



The Restless Hungarian: Modernism, Madness, and the American Dream

Tom Weidlinger

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The Restless Hungarian is a warm, heartfelt family memoir revolving around complicated relationships defined by world events.

Tom Weidlinger's family memoir *The Restless Hungarian* journeys through world history toward an unexpected personal discovery.

When he found that he'd been excluded from his father Paul's will, independent filmmaker Tom Weidlinger set out to discover who his father—a legendary construction engineer and pioneer of his field—really was. In the course of this investigation, Weidlinger stumbled upon the greatest secret of them all: that the Weidlinger history was that of Hungarian Jews rooted in Eastern Europe.

The discovery of his deep roots also brought Weidlinger deep pain. While traveling the world to retrace his father's amazing life, he stumbled upon the truths of the tragic deaths of his mother and sister, and ultimately the truth about himself.

The text alternates between Weidlinger's perspective as a detective and the voices of the people he speaks to, including Paul. It interweaves letters, diaries, interviews, and introspective ruminations into a well-rounded portrayal of its characters. Particularly eye-opening is the inclusion of a professional behavioral evaluation of Paul as a young man that pulls the curtain on the persona he crafted for himself. Photographs help to introduce characters, adding emotional depth to their stories.

Though it covers over a century, the book focuses most on a six-year time period in the late 1930s and early 1940s that was formative for Paul. Its chapters are short, sometimes written as anecdotes. It starts out as a biography of Paul, but soon develops into a family memoir where Weidlinger's emotional journey takes center stage.

At times it is difficult to determine who the book is talking about. The confusion is furthered because the book alternates between referring to Paul as father, Pál, and Paul—further complicated by the inclusion of a Hungarian cousin also named Pál, who turns out to be crucial to discovering the lost family history.

Scenes are set in an effective and evocative way, and the book holds attention as it follows Paul from Hungary to Czechoslovakia, between Great Britain, France, Bolivia, and the United States. The urgency behind each decision to move is captured well, as are Weidlinger's research trips and developing family intimacies as people get to know each other. An introspective final chapter brings closure to the family history and reveals this to be Weidlinger's story as much as his father's.

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ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (May 16, 2019)

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