

# WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

## Orpah's List 2011 Study Guide

### *The Invisible Bridge*

by Julie Orringer



*Women's League is grateful to Ellen Kaner Bresnick (Har Shalom Sisterhood, Potomac, MD) for the work she put into this study guide. We are the beneficiaries of her many years of teaching literature.*

*This study guide is very thorough, justly deserved for a rich and complex novel. Leaders can choose from several approaches: character and plot, literary device and structure, and Holocaust poetry and literature. On a final note: Julie Orringer was the Rona Jaffe Foundation Fellow at the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library.*

### SYNOPSIS

During September of 1937, Andras Levi, an aspiring architectural student makes plans to leave his home in Konyar, Hungary to study at the Ecole Speciale in Paris. A scholarship recipient, he is very aware that he must leave behind his family, especially his elder brother, Tibor, who is waiting to gain entrance to medical school in Italy, and his younger brother Matyas who yearns to be a dancer. Andras also senses that his family's life in Hungary is about to change significantly because of escalating anti-Semitism. He knows that his life in Paris, although not completely free of ethnic hatred, will be one that is very different from what he had begun to experience in Hungary where his educational opportunities had been very restricted.

Before he leaves Budapest, Andras makes the acquaintance of Mrs. Hasz, an elderly Jewish woman who is a member of a wealthy Hungarian banking family. She urges him to deliver a letter to a C. Morganstern on the Rue de Sevigne. Since the request is so mysterious, Andras looks forward to meeting the letter's recipient who he finds out later, in Paris, is Mrs. Hasz's daughter, Klara, a beautiful and enigmatic woman, living under the pseudonym of Claire Morganstern.

Once he arrives in Paris, although he is one of a small number of Jewish students at the Ecole Speciale, he is provided many educational opportunities. He attains great success as a student until a newly-enacted Hungarian law prohibits the granting of scholarships to Jews studying abroad. A job at a theater run by a fellow Hungarian named Zoltan Novak, whom Andras had met on the train to Paris, gives him just enough money to stay in school. He also begins a friendship with Claire, who supports herself and her belligerent teenage daughter Elisabet, teaching ballet. Despite their age difference and Claire's unwillingness to reveal details about her past to Andras, the two fall in love.

Increasingly aware of the tide of anti-semitism spreading throughout Europe, Andras worries about his brother Tibor who had finally been able to enroll in medical school in Modena, Italy. When Tibor's visa expires and he is unable to renew it, he returns to Hungary with his bride Ilana. Later, at the end of Andras's second year in Paris when his visa expires, he is summoned home to Hungary, which is building up its military forces as a German ally. Claire, now known (again) as Klara, decides to follow him back to Hungary. Elisabet, meanwhile, elopes to the United States with Paul, a young American student whom she met when he was studying in Paris.

After Andras and Klara marry, Andras, Tibor, and their younger brother Matyas are drafted into the Hungarian Labor Service, which supports the country's army. Matyas is sent to Siberia and the family loses contact with him. Additionally, Klara's past threatens the safety and fortune of her family, adding to its anguish.

As Hitler's armies march across Europe, in Budapest Andras and Tibor and their families experience terrifying uncertainty and see their world disintegrate. Tibor is the first to witness atrocity when his work crew digs a mass grave for hundreds of murdered Hungarian Jews.

Hearing reports of other mass killings of Jews in Eastern Europe, the brothers worry about the safety of their families and grasp at the possibility of emigrating to Palestine. They make clandestine plans to escape, but their plans are thwarted when Andras and Tibor are deported to work camps in the east. In the turmoil the brothers lose track of one another. After months of horror, Andras is liberated by Soviet troops and returns to Budapest to face what the war has cost his family and his beloved country. Later, the family plans to emigrate to the United States, and the story ends when Andras' grand-daughter hears the story of survival for the first time.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS I**

### **Literary Development, Characters and Storyline**

1. In the opening chapter, how would you characterize the relationship between Andras and Tibor? Is this a relationship that changes or stays the same throughout the novel? Why? What factors influence their relationship? Are these factors within or beyond their control?
2. According to Tibor, what cultural influences must Andras experience before he leaves for Paris and his architectural studies? Why are these cultural influences so important in Tibor's opinion? Do they protect Hungary when Germany invades the country in 1944 or are they a liability for the Hungarians?
3. What social and economic differences exist between the Levi and Hasz families in pre-war Budapest? Do these differences predetermine the reactions of family members toward the anti-Semitism and ethnic and religious cleansing that they experience through the war? Why or why not?
4. How would you characterize Andras' friends at the Ecole Speciale? How do their nationalities affect their responses to *Le Grand Occident*? What other factors catalyze their reactions to the verbal, physical, and educational attacks that they experience at school? Is there any sense of naivete here on the part of the young men? What elements of Zionism were starting to appear in their discussions? How realistic is it that Andras' friends would have been representative of so many points of view?
5. In the Jardin du Luxembourg, Andras experiences a number of epiphanies. What are they? Why are they important? What does he learn about *rachmones*? How do these epiphanies illuminate methods of survival for him in later, more difficult days?
6. How do cultural icons influence Novak's decisions to give Andras a job? What success does Andras have at the theater? Why? What does Andras learn about the people with whom he works? Do you see any correlation between his visit to the Operahaz in Chapter 1 and his work at Theatre Sarah-Bernhardt in Chapters 4-6? How does his work at the theatre enable him to begin his courtship of Claire?
7. Why is Claire/Klara so adamant that Andras not reveal her identity to Jozsef? How realistic is it that Jozsef would not have known where she was? What kind of person is Jozsef? Is he a multi-dimensional character at the beginning of the novel? At what point in the novel do

you see changes in his personality? What are the changes and why do they occur at those moments?

8. How does Polaner's beating affect Andras? Why does Tibor tell Andras the story about Matyas and the bridge immediately after the beating? What is Tibor's point? Why does Andras' relationship with Klara become a subject of their discussion as well? What is the correlation between and among all of these different topics? Why is Tibor afraid for Andras?
9. Why is Andras particularly anxious when he spends a lot of time with Jozsef? Contrast this with his feeling when he learns under Forestier's tutelage? What does Forestier teach Andras about creating illusion? How does this lesson serve Andras later in the war?
10. What are the complexities that exist in Klara's relationship with Novak? Why is she unable to separate herself from him completely? What does this do to her relationship with Andras? Why is the trip to Nice so important to Klara and to their relationship? Why does Klara say, "I think I am finished gardening"? (p. 238) What does she really mean here? What is she cultivating? Why is this such a crucial time in their relationship?
11. At Rosh Hashanah (p.250), Orringer describes Europe as seeming to "hang from a filament above the abyss." Later (p. 252), Andras says, "The dreadful call-up has come." How do these descriptions seem acutely appropriate to the High Holidays and to Judaism, in general, despite the fact that Andras uses them within the context of the war? Where else in the novel do Jewish imagery and references describe the situation in Europe? What kind of comfort or support does Andras receive from his Judaism? How does Judaism provide him with the language and the context for dealing with the horror? How does it help him to articulate his feelings about what is happening to his relationship with Klara?
12. The argument between LeCorbusier and Pingusson (p.346) focuses on their perspectives toward architecture and its role in society. How do their points of view parallel the varied perspectives toward the "architecture" of the world at that moment in time? Had the countries of Europe and their leaders forgotten the "Greeks and Romans entirely" (346)? Had they given up ownership of those principles to the Nazis? Does the metaphor of architectural sources effectively convey what was happening at that time?
13. Elisabet's elopement to America aboard the Ile de France crystallizes something very significant for Andras (p.374). What happens to him? Does this realization serve him well or does it weaken him? Is the effect of this permanent? How does all of this relate to the litany of "would he have gone" statements (p.387)?
14. What was life like in the labor camps? What are some of the ironies that exist within this difficult situation? Why is Mendel's presence so important to Andras? (pp. 404-409) Why do they decide to produce the newspapers? How do they think that these newspapers will help them and the other prisoners? What prior life lessons help the men survive the horrific conditions? Are there any moments when their Judaism provides them with any comfort?
15. Passover, as a holiday, carries with it many symbols, stories and requirements, yet this holiday highlights for Andras' extended family the ability to live a life of normalcy during extraordinary times. In what ways does the preparation for the holiday (p. 446-448) enable the family to function as a unit? What is there about Passover that allowed this to happen?
16. What effect does Matyas' visit have on Andras? How do his conversations with Matyas clarify certain ideas? What do they think has happened to art as a cultural representation during this war? Why is art so often destroyed during war? What power does it have? Why did the Nazis steal so much art?

17. What are the revelations that Andras has about Novak when he meets him again? How do these revelations relate to the ones that Andras has in Banhida about General Marton and about Captain Erdo and General Nagy in Turka? What is the important life lesson that each of these four men practice? What is the effect of these revelations on Andras?
18. When Andras and Tibor go to Miklos Klein's house, they experience something that appeals to all of their five senses. What specific parts of the scene appeal to each of these senses? Why does Orringer create this kind of setting? How does she relate this multi-sensory experience to their request of Klein? What is it that they think Klein can give them? What images enhance the belief that a certain amount of magic is involved in their requests? When they return to Klein's grandparents' main room, how is this sense of magic enhanced? What do they see as their future?
19. What is significant about the fact that both Elisabet and Shalhevet are making promises to speak to people? How are these two women similar? What does Shalhevet mean in Hebrew? How is this meaning important to the story? (p. 545) How are the two women's locations important? What is Andras' feeling about God and His role in all of this? (p. 549) How does being an architect relate to this? (Remember also how the Nazis used the word "architect" to describe those who had designed plans for the destruction of the Jews.)
20. What kinds of psychological behaviors do the men exhibit in order to cope with the horror and turmoil in their lives? How does Jozsef change these behaviors?
21. As the family makes plans to escape to Palestine, Klara reads Andras some passages from "Bialik or Brenner or Herzl". Why would these three men be the ones whose work she would read? In what ways would each one inspire Andras and Klara? What do they represent?
22. What is wrong with the "Ivory Tower's" belief that Andras and the others were put on the boxcars because they knew about the black market? How were the Nazis able to hide their real intent regarding the Jews? Why were people unable to figure out what was planned for the Jews of Europe? At what point does Andras realize that he and the others are being sent to the Ukraine? What does he realize about the main house that they are staying in once they arrive in the Ukraine? Why does this have such a profound effect on him?
23. How do Andras and Jozsef escape at the end of the book? How did Klara survive the siege of Budapest? What happened to the rest of the family? How did Polaner find his way to make everyone's life better? How did Andras handle the news of what happened to Tibor?

## STUDY QUESTIONS II

### Literary Analysis, Holocaust Literature and Historical Context

*The following notes and questions are not only about the specific details of the novel, but also focus on its historical context and literary structure as ways of enhancing the meaning and power of the story.*

1. In the Table of Contents, the five sections of the novel - The Street of Schools, Broken Glass, Departures and Arrivals, The Invisible Bridge, and Fire - combine to tell a story. What story is it? The titles also must be significant for Orringer since she divided the chapters into these sections. What do you think that significance was? What is the tone that she has toward each section? Why give a title to each section and then provide a title for each chapter? What was her intent? Did she succeed?

2. What is the inspiration for the title *The Invisible Bridge*? In what other literal or figurative places, do you see invisible bridges? Are they always invisible? Are these bridges always intact or are they somehow fractured? What do these bridges suggest about Andras' world as well as our world? How do they relate to other characters in the novel?
3. In what other ways does this novel relate to today's world? How does Orringer make points about the act of survival? What does she say about how we survive as humans and as Jews?
4. An archetype is a common literary technique often used in Holocaust literature. It literally means a basic model or a pattern from which copies are made, i.e. the original action, character-type, or image in storytelling that later recurs on a consistent basis in other stories. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung saw archetypes as certain ideas, images, and actions rising out of the experiences that the human race encountered early in its development. Some of the most prevalent and influential sources that Jung viewed as key to the development of an awareness of archetypal patterns were the Bible, mythology and long-established classical sources. He saw patterns as some of the archetypes that existed within the collective unconscious of both writers and readers, such as:
  - the coming of age story
  - the crucial journey that tests the hero in some way story
  - the rivalry between brothers/sisters story
  - the stranger in a strange land story
  - the errant child or rebel story
  - the womanizer story
  - the birth or death re-enactment story
  - the femme fatale story
  - the hero v villain story
  - the guilt-ridden figure story
  - the creation/reinvention of oneself

There are many other archetypal patterns as well.

- What kinds of archetypal conventions are specific to Holocaust literature?
- Which archetypes from the list above does Orringer employ?
- Why these particular ones?
- Are they particular to the Holocaust in any way?
- What other archetypes does she utilize?
- Why does she use these?
- How do they help to tell the story?
- What additional information do they give?

5. Read the passage below from p.19.

*Andras found himself looking out the window at a little town where the street signs and shop signs were all in German. The train must have slipped over the border without his knowing it; while he had been asleep with a book of Petofi poems on his lap, he had left the landlocked outlet of Hungary and entered the larger world. He cupped his hands against the glass and looked for Austrians in the narrow lanes, but could see none; gradually the houses became smaller and further apart, and the town dwindled into countryside. ..He opened the window for a few inches; the air out was crisp and smelled of woodsmoke.*

*He had the strange sensation of not knowing who he was, of having traveled off the map of his own existence."*

- What significant and interesting words do you see here?
- What do they mean?
- How do they lend themselves to particular archetypes? (Look at the list.)
- What archetypal patterns do you see here?
- Why does Orringer present these in this way?
- How does it or do they foreshadow Andras' experiences in France and ultimately in Hungary and the Ukraine during the war?
- In what other ways do any of these archetypal patterns function? (Hint: Focus on the word "ovulet" for one of the archetypes.)

We might make the assumption that Orringer, like other authors, chooses her characters' names with great care. The name choices in this novel seem to be both language-based, e.g. Ben Yakov, and symbolic, occupational or archetypal in focus, e.g. Mrs. Apfel, Lemarque, Forestier, Le Bourgeois. Through their literal meanings or their references to specific people, occupations, or objects from literature, the Bible or mythology among other sources, these characters' names tell the reader something about the roles that each character plays within the novel.

6. Do you think that Orringer's use of these names adds to or diminishes our understanding of the significant ideas and themes in the novel?
7. Why might she have done this?
8. What other names did you come across that seem interesting? To what archetypal characters or objects or stories are some of these names referring?
9. What is the connection between the archetypes and the characters themselves?

A symbol is more than something standing for something else. There is a relationship or connection between the symbol and what it symbolizes. One very specific kind of symbol that Orringer utilizes frequently is a motif which is a recurring word or verbal pattern, image, character, idea, or situation. By tracing the different ways in which a motif is used in a novel, we can unpack an interesting observation about the character that is utilizing the motif and illuminate some ideas.

Some common examples of motifs or recurring images throughout this work are:

- envelopes/letters/notes
- quilts/blankets
- tallit,hats/caps
- hands/arms/fingers

10. Can you think of any other motifs that you observed as you read this novel?

Trace a particular motif by making a list of a number of passages in which the motif appears. To do this, you should copy whole passages, not just words or phrases or even single sentences. You need to get some impression of the motif within the whole context.

Here is an example of passage-finding for the motif of quilts, blankets, clothes and other things that Andras uses to cover himself. Watch what we observe about him once we trace the motif throughout the novel.

**Passage 1: at the Hasz house, pp. 11-12**

*“Ah,” said the younger Mrs. Hasz. “How fortunate! And a scholarship, too!” But at the last words, she lowered her eyes, and Andras experienced the return of a feeling from his school days in Debrecen: a sudden shame, as if he’d been stripped to his underclothes.*

[**Analysis:** He is wearing the very basic of covers and feels shame. Does he feel completely powerless? He still has some clothes on, even if they are only undergarments. Does this mean that more clothes make him feel more confident, more powerful?]

**Passage 2: on his journey to Paris, p. 25**

*At the exchange counter, a gap-toothed matron in a gray tunic made him sign a document affirming that he would spend all the exchanged money within the borders of Germany. He tried to enter a café near the station to buy a sandwich, but on the door there was a small sign...Jews not wanted.*

[**Analysis:** Someone who is giving him a difficult time is wearing the clothes. She is covered by a gray tunic. A tunic is a singular piece of clothing that completely covers her, and he cannot distinguish any separate parts to the outfit. It is as if he cannot focus on any singular part of her other than the tunic and her gap-tooth. She is covered and has the power, but he is able to steal some of it back by focusing on a physical part of her that he can demean.]

**Passage 3: At Jozsef’s house, p. 30**

*In the morning, he woke on a sofa beneath a window, his eyes draped in a silk chemise, his head a mass of cotton wool, his shirt unbuttoned, his jacket rolled beneath his head, his left arm stinging with pins and needles. Someone had put an eiderdown over him and opened the curtains; a block of sunlight fell across his chest.*

[**Analysis:** He wakes up with a hangover, his clothes in disarray. Some pieces he is no longer wearing. Someone else covers him with the eiderdown that belongs to someone else. He cannot see clearly because of someone else’s chemise. Even his head is figuratively filled with clothing materials in an unprocessed state. Who has power here?]

**Passage 4: When Andras finds out that the theaters are being closed, p. 162**

*He went home that evening with a frightening sense of vacancy in his chest. No more Sarah-Bernhardt. No more Monsieur Novak. No more Claudel or Pely; no more Marcelle Gerard. And no more Klara. No more Klara. The hard white shell of his life punctured and blown clean. He was light now, hollow, an empty egg. Hollow and light, he drifted home through the January wind. At 34 rue des Ecoles he climbed the flights and flights of stairs--how many hundreds of them were there?--feeling he didn’t have the energy to look at his books that night, nor even to wash his face or change for bed. He wanted only to lie down in his trousers and shoes and overcoat, pull the eiderdown over his head, ride out the hours before dawn.*

[**Analysis:** He is afraid. There will be change in his life that will impact him in many ways. What protects him that has now been punctured? A hard white shell, like the tunic in passage 2, is something without a separation until this moment when it is punctured. What image does the hard white shell suggest? Remember the “ovulets” in question d. above. Without his shell, his covering, what happens to his energy or power level? Look at how he wants to pull on specific clothing to help him. Why does he want these particular clothes? What will the eiderdown do? What are we learning about him in this situation?]

11. What do you notice about the way in which Andras is using this motif throughout these four passages?

12. Is he changing or developing in a particular way?
13. How does the motif enable this to happen?
14. Does Andras use the motif in different ways from passage to passage?
15. What inner experience exists for him in each of these situations? For example, Andras covers himself with other things as well, like quilts, coats, and tallitot. How does each thing that covers him add to our understanding of something significant that is happening to him internally?
16. What is the most interesting thing that you noticed about this character through his or her use of the motif?

[**To Leader:** Now, either continue with this motif or choose another. Be sure to let the passages speak to each other and inform you about subtle changes in your analysis.]

**NOTE 1:** *The frontispiece of the book contains one excerpt from the much longer poem Picture Postcards by Miklos Radnoti, one very short excerpt from the poem Unrecounted, by W.G. Sebald, and one short excerpt from an article in a Hungarian Labor Service newspaper:*

- Why does Orringer include these?
- Are they reflective of her perspective toward her characters, their quests, their environmental pressures, their conflicts, or something else?
- Do they relate to Orringer in any way?
- Are these pieces of writing presented from the perspective of the omniscient narrator through the novel or that of the very specific young female narrator in the Epilogue?
- What is Orringer hoping to convey?
- How do these poems connect to the poem at the very end of the book, Any Case, by Wislawa Szymborska on p. 758?

**NOTE 2: Picture Postcards** with a short biography of the poet.

Miklos Radnoti ( 1909-1944) Hungarian poet ; published 6 volumes, including Walk On , Condemned (1936) which won prizes in poetry; soon after the success of this book of poetry, the Hungarian government began conscripting him in labor brigades; in the late fall of 1944, during the German retreat from Hungary, he and 21 others were shot and buried in a mass grave; when the grave was exhumed and his body found, in his pocket was a small notebook containing seven poems that detailed his feelings during those days in the labor brigades, including Picture Postcards]

Picture Postcards by Miklos Radnoti

The roar of cannon rolls from Bulgaria dense and broad,  
 resounds upon the mountain crest, then hesitates and ceases;  
 the maned sky runs above; but recoils the neighing road;  
 and men and beasts are tangled, and wagon, thought and load.  
 You're deep and constant in me despite this turbulence  
 and glowing in my conscience, forever still, intense  
 and silent like an angel when wondering he sees

destruction, or like beetles entombed in dying trees.  
(Aug. 30, 1944)

Nine kilometres from here, look, the haystacks  
and homes consumed in blaze,  
the peasants smoke in silence by the meadow  
and huddle in a daze.  
But here, the shepherdess leaves in the water  
light ripples in her wake  
and gently dipping down, her curly flock drinks  
the clouds up in the lake.  
(Oct. 6, 1944)

The oxen slaver red saliva, people  
pass urine mixed with blood, my squadron stands  
disorganized in filthy bunches. Death  
blows overhead its cold, infernal breath.  
(Oct. 24, 1944)

I tumble near his body. It turns over  
already taut as string about to break.  
Shot through the nape. You too will end up like that,  
I mutter to myself. Lie calm. Be patient.  
The flower of death unfolds in fear. I wait.  
Blood mixed with dirt grows clotted on my ear.  
I hear a soldier quip: He'll get away yet.  
(Oct. 31, 1944)

- Why did Orringer include this particular poem at the beginning of her novel?
- Why did she use only an excerpt? Should Orringer have included the whole poem? Why?
- Is anything missing from the excerpt that is present in the rest of the poem?
- What is the tone of this poem? Is it regretful? Is it fearful? Is it something else?
- Do you see any imagery here which is also present in the novel? If so, what is it and why is it so important?

### NOTE 3: The Final Chapter - "A Name"

- What is the significance of the title?
- Read the passage below:

*He was right, of course. Nothing would change what had happened--not grief, not time, not memory, not retribution. But they could leave this place, would leave it in a few weeks. They could cross an ocean and live in a city where Aprilis might grow up without the gravity that had marked her brother, without the sense of tragedy that seemed to hang in the air like the brown dust of bituminous coal. And Andras would become a student again--if not the young man who had arrived in Paris with a suitcase and a scholarship, then a man who knew something more of both the beauty and the ugliness of the world. And Klara would*

*be with him--Klara, who stood before them now with her dark hair blowing, her hands raised, the camera hiding her face behind its glass eye.*

*He put his arm around his brother and said, "ready."*

*She counted to three in English, a daring act in the shadow of the Ministry of the Interior. And she captured them, the two men on the steps: Andras and Matyas Tibor." (p.754)*

- What does a name represent within the context of this passage?
- How have names played a role in this novel?
- What happens when one gains a name or loses a name?
- What does it represent for Andras?
- What is Andras saying about the act of remembering? Is what he is saying possible or realistic?
- According to Andras, what will help him/them to deal with what had happened to them?
- What images are the last ones that he focuses on as he and the others begin this new journey? Why? How do these relate to the Epilogue which follows this final chapter? Do these correlate with the images and impressions that the narrator focuses on in the Epilogue?

#### **NOTE 4: Children of the Holocaust and Second Generation**

**Judit Toth** (1936- ) is a Hungarian poet orphaned at an early age when her parents were killed in concentration camps. She was brought up by relatives and currently lives in Paris. She has published three volumes of poetry and is a contributing editor for Hungarian literary magazines. In her poem Remembering there is a strong correlation with some of the major themes of this novel.]

Remembering by Judith Toth

*Pieces of memory stick together  
Mixed in with the soil of the present tense  
Images darkly looming are lost  
In their environments.  
Tar-tufts, plankboard-slivers,  
Stones on the noon sand.  
Water covers them repeatedly,  
then once again they surface  
as the sea withdraws,  
but now inseparably from the sand.  
The city, the river, moon-splendor of bridges,  
narrow sidestreets, arcades, alleyways,  
steps go clomping, here new, here old.  
Algae get tangled with the sand.  
In the seemingly accidental light  
now this, now that housewall incandesces.  
But the touch, the gaze cannot go astray  
In the coincidence of scenes and of time.*

*The onion's peel separates,  
out of the vapor steps a June noon,  
and my knife-grasping hand and the onion  
and an old tubful of water, the dusty leek  
and a figure on the hot stairs---  
It's to one system the onion  
and time curving to the onion's peel belong.*

- What is Toth, a Hungarian Jew who survived, saying about the act of remembering?
- What images and words help her to convey that message? On what motifs or images is she focusing? Why does she choose these motifs?
- Are they some of the ones that Orringer incorporates into the novel?
- Do you see any of the Hungarian influences, ideas, and interests that you read about in the novel in this poem?
- Would she agree with what Andras says in the last chapter or with what the narrator talks about in the Epilogue?
- Is her feeling about remembering affected by the fact that she is also a survivor, although she was never in the camps?
- Is she technically what is considered a “second generation Holocaust survivor”---one who is the child of those who were killed in the camps or who survived the camps.

These children typically were affected in both negative and positive ways by their parents' experiences. Often, they were overwhelmed by what their parents had to say if the parents chose to tell them about their experiences, or they were confused and burdened if their parents remained silent.

In either situation, psychologists have documented the fact that children of Holocaust survivors were often guilt-ridden and may have had difficulty in formulating strong and lasting personal relationships. At the same time, some of these children may have gained strong coping skills because of the trauma inflicted upon their parents.

The intergenerational transmission of trauma is so strong that often Holocaust-related influences can be seen in the Third Generation - children of the children of survivors - such as the narrator in the epilogue and Julie Orringer, the author.

Do the issues differ for a fictional character such as this narrator than they do for a real person such as Orringer? (We have to assume that our narrator is a fictional creation, since this is a novel, although it might contain elements of truth and fact.)

- Do you see any of these issues manifesting themselves in the narrator in the Epilogue? If so, what?

#### **NOTE 5: Epilogue**

In the Epilogue, the narrator is quick to point out that her books “about that war...hadn't much to say about Hungary.” (756)

- Why is it that history books have not focused on the Hungarian Jews and their experiences during the war?

- Why does the narrator call it “that war”? In what way has she learned about the war? What are the implications of what she says about the way in which she learned about the war?
- How does this relate to what Andras talks about with regard to remembering?
- How does it relate to what Judit Toth talks about in her poem?

Later, the narrator talks about “strands of darker stories. She didn’t know how she’d heard them; she thought she must have absorbed them through her skin, like medicine or poison.” (756)

- What is she suggesting about how she heard these things? How does she feel about this?
- When she has a nightmare, why does she not tell her parents what she had been dreaming and says, instead, “You don’t want to know”? (757)
- What conclusion does she come to about “the problem”? (758) What is the “problem” for her? How valid is this solution?
- What about her choice of the word “problem” - what impression does the word convey?

Later, she says, “Or maybe even now they didn’t want to talk about it. But she would ask next time she went to visit. It seemed right that they should tell her, now that she was thirteen. She wasn’t a child anymore. She was old enough to know.”

- What is the sense you have about this narrator? Is it a problem that Orringer’s narrator is only 13? Why has her family not told her anything about what happened?

Why has Orringer chosen *Any Case*, by the Nobel Prize–winning Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska, as the coda to her novel? What does it express about individuals caught in the flow of history and the forces that determine their fates?

### Interview #1 with Julie Orringer

In the following excerpt from an interview with Julie Orringer ([knopfdoubleday.com/orringer/?ref=banner\\_300invisiblebridge\\_bb](http://knopfdoubleday.com/orringer/?ref=banner_300invisiblebridge_bb)) she talks about where she got her inspiration for the story-line in which some of the plot elements are autobiographical while others are fictional.

- Do you see any differences in her feelings toward her background from those of her narrator in the Epilogue? If so, why might these differences exist?
- In what ways did she see the writing of the novel as difficult?
- Were these justifiable difficulties?
- How did she overcome them in her opinion?
- Do you think that she did overcome them?

### Interview #2 with Julie Orringer

[redroom.com/member/julie-orringer/press/an-interview-with-julie-orringer-author-of-the-invisible-bridge](http://redroom.com/member/julie-orringer/press/an-interview-with-julie-orringer-author-of-the-invisible-bridge)

In a second interview with Julie Orringer the interviewer, Ilana Simons, says: “There’s a distinct feeling I got from some of your protagonists: I feel big love for them when they do quiet good deeds...I’m ...thinking of the underspoken way in which Andras carries that big crate to Paris,

without ...complaining. When they handle their pain like that, I get a deep warm sense of their dignity. Does that idea resonate with you?"

When Simons asks a question like that, she is engaging in some of the behavior for which authors of Holocaust-related novels like *The Invisible Bridge* have been criticized: stylizing the Holocaust through literary devices. This criticism alludes to the idea that fictional representations of Holocaust-set situations are often presented through complex character development, intensely engaging and inventive story-lines, and detailed descriptions of mass-suffering that ironically may sanitize the actual events because of the inability to focus on what really "was" rather than what was imagined "to be."

### **STUDY QUESTIONS 3: Holocaust Literature as a Literary Genre**

**Lawrence Langer**, one of the first literary critics who wrote about the genre of Holocaust literature, asked if literature, in general, has within its power the ability to represent extreme events like the Holocaust. He also asks how the response of a reader is even one that can be considered legitimate considering the size of the horror of the Holocaust.

1. What do you think about this? Is it fair to say that literature, especially a novel, is limited and cannot convey the truth of the Holocaust?
2. Does this novel convey the truth of the situation in Hungary for Jews during World War II?
3. Does it give a fair presentation of the Holocaust on a much larger scale?
4. What about the word "represent" above? What is the problem with that word?
5. Is Langer correct, that a reader cannot give an accurate or complete response to something so horrific?

**Theodor Adorno**, a German philosopher, is famous for saying that poetry after Auschwitz is no longer possible. The moment one elevates the singularity of an event into an aesthetic experience it legitimizes the barbarism of the crime and the society that produced the crime.

6. What do you think he meant by this?
7. How does this statement correlate with the fact that so many survivors wrote poetry during their imprisonment in the camps?
8. Despite Adorno's strong feelings about Holocaust poetry, why does Orringer end her novel with the poem Any Case by Szyborska?
9. How does the poem illuminate some key truths for Orringer? for the narrator in the Epilogue? for Andras?
10. What are those truths?
11. How would Adorno probably feel if he read the novel and then the poem at the end? Do you think he would necessarily reject the poem? Why?

**Other literary critics** have seen some benefit to fictional narratives, like novels, as a way of presenting the terror of the Holocaust. They felt that those who did not survive did not have a way to show their last minutes of life. Thus, these critics saw these fictional representations as a way of providing the dead with a voice.

12. What do you think of this perspective? How do you reconcile it with Langer's and Adorno's statements?

## NOTES

**Raoul Wallenberg** As a well-educated young man of Swedish origin, Raoul Wallenberg was sent to work in Palestine in the 1930s where he met a number of Jews who had escaped from Nazi Germany. Through his numerous business trips into France and Germany, he quickly learned how to navigate the German bureaucracy, and he used this knowledge to save many Jews trying to escape Hungary where he had been sent to represent the Swedish legation.

The Jewish citizens of Budapest had asked the embassies of neutral countries like Sweden and for help. Wallenberg and his friend Per Anger began issuing protective passes which ensured that the bearers would be treated as citizens of Sweden. He also convinced King Gustav V of Sweden to appeal to Miklos Horthy, the Hungarian head of state, stop the deportations. After the king wrote to Horthy, the deportations did stop. Some German leaders, like Himmler and Eichmann, had begun wrangling for power and saw the war proceeding as less favorably for the Nazis.

Wallenberg continued to produce Swedish protective passes and saved 4500 more Jews. In October of 1944, Horthy declared that he wanted peace with the Soviets. This announcement caused him to be replaced by Ferrenc Szalasi who was more sympathetic to the Nazis. The deportations began again. When this happened, Wallenberg began to build Swedish safe houses which he declared as Swedish territory in the middle of Budapest. Other neutral government legations followed his lead.

During this time, Eichmann started his brutal death marches of Jews out of Hungary. Wallenberg furiously worked to produce more passes, and over 700 Jews lived in his safe houses. When the Russians arrived in Budapest in January of 1945, they found 97,000 Jews alive. In total, 120,000 Jews survived in Hungary due to the efforts of Wallenberg and other courageous individuals.

Wallenberg disappeared under the auspices of Russian officials. No one is sure whether he was imprisoned by the Russians and died in prison or whether he is still alive today. No single reason for his imprisonment was ever established.

**The Struma** was a Bulgarian ship that sailed under the Panamanian flag. A number of Zionist organizations commissioned the ship to take refugees from Romania to Palestine which was under the control of Great Britain. The ship's engine was faulty and gave out a number of times during the voyage. The British refused to let the passengers enter Palestine and Turkey refused to let them disembark because the passengers did not have entry visas. Eventually, after letting the Struma stay in Istanbul harbor for 71 days, Turkey towed the ship into the Bosphorus where many passengers hung signs that said "Save us" in English and Hebrew. On the morning of February 24, 1942, the ship was torpedoed and sunk by a Soviet submarine. All aboard died except for one 19-year-old.

**The Monument to the Shoes** A memorial along the banks of the Danube River in Budapest honors Jews who perished in Budapest during World War II. Sixty pairs of cast-iron styles 1940's style shoes commemorate those who were shot alongside the Danube.

## JULIE ORRINGER BIOGRAPHY

Julie Orringer is the author of *The Invisible Bridge* (Knopf, 2010) and *How to Breathe Underwater*, a short story collection (Knopf, 2003). Her stories have been published in *The Yale Review*, where

they've twice been awarded the Editors' Prize for best story of the year; the Paris Review, which awarded her the Discovery Prize in 1998; Ploughshares, which selected her work for the Cohen Award for Best Fiction; Zoetrope All-Story, which nominated her for a National Magazine Award; and by the Washington Post Magazine. She is the recipient of two Pushcart Prizes, and her work has appeared in numerous anthologies, including The Granta Book of the American Short Story, The Best American Nonrequired Reading, and The Scribner Anthology of American Short Fiction.

For a complete biography: <http://redroom.com/member/julie-orringer/bio>