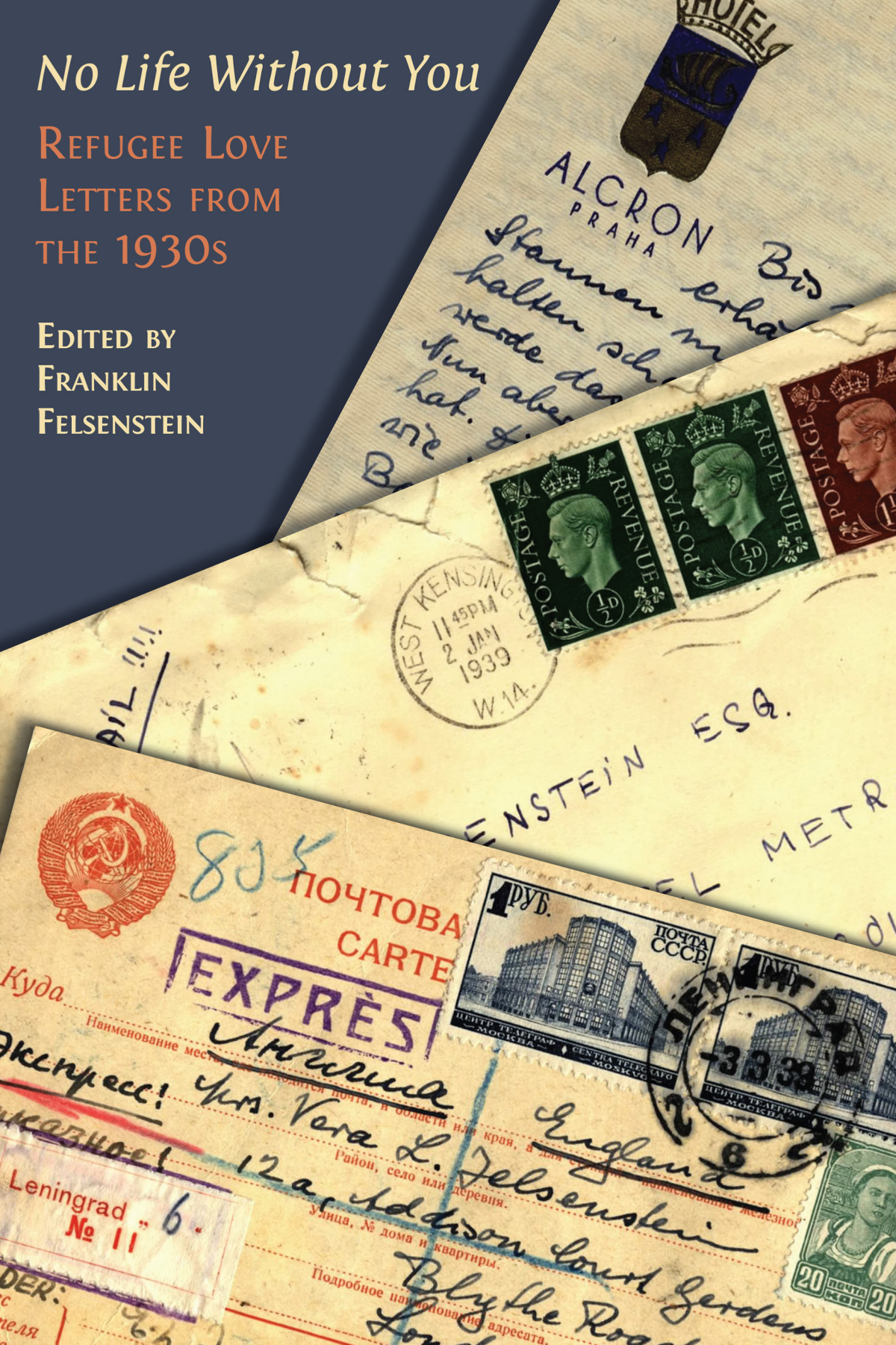


No Life Without You

REFUGEE LOVE LETTERS FROM THE 1930s

EDITED BY
FRANKLIN
FELSENSTEIN





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Twenty:

“More of a Stranger Here Now”

10 January though 3 February 1937

The agreement between the Gebrüder Felsenstein and Mope stipulated that, whilst he remained with the company, he was free to travel at will in preparation for whatever life he was planning. But he knew that he needed to be back in Leipzig to assist his mother in seeking an apartment since Nazi “Aryanization” had forced her out of her own. Additionally, he wished to further his discussions with Haavara and the PalTreu regarding emigration to Palestine. In order to satisfy British mandatory requirements, each emigrant needed to post a surety of £1,000, yet German currency restrictions prohibited the exchange or exportation of Reichmarks. In an important exchange of letters (out of which, alas, we only have his side and a short entry from her journal), Mope and Vera also engaged in discussion on questions of female chastity with hangovers that appear to be primarily of his own making.

VERA

Journal entry, 10 January 1937

This morning, my Mopelein went back, after we spent two and a half very happy weeks together.

This man is the one I have been waiting for all my life, a man with a heart, a mind, a body that is attractive to me, and equipped with so much sensitivity. I love him and I want to make him happy.

On 25 December, because of a conversation, I realized that he thought I had not been with a man before. I was very sad to have to hurt my beloved man like that, because of the thought that he might think

me insincere and also because of the matter itself which cut him to the quick. All men are vain!

I know that I did the right thing back then, the thing that was necessary for me. Nevertheless, had I known that a Mope would come later, I would not have done it.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 13 January 1937

I am more of a stranger here now than I have ever been. It is absolutely not the outbreak of a depression that makes me write like this. Maybe even the opposite actually, because this feeling of loneliness only incites me to shorten the time until we are finally together again.

Yesterday evening, there was a pleasing concert of the Berlin Jewish orchestra at the local culture alliance. First a Mendelssohn overture, then Mozart's "Kleine Nachtmusik," and after the intermission, Beethoven's Third Symphony in D-major under the new conductor Professor Julius Prüwer. The former conductor, Prof. Steinberg, took a position abroad and was better than the one today by a far margin.³⁷ After the concert, I was at Felsche's—to digest the music—and was simply too tired to still write to you.

Today, I examined approximately 1,500 Persian lamb skins for six hours without a break, piece by piece, and then had to adjust the catalogue that had already been annotated by both Semy and a second partner. The auction tomorrow will show whose judgment was more correct.

I sent the Weizmann speech to you today and hope that you will find time to read it with as much attention as is appropriate for its very valuable content.

Once again, it is illegally late so that I have to close as quickly as possible and since I cannot do it in person, I am once again forced to do it in writing with such feeling that you will remember the real caresses

37 Julius Prüwer (1875-1943) was an Austrian-born conductor and a protégé of Hans Richter. He eventually fled from Germany and died in obscurity in New York. Cologne born William Steinberg (1899-1978) had been dismissed from the Frankfurt Opera in 1933, and left Germany for Palestine in 1936, becoming the first conductor of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra. After 1938, he continued his career in the United States.

and hopefully yearn for my lips that are burning to kiss you and want to whisper sweet nothings that my heart dictates to them.

MOPE TO VERA

From Erwig's Hotel Fürstenhof, Leipzig, 20 January 1937

As you can tell by the stationery, I am sitting in the hotel with my dear mother. She arrived yesterday afternoon and unfortunately, I was not able to see her until I had finished the inspection of the merchandise. Instead of me, a young man from the store met her at the train station. I found her looking a little small but not bad. Today she had to look for an appropriate room—sadly without me once again, but she has not decided on one, although I had already looked at several before. It is just not that easy to accept a little room in a city where you have run your own large household for more than forty years.

There is so much poverty and despair here among the Jews, and we hardly know anymore which way to steer.

My activities today were just as ineffectual, since the prices obtained at the auction were far above what we were able to invest so that I was able to buy almost nothing. A little dissatisfying, when one has worked so strenuously for two days and then has to go home without any results. But that is one of the quirks in this line of business, ever since the export can only take place with the appropriate authorization.

It makes me glad that you read the Weizmann speech and found it good. It is, as has often been said, really a historical document in the history of our people.

It is really cold here and it has been snowing almost without a break. A pity that one has neither the time nor the money to go on a winter sports vacation.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 24 January 1937

This morning, I went looking for a room with my dear mother, and after an hour and a half of climbing up and down stairs, we met with the desired success. We rented a room with steam heat, a room that is large, bright and friendly. The washing facilities are in a bathroom with

warm and cold water. The move will probably take place on Wednesday. Until then, the dear lady is staying with Uncle Siegfried who seems to be enjoying the company.³⁸

This afternoon, I was at the Kaiserhof with one of my fraternity brothers and celebrated—by myself unfortunately—the cocktail I spilled exactly one year ago in the company of Annelie and you, before we went to see the movie “Bosambo.” Do you remember that? Now we are at the stage of celebrating anniversaries of our acquaintance and the love that grew from it, and still, we are so far away from each other.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 25 January 1937

If I sound downhearted and sad, I have to admit that I am indeed, in giving voice to doubts that burden me concerning your relationship with Lancelot.³⁹ Sometimes, I think that I love you too much to stand life without you any longer. That is where these thoughts are coming from that might appear not only unjustified to you but also silly. They might lie in a completely different area, but a woman who so completely adjusts herself to the needs of her man meets all doubts with a proof of value and lets them burst like soap bubbles. Still, I do know that you will not be angry with me for talking about what was bothering me, because you can stand above that.

I don't believe that any girl will relinquish herself to any man against her will. Nevertheless, there is no excuse for Lancelot. *If the possession of the girl had meant anything to him*, he might even be considered a nasty, frivolous bastard and criminal for whom no punishment can be hard enough. A guy who only takes a girl who has never belonged to anyone before him, in order to possess her once and satisfy his senses, can destroy that girl for life and make her unhappy, and I—maybe I am a fool and think more of women than they deserve and are worth—am surprised that you got over the deed and the following behavior of

38 Siegfried Felsenstein (1853-1939) was an uncle to Mope and his mother's widowed brother-in-law.

39 Mope is, of course, alluding to Vera's relationship with Mitja. He bases the name on Friedrich Markus Huebner's drama, *Lancelot and Sanderein* (1916), that both he and Vera knew. In the story, Lancelot takes advantage of Sanderein, though with the implication that the relationship is consensual.

the fellow without any psychological cracks, or even with a certain self-assurance.

Maybe I am unjust in losing all objectivity in connection with your person. In a neutral case I would most likely try to give understanding to a male subject who had acted like him and maybe even defend him. But since it concerns your person whom I love most deeply I see red and get so angry, an anger that does not find any outlet so that I don't even know myself any longer.

It is probably good for me that I am telling you about it, because in doing so I can find my way back to reason, and pose to myself the question how would I have acted. Had I been your first lover, I think that I would have acted differently or would at least have fallen deeply in love with you.

However, you do recognize that your first experience has robbed me of my objectivity. I know that this wave of rage will come over me again and again until it subsides, especially because your attitude towards the affair is psychologically incomprehensible to me and doubt overpowers me and I wonder if some small piece of this man did not stay behind that has been revived through me and keeps some small part of you from me. I ask myself whether this experience has been overcome by you completely or survived well, an experience you told me about with a certain amount of pride.

Maybe it is wrong to try to handle such a delicate question objectively when a deeply loved person is involved or to reduce the matter to its smallest psychological details. Maybe one should keep that jealousy of the past to oneself if it exists, but—maybe it is right or the right thing to talk things out with a human being that one loves as much as I love you and whom I trust implicitly, because I can count on the same honesty, *even if it hurts*, to get an honest answer. That is the only way—complete clarity even in this can be created between two lovers—and that cannot diminish my love for you.

My jealousy—you see, I am not trying to prettify anything—is based on the general claim that a girl will never forget the man whom she belonged to first, because she can never get over the love for him (and a man who loves back is worthy of that love, although real mutual love that finds fulfillment is so rare that it would have to be called perfection). Had I been a girl in the course of my soul's travels, I would surely be more understanding than it is possible for me like this. Please accept that as an apology for my behavior.

However, please understand what I am saying in relation to my longing for you, a longing that demands more, *all of you*. It is so wonderful for me that you see our future path as so straight and without difficulty in front of your eyes, and my remarks should not be obstacles on that path but should show you that we can talk to each other about inner unrest without taking offense or tripping over it, because the one who is feeling the unrest expects his best and most loved friend to be understanding.

VERA

Journal entry, 31 January 1937

A few days ago, I was too tired to go on. Today, I planned to refresh my memories of Mitja and to send a report of the events to Mope, just as soon as I have the time to write everything down.

I am so glad—no, actually it makes no sense to write such mundane sentences here. I have found in Mope my “husband”—really and truly!

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 3 February 1937

We just talked—by the way, for nine minutes—to each other and I was so happy once again to hear your voice and to find out with how much interest you made my business yours. Not because you are helping me and I am really grateful to you for that help, but because the intensity of the help and the wish to help prove your love to me, and I am especially happy about that.

Tomorrow evening, I have to go to a lecture which is followed by yet another meeting, so that I don't know if I will be able to write to you afterwards. It will be quite late, I'm afraid, but it concerns the procurement of money for Palestine. During today's meeting, a report was made about the new actions that would give a guarantee that all Palestine-transfers through Haavara will function with the greatest simplification. Of course, I did not say anything to that, but just stared at the table for so long that it appeared green to me.

My beloved mother still wants to move to Jerusalem where her siblings are living as well and she also has two children in the vicinity.

In contrast, I will move to London, according to your wishes and in consideration of the circumstances.

Because the economic pre-requisites in Palestine have changed inordinately since my orientation trip last year, I have to try to get a clearer picture of the new situation. During my stay in Palestine, there was a period of prosperity following an economic depression, caused by the unrest, etc., and the plan which had been established based on importing luxury goods no longer appears to fit the current situation, or, as the case may be, no longer promises the expected livelihood. However, the alpha and omega lies in the fact that the transfer of assets to Palestine has to be arranged to the advantage of the German economy and hopefully not be too disadvantageous to me.

Today, I am writing to you from the office for a change. Unfortunately, the letter is a hopeless chaos, because I have been interrupted untold times, have served customers, have taken phoned in offers, signed bank stuff, and whatever other daily jobs and demands there are.

And now finally, an end to all that business stuff, that is necessary unfortunately and which you take on so lovingly. I considered flying there to be with you over the weekend. But that costs RM 216,—return trip and my heart is for it and my wallet so against it that the war between the two had to be decided in favor of the Mammon, much to my regret. Sometimes it is downright sad, that one is not rich enough and to have to send letters via airmail instead of oneself.

A few days ago, I wanted to write and tell you that our love does have a large dose of romanticism, because, as factually as all the economic questions have to be treated, it is an unusual path that is supposed to lead us to each other. I only regret that you have to go to so much trouble that is added to your work which takes up most of your time already. I hope that you get enough sleep anyway and that you take care of your health. I am seriously worried that people burden you with too much and would be very grateful to your dear mother if she would make sure that you don't go to bed too late and watch your food and take care of yourself. It does not matter if one or the other of the letters does not get done for a few days if it helps you relax. *Your well-being is the most important problem to me.*

I kiss you most passionately and full of great love, your Mope

On the fly, Mope opted to leave for London, arriving unannounced to an astonished Vera one evening in early February and greeting her with a bouquet

of flowers as she was leaving work for the day at Marks & Spencer. Their unplanned reunion was joyous, though during his stay Mope was obligated to take account of his fiancée's packed work schedule, patiently awaiting long hours in the frigid winter night outside the Kilburn store until Vera was free to join him. After just over two weeks, he returned to Leipzig on 21 February.