

**Introduction to Anne-Lise Stern: ‘Be Deported.... and Bear Witness!’
A new translation by Dorothée Bonnigal–Katz**

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The genesis of this translation lies in the seminars I taught on the Site for Contemporary Psychoanalysis training in 2012 on the topic of trauma. I was clear that I could not leave uncovered the Shoah or Holocaust, partly simply because of its insistence in the modern world, and also because I have worked with and known second generation Holocaust survivors. My researches led me to Anne-Lise Stern, via a review of her book on the *Other Voices* website by Michael Dorland, a Canadian academic. I obtained the book, but my elementary French was not up to a thorough reading of Stern’s artful writing and I was hugely grateful that Dorothée Bonnigal-Katz offered to translate one of the papers so that both I and the training group could read the primary text. I am delighted to be able to introduce it here in *Sitegeist*, with kind permission of Edition du Seuil.

Characteristically, Dorothée applied her full professional skills as a translator to capturing the quality of the language Stern employs. I remember her describing it as ‘rough’, no doubt an intentional effect. There is not much available to read on or by Stern in English,¹ but the impression I have formed is that a description of ‘uncompromising’ would fit her. Elisabeth Roudinesco strikingly describes her in this way:

A woman with a bibliography, she embodies, in all its splendour, the impassioned adventure – bereft of homeland and of borders— of psychoanalysis. (Roudinesco1990: 160)

Someone who, even though she remained all her life a peripheral figure in the psychoanalytic establishment, can be seen to embody something powerful about its very nature.

A German-born Jew, she and her parents relocated to France in 1933 on Hitler’s rise to power. The family was a politically and culturally radical one, and had provided her with a rich and diverse upbringing. Her father was a psychiatrist who sought to combine Freud and Marx.

During and after the War, he laboured to assist those who suffered under the Nazis. Anne-Lise was in the middle of her medical studies when WW2 broke out, and after living for a while under an assumed name, she was denounced as a Jew and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in April 1944.

After her liberation in May 1945, she returned to her parents, who had spent the War in the South of France. As with all who survived the camps, terrible scars were left. She was always open about these effects and the fact that she was suicidal. Psychoanalysis with Jacques Lacan saved her, she declared, along with the readiness of her parents to hear everything she had to say.

In the face of Holocaust denial in France, Stern fought a life-long campaign to face the public with the realities of the camps and their consequences both for individuals and for the body politic. The psychoanalytic establishment disappointed her in its failure to take the lead. To oppose this, she ran a regular fortnightly seminar in Paris setting out her very personal and individualistic stance. Michael Dorland attended these seminars for a year, and describes how she would nearly always cry as she recalled some fragment of her experiences in the camp. By then, of course, she was an elderly woman, who had devoted her professional life to working with troubled children. Some took her to task for 'not moving on' but that seems facile in the face of such experiences. Who is to judge such questions?

She poses explicitly in this paper the question which the whole of her life after Auschwitz embodied, the life of a psychoanalyst and Shoah survivor: how can it ever be right or acceptable to survive, to move from, scenes of such pain and torment? To view them, as she asks of her fellow survivors, with smooth equanimity? As she puts it at the beginning of this paper:

Be Deported.... And Bear Witness! This is a rough title, rather targeted at my fellow psychoanalysts—at what they do and don't do with that History. I will try to explain myself on this. But rough it remains, and I must voice my admiration for the often excep-

tionally great serenity of some, of some fellow deportees. I'm not there yet and am probably mostly mad at myself: a deportee and a psychoanalyst, hard to hold these two terms together (Stern 2016 (2004), *Sitegeist* 12: 93).

Perhaps the task of psychoanalysis in the face of human pain and suffering will always remain ambiguous. Those who have survived the worst of the world's trauma: war, torture and genocide, raise this ambiguity in its starkest form. And such survivors do still turn to psychoanalysis for help, as ALS did, so we can learn much from her, I suggest. How to witness with dignity, tact and warmth, but without collusion. Can I, who have never experienced anything even close to the unimaginable anguish of a genocide survivor, have anything useful to say as a psychoanalyst in this context? As Stern notes : 'All this needed to be specified, for any elaboration originating from outside is often offensive to other deportees. ... Inevitably, "it" (*ça*) is never conveyed' (*ibid*: 101). Witnessing, as she says, is another of the impossible professions. Even for Stern, who was a deportee, the burden is heavy. She is frank about the relatively short duration of her own detention, and the fact that her parents were not deported.

To speak of or from a shared humanity appears grossly simplistic, yet is perhaps ultimately the only grounds for an answer. We apply the familiar psychoanalytic terms, and see if they fit these extraordinary lives. Here, Lacan's notion of anxiety seems to me most apposite.

At the centre of the paper presented here, you will read a striking account by Stern of an occasion when she, then an Auschwitz prisoner, looking out through the window of an office, saw the slowly moving line of transported Jews heading, in all probability, for the gas chambers. The scene itself had been recalled to her by seeing a photograph in a book on Auschwitz. It was not, she tells us, a traumatic memory, nor had it especially haunted her. She has never forgotten it, but neither has she remembered it with any sharpness. But the photograph, in the context of her own fight to keep the Shoah alive in the public mind, promoted the re-appearance, the revivification, of the memory. At the same time as

she glimpses the line of deportees moving slowly to their deaths, she sees in a mirror an incongruous scene inside the office, where a Nazi guard is having a button sewn on his trouser flies by another prisoner, a blackly humorous moment of the vulnerability of his 'jewels' to the imprisoned and despised woman. The SS man meets Stern's gaze in the mirror too, and sees the scene momentarily through her eyes, provoking a fleeting sense of uncertainty, she imagines. The whole scene is suffused with anxiety, in fact. Another prisoner has quickly smuggled in a bucket of some forbidden luxury, and Stern herself is in the office to try out her skills in typing lists of looted jewels in German. In the urgent plotting and planning of how best to survive in the camp, it is not certain if a job in the office would keep her safe, or the reverse.

Above all, there is the slowly moving line of frightened, tired and thirsty Jews, the rags, rubbish and tatters, as Stern expresses it so graphically in this paper, that they have become in German eyes. A little girl who anxiously seeks water is told by the guard that there will be a tap further on. A lie which acts to allay anxiety, turning the *Unheimliche* into *Heimliche* for a while. The translator's note draws our attention to Stern's unobtrusive use of the term *robinet* (tap) which is also a slang word for penis. A poignant reminder that this particular little girl is not to have any future to enter the world of her sexuality.

In an interview published in the *Revue Belge de Psychanalyse*, Laurence Kahn refers to this same scene. She comments on the way in which it encapsulates the two faces of the totalitarian Nazi evil: sadistic excitement and the cold dry bureaucratic efficiency. Further, she suggests that psychoanalysis is still far from coming to grips with what the Shoah represents, the total disjunction between the psychic inner world and the terrible devastation wrought by humanity upon itself. Psychoanalysis has yet to account for how these things could come to have happened.

So far, we have only brief and frightening glimpses. In *Seminar X*, Lacan writes of the way in which anxiety is framed. Referencing the Wolfman's dream, he writes:

What I simply want to accentuate today is that the dreadful, the

shady, the disturbing, everything by which we translate..... the *Unheimliche* presents itself through little windows. The field of anxiety is situated as something framed. You'll always find the stage that presents itself in its own specific dimension and which allows the emergence into the world of that which may not be said...

Anxiety is the appearance in this framing, of what was already there, at much closer quarters, at home, *Heim* (Lacan 1962: 74–5).

Here, in Stern's Shoah scene, anxieties lurking beneath the surface of twentieth century Europe assume their most monstrous shape, to show beyond all doubt, 'that which *may not* be said'. A moment, a snapshot, a dream scene, serve to capture our deepest dreads in a form which, though it may quickly vanish, leaves indelible traces. This is true on the level of the individual and the nation, as we see in the face of our own era with its characteristic avatars of dread and disturbance.

Notes

1) The only other English translation of a paper by Stern I have been able to find is 'Ei Warum, Ei Darum, O Why?' in the book *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, edited by Stuart Liebman, OUP, Oxford, 2007
The book *Le Savoir-déporté* was reviewed in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* by Eva Weil in 2006, Vol.87 pp. 610-613

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