

No Life Without You

REFUGEE LOVE LETTERS FROM THE 1930s

EDITED BY
FRANKLIN
FELSENSTEIN





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Twenty-two: “Human Beings Are Good!”

4 April through 14 May 1937

Over this short period, Mope sought authorization from the British consulate in Dresden to establish himself in England. Fearing Nazi scrutiny, his references to the consular office are couched in terms that are deliberately oblique. “H.O.” and “Gebr. H.O.” are shorthand for “Home Office.” Simultaneously, he was chasing contacts with Paltreu/Haavara with the notion of transferring capital to Palestine to aid the emigration of his mother. In this, he had already enlisted the support of his cousin, Julius Rosenfeld, in Palestine, and his brother-in-law, Fred Rau, in London. Fred undertook a short visit to Leipzig, which Mope reports in his letters.

In anticipation of his impending resignation from the Gebrüder Felsenstein, Mope began looking for clients that he would represent once he was ready to strike out on his own. On other topics, Mope’s involvement with the Kulturbund throws light on the ghettoization of Jewish culture by the Nazis. He also made regular visits to his artist friend, Max Schwimmer, whose sketches and watercolors adorn several of the letters. Primarily, his attention focused on his fiancée and their joint desire to determine a new date for their postponed wedding. Over the Whitsun weekend (15-16 May), they met and spent two days together in Brussels.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 5 April 1937

I am sitting at my desk once again, the witness to so many letters that I have written to you filled with my love for you. It is rather late. My

return trip was quite comfortable and since I had decided to travel 2nd class, I was able to catch some undisturbed sleep.

During the day, there was nothing much to do today. Some of my customers who usually only work with me had been here in the past week and they found more merchandise than I had thought possible. Those people seem to be buying anything and everything that has hair on it in order to keep their businesses going.

Max Schwimmer will come to see me tomorrow and pick up the colors. He was very happy that I procured them for him.



Fig. 70 Erotic watercolor by Max Schwimmer with verses included with letter from Mope to Vera, Leipzig, 5 April 1937.

For Maurice's Beloved

The gentle immortal one sobs,

The brown white birds scream along ice storm coasts,

The yearning seeks the dark wave of roses,

in which butterflies and nightingale once kissed.—Max Schwimmer

I kiss you, my sweet, beloved wife, and my arms reach out for you in vain—they yearn to embrace you.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 7 April 1937

I just got home from the very brilliant performance of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* of the culture union. Since I had not read Saturday's community leaflet, I found out about it by accident today and was happy that I went. The troupe had come from Berlin with its own orchestra.

Today, I told a few sales representatives and customers that I will leave the Gebrüder Felsenstein very soon, hopefully, something that caused genuine consternation (in the truest sense of the word). After all, no one is indispensable and I was feeling particularly replaceable at that time.

I love you unconditionally with all the intensity I am capable of, and as I have already told you, for the first time in my life without pain and therefore, not comparable to any other feeling I have had before. Additionally, I feel my love is more mature and—like a well-aged wine that has already reached its final aroma—it tastes wonderful to me, like it was pressed from the most exquisite grapes. If permission is granted, I will soon be able to drink my wine all the time and let it intoxicate me over and over without ever having the feeling that it might just be too much. I am yearning for this enjoyment and have discovered—a side of me I did not know about—that I am a gourmet who would be overjoyed if he could just have the smallest sip of the drink that will let every day become a holiday later.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 11 April 1937

Aside from a Hebrew course this morning and the reading of my mail at the store, I spent the day sleeping and reading. I have started to read books all the way to the end again, something I have not done in a long, long time, and I regard that as progress towards inner peace and balance, that I owe to you and my awareness of you, which makes me very happy.

I am expecting Fred here on Tuesday and I hope that he will also report about your well-being in his own words and according to his view. I had talked to Fred several times and at length about the matter of assets and there should be no misunderstandings in this respect.

In the meantime, I have been thrown out of Felsche's and want to finish this letter quickly, so that it can be mailed today.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 13 April 1937

I went to pick up Fred from the train station after he called and informed me about his arrival and his intentions here. Now he is at his cousin's and I did not go with him. In one hour, I will pick him up again and we will talk for a short time, because he has to leave for Freiburg at 7.00 in the morning. I will accompany him on this car trip so we can really talk in detail. We will be back around noon and he will continue on to Berlin while I have to go and inspect merchandise for an auction on Thursday. Semy seemed to attach great importance to the fact that I do the inspection that was not yet possible today.

* * *

Now I am sitting in Fred's hotel room while he is stretching his apollonian limbs in the bathtub. It is 12.30 a.m. and, since we were at his cousin's until now, we have not yet found the time to talk about business. He only told me that he received a letter from Julius Rosenfeld in Palestine on the day of his departure but could not say more than that. He will send you a copy after he returns.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 14 April 1937

I am satisfied with the discussion between Fred and me, as far as that is possible. It was really good that we had enough time while driving to Freiburg. Aside from that, the car trip was pleasant, since I had ordered quite a nice car yesterday, and the area has its charms in the first stage of Spring, charms we did not have much opportunity to admire because of concentration on the matters that occupied us.

We got back in time for the Berlin train and, after I had shown the document to Fred and took a short lunch, I went on to the inspection of

merchandise which did not satisfy me qualitatively. Fred had actually not seen the document back then because of his long trip and he was completely right with his claims not to know it. You will hear about my views from Fred directly, and I am too tired today to repeat them and my opinion once again.

My dear mother is supposed to have traveled to Hamburg today where she will stay with Ketty for a few days.

On Saturday, Semy is traveling to London, and I would probably be much, much happier than he is if I could go in his place.

I kiss you and embrace you and love you, my most passionately loved wife—unfortunately only in my thoughts again and fueled by my imagination.

My sweet Lilongo, Your Mope

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 18 April 1937

Early today, your very dear Friday letter made me happy, a letter that was actually written at the same time as my letter to you. In the meantime, you should be provided with more than enough mail, because I am writing every day, which is beyond comprehension to me. A year ago, I would have felt that anyone thinking me capable of that had to be damaged in the head, although I already knew you back then and we were actually engaged. Admittedly, my letters don't always get to the mailbox in the evening, often not before the morning like this one that is coming into being in my room after a long evening spent at Zellner's.

After quite an inspiring Hebrew hour, I took care of my own business correspondence at the store and taught the typewriter, after a few failed attempts, to follow my orders halfheartedly. A relatively detailed letter looked quite decent when I was finished with it. After that, I had a late dinner. Tomorrow, I will inspect more merchandise, since the auction begins on Wednesday. In the evening, I have another Hebrew instruction meeting and will go to Max Schwimmer afterwards who has invited me to come over.

MOPE TO VERA

Dresden, 22 April 1937

Yesterday morning, I received a letter from the branch office of Gebr. H.O. at the store which induced me to visit the branch office today. Unfortunately, I was not able to talk to the boss on the telephone and an employee wasted such a flood of words on me that hardly gave me any opportunity to present my offer in the way I wished for. He maintained that they received offers like that every day and had very little interest in them, aside from the fact that any order could only be made from the main office. So I could have answered the query in writing without going to any kind of trouble, but "I tried my best" and no one can do more and if you do any less to reach success, you might reproach yourself later. When all is said and done, the employee is not the one making the decision anyway.⁴⁶

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 23 April 1937

Despite all the difficult obstacles that have placed themselves between us at such great length, I am still very happy in my knowledge of you and so filled with it that my thoughts, and often my actions and reactions to events as well, are influenced by it. However, I do not want to state that there has been a change in my ego, but every human being has different possibilities to react, and now, I often follow the decisions that were precipitated by a short dialogue between us, before I react; and you are always the superior reasonable part in me during that conversation.

This morning, your dear letter from Wednesday made me happy in the bathtub, and I lay there dreaming and thinking about it in the water, until I almost forgot the time.

I got the information on the plane connections to Brussels from London today and found a connection—one that will hopefully do justice to the short time—which you will hopefully accept. In order for me to pay

46 The British Consulate (referred to here in coded fashion by Mope as "Gebr. H.O.") had been transferred from Leipzig to Dresden in July 1936. Its address in Dresden was 20 Mosczinskystrasse. The Consul ("the boss"), previously at Leipzig, was Henry Livingston. The "main office" was, of course, the British Embassy in Berlin. (Information supplied by Dr. Stephen Twigge, Official Historian at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London). Mope traveled to Dresden by train.

for the stay, Fred will have to give me a Whitsuntide present that he can send to a hotel he has to name, because I don't know of any. That is what the poor boy gets for being allowed to marry my sister!! Would you be so kind and let him know about this happy message?

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 30 April 1937

Yes, it is Friday evening and I have enjoyed it all the more, because it gave me the opportunity to talk to Annelie. She looks really good, as also her parents whom we encountered as I was bringing her home, and I got the impression that she has lightened the weight on her heart a lot, even though she is not completely over it yet. Annelie said today that the veins on my left hand form a "V" and represent an "H" on my right, and it is actually really visible and I find it rather amusing. Other people have to determine the initials by throwing apple peels behind their head. For me, they are more intensely marked than if they had been tattooed, and I did nothing for it.⁴⁷

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 3 May 1937

After a walk under the stars, as far as they were observable between the houses, I have landed at Felsche's in order to give form to my daily desire to have a visible chat with my beloved. Early today, I received your loving letter from the office during the first day of the London omnibus strike, which will hopefully not be followed by others.⁴⁸

It is really regrettable that it can come to such laying down of work by thousands of people, which, besides the usual consequences, also creates difficulties for the people on strike, because they are responsible for the maintenance of their families. The strike fund will only be of use for a short time in avoiding the distress that hunger will bring to the people. But following my letter from Thursday, I have to say that I am only really touched by the strike because my poor dear little girl has a

⁴⁷ i.e., "V" for Vera, and "H" for Helene, Mope's mother.

⁴⁸ The London bus strike lasted for four weeks, disrupting public transportation at the coronation of George VI on 12 May.

much more difficult trip to the store and through that, an even greater demand than usual is placed on her strength.

Today, I had to run the business by myself and it worked out so well that I was even able to take care of my private correspondence and still closed on time (more on time than usual). And I even took care of some business-related work that would normally not get done, because one always wants to pawn it off on the other. Additionally, I sat down in a club chair on the roof during my lunch break and gave the beautiful sun the opportunity to fry me. I have a nice tan already—at least in the face.

Did I tell you already that I had another call-back from Dresden? Of course, I answered it immediately and would be happy if I could get the final contract soon, but they are taking their time back there.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 5 May 1937

I wonder if the bus strike is over by now. I would really like it if your workday, including traveling back and forth to work, would at least be shortened by one hour. The work at Gebrüder Felsenstein during those two days of “absolute rule” was very pleasant to me and that pleasure was in no way diminished by Semy’s return today. He is a good man and I can talk to him about everything, and he can give his opinion pro and con without anyone having to misunderstand it, because he is such a decent and objective man. What a difference to having to be alone with the other partners, where one feels pursued by falsehood with every step made, and add to that their obvious ineptitude that tries to hide behind an act of supposed importance.

Today, another stupid letter arrived from Dresden, and I will most likely go there next Tuesday. I can hardly help but feel that the people don’t want me, but I won’t lose courage, and I will work without them, if they want to give me problems.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 6 May 1937

After I was lazy all morning today—the sun did not come out until early afternoon—I went to Zellner’s and into the store and then, I went for a walk with an acquaintance. While I was at the store, I wrote a letter to

Dresden—with the typewriter which is very slow—and asked if my visit would be welcome on Monday or Tuesday, and now I am waiting to see what the high and mighty gentleman will answer.

Why do you think that it is especially notable that the business at Gebrüder Felsenstein works without problems for me? It would function a lot better if I were by myself and would not constantly have to start a discussion about even the smallest matter in order to assert my opinion—in most cases anyway. It works really well with just Semy and he can oversee everything much better than I can, something that is helped by the fact that he undertakes the purchase of merchandise and its disposition. Additionally, my head has been so filled with personal matters for some time now that I am not always able to concentrate completely on the interests of Gebrüder Felsenstein, something that Semy does understand.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 7 May 1937

There are many things that can make a person mad, if that person is predisposed towards that. I have made some amusing studies concerning myself on this subject. For instance, it happens when I drop my keys and I introduce me to myself as “idiot” or “camel” or tell myself, “You are an especially stupid specimen today!” On other days, I discover that I whistle a happy tune during the same occasion so that my mouth cannot move fast enough from the pointed shape to the normal one and so I keep whistling happily. Do you whistle, too, my Veralein? Whistle for everything annoying or burdensome to you that wants to place itself in your path, because things will go much easier and better.

So, today is the last Friday on which I am writing to you before our longed-for reunion. Next Friday, I will be sitting in the train and will dream towards you, and that knowledge makes me so happy today that I would like to dance for joy. I suppose that my beloved will write to me one more time next Friday and will send her loving greetings towards me, greetings that heighten my longing for her even more (if that were possible) and will calm my agitation.

Now, your squandering husband has to tell you that he bought himself a wonderful portable typewriter for a horrible amount of money. However, he does need it and he had the choice between two models of which the better one cost about RM 40 more, and so he decided for the more comfortable one.

I will be thrown out of Felsche's any minute now. The last of the very few guests are getting ready to leave.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 8 May 1937

You will have just left the store and have started your way home which still seems to be circuitous, while I am sitting at Zellner's and make the embarrassing observation that the clock, despite my wish to make it move forward, or maybe despite of it, hardly moves. At 11 p.m., I want to call my beloved. Her letters during the last few days have sounded so downhearted that I hope to be able to lighten the mood through the telephone just a little bit. Soon you will read my letter from yesterday which—if it serves its purpose well—will also contribute to lift that little mood and make it ready for the weekend.

Early today, my typewriter which I had had furnished with £ and \$ signs was delivered. I am happy like a child with it and will probably write the letters to my beloved on it, although that would be just a little impolite.

On Monday, the new Palestine film "*Hatikvah*" (The Hope) will be shown here, and it is supposed to be very good.⁴⁹ Everything with legs will go, because the interest in the land, in which everyone here has relatives and friends, has become exceptionally great. Unfortunately, the available location is much too small and will not be able to take, in my estimate a third of the people who would go if it was bigger.

On Tuesday, Alexander Kipnis⁵⁰ will sing arias and songs for the culture league. Unless I am wrong, I have already heard him before and was only moderately awed. It could however be a mix-up with another person.

Now I am going to the store to call you and I am really looking forward to hearing your beloved voice for a few minutes.

49 Released in 1937, *Hatikvah* ("The Land of Hope") was a Zionist documentary film, directed by George Engel. In 1940, for his film, *Der Ewige Jude* ("The Eternal Jew"), the Nazi director, Fritz Hippler, juxtaposed scenes from *Hatikvah* showing Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem with similar sequences from the Polish ghetto to propagandize the idea that the Jewish scourge was everywhere the same.

50 Alexander Kipnis (1891-1978) was a famous Ukrainian born operatic bass. He had become an American citizen in 1931 but continued to tour in Europe until the Anschluss (annexation of Austria) in 1938.

So, now I have talked to you and I am very happy about it, because you seemed to be in a better mood and that calms and gladdens me. I have landed in a café in the meantime where I had to talk Italian with customers from Naples, and now, it is late again and the letter is supposed to be mailed tonight.

My Lilongo, your yearning Mope

Now I am sitting here without an envelope, because I had to use the one intended for you to contact Milan about the credit worthiness of the customers!

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 9 May 1937 [Envelope written with new typewriter]

It is correct that my sister Hanna was able to take care of everything in Leipzig back then. The gentleman did not move to Dresden until a short time ago. I also received my Palestine visa a year ago today. Even if it is uncomfortable to me, I cannot blame the man for the fact that he prefers the beautiful city of Dresden as his residence.⁵¹

In another week, two people will lie in bed around this time and be unbelievably happy together and all difficulties and hardships will be forgotten when they embrace—indescribably happy and looking forward to the future and aware that they belong together completely and without conditions.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 10 May 1937

Today, I was very lucky once again—I had two letters from a certain young lady who whistles like a cobbler's boy (please read that in French!) and manages to overcome moments of sluggishness with the

51 Hanna and Fred Rau had married in 1932. According to Dr. Stephen Twigge (Official Historian at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London), "only Consuls had authority to register *lex loci* marriages and marriages to be solemnized under the 1913 Foreign Marriages Act" (personal communication). Hanna was a German citizen, and Fred was British. The British Consulate at 10 Dittrichring, Leipzig, was moved to Dresden in July 1936. The Consulate was responsible for the issuance of visas for German citizens wishing to visit Palestine, which was under British Mandatory control. See also note 46 (above).

aid of that whistling. Besides the demands on different organs that are absorbed by that, whistling also supports regular breathing, and that is of exceedingly great significance for the resistance on the part of the body and the soul in cold weather as well as in bad moods. What does my beloved who has had at least eight semesters of medicine say about this brazen meddling of a chemist outsider, who might just have some small idea about the combustion processes in general biology, in the field of psychology?

But now, I have to return to being serious. Your pronouncement concerning the "ideal" marriage is, in my opinion, the main condition for such an institution. The togetherness of people has to serve the purpose of letting people grow closer together, otherwise, it is sterile and therefore a waste of time and energy. Such people find their way to each other while playing bridge; because they hope that they can at least win something from the other, and any other kind of togetherness would make them go to sleep or start to fight. Just the awareness of two people who want to get married or are already married that the pan has a lid and the lid has a pan lets those two be more than they would be by themselves. Reassurance lies within this awareness, and there is an inner balance. But once that is gone, the marriage is down the drain as well and can only be continued officially when both parties agree to tolerate adultery.

No, my beloved girl, I expect much more from our marriage and the "more" can be embodied in the most beautiful form through our fruitfulness, because we want to grow through our children and allow our mutual understanding to become keener than it is without offspring.

However, the result of your deliberations concerning the fact that you are feeling regret about not meeting me six years earlier makes me very happy, because it shows me that your love is deepening. When you wrote to me, in a different matter, that it was a sin for even one minute not spent with the one you love, it reminded me of how much you resisted any such thoughts not too long ago.

Now, I have not even told you about today's Palestine film. It was a substandard film, quite good, by an industrious photo amateur which did lose a lot of its impact however because of the small reproduction area in the relatively large room. Nevertheless, it was quite inspirational, because I was able to remember the colors and to see everything shown in a different light than someone who does not know that glorious country.

I decided not to go again to Dresden and wrote a detailed letter instead which will hopefully serve the same purpose.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 11 May 1937

Today, the Kipnis concert took place, and I could not get there until after 9.00 p.m., because I had an important meeting beforehand. The man has a wonderful baritone, and I am just a little sorry that I was forced to miss the first part. Then, a small circle of friends and acquaintances got together at Zellner's, and I am writing to you from there. I really did not want to start writing a letter, because it has been terribly late every night during the last few days and I really wanted to get to bed before 2.00 a.m. for once, especially if I want to read for a little while.

There was much to do during the day today and I was happy, as always, when I can be alone with Semy. Right now is the buying season for seals captured from Norway and since the purchase takes place via telephone and telegram and the prices can be very different, it is a really exciting affair. Additionally, our company secretary was there who took my passport along to secure the Belgian visa for me. You will also have to get one. Please don't forget.

I will think of you tomorrow and take pleasure with you in your day off. In the evening, I will be at Max Schwimmer's—I sent him a bottle of champagne, and he was as happy as a child.

They are waiting for me and the tavern is closing soon.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 12 May 1937

My lady, as the title page has already informed you, I have just come from Max who honored me with a very charming etching, beside this one. Now, I am sitting in the Park Café in order to devote myself to my beloved. I did not want to write the letter at Max's again, otherwise he will lie on his couch quite desperate, just like the last time, and says, whenever I want to leave, "but no, just stay, you are not bothering me at all." Additionally, I left one of his most intimate girlfriends with him.



Fig. 71 Erotic watercolor by Max Schwimmer accompanying letter from Mope to Vera, Leipzig, 12 May 1937.

Today was a big day for the people in London,⁵² as the newspapers showed in transmitted pictures. Hopefully, my beloved did not participate in it, but used the day for rest, thankful for the day off, and recuperated a little from the strain of work. I would really be happy if you came to our rendezvous less strained and am afraid that the trip will really use up your strength.

As long as I cannot use the typewriter well enough, I will keep writing the letters to my golden girl by hand. I have been taking instructions during my lunch break every day this week and I am learning to type with ten fingers. That is, aside from the general usefulness, very good training for my left hand. The instructions demand—despite the senselessness of what is written—the most complete concentration. I write, or I type without looking at my hands or the typewriter and I am marveling at the idea that something like that is even possible and can be successful. The entire course takes about fifteen hours and I only regret that I have not had a single evening to just practice, because of other obligations. Maybe I can arrange things differently after my trip.

I am in constant contact with my dear mother through letters. She is spending a quiet but psychologically demanding time in Hamburg, since my brother-in-law has been ordered to stay in bed for the last few weeks due to a heart attack, and there has not been any kind of improvement

⁵² The coronation day of King George VI.

in his condition, unfortunately. I feel sorry for my sister, because the economic difficulties are now joined by the worry about him.

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 13 May 1937

After the rather short letters of the last few days, I remained without mail today and only the thought that that can probably be traced back to the coronation hype calms me somewhat. I hope to be compensated quite well early tomorrow. Tomorrow evening at this time, I will be on my way to our rendezvous already, a reunion I look forward to so much that I have been gripped by travel nerves—a “sickness” formerly unknown to me. My things are packed already so that I won’t even go back to the apartment tomorrow.

My typewriter instructor told me today that he is counting on teaching me to type with ten fingers in about twenty-five hours. For my rather modest expectations, I think I have already learned amazingly well. I would have never dared to think that my stiff fingers—every single one of them—would ever gain so much active independence. For instance, I write “aqwert” and “zuioplo” fifty times in a row, or “hassdasgas” or “als das da lag” and find less sense than satisfaction in this activity, that usually finds its end after about one and a half hours with a little back pain, because of the unusual activity and quite an appetite for the postponed lunch. After I came into my room yesterday, I practiced for another hour, although it was rather late already, something I will not repeat because I am too tired.

Yesterday’s letter will hopefully give you pleasure, at least as far as the charming drawing is concerned. Max Schwimmer came looking for me at the store today, because I procured some animal skulls for him. To have gorilla, lion and leopard skulls as decorative elements in his living space seems to me to be a little eccentric, but the animal forms will probably give him inspiration for some kind of picture and in that way will fulfill a real purpose.

As you can see, I have nothing real to tell you at the moment, because what fills me cannot be recounted in words. It is all so elementary, so huge, so restlessly concentrated on the moment of the reunion inside of me, that written words will make everything else seem trivial and maybe even banal.

Mope and Vera encountered horribly cold weather during their thirty-eight hours together in Brussels, although (as he gallantly wrote to her a few days later), “it did not seem as disturbing because of your beloved presence.” Their initial rendezvous proved problematic as they arrived at different train stations, and each suffered momentary panic before they succeeded in finding one other. For Mope, despite the short time, “the feeling of walking together, side by side, to hear your voice—without the influence of some bureaucrat charging fees—to watch your ever so beloved, beautiful face with its animated expressions and everything else in our togetherness has given me so much and filled me full of inner happiness.” Being together, he adds “has balanced both of us inside, so that we can give each other even more with our letters when we are apart.” They were not to meet again until more than two months later. In Brussels, he employed his Leica camera to take photos, of which he says “as far as can be judged by the negatives, four pictures of you and one of me came out well. All the others are out of focus or wiggly.” He attributes this to Vera’s “bursting with the need to move” and inability to stay still.



Figs. 72 (a) and (b) Mope and Vera in Brussels, May 1937.

VERA

Journal entry, May 1937

From 16 through 17 May—evenings

Two, or rather, 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ days of perfect marriage spent with Mope in Brussels.