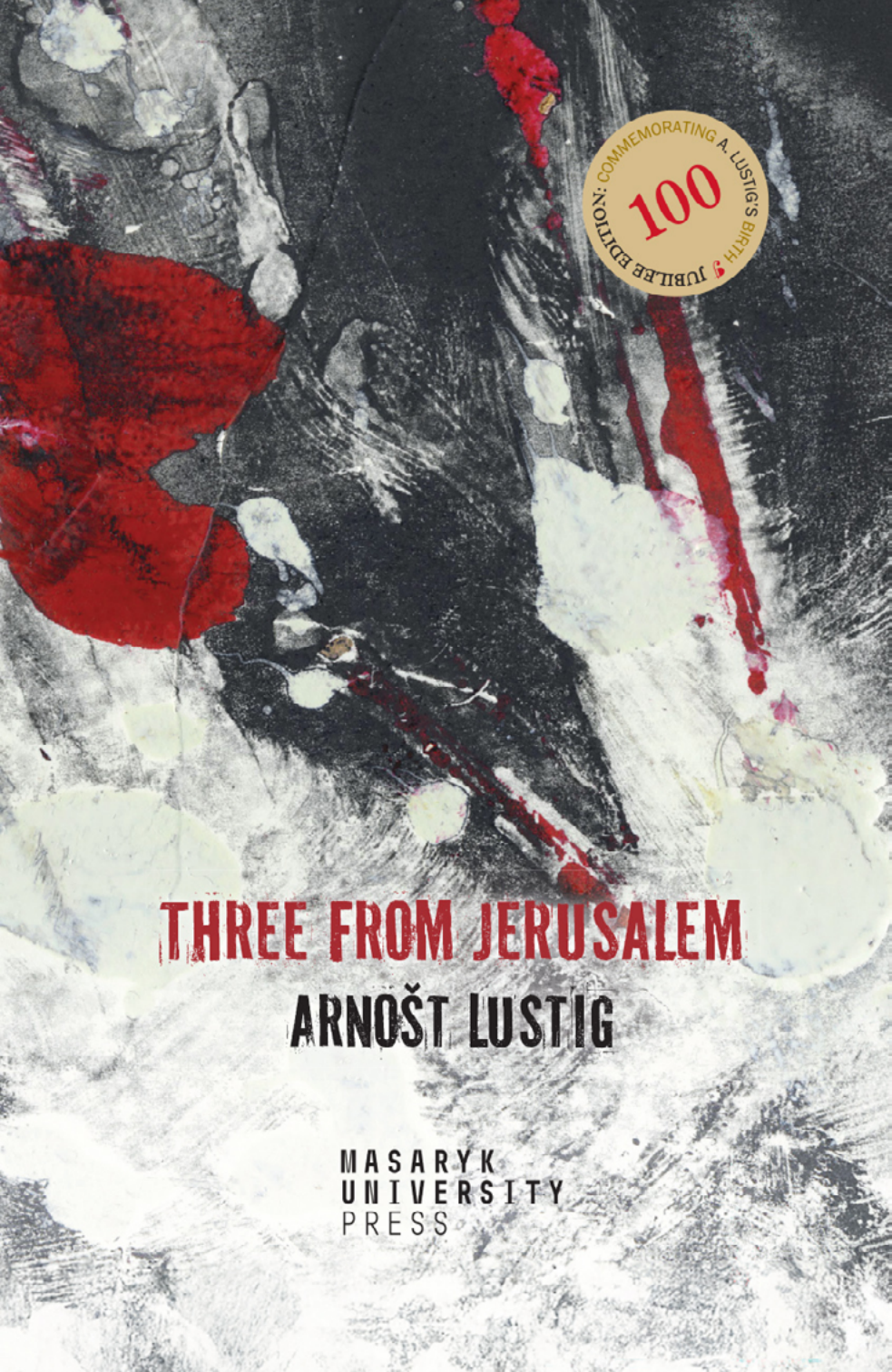
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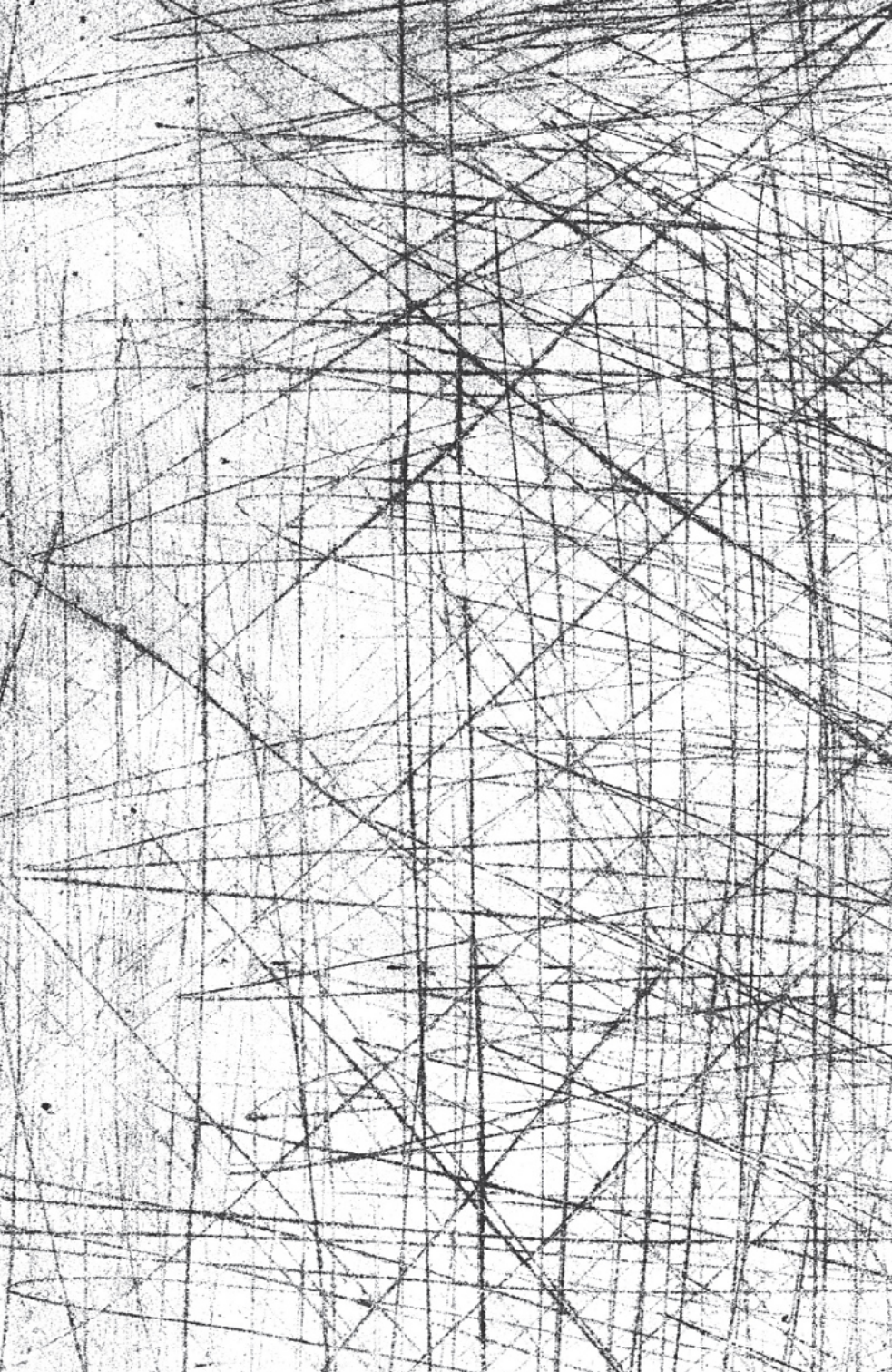

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ARNOŠT LUSTIG

THREE FROM JERUSALEM

TRANSLATED BY GABRIELA K. SHARMA

MASARYK UNIVERSITY PRESS
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Alena Mizerová, Ph.D.
Director
Masaryk University Press

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Three from Jerusalem is the first book in a trilogy published by Munipress as part of a Jubilee edition of books being prepared for the 100th anniversary of Arnošt Lustig's birth and the FestivAL100 project. The book was created in beautiful synergy with the Munipress Publishing House. I would like to thank its director, Alena Mizerová, and Editor, Lea Novotná, for their cooperation.

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Eva Lustigová, MBA
Co-founder and Chair, the Board of Trustees
of the Arnošt Lustig Foundation

Ex Libris Arnošt Lustig

"Without truth, I would be terribly poor,
whereas with truth I may be poor in other ways,
but at the same time immensely rich."

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The Birth of a Writer

Eva Lustigová

"I write to purify myself. To understand why a person turns into an animal, and whether an animal can return to being a person."[1]

Arnošt Lustig

The Creation of a Book

I was curious about how he wrote when he was starting out. I was interested in the thoughts and voice of the 21-year-old author. What did he want to convey to readers about himself? What new things could I learn about him? How did he change as a writer over time?

Even then, Arnošt Lustig lived in *threefold time* with his body and soul, just like the nameless man, the protagonist of his short story ***The Great White Road.***[2] In the *threefold time* – "in the now and before and even before that... In each of his *threefold time* there was... Germany." In this strongly autobiographical story, the nameless man somewhere near Mariánské Lázně, Modrá skála, or Polední hora "is dying in a gully where he has been blown by a snowstorm... The man in the snow did not look twenty years old. His face was stiff with age, and only his blue, tearful eyes were young. He listened again to the roar of the wind. It resembled the tones of a harmonica."

The hero looks over his life and says to himself:

"It's strange that I live, alone out of so many people who were in many ways better and more talented than I am, and that I can't make amends because I wasn't the cause of their suffering. But my

[1] Arnošt Lustig, „Arnošt Lustig: Tenkrát a teď" (*Then and Now*), Salon Práva, Novinky.cz, 7. 3. 2011.
https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/kultura-salon-arnost-lustig-tenkrat-a-ted-42506

[2] Arnošt Lustig, „Vlny v řece" (*Waves in the River*), Československý spisovatel, Prague, 1964.

survival is good to keep reminding myself of that... So, it doesn't matter a person has their name back instead of a five-digit number tattooed on their forearm. The Devil is the god of evil. The god of evil is the Devil..."

I had been curious for a long time, even more so after Arnošt's death, when a void opened up that I managed – sometimes more, sometimes less – to fill by immersing myself in his work. Realizing once again it is timeless work, understood in all languages, regardless of ethnicity, origin, religion, or citizenship. Beautiful and meaningful, it tells human stories with a universal message and validity here and now, even though most of it was written in the last century.

The historical context in the stories of writers and poets from antiquity, the Middle Ages, or the last century adds another dimension to their work. It takes us back to a world we discover through reading – but without suppressing the stories themselves.

Humanity does not age; people do not change in their essence. We still care about the same things; they just wear a different coat.

I had been carrying the idea for this book in my head for a long time, waiting for the right moment. That moment came in 2022, when Anička Adamírová and I set out to explore the literary works of Arnošt Lustig at the Jewish Museum in Prague. Then Kristýna Jonová from the Higher Vocational and Secondary Industrial School in Šumperk came into my life. We agreed that students could illustrate the book. Kristýna involved her colleague Petra Jarmarová in the mission, and I visited the school several times to introduce the project and Arnošt Lustig to the students and school administration. A beautiful creative collaboration was born.

I had in mind the anniversary of Arnošt's birth and the idea that if everything had been different and he could have taken a breath and blown out a hundred candles on his favorite Wafer cake in 2026, he would have received this book. We will blow out the candles–and instead of a Wafer cake with thick dark chocolate icing, we will celebrate differently. Sweetly and chocolatey with this book, which would be his next child. This book would be sweet and chocolatey, his next child, my new sister, because each new book he loved as his child.

These early texts by Arnošt Lustig are being published in book form for the first time. They were originally published in the *Newsletter of the Prague Jewish Community* in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Three from Jerusalem is also the first book in a trilogy published by Munipress, entering into a Jubilee edition published to mark the 100th anniversary of Arnošt Lustig's birth and the FestivAL100 program. Since the honoree was a writer in heart, body, and soul, the Arnošt Lustig Foundation wishes to offer this collection to new generations of readers, as well as to those who already know Arnošt Lustig, and to those who have his works – sometimes even signed – at home.

The Making of a Writer

"... the desire to write was very strong in me; it was an opportunity to create a life other than the one we live, and at the same time the life we live, only multiplied a thousandfold by an imagination that cannot be contained in anything other than words, which are capable of constantly reviving this old-new life. The very fact that this was possible prostrated before me in the best books written in this generation, and I must say it is precisely these best books that are the greatest encouragement."[3]

I read through the texts in this book, which deal primarily with the theme of Israel, and I ask myself where – apart from the place on his birth certificate – Arnošt Lustig was born as a writer. I come to the conclusion that it was here, in the land where priests, prophets, scribes, and scholars wrote the Old Testament – in the words of Arnošt Lustig, "the world's first bestseller." By a twist of fate, Arnošt Lustig came to this country at the age of twenty-two as a war correspondent for Czechoslovak Radio and a freelance correspondent for *Lidové noviny* and *Zemědělské noviny*.

However, fate also brought romantic intentions – with Věra Weislitzová as the protagonist of the story in a country little Arnošt

[3] First lines from Arnošt Lustig's *Waves of Happiness, or We Wanted a Different World*, edited by Eva Lustigová, Euromedia Group, a.s. in the UNIVERSUM series, Prague, 2021, p. 95.

had heard about during lessons at the Jewish school in Libeň. He had already noticed her in Terezín, saying she was the most beautiful... But they didn't meet again until in Prague after the war. She and her older sister survived. Unlike Arnošt, she wanted to leave Europe, away from the tragic, senseless deaths of her parents and relatives from Moravská Ostrava, murdered in Auschwitz, Łódź, and Dachau. Before Věra moved to the Holy Land with her sister, she told Arnošt he should visit her if he was serious about her. He did.

They were married by a rabbi in the coastal town of Nahariya near the Lebanese mountains on July 24, 1948, barely two months after the declaration of the State of Israel. The newlywed said that if she hadn't married him, he would have shot himself. Nine years later, still aged 34, he returned to this story in his romantic short piece *The Girl by the Oleander Bush*[4].

I believe, it was in Israel that Arnošt Lustig was truly able to breathe as a writer. By then, he had had time to reflect on life during the war, "in a Nazi world of violence, absurdity, and lies, terror and immorality," in a world of "extinction."[5] Simultaneously, he was hungry for freedom and peace, for the opportunity to walk with his head held high. Other feelings included everything he had dreamed of during the war: decency, cultivation of the soul and body, education, culture, entertainment, and fun.

The five-year gap, in the camps where he found himself on the brink of death, that had made him an ambitious, diligent student of life. He returned to the inspiration he found in the Terezín ghetto, where he spent two and a half years of his adolescence. In Terezín, "before the Germans turned them to ashes... singers, poets, painters, and teachers reminded us of the best human qualities, dignity, honor, courage, and truth."[6] It was there that he was exposed to unique theater performances, cabarets, and skits in an attic with a single light bulb, free of charge, which "meant art

[4] First published in 1959 in the collection of short stories „*Ulice ztracených bratří*" (*Street of Lost Brothers*).
[5] Arnošt Lustig, Eseje. Vybrané texty z let 1965–2000. Opening Exhibition Speech on Terezín Theater (March 15, 2000), (*Essays: Selected texts from 1965–2000*), H & H, Prague, 2001.
[6] Ibid.

and entertainment and meaning for those condemned to death."[7] He wrote: "I saw in Terezín... before they transported us to the east, what I could only experience on leading European stages."[8]

Even there, despite the appalling conditions and circumstances, thanks to his inquisitive nature and thirst for life, he gathered fragments of knowledge from leading Jewish intellectuals with whom he swept the streets (Chief Rabbi Leo Baeck from Berlin, for one example) or listened to attic lectures by European authorities (such European experts on art as Professor Goldberg from the University of Vienna on *Venus of Dolní Věstonice*, the prehistoric cave *Pekárna*, and the nearly thirty-thousand-year-old *Venus of Willendorf*). For a teenage boy from Libeň, it was "at the same time a confirmation of the power of the human spirit, which is invincible and mortal only in the lives of individuals, but immortal in the same sense as the immortal soul... Proof of the spiritual victory of the defeated. Of the power of the downtrodden, the exhausted; about what is beautiful in a person, even if they are condemned to live like an animal. ... confirmation of the rebellion of the powerless, of the invisible but palpable victory of the starving and defenseless; about the power of imagination, about the power of one of man's ambitions to show his greatness, even though he is condemned to the insignificance of an ant."[9]

After the war, he enrolled at the College of Political and Social Sciences in Prague, majoring in journalism, and joined the news branch of Czechoslovak Radio. There he met the writer and journalist Ludvík Aškenázy, who became his role model, colleague, and close friend.

In Israel, so far from everything that came back to him at night with his eyes closed, everything he heard without effort, he wrestled with the waves of the Mediterranean Sea. Three years after escaping from the death transport to Dachau, a new sky and new freedom spread over him, symbolically and literally. He was no longer persona non grata. He gained a new perspective.

[7] Arnošt Lustig, Eseje. Vybrané texty z let 1965–2000. Opening Exhibition Speech on Terezín Theater (March 15, 2000), (*Essays: Selected texts from 1965–2000*), H & H, Prague, 2001.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

He drew from his life as a starting point, the rest was imagination and talent. In order to begin writing, he needed a motive – and he had one. It was "everything a person experiences, sees, hears; first-hand experience, shared experience, and even experience we have just come across. But some experiences are more significant than others; we can call this motivation or lasting, conscious, and subconscious inspiration."

I will list a few motivations, knowing that every experience he gained firsthand, even those retold, left a permanent mark on him and his writing.

Motive 1: Childhood in Libeň and Westerns at the Svět Cinema

Let's start with his childhood in Libeň. Little Arnošt's mother used to lock the cupboard with bread in it, because otherwise he would eat what was supposed to last the family a week.

"I come from a working-class neighborhood where people read second-rate literature, pulp fiction series, cowboy movies, cheap detective stories, and above all, we went to the Svět cinema... And in that cinema, they showed cowboy movies every Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday afternoon. Tom Mix, etc. Rin Tin Tin. The movie theater was owned by a lady, and we, kids, never had any money, so we waited until the newsreel was over, and after the newsreel we called her 'ma'am' and she asked, 'How much do you have?' ... And she let us in.[10]

Cowboy movies were "the only cultural events I came into contact with as a child... When I think about what I liked about them... they were fairy tales for adults, where good somehow triumphed over evil. The cowboy was usually alone, he had a sense of justice, he was brave, sociable, he helped people, and in the end he won. The cinema was a source of entertainment, education, and contact with the wider world. That was still during the First Republic, before the war."[11]

[10] Arnošt Lustig, Unused film material, „Zlatá šedesátá" (*The Golden Sixties*); Directed by Martin Šulík, 2009.
[11] Ibid.

Motive 2: "Then There Was the War"

"Well, then there was the war, Jews were banned from going to the cinema, which we didn't like. I was always at the cinema. One of my friends was called Porgess, blue eyes, blond hair, so we put a cross around his neck and went to the movies, illegally, yeah! We saw films, German films like *Jew Süss*, anti-Semitic films, which we didn't like, but we liked the fact that they were films and that we were at the cinema."

A month before his sixteenth birthday, on November 19, 1942, Arnošt, his mother, and his older sister Hana were deported to Terezín from the Praha-Bubny railway station near the Trade Fair Palace. There Arnošt said goodbye to his beloved father for the last time before he, too, was deported to Terezín.

"There were about two thousand of us. A few hours later, we left for Terezín, to Bohušovice, and from Bohušovice we walked with our luggage to Terezín. Everyone was allowed 50 kilos of luggage, and I must admit that I could barely carry it. My father stayed here because he was a bricklayer and was building barracks in Smíchov."[12]

Motive 3: Home for Difficult Boys

After arriving in Terezín, Arnošt Lustig described another formative experience from his life:

"My mother was placed in the women's barracks with my sister and cousin, who lived with us because her parents had been stoned to death. And I went to a kind of home for boys, where we worked. We carried bricks, helped in the carpentry workshop, the shoemaker's, or in the tailor's. It was called Hundertschaft, which meant a hundred crafts. We were like girls for everything, or boys for everything. We dug shelters for the German hospital and so on and so forth. I remember they assigned a Jewish boy to me who, just two weeks earlier, had been in the Hitlerjugend, and they discovered that his father, who was a captain in the Luftwaffe,

[12] Arnošt Lustig, „Tvoje slza, můj pláč" (*Your Tear, My Rain*); Directed by Eva Lustigová, KVIFF, 2012.

the air force, had a Jewish grandmother, so they immediately sent them to Terezín. The boy didn't want to throw dirt next to me, and I was digging, so I didn't get along with him. And I said, 'Now you're a Jew, you're not in the Hitlerjugend anymore, now you have to work like me. I can't work for you, for two people.' I didn't say it as kindly as I'm saying it here. Then I beat him up so badly that he complained. But I didn't show up for work the next day. And that brought me my first sexual adventure with a homosexual teacher whom we loved.

He called me in and asked, 'Why didn't you show up for work?' And I said, 'Well, because the guy who was in the Hitlerjugend and his dad is in the air force, they found out he had a Jewish grandmother, so they sent him here, and he doesn't believe he's not in the Hitlerjugend, even though he doesn't have his uniform anymore. So, I didn't show up for work.' I said, 'I can't dig and throw things away at the same time, it's impossible. I'd be completely exhausted in four hours. We worked eight hours.' He said, 'You didn't do the right thing. You should have explained it to him, not to beat him up.' Then he told me, 'You have nice legs. . .'

It turned out that he was a morally exemplary person named Fredy (Hirsch)... He was a handsome man, an athlete... the SS men learned jiu-jitsu and various Asian methods of self-defense from him. Well, I didn't react to that, it wasn't enough for me. So, he said I had nice legs, fine. It was better than when they talked to me about having to go to work. There were punishments for that. I remember he then asked me if I wanted bread with sardines, because as a manager, he got bread and sardines. He treated me, and then he wanted from me what he would normally want from everyone... It wasn't so bad. It was only when he wanted to kiss me that I felt uncomfortable. Well, he understood, so he let me go. I was really looking forward to telling the boys in room number sixteen. That was the room of the biggest rascals, the so-called unruly ones. I worked in Terezín, and then my father finally joined us. Because Father worked on the construction of the barracks, they didn't send us to Łódź or Auschwitz, at least not yet. Then they sent us. But only after Father arrived."[13]

[13] Arnošt Lustig, *„Zpověď"* *(Confession)*, Multisonic, Prague, 2006.

Motive 4: Crime and Punishment

The setting is a prison in the Terezín ghetto in the Magdeburg Barracks, where the Council of Elders was also located. The protagonist is the underage offender Arnošt Lustig.

"The Jewish Court of Elders was located at No. 619 Rathausgasse, where there was also a Jewish bank issuing banknotes with Moses on the odd side. The Jewish prosecutor looked at Adler and me, at the judge and the assistant social worker for youth, and said to his audience, 'What is it that turns our youth, who were innocent yesterday, into serious criminals?' They sentenced us to six weeks. Adler and I stole light bulbs from the hallway of the women's Hamburg barracks above the warehouse where Kurt Gerron had his *Karusel* cabaret. We didn't have sockets for the light bulbs, but it was fun to break them. In addition, we came under suspicion for stealing a box of margarine from the baby food warehouse."[14] He led a gang of Jewish boys and was called the Snake Man. His mother cried when the sentence was announced, but she didn't visit him in prison.

Arnošt Lustig later wrote about this episode: "She waited until the seventh day of the sixth week had passed... I was a black sheep, but still a sheep. The cell was cramped, stuffy, and difficult to breathe in. I slept on a straw mattress that was lice-ridden, full of fleas and bedbugs. I couldn't sleep at night because of the heat. I also felt something pressing against my back, a brick or a stone. At dawn, I discovered that it wasn't a brick, but a book. Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment. I read it in one sitting."[15]

"I got a fever. The conflict between morality and immorality, good and evil, and evil and evil, the murder of an old woman by a student who made his own laws and determined for himself what was right and wrong, the cunning of a police officer who took his time and devilishly spun a web to catch his prey – all this was forever imprinted on my soul. It was my first encounter with

[14] Arnošt Lustig, „Tanga z Hamburku, Židovská trilogie II" (*Tanga from Hamburg, Jewish Trilogy II*), Eminent, 2000.
[15] Arnošt Lustig, Eseje. Vybrané texty z let 1965–2000 (*Essays: Selected texts from 1965–2000*), H & H, Prague, 2001.

literature. I suddenly knew who Dostoevsky was. The truth shook me. Dostoevsky's questions awakened me: What is man? What is beauty and ugliness? The assertion in the introduction that man was just a piano key. The philosophy that we all are responsible for everything and everyone. I have never forgotten that name: Dostoevsky."[16] Until then, as he said, he went to the cinema and read second-rate literature "with my dad in bed... I cuddled with my dad; I didn't have a bed."

This episode probably took place in 1942. At that time, Arnošt Lustig had no idea that two years later he would leave Terezín for Auschwitz on the same transport as the famous Berlin actor and director Kurt Gerron – the man who, together with other selected prisoners, directed the propaganda film *The Führer Gave the Jews a City.* It was this experience "making a film," if you can call it that, which inspired Arnošt later to write the screenplay for the internationally acclaimed film *Transport from Paradise.*[17] He describes the filming itself in his essay *Memory*.[18] The film is a loose adaptation of the short story collection *Night and Hope*[19], Lustig's literary debut.

Motive 5: The Instinct to Survive

The struggle to survive was closely linked to the belief that if one remained faithful to hope and persevered, one would witness the absolute evil committed against Jews and other people whom the Nazis deemed unsuitable or useless for the Third Reich. As a witness, they would be able to show the world what humans are capable of – and warn future generations.

This motive was not only the driving force for the young Arnošt Lustig. The same idea strengthened the resilience and survival instinct of all those who survived the Holocaust.

[16] Arnošt Lustig, Eseje. Vybrané texty z let 1965–2000 (*Essays: Selected texts from 1965–2000*), H & H, Prague, 2001.
[17] *Directed by Zbyněk Brynych, filmed in 1962.*
[18] Arnošt Lustig, „Eseje 1965–2008" (*Essays 1965–2008*), Published as part of selected essays, Mladá fronta, 2009.
[19] Arnošt Lustig, „Noc a naděje" (*Night and Hope*), First Edition, Naše vojsko, 1957.

"Of all the feelings a person has, the very best is the feeling of hope. To think I still have a reason to live and better things are yet to come. This hope can only disappear with a person. I would like to think that everything I write from now on will contain this insight."

Motive 6: No One Believed Him

Actually, the decision to become a writer came after the war in Prague. He was nineteen. Writing was the choice he made from the reactions of people to the experiences he'd shared with them. He expressed it this way:

"When I returned from the camps in 1945, I naturally felt the need to confide in someone. I visited my favorite teacher, his name was Jůza, and he was very happy to see me, and I told him what the camps were like. After a while, he started stroking my head, like you stroke a madman. I realized he didn't believe me, he thought what I was telling him was impossible. That it couldn't be communi-cated! Paper believes you; a pencil believes you; the written word believes you, if you breathe credibility into it. So, I started writing."

His very first newspaper article appeared in *Rudé právo* on September 28, 1947. This article, along with the following three essays, also journalistic, preceded the publication of his first short story, *Egged*. Arnošt Lustig never forgot his first publication in the *Newsletter of the Prague Jewish Community:* "That short article about a young man meant a lot to me. Undoubtedly, more than the number of lines and words it contained, because it was only three narrow columns. After reading several issues of the newsletter, I felt that it lacked the perspective of younger people. I lived among them. I went to the boys' home in Krakovská Street and the girls' home in Lublaňská Street in Prague, and to the orphanage at 24 Belgická Street. I went to parties and lectures. The hopes of the youngest generations were intertwined with the aura of the liberators, whom they could "touch." I was like that too. We knew each other intimately. We were together in the camps. The color of hope seemed red to us. We owed nothing to anyone. Our hands were clean. For the first time in our lives, we could vote freely. From

today's perspective, it may seem naive and simple-minded. At the time, for me, it was a truth filled with hope. A truth promising the redress of all injustices. As if that were ever possible."[20]

It is certain that with his first stories – lyrical reports – published in these pages, he became a writer at the age of twenty-two. Perhaps modesty prevented him from admitting this in his interview *První řádky (First Lines)* on Czechoslovak Radio in 1966. The reflections he wrote first, as well as those that followed, are journalism.

Leitmotiv

What did he write about in his first texts? He wrote reflections on the world and people. A year later, in short stories and lyrical reportages, he wrote about the present and the past, about World War II, and Israel's first war of independence, which surrounded and permeated him like the sun and the desert. He wrote about his vision of a different world he wanted to belong to. The lyrical reports he wrote, with Israel as his canvas, read like chapters of life... And so do the other texts and reflections in this book – it doesn't matter whether they take place in Terezín, Auschwitz, the Warsaw ghetto, or in his soul.

This book introduces us to the world of a dreamer who lived in the hope of a better, more just world and breathed life into that hope himself. In his words: "Hope has the nature of a dreamer. It also contains the unanswered 'what if'. Hope, the sister of despair, who has the eyes of a blind man, the ears of a deaf man, a whispering heart."

He wrote about people, their faces, nature, motivation, and morality; about solidarity, compassion, and romantic love. He wrote about the latter in the short story *Three from Jerusalem*, which twenty years later became the basis for his novel *Miláček* (Sweetheart)[21]. At the age of twenty-five, he did not yet dare to write openly about himself, writing "only" about Magda from Slovakia.

[20] František Cinger, „Arnošt Lustig Zadním vchodem: Autorizovaný životopis", *(Arnošt Lustig Through the Back Door: Biography)*, Prague, Mladá fronta, 2009, pp. 107–108.
[21] Arnošt Lustig, „Miláček" (*Sweetheart*), First Edition, Československý spisovatel, Prague, 1969.