

FELIX POLLAK

GINKGO

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New Rochelle, N. Y.



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A MATTER OF HISTORY

In Memory of Lotte, Ernst, and Fritz Strass

It all has passed and is gone, the cries silenced, the blood congealed in the earth. The cries dissolved in air, the blood sucked up by grass, transformed into the sap of young trees. The torturers again what they had been before — hotel captains, clerks, engineers, raising families and pets, watching wrestling on *Fernseh* screens, with only a faint remembrance, a vague nostalgia for *Kraft durch Freude* — *wo sind die Zeiten!* The torture instruments themselves matured into museum pieces, exhibits A,B,C, adjoining the nickelodeon and the paraphernalia used to question witches. Dachau, Buchenwald, Auschwitz, Theresienstadt — place names again, towns, railroad stops. Hotels to spend the night in between trains. Silenced the cries, congealed the blood, the ashes dispersed by winds. The mass graves grown over, the cases closed, the compensations paid. Only the bones still real in the graves, alone the numbers tattooed on forearms surviving in San Francisco, Brussels, Shanghai, merely the memories of feces and sweat, of whips and crucifixions and howls of terror and death, of hoses, of bursting intestines, of chimney fires and the smell of burning flesh and hair, of dog barks and the shots of voices and cracking bones and sudden silences still real buried in skulls dispersed over the globe, only the scars on displaced souls bleeding mutely into private nights over the earth, gray flickers across daytime eyes . . . faint, growing fainter and scarce, bats fluttering through daydreams on their way into the crevices of gray oblivion. Strewn by winds over seas the ashes of Auschwitz, icicles hanging from trees the deathcries of Belsen, melting in a new now. Sunken beneath the flowers the corpses frozen into the ground barefoot at attention, their last moans ground into soft powder by the wings of bees. The camps, concentrating on tourists, now sideshowsights for travellers out

to learn the fine art of shuddering. No smoking, please, in deference to the martyrs — a slight but symbolic sacrifice. Keep off the grass, you might be walking on a grave. The touching of the torture instruments strictly *verboten*, read the signs, ladies and sirs, and kindly refrain from loud laughter, as it would violate the decorum of the place. This way to the gas chambers, if you please. — All past and gone. The murdered dead, the blood of the red headlines congealed in archives, the writers, the murderers, forgotten — have and are. *Wie gehts? — Man lebt.*

And already a child coming home from school asking,
Daddy, who was Hitler?