

Translation / Traduction

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**Translator's introduction: *Flight and Refuge* in
Exile and Internment: Josef Eisinger's Accidental
Immigration to Canada**

Over the last thirty years, Holocaust child survivors, including Josef Eisinger, have shared their experience of the Kindertransport, the rescue operation which allowed for the relocation of ten thousand children at risk of deportation from Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the Free City of Danzig, mainly to Great Britain before the outbreak of World War II. Placing the Kinder's own testimonies at the centre of the representation of the Kindertransport has proven beneficial in remodeling this history to include lesser-known aspects of this celebrated operation. Narratives written by Kindertransportees who were deported to British dominions, for instance, contribute to the shift in the understanding of this rescue operation in transnational terms. Such narratives direct their readers' attention to the underdiscussed internment of older Kinder deemed enemy aliens, rather than solely on Britain's generous hospitality.¹

In the pages that follow, I offer the French translation of both Josef Eisinger's German- and English-language writings about his experiences as a Kindertransportee. *Flight and Refuge: Reminiscences of a Motley Youth* was published in English in 2016 and is comprised of Eisinger's retrospective reflections and his English translation of his German diary entries. Since its 2017 German translation, *Flucht und Zuflucht: Erinnerungen an eine bewegte Jugend*, includes Eisinger's diary entries in their original language, I was able to include them in my translation. By way of introduction, I build on the selected passages to demonstrate that by narrating the first decades of his life, Eisinger not only challenges the British celebratory narrative, but also complicates narratives of the Canadian response to the Holocaust, including Canada's internment history and its immigration policies in the 1930s and 1940s.

The translation of passages from *Flight and Refuge*, a memoir which was written over three distinct periods, provides some interesting challenges. After three years of compiling the autobiographical essays he had written over several decades ago into a single book, Josef Eisinger published his memoir as a tool for his descendants "to better understand the world [he] experienced."² *Flight and Refuge* is the result of Eisinger's reflections on his motley youth over the span of almost 80 years.³ To convey these different perspectives of a single narrator writing of his experiences at distinct moments of his life span, my translation of the selected excerpts maintains the use of italics when translating Eisinger's personal diary entries. Since he wrote these entries as the events were unfolding, Eisinger's entries present how he slowly "immigrated into English."⁴ To reproduce this linguistic shift, I translated the chosen entries using their respective original language. In instances in which Eisinger provided English translations of his original entries, I used their German versions provided in *Flucht und Zuflucht* as departing texts. This language-switching strategy, together with the use of italics, distinguishes Eisinger's contemporaneous diary entries from his later, retrospective autobiographical essays in which he introduced both commentary and further historical context. To reproduce this temporal leap in the French version, I

made use of the French language's varieties of past tenses. I favoured the "passé simple" for Eisinger's comments made decades after his internment, while I employed the "passé composé" for his contemporary reflections. To include Eisinger's later comments, I incorporated some of the footnotes that were added by Eisinger while assembling his memoir between 2013 and 2016.

Eisinger's personal account, especially his diary entries written out of loneliness, challenges the British celebratory narrative that has been put forward for more than 50 years—a view of the Kindertransport as a rescue operation that gave ten thousand children "the opportunity to grow up in an atmosphere of decency and normality, to work, to play, to laugh and be happy and to assume their rightful heritage as free men and women."⁵ Although grateful for Britain's role in granting him temporary asylum, Eisinger does not shy away from including in his memoir the less pleasant aspects of his 'cold and miserable' life as a farm lad and hotel trainee in England.⁶ In his subchapter 'Collar the Lot,' Eisinger explains that a month after Britain declared war on Germany and the last Kindertransport arrived in London, Britain began classifying her foreigners depending on their potential at hindering the war effort.⁷ The mounting fear that foreigners from nations at war with Britain would carry out Germany's plan from within, in the event of an invasion, pushed Churchill and his government to intern German-speaking refugees regardless of their classification. As a result, Britain sent approximately "1,900 POWs [prisoners of war], 2,100 dangerous internees [such as pro-Nazi immigrants], 400 civilian Italians and 2,290 refugees from Nazism, almost of them Jews" on a perilous transatlantic journey to Canada and Australia.⁸ In his memoir, Eisinger highlights the paradox in Britain's response: the humanitarian gesture of rescuing vulnerable children from Nazi-occupied territories, and the deportation and internment of a percentage of those older children. Eisinger's retrospective comment on his arrival in Trois-Rivières, Quebec, draws attention to another incongruity, but this time, about Canada's inaction regarding the internment of class B and C, i.e., enemy aliens.⁹ Although evidence shows that the population and soldiers expected dangerous enemy aliens interned for being Fifth Columnists, Dr. Paula Draper has convincingly shown that the Canadian government knew that amongst those internees were individuals sent to Canada as a preventive measure rather than because they were considered imminent threats against the war effort. Draper notes that as the passengers of the S.S. *Duchess of York*, the first ship to carry internees to the dominions, set foot on Canadian soil, telegrams from Canada's High Commissioner in Britain warned the Canadian government that amongst the passengers of subsequent ships would be category B and C aliens.¹⁰ When Eisinger arrived in Canada on the *Sobieski*, the Canadian government was definitely aware that category B and C aliens were amongst the passengers. Eisinger's memoir corroborates Draper's conclusions as passages describe Canada's hostile welcoming and its reluctance to acknowledge the difference between refugees from Nazi oppression and Nazi Prisoners of War. Eisinger's account proves that, even when it became clear

that victims of the Nazis were amongst the internees, the Canadian government granted them no real concessions. Both Nazis and their targets were forced to wear prisoner of war uniforms with a big red target on their back, and were—at least initially—housed together. As Eisinger's sponsorship letter also demonstrates, the government did not release Jewish refugees promptly nor easily.

In his publication, Eisinger comments on other important Canadian aspects of Kindertransport history: his encounter with French Canadians, his internment in Trois-Rivières, and more generally on his life as an internee, a geologist's assistant, and a soldier in the province of Quebec.¹¹ In doing so, he not only presents a redemptive narrative in which he mentions his determination in contributing to Canada's war effort in training Canadian military recruits, but he also implicitly addresses the Canadian response to the plight of Jewish refugees, which mirrored its strict immigration policies. Prior to consenting to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 1969, the Canadian immigration system did not differentiate between the terms immigrant and refugee. Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied territories were therefore required to comply with the usual immigration regulations in order to find refuge in Canada. However, because immigration was essentially understood as a means to support the country's economy by enabling skilled individuals to settle in Canada, and because restrictions related to one's nationality, religious belief, health, and sexuality played an important role in the admission of immigrants, only 5,000 Jewish applicants qualified under the Canadian Immigration Law from 1933 to 1939.¹² Eisinger and his fellow Jewish refugees were Canada's accidental immigrants when none was too many.¹³ Eisinger's memoir reveals that his journey to safety was the result of Gertrud Wijsmuller-Meijer's initiative, his parents' role in taking the heart-wrenching decision to send him to England, and Canada's reluctance to deny Britain's request to accommodate its enemy aliens. Eisinger's accidental admission into Canada brings the complexity of the internment in Canada to full light. Indeed, although the internment of Nazi-oppressed refugees ought not to be celebrated, Eisinger's memoir reminds its readers that without this preventative, yet discriminatory scheme, he, and a number of Jewish refugees, would not have been allowed on Canadian soil, and might have met far worse fates in Europe.

Eisinger's unconventional writings, in which he expresses being grateful for his internment, challenge both general expectations regarding the tone and content of a memoir on life in internment, and the Canadian national narrative. Eisinger's positive comments indirectly remind its readers that, at a time when the Jewish population caught in Nazi-occupied territories sought asylum, countries like Canada maintained a closed-door policy. It is Eisinger's status as an 'enemy alien,' rather than his status as a 'refugee' from Nazi-oppression, that enabled him to immigrate to Canada. By narrating his personal journey, Eisinger adds layers to the Canadian narrative in which Canada recognizes its inaction regarding the plight of Jews before,

during, and after WWII.¹⁴ Indeed, by drawing attention to Canada's paradoxical immigration policies, he addresses the underdiscussed accidental admission of Jewish refugees when Canada opened its doors to Britain's enemy aliens. Eisinger's narration of his experiences from 80 years ago consequently contributes to contemporary discourses on national memory and on refugees and forced migration.

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Flucht und Zuflucht: Erinnerungen an eine bewegte Jugend, fosters new dialogues by recognizing Eisinger's journey as part of the history of his departing country. Since the translation of his memoir, Eisinger and his work have helped raise Holocaust awareness in Austrian classrooms.

2

Eisinger, pg. 1.

3

2021 marks the 80th anniversary of Eisinger's release from internment.

4

This is an allusion to Ocean Vuong's autobiographical essay "Surrendering," about his immigration experience from Vietnam to North America. Vuong's essay describes his experiences in retrospect, but through the eyes of his younger self, and places a premium on his linguistic journey and transformation. Vuong, Ocean. "Surrendering." *The New Yorker*, June 6&13, 2016, pg. 82.

5

Presland, John [Gladys Skelton Bendit]. *A Great Adventure: the Story of the Refugee Children's Movement*. Bloomsbury House, 1944, pg. 16.

6

Eisinger, pg. 51.

7

Eisinger is referring to Churchill's "inimitable phrase: Collar the Lot!" pg. 63.

8

Strutz, Andrea. "'Detour to Canada'. The Fate of Juvenile Austrian-Jewish Refugees After the 'Anschluss' of 1938," *The Young Victims of the Nazi Past: Migration, the Holocaust and Postwar Displacement*, edited by Simone Gigliotti and Monica Tempian, London, 2016, pp. 31–50, pg. 40.

9

Three categories divided foreigners between Class A, B, and C. Foreigners classified as A were deemed dangerous, while class B aliens were deemed friendly and class C were termed friendly aliens and refugees from Nazi oppression.

10

Draper, Paula J. *The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees*. 1983. University of Toronto, PhD dissertation. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, pg. 34.

11

The French translation of Eisinger's passages is relevant as he experienced Canada mainly through his time in the province of Quebec. French Canadian colloquialisms were also, for this particular reason, included in my translation. I hope that this article will help uncover this buried history; a history which was still unknown to me a few years ago, even though I grew up visiting the Parc de l'Exposition in Trois-Rivières and studied German less than 3 kilometers away from it.

12

Goldberg, Adara. "Canada and the Holocaust," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, May 6, 2016, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/holocaust>. Accessed March 3, 2021.

13

The term 'accidental immigrant' was coined by Dr. Paula Draper in her 1983 dissertation titled *The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees*. 'None is too many' refers to the word uttered off-record by an anonymous senior Canadian official to a journalist in 1945. After being asked how many Jewish refugees Canada should accept after the end of the war, the Canadian official replied the now-well-known sentence: None is too many. Although these words commented on post-war immigration quota, they summarize well Canada's position before and during the Second World War. For more on this aspect,

read Irving Abella's homonymous book.

Abella, Irving and Harold Troper. *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948*. University of Toronto Press, 2013.

14

This includes Canada's refusal to grant asylum to the passengers of the MS St. Louis.