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Christopher R. Browning, Richard S. Hollander, Nechama Tec, eds. *Every Day Lasts a Year: A Jewish Family's Correspondence from Poland.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xxii + 286 pp. $28.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-88274-3.

Reviewed by Catherine Epstein (Department of History, Amherst College)

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Letters from Afar

It is a great story: after his parents died in a car crash, Richard Hollander was rummaging through their attic. In a tan briefcase, he discovered dozens of letters from family members to his father, Joseph. But these were no ordinary letters: Jewish family members in Krakow wrote them during the Nazi occupation. Hollander learned about a completely new dimension of his father's life, one he had sensed but never known. But there was even more. Just as Joseph was trying to help his mother, two sisters, and their families stranded in the General Government, he was waging his own battle to stay in the United States.

Every Day Lasts a Year consists of three introductory chapters and 175 pages of letters. In the first section, Hollander relates how his father, Joseph Hollander, a successful Krakow businessman, recognized the warning signs and left Poland shortly after the German invasion. After a three-month odyssey, Joseph and his then-wife landed in New York, but without proper papers. Joseph spent the next years desperately avoiding deportation. The narrative drags a bit, as Hollander documents each of Joseph's court appearances and judicial appeals. Even so, the situation is riveting: poor Joseph, barraged with letters from Krakow seeking help, could barely survive himself. And in the midst of it all, his wife left him for a rich American. This event, however, paved the way for Joseph to meet his second wife, Hollander's mother. Although the chapter is marred by a tendency to idolize his father and idealize his parents' marriage, Hollander has some thoughtful things to say about the letters. When he found them, they were neatly bound and chronologically organized. "I became convinced," Hollander writes, "that it was my father's unspoken hope that one day I would give a voice to his entire family" (p. 6).

The next two chapters seek to place the letters in historical context. Christopher Browning gives a good overview of the history of Jews in Krakow during the Nazi occupation. Drawing on many archival sources, he recounts Governor General Hans Frank's efforts to make Krakow "the most Jew-free" city in the General Government (p. 48). Browning also expertly links developments in Krakow and beyond to events mentioned in the letters. In 1940, for example, Joseph managed to get his sister Klara, her husband, Dawid, and their two teenage

daughters, Genia and Lusia, entry permits (but not passports) for Nicaragua. Later, this paperwork almost saved their lives. In 1943, the Nazis brought Jews holding foreign papers to Bergen-Belsen while they inquired about the documents' validity. Klara and her family seem to have been in this group. But after a negative answer from the Nicaraguan government, they were deported to Auschwitz.

In her essay, Nechama Tec attempts to tell the story of the Krakow Jews "through the eyes of the oppressed" (p. 60). This essay, though, is neither fish nor fowl: it focuses too much on the Hollanders to be a more general history of the Krakow Jews, but it also includes digressive material that goes well beyond contextualizing the Hollanders' experiences. In addition, Tec provides her own analysis of the letters. Here, however, her preoccupations overwhelm her insights. She states, for example, "Comparative cross-cultural research shows that most people live in patriarchal, male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered communities" (p. 86). This may well be true, but it is jarring in the context of the letters. Joseph's youngest sister, Dola, was trapped in an unhappy marriage, but at the beginning of the war, her husband Henek fled to the parts of Poland controlled by the USSR. Dola soon fell in love with another man, Munio, and wished to divorce Henek. In numerous letters, Dola sought advice and permission from Joseph to divorce and marry; when she did not hear from Joseph, she married Munio anyway. But according to Tec, because Joseph was the only man in the family, he "automatically became the family head … In the rather lengthy correspondence that concentrates on the issues of Dola's divorce and remarriage, no one questioned the fact that Joseph was in charge of the traditional, moral issues affecting the family. Patriarchal principles, following the established traditional pattern of male dominance, were firmly entrenched" (p. 89). Perhaps. But Dola may simply have wanted affirmation from a brother that she loved; after all, she did marry Munio without Joseph's express consent. Tec may be on firmer ground when she suggests that family members' involvement in Dola's marital affairs may have "distracted them from the devastating surroundings in which they had to live" (p. 91). Then, too, Tec is very insightful in some of her other analyses: she writes, for example, that the teenagers were very self-centered in their letters; that the men focused on trying to solve problems that they faced, thereby playing out their traditional roles as protectors; and that all of the letter-writers were both anxious for Joseph to have some sense of their difficulties, yet eager not to worry him too much.

In an understated way, the letters speak volumes about Jewish life in Krakow between September 1939 and December 1941. Joseph's family wrote mostly about personal concerns: health, work, housing, food, and attempts to secure papers to leave the country. The family wrote almost nothing about the general situation of Jews in Krakow–with good reason, of course, since such letters would not have gotten past censors. In fact, much of the power of the letters rests on what their writers allude to, but never actually state. Joseph's aging mother, Berta, for example, once noted, "Dear child, I cannot write much about myself, I would not have enough paper to write everything down" (p. 220). The reader is left to imagine what Berta might have penned. Over time, the letters suggest a creeping desperation. In the beginning, the authors make little mention of food or hopes for packages from Joseph; later, these themes are much more prevalent. In addition, the Hollander family, a generally functional unit, saw its share of tensions when forced to live in the very close quarters of Krakow's ghetto. The writers also express growing fears about having to move apartments, possible deportations, and potential separations. As Joseph's sister Mania wrote, "[w]e all sit like on a volcano, our nerves are almost used up. So many months we live in uncertainty and new worries keep coming up" (p. 193). The letters also emphasize how important it was for the Hollanders to have a link to the outside world. As Mania noted, "[i]n the situation we are in right now the letters from you are the only sunshine" (p. 218). In a very real way, Joseph was the Hollander's lifeline: he was their only hope.

Unfortunately, the letters do not seem to have been translated particularly well. "GlÃ¼ck," for example, is always translated as "luck," even though "happiness" might sometimes have been more appropriate. The translations give the letters an air of old-world shtetl charm, but they hardly do justice to the educational level of the sophisticated Hollander family. At the same time, these letters spark–but cannot answer–some profound questions: When and how did the Hollanders realize that they were stuck and would, in all likelihood, die? How did they process this realization? What did Joseph feel as he responded to his relatives' pleas? Did he later suffer from survivor guilt? Did he ever make his peace with the fact that he had been unable to help his relatives in need? *Every Day Lasts a Year* shows how Jews living under German occupation expressed their hopes, fears, and concerns to a family member abroad whom they believed could save them from their awful circumstances. Finally,

it illustrates a global dimension of the Holocaust: relatives abroad learned about what was happening to their loved ones, but they could do precious little to actually help them.

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