

To everyone at home –

Just arrived back to the CEU,¹ the sun a red blaze over Buda tearing up the sky. I've had what is known around the 4077² as a full rich day, although in what I could not tell you. Spent the morning at the Holocaust Documentation Centre. Thick black rooms, the sound of marching boots at my back rounding me up in numbers, from 19C Jews proud to be 'Hungarians of the Mosaic Persuasion' to the first anti-Semitic laws of 1920, and on, 1938 Act XV, 1939 Act IV, forced labour service, 1944 German invasion, May 15 deportations, Oct 15 Arrow Cross coup.³ Over half a million people dead by 1945. I could not read about the rescue attempts made by Gentiles for Jewish friends and strangers. I was full. I sat in the courtyard next to the memorial wall with M's uncle's name on it and cried.⁴

Then to Belváros to meet J.⁵ Told him about my novel, my research here. After tea (solution to everything, apart from colonialism, obviously) J took me to see the protest in Freedom Square. The Orbán administration has been trying to erect a statue depicting Hungary as the Archangel Gabriel under Jewish and German civil groups, all protesting this representation of Hungary as straightforward victim, rather than long-standing perpetrator and ally. Survivors have been handcuffed and carried away, police film any who walk by – J says he has been documented going to and from work. How to walk like an innocent abroad?

The monument – now chipped pillars draped in tarpaulin – is faced with another kind of monument, protest offerings: candles, flowers, shoes representing people shot into the Danube, photographs of victims, of Hitler and Horthy⁶ shaking hands. There were no protesters tonight, only an empty police car and a few stragglers. J and I joined the crowd seated on burnt grass in the middle of the square, all shouting about something else. Columbia is beating Greece in the World Cup. Behind the giant screen, protective barriers around the Soviet memorial have been removed for the first time in decades – presumably to detract attention, though the football is managing just fine.

I wanted a demonstration.⁷ I wanted a circuitry of fury into which I could solder my confusion, my

ambivalence towards this place that almost cut off my family line, and saved it, this place now re-writing its past whilst writing itself out of democracy. This is the first place I've felt unable to speak my ancestry or political beliefs. I want to show I'm not scared. But all I have is my novel. The old Jews I meet say they are frightened, more frightened than they have been in years. They say Central Europe was a myth, a gem polished by the West, and now the shine is off. No one cares what happens in the East. What can I do? Write write write, as if it will make a difference. (And if you don't think that last comma was deliberately ambiguous, you're out of your mind.)

Please send encouragement and gluten-free biscuits.

- K

¹. CEU refers to the Central European University's student accommodation in Budapest's tenth district, available to rent during the summer.

². 4077 refers to the TV show *M.A.S.H.* (4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital). 'A Full Rich Day' is an episode narrated through the character Hawkeye's letter home.

³. The Arrow Cross was the Hungarian fascist party.

⁴. 'M' refers to the writer's grandmother.

⁵. 'J' refers to the boyfriend of a friend of a friend of the writer, who happened to be working in Budapest while the writer was there.

⁶. Horthy is Admiral Horthy, leader of Hungary for much of the war.

⁷. In more recent months, significant anti-government protests have spread across Hungary.

Kim Sherwood is writing her first novel, exploring third-generation descendants of the Holocaust. She spent the summer carrying out research in Hungary. Kim is in the final year of her critical and creative writing PhD at the University of East Anglia, for which she was awarded a studentship. She teaches literature and creative writing. In 2014, Kim was shortlisted for the Words and Women Prize, longlisted for the *Mslexia* short story prize, and nominated for the 2015 Pushcart Prize. Her work can be found in *Going Down Swinging*, *Mslexia* and *Elbow Room*. Born in London, Kim now lives in Norwich, a Fine City.

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