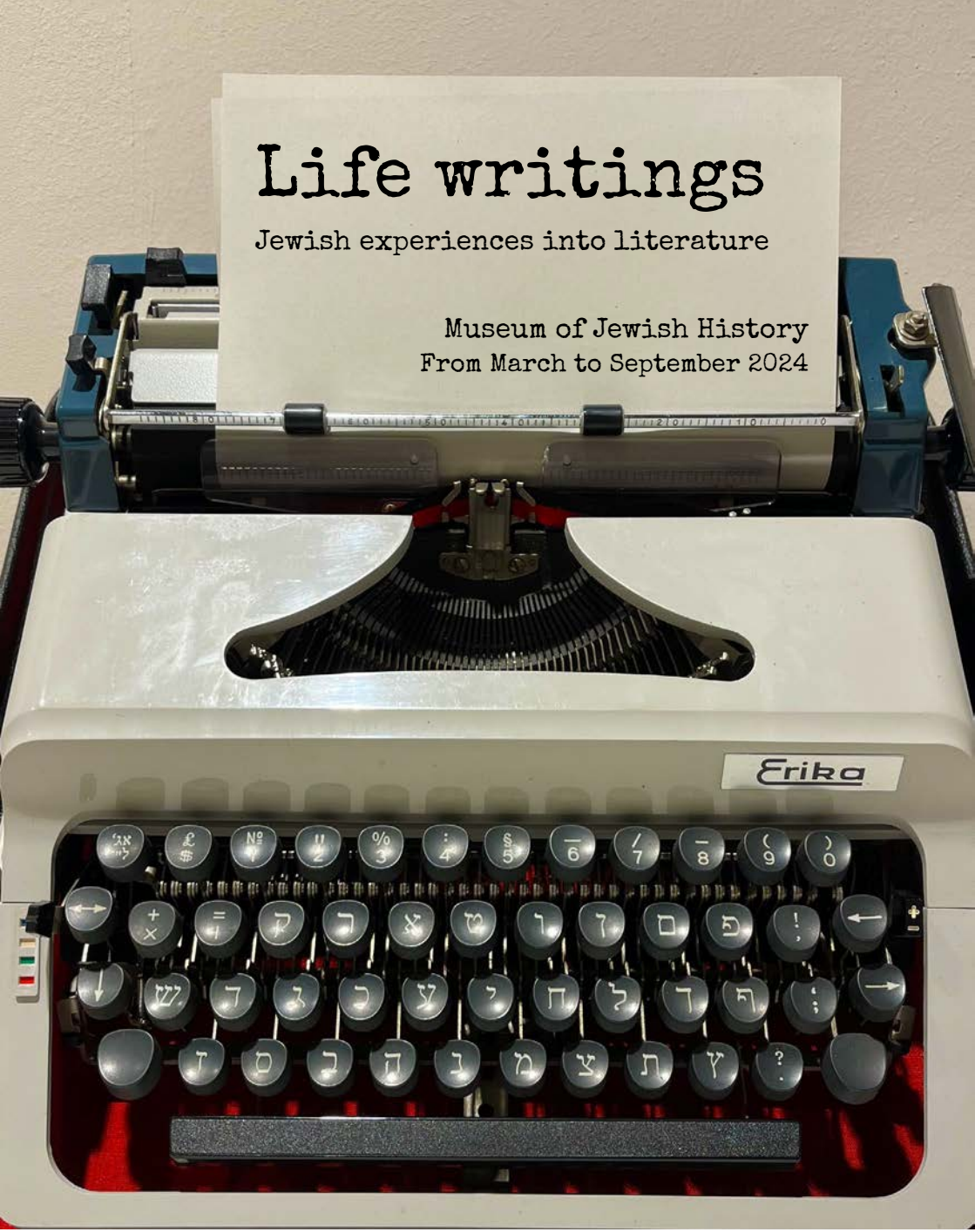


PATRONAT CALL DE GIRONA

Ajuntament de Girona

Diputació de Girona

Generalitat de Catalunya



What do Glükel of Hameln, Natalia Ginzburg, Imre Kertész and Yehuda Amichai have in common?

This exhibition presents authors of Jewish origin who, in a time arc ranging from the 17th to the 21st century, have written from the self, have woven stories where they speak from the inside and, at the same time, have projected themselves to the world and explain it from their context and their life circumstances.

Their life writings are a legacy that allows us to better understand crucial episodes in our history.

With this exhibition, we want to propose a reflection on the importance of writing conceived as a vital witness and on the transcendence of the cultural diversity that shapes us.

Writing life

Writing is a way to get out of your heart, to show yourself to the world and, at the same time, to show the world you live in, with tragedies and contradictions, with euphoria and successes.

Based on this premise, and around this perception of writing, we wanted to ask ourselves what the works of several authors have in common: Glükel of Hameln, a German businesswoman of the 18th century; Yehuda Amichai, one of the greatest poets of the 20th century; Natalia Ginzburg, author of delightful texts that help to understand contemporary European life and society, and even Imre Kertész, whose experiences, made into literature, implicitly contain all the horror of the Shoah.

The texts we present, out of their pens, have a common feature: they are written from within, from the self, and they expose –in a raw and direct way– emotions and experiences, sorrows and joy; experiences and feelings that can only be understood if contrasted with the contexts in which they take place: Glükel's diaries present Ashkenazi Jewish life in the 18th century; Yehuda Amichai's poem points to an Israel of immense contradictions; Natalia Ginzburg's story is the gaze of an atheist Jew towards a past that is the result of tradition and, also, of repression; and the written memory, precise and painful, of Imre Kertész captures the heartbreaking, human and dignified reaction of a victim who is a witness and a survivor.



Glückel von Hameln

Glikl bas Judah Leib, 1646-1724

The essential writing, the one from the margins



Married to the Jewish merchant Hayyim von Hameln and mother of twelve children, in 1689 she was widowed and took over the management of the family business.

She established business relations with Amsterdam, Vienna, Leipzig, Metz and Paris.

In 1690 she began to write her diaries, of which seven notebooks have been preserved. In all of them, she uses Yiddish, her own language, called *Mame Loshn* (mother's tongue), which is formed from medieval High German and elements of other languages, mainly Hebrew and Slavic languages. This was the language spoken by most of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, exterminated during the Holocaust.

The *Diaries* of Glükel von Hameln offer a very interesting approach to being a woman and a Jew and help to understand what it was like to position oneself in the world from these perspectives.

With a very personal and intimate style, which makes her close while revealing her feelings and anxieties, she recounts the daily life of the Jewish communities of the Rhine, as well as key aspects of the history of her time.

In my great grief and for my heart's ease I begin this book in the year of Creation 5451 (...). I began writing it, dear children, upon the death of your good father, in the hope of distracting my soul from the burdens laid upon it (..). In this way I have managed to live through many wakeful nights (...). This, dear children, will be no book of morals. Such I could not write, and our sages have already written many (...). However, I am not writing this book on order to preach to you, but to drive away the melancholy that comes with the long nights (...). If God wills that I may live to finish them, I shall leave you my Memoirs in seven little books.

Glückel von Hameln, *Zikhroynes* (1691)

Only what I have already lost
is mine forever.

Rahel Bluvstein, 1890-1931

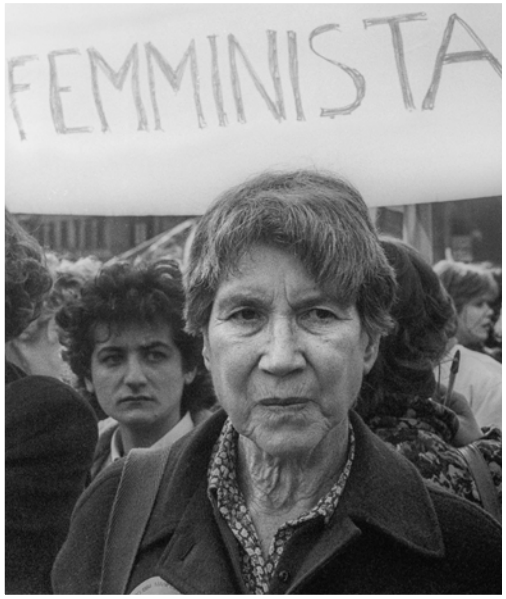
The thing which all my life
seemed to me the greatest shame,
which was the misery
and misfortune of my life
-having been born a Jewess-
this I should on no account
now wish to have missed!

Rahel Varnhagen, 1771-1833

Natalia Ginzburg

Natalia Levi, 1916-1991

Homeland is the language of home



Raised in atheism by a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, in 1938 she married Leone Ginzburg, a secular Jew, and adopted his surname.

From 1941 to 1943, they lived an internal exile in a depressed town in Abruzzo due to Leone's activities against Mussolini's fascist regime. In 1944, they secretly went to Rome, where Leone was arrested and died, after being severely tortured in prison.

The experiences lived during these years forever changed Natalia's relationship with her Jewish identity and she reflected deeply on issues related to the war and the Holocaust, topics she dealt with in the form of fiction and essays.

In 1950 she remarried and moved to Rome, where she began her most prolific period as a writer.

Ginzburg remained involved in politics throughout her life as an activist and polemicist.

Regarding her work, which contains a powerful autobiographical or autobiographical fiction account, she said: "memory is weak and books created from reality are only bits and pieces of what we have seen and heard."

We are five siblings. We live in different cities,
some of us abroad: we don't write to each other very often.
When we meet, we can be distracted, or indifferent
to each other. But it only takes a word. A word
or a sentence, one of those ancient sentences,
endlessly heard and repeated in our childhood (...).
It only takes one sentence to suddenly recover
our old relationship, and our childhood and our youth,
indissolubly linked to those sentences, to those words
(...). Those sentences are our Latin, the vocabulary
of our long-gone days, they are like Egyptian
or Assyrian-Babylonian hieroglyphs: the testimony
of a vital core that no longer exists, but that survives
in the texts, saved from the fury of the waters,
from the corrosion of time. They are the foundation
of our familiar unity.

Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico famigliare* (1963)

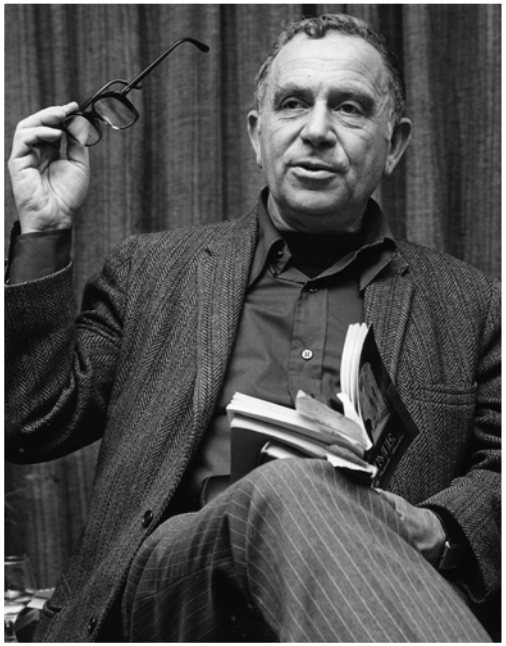
Literature is always the answer,
because literature
contains an antidote
against fanaticism,
through imagination.

Amos Oz, 1939-2018

Yehuda Amichai

Ludwig Pfeuffer, 1924-2000

The poetry of the particular self



Born in Germany,
the unstoppable rise of Nazism
brought his family to Palestine
in 1935.

Approximately in 1946,
he adopted the name Amichai
(my nation lives).

Around him arose
a new school of poetry,
named *Gal he-khadash*
(New Wave), which is
innovative both in terms of
the use of the contemporary
Hebrew language, and in the
topics that deals with, and its
aesthetic conception.

Amichai is considered one of the greatest universal poets of the 20th century. His work has exerted a decisive influence on an entire generation of poets in Israel, and reflects the personal suffering and hesitation in front of a world without faith that has also been shaken and destroyed by war.

He and the poetic generation that accompanies him write a different type of poetry, much more lyrical and personal, rebellious and critical, not at all self-indulgent, and which calls for a return to each person's particular self and to the literary exercise of individualized and own experience of the reality.

My soul has deteriorated
Like the sight of diamond cutters:
Precious and hard, the days of my life.
My body is like a bad check:
If anyone demands gold, I must die.
And my hands are pretty much in place,
My eyes in place, my home in place,
Only I am wrong.
I am wrong.
Precious and hard, those are my days.

Yehuda Amichai, *Poem about me*
(Catalan translation by Manuel Forcano, 2018)

If they attack me as a Jew,
I have to defend myself as a Jew;
not like German
nor as a citizen of the world,
nor as a holder of human rights,
nothing for the style.
Rather: What can I do as a Jew?

Hannah Arendt, 1906-1975

Imre Kertész

1929-2016

The voice of the fatelessness



He was born into a bourgeois Jewish family. In 1944, at the age of 14, he was deported to the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz, and later sent to Buchenwald and Zeitz.

In 1945, as a survivor of the camps and horror, he returned to Budapest. He finished high school and started working as a journalist, until he was fired from the newspaper in 1951, when the Communist Party of Hungary came to power.

Then he subsisted by translating authors such as Nietzsche, von Hofmannsthal, Freud, Wittgenstein and Canetti, and by writing comedies and film scripts.

He devoted himself fully to literature from the 1970s onwards. In 1975, he wrote *Sorstalanság* (Fatelessness), with a clear autobiographical content, a masterpiece that narrates the passage of a fifteen-year-old Hungarian and Jewish teenager through various Nazi camps. The book was not widely distributed in Hungary, immersed in the denial of a racist past and the regime's censorship, but German publishers and readers from all over Europe were interested in it.

In 2002, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for a writing that upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history.

Then with a softened voice he said to me: „Are you coming from Germany, son?" „Yes," I said. „From a concentration camp?" „Yes, of course." „Which one?" „Buchenwald." „Yes," he answered, he had heard of it-one of the „pits of Nazi hell." „Where did they carry you away from?" „Budapest." „How long were you there?" „One year." „You must have seen a lot, son, a lot of terrible things," he said, but I didn't reply. „Anyway," he went on, „what's important is that it's over, it's finished," and with a cheerful face pointing to the buildings that we were passing, he asked me to tell him what I now felt, being home again, seeing the city I had left. I answered, „Hatred."

Imre Kertész, *Sorstalanság* (1975)

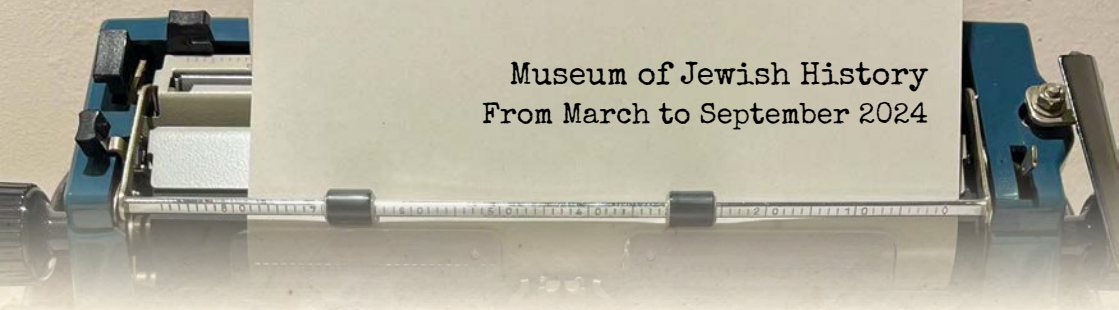
You who live safe
In your warm houses,
You who find warm food
And friendly faces when you return home.
Consider if this is a man
Who works in mud,
Who knows no peace,
Who fights for a crust of bread,
Who dies by a yes or no..

Primo Levi, 1919-1987

Life writings

Jewish experiences into literature

Museum of Jewish History
From March to September 2024



Concept and design
Nahmanides Institute for Jewish Studies

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Museum of Jewish History

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Technical team
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