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Man Of Ashes (Texts And Contexts)



Synopsis

"A poignant, groundbreaking memoir that links the Holocaust and its aftermath to the safe haven that opened for camp survivors in Latin America at mid-century. The controversy surrounding the collaboration between Isacovici and Rodríguez remains an extraordinary opportunity to reflect on the thorny path of Jewish-Hispanic relations worldwide."-Ilan Stavans "Distinguished by geography as well as by its painful testimony. . . . Much of the memoir's early drama involves the creeping Nazi threat opposing Jews' wishful thinking-that the war might be ending and that 'it can't happen here.' . . . The author's family is shattered in Birkenau, but he survives Auschwitz with jobs peeling potatoes and mining coal at Jaworno, and he survives a gruesome death march as the Soviets advance. Isacovici is able to rejoin two brothers in a fruitless return to the family farm and to many European cities in search of a haven. He then joins the family of a woman with whom he has a serious romance, who end up with visas for Ecuador, where he feels an empathy for the suffering of the local Indians. . . . This account tells an unforgettable and unique story."-Kirkus Reviews

Salomon Isacovici died in 1998. Dick Gerdes is a professor of Spanish at George Mason University. *Man of Ashes* was first published in Mexico in 1990 as *A7393: Hombre de cenizas* and was awarded the Fernando Jeno Prize.

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Customer Reviews

In this moving memoir, first published in Spanish in Mexico in 1990, Isacovici writes of his youth spent on a farm on the border between Romania and Hungary. After the German occupation of

Hungary in 1944, Isacovici experienced the horrors of the destruction of Jewish life in Europe: ghettos, forced marches, transports, and death camps. Upon returning to his hometown of Sighet (also that of Elie Wiesel) at war's ending, Isacovici decided to leave Europe and, after a few years in Paris, settled in Ecuador with his future wife. The author recounts beautifully his search for God and life's meaning in the midst of catastrophe. Recommended for Jewish studies collections. ?Gene Shaw, NYPL Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Distinguished by geography as well as by its painful testimony, Isacovicis (d. 1998) memoir was first published in his adopted country of Ecuador. Like Elie Wiesel, Isacovici came from Sighet, Romania, and it took longer for the Holocaust to reach that far east. The comparison with Wiesel ends there, as we get mundane phrases like "my tenacious desire to survive"; otherwise, the co-author and the translator have done an admirable job with the unearthly suffering depicted here, and the unusual psychological self-awareness of the survivor. Isacovici, typically, has few theological insights about the momentous events he lives through, but there are a few reflective philosophical moments. The authors peaceful childhood was already rocked by a sense of evil learned from predatory owls and a destructive flood. And while life with his large farm family was otherwise uncomplicated, young Salomon had already learned to smuggle to get ahead. Much of the memoirs early drama involves the creeping Nazi threat opposing the Jews wishful thinking that the war might be ending and that it cant happen here. The residents of the authors town heard blood-curdling testimonies from Polish refugees, tales of massacre and rape. Only a few other memoirs document such breaks from the Nazis code banning sex with non-Aryans, and, together with descriptions of the brothels at Auschwitz and the kapos as often being released prisoners "who slept with young boys chosen from among the prisoners," the memoir offers these more unique bits of historical significance. The authors family is shattered in Birkenau, but he survives Auschwitz with jobs peeling potatoes and mining coal at Jaworنو, and he survives a gruesome death march as the Soviets advance. Isacovici is able to rejoin two brothers in a fruitless return to the family farm and to many European cities in search of a haven. He then joins the family of a woman with whom he has a serious romance, who end up with visas for Ecuador, where he feels an empathy for the suffering of the local Indians. Above average in the torrent of Holocaust memoirs, this account tells an unforgettable and unique story. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book will stay with you for some time after you read it. Fans of Primo Levi will find the approach fairly familiar, but here Isacovici pours out his whole story in a single tome. You're first transported to the carefree and then less carefree days in pre-war Romania, getting a sense of life along the river. Then the darkness sets in, and Isacovici vividly recounts his stories of surviving what's too horrific to really imagine. He's one of the lucky ones of course, making it out and ultimately arriving in Ecuador, but some injustices he witnesses there are too galling for him especially after everything he lived through. While it's not one of the better known Holocaust memoirs, and I only discovered it in *The Ecuador Reader: History, Culture, Politics (The Latin America Readers)*, his story is one worth remembering.

This is a book that must be read by anyone interested in the Holocaust and Jewish life. It is unlike any Holocaust autobiography in that it involves Jewish life in South America. Even after living through the tragedies of the Holocaust Salomon Encourages joy and happiness. As a College student, and as Salomon's grandson this book touched my life in a very special way.

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