

mother, with good sense, answered that in such dire predicaments one name was as good as any other. Of course! Finally, excluded but always suspect, I was prohibited from signing my own name in newspapers. I then took the transparent pseudonym of Pseudo. All of this by way of saying that in those years, for reasons wholly connected with Fascism, my identity daily became more uncertain, more problematic, more ephemeral.

Fascism fell, the Badoglio period followed, I wrote articles critical of the fallen regime in *Popolo di Roma*, edited by Corrado Alvaro. After that came the 8th of September, Nazis and Fascists returned. And then I began to see that absurdity, after having been a kind of agonizing limbo for a long time, was now becoming the hell which in truth it was. In other words, I began to feel the emotion of fear, which under regimes of terror strikes all those who, for whatever reasons, are not, or do not feel themselves to be, "in conformity." In no way was I in conformity, not racially, politically, nor culturally. On the other hand, even had I wanted to, I couldn't be in conformity. I couldn't invent an Aryan grandfather, I couldn't believe in Fascism, and lastly, I could not not write in the style in which I was writing. I was, in short, irremediably "different."

One morning, walking through the Piazza di Spagna, I met a foreign journalist, a member of the foreign press corps, who warned me that I was on the list of those who very shortly would be arrested and sent to Germany. Immediately I went back home and told my wife that we had to get out as quickly as we could. As I was packing a suitcase with the necessities for our flight, the telephone rang. I lifted the receiver, put it to my ear, and heard a not ex-

actly friendly voice ask, "Am I speaking to the traitor Moravia?" Thus "different," in a few days I had become "traitor"! But that was right too.

It is not important here to tell how I got through all that. What I really would like to try to explain is the nature of the ever deepening, more anguished feeling of apprehension that I experienced in those days. I've described it as the feeling that those who know, or fear, they are not "in conformity," suffer in regimes of terror. But what exactly is terror? In my opinion, at least in the light of that far-past experience, terror consists in the disintegration of the institutions which form the foundation of our identity, and in the painful and very difficult replacement of identity with the anonymous and undifferentiated instinct of self-preservation. In short, I felt like a trapped animal, and like a trapped animal, I no longer felt I was a person, an individual, a man; rather a lump of threatened existence. If I had had time and an inclination to reflection, I would certainly have recognized in that diminution of my identity to a mere biological datum a forced regression to a natural state. In fact, terror is the normal state in nature. For example, the herds of zebras that one so often sees browsing tranquilly and serenely in Africa, are in fact, "terrified." At the slightest indication of danger, the entire herd will gallop away en masse. Man has tried to eliminate terror—the natural condition—through the creation of institutions. The failure of institutions creates absurdity, which in turn, plunges incredulous, horrified man back into nature's ancient terror.

Why do I introduce this autobiographical note to the preface to Giacomo Debenedetti's *October 16, 1943*?

Because as I prepare to speak about the Nazis' roundup of Roman Jews, it occurs to me that I would be dishonest if I hid the fact that I too have known terror, that I too have gone through the ordeal of the collapse of institutions, of the disappearance of identity, and of the relapse, however briefly, into a natural state. I too, in short, have known persecution, meaning active and zealous injustice. So, I say again, it would be less than honest to hide it, and to pretend, in writing this preface, to an "above the fray" serenity. Though twenty-five years have passed, it would, in a way, be tantamount to denying my solidarity with those unfortunate souls whom Kappler's SS troops arrested that long-distant morning and sent to their deaths in the crematoria of the extermination camps.

Giacomo Debenedetti's little book is intended as a moving and precise account of that terrible morning. But we have to be clear about the nature of the book. The introductory note to the Saggiatore edition compares *October 16, 1943* to Manzoni's *Column of Infamy* and Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*. The comparison can be sustained primarily with reference to the substance of the book. Analogous to Defoe and Manzoni, Debenedetti describes a public calamity as unimaginable and unpredictable as it was undeserved. The plague, Defoe's and Manzoni's subject, becomes ideology in Debenedetti. The resemblance between disease and ideology, both of them irresistible and rapidly propagated, has been described by more than one writer. It will suffice here to recall *The Plague* by Camus and the story called *The Epidemic* by the undersigned. On the other hand, the felicitous balance of elements in Debenedetti's account consti-

tutes another point of resemblance with the Defoe and Manzoni works. But the comparisons, in my opinion, must end here. Debenedetti was not a puritan realist like Defoe, nor a Catholic moralist like Manzoni. He wasn't even a storyteller, as both of them were. He was a critic, who belonged by right to a European culture that straddled two centuries. A decadent culture from a historical point of view—the least one can say of it is that it was absolutely unprepared to cope with the tragedies of those past years. Debenedetti's very preference for Proust is significant. Proust does not exist outside of institutions. He is a "protected" writer, who has certainly subjected identities to original and relentless analysis, but never questioned them. Perhaps, actually, *past* and *memory* in Proust could have been interpreted as flight presaged by *terror* which lay hidden in the present and even more, in the immediate future. In short, no one was less suited than Debenedetti to describe the fate of Roman Jews, that is, the collapse of institutions and the substitution of terror for identity.

But no. The subtle, the sophisticated, the intellectual Debenedetti, in the fifty brief pages of *October 16, 1943*, succeeds in giving us everything we might have expected from a writer of Defoe and Manzoni's ilk. Reason shocked in the face of irrational fury, religious charity, historical compassion, existential torment. But how did this all come about?

In the first place, thanks to literature, Debenedetti must have understood that he could not expect any help from intellectual and psychological decadence and turned instead to the classics as his only possible model. However, the most interesting aspect of this literary effort is that

Debenedetti resorted to the classicism of a refined intellectual such as he himself was; that is, he told the story of the Nazi roundup in a style lightly coated with estheticism. In other words, at the same moment that Debenedetti was freeing himself from his own intellectualism, he was confirming it in the very way he chose to free himself of it. At this point, someone might ask "Why estheticism?" I reply, why is there art in the tomb? Estheticism. In this case, it means compassion.

But estheticism could not suffice. Pain was also required. Does a critic suffer? Does he enter into the world's suffering? I doubt it. Above all, and unavoidably, literature forms a barrier between him and suffering. Now Debenedetti has had the courage to knock down the barrier and to accept his own suffering as the principle motive for his writing. Thus we must view the little book as a victory of pain over literature. A difficult victory that allowed literature to mingle with pain and to confer upon it the elevated status of tragedy.

On the subject of the Nazi roundup there is little I can say that Debenedetti has not already said very well. I would like to add only that Debenedetti touched upon the truly painful point of the whole sinister business in these pages precisely through his rediscovery of the classically balanced approach. Racism is a mass ideology, and its victims neither have, nor can be allowed to have, individual and recognizable faces; they too are seen as a mass. The pain, therefore, is not merely about the injustice but also about the crumbling of humanistic values, the end of the interval of individualism between primitive barbarity and the barbarity yet to come.

October 16, 1943



Until a few weeks ago, on Friday evenings, at the appearance of the first star, the great doors of the synagogue, those facing the Temple Square, would be opened wide. Why the great doors, instead of the less conspicuous entry at the side, as on all other nights? Why, instead of the narrow seven-branched candlesticks, so many blazing lights, which drew flames from all that was gold, radiance from plaster carvings—stars of David, Solomon knots, and Jubilee trumpets—and lustrous flashes from the brocaded curtain hung before the holy Ark, the ark of the Covenant with the Lord? Because every Friday evening at the appearance of the first star, the return of the Sabbath was celebrated.

Not the thin psalmody of the cantor, lost at the distant altar, but from the choir stall above, amid the resounding praises of the organ, the chorus of young voices raised high in a song of holy love; the old kabbalists' hymn, *Lekhabh dodi, likrat Kallah*, "Come, my beloved, come to meet the Sabbath." It was the

mystical invitation to greet the approaching Sabbath, the Sabbath that arrives like a bride.

But it was a disheveled, dirty woman dressed all in black, who arrived in the old Roman ghetto that Friday evening, the 15th of October. Drenched in rain, she can hardly speak, agitation chokes back her words, spittle forms at her mouth. She has run all the way from Trastevere. Just a while ago, at the home of a woman for whom she cleans half days, she'd met a woman, a carabinieri's wife, who told her that the carabinieri had run into a German, and that the German had a list of two hundred Jewish heads of households, who, with their entire families, were going to be deported.

The Jews of the Regola quarter were still in the habit of going to sleep early. Shortly after dark they were all in their homes. Perhaps the memory of an ancient curfew is still in their blood; from the time, when at the first fall of shadow, the gates of the ghetto screeched shut with an inviolable monotony that routine had perhaps rendered gentle and familiar to them, a reminder that night was not a time for Jews; that at night they were in danger of being seized, taxed, fined, imprisoned, beaten. Thus, those Jews accused of plotting in the shadows against world peace and security have in reality for ages been diurnal creatures. From early morning, just after the barest gleam of light, thick and gray as their houses, begins to rise up to the cornices, and like a can opener inserts its spiral corkscrew down into the alleys below, you'll find all these Jews out on the street shouting, calling out each other's names, agreeing, arguing, discussing, setting up trades and deals,

carrying on at great length despite the fact that their discussions and transactions may have no great urgency. But these Jews love life; and their need for it, which night denies them, bursts through.

On that evening as well, families were already gathered in their homes. Mothers were lighting candles in Sabbath candlesticks—not the best ones, which had been hidden since the first German plundering—while old men with *tephila*¹ prayer books in their laps were reciting the blessings and alternating between mumbling prayers and hoarse and angry tirades against their noisy grandchildren. So the disheveled woman had no difficulty assembling a large group of Jews to warn of the danger.

But no one would believe it. They all laughed at the idea. Even though she lives in Trastevere, Celeste has relatives here, in the Ghetto, and is well known to the entire *Kehila*.² Everyone knows she's a gossipmonger, a hysteric, crazy. It's enough to see her gesticulate as she talks, with her wild eyes and that bird's nest hair. And besides, it's a fact that everyone in her family is a little touched. Who doesn't know her oldest son, the one who's twenty-four, thin, hairy, dark and weird, who looks like a *habam*³ manqué, and who they even say has epilepsy? How can anyone pay attention to Celeste?

"You have to believe me. Get away, I'm telling you," the woman pleaded. "I swear it's the truth, on my children's heads."

1. Formulary of prayers. (Notes marked with an asterisk are the translator's.)

2. Community.

3. Learned, sage; and, by extension, rabbi.

The truth? Who knows what anyone might have said to her? Who knows what she understood? Their laughter, their disbelief, infuriates her. She begins to lose her temper, to use foul language—it's as if she, not the Germans, is their primary threat, and now she feels insulted at not being treated seriously. If she knew how to do it, she would carry on even more, to avenge herself and to finally instill some fear. She shouts, implores, her eyes fill with tears, she sets her hands on the heads of little ones as if she is there to protect them.

"You'll be sorry. If I were a fancy lady, you would believe me! But because I don't have a penny, because I'm wearing these rags . . ." and in pulling at her clothes in fury, she tears them all the more.

By now thirteen months have passed, and many who witnessed that evening are inclined to acknowledge that perhaps, if Celeste had been a lady, and not the poor wretch that she is. . . . Nevertheless on that evening, they returned home, resumed sitting around their tables, eating their dinner and discussing her senseless story. It was clear what had likely gone through the madwoman's head. About three weeks earlier, Major Kappler had threatened Commander Foa, president of the Jewish community, and Doctor Almansì, head of the Union,⁴ with the taking of 200 Jewish hostages. The numbers were the same, which explained her confusion. Poor people always learn things after everyone else and always indirectly, but the little that they do get to know, they always believe to be pure gold. By now, the threat of the 200 hostages had been

*4. Union of Italian Jewish Communities.

averted. The Germans may be *rashanim*,⁵ but they are men of honor.

Contrary to general opinion, Jews are not distrustful by nature. Or to put it more clearly, they are distrustful in the same degree that they are perceptive about small matters, but credulous and disastrously ingenuous when it comes to large ones. In regard to the Germans, they were ingenuous, almost ostentatiously so. There are several possible reasons for this. Convinced by centuries of experience that it is their fate to be treated like dogs, Jews have a desperate need for human sympathy; and to solicit it, they offer it. To trust people, to rely on them, to believe in their promises, is precisely such a proof of sympathy. Will they behave this way with the Germans? Yes, unfortunately. With the Germans there would also come into play the classic Jewish attitude toward authority. Even before the first fall of Jerusalem, authority has exercised absolute, arbitrary, and inscrutable power of life and death over Jews. This has operated in such a way that both in their conscious and unconscious minds authority has assumed the form of an exclusive, jealous, and omnipotent God. To distrust His promises, whether good or bad, is to fall into sin for which sooner or later one will have to pay, even if that sin remains unexpressed, and is only an intention, or a mumbled complaint. And finally, the fundamental idea of Judaism is justice. The mission of the Jews was to bring this idea to Eastern civilization. Renan makes this expressly the theme of his interpretation of the entire history of Israel, including the great eschatological statements, in-

5. Evildoers.

cluding the Messianic wait, and the promise that on that Day of the Lord, tomorrow or who knows when, He will light His dawn at the height of the millennia precisely to bring back the reign of justice upon this earth.

For these reasons, Rome's Jews had a certain kind of faith in the Germans, even—we should say *particularly*—after all that happened on September 26. They felt as if they had been inoculated against further persecutions. Any such would have been an injustice, and their natures would not allow them to believe in that possibility. To show fear would have meant to antagonize the Germans—to reveal their antipathy to them. And finally it would have been a sin against Authority. So, on that evening, the Jews laughed at crazy Celeste's message.

(We beg forgiveness for this digression, and for any others in which we might indulge, but in order to understand the full horror of the drama which we seek to reconstruct, it is necessary to know the people involved a little better.)

In fact, on the evening of the 26th of September, 1943, the presidents of the Roman Jewish community and of the Union of the Italian Communities had been summoned—through Doctor Cappa, a police official—to a 6 P.M. meeting at the German Embassy. They were received with frightening courtesy and “politesse” by SS Major Herbert Kappler, who made them comfortable and spoke to them for a few minutes about this and that in conversational tones. Then he went to the heart of the matter. Roman Jews were doubly guilty, as Italians (but less than two months later a German-Fascist decree, sponsored by

Rahn, Mussolini, and Pavolini, will no longer recognize Italian Jews as citizens of Italy, and what then Major Kappler?), for their betrayal of Germany, and as Jews because they belong to a race eternally inimical to Germany. Therefore, the government of the Reich was levying a tribute of 50 kilograms of gold, to be produced before 11 A.M. of the following Tuesday, the 28th. Nonfulfillment would result in the roundup and deportation to Germany of two hundred Jews. Essentially, a little less than a day and a half to find 50 kilograms of gold.

Responding to the difficulties which the two Jewish representatives pointed out in opposition to the plan, the Major countered with a concession; he would furnish motor vehicles and men for searching out the gold. The two *Herren* would not accept? That's all right. It's as if it were never said. But in the same generous vein, he would extend the time for an additional hour. They asked him what the value of gold was in lire. Kappler understood the implications. “The German Reich,” he answered, “has no need of lire. And if ever it should need them,” he smiled, “it can always print them.” Then he considered it appropriate to complete his presentation by announcing that in dealing with him there was no possibility for recalcitrance. Otherwise, he would take personal responsibility for the roundup. He had done so in several similar circumstances and had always succeeded very well at that type of operation. With which remark the subject appeared to be closed and the meeting was concluded.

Italian police headquarters, which was immediately informed of the exaction, did not respond. There were repeated messages, visits, telephone calls. Silence, to use a

cruel illusion, was more than ever golden. So the same evening and the next morning the most influential members of the community, along with those known to be discreet, adept in business, and well-to-do, were gathered together. Disconsolate and distressed, they discussed the thing and declared it not doable. But the most forceful of them prevailed, and the collection of gold began. Word had already run through the Jewish community. Nevertheless, the offerings came very slowly at first, with a kind of uncertainty. It was during this period that the Vatican announced officially that it was putting 15 kilograms of gold at the disposition of the Jewish community to make up any eventual shortfall.

Meanwhile things had begun to improve. By then, all of Rome had learned of the German outrage and had been moved by it. Warily, as if fearing a refusal, as if intimidated to be coming to offer gold to the wealthy Jews, several "Aryans" appeared. They entered the room adjacent to the synagogue uncertainly, not knowing whether they ought to remove their hats or keep their heads covered as, all of them knew, Jewish ritual required. Almost humbly, they asked if they too could . . . if it would be acceptable. . . . Unfortunately, they did not leave their names. One would have liked to have a record of them for those moments when we lose faith in our fellow beings. Which brings to mind a fitting phrase that George Eliot used, "The milk of human kindness."

The collection station was set up in one of the Jewish community offices. The police, whose deaf ear finally began hearing, assigned men to keep order and stand guard. The flow, in fact, had begun to be remarkable. At

the table sat a trusted member of the community. Next to him, a goldsmith assayed the offerings, and another weighed them. At the very first, word had been sent out that cash contributions were not acceptable. This would have slowed the flow of metal. Gold objects often represent cherished memories, which tend to become even more memorable, and more cherished, at the moment of parting from them. Moreover, during periods of war and disasters, gold has proved itself the best and most portable asset for dire emergencies. Cash, on the other hand, would have come in plentifully and quickly. It would, however, have created a problem, not least, the risk of locating that much gold on the black market. But the metal already was beginning to pile up, and so many people had come offering gold for sale, that they even began to accept cash and to buy gold on the basis of varying prices. The woman at the newsstand on the Ponte Garibaldi helped greatly with these purchases.

By 11 A.M. Tuesday morning the full amount had been gathered, with even a surplus of more than two million in cash, which was put aside in the community safe. The collection room was closed and locked. Outside the door, along with police agents, sat the goldsmiths and several community representatives. A cultured and witty German opera-lover might perhaps have joked about these Fafners⁶ guarding their treasure. Instead, as their wives had brought these good people food, far from vomiting flames, they ate their meal in peace. Their consciences were clear. There

*6. Dragon who guards the Rhine gold in Wagner's ring cycle.

OCTOBER 16, 1943

had been moments of anxiety, feverish clock-watching, but all things considered, their work had gone well.

A call was put in to the German ambassador in order to obtain an extension of a few hours. It was a precaution in view of the prompt attainment of their goal, to forestall any increase in the demand. The blessed naiveté of the shrewd! As if the Germans wouldn't have had spies. Nevertheless, they obtained an extension until 6 P.M., at which hour three automobiles set off from Lungotevere Sanzio⁷ with the gold, the two presidents, the two goldsmiths, and a police escort, again led by Doctor Cappa, in the direction of Villa Wolkonski.⁸

Let alone sink to the formality of receiving them and of "collecting" all that gold, Kappler didn't even deign to appear. He had a secretary tell them in the antechamber that the ransom would have to be deposited on via Tasso.⁹ This is perhaps the first appearance of via Tasso in the criminally black chronicle of the German occupation. The convoy leaves via Wolkonski, turns the corner, and reaches the infamous street.

On via Tasso the Jews found themselves before a certain Captain Schultz,¹⁰ certainly one far more cruel than the Schultz of our old Latin grammars. The man was assisted by a goldsmith and a weigher, both German. The gold had been packed into ten of those cardboard containers, the size of large file boxes used in offices to store correspon-

*7. Still the address of Jewish community offices.

*8. German Embassy.

*9. Gestapo Headquarters.

*10. Schutz in the Jewish community's report and others.

OCTOBER 16, 1943

dence. To repeat, there were ten—and each contained five kilograms of metal. To weigh and examine them must have been the easiest thing in the world to do.

But 8 P.M. came and went and neither the presidents nor the goldsmiths had yet returned to their residences. The tick-tock of the clocks in the silence of those homes were to their families like the gnawing of anxiety, measuring out minute by minute ever more grievous conjectures. An absurd trilling of the telephone. But the men weren't calling. Their friends were, those who had worked most assiduously with them to collect the gold, and who now hung up their phones with words meant to sound confident, and yet sounded mournful.

Finally the four men returned, filled with that mixture of relief and exhaustion that completely takes over one's being after an enormous strain. The feeling was a little like that of someone who returns from having accompanied a loved one to the cemetery along a long road in inclement weather, when one was already exhausted by bedside vigils and anxiety. You eat something, throw yourself in bed, try not to think of it any more.

What had happened? They themselves didn't understand it clearly. At the end of a first inspection, the German, in a tone that allowed no challenge, had claimed that there were only nine boxes. How could anyone think that the Jews would have tried to cheat the Reich? There's always enough iron to retemper Brennus's sword.¹¹ Long,

*11. After a seven-month siege of Rome in 391 B.C., Brennus, chief of the invading Celts, demanded 1,000 pounds of gold to

quibbling, and dramatic discussions followed. Captain Schultz refused any recounting. Until finally, the counting and weighing were repeated, almost arrogantly, and there were undeniably ten boxes of correct weight, with even a few grams in excess. Nevertheless, Captain Schultz had refused to give them a receipt.

Why? It was thought that the Germans did not want to leave behind any documentation of the outrage. But they have left and will leave plenty of other kinds of documentation; in pits, in places of slaughter, in establishments blown up by mines, in their plundering. With their every step they've left them and are leaving them, and they are such that they are etched into Europe's surface and will remain so for decades to come. Oh, perhaps no one would dare put a *personal* signature under such a document? The Moscow Accords on the responsibilities and the punishments of war crimes would not be stipulated until long afterwards, but to the criminal mind there's always a sense of the inevitability of punishment. More probably, the explanation of the refusal can be sought in the events that followed, considering the likelihood that to the Germans, creators of paper-scraping notions, any receipt or contract would constitute a bond or obligation.

Did Captain Schultz know by then what preparations were being made for the following day? There's no doubt that Major Kappler of the SS knew of them, because it was

leave the city in peace. The money was raised with difficulty, and at the weighing the Romans accused the Celts of using false weights, whereupon Brennus threw his own sword onto the scales, calling out, "*Vae victus*," Woe to the defeated.

an SS squad which appeared at the community offices the following morning, the 29th of September, and carted off archives, documents, registers, everything they could find, including of course, the two million in cash left over from the collection of the gold. Except for that, their visit wasn't very profitable. The Temple's furnishings and its most precious objects had already been removed to safety. Which was, we believe, one of the very few precautions taken by the Jews.

It would be interesting to know more about the strange figure who appears at the offices of the Jewish community on October 11. He too is escorted by SS troops and appears to be just another German officer, but with an extra dose of arrogance that comes from having a privileged and, regrettably, well-known "specialty." Like the others, from head to toe he is all uniform—that close-fitting fastidiously elegant, abstract, and implacable uniform which, airtight as a zipper, locks in the wearer's body and, above all, his mind. It is the word *verboden* translated into uniform; access forbidden to the man and to the personal experiences he has lived through, to his past, and truest *uniqueness* as a human being on this earth; access forbidden to the sight of anything but his *present*, stern, programmed, unyielding.

While his men commence ransacking the libraries of the rabbinical college and the Jewish community, the officer, with hands as cautious and sensitive as those of the finest needlewoman, skims, touches, caresses papyri and incunabula, leafs through manuscripts and rare editions, peruses parchments and palimpsests. The varying degrees of caution in his touch, the heedfulness of his gestures, are

quickly adapted to the importance of each work. Those texts were, for the most part, written in exotic alphabets. But when the officer opens to a page, as happens to certain particularly gifted readers, who can instantly find desired and meaningful passages, his gaze is riveted, his eyes become bright. In those aristocratic hands, the books, as though subjected to the cruel and bloodless torture of an exquisite sadism, revealed everything. Later, it became known that the SS officer was a distinguished scholar of paleography and Semitic philology.

The library of the rabbinical college of Rome and, even more so, the Jewish community library contained extraordinary collections and rare editions, some of them unique. Neither a complete study of the library's holdings nor a catalogue had yet been prepared. Perhaps they would have revealed other treasures. What we do know is that there were a great many documents and chronicles in manuscript and print, dealing with the diaspora of the Mediterranean basin, as well as primary sources relating to the entire history and origins of the Roman Jews, the closest and most direct descendants of ancient Judaism. Fresh descriptions, unknown views of Caesar's Rome, of its emperors and popes were hiding in those writings. And generations who indeed seem to have passed on this earth like autumn leaves lay waiting deep in those pages for someone to bid them to speak.

A quick jerk of the zipper and the uniform has closed off the scholar of Semitic philology, who once more has become an SS officer. He issues an order. Anyone who touches, hides, or removes so much as a single volume will be shot in accordance with German military

law.¹² He leaves. His heels click down the stairs. Shortly thereafter, three large freight cars arrive on the tracks of the Black Tram line. The SS load the two libraries onto them. The cars leave. Books, manuscripts, codices, parchments are on their way to Munich.

Who knows if it will be these very same freight cars which will shortly be called upon to carry another, a very different, living, cargo to Germany? There was time enough to get there and back—five days. And again, we ask ourselves this one last time, as if the question could still sound the alarm to those it concerns—with such persistent provocations, why not think of fleeing to safety? Well, the theft of the books wasn't a provocation to the ghetto Jews, who knew little about books. On the other hand, it was precisely they, those of the *Piazza Giudia*, who should have been most alert to the menace, as they were destined to become the prime booty of the roundup. But would they have even heeded an alarm? They were phlegmatic and attached to their immediate surroundings. The wandering Jew is tired by now, he has walked too much and can't go on. The exertion of the many exiles, flights, and deportations, of the many roads traversed by ancestors for century after century, has resulted in damage to the sons' muscles. Their legs refuse to keep on dragging their flat feet. And

12. Naturally, the community representatives sent an appeal to the Ministry of the Interior and another to the Ministry of National Culture, both of which met the same fate as the appeal sent to the police several days earlier.

then there was, without a doubt, there was a fifth column, whose goal it was to “disseminate reassurance.” For example, several Jews had been arrested on October 8. Many others became frightened that this might have been the beginning of individual persecutions. Immediately, in reply, the reassuring news was circulated (and responsible members of the community doubtlessly with good intentions, helped circulate it) that those who’d been arrested were exceptional cases, people previously known for their anti-Fascist activities. They had been targeted not for their race, but for their actions. The Germans continued to behave discreetly, almost humanely. With their overwhelming power, with their absolute authority, *they could have done many worse things*. And instead . . . No, there was no special reason not to trust them, or to take the worst possible view of things.

So the Jews were sleeping in their beds around midnight on Friday, October 15, when the streets began resounding with gunfire and explosions. Beginning on July 25, when Badoglio had instituted the curfew, and more frequently after September 8, almost every night they’d hear shots in the streets and tell themselves it was aimed at people out past the curfew without permits. But those shots were generally discreet, like a clock striking the hour; rarely were they heard so close by and never so persistently. These, on the other hand, intensify, sound ever closer together, overlap, and become a veritable barrage. And would that they were only shots, but a more ominous sound is mixed among them. Explosions that start out crisply then spread almost in waves, and flare deep craters in the dark-

ness. *Baruch dajan emed*.¹³ It sounds like the middle of a battle. There are some who wake and sit up in bed. But there’s no one who still remembers the warning they’d received at nightfall in the piazza in Trastevere.

The courageous go to their windows. Bullets and shards whistle and whine a few inches from their shutters and penetrate the ancient plaster facades. Through the shutters, through the clammy drizzle, between flashes of gunfire and the glare of explosives, they see squads of soldiers in the street shooting into the air and throwing grenades at the sidewalks. By their helmets they would guess they’re Germans, but they’d only taken a brief glimpse. It’s not safe to stay at the window. Now the *jobetin*¹⁴ have begun screaming and yelling as well—shattering, furious, taunting incomprehensible words and shouts. What do they want? Who are they after? Where are they going?

In the houses, everyone is out of bed by now. Neighbors gather to try to keep their spirits up but only succeed in frightening each other. Children scream. What can you say to silence children when you don’t know what to say to yourself? Be good now. They’re on their way to Monte Savello. To Piazza Cairoli. You’ll see, it’ll be over in a few minutes. But it isn’t over at all. They seem to be going away, but then here they are again, and all the while the

13. Blessed be the Judge of Truth. (*Transliterated into English, the phrase would read *Baruch dayan emet*. It is generally translated as Blessed be the one true Judge—and is associated with facing death.)

14. Soldiers.

OCTOBER 16, 1943

shooting has never stopped. If only they did something, smashed through a door, a gate, or into a store—at least you'd understand why. But no, all they do is shoot and shout. It's like a toothache—there's no knowing how long it will last, how much worse it can get. This not understanding is the worst of their anxieties. A woman who gave birth a few hours earlier can no longer stand the strain, and leaping from her bed, grabs her newborn and rushes into a neighbor's dining room, where she faints. Women revive her: cognac, hot-water bottles—this at least is part of everyday life, of misfortunes they can alleviate. But down in the street, the shooting and shouting has been going on—two hours, three hours, more than three hours.

Every year at the Passover meal—*let whoever is hungry come and eat*—one sets aside half a piece of matzoh. A belief, handed down from who knows what ancient times, perhaps from when the Jews were still farmers, has it that a piece of that unleavened bread, thrown from the window, will calm hurricanes, tempests, and hailstorms which destroy crops, ruin grapevines and olives, and threaten famine, perhaps death. Who knows whether it occurred to anyone that night to take the matzoh left over from the previous Passover—the last time they had commemorated the flight from Egypt and liberation from the Pharaohs—and of throwing it into that inferno in the streets. The grain had been harvested, the vines gleaned, but there was another crop that needed to be saved, the progeny of Israel, which the Patriarchs had been promised would be as numerous as sands of the sea. Yet had the harmless matzoh fallen from a window, the Germans would have aimed their rifles and machine guns, hurled their grenades at that window.

OCTOBER 16, 1943

Only they knew the reason for that hell. And perhaps the real reason was precisely that there was no reason—a gratuitous hell, so that it would be more mysterious and therefore more frightening. At the time people assumed it was meant to be insulting, a spiteful anti-Semitic act. Later, with logic and hindsight, it was thought that the Germans deliberately frightened the Ghetto residents—compelled them to shut themselves in their homes, so that in case something of the next day's plans had leaked out they could still all be taken.

Toward four o'clock in the morning the shooting subsided. It was cold, the dampness of the rainy night penetrated the walls. Having been roused in the middle of the night, everyone was in nightclothes and slippers, with only a shawl or coat over their shoulders. Perhaps their empty beds would still have a little warmth. Tired, with that sense of hollowness and dryness that strong emotion leaves behind the eye sockets, with aching bones and chattering teeth, people returned to their own homes and their beds. In two hours it would be daylight—they would finally know something. But then again, when you really think about it, "*nothing had happened.*"

It appears that a woman named Letizia, known to the neighborhood as Goggle-eyed Letizia, sounded the first alarm. She's a large, elderly, fleshy-featured spinster with staring eyes and thick protruding lips that set a rigid, meaningless grin on her face. The voice she emits is distracted, irritated, and detached from her words. Toward 5 A.M. she was heard shouting, "Oh God, *i mammoni.*"

Mammoni in Roman Jewish slang means cops, guards, police. In fact, it was the Germans, who, with the heavy, cadenced steps (we know people for whom that step has

remained the symbol, the terrifying audio equivalent, of the German horrors) had begun to barricade streets and houses of the Ghetto. The owner of a small café near the Portico di Ottavia—a non-Jew, who, from the favorable position of his shop was able to witness events as they unfolded around him—had just arrived there from his home in Testaccio. Passing through Monte Sabello and the Portico, he hadn't noticed anything out of the ordinary. (Would there have been time to save oneself after the gunfire in the streets? Or was the quarter already surrounded?) He says that he himself first heard the rhythmic steps toward 5:30 (it hasn't been possible to get the witnesses to agree on the exact time: that disastrous moment must have been dreadfully elastic, subject only to psychological measure). He hadn't yet opened his shop. He was just pressurizing the espresso machine. He opened a shutter partway and watched.

He watched two columns of German soldiers coming along the sidewalks. He figured there were about a hundred of them. Officers standing in the middle of the street were stationing armed guards at every intersection. A few passersby stopped to watch. The Germans paid them no heed. It was only much later that they seized anyone carrying packages or suitcases, indications of attempted flight.

We will return to the story of the Ghetto because it was at the epicenter of the roundup. But there were other places in the city where the work had been begun several hours earlier. There's the fact, for example, that Sternberg Monteldi, a lawyer from Trieste, had been arrested at 11 o'clock the night before at the Hotel Vittoria where he

and his wife were staying. This is the point at which the questions about the criteria and the procedures that governed the roundup come to the fore. The lawyer and his wife had Swiss passports, therefore their names did not appear on any register of the Roman population. They had not filled out any racial declarations, therefore were not considered Jews. How did their names get to the SS? As to the procedures employed, it is known that in this case the arrest was made in the harshest way. The couple was forced to get dressed in the presence of the soldiers, who kept their guns trained on them.

This premature beginning could have severely jeopardized the Germans' plans. It would have been enough had the news spread, as it did the following morning the instant the roundup began in earnest, racing through the entire city so that friends and even police officers were able to warn people, at least those they could reach by telephone.

Had such an alarm come the previous evening, it would have emptied at least half the Jewish households. Instead, although the Sternbergs' arrest took place in a hotel, it remained unknown. The gossip of the domestic staff and the night clerk was not sufficient for it to leak out. As far as is known, not even the police department got wind of it. So the next morning the Germans found it possible to do their work methodically, according to plan and with the fullest measure of success.

Now we enter a house on via S. Ambrogio in the Ghetto. We'll be able to watch the entire raid from here. Toward 5 A.M. (a psychologically meaningful time, we repeat) Signora Laurina S. hears herself called from the street.

It's her niece shouting, "Auntie, auntie, come down! The Germans are taking everyone away."

A few minutes before, on leaving her house on via della Reginella, this girl had seen an entire family with six children, the oldest of which was ten, being taken away. Signora S. looks out the window. She sees two Germans, one on each side of the doorway, armed with rifles or machine guns (she can't tell which). Here, one wonders how the niece could have shouted such explicit words in the presence of the Germans. The street was extremely narrow, just an alley. And we must explain again that for the most part the Germans did not round up people on the street. Out of doors they took only those poor souls who took no precautions to keep from being taken. Nor is it necessary to think that the tragedy was enacted in an atmosphere of muted and astonished solemnity. People went on talking among themselves, shouting out news, suggestions, as they do in ordinary life. Destiny performed its serious work without troubling itself with ceremony, without concern for the trivia of style. Tragedy entered the stream of life and blended into it with such terrifying naturalness that from the first there was no room for anything, not even astonishment.

At first Signora S. assumed, as everyone else did, that the Germans had come to take the men for "labor duty." This idea, probably deliberately disseminated, was the ruination of many families, who never thought of sheltering old people, women, and children. Therefore, presuming the immunity of women, Signora S. plucks up her courage, dresses as best she can, takes her ration cards and shopping bag, then goes downstairs to try to find out what's

going on. A few days earlier she had fallen and is now dragging one leg in a cast.

When she gets outside, she approaches the German sentries and offers them cigarettes, which they accept. One of them could be about twenty-five years old, the other seems to be about forty. Just as in all books like *My Prisons*¹⁵ there's almost always a good jailer, so in this raid there will be kindhearted SS men. These two, for example. The tale that formed about them subsequently in the Ghetto has it that they were Austrian.

"Taking away all the Jews," the older of the two answers the woman. She slaps her hand against her plaster cast.

"But I have a broken leg—going with my family—hospital."

"Ja, ja," the Austrian nods and gestures with his hand that she can slip away. But while she waits for her family, Signora S. decides to take advantage of her friendship with the two soldiers and save some neighbors. Now it is she who calls up from the street.

"Sterina, Sterina."

"What's the matter?" the woman answers from her window.

"Get out. They're taking everyone."

"In a minute. I'll dress the baby and be right down."

Unfortunately dressing the baby was fatal. Signora Sterina, her baby, and entire family were taken.

*15. *Le mie prigioni* is a 19th-century memoir by the Italian, Silvio Pellico, of his years in an Austrian prison. It is known for its remarkably gentle tone.

Lamentations and shouts sound from via Portico di Ottavia. Signora S. peers around the corner of via Sant' Ambrogio and the Portico. It's really true that they are taking everyone, every single one, worse than anyone could have imagined. The captured families are straggling single-file down the middle of the street. SS troopers at the head and the tail of each little band are guarding them, keeping them more or less in line, prodding them on with the butts of their machine guns although no one is resisting with anything more than tears, moans, cries for mercy, confused questions. More than even suffering, the faces and bearings of these Jews are already marked with resignation. It's as if that heinous, unexpected, sudden roundup no longer astonishes them. Something in them recalls their unknown forefathers, who had walked at the same pace, driven on by oppressors like these, toward deportation, slavery, torture, and the stake. The mothers, or sometimes fathers, are carrying the smallest children in their arms, holding the older ones by the hand. The children search their parents' eyes for reassurance, comfort the latter can no longer give, and this is even more devastating than having to say, "there isn't any" to a child asking for bread. On the other hand, it is just a question of time. If they aren't killed first, they'll come to that moment too. Some of them kiss their children, a kiss that they try to hide from the Germans, a last kiss surrounded by the streets, the houses, the sites that witnessed their birth, and the first smiles of their lives. And there are fathers who keep their hands on their child's head in the very same manner with which, on holy days, they had bestowed the *Birchad Cho-*

*anim.*¹⁶ "May the Lord bless you and keep you . . ."—the blessing that invokes and promises peace to the children of Israel.

Signora S. also saw old Aunt Chele, who's about eighty years old and half out of her mind, in the line. She was swept along among the others, almost skipping a little, without understanding what was happening to her, and was responding to the stares of people around her with greetings and inane, even fatuous smiles. But she jumped with fright and began murmuring fragments of prayers when the Germans began shouting again. They were shouting for no good reason, probably only to maintain an air of terror and a sense of their authority, so that they wouldn't run into any snags and would get the whole thing done quickly. Another old woman, eighty-five years old, deaf and sick goes by. A paralytic carried aloft in his chair goes by. A woman with a nursing child in her arms opens her blouse and takes out a breast and presses it to demonstrate to a soldier that there is no longer any milk for her child. But he pokes his machine gun into her side to get her to walk. Another woman seizes the hand of a German and kisses it, weeping, to soften his heart, to ask him for who knows what trivial favor, perhaps only because she is grateful, from the depths of her humiliation, that he hasn't treated her worse. A blow and a shout are her answer. At the sides of the street, stunned passersby, unable to help, stand rigidly and watch. Eventually, the Germans no longer want to have these spectators around and menacingly order them to get moving.

16. Priestly blessing.

OCTOBER 16, 1943

A young man leaves the line—he has obtained permission to get some coffee under the surveillance of an SS man, who, however, will not agree “to keep him company.” He sips it noisily, the small cup trembles in his hands and his legs wobble. He turns his dazed eyes toward the small tables where he used to sit and play cards on evenings that still had a tomorrow. With a kind of embarrassed, weary smile, he asks the café owner, “What are they going to do with us?”

These poor pathetic words are among the few left to us by those in the process of departing. In them we hear the voice of a human being restored for a moment to life, living with us, when he is no longer a part of our lives and has already entered into that new, terrible, dark, existence. And they tell us as well what was going through the minds of those poor, unfortunate souls in the first moments—the hopeless hope that they had misunderstood what was happening to them.

The lines were being directed toward the ugly little Museum of Antiquity and Fine Arts, which rises at the summit of Portico di Ottavia in front of via Catalan, between the church of Sant’ Angelo and the Teatro di Marcello. At the foot of the museum building, there’s a small excavated area, several meters below street level, that’s cluttered with ruins. The Jews were gathered together in this pit and arranged in lines to await the return of three or four trucks, which were shuttling back and forth between the Ghetto and the site that had been set up as the first staging area. These trucks were covered by tarpaulins (it was still drizzling). The tarpaulins were dark, some say they were ac-

OCTOBER 16, 1943

tually black—these same people say the trucks were black as well. It’s more likely that all that blackness was perceived by distraught, sorrow-filled eyes. In reality the trucks must have been painted in the murky, depressing enough mud-and-lead color, which is the standard finish of German military vehicles. Nazis love creating productions, theatricality, dark, dread-filled Nibelungian solemnity. But here the production was in the circumstances themselves. And unnecessary too, because everything unfolded with extreme ease, without their having to induce success with any particular staging or special effects.

The trucks’ right sideboards were lowered and the loading began. The sick, the disabled, and balky were urged on by insults, shouts, shoves, and blows from gun stocks. The paralyzed man in his chair was literally flung into the truck like a discarded piece of furniture onto a moving van. As to children snatched from their mothers’ arms, they were subject to the treatment packages undergo when postal workers load their vans. And the trucks would leave again, no one knew for where, but the regularity of the return of the same ones led to the belief that they weren’t going too far away. And perhaps this might have sparked some hope among the victims. They’re not sending us out of Rome. They’re keeping us here to work.

We resume following Signora S. Her tale, doubtlessly repeated many times in the past few months, will certainly have been somewhat reconstructed—in the order of facts and sequence of events, which perhaps they did not have in real life. But the people she refers to—those it’s been

OCTOBER 16, 1943

possible to question—confirm the truth of the events and the precision of the details.

Having arrived with her family at Largo Argentina, that is, having by now crossed the Red Sea, Signora S. hears about a relative who, for fear of those guards posted at the door, had remained upstairs. (A frequent and unfortunate situation; because of that fear, many were unwilling to leave their apartments and thus were captured there.) In spite of her family's protests, Signora S. decides to go back and rescue the relative if she can get there in time. This might seem an excess of bravado, too much of a good thing. Nevertheless there are people whom extreme circumstances endow with exuberant vitality which in turn creates a belief in their own invulnerability. It's the same with those nurses who make their rounds during epidemics with a carefree, almost irritating, disdain for prophylaxis, and nevertheless are precisely the ones who get away with it, as if disease had no power over them.

The two "Austrians" are still at the door. Just a glance is enough to reassure the signora that their tacit pact is still in effect. She calls up to the relative from the stairwell.

"*Rescind*,¹⁷ Enrico."

But just at that moment seven German soldiers arrive. They've heard her call and no matter that they didn't understand it, their leader decides to give Signora S. a slap that sends her sprawling across the doorway. Then, with incomprehensible German words, and too easily understood threats with the butt of his machine gun, he prods

17. "Get away."

OCTOBER 16, 1943

her to get up unaided. Two soldiers place themselves in front of her, three behind her, and force her up the stairs. On the landing, the doors of three apartments are bolted shut (one is the now-deserted S. family apartment).

The dramatic intensity and complexity of the actions that are about to take place on this landing might cause one to visualize an appropriate, one might even say an Aeschylean, setting. But that would not accord with reality. This is a tiny area, not even two square meters, which interrupts a spiral staircase made up of filthy stone steps encrusted with old refuse, set between two oppressive walls. This is a hovel—even if we didn't know it was destined to suffering, and how much suffering it underwent!—in which poverty and misery have a hostile, almost sinister desolation. Every one of life's odors has permeated its walls, wood and iron, even, one might almost say, the panes of its tiny windows. Such, or very like it, were the buildings which housed the majority of the most terrible enemies of the Great German Reich.

The Germans consulted a typed list. Unfortunately, two of the doors bore the silly affectation of a nameplate on the knocker. And the names corresponded to those on the list. The Germans knocked on them, then, not receiving any response, broke the doors down.

Behind them, stony and stiff as if posing for the most frighteningly surrealistic of family portraits, their residents stood in terrified attention—their eyes as though hypnotized and their hearts in their mouths. The alarm had been sounded almost an hour before, but in their agitation of conferring about fleeing, salvaging a few possessions, in the tumult of ineffective and contradictory decisions, almost

none of them had found time to get dressed. Most were still in nightclothes or, at best, had put on an old coat or a threadbare jacket.

The squad leader goes up to them. He has a kind of typewritten card in his hand from which he reads in German. All they understand is his peremptory, menacing tone. The women and children burst into tears. Signora S. has had time to notice that her name is not on the list. This gives her courage. As if to avenge herself for the slap, she snatches the card from the German's hands. The text is bilingual. And it is she who reads it in a loud voice to her neighbors.

1. You, your family, and other Jews in your household are being moved.
2. You must take with you:
 - a) food for at least eight days
 - b) ration cards
 - c) identification cards
 - d) drinking glasses.
3. You may take with you:
 - a) a small suitcase with personal effects and belongings, linen, blankets, etc.
 - b) money and jewelry.
4. Lock your apartment up—also the house. Take along the key.
5. The sick, even those gravely ill, cannot under any circumstances remain behind. There are hospitals in the camp.
6. Your family must be ready to leave twenty minutes after receipt of this card.

Twenty minutes; no time even to complain. Much less time enough to get things together. The good glasses—it'll be better to leave them at home. And suitcases, where are we going to get one for everybody? The children will need one for themselves. Never mind that. Just be sure the Germans don't see where the *manhòd*¹⁸ is hidden. There's no jewelry around any more. It's all with a *nharel*.¹⁹ The crucial words have to be spoken in Hebrew of the only kind they know, in that jargon that sounds like thieves' slang, and has always created the suspicion that Jews were involved in a conspiracy. But how else to talk with those two soldiers in the house watching their preparations? The children cling to their mothers' skirts but are not allowed to hold on. Some of them get slapped across the face. Jews are quick to use their hands in dealing with their children.

The soldiers still out on the landing approach Signora S. and ask her if she is related to those families. No, she is not related. If she is a *Juda*. No, she isn't a *Juda*. Give them proof. The Signora takes out her key, opens her apartment door to show that is her home, that she doesn't live with the others, that she has nothing in common with them. They force her into the apartment and order her to shut the door. The twenty minutes allowed to her neighbors have almost expired. As the Germans hurry them on, the cries and pleas start again. In the confusion of making their preparations they've almost forgotten that these are preparations for being taken from their homes. Signora S. can no longer stand it. She goes out onto the landing. The

18. Money.

19. Catholic.

OCTOBER 16, 1943

Germans are about to shove her back in, but she turns and points to her leg in the cast. She has to go to the hospital. One of them indicates that she is free, that she'd better get out of there quickly.

Just at that moment, seeing her start down the staircase, four children rush from the two apartments and clutch her arms and her dress. "Help us, Laurina! Laurina, save us." One of the four is the then little twelve-year-old Esther P. She explains that she came to sleep over at her aunt's that night because very early this morning she had to get on the ration line for vegetables and she'd been afraid of going out alone in the dark. The moment she and her aunt were out in the street, they saw Germans stationed at every street corner. Immediately they went back home. Auntie thought (and so did she) that the Germans had come to take the men, and Auntie wanted to give her husband some money so that he could escape. Had they continued going down the street, at least the two of them would have been saved. Instead they were trapped because shortly thereafter the seven Germans had come up. When she realized that she too was being taken away, the child's biggest fear was that her father would be furious at her for not coming right home. Even Auntie, rushing between the wardrobe and the chest of drawers, packing things, was telling her, "Get out of here, go back home or your father will give me what-for later."

This idea of a scolding and even more of a "later" tells us many things. They went on thinking of an "afterwards" as though their earlier lives would continue on as before. (And yet the card had put it clearly.) Without a doubt there were people who were more aware, who immediately understood what was happening. But to most of those who

OCTOBER 16, 1943

lived around the Piazza Giudia, it was as if they had taken a relative to a doctor who makes a diagnosis that leaves no hope. For a while they repeat the name of the illness, they make observations about it, almost getting to feel familiar with it, as if it were the name of one of the many illnesses that they already know, that have already passed through the household. Only much later, do they understand what the name implies, what the name holds for them.

Signora S. clasped the children to her, said that they were hers. The Germans didn't challenge her. As soon as she and the children were far enough down the street, the children slipped away from her. Signora S. took a few more steps and then fainted. Some "Aryans" came to her rescue and carried her to the café at Ponte Garibaldi.

It may seem strange that this woman who thrust herself so fearlessly into the heart of that roundup, almost without missing any opportunity to jeopardize her own safety, wasn't recognized to be Jewish and taken away herself. Just as it also seems strange that the Germans had so readily conceded the four children to her. It's already been said that above all they operated on the basis of their lists. And some may be tempted to add that Germans usually lack intelligence and imagination. They follow orders without any input of their own.

To which, however, one could reply that, on the other hand, cruelty is always shrewd in its way, or at least mistrustful and alert. All things considered, the impression remains that the SS, already inured to this type of operation, had acted that morning with a kind of professional rigor, with a consciousness of their trade, rather than from the stimulus of specific fury. The brutality that they demonstrated, one could say, was part of their technique and only

exceptionally became an act of individual sadism. Driven by motor power, the fly wheel, which is itself forced by the workings of the gears, expends all its energy in crushing the unlucky creature caught in it, but will not shift even a millimeter to find itself a victim. For that reason, the roundup that morning did not, generally speaking, turn into a hunt for Jews. For example, the famous weekly distributions of cigarettes were, for once, really providential. Many men escaped because they were on line at the tobacconists, and not one German soldier bothered to go looking for them there. Fate was holding some of them aside for the Ardeatine Caves. (Many were rounded up or captured later, mostly after February 1944, by the same Germans, or still later by the Fascists. Most of them ended up in northern Italian concentration camps—Modena and Verona—until later in April when they were deported to Germany.) In essence, the SS acted primarily *as if* their responsibility was to furnish their superiors a certain—and without doubt—a very considerable number of Jews. And seeing that goal was easy to reach, they didn't trouble themselves to put too fine a point on it, or to get overzealous in the attempt.

But there are examples to the contrary, which demonstrate that the presumed rule was subject to so many exceptions that it ended up deceiving anyone who believed it, becoming a trap for those who relied on it. Our mistake is to want to find a rule in the most terrifying arbitrariness. A certain woman named N. had taken refuge in the café. Suddenly she heard louder and more excited voices approaching in the street. A young man, who later described himself as an Italian journalist, was arguing in German with an SS man to try to get a pregnant woman

off the line already headed toward a truck. Signora N. recognizes the woman as her own sister, whose fate she hadn't known. She can't hide a gesture of shocked sorrow. A German notices it, infers the relationship, rushes at N. and takes her away with the little daughter standing at her side. Another woman thought of herself as saved; her husband, who had been poorly hidden in a water tank, had been taken. She and her four children, two of whom are sick with diphtheria and have a high fever, had fled and were already at the Ponte Garibaldi. She sees a truck laden with relatives pass and emits a shout. The Germans fly at her, seize her and her children. An "Aryan" intervenes and manages to save one of the little girls protesting that she is his. But the child starts crying that she wants to be with mamma and she too is taken.

We've spoken many times about the infamous lists. Even these were more arbitrary than one can imagine, with equally inexplicable inclusions and omissions. How they were compiled, and on what basis, no one has yet managed to understand. However, in the meantime, we can exclude the possibility that the names were taken from documents stolen from the community's records. Those were lists of contributors, while the German's list was made up mostly of families who had never made any contributions. Others say that the local Fascist groups had complete lists of "citizens of the Jewish race" living within the jurisdiction of the group. But these agencies had been subject to attacks by anti-Fascists after the 25th of July. Moreover, the omissions and additions on the German lists raise a doubt that those could have been the source. The same for police precincts, also possessed of information of that nature,

which during the Fascist days were useful for the petty harassment of Jews (calling them to *audiendum verbum*,²⁰ searching for hidden radios, visiting to check on whether they had Aryan servants, and so on). Or perhaps the Germans had recourse to the Directory of Demography and Race at the Ministry of the Interior? But then one wonders, why, after July 25, with the racial campaign over, the ministry didn't think of disposing of those now superfluous registries and files. And if not after July 25, why not, at least after September 8, as other ministries did with other documents?

In September, the negligence of July becomes criminal responsibility. In the days before the roundup, the Germans had spent long hours at the offices of the rationing board, rummaging through files and making notes, on the pretext of an impending distribution of new food cards. Could the lists have come from there? But no one ever noticed any indication of race on a ration card, and the Germans would therefore have had to make a set of long and difficult comparisons with their own manuals of Jewish surnames. The writer of this account spent the morning of October 16 in the house of a neighbor. This woman let it slip that she had anticipated the roundup. Actually, an acquaintance of hers, employed at the Registry Office, had confided to her a few days earlier, that they were being worked to death preparing certain lists of Jews for the Germans. On returning to Rome the following July, we tried to reopen the discussion with her, but it was completely

*20. "Literally, "The word must be listened to." The term derives from the era when Jews were forced to listen to sermons in church. Here they were Fascist "sermons."

hopeless. The woman was utterly nonplussed, had no memory of having known anything, much less having said anything of the sort.

The weather, which had remained rainy and dark all morning, cleared briefly at about 11 A.M. A little sunshine glowed on the paving stones of the Portico di Ottavia, along which those poor feet had been dragging for hours, those so often derided flat feet, so tired and painful before beginning their journey. On by now distant Sabbaths, that ray of sunlight would pierce the windows of the synagogue and gild the organ pipes, which would reply to it in their most golden register. And that ray of light would pour down on the faithful in a harmony of jubilation, in a glow of holy joy. The children would sing, "*Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of hosts. All the earth is filled with His glory.*" Now, from the depths of the pit in which they stand awaiting deportation, these children raise only laments, laments not joined in chorus, which do not rise toward heaven like the smoke of sacrifice; and which heaven, dark and low once again, seems to reject and send falling back upon their shoulders. How many years will still have to pass before that lament becomes the canticle of children in the fiery furnace? Before the Lord of Hosts hears them, once again rapt in the celebration of His glory?

The roundup lasted until about 1 P.M. When it was over, there wasn't a soul to be seen on the streets of the Ghetto, the desolation of Jeremiah's Jerusalem was upon it, *quomodo sedet sola civitas*.²¹ All of Rome was stunned. In

21. "How doth the city sit solitary (that was full of people)" is the first line of the Lamentations of Jeremiah. The Latin phrase also begins chapter 28 of Dante's *Vita Nuova*.

OCTOBER 16, 1943

other neighborhoods the raids had followed the same pattern as in the Ghetto, but of course, their yields were mere trickles. The city had been divided into several sectors, with a truck assigned to each of them, which proceeded down the streets stopping at the front doors noted on the list. Early in the morning, when they found the doors still closed, the SS had the Italian police open them. Usually a noncommissioned officer would remain in the truck, while two enlisted men would go up to the apartments. If the apartment seemed middle-class or comfortable, the first thing the soldiers did was to find the telephone and pull out the wires. There's a story that in Prati, a worker, having noticed the momentary distraction of a soldier left on guard, jumped into the truck and sped off with its cargo, all of whom unexpectedly found themselves free. (However, I, personally, was never able to find any of these miraculous escapees.)

The SS who performed this roundup belonged to a special unit which, unknown to all the other German troops stationed in Rome, had arrived from the North the previous evening. They didn't know their way around the city and hadn't had time to reconnoiter the parts of it in which they were to work, so that, in fact, one of the units ordered to the Ghetto stopped on the via del Mare to wait for passersby, rare at that time of the morning, who could tell them where they could find via della Raganella (they meant della Reginella).

It was irresistible to some of the young soldiers finding themselves with a motor vehicle at their disposal, even if it was full of rounded-up Jews, to take a tour of the city. So that before reaching the detention center, the poor souls

OCTOBER 16, 1943

standing inside the trucks had to suffer the most capricious peregrinations—always more uncertain of their destination, and at every new turn, at every new street that they traveled, assailed by various and always alarming conjectures. Naturally, the most popular goal of these tourists was St. Peter's Square, where several trucks stopped for long periods of time. While the Germans uttered the *Wunderbars* with which they would sprinkle the tales they intended to tell their Lili Marleens back home, from within the truck came shouts and invocations to the pope, asking that he intercede, that he come to their aid. Then the trucks were on their way again, and even that last hope was gone.

The Jews were gathered at the Military College. The trucks entered the grounds and drove to the furthest arcade. The unloading operations were carried out as summarily and roughly as the loading had been. The new arrivals were made to line up in groups of three at some distance from others like them, who were now under the surveillance of numerous German guards, armed to the teeth. Several Italian Fascist republicans were seen walking among the groups with the arrogant scowls of inspectors and smug festival-day airs.

Beginning at a certain time, the men and women were separated and led into the halls of the college. It was dark as the grave within because the blinds were hermetically sealed. As far off as the courtyard, where the most dreadful confusion reigned all day long, one could hear anxious screams mixed with mournful cries of suffering coming from those halls. Every once in a while a threatening shout

in Italian reestablished a momentary and almost more anguished silence. It didn't take long, as in all places so jam-packed with people, for the place to become contaminated with stagnant air, like the miasma which affects all prisons and places of deportation. Guards and overseers almost always impeded the way to the latrines. The goal of humiliating, demoralizing, reducing these people to human rags, without will, almost without self-respect, was quickly evident.

Perhaps the Germans weren't expecting such utter success. The abundance of material rounded up exceeded their expectations, at least to judge by the site in which they had chosen to gather it, which, it soon became clear, was inadequate. And it was necessary to leave a large number of people, who couldn't be accommodated in the halls, under the arcade. The sturdiest-looking men, those who might threaten an "uprising" were placed with their faces toward the wall, which is by now the classic position for humiliation and intimidation, created by the Nazis from their first persecution of the Jews. If some child tried to play, the guards ordered the mother to make it stop, with the usual threat of shooting. Straw mattresses were set out and the order given to lie down on them.

During the night two women went into labor. The Italian doctors discerned that both would be difficult births requiring medical assistance. For these women the clinic would have been a road to freedom. But the Germans would not permit moving them, and the two newborns opened their eyes in the shadows of the ill-omened courtyard. What names were given to these two first-borns into a new Babylonian slavery? (Moses named the son born to

him of Zipporah, while in servitude, Gershom, [wayfarer in a strange land], but the two born that night without a Moses were on their way to gas chambers.)

On the other hand, permission was obtained for a young boy who had a suppurating abscess to have it treated at the hospital. However, the Germans attended the surgical procedure, and as soon as it was over, took the boy back with them.

That's how Saturday night went by, then all day Sunday and Sunday night. The city and the Ghetto, in the meantime, had learned where the unfortunate souls had been taken. Relatives, passing themselves off as "Aryan" friends, came to the doors of the college, handed over food and notes for the prisoners, but never knew whether these comforts reached those for whom they were intended.

Toward dawn on Monday, the prisoners were boarded onto motor vans and taken to the Rome Tiburtino station, where they were loaded onto cattle cars, which remained on a dead-end siding the entire morning. Some twenty German armed guards prevented anyone from approaching the convoy.

At 1:30 P.M. the train was assigned to motorman Quirino Zazza. Almost immediately he realized that the cattle cars "contained"—so a relative of his put it—"many civilians mixed as to age and sex, who, he later realized, were of the Jewish race."

The train began moving at 2 P.M. A young woman, arriving from Milan to meet relatives in Rome, says that at Fara Sabina (but more likely at Orte) she passed the "sealed train" from which hellish cries were coming. There,

OCTOBER 16, 1943

through the grates of one of the cars, it seemed to her she recognized the face of a little girl related to her. She tried to call to the child, but another face came to the grating and signaled her to be quiet. This call to silence, to forgo any attempt to return them to human contact, is the last word, the last sign of life that we have from them.

Near Orte the train encountered a closed semaphore signal and had to stop for about ten minutes. "At the request of the confined passengers" (it is again the engineer who is speaking), several of the cars were opened, so "those who needed to take care of bodily functions could do so." There were several escape attempts, immediately terminated by ample gunfire.

At Chiusi, another short stop, to drop off the body of an old woman who had died during the trip. At Florence, Signor Zazzi left the train without having succeeded in speaking with anyone of those whom he had taken on the first step of the journey of deportation. With a change of service personnel, the train continued on to Bologna.

Neither the Vatican, nor the Red Cross, nor the Swiss, nor any other neutral state succeeded in obtaining information about the deportees. It is estimated that the number of those taken on October 16 alone was more than a thousand, but certainly the true figure must be higher, because many families were taken in their entirety, leaving no trace of themselves, nor any relatives or friends to report their disappearance.

Eight Jews

1. *The Corvette Claymore*

Rome, March 24, 1944. They are working on the so-called preliminary list for the Ardeatine Caves.¹ The Germans, on their own, had already taken ten hostages.

"I told Carretta to take ten names off. Eight Jewish names were at the very end of it. We figured they'd been added at the last minute in order to get the total to fifty. So Carretta took them off along with two others we chose at random."

These, according to newspaper accounts, were the words used by Raffaele Alianello, Commissioner for Public Security, expressly released from a concentration camp to testify as a witness before the High Court of Justice for the Punishment of Fascist Crimes in the Caruso trial. It is a well-known fact that policemen's

1. See Introduction, p. 10. (All notes are translator's.)