



Götz and Meyer

David Albahari, Ellen Elias-Bursa? (Translation)

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David Albahari , Ellen Elias-Bursa? (Translation)

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Götz and Meyer, two noncommissioned SS officers, are entrusted with an assignment, “not a big one,” but one that “requires efficiency.” Their task is to transport prisoners from a concentration camp near Belgrade in a hermetically sealed truck, in which they are asphyxiated.

The nameless narrator of *Götz and Meyer*, a Jewish schoolteacher, discovers Wilhelm Götz and Erwin Meyer while researching the deaths of his relatives. Overwhelmed by the horror of his discoveries as they become entangled with his own feverish imaginings, he organizes a class trip. The school bus becomes Götz and Meyer’s truck, and the teacher and his students merge with Belgrade’s lost souls in a sacred act of remembering.

Götz and Meyer Details

Date : Published January 1st 2007 by Harvest Books (first published 1998)

ISBN : 9780156031103

Author : David Albahari , Ellen Elias-Bursa? (Translation)

Format : Paperback 168 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, War, World War II, Holocaust, European Literature, Serbian Literature, Literature, Jewish, Novels

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From Reader Review Götz and Meyer for online ebook

Temz says

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<http://knijno.blogspot.com/2015/01/bl...>

Maryse says

Brilliant in a disturbing and sometimes funny way.

Gotz and Meyer are two SS non-commissioned officers tasked with driving a hermetically sealed truck around Serbia during one of the Nazi's early attempts to rid the world of Jews. The story is narrated, however, by a nameless narrator, a professor in modern day Serbia obsessed by the eradication of his family members during WW2. At first, the story reminded me of Elie Wiesel's writing in that it asks the same questions of how such an atrocity could happen, why didn't the Jews fight back, why didn't God help them. But the book eventually transcends all that. Despite being a book about the war, it leaps through time in the same way that the narrator leaps from past, present and imagined, delving and studying our notions of death, life, responsibility and memory.

And it helps that Albahari writes excellently. As a writer myself (and I use that term very loosely), I cannot imagine how anyone can write such a book. There are no paragraphs, no page breaks, just one long stream-of-conscious type narrative. Reading it feels spontaneous, almost as if the narrator is right in front of you telling you his story, and yet the entire tale is so intricate that under the pen of another writer, the story could have easily crumbled into a hodge-podge of facts and figures. The beauty of the story is in the way Albahari deftly uses staid numbers and figures to re-imagine and understand the horror of Holocaust. I particularly liked the part where he talks about his family tree and how some branches will never grow. It echoes a little to Cain and Abel's story where Cain says that he does not know where his brother is. God responds by saying that he can hear them crying. That is the horror of the holocaust, that killing a person does not just kills the individual, it wipes off families, entire branches of families. And that is the horror of Gotz and Meyer, that in the end of it, all it took were 2 men to wipe off not only the present, but the future as well.

Slap Happy says

The anonymous narrator in this novel by David Albahari becomes obsessed about the origins of evil within ordinary men when he is confronted by the names of two German officers, Gotz and Meyer, who are responsible for the deaths of his family and relatives during the Holocaust. His disparate search for any information about the details surrounding their "termination" leads him to old archival files in long forgotten

government buildings where dust lays heavy and the scent of mold has permeated every inch of the premises. This is the beginning of a line of questioning that becomes increasingly futile and self-destructive for the narrator because it all amounts to pointless inward speculation: from minute details on the actions and thoughts of the two German soldiers on that day as they drove the prisoners from the concentration camp to their death to unanswerable inquiries about intimate details about their lives separate from their roles as Nazi executioners. *Where did they live? Did they have families? Did they love their children?* Including even more mundane details about who they were. In the end, his thirst to know and comprehend the actions of Gotz and Meyer can never be sated, their faces are always shrouded by an empty space, as there are some answers that cannot be found on parchment and text. It's inevitable that this part of history would be lost to the history books; lost to time and by the enormity of life that passes by every second, every minute of every day. It's almost like the narrator believes he might find the precise moment for the origin of this evil nestled away in one of those minutes, his mind is so unstable by this point by grief and sadness.

AC says

This is not an easy book to write about. It is disturbing - very disturbing - effective..., and a bit postmodern - though, even for a dummy like me, it is utterly readable. A (seemingly, only) rambling meditation by a professor of literature on the two drivers of a gas truck in Belgrade that was driving about and murdering Jews with carbon monoxide in 1941 and 1942, before the full apparatus of the extermination camps was developed.

Götz und Meier are the epitome of the banality of evil.

Perhaps 4.5 stars - for the pathos is ultimately drowned out by the recursive nature of the writing.

On the other hand, what can one do with such an absurdity as this -- but to view it obliquely? Otherwise, the pathos descends into bathos -- and that is even more absurd.

At any rate, an obscure book - but highly recommended.

?????? ???? says

???? ? ?????: <http://izumen.blogspot.com/2015/04/bl...>

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Robert Wechsler says

Freud wrote about two ways of remembering trauma: (1) the narrative, which leads to understanding, and (2) repetition, acting the trauma out. Therapy deals with trauma through narrative, but what about fiction? Is narrative enough, especially when understanding is not the goal, may not even be possible?

What makes this novel so special is that its narrative is, until near the end, itself a repetitive act, as well as a narrative of the narrator's repeated search for information, for what it's worth.

The trauma here is the loss of the narrator's family (and so many others') in the Holocaust. Since the narrator knew few of them, it is more of a secondary trauma than a directly experienced trauma. As is one's reading of this troubling novel.

What happened is just as repetitive as the novel itself: the act of killing (a very specific kind, in this instance).

There is no understanding, nor any narrative that really matters. Instead, Alibahari turns a traumatized man's obsession into a constant reliving and imagining of events he knows little about, even though he keeps looking for information. And there is also his attempt to humanize two individuals who are, to him, only names and jobs — the opposite of the dehumanization of those who died.

There are only two weaknesses in this superb novel. Both involve its final scene; one is a weakness for Anglos. The final scene (a shared reliving, as the novel is itself) doesn't work as well as the rest of the novel. And the emphasis on the need to remember, which might be very important for young Serbs to do, is not something that the Anglo readers of this novel need, for they have already repetitively remembered the Holocaust, if not this small slice of it. Hence a 4.5.

Dorian says

Thanks to a friend with impeccable taste, I was alerted to this existence of this quite extraordinary text, which I read over the course of an afternoon an evening, struggling between my desire to keep turning the pages, mesmerized, we might say, and a countervailing desire to put the book down and let the sour feeling in my stomach subside.

(The hurtling, monologic quality of the text, which owes a lot to Thomas Bernhard (and not much at all, *pace* the American publisher, to W. G. Sebald), does have a probably detrimental effect on one's own style--compelling one to longer and longer, ever-more nuanced and yet circular, sentences.)

There are a lot of things to like about this book--one of them is its attempt to grapple with the enormity and the precision of "the Holocaust." So we have the attempt to read or imagine or, even, mimetically, psychotically, *become* two figures, the titular Götz and Meyer, two (ostensibly) historical figures

intimately and yet detachedly concerned with one type of Aktion.

I'm really fascinated, too, by the book's relationship to genre: is this fiction, or memoir, or something else. When we learn that the author is born in 1948, and so does not share the life history of the "I" protagonist, and is thus quite likely not himself Jewish, why does this surprise so much? Why does it seem to make a difference?

And interesting text to compare to Mendelsohn's *Lost*, a book I also liked a lot, but which is generically, temperamentally, and stylistically at the other end of the register from Albahari--the former models himself on Proust, the latter, as I said, on Bernhard, or maybe Kertesz.

At any rate, an utterly engrossing and intelligent book--one I'll definitely be teaching in the Holocaust Lit class I am slowly preparing.

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????? ????: <http://knijenpetar.blogspot.com/2014/...>

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Tony says

Our narrator is a literature teacher but that is not what he wants to talk about. Somehow, when the Nazis decided to eradicate the Jews in Belgrade, he and his mother and father survived. He is obsessed with the minutiae, the details of the extermination. How to dispose of 5,000 living Jewish souls. It was done 100 souls at a time, in a Belgrade Saurer, a boxlike truck. The Jews were loaded in the hermetically-sealed back, with promises of a better life. Just down the road, the drivers would stop -- two such were actually named Götz and Meyer -- and with a simple mechanical adjustment, they'd turn the exhaust inward. Twice a day, excepting Sundays, Götz and Meyer made their trip, from the Fairgrounds to awaiting graves. *Death is heavy. Death is a weight.*

He takes his students on a bus. He gives them names. David, Isak, Bata, Jakov, Moric, Leon, Samuilo, Ruben, Rafael, Haim, Solomon, Ilija, Josif, Marko, Mosa, Avram. Real names. Like Götz and Meyer. And he takes them on the trip, narrating the trip that Götz and Meyer took twice a day until their work was done.

For homework, I said, and the flicker was instantly snuffed out, write a composition on the theme: "Today I Am Someone Else."

• • • • •

It isn't easy to show someone that the world, like a sock, has its other side, and that all you need is one skillful twist to switch one side to the other, skillful and quick, so that no one notices the change, but everyone accepts that the wrong side is in fact the right side of the world.

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Adam says

It is 1941 or 1942. Every day, Götz and Meyer drive a truck between the Fairground on the left bank of the River Sava in Belgrade and the village of Jajinci on the southern edge of Belgrade. They run a regular transport service between the two places. On each outward bound trip, they leave the Fairgrounds with about 100 passengers in the back of their window-less truck. They always return with an empty truck.

Götz and Meyer, the crew operating the truck are both members of the Schutzstaffel (the ‘SS’). Their passengers, who board the truck ignorant of the fact that they are embarking on the last journey that they are ever going to make, are all Jewish. Somewhere, between the Fairgrounds and Jajinci, the driver of the truck, who might be either Götz or Meyer, stops the truck, and his colleague, it would be Meyer if Götz were driving, steps outside and crawls under the truck. There, he attaches the vehicle’s exhaust pipe to an opening under the passenger compartment behind the driver’s cab, and returns to his colleague waiting at the steering wheel. They continue their journey, and by the time they reach Jajinci, all of their 100 passengers will have died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

David Albahari, the author of Götz and Meyer, is a Serbian of Jewish origin, born in Kosovo. He was born in 1948, and therefore narrowly missed experiencing the horrors of the German occupation of his native Yugoslavia. In Götz and Meyer, Albahari explores the tragedy that hit the Jews of Belgrade by trying to enter the minds of the two operators of the truck, who were, after all is said and done, merely following orders. I suppose that it would be fair to say that the author does succeed in doing this, but I did not find his somewhat repetitive meditative style of writing particularly satisfying.

Nevena Kotarac says

Ovo je roman o praznini i ?utanju. Jedan stari beogradski profesor shvata da je najve?i broj njegovih predaka stradao u nacisti?kom logoru na Sajmištu. Nastoje?i da pojmi kako se to zapravo dogodilo, on podmi?uje ?okoladnim bombonama svog ro?aka, zato?enog u stara?kom domu, ne bi li saznao imena žrtava; posve?eno

crta svoje porodi?no stablo, bilježi praznine, domišlja neostvarene živote; pretražuje arhive, posje?uje muzeje, piše pisma svojim dalekim, poluzaboravljenim ro?acima; "nepogrešivo ule?e u praznine", gubi dah. Pri tom, on opsesivno razmišlja o Gecu i Majeru, voza?ima gasnog kamiona, koji su ubili na hiljade beogradskih Jevreja. Iznova i iznova on se suo?ava sa bjelinom njihovih lica i banalnoš?u njihovih života. Dok tone u sumrak istorjskih stradanja, on sa narastaju?im strahom zapaža njihovu neupadljivost, njihovu nemarnu i nesvjesnu surovost, naizgled tako prirodnu zaptivenost njihovih srca. Oni kora?aju kroz svijet, umotani u privid uobi?ajenog, ušuškani u svoju površnost, slijepi za košmar koji ih okružuje i kojem doprinose, okruženi tišinom. Dolazi do raslojavanja, profesor se preobražava nekad u Geca, ili u Majera, a nekad u žrtve; lebdi u procjepima istorije, kroz paperjastu svjetlost duša koje napuštaju tijelo, tijelo u koje se podlo ušunjaо ugljen monoksid; kroz svoju sopstvenu, nerješivu samo?u. O?ajan, zamišlja da je dje?ak, koji namjerno odlazi u logor, da bi proživio "avanturu svog života", ali koji umire, upucan, padaju?i "veoma sporo, deo po deo, kao da se kruni, kao da (...) nikada ne?e pasti". Na vrhuncu romana, u potresnoj, gr?evitoj sceni, on nastoji da svojim u?enicima prenese strahote onoga što se dešavalо, ali uvijek nailaze?i na „zid otpora”, zid neshvatanja, zid kona?nosti. Roman o tišini, tišini koja se istrajno krije ispod svih zvukova ovog svijeta, tišini istorije koja ne prestaje, mrtvih, ubijenih i nestalih, tišini trave, snežnoj tišini utjehe, bezdanoj tišini Geca, ili Majera, tišini koja guši, raste i ?ije sjeme nosimo u sebi, nesvjesni i sre?ni, spokojni.

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Jonfaith says

We'll be sorry, I told my students, if we ever stop telling stories because if we do, there will be nothing to help us sustain pressure of reality, to ease the burden of life on our shoulders. Almost at the same moment, as if on command, all of them stopped writing and looked up at me. But, they asked, isn't life a story? No, I answered, and touched my earlobe, life is the absence of story.

Gotz and Meyer begins as a detective story and concludes as sort of a field trip. How else can one describe the mechanics of a process by which women and children were exterminated? How do we portray the stewards of this process? Is it wrong to muse on their hobbies. . .their laughter and their homesickness? Albahari doesn't use paragraph breaks, much less chapters. He wants the dear readers to push through to the terminus. The conclusion isn't happy. How could it be? The novel takes place largely in Belgrade, yet the landmarks are in the skull of its bewildered protagonist. Žižek implores us not to think of the Holocaust in tragic terms; such is a disservice to the memory of the lost. Tragedy was not at play as its victims were not extended choices. Gotz and Meyer is a damning novel, though no one is to blame.

Jonathan says

Letter, sent by Willy Just to Walter Rauff on June 5, 1942:

"Previous experience has shown that the following adjustments would be useful:

- 1.) In order to facilitate the rapid distribution of CO, as well as to avoid a buildup of pressure, two slots, ten by one centimeters, will be bored at the top of the rear wall. The excess pressure would be controlled by an easily adjustable hinged metal valve on the outside of the vents.
- 2.) The normal capacity of the vans is nine to ten per square meter [= 10.8 sq. ft.]. The capacity of the larger special Saurer vans is not so great. The problem is not one of overloading but of off-road maneuverability on all terrains, which is severely diminished in this van. It would appear that a reduction in the cargo area is necessary. This can be achieved by shortening the compartment by about one meter. The problem cannot be solved by merely reducing the number of subjects treated, as has been done so far. For in this case a longer running time is required, as the empty space also needs to be filled with CO. On the contrary, were the cargo area smaller, but fully occupied, the operation would take considerably less time, because there would be no empty space.
- 3.) The pipe that connects the exhaust to the van tends to rust, because it is eaten away from the inside by liquids that flow into it. To avoid this the nozzle should be so arranged as to point downward. The liquids will thus be prevented from flowing into [the pipe].
- 4.) To facilitate the cleaning of the vehicle, an opening will be made in the floor to allow for drainage. It will be closed by a watertight cover about twenty to thirty centimeters in diameter, fitted with an elbow siphon that will allow for the drainage of thin liquids. The upper part of the elbow pipe will be fitted with a sieve to avoid obstruction. Thicker dirt can be removed through the large drainage hole when the vehicle is cleaned. The floor of the vehicle can be tipped slightly. In this way all the liquids can be made to flow toward the center and be prevented from entering the pipes.
- 5.) The observation windows that have been installed up to now could be eliminated, as they are hardly ever used. Considerable time will be saved in the production of the new vans by avoiding the difficult fitting of the window and its airtight lock.
- 6.) Greater protection is needed for the lighting system. The grille should cover the lamps high enough up to make it impossible to break the bulb. It seems that these lamps are hardly ever turned on, so the users have suggested that they could be done away with. Experience shows, however, that when the back door is closed and it gets dark inside, the load pushes hard against the door. The reason for this is that when it becomes dark inside the load rushes toward what little light remains. This hampers the locking of the door. It has also been noticed that the noise provoked by the locking of the door is linked to the fear aroused by the darkness. It is therefore expedient to keep the lights on before the operation and during the first few minutes of its duration. Lighting is also useful for night work and for the cleaning of the interior of the van.
- 7.) To facilitate the rapid unloading of the vehicles, a removable grid is to be placed on the floor. It will slide

on rollers on a U-shaped rail. It will be removed and put in position by means of a small winch placed under the vehicle. The firm charged with the alterations has stated that it is not able to continue for the moment, due to a lack of staff and materials. Another firm will have to be found.

The technical changes planned for the vehicles already in operation will be carried out when and as major repairs to these vehicles prove necessary. The alterations in the ten Saurer vehicles already ordered will be carried out as far as possible. The manufacturer made it clear in a meeting that structural alterations, with the exception of minor ones, cannot be carried out for the moment. An attempt must therefore be made to find another firm that can carry out, on at least one of these ten vehicles, the alterations and adjustments that experience has proved to be necessary. I suggest that the firm in Hohenmauth be charged with the execution.

Due to present circumstances, we shall have to expect a later date of completion for this vehicle. It will then not only be kept available as a model but also be used as a reserve vehicle. Once it has been tested, the other vans will be withdrawn from service and will undergo the same alterations.

II. To Gruppenleiter II D
SS-Obersturmbannführer Rauff
for examination and decision."
