

Conscience 4

I understand very well, how Peter Zadek, driven out of Germany as a Jew, whose relatives were exterminated, later felt himself compelled to create such scandalous theatre, and then again, why the post-war Germans were such glad witnesses to these scandals.

Now Zadek has died. I didn't know him well, but am grieving, because I am left with memories of my earliest childhood that are connected to my father: Peter Ury and Peter Zadek were the closest of friends, as young men, as Jewish refugees, in London of the forties and fifties; Peter Zadek was born in 1926 in Berlin, which made him years younger than my father; his family emigrated to England in 1933.

My father composed and played music for Zadek's first theatre productions, in England. With his death a link to the past and to my father (who died in 1976) has finally been severed - in the truest sense, because I made a gift of these compositions to the City Archives in Cologne. They will probably never see the light of day again –5 months after the collapse of the Historical Archives, no one, at any rate, has yet informed me, as estate benefactor, what might already have been salvaged.

Zadek achieved his great success, not in England but in Germany – the contacts having been made for him by my grandfather Alfred and his brother Wilhelm Unger, whose personal effects were also, so to speak, "secured", in the City Archives. The Ungers were theatre people that Zadek mentions in his autobiography "My Way", several times, as does he my father:

"I became very close to him and everything that I know about music, I learnt from him. We drove down together to Cornwall once, rented a house with a piano and wrote an opera together. It is called *Hinzelmeier*, after the fairytale by Theodor Storm. Peter Ury set much of Erich Fried's poetry to music."¹

That was probably in 1956, and I travelled down to Cornwall as a toddler on holiday with them. We children (Ury and Zadek) spent daytime hours with our mothers, walking along and playing on the beach, while our fathers worked on the opera indoors. Later, I would lay myself down under the piano, while my father was playing, to listen to the sounds of the new compositions, with my whole body.

It was the story of Timothy, who fell in love with a rose maiden, but who, instead of devoting himself to this love, set off to journey throughout the world, in search of the stone of wisdom, only to discover, as an old man that love is the purest form of wisdom; when they finally meet again, at the end of the opera, Timothy and the rose maiden are too old to spend a life together in love and wisdom.

I can remember many passages of this opera that was never published, although arias from it had been recorded (with Pamela Bowden, Heather Harper and Wilfred Brown). I made a gift of these recordings to the Historical Archives, which are now probably destroyed and no copies of these exist. One of these arias was sung by the devil, who intended to blow the world up with a bomb, another was about a woman, who spent her days baking all day – scenically, pancakes were to be shot out of a chimney on stage,

¹ P.171, „My Way – an Autobiography“, Peter Zadek, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1998, ISBN 3-462-02753-0 (translation from German Tanya Ury).

and yet another was about Jasper, the black raven, Timothy's companion, as he travelled the world in search of wisdom. There was also the rose maiden's music. My father's style was late romantic.

Hinzelmeier was composed on, and for the piano – these compositions had not yet been orchestrated. Some years after my father's death, Zadek visited my mother in London, to ask her for permission to perform this music – he had financial support to stage the opera in Germany and would like to orchestrate the piano score. My mother Sylvia Ury and Peter Zadek were unfortunately unable to come to any agreement – and so this opportunity was missed.

Some 15 years later - in the year 2000 - I met up with Zadek in Stuttgart, the pretext being his theatre presentation of "Hamlet". I asked him about the possibility of at last staging the children's opera. I was absolutely prepared to come to an agreement with him, and would let him have the original score that was, at the time still intact and being stored in the Cologne City Archives. But the moment had passed – sponsors for this particular project had withdrawn their offer, according to Zadek

On the 29th July, I filmed the piece of land, in the middle of Cologne, commonly known as the "hole", where formerly, the City Archives stood. Ten per cent of all documents previously stored in the Archives are still buried under the earth there – all search and first aid actions having nearly been accomplished. In the meantime, efforts to deal with these damaged objects, which will take decades, if not longer, have been embarked upon.

As I made my way over the mounds of earth that bulldozers had covered parts of the "hole" with, I almost stumbled over a roll of black videotape that had been separated from its cassette, and was peeping out of the earth's top layer. The fire service people, who had been accompanying my cameraman and myself, took this up for safekeeping.

It was pure coincidence that we came upon this videotape, but it was in no good condition. I had to think of other objects important to me that might still be lying under the earth. My grandparents' yellow Stars of David, for instance (that they were forced to sew onto outer garments in Nazi Germany), or the letter, a last sign of his mother Fanny Hedwig's life that Peter Ury received from Auschwitz in 1944, in which she informed that she was well, and the original editions of my grandfather Alfred and his brother Wilhelm Unger's books, copies of which were destroyed in the book burning only to be forever lost in this black hole.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

16.8.2009 "Trapped" Cologne authors, priests and politicians on the collapse of the City Archives, 3 pm Basilika St. Severin, Im Ferkulum 29, 50678 Cologne (D): Tanya Ury: The souls of my dead relatives. The Loss of the Ury/Unter family estate. 4.30 pm Severingtorburg, Chlodwigplatz 2, 50677 Köln: Tanya Ury: reading from Alfred H. Unger's *The Story of the Great Nazarene* (1926) <http://www.koeln-journal.de/index/seite/Aktuelles/artikel/4630822/dokument/4630821/dateii/grossebenefizveranstaltungfuerhistorischesarchiv.html>