



Stalemate

Icchokas Meras, Jonas Zdanys (Translator)

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A classic of Holocaust literature from “one of the great masters of the short novel.”

—The New Yorker

In the Vilna Ghetto during World War II, Nazi Commandant Schoger demands that all children be sent to the death camp. When Abraham Lipman pleads with him to spare their lives, Schoger reconsiders, and tells Lipman there will be a chess match between himself and Lipman’s only surviving son, Isaac, a chess prodigy. If Isaac wins, the children will live, but Isaac will die. If Isaac loses, the children will die, but Isaac will live. Only a draw will save the ghetto from this terrible predicament.

The chess game begins: a nightmarish contest played over the course of several evenings, witnessed by an audience impotent to act, staking the lives of their children on a stalemate. This is a moving story of a father and a son who shame their cruel perpetrator with their dignity, spirit, and extraordinary courage. Stalemate speaks to the power of humor even under the direst circumstances. As a parable that gives voice to the unspeakable, Stalemate is an antidote to despair.

“Gripping . . . a truly memorable work.”

—Booklist

Stalemate Details

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Mazel says

Vilna. 1943 :

" Ecoute-moi, dit Schoger, le commandant allemand du ghetto, au jeune Isaac Lipman, joueur d'échecs prodige, écoute-moi bien. Nous allons jouer ensemble, toi et moi.

Si tu gagnes, les enfants ne seront pas déportés, mais je te tuerai.

Si tu perds, tu vivras, mais tous les enfants de moins de dix ans partiront pour les camps.

Si la partie est nulle, nous en resterons là. "

La partie va se jouer devant tout le ghetto réuni et silencieux.

Isaac a dix-sept ans. Il aime Esther, seize ans.

Certes, il va essayer de faire partie nulle. Mais il sait qu'au-delà du pouvoir sur les corps, ce que Schoger veut briser chez les autres c'est la liberté, le destin.

Réduits à jouer leur vie sur la carte forcée de cette cauchemardesque partie, les prisonniers, de jour en jour plus conscients des limites de leur esclavage, s'organisent...

Dans un style limpide et implacable doté d'une grande force poétique, Meras écrit une fable sur la façon dont l'homme essaie de préserver sa dignité.

Loin de se vouloir un témoignage ou un roman réaliste sur la Shoah, La partie n'est jamais nulle s'inscrit dans la grande tradition des contes juifs d'Europe centrale.

kamiileee says

"Lygiosios trunka akimirk?" - romanas, kuris taip skaudžiai ir sykiu subtiliai prabila apie holokausto problem?. Tai knyga, kuri parodo kok? košmar? išgynėvo pats rašytojas. Parodo ir tai, kad žydams tenka plaukti prieš srov?, kas dien? ir kas valand? turi kautis su nuovargiu, alkiu, šal?iu ir su j? nulenta inercija jie privalo atsilaikyti prieš priešus ir nesigail?ti varžov?, aštrinti prot?, tvirtinti kantryb?, stiprinti vali?. Mano nuomone, tai romanas, kuris išliks gyvas m?s? vis? atminty, nes tai juk istorija...

Meaghan says

I was concerned that I wouldn't like this book, since I don't know the first thing about chess. But happily, this

was not a problem. The book had me on the edge of my seat the whole time, wondering what was going to happen, and I was interested not only in Isaac's fate but in all the minor characters too -- Janek in particular was fascinating. My only complaint is that all the many POVs in the story sounded the same -- which may be a problem with the translation more than the original writing. I can't read Lithuanian so who knows.

Daniel says

Stalemate is about a life and death game of chess played in a Polish ghetto where Isaac faces a horrifying situation: If Isaac wins (against a Nazi Commandant), all the children in the ghetto will live, but Isaac will die. If he loses, he'll live, but the kids will die. Only a draw will ensure a happy ending. This is a tough book to read, and yet a great book - small in size, huge in spirit, in hope.

Riah says

I did enjoy this book, but wanted it to be so much more intimate than it really was. To me, chess, strategy, love and loss all seem like such intimate situations. This book literally showed snapshots, which was interesting, but not quite intense enough for its subject matter. This was a very short novella and overall a good read.

Özgür Da? says

Icchokas Meras Litvanya'n?n en büyük yazarlar?ndan birisi, ailesi Nazi zulmünün h??m?na u?ram?? küçük ya?ta anne ve babas?z kalm??. Eserlerinin ço?u bu kitapta da oldu?u gibi Yahudi Soyk?r?m?'yla ilgili. En komplike eseri, ad? '20. yüzy?l?n modern klasikleri' aras?nda gösterilen varolu?cu roman? *Striptiz* (*Striptizas*).

Oyun Asla Berabere Bitmez'de Litvanya'da duvarlarla çevrili bir gettodaki insanlar?n çaresizlikleri ve mücadeleleri yal?n ve naif bir dille aktar?l?yor.

"Bebek, olgun bir meyve gibi dolu ve ?i?kin memeye oburca sald?rd?. Di?siz, küçük a?z?yla çi?niyor, aceleye, ses ç?kararak emiyordu ve oradakilerin hepsi bu küçüçük insan yavrusunun karn?n? doyuru?unu sessizce dinliyordu."

(view spoiler)

Stany says

Meras' Stalemate is spellbinding.

It will haunt and absorb you with its rhythm, its repetitions, its tragedies.

Everyday flowers blossom into immense acts of defiance, of hopes that cannot be smothered, while the tension builds-up like a midnight avalanche.

It will haunt and absorb you with its beauty, its poetry, its art.

Megana Mikuciauskaite says

Still one of the most heart-breaking books I've ever read. Stunning.

Viktorija Nabažait? says

„Kam pasakoti,jeigu galima taip s?d?ti ir ži?r?ti vienam ? kit??

Neringa says

NUOSTABI knyga. Autorius puikiai perteik? Vilniaus žyd? geto žmoni? gyvenim?, likimus. Kaip ir kiekviena knyga, liudijanti holokaust?, ši knyga ?rod?, kad karas, rasin? netolerancija neatneša g?rio ir yra beprasmiai dalykai. Perskai?iau vienu pris?dimu, nes knygos išd?stymo planas, atskir? veik?j? likimai sukuria ?domu siužet?, nuo kurio buvo ne?manoma atsitraukti. Labai patiko knygos parašymo stilius. Atrodo, kiekvienas žodis daug pasakantis, apgalvotas ir pasvertas.

Mareike says

Im *Remis für Sekunden* stehen sich der 16 Jährige Isaak Lipmann und Oberkommandant Adolf Schoger in einer Schachpartie gegenüber. Ort des Geschehens ist ein Ghetto in Polen als die Nationalsozialisten herrschten. Ein Interessenrat im Ghetto schickt Abraham Lipmann, Isaaks Vater, zu Schoger, um zu erbitten, dessen Vorhaben, alle Kinder bis 10 Jahre aus dem Ghetto wegzuschicken - angeblich in ein Kinderheim - zu verhindern. Lipmann handelt eine Schachpartie zwischen Schachliebhaber Schoger und Isaak aus.

Sollte Isaak gewinnen, bleiben die Kinder im Ghetto, bei ihren Eltern, wie es von den Bewohnern gewünscht wird, aber Isaak wird erschossen - von Schoger.

Verliert Isaak, bleibt alles, ie gehabt - Isaak darf leben und die Kinder werden fortgeschickt.

Bei einem Remis, also einem "Unentschieden" zwischen schwarz und weiß, dürfen die Kinder im Ghetto bleiben und Isaak lebt weiter.

Das Schachspiel selbst nimmt nur einen kleinen Teil des Buches ein. Hauptsächlich werden die Schicksale aller Kinder Abraham Lipmann erzählt, welche stets mit einem "*Ich, Abraham Lipmann, habe Tochter Riwa/Sohn Isaak/... gezeugt.*" eingeleitet wird. Leider sind diese Geschichten teilweise recht langatmig.

Steve says

I had exceptionally high hopes for Stalemate. My knowledge of Chess is limited (your infant baby sister could beat me) and my knowledge of Lithuania extends to knowing that the 1992 Olympic basketball team wore tie-dye and were the only real "challenge" to the dream team. But I enjoy holocaust literature and I just watched Searching for Bobby Fischer, so, you know...

Through the first half of this, I was highly confused as to what was going on. Each chapter began with a little banter on the chess match. Then it would step back in time and launch into a small tale of the Jewish ghetto. But each section was narrated differently and I found myself confused by who was speaking and when. Through page 100, I would have argued you can basically skip the middle parts and just read the first page or so on each chapter and get your chess match freak on. The last chapters were much better. Either I figured out the pacing and could distinguish the characters or it just was more engaging. Not sure which. Regardless, the last sixty pages earned this book three stars.

Not much else to say - I would recommend - purely because just about everything from the holocaust is worth reading and, frankly, you can probably blow through this in a few short sittings. However, part of my recommendation would be to find someone who can explain the ending to me since I still don't get it.

I picked this up at Book Off earlier this year. I just finished on a lunch break and returned it to Book Off. Cost me \$1 and I returned it for a buck. So, taxes...9 cents. It was certainly worth 9 cents. Plus, sale day at Book Off. While they were "evaluating" its value, I found two others which I got for \$1.09 total. So, essentially, for \$1.18, three books. Not too shabby.

Rusn? Poligait? says

Beautifully written. I enjoyed every second of reading this book and I felt... I don't even know, maybe close to this novel. It's because „Lygiosios trunka akimirk?” is set in Vilnius and it's a very dear place to my heart and it was so interesting to read how it was in a different time period when holocaust was happening. Can't wait to discuss this book in class and read more of Icchaokas Meras work.

Paul says

Meras is a Lithuanian Jew, born in 1934, who lived through the horrors of the Nazi Occupation, went to school after the war, and began to write. He was expelled from Lithuania in the early 1970s when the Communists took a dislike to his work and now lives in Israel. In short, a common coming-of-age story for a whole generation of Eastern European writers born between the two World Wars. He has written a number of novels but I've only read this one -- STALEMATE (translated by Jonas Zdanys). It is a masterpiece.

Set in the Vilnius ghetto in the latter days of World War II, it tells the story of a Jewish family -- the Lipmans -- whose youngest son is a chess prodigy. The narrative is built around a single chess match played between the son, Isaac, and the ghetto's Nazi commandant, Schoger. Special conditions are attached to the outcome of the match: if Isaac wins, he lives and the ghetto children die; if Isaac loses, he dies and the ghetto children live; if the match is played to a draw, a stalemate, all live. Each chapter begins with a account of where the game stands. By the next-to-last page, the suspense has become unbearable: one finds it hard to

breathe and is forced to close the book rather than read on to the dreadful next sentence.

Compelling as the narrative framework is, Stalemate is not simply a novel about chess, or the Holocaust, or grave moral dilemmas, although those subjects are treated magnificently in the book. It is a wonderful story filled with young love, a parent's grief, work, sex, food, music, childbirth, sacrifice, despair and hope: all the things that make up ordinary human lives, even those lives lived under the worst of circumstances. At least two of the chapters had me in tears, unable to read on... Yet STALEMATE is not depressing. It may at times be brutal, painful, and ugly, but it is also funny and filled with joy, its pathos balanced by its author's compassion.

Charles says

I keep saying that I try to stay away from Holocaust literature, but for some reason, I end up reading it anyway...

Despite my stated aversion to the underlying topic, this was a very engaging novel. I liked the structure and the cadence, as well as the imagery and characters. "Stalemate" has a fairy-tale feel to it, with the hero (and his cadre) on a quest to defeat the evil villain.

My only real criticism of this book is that the "badness" was concentrated in one central villain, rather than more broadly apportioned (as would be appropriate for the situation). In Meras's setting, no one except Schoger is really bad; even the guards (be they German, Czech, or other) are sympathetic and helpful to their charges. The resulting story is simpler, more black-and-white (like the chess pieces), hero vs villain, than is realistic. Don't look for realism here - reality is far more complicated - just a good story by a fine writer.
