Hinko Gottlieb and the Beginning of Holocaust Literature in Yugoslavia

Krinka Vidaković Petrov | ORCID: 0000-0001-6226-5563
Dept. of Comparative Literature, Institute for Literature and Art, Belgrade, Serbia
krinkavidakovic@yahoo.com

Abstract

The article is dedicated to Hinko Gottlieb (1886–1948), who is introduced here as the first Yugoslav Jewish writer who dealt with the theme of the Holocaust in real time. The personal biography of this forgotten author presents his life in the historical context of the pre-Holocaust and Holocaust periods. The inception of Holocaust literature in Yugoslavia is manifested in Gottlieb's works, imbued with irony and satire, written prior to the occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941. Special attention is paid to his works written during the Holocaust in Yugoslavia (1941–1945), highlighting key issues regarding the presentation of the Holocaust in literature as art, the function of intertextuality and the use of literary genres, such as the science fiction novel, not traditionally associated with Holocaust literature. Attention is also given to the reception of Gottlieb's works in the post-Holocaust period.

Keywords


1 Hinko Gottlieb: a Personal Biography

Dr. Heinrich (Haim) Hinko Gottlieb (1886–1948) was a Yugoslav Jewish lawyer, writer, translator, and editor. Gottlieb was born in the small town of Đurđevac in Croatia, which, at the time of his birth, was part of the Austro-Hungarian
Gottlieb was very active in the Zionist movement in Yugoslavia. In 1936 he launched *Omanut* [Art], a Jewish monthly for culture and art, published in Zagreb in the Serbo-Croatian language by the Society for the Promotion of Jewish Art, and functioned as its editor in chief till 1941. He published poems, stories and articles in *Omanut*, in other Jewish journals and newspapers (*Židovska smotra*, *Židov*, *Gideon*, *Hanoar*, *Ha'aviv*), as well as in the Yugoslav daily *Politika*, under the pseudonym Tihomir Jarebic. He was also known as a literary translator; although he translated poetry from Hebrew for an anthology of new Hebrew literature in Serbo-Croatian (1933), we have no information on whether it was published. His only collection of poems published in book form was *Iyar, Jewish May*.2 Finally, Gottlieb's most ambitious work in this field was the translation from German of a book of selected poems by Heinrich Heine.3 Both books were published in Zagreb by the Omanut Society for the Promotion of Jewish Art.

Then came the Holocaust. Gottlieb was arrested in Zagreb in early May of 1941, very soon after the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis Powers on 6 April, the capitulation of the country, its dismemberment, occupation, and the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) on 10 April. Only one month following the inception of the ISC, a number of prominent Zagreb's Jewish lawyers were arrested and deported to prisons in Austria, primarily to Graz.4 Gottlieb was sent to the *Staatspolizei* [State Police, Gestapo] Prison on

---


2 H. Gottlieb, *Ijar, jevrejski maj i druge pesme* [Iyar, the Jewish May and Other Poems] (Zagreb: Omanut Society for the Promotion of Jewish Art, 1935).


Elizabeth Promenade in Vienna (the former City Prison). He was held there until 14 August, when he was released and allowed to return to Zagreb.  

In Zagreb his wife Ruža (née Löwenstein) had managed to acquire travel permits that allowed the family to escape to the Italian occupation zone, where they had a chance of surviving. However, their younger son Daniel (Danko) had already been arrested. While their older son Vladimir (Vlado) had fled earlier, Hinko and his wife remained for a while in Zagreb, waiting for Danko to return, which he never did. Hinko and Ruža managed to escape from Zagreb and join Vlado in the coastal town of Kraljevica in Northern Dalmatia in the Italian occupation zone, where he had been living as a refugee since the fall of 1941. However, in the night between 31 October and 1 November 1942, the Gottliebs, along with other Jewish refugees from Kraljevica and the surrounding villages, were transferred by the Italian forces to the newly established Kraljevica Camp [Campo di concentramento di Porto Re]. They were inmates in the Kraljevica Camp until June 1943, when the Italian authorities transferred the Jews from various camps in the Italian zone to the Kampor Camp on the neighboring island of Rab. After the fall of Italy in September 1943, Kampor was dissolved. Hinko Gottlieb was among the 691 former inmates who joined the Yugoslav Partisans either as fighters or civilians under their protection. He worked on the mobile printing press of the Partisan army.

In 1944 Hinko, Ruža, and Vlado were transferred to Bari, Southern Italy. In early July, the Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobodjenja Hrvatske [National Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Croatia], the...
highest ruling authority established by the Partisans in the liberated territories of Croatia, informed the Yugoslav Military-Medical Delegation in Bari that Dr. Hinko Gottlieb was being sent to them as a representative of the Red Cross with the express duty to assist the Jews of Yugoslavia, establish communication with international organizations, and take care of their eventual evacuation to Palestine." Gottlieb was first a representative of the Committee of the Red Cross for Croatia, only to become, in August 1944, a representative of the centralized Red Cross Society of Yugoslavia in Bari. In September of the same year Gottlieb was informed that the Red Cross of Croatia had become part of the centralized Red Cross of the Democratic Federative Yugoslavia, within which Gottlieb would represent the Croatian branch.

When it finally seemed that Gottlieb, his wife, and their son were far from war operations and in a safe place, tragedy struck again when Vlado died on 16 September 1944 in a motorcycle accident in Bari. While the war was still going on in Yugoslavia and several years before the establishment of the Jewish

---

9 Documents in the Eventov Archives, preserved under the arch. no. A-24, confirm Gottlieb’s correspondence with the Jewish Agency and Comitato Ebraico di Assistenza (Delasem).

10 Copy of the EA document, a letter dated 3 July 1944, signed “Gregorić, Secretary” (Pavle Gregorić).

11 EA A-24, document 3/44 dated 2 July 1944, signed by the president of the Committee of the Red Cross for Croatia: “With the present we attest that Dr. Hinko Gottlieb, lawyer and publicist from Zagreb is a member of the Country’s Red Cross Committee for Croatia.”

12 EA A-24, document 8/44, letter dated 17 August 1944, signed by Dr. N. Nikolić in Bari, invites Gottlieb to the founding meeting of the Executive Board of the Red Cross Society of Yugoslavia in Italy. The Red Cross Society of Yugoslavia was established during the ongoing war and lasted from 1944 to 1946. It was the forerunner of the postwar Yugoslav Red Cross. In the years 1944 till 1946 it had a delegation in Bari working with other national Red Cross organizations as well as the International Red Cross Committee in order to obtain and distribute humanitarian aid. Gottlieb was in charge of communication with international Jewish organizations and distributing aid to Jewish refugees in Croatia. At the same time, another delegation of the Red Cross Society of Yugoslavia was associated with the general headquarters of the Partisan army on the island of Vis.

13 EA A-24, document 8/44a, letter of the Zemaljski odbor Crvenog križa Hrvatske.

14 The photograph of Vlado’s tomb (preserved in the Eventov Archives, EA A-24, shows a tombstone consisting of a simple wooden pole with a star of David on the top. Framed by it is a five-pointed star [zvezda petokraka], a Partisan symbol, then the letters “N.L.A.Y.” [National Liberation Army Yugoslavia], the word “Partisan,” name and date of death. The other tombs have simple crosses with the petokraka and name of the deceased, Vlado’s being the only one bearing the Jewish symbol. That would suggest that Vlado was buried in an improvised Partisan cemetery close to the British base in Bari.
State of Israel, Gottlieb and his wife, in line with their Zionist convictions, took the opportunity to join a group of 900 Jewish refugees who made aliyah from Italy to Mandate Palestine, and immigrated to that country in March 1945.

Gottlieb's first encounter with the Land of Israel was through the Atlit detention camp: “The camp was separated by barbed wire, it was under the control of British Mandate authorities, the British military and Palestinian police.”

His time in Palestine was neither long or happy. Here are some of the last entries from his *Diary*:

9 September. The day my unfortunate Vlada died. We lost him when we had begun to believe we had definitely saved him. Ever since he was born I took care and worried about him because somewhere in the depth of my heart I suspected that an evil fate was threatening my children. My Vlada, my never healing wound!

3 October. Since I wrote the last entry here, I have been continuously ill and my sickness is not getting any better. I have written two brief texts, “Kraljev sud” and “Krava.” However, I have no will or strength to go on writing. I think I am finished. Tomorrow is my Danko’s birthday. I wish I was dead tomorrow.

19 October. There is no more oil in my lamp...

Hinko Gottlieb passed away in November 1948 and was buried in the Nahalat Yitzhak cemetery in Givatayim, Israel.

Gottlieb's Works Prior to 1941: Irony and Satire

The Omanut Society for the Promotion of Jewish Art organized public lectures on Jewish topics, literary evenings presenting unpublished works by Yugoslav

---

15 Cvi Rotem, “Hinko Gottlieb u Erec Izraelu. Za desetogodišnjicu smrti,” *Jevrejski almanah* 3 (1957/1958) (Belgrade: SJOJ, 1958), 233. The Atlit detainee camp was a detention camp established by the authorities of the British Mandate for Palestine at the end of the 1930s on the Israeli coastal plain (what is now Israel’s northern coast), 20 kilometers south of Haifa. The camp was established to prevent Jewish refugees from entering Mandatory Palestine. Tens of thousands of Jewish refugees were interned at the camp, which was surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlit_detainee_camp, accessed 19 January 2021).

Jewish authors, theater performances, and charity concerts featuring Jewish musicians and vocal artists performing Jewish music and European classical authors whose works included Jewish themes or motifs. The Society also published literary works of Yugoslav Jewish authors, translated Jewish writers and music scores by Jewish composers. Among the literary works and translations were Ijar, jevrejski maj i druge pesme [Iyar, the Jewish May and Other Poems] by H. Gottlieb; H. Heine, Izabrane pjesme [H. Heine, Selected Poems], translated by H. Gottlieb; and Bajke i priče [Fairy Tales and Stories] by Šmuel Romano. Every year the Society would present gifts to its members, and in 1939 these were one of its publications, a collection of linocuts by the Sarajevan Jewish artist Daniel Ozm. Zagreb was the Zionist center of the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and Gottlieb was a true advocate of the inclusive view of modern Jewish culture as a unifying force overriding the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic cultural heritage, as well as the diverse influences of national cultural environments in the Diaspora [galut]. Published in Serbo-Croatian, common to both Sephardim and Ashkenazim, the journal addressed the Yugoslavian Jewish intellectual elite as well as Jewish readership who were open to the Zionist idea of forging a Jewish national culture crossing European state borders. This implied a view of Jewish culture in Yugoslavia primarily as part of an overall national Jewish culture, rather than as a Jewish contribution to Yugoslav culture. It would seem that the Zionist orientation of the journal (implying the exclusion of non-Jewish authors), limited its reception to the small Jewish segment of Serbo-Croatian readers in Yugoslavia. Gottlieb's prewar literary activities were closely connected with the Omanut Society and journal. As mentioned above, his major works appeared in the Omanut journal or were published by the Omanut Society. In his detailed review of Gottlieb's translation of Heine's poems, Eliša Samlaić presented two key observations. Firstly, that unlike other Yugoslav translators of Heine's

18 The Report from the annual meeting of the Omanut Society held on 26 September 1939 contains information on the intellectual nucleus of this organization: Hinko Gottlieb (founder, vice-president and editor in chief); David Spitzer (president), Eliša Samlaić (secretary); members of the executive board: Adolf Blau, Dr. Lavoslav Glesinger, Otto Glicksthal, Dr. Gustav Kraus, Dr. Šmuel Romano, Mirko Šenberger, and E. Trepper; members of the auditing board: Dr. Hugo Bauer, Dragutin Šrajber; music editors: E. Samlaić, Žiga Hirschler, Dr. Bjeljinski, and Marko Rothmüller from Zurich; drama editor Robert Stein; visual arts editor Slavko Bril (Omanut, 10 [October 1939]: 163–168).
19 In 1941 the Jewish population of Yugoslavia amounted to not more than 0.5%.
Among numerous translators of Heine’s poetry into Serbo-Croatian the most well-known were Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Vladimir Nazor, Aleksa Šantić, Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević, Boško Petrović, and August Šenoa.

This is probably a reference to the irony and satire in the novel Tri kćeri Geierove [Three Geier’s Daughters] that Gottlieb was writing on the Jewish milieu of Zagreb. He never finished this novel, which was destroyed together with other papers Gottlieb left at home when he fled from Zagreb.

Juda Levi, Jugoslavenski Jevreji u književnosti, nauci, novinarstvu, u muzici, likovnoj umetnosti i glumi, manuscript dated Belgrade, 15 January 1941 (Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade, not catalogued).
One hundred years after Heine’s departure into exile, the current rulers of Germany have expelled him again. They burned his books at stakes, demolished his monument in Hamburg, proclaimed his books as dirty and worthless literature [...]. Some of [Heine’s] poems mercilessly lash at political racism as if they were written in present day Germany [...].

The news of discrimination and persecution reached Yugoslavia through the media, especially in German language newspapers available to Gottlieb in Zagreb. In addition, since 1939 Yugoslavia had become a welcoming transit territory for approximately 5,000 Jews primarily fleeing from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. They too were a source of first-hand information on nazi-inspired antisemitism spreading throughout the continent.

Gottlieb’s texts published in Omanut pertain to various genres, both literary and journalistic. His literary texts include novellas, poems, and short stories. There are several essays on the current discrimination and persecution of Jews in Europe. Also included are a public lecture on art and a few articles dedicated to outstanding Jewish figures. In his editorial for the first 1939 issue of Omanut, Gottlieb emphasized the dramatic political events culminating in 1939:

This year it should be decided whether the world will take the road of force, lawlessness, and systematic promotion of stupidity or return to the road of progress, a rational concept of freedom, and true democracy. This is why this year will be crucial for us [...]. We the Jews have no political power although the national-socialist press would present us i.e. world Jewry as a political power of the first order [...]. Our political future is tied to the survival of the great democracies: England and America [...]. We are not tied to democracy for any reasons of usefulness, but because the concept of democracy is our Jewish contribution to world civilization [...]. We are beginning the third year of publication of Omanut with a simple and brief program: to always, again and again, contribute to our Jewry as they search for the meaning of current events impacting us. So they would know and understand that they suffer in order to secure more air in stuffy Europe. More understanding among nations, more sunlight and more space on Earth.  

Gottlieb analyzed these realities in his essays, but these events also pushed their way into his literary works, and through them into Yugoslav literature. This is already evident in the 1939 issues of *Omanut.* While other authors publishing in the journal focused on historical themes, traditional and modern Jewish music, the Jews in Palestine, and outstanding Jewish figures in history, Gottlieb shifted his attention from the past and heritage to current political realities. He stands out in the 1939 issues of *Omanut* as the contributor who turned the limelight on current developments related to the early phase of the Holocaust.

3 Introducing Holocaust Themes into Yugoslav Literature

An interesting issue regarding Gottlieb’s works published in *Omanut* prior to 1941 is how his journal articles correlate with his literary texts, both published in the journal, sometimes in the same issue. I will comment on two texts Gottlieb published in the 1939 issue of *Omanut:* the article “The Rosenberg Project,” and the story “Residence Permit.”

In the article, Gottlieb comments on news from the Swiss German-language newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* The first paragraph contains the essential elements of the information: “Just before the conference on Palestine in London, Alfred Rosenberg explained to the diplomatic and press representatives in Berlin how he envisioned the solution of the Jewish problem.” Gottlieb states that Rosenberg did not expect any solutions from the 1938 Evian Conference, emphasizing that the decision taken by the world democ-

26 In this respect, he moved closer to the Yugoslav journals on the political left that were sounding the alarm in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War and focusing on political realities that were eclipsing interest in purely cultural or artistic issues.


28 Alfred Rosenberg, the author of a seminal work of nazi ideology, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930), is considered one of the main authors of key national socialist ideological creeds, including its racial theory, persecution of the Jews, *Lebensraum,* abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles, and opposition to what was considered “degenerate” modern art (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Rosenberg, accessed 20 January 2019).

29 Since 1933 the nazis took steps to force Jews to emigrate from Germany, so by 1938 one fourth of the Jewish population in Germany had left the country. However, following the annexation of Austria, the number of Jews in Germany rose again. Although many of them tried to escape from Germany, their attempts failed due to the problem of obtaining visas from countries they hoped to find refuge in. Western countries, including the United States, were not willing to issue visas despite the pogroms taking place in Germany in 1938. That same year, a conference was convened in the French resort Evian to discuss this issue. Thirty-two countries participated in the nine-day conference. Although the delegates
racies was to “discretely distribute” Jewish emigrants around the world, except in their own countries and Palestine. Commenting on the positions of the Western democracies and especially that of nazi Germany, Gottlieb concluded, rather ironically, that the Rosenberg project envisioned a “closed territory” similar to a “reservation” (Guyana or Madagascar) capable of absorbing 15 million Jews, that would be strictly controlled by “a well-organized police force” and ruled by a governor representing the democracies, but appointed by the League of Nations:

[...] so in order to prevent the Jews from continuing their bloody struggle for democracy and against inhuman action, all 15 million of them should be confined to a concentration camp. Rosenberg calls it differently: a “reservation” [...] The democracies were to provide such a territory, the candidates being Guyana and Madagascar [...] tropic countries with a climate unsuited for white people. If the Jews would somehow manage to adapt, there remains a slight hope that with time they would become blacks. In the long run, that would certainly be the best solution to the Jewish issue!

The plight of European Jews, the response of the Western democracies at the Evian Conference, and the racist ideology of nazi Germany that would ultimately lead to the ‘Final Solution,’ all inspired Gottlieb to write a story entitled “Residence Permit,” published in Omanut in continuation of the article “The Rosenberg Project.” The position of the two texts in the journal underlines their thematic affiliation, emphasizing at the same time their generic difference. However, the article and the story are like two wings on the same thematic body, the article commenting on real time factual news, the story evolving in the fictional timeless mode of the parable.

It begins with the narrator’s auto-poetic statement, imbued with gentle irony, and featuring two examples of paradox, a literary device that will also be used in one of the closing paragraphs. Here is the opening paragraph:

In order to tell you a brief little story, I have to write a long introduction. I am very much aware this runs against the basic principles of aesthetics, but if I were to stick only to rules of aesthetics, it would seem to you that my little story lacks a punch line.

One paradox refers to the length of narration, i.e., its structure (the length of the introduction as compared to the length of the main segment of narration) and the other to the relation between poetic tools and the meaning they seek to convey. Both refer to how a story is told. On the other hand, a paradox featured in one of the concluding paragraphs refers to what the story is about. In this instance paradox serves as a tool for exposing, highlighting, and condemning the hypocrisy involved in the policies of the “good people” in democratic countries who are worried for the fate of Jewish refugees. Here is the paradox: these countries are too small to provide refuge for a living Jew, but their cemeteries are big enough to bury a dead one. Gottlieb wraps up his story by repeating pairs of opposing motifs denoting quantity: brief–long in the opening and small–big in the closing. These oppositions in terms of size serve to expose a negative moral quality (hypocrisy).

Among the literary devices Gottlieb uses in “Residence Permit,” one is embedding one story in another (combining an outer framing story with an inner one). Another is parody of a generic structure rather than of a specific work. Although Gottlieb refers to Genesis, the genre he chooses for his own work is the parable, a brief, imaginary ‘biblical’ allegory, a moral tale. God has many assistants—angels and cherubim—who are satisfied with his creation. Azbukiel is the one in charge of a very important technical issue—the cadaster. Azbukiel suggests that the earth is too big for Adam and Eve, but God responds: “No, wait and see how it will end up being too small.” Then God unexpectedly introduces film—an invention of the modern age. He asks Azbukiel if he knows what a film is. “No,” answers Azbukiel. “In a million years,” says God, “man’s imagination will have become so impoverished, that he will have to order illusions from factories. I will show you such a film. What you will see is not real, the action does not take place anywhere, everything is vague, as if you were dreaming. Like a nightmare. Look!”

The ‘film’ is about a humble Jew trying to cross the border from a country called Asperia to another called Adastria. These names are an ironic allusion to the Latin saying Per aspera ad astra [through hardships to the stars]. Gottlieb’s satire is directed at the state bureaucracies that enforce rules knowing that their ultimate effect is a death sentence for the Jews. Gottlieb ridicules the detailed, almost perfect administration of Adastria designed to implement regulations without any personal involvement, thus allowing all bureaucrats—from the highest statesmen to the lowest local policeman and prison guard—to wash

---

30 Gottlieb’s made-up character’s name seems to come from the Serbian word *azbuka*, meaning alphabet (based, just like the Greek version, on Slavic words for the two first letters *az* and *buki*, from *bukva*, meaning beech), with a suffix “El,” one of the God’s names, as found in names such as Ezekiel.
their hands of responsibility for the tragedy of the Jews fleeing from Asperia (Germany) where they were stripped of all rights. Quite ironically, Gottlieb describes the bureaucrats as “good people” performing their duty and abiding by the laws of their country.

Film is presented as a product of the “factory of illusions” designed for entertainment. However, it also suggests the use of film as a nazi propaganda tool. A reader today might also associate the factory of illusions with the “death factories” of the Holocaust. The inner story presented by the film parodies the genre of parable, it plays with allegory—a Jew fleeing from Asperia (Germany) into Adastria (a Western democracy)—and with the disclaimers often found in films dealing with protagonists/events similar to real ones. Gottlieb also highlights contrasting leitmotifs—such as big and small, long and brief—that rely on binary oppositions such as original—imitation, literal—allegorical, reality—appearance, true—false, earnest—hypocritical.

The reader of Gottlieb’s story today can detect an anticipation of the concept of the banality of evil coined several decades later by Hannah Arendt apropos the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem.31 Gottlieb saw the embryo of this concept in 1939. It is the semantic nucleus of the story, which grows into a textual body feeding on irony and satire.

Among Gottlieb’s poems published in Omanut, two deal directly with Holocaust themes. “Nokturno” [Nocturno]32 opens with lines about “my brothers [...] in faraway Poland,” who are suffering in the night while their neighbors are lulled into “a righteous, warm, and soft sleep.” It is about Jews persecuted in Poland and Czechoslovakia who come to the poet as ghosts during the night, bringing fear and images of death. The poem expresses the violent break of society: the contrast between the persecuted Jews and others who either do not see it or see nothing wrong with it. “Pismo iz koncentracionog logora” [Letter from a Concentration Camp] is to my knowledge the first work in Yugoslav literature on the theme of the Nazi concentration camps:33

---

Gottlieb’s stories and poems published in Omanut in the late 1930s not only introduced the Holocaust theme into Yugoslav literature, but also anticipated his personal experience of the persecution of Jews in the Independent State of Croatia and life in the Italian camp in Kraljevica, where the irony of neighbors lulled in “a righteous, warm, and soft sleep” and “here no one is hungry” would be confirmed in real life. “Residence Permit” is also important as a direct precursor of the novel The Key to the Great Gate.

4 The Literary Representation of the Holocaust as Personal Experience: Science Fiction in the Novel The Key to the Great Gate

Gottlieb’s works of the period 1941–1945 deal exclusively with the Holocaust and are based on first-hand experiences of persecution, prison, camps, and armed resistance.

The Key to the Great Gate is Gottlieb’s most ambitious work. It is based on his incarceration by the Gestapo in the Staatspolizei prison during the period from 9 May until 14 August 1941. The novel is considered a work of science fiction, but based on real people confined in a real place (cell 84 of the Vienna prison), and with real experiences of captivity. Three of the four Jewish characters are based on real people. The first is Gottlieb himself, the real author and narrator in the novel. The second is the chief rabbi of Salonika who is never named, but is obviously a character modelled after Tzevi Koretz, chief rabbi of Salonika, who the Germans arrested on 17 May 1941 and deported to the prison in Vienna. The third, Dr. Hans Anton Strauss, a Viennese lawyer who had converted to Catholicism, is also based on a real person who Gottlieb knew from the Kraljevica camp. Only the fourth, Dov Tarnopolski, is completely fictional.

Tarnopolski is the inventor of a space machine (“space condenser”) and bears some resemblance to the fictional time traveler in H. G. Wells’s novel The Time Machine. Another source of science fiction motifs in the novel


is Einstein’s theory of relativity forwarding a new view of time and space as relative, connected, and interactive categories. The idea that both could contract and expand is used by Gottlieb to explain the effects of the “space condenser.” Nonetheless, science turned into science fiction was used by Gottlieb as a tool rather than an aim. His intention was to use science fiction as a tool for demasking and criticizing totalitarianism rather than for creating a pure science fiction construct. He used science fiction to break logic and realism: Tarnopolski brings food, drink, a rooster, a piano, and even a little cannon into the cell, and all this is thanks to “science,” rather than a magician’s illusionism. Subsequently, Gottlieb uses it to subvert, ridicule, ironize, and satirize the nazi world of objectiveness, superiority, perfect organization, all surrogate and false, but imposed by overwhelming military power and totalitarian social control. The nazi world was rising by derogating and manipulating ethics and human values.

The very originality of Gottlieb’s The Key to the Great Gate—merging Holocaust themes and science fiction—turned out to be a hurdle in its reception by the Anglophone audience in the aftermath of the war. In addition, the novel had little resonance among Hebrew language readers due to its late publication (1980) and it is virtually unknown among the Serbo-Croatian reading public because it remained unpublished in its original language until recently.

5 A Poem and a Play from the Kraljevica Period: Use of Intertextuality

Two of Gottlieb’s works written in the Kraljevica camp are important: a poem and a play. “Psalam” [Psalm] is a poem that obviously relies on models from the Book of Psalms.36 Like the biblical Psalms associated with the Jewish religious rite, this poem was recited “every Saturday in the Kraljevica camp in 1942.”37 Recitation of psalms in times of distress sought to reaffirm faith and hope. In line with the need for faith and hope, Gottlieb’s poem merges two of the four main functions of psalms: it evolves as lament and prayer rather than praise and thanksgiving. It is not a new version of any particular psalm from the

36 Hinko Gottlieb, “Psalam,” typewritten manuscript (EA, A-24). The poem was published in Hebrew translation together with Gottlieb’s other works thanks to his friend Zvi Rotem, who encouraged the author to reconstruct the texts of his works that had been lost or destroyed during the war. During the time that Gottlieb lived in Palestine, he reconstructed some lost texts, completed the novel begun during the war, and wrote new works, mainly short stories.

37 This is indicated by a handwritten note, written by Gottlieb or Zvi Rotem, on the margin of the document’s text.
biblical source, but a combination of motifs from various texts. Most importantly, the first stanza, which sets the tone of the poem, reveals an intertextual link with the opening verses of Psalm 97. The latter is one of the celebratory psalms traditionally recited for Sabbath. The first stanza of Gottlieb's poem adopts, changes, and reinterprets the original meaning of the opening verses of Psalm 97. In the original psalm the reader rejoices at God's power and righteousness:

Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.
A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.
His lightning enlightened the world: the earth saw and trembled.\(^{38}\)

In Gottlieb's reinterpretation adapted to Holocaust reality, the faithful laments his own condition and questions God's power to save his people:

Has your lightning been extinguished, O Lord,
And your thunder fallen silent?
Have you no more fire rain
To burn with it and destroy
My mortal enemy and evil adversary?

Although Gottlieb’s psalm opens with desperation and doubt, it closes with a reaffirmation of faith in God, who responds to the prayer by announcing deliverance:

The day breaks as it must,
as the new young day must come from across the sea
to dispel the shadows of night [...] For you, Jacob, ancestral sufferer,
I have prepared days full of light,
this must be, so fear not because it will come.
Look up, the day is breaking,
Halleluiah.

The subjective I of the poem identifies with Jacob, the \textit{ancestral sufferer} representing the Jewish people. The Holocaust is viewed as a tragedy, but one that occurs cyclically in the history of the Jews. Therefore, both suffering and deliverance are viewed as repetitive events. Thus, they are identified with the

\(^ {38} \) Ps 97:2-4.
natural cycle, the alternation of night and day, darkness and light, suffering and joy. The lyrical dynamic of Gottlieb’s psalm moves from lament to prayer and from desperation to faith in God’s deliverance.

The play with three alternative titles—Do Not Forget or Remember and The Persian Chest—\(^\text{39}\)—that Gottlieb wrote in the Kraljevica camp in 1943 also uses intertextuality as a key literary device in the construction of its message. The play was supposed to be performed as part of the Purim celebration in May 1943. However, it seems this never happened, probably due to a ban on the part of the Italian censors.\(^\text{40}\) The play was published in Hebrew translation many years after the author’s death, but in the post-World War II Yugoslavia as well as nowadays, it remained almost unknown.\(^\text{41}\)

The problem confronted by Gottlieb as well as other authors writing in real time was: how to celebrate Purim under Holocaust conditions? Traditionally, Purim was celebrated to commemorate the joy of deliverance from a tragedy that had threatened the Jews in their legendary past in the Persian Empire. The festival was celebrated with a lot of humor, comedy, singing, and feasting, but these elements would inevitably be interpreted ironically in the context of the Holocaust. Gottlieb wanted to avoid irony, so he devised a sophisticated and creative response to this challenge by doing the following: (a) structuring the play in a specific way and using staples of Greek drama such as a prologue and a chorus; (b) resorting to existing literary models and establishing intertextual links, namely with Heinrich Heine’s poems “Princess Sabbath” and “Yehuda ben Halevy”;\(^\text{42}\) (c) reinterpreting the character of Queen Esther;

---

39 Hinko Gottlieb, Ne Zaboravi ili Zapamti, typewritten manuscript, no. 365/1633-1-2/3, preserved at the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade (JHM). It was sent to the Museum in 1970 by Elsa Kapiloff, who was supposed to participate in the performance of the play in Kraljevica 1943. Another copy, sent to the Eventov Archives by Mira Sneler (Gavrin-Tolnauer), who was to play the part of Queen Esther, is titled The Persian Chest. The latter served for the Hebrew translation: Gottlieb, “The Persian Chest,” in Works of Hinko Gottlieb, vol. 2, 203–210.

40 About the cancelation of the performance, see Rajner, Fragile Images, 319 and n. 52; and also Kušec, Propusnica za koncentracijski logor Kraljevica, 113–114.

41 The only article dedicated to it is Gordana Todorić, “Jednočinika Ne zaboravi ili Zapamti dr Hinka Gotliba,” in Deveti medunarodni interdisciplinarni simpozijum Susret kultura, eds. Ivana Živančević Sekeruš and Željko Milanović (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Novom Sadu, 2018), 299–307. The play is discussed in detail in Vidaković Petrov, “Time and the Narratives of Hinko Gottlieb.”

42 One of Heine’s last books of poetry was the Romancero, which includes a cycle entitled “Hebrew Melodies.” The latter consists of three long poems: “Princess Sabbath,” “Yehuda ben Halevy,” and “Disputation.” Gottlieb was well acquainted with these poems from the years that he had worked on the translation of a book of selected poems by Heine, which he published in 1936. Gottlieb’s translations include the two above-mentioned poems.
(d) referring to what would become central Holocaust themes—witnessing and remembering.

The realistic setting and action at the beginning of Gottlieb's play changes abruptly with the appearance of a mysterious chest addressed to “Enrico Gottlieb, poeta” that is brought in by an anonymous “soldier” (an embodiment of the writer’s alter ego). The Persian chest motif, while recalling Purim’s origins, comes from a section of Heine’s poem on Judah Halevi in which Heine tells the story of Alexander the Great. After his victory over the Persian King Darius, Alexander found a richly ornamented “little golden box” that had served to hold “the priceless treasures” of the Persian king. Alexander gave away the jewels, and used the box to keep his own greatest treasure in it—Homer’s poetry. The protagonists of Alexander’s dreams are described as “heroic airy figures” coming out of the Persian chest, creeping in “fantastic fashion.” Later in the poem, Heine comments what he would do if he came into possession of this magic casket: he would enclose within it all the poems of Judah Halevi. In a clear analogy, the chest in Gottlieb’s play contains his own entire literary opus. However, the chest is not only a refuge for Gottlieb’s literary treasures, but also for the Book of Esther and other Jewish books representing an identity preserving tradition.

The miraculous appearance of Esther from the chest is based on two images from Heine’s poetry. One is the image of “the heroic airy figures” from Homer’s poems emanating from the casket and coming to Alexander in his dreams and visions. In Gottlieb’s reinterpretation of this motif, it is Queen Esther that rises from the chest like an “airy figure.” This version of Queen Esther is “heroic” in analogy to the protagonists of Homer’s epics. She is also tragic rather than in line with the humor inherent to mock Purim plays. The second is the image of Princess Sabbath from Heine’s poem bearing the same title. In this poem Heine writes about Halevi and his works, in which he likens Israel to a prince/groom, waiting for Princess Sabbath, the bride, to come for the wedding. But as soon as Sabbath passes, the enchantment disappears, and Israel returns to a degraded status.

Gottlieb’s Queen Esther merges the image of a tragic and epic character from the first poem and the image of Princess Sabbath from the second poem. So, both the main dynamic motif of the play (the chest) and the main character (Queen Esther) rely heavily on models derived from Heine’s poetry. This intertextual link greatly expands the semantic network of the play written in real Holocaust time, suggesting a new layer of interpretation that integrates the reality of the camp and the Holocaust.

The figure that Gottlieb envisions of a Holocaust Queen Esther is very different from the traditional character associated with Purim. While the latter
is young and beautiful, the former is an epic mother figure partaking in the unfolding tragedy of her children; she is a tragic figure because she is powerless to save them; she comes to them “empty handed,” but bearing intangible gifts of hope and remembrance. The alternative title of the play (“Remember”) echoes the following words spoken by Esther and repeated by the chorus:

When you are boiling inside, but you may not utter a word when you clench your teeth in powerless rage when you want to shout, but must be silent, when you feel like weeping, but cannot, write it in your heart and let the flaming letter Keep the fire. Remember! Remember!

At the same time, Esther has become the model of the witness in the Holocaust. In her article on this play, Todorić pointed out that Gottlieb is an early precursor of the interpretation of the Holocaust as a manifestation of the supreme evil embodied in the biblical Amalek. Taking this a step further, we can consider *The Persian Chest* as a true literary representative of the era of the witness. Gottlieb’s Esther, unable to save her “children,” has become the supreme witness of the tragedy of the Jewish people. This is a reinterpretation of the traditional Esther figure adapted to the real time experience of the Holocaust.

6 A Jewish Perspective in Partisan Literature

The third group of Gottlieb’s works written in real Holocaust and World War II time are short stories dealing with themes associated with his experience as a member of the partisan armed resistance. Rotem translated and published some of Gottlieb’s partisan stories soon after the author’s arrival in Palestine, where he continued to write them. The partisan stories are the best known part of Gottlieb’s opus in both Yugoslavia and Israel, due to the fact that their theme—the antifascist armed resistance of the Yugoslav partisans—was in line with the expectations of the mainstream public in the aftermath of the war.

44 Todorić, “Jednočinka,” 304.
45 Rotem wrote about an event organized by the Association of Journalists in Tel Aviv: the hall was full as the audience listened to one of Gottlieb’s stories and his talk about his experiences with the Yugoslav Partisans turning the event “into an enthusiastic expression of support for Yugoslavia which was still fighting the war” (Rotem, “Hinko Gottlieb,” 237).
and the Holocaust. This was the case in Yugoslavia, where the Tito regime had been firmly established, but also in Israel, where the need to highlight active Jewish resistance during the Holocaust eclipsed the ‘passive’ victimization of camp inmates. An interest in partisan stories continued throughout the 1960s.

The best known of these stories, published in post-World War II Yugoslavia, was “Kaddish in a Forest,” occasionally also entitled “Kaddish in a Serbian Forest.” It was part of the corpus of Yugoslav partisan literature, and within the latter an example of a Jewish author writing about armed resistance from a Jewish perspective. This was important because it was a Jewish version of the Partisan narrative, rather than a Holocaust narrative dissociated from the latter.46

Written in the early phase of the development of partisan literature, these stories are examples of realism in literature. This was a new orientation in Gottlieb’s opus in which realism marked disruption rather than continuity. “Kaddish in a Forest” contrasts with Gottlieb’s previous works such as “Residence Permit,” The Key to the Great Gate and The Persian Chest. Therefore, it contributes to showing the diachronic dynamics of Gottlieb’s writing, it highlights variety in his literary orientation, and last but not least, it signals Gottlieb’s return to the short story genre that marks the beginning as well as the end of his opus.

7 Conclusion

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Gottlieb’s death, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia sent a letter to all the major Jewish communities in the country, encouraging them to organize events to pay tribute to the author.47 Accompanying the letter was a three-page biography of Gottlieb written by David Levi-Dale, who emphasized Gottlieb’s Jewish

46 The story was first published in Serbo-Croatian as “Kaddish in a Forest,” in Jevrejski almanah (Belgrade: SJOJ, 1954), 209–210; see Rajner, Fragile Images, 362–363, and n. 3. It appeared also in Hebrew translation entitled “Kaddish in a Forest,” in Works of Hinko Gottlieb, vol. 2, 91–92. For a more detailed discussion, see Vidaković Petrov, “Time and the Narratives.” I refer here to two of Gottlieb’s stories, “Kaddish in a Serbian Forest,” and “Captain Jaquel’s Story.” They were included in The Massacre of European Jewry. An Anthology (Tel Aviv: World Hashomer Hatzair, English Speaking Department [Kibbutz Merchavia], 1963). This information was kindly sent to the author of this article by Dr. Dimitrios Varvaritis.

47 Letter of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia dated 2 December 1968, signed by secretary L. Petrović and Aleksandar Stajner (on behalf of the Cultural Commission), preserved at the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade.
activism before the war (without a mention of Zionism), his antifascist ideology before and during the war, and his participation in the armed resistance:

In the period between the two great wars Gottlieb was an outstanding Jewish activist, who on various occasions boldly stood up to defend man and human rights, not as a lawyer, but as a man, clearly expressing his progressive view of social problems, all of which were summed up in a common denominator—antifascism [...]. One of Gottlieb’s personal friends, Slavko Radej, published in the 1954 issue of Jevrejski almanah an article dedicated to this deserving writer and poet, citing words of Maksim Gorky: “If you wish to pay tribute to someone, his virtues and sensibility, the greatness of his work, then say only one simple word, tell him he was a man!” Let us use the word suggested by Maksim Gorky, let us say: Hinko Gottlieb was a MAN!

Suggested readings included two partisan stories, three written in Palestine, and five poems (mostly from the pre-war period), with no mention of those of Gottlieb’s works selected for discussion in our article, except for “Kaddish in a Forest.” This shows that even in 1968 the Yugoslav Jewish reception of Gottlieb focused on the author, his personality, and ideology, rather than on the literary merits and importance of his works.

In her pioneering work Presence and Disappearance: Jews and Judaism in Former Yugoslavia in the Mirror of Literature, Dina Katan Ben-Zion dedicated a chapter to Hinko Gottlieb, who she considered one of the finest writers of his generation. She paid tribute to Zvi Rotem, Gottlieb’s loyal friend, who translated the author’s works into Hebrew and made possible the publication of his collected works in Israel (1980). Finally, she suggested a literary affiliation of the works of post-Holocaust Yugoslav Jewish writer Danilo Kiš with the works of Gottlieb, “although Kiš had probably never read them.” In the literature of socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1991), especially in the first decades following the Second World War, the latter was a source of many literary themes and motifs. This was also true of Yugoslav Holocaust survivors. The first among them to take up these themes in the early post-Holocaust years were Stanislav Vinaver,

48 Katan Ben-Zion, Presence and Disappearance, 164–177 [Hebrew].
49 She also wrote about Gottlieb and Rotem as an inspiration for her own life-long dedication to translating works of Yugoslav Jewish authors into Hebrew, idem, “Puteljak, staza, svijet, univerzum,” in Srpska književnost 20. veka: poetika prevodenja i interkulturno istraživanje, ed. Krinka Vidaković Petrov (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2016), 113–124.
Isak Samokovlija, Jozsef Debreceni, Andrija Deak, Đorđe Lebović, and Magda Bošan Simin.

However, this research shows that the dating of the beginning of Holocaust literature in Yugoslavia should be moved back from the early postwar years to the late 1930s, so that Gottlieb should be credited for introducing Holocaust themes into Yugoslav literature. The fact that Gottlieb wrote Holocaust literature in real time is another point that should be emphasized. Although he could not publish works such as “Psalm” and The Persian Chest in those circumstances, we know that both works reached an audience, albeit limited, in the camp: the poem was recited every Saturday at Shabbat meetings improvised in the camp, the play was rehearsed by the inmates, and they have been preserved in their memories as well as in written form. Even more important are the literary solutions discussed in detail in this article. Gottlieb’s works contribute to Holocaust literature in his use of intertextuality, reinterpretation of traditional cultural icons, and construction of new semantic and formal models adapted to Holocaust circumstances. Furthermore, Gottlieb’s works were early heralds of Jewish literature of the era of the witness. His novel The Key to the Great Gate implies an original form of merging Holocaust themes and science fiction, while some of his partisan stories were the first to introduce a Jewish perspective into Yugoslav Partisan/war literature. The history of Holocaust literature in Yugoslavia, therefore, opens with the works of Hinko Gottlieb. Although forgotten (and only recently in a process of being rediscovered), Gottlieb is actually a precursor of the long line of postwar Yugoslav writers dealing with this theme and a writer who merits a high position in the canon of Yugoslav Jewish literature.