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## **PERSPECTIVES**

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The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry publishes commentary and analysis on Jewish identity and culture. You are welcome to share your thoughts on our Perspectives with us: [cst@tauex.tau.ac.il](mailto:cst@tauex.tau.ac.il). We are glad to share with you the forty-second issue of Perspectives.

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### **Hans, Prince of the Jews**

*What are we to make of the fate of Herzl's son,  
and the way he is remembered*

*Uriya Shavit*

In the end, all that is left are a few articles and photos in black and white.

In one, Hans the boy poses for the camera along with his father, Theodor, his older sister, Pauline, and his younger sister, Trude. They are close one to the other, yet seem distant. Hans is wearing a sailor's suit. His hair is fair. His face, Nordic in complexion, is confident and dreamy. He looks a good fit for his father's secret plans to crown him as the Doge of the future Jewish state while declaring, "Your Highness, my beloved son!"

In another, Hans, the teenager, is wearing the uniform of an English Jewish boarding school, to which he was sent following his father's premature death in 1904. All of a sudden, he has Herzl's sad, penetrating eyes. His thick hair is dark, and so is the complexion of his face. He looks every bit the sojourner, the one who never belongs.

Then there is Hans in his mid-30s, the least known image. He presents an unflattering Weizmann-style bold head and a mustache. His eyes are withdrawn and defeated, his face thin and pale. A devastated man who never found love, a steady job, or a home. A man who resisted the expectations of the Zionist leaders to follow in his father's footsteps and assume a leadership role in the movement, and to their great horror, converted to Christianity.

That photo was taken shortly after news about Hans' conversion broke out. The Palestine-based Zionist daily *Doar Hayom* called him an apostate, expressed concern that he might pose a threat to the Zionist movement, and accused him of being a dupe of the Catholic Church. The New York-based Yiddish-language daily *Jewish Morning Journal* speculated whether Hans' "action was due to [his] feeling aggrieved at the Zionists' attitude withholding the limelight and influence due to [him]" and whether he planned to travel to Palestine "with a view to carry on Christian propaganda."

One of Theodor Herzl's short stories, authored in 1890 shortly after he became a father for the first time, is called "The Son."

The father-narrator in the story, who stands trial on embezzlement charges, speaks about his son, who, by threatening to kill himself, stopped him, the father, from going through with his plan to do the same thing. The father tells that back in the day, the newborn taught him the meaning of life and to love life. He tells the court of the euphoria he felt when his son was born, in knowing that the son, and then one day the grandson, guarantee that he, the father, will through his descendants continue to walk forever under the sun, young, handsome, and strong.

Hans Herzl committed suicide in September 1930 in Bordeaux, France, a week after his older sister, who led a scandalous, unhappy life, disturbed by mental illnesses and addictions, died in the same city. He passed away a Christian.

According to Anne Perez, in an article in the *Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies*, in his suicide note, Hans called upon his "Jewish brothers" that "If they go to the New Testament, they will find divinely revealed truth."

"My life was badly lived, and it is taking a bad end," he wrote.

Theodor Herzl's only surviving daughter, Trude, who also suffered from mental illnesses throughout her adult life, died in the Theresienstadt concentration camp at the hand of the Nazis. She was survived by one son, Stephan Theodor, who served in the war as a lieutenant in the British army.

In 1945, on the way back from India, Stephan visited Mandatory Palestine, where the signs in Hebrew, the cosmopolitan vibe of Tel Aviv, and the free, happy, normal faces of the Jewish children impressed him, but where he decided not to stay. In September 1946, Herzl's only grandson joined the staff of the British Commonwealth in Washington, D.C. Two months later, he committed suicide by jumping off a bridge in the city.

The last of the Herzls left no note. When he plunged to his death, the dream of a House of Herzl died with him.

If we know anything at all today about the doomed dynasty, it is because while Hans Herzl was a lonely person, he had a number of friends who cared about him dearly and were saddened by the attacks his conversion stirred, attacks from which his eulogies were not spared.

One of them was Marcel Sternberger, a Hungarian Jewish journalist eight years his younger, whose father opened the first branch of the Zionist Movement in Hungary, and who accidentally ran into Hans in a London church while searching for material for an article on eccentric religious groups.

In the mid-1930s, Sternberger changed his career path to become the photographer of the Belgian royal family and, later, after moving to America, of world-famous personalities, including Albert Einstein, Nehru, Freud, and Roosevelt. The biography he authored to defend Hans' honor was never released. Zionist leaders feared its publication would stain the Herzl name and serve the enemies of Jewish nationalism.

Decades later, Marcel's widow, Ilse, returned to the shelved biography and expanded on it to include the story of Herzl's other descendants. Her book, *Princes Without a Home*, published in English in 1994, was not met with much interest and is hard to locate.

Last month, through the efforts of the Israeli Yuval Or, the first Hebrew translation of *Princes Without a Home* was published by Yediot Sfarim. Or, who frequently visits Kenya for work, became fascinated with the Herzl story after he learned that the Uganda plan was actually a plan to settle Jews in North-West Kenya.

He deserves praise. I wish many Israelis and many Jews will read Sternberger's book. While it is not a great piece of literature or scholarship, it is full of information and subtle psychological observations and tells, as no other book does, the drama and tragedy of the man who changed modern Jewish fate as no other modern Jew did.

It is also a mirror of a culture that disappeared. It is fascinating, for example, to explore the combination of distance and intimacy in the letters written by the Herzls. The most affectionate words are conveyed to close friends in the third person. The introverted Hans is not shy to share with his mother the output of his intestines or share with his guardian the advice he was given by Carl Jung, who treated him, to masturbate as a means of healing.

I have been engrossed with the Herzl family story for some time.

In 2000, the Austrian journalist and researcher Hubertus Czernin found files pertaining to Trude Herzl in the archive of the Austrian Internal Revenue Commission. He wrote about them in the quality daily *Der Standard* and was later generous in sharing them with me, providing me with a perfect excuse for publishing an extensive cover story on the Herzl children in the *Haaretz* weekend magazine.

Following the publication of that story, I was contacted by a reader who introduced me to a family treasure: previously unknown, fascinating and heartbreaking letters of Trude, her husband Richard and their son Stephan Theodor, which I also published in *Haaretz*.

The Trude files did not contain dramatic new information but provided another demonstration of the bureaucratic lunacy of the Nazis, who would not rest until the last meager possession of the last poor Jew was in their hands.

My feature articles served an under-the-radar campaign led by Dr. Ariel Feldstein. The campaign called upon the State of Israel to respect the final wish of the visionary who made its existence possible and bring the Herzl children to be buried on the mountain named after him.

In 2006, Pauline's and Hans' remains were finally laid to rest there in an official ceremony, with the Prime Minister present, and a year later, Stephan's remains were brought to rest in the same place. Trude's ashes will forever remain in Theresienstadt.

Zionists were so unforgiving about Hans Herzl for so many years for reasons broader than the immediate offense taken by seeing the son-of become a convert-dissenter.

Reading the manuscript of the canceled biography of Hans, Albert Einstein, who came to know and appreciate Marcel Sterberger after he took a captivating profile of him, wrote the author: "His [Hans'] wasted life constitutes a warning to all Jews against defection from their people."

Theodor Herzl outraged much of Jewish Orthodoxy in his time, and still does so today, in part because he, a secular Jew, considered Jews a nation, a nation in the modern sense of the word, and more than implied that Judaism can exist as an identity also without the Jewish religion. Yet Herzl never systematically developed this idea, and his writings and doings suggested that he also feared that without religion, Jewish identity could not survive.

Even after converting to Christianity and starting to detest practical Zionism, Hans Herzl still considered himself Jewish in the national sense. It is not a compelling model for secular Zionists that the belatedly circumcised boy who grew up with a Christmas tree in his home ended up a detached, troubled, anti-Zionist Christian.

Zionism is a fantasy-come-true, which could have easily crashed along different crossroads. In his short public career, Theodor Herzl repeatedly walked the fine line between being a great leader and being a silly joke, being a king and being a *Hochstapler*. Hans resembled him in so many ways: the depressions, the proud introversion, the illusions of grander, the brilliance clouded by shallowness. What a terrifying thought it is for any conscious Zionist that the father of Zionism could have easily ended up like his son.

Herzl rebelled against history, against Jewish destiny. That is the essence of Zionism: a rebellion. A people finally taking their fate into their own hands. The mental

misfortunes of all of Herzl's descendants, possibly inherited through his wife and through him, beg the question of whether individuals can escape their genes no matter how hard they try. And if individuals cannot, what about nations?

Many years ago, after a lecture I gave on the Herzl family tragedy, an international student from India asked me how it was possible that Hollywood never made an epic movie about Herzl.

Good question. I have no clue.

Having no skills or contacts in the movie world, his question encouraged me to write *The Third Wish*, a novel for young readers about an Israeli boy who travels back in time to join Herzl and his family, published by Hakibbutz Hameuchad on the centennial of the first Zionist Congress.

In the preface for the Hebrew translation of *Princes without a Home*, Yuval Or writes that for years, he has been trying, in vain, to find a producer for a television mini-series or movie on Herzl and his family.

What a pity. The Herzl story deserves attention not only because of what we owe this great man and not just because it is an amazing tale of triumph and disaster, but also because Jews should no longer escape the uncomfortable questions it presents.

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Uriya Shavit is Head of the Center.

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