



Girl: My Childhood and the Second World War

Alona Frankel

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Alona Frankel's simply titled memoir, *Girl*, presents World War II and the Holocaust through the eyes and imagination of a young Jewish girl trying to make sense of daily experience and the world being torn apart around her.

Frankel is an internationally renowned children's author. She was born in Poland, where *Girl* takes place, to Jewish parents who were also Communists loyal to the Russian revolutionary movement. In stream-of-consciousness fashion, the book jumps from place to place as the narrator recalls the German occupation, the Lvov ghetto, her family's escape from the ghetto and certain execution, her filthy and cramped "hiding place" during the Red Army's expulsion of German forces, and her family's later emigration to Palestine.

Sondra Silverston's English translation from Hebrew perfectly captures Frankel's delicate impressionistic prose. Similar to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the memoir relays events as subjective impressions in a child's brain, letting memories and associations bleed into each other in vivid, painterly patterns. The red bricks of an orphanage, for example, are "the color of clotted blood." The striking image is woven throughout subsequent chapters and becomes a haunting refrain, a constant reminder of the mass murder and bloodshed suffered by the Jewish people. Other moments of childhood alienation benefit from more adult abstractions. "I looked like an existential error," Frankel writes of her shabby appearance. "Like dissonance."

Reading *Girl* is an unforgettable experience. The horror of the Holocaust—"the heavy, viscous fear of death"—seeps into every page. Yet, what remains by the book's end isn't the horror of human evil but the good of the human heart. It's young Frankel as a girl who befriends rats and mice while in hiding, who celebrates the miracle of life in unspeakable conditions. It's a little girl in hiding who ultimately finds "beauty that needs nothing else."

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