ForeWord Reviews

Crossing the Hudson
Peter Jungk
Peter Stephan Jungk
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Handsel Books
978-1-59051-275-3
(March 2009)

It is the Mother from Hell who opens this novel as her son Gustav arrives at JFK Airport to spend his va-cation with his family in upstate New York. As they set off across Manhattan, Mother has words for Gustav, his Sephardic wife, his Orthodox business partner, his dead father, and everything else in the world.

"There was no vaccination to protect you from Mother's know-it-all attitude," Jungk writes. "No travel route, no daily schedule, no personal or social conflict was safe from her determination to have a say in the matter."

Mother is so distracting that Gustav makes several wrong turns and ends up on the wrong side of the river. Where to cross? They arrive at the Tappan Zee Bridge, but traffic comes to a halt. Construction. A wrecked truck. They're stuck. It's going to take them a long time to cross the Hudson.

Peter Stephan Jungk, a former screenwriting fellow of the American Film Institute, is the author of an ac-claimed biography of Franz Werfel and *The Perfect American*, a fictional biography of Walt Disney's last months. The details in *Crossing the Hudson* show his familiarity with New York, Los Angeles, and several European cities, giving this novel about the troubled generations of a post-War Jewish family a verisimilitude that draws readers in.

Desperate to escape Mother's opinions, Gustav gets out of the car and stands at the railing, looking south. "Here, as on every large bridge, Gustav had the feeling of being transported into a floating, dreamlike state. Since his earliest childhood, he had experienced the crossing of mighty bridges as the form of locomotion closest to flying." In his altered state, he looks down in the river. He and Mother have been discussing Father, a renowned intellectual and loving yet terrifying parent who supported Gustav late into adulthood. There, lying in repose in the Hudson and a mile long, there is Father's body. "No doubt about it, it was the fatherbody, lying there like Gulliver stranded in Lilliput. The father he had idolized … the fatheranimal that seemed to him immortal. … [Gustav] stared for long minutes down at the giant body…."

Actually, as the family history is revealed, it turns out to be a complex, haunted family from Hell, and Gustav's day on the bridge across the Hudson is a day from Hell. But Jungk's telling of the story is irresistible.

Barbara Ardinger