Julius Streicher and his men with his whip on Fürth's main street, which made her run into the entrance of a house, is moving. As is the sudden social exclusion the day after the transfer of power 1933: Ruth and her sister Margot were avoided in particular by Ruth's schoolmates. The loneliness is noticeable a la Sara already mentioned.

The description of Ruth's teenage years in the Johannesburg suburb of Mayfair is terrific. The following is an example of the fear of her Boer neighbours of contamination with Blacks: Immediately after arrival from Europe, Margot and Ruth played with a black baby, whose mother Jenny becomes Mrs. Weiss' house help, whereupon several women of the neighbourhood appear to explain to the family that one doesn't touch black babies, as if the hateful skin colour could be transferred to whites! Or in a Calvinist Church black men are the last given a drink of water while they kneel, as the white women hold the water jugs high up in the air, lest these touch the men's mugs.

Through reading the book we learn en passant to differentiate intimately South African history and politics. This sovereign knowledge is reflected in MY SISTER SARA, where all these insights are used literary.

I must use some English in this talk: Ruth writes that she was the eternal OUTSIDER: In the village, I had been the only Jew; in Fuerth, the only girl from a village; in Mayfair, a foreigner; And now I was the only girl from a poor white suburb.

Ruth reveals that she was NEVER ONE FOR THE GREAT OUTDOORS! Well, more Jewish is impossible!

We also learn about Ruth's brilliance in areas other than literature. For a long time she was a great insurance expert, the only woman among hundreds of men at international insurance conferences and the only woman invited into the illustrious Room of Lloyds of London – the INNERMOST HOLIEST of the insurance world of the FIFTIES!!!!

We read of Ruth as an expert in issues of finance and economics; she advanced to become a well-known business journalist for prestigious British and South African papers!

She became perfect in three languages: English, Afrikaans and of course German!!!!

She gained an intimate knowledge of Africa and its early state elites: Kenneth Kaunda, Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, Julius Nyerere, the MPLA in Angola, Mozambique, etc. etc.

She lived in London and Cologne and turns into a true citizen of the world!

However, one question I will never forget, which someone – actually in England, if I remember correctly -- asked: Ruth, what is it like to be a Jew?

Ruth turned away in disgust!

Her love to her son Sohn SACHA shines throughout the book!

One of my favourite books penned by Ruth is the study of Sir Garfield Todd and the Making of Zimbabwe. Though I knew something of Ian Smith's breakaway regime and the development that succeeded it of Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU and Robert Mugabe's ZANU, I have to admit honestly that I knew nothing of Sir Garfield Todd. But Ruth's great study ended my ignorance. Ruth's detailed meticulously researched biography of this man beautifully presents the personal as well as the political life of a complex personality. In elegant and sovereign written English of a Native speaker, Ruth described the career of the charismatic Garfield Todd from his childhood in New Zealand to his post as Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia. We learn of his triumphs as well as of his defeats. Above all we learn a great deal of the complexity and difficult existence of a white liberal, who had to steer his ship between the Scylla of white settler racism and the Charybdis of the awakening black independence movement, to be finally overwhelmed by both despite his immense capabilities as a human being and politician.

I discovered a completely different Ruth when by chance I found a book in our University of Michigan library. Together with GUY ARNOLD she wrote and published STRATEGIC HIGHWAYS OF AFRICA in 1976, a masterpiece of the political and economic geography of an entire continent. Ruth and her co-author describe in detailed empiricism the regional differences of Africa's Highways, the natural Highways such as rivers – above all the ZAMBEZI and the CONGO – as well as Highways constructed by humans, whether roads or rail tracks.

By the presentation of these constructions, the authors succeed in allowing the reader to visualize different political phenomena: from the colonisation and its long term effect to ethnic conflicts. Of rivalries between states and also of cooperation; including the implication for the world powers, in particular China!

And then I came across the six-volume history of the Loews, which has fascinated me and I can't put it aside! I became truly addicted and was irritated that every now and then I had to see to other matters instead of reading Ruth's great work! I consider it simply brilliant: beginning with the construction of themes, the language, the minute researched and precise history of this tale! I am speechless!

In the first volume – THE JEWS PATH - Ruth offers us a detailed description of the immediate post-1648 situation in Franconia, which is simply great in its meticulousness and detail – Ruth's quality mark! From the fauna to the flora, from the architecture to the anthropology of village life – this story lives in a context that Ruth describes brilliantly, revealing great historical knowledge: about the aristocracy, the knights, the peasant class, the Jews, what they all eat, how they work and live! Everything is precisely researched, there is nothing invented. The story is an invention, but everything else is totally real and matches reality!

The description of a pogrom is realistic in its cruelty! I had to put the book down for a day, before I could continue reading. I was deeply moved by this passage! I was unaware that Jews had been humiliated and tortured by hanging them by their feet, so that the agonized death was prolonged and they did not perish immediately which they would have had they been strangled by the rope. The death of the Jew was sometimes accompanied by a juggler, who copied the contortions of the tortured man to a cheering crowd, who enjoyed his “playacting”!

Incredible stuff!

In the second volume „EMERGENCY BAPTISM” we find ourselves in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century and learn of the abduction by the Catholic Church of a small Jewish girl, who is confined in a convent to be released of the curse of Judaism. The details are too gripping and captivating for me to summarise these adequately. But of course Ruth – as in all her work - writes about macro-historical issues, apart from the specific theme of her novels. Thus we meet SABATAIZVI, the sephardic Rabbi of SMYRNA (IZMIR), a famous mystic and cabalist, who either declared himself to be the long awaited Messiah or was seen as such by thousands of impoverished and desperate Jews, who saw in this person the alleviation of their suffering. Zvi is a fascinating figure, who converted to Islam – that is he was forcibly converted by the Ottoman rulers – but who was caught singing Hebrew psalms towards the end of his life. He died alone and deserted. One of Ruth’s important characters in EMERGENCY BAPTISM becomes a Sabbatist.

And then we reach the third volume: THE SOCIAL RISE!

It begins with a brutal story as a well-known Jewish banker is humiliated in the presence of his small daughter by Prussian guards, who deny him the entry in his coach into Berlin and force him to sit in a passing cart carrying pigs in order to pass through the gate into the city of his birth. The guards jeer SAME TO SAME!

We encounter the Seven Year War, the French Revolution, Napoleon, The Congress of Vienna, Waterloo, Moses Mendelsohn and his attempt to turn Jews into Germans, with which it looks as if he had succeeded to some extent, but it only seems to have been so.

In this volume Ruth discusses the question of integration and assimilation that is still important today – what can succeed and what fails. Is it possible to be a Jew AND German (the famous discussion of the everlasting issue of Jewish Germans or German Jews?) or Jew and something else? Jew and French? Jew and British? And above all – what succeeds for whom? For oneself or for the outside world? And for which world outside? And to what degree and with which sacrifice and cost? Ruth covers the problem in this volume of personal identity, which is still acute today, both in its subjective and objective dimension. Simply great!

Finally may I say something about the „Festschrift“ in Ruth’s honour!

First of all we have to thank Frederick Lubich for his devoted labours. One can sense and feel the love and dedication with which he worked throughout the pages of the book. The range of themes and the internationality of authoresses and authors that shape the book are a wonderful reflection of Ruth’s life and work, endeavours and influence! Ruth has fully deserved each of the 716 pages! I hope Ruth enjoys reading this book!

At this point I also wish to thank ANNI KROPF for her sincere and warm hospitality and support. She was from the first email a wonderful correspondent, who was always helpfully at my side! With great humour, great sensitivity, total optimism and above all with great love, respect and devotion for Ruth, which was present in each one of Anni’s lines!

Now my dear Ruth, I have nothing more to say, apart from a heartfelt MAZEL TOV and of course MUCH LOVE with which I signed my numerous Mails to you, which always delighted you, for whatever reason.

ERGO: MUCH LOVE, my dearest Ruth!!!! FOREVER AND ALWAYS!!!!