

Contemporary Writers' Forum: George Ellenbogen - Reading 18 May 2014 at Schellack

Musikbar, Siegen Oberstadt

Poet George Ellenbogen, a Canadian Jew, has come to Siegen once more. Earlier that day he taught a Creative Writing workshop at the Evangelisches Gymnasium in Weidenau; now, in the evening, he gathers listeners in the music bar Schellack to read from his works and from his own and his late partner Evelyn Shakir's memoirs. The weather is playing along nicely and the atmosphere is relaxed as Ellenbogen contrasts the sunny evening with his poem "Frozen White", a work on a dying love. Constantly teasing the audience's reactions he talks about his inclination for images of interrupted movement and coldness. The imagery of snow and ice finds its repetition in a second poem, "Night Train To Zagreb". This particular work was born of an experience Ellenbogen made many years ago in the actual night train to Zagreb where he met a woman who lost her arm in the Kosovo war. He explains how this experience haunted him for years until one day his "Night Train to Zagreb" took shape. On inquiry, Ellenbogen explains that the repetitive use of the ice imagery can probably be linked to his stay in the Arctic which has left a lingering impression on him.

He continues with extracts from the two memoirs which correlate with each other beautifully. Ellenbogen, born to Polish parents, who immigrated just before the Second World War, wrote his memoirs to immerse into his youth and adolescence. In *A Stone in My Shoe*, he paints a picture of a Montreal that became his home sixty years ago and mentions how his great love for language and literature came to be. He talks about how his growing up in the sheltered Jewish community made the world outside seem like a true adventure. Afterwards, he reads from Evelyn Shakir's memoirs, *Teaching Arabs Writing Self*. It talks about her first love with some of the disruptions it brought to her Arabian family's household as well as about her life as an Arab-American teacher of literature. Ellenbogen also relates how strange it was for her, who saw herself as very strongly influenced by Arabian culture, when she went to teach in the Middle East for a while, where she was perceived as an American.

Ellenbogen has already had a long day, but he finds time to answer questions from the audience, sign autographs and chat. He welcomes personal questions as well as those addressed to his working process and gives advice to aspiring writers. The evening passed quickly in a pleasant atmosphere which was certainly owed much to Ellenbogen's congenial personality.

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