**Extracts – György Konrád: *A guest in my own country: A Hungarian life***

***The father’s arrest***

He departed through the garden gate accompanied by gendarmes and German officers. I watched his slightly bent back from the upstairs balcony. I had never seen him escorted by bayonets before. After he and my uncle had been led off, we went to the dining room, where we could follow them through the window facing the street. In front were the Gestapo officers, behind them a couple of gendarmes in their sickle-feathered caps, then my father and uncle, then more gendarmes with bayonets at the ready, and the ridiculous Csontos policeman drawing up the rear. Everything else was as it always was: the cow pats drying in threes on the hot cobblestones, it being mid-May, the yellow light falling on the thick spire of the Calvinist church, the indifferent row of locust trees lining the main street.

(…)

My father looked neither right nor left: he greeted no one, nor did anyone greet him. It is instructive to observe the faces of acquaintances approaching from the opposite direction when one is being escorted by armed men. Although my father knew everyone he passed, he walked like an actor making an entrance on stage. The scene was not outrageous, just unusual.

**Who and when arrested the father?**

**Could you discribe the arrest in a few sentences?**

**How did the acquaintances react when they saw the father, and why do you think they responded that way?**

***Yellow star***

We were still heating the living room, and the atmosphere was familial: my mother was sewing yellow stars onto everyone’s coats and jackets. Homemade stars were acceptable, though private industry was flexible in responding to the new needs. Everyone knew the specifications: canary yellow, machine-hemmed, six-by-six centimeters. You had to sew it on tightly enough to keep a pencil from going under the threads: those clever Jews were capable of putting it on just for show and taking it off whenever they felt like it. The Jewish newspaper encouraged its readers to follow the authorities’ instructions to the letter.

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Though no longer allowed into the pool, we would peek through the fence and watch the boys imitating Stukas, the German dive-bombers, as they dived screeching from the trampoline into the twenty-five meter basin fed by the lazy, quiet flow of the artesian water. As usual it was drained on Sunday and would refill by Wednesday afternoon. The previous year István, Pali, and I had swum eighty lengths and were given money for chicken paprikás and noodles at the pool restaurant.

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Our classmates were not particularly hostile to us, nor did they rejoice in our situation. They were uninformed and indifferent. They would look at the tanks and say nothing. “Now you’re gonna have a peck of trouble,” scornfully remarked a scraggly little boy, the poorest of us all and the worst pupil. His father had joined the Arrow Cross as a road worker. There were only two Jews at the school: István and myself. The poorer ones were not accepted.

(…)

István liked to establish bitter truths, the kind that got you absolutely nowhere. “We are the richest in our class and the best pupils: of course they don’t like us. How many people are free of envy? Some like one or two Jews but not the rest. There are few good people and few truly bad ones; the rest are neither one nor the other. If they let the Jews live, all well and good; if they kill them, that’s fine too. Everyone agrees to everything.”

(…)

Taking walks with the yellow star gradually grew less pleasant. The message in the faces of the passersby did not generally leave a good feeling. The crudest would communicate, “Well, now you’ll get what’s been coming to you!”; the majority, “Aha. So that’s how it is. So they’re taking you away. Well, let them!” Even the warm looks, looks of sympathy, were combined with a quickened pace: solidarity in a hurry. We preferred to stay in the garden. I would swing for hours, until my head spun.

(…)

I went to the artesian well in front of the post office, where my good suit and shoes provoked pleasure at our misfortune from the constant semicircle of its users. But even with the yellow star I made new acquaintances: women occasionally greeted me warmly on the street; I would exchange a few words while waiting for the well. The village idiot, who once managed to eat an entire bucket of cooked beans on a bet, asked me for my yellow star. The onlookers laughed: still crazy as ever.

**What kind of deprivations appeared after the Germans had occuped Hungary?**

**How did the Jewish Community react to the new laws?**

**What kind of reactions did he experience when he began wearing the yellow star?**

**What reasons does the text suggest for the negative reactions toward the Jews?**

***Return home***

On 28 February 1945, the seventh day of our journey, we reached the Újfalu station. It had hardly changed over the year, as there had been no serious battles in the vicinity. (…)

The first acquaintance we saw was my former teacher at the Jewish school, Sándor Kreisler. Everyone in our class had been killed, as had all the pupils in our school, so our teacher was naturally deeply moved to see us. There he stood, a short, plucky man with a mustache. Seeing him was almost as unbelievable as it would have been to see my father.

Mr. Kreisler had returned from forced labor. His parents and siblings had been taken to Auschwitz, and all his pupils had perished there. He was as surprised to see us as we were to see him. He hugged us and kissed us, which he had never done before. He listened to Zolti Varga’s story, thanked him for bringing his two pupils home, and promised to testify to Zolti’s valor should he ever need it.

(…)

The teachers and pupils were the same, except that István, who had remained in Budapest, was not sitting next to me. There was no military education, from which we had been excluded the previous year, so I was a full-fledged member of the class community. Neither the teachers nor the pupils knew quite how to deal with me.

“Where’s your father?” asked my classmates, but all I knew was that my parents had been deported. There was a boy in the class whose father had fallen at the front and one whose father was a prisoner of war and still missing. Rumor had it that there, abroad, civilians and prisoners alike were starving and the weak had frozen to death. I was not alone in my orphaned state. We came to accept one another again and avoided speaking of our families.

**Who is the first acquaintance he met when he returned to his hometown?**

**Why is it so emotional for them?**

**How did the teachers and the students deal with him?**

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**How could you use this texts in the classroom?**

**What was the most surprising thing you read in the book?**