

Tainted Lives
by Nicolas Kiroy

Rationale and synopsis: I believe whole-heartedly in a didactic approach for most forms of writing and this includes the piece I wrote. The Shoah was an event catastrophic to the development of a group of people for ages to come and should not have any element removed from the history of the event for those in the future who will learn about the atrocity. There was a period of time after the Shoah that it was not widely spoken of due to an intrinsically produced moratorium of speaking about most devastating events. Once it did begin to be discussed and recorded at length it was focused on the plights of the Jewish peoples. It is relatively new to circulation the other marginalized populations involved: Homosexuals, differently-abled, and gypsies. It wasn't until the release in 2010 of the anthology piece "Sexual Violence against Jewish Women of the Holocaust" that sexual crimes were discussed more overtly as well. I wanted to create a piece that would incorporate as many disenfranchised individuals and affected people into the narrative. I also thought about how the event is temporally related, but how many people would have not only been affected for the rest of their lives, hence the title tainted lives, but also how those who were not directly involved may have been effected. These people were not liberated and able to return to their past lives, they were forever scarred. So I attempted to humanize subjects in the before, describe the during, and paint a grim view of the after.

The work describes in a 20-line standard stanza the lives of six individuals who were affected in some way by the holocaust. I tried not to just define each character by their status and circumstances, but also by a dominant emotion that would carry with them. The first character, Alfons, I share the closest connection with personally because he and I both are nineteen. I attempted to imagine how my life would be affected if I were forced to endure this event at a time of discovering I face now. Along with devaluation, expectations, and hopelessness as elements, what path was he set on by this exterior force on his life? The other characters are much similar in having faced normal human difficulties in their pre-holocaust lives, endured unimaginable hardship during the events that took place, and were forever disadvantaged and scarred by this portion of their lives in which they involuntarily relinquished control to a great evil. Each of the characters are distinct in their own unique experiences shaped by where they went, who they were before they became involved, and how they cope with these hardships. Each of the characters are also the same inasmuch as they are unsuspecting victims in a merciless campaign to de-humanize that which is different, an increasingly relevant concept as the post-modern age progresses in a globalized world of self-awareness shared in a space with that of many others different from ourselves.

Tainted Lives

The name is Alfons, but I was once known as inmate 186274
This was a time when I was excluded from the world
I was nineteen, an age where one finds who they are
Where I differ is I was never afforded this opportunity
I was sent to Monowitz, forced to dig graves and bury the fortunate
They said I was lucky to be alive, so I wished for bad luck
My wish was almost granted when I came down with meningitis

I was sent to the incinerator, I was of no use anymore
Standing in line I heard a chorus of cheers and explosions
We were being liberated, my life was saved
In the aftermath the liberation was described as the catalyst to our freedom
Looking back, my true liberator would have been those flames
Dying became my choice, the brit's heroics took that from me
I wasn't even sure if I were a true believer
I was punished for a choice I had not yet made
Nothing in my life has been in my control
I am alive today, but I do not feel it
Every day I get older is just another step in that line
I should have died that day
My father sealed his and my fate, he was the lucky one

I met Ritter when I was only fifteen
He was a little older but never held that against me
He was the first to recognize my peculiar attractions
Never did he push me to love him, only myself
But I couldn't help but love him, and him me
Under the increasingly strict system our love became clandestine
This was not enough and I was arrested, not knowing the fate of my beloved
I was sent to a rehabilitation camp with a pink triangle on my shirt
This was to mark me as a deviant, the lowliest of society
They told me my aryan blood held a contagion that could not be allowed to spread
The truth was I was not diseased, just born unlucky
One guard fancied me among the rest and was especially attentive to my "needs"
The weight of this man on my back, his sticky breath on my neck
I was the victim, yet somehow was convinced to feel shame for what I was
The guard fed me extra food to keep myself healthy and of good strength
I thrust my fingers down my throat after every forced meal to weaken myself
When we were eventually freed, my nightmares prolonged my imprisonment
I was never able to find my partner after the war, I never even looked
What would he want from me, a loose and broken sod
Love proved to be nothing but a weakness in the end

My true name is unknown, but people call me Gaelle
This name was given to me by my adoptive parents
They tell me I was being raised by my father among many children when he was taken
I was of the tender age of three when he hid me among a family
Apparently he was a mysterious man, but a very loving man nonetheless
I learned as I got older of his true fate, he became a victim of Jewish purging campaigns
I wonder what has happened, whether he is still alive or thinks of me
I cannot complain about the Shoah, I was not intimately involved
Yet when people speak of this event I wish for nothing more than to share my trauma
Growing up without my father has left me with many questions and no answers
I surely must have a mother too? Were the multitude of other children my siblings?

My only connection to my past life is a star shaped necklace
I am 45 now and still look for his face in crowds, a face I would not even recognize
The worst part is I realize now I have to hope that he died
For if he did not die, why has he not searched for me?
After the incidents ended, there were programs to bring families back together
This became a hope, then a desire, and finally an obsession
I have heard that praying works, but to whom do I pray?
My father prayed to his god and that ended in nothing but misery
So instead I have accepted my life of wandering, my hope dwindles by the day

I was excited for my new position, to support Germany and her people was a gift
My assignment to Auschwitz would allow me to support the great cause
What I considered a self-righteous path of enlightenment was in retrospect the period I lost my
humanity
I rose to the rank of Rottenführer by the end of my stay
It began with days spent in the financial repurposing offices
I dealt with confiscated goods and enjoyed the triviality of lost money and exotic booze
This fantasy devolved into reality the night we were handed pistols and told to search the woods
for escapees
If I sensed movement, I was told to shoot and then investigate
I truly believed in the Jewish menace, my time in Hitler's youth convinced me of this view
What I was unprepared for was putting a bullet through the spine of a little girl
What I felt was my greatest mistake was handled with a pat on the back by my superiors
I approached my commanding officer and he told me to never lament over a soldier's duty
After that night I began to pay more attention, that was when I began hearing the faint screams in
the night
What came to haunt me was not that I became aware of these atrocities, but that I turned a blind
eye
Years later after some time away I returned to the post Nazi state to find I was now the villain
Even my family could not look at me the same way, and I could not blame them
I was just following orders, carrying the weight of an arbitrary justice
This argument only carried me so far, I wanted nothing to do with that history
But how much of it had become me, how could I live unpunished for my crimes
I learned years later I did not go unpunished, my conscious became my jailor

Life is a race against relative extremes
I try to believe this, but I struggle still today to find any positive in what is left of me, faith was
irrelevant
I thought that my punishment was handed to me for my faith
I was left to survive in a freezing railcar for days on end
The cold became worse as the warmth left the bodies of the deceased with which we were forced
to sleep
We threw them out at first, but that became a waste of energy
Two stops were made at camps, but I was to be sent to a prison instead
I arrived at Plötzensee and learned of my true purpose within hours
A mad doctor was on a quest to learn more of the female anatomy

He told me I should be happy, that a gift would be bestowed upon me
This was left unexplained until they were ready to begin experiments
I was raped against a cold steel lab table
A chemical cocktail of Sperm, blood, and sulfanilamide pooled at my feet
I truly planned to save myself, but that was just the naïve thought of a fourteen year old girl
My reward for these tortures was my reacquaintance years later with the son I was forced to carry
We were separated for years but I was able to take care of him in the last of his youth
He is a gentle man, and a mother would be unable to be prouder
But I never could truly care for him the way he deserved
His resemblance was much too close to that of his father, his eyes took me back
I had to remove myself from his life, that was the day he told me of his acceptance to medical school

I lived a good life, at least the former half was fulfilling
I was lucky enough to have a child, but lost my wife during the birth of our second
I still had my first daughter, but I felt lonesome
I had money saved so I decided to run an orphanage to support the lord's cause
These years proved to be my happiest, but then came my reckoning
I was sent to Buchenwald, and labored years away
It was too easy to allow myself to succumb to sickness, so I fought until the end
At first I felt good, as if the strenuous labor had revitalized my old bones
I gave much of my bread away early on, others needed it more than I
I lost 40 pounds within the first year and was under scrutiny from physicians determining how much work I had left in me
I decided I would have to fend solely for myself to pass Yahweh's trial, and minded no others
That was until the month before liberation
I woke up one morning to the stiff body of my bedmate, his little boy standing over him in tears
The man had bread stashed between his pant and shirt, his son leaned to claim his inheritance
I pushed the child away and plundered the body for any more hidden food
That was the day I failed, I was too easily broken
When we were freed I returned to the neighboring town of my home, but could not finish the journey
My little girl's name was Estera, I wanted nothing more than to see her again
But it had been years, and the father who had left is not the same who would return
I lost my right to my child the moment I forsake another of god's children
She is better off without me, she will find her way