

Lily of the Valley: Rudolf Dilong's Forbidden Love (Konvália: Zakázaná láska Rudolfa Dilonga)

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About the Author: Denisa Fulmeková (1967) studied journalism at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava (1985–1989). She worked as an editor in cultural reviews, from 1997 to 2004 she was editor-in-chief in the esoteric magazine *Orientácia*. She has been a freelance writer since 2004. She has published poems, reports, short stories and novels. Fulmeková's works use devices of popular literature and often focus on the lives of contemporary Slovakian women, their hopes and illusions.

Further Important Publications: *Som takmer preč* (2004, I'm Almost Gone; poems); *Topánky z papiera* (2009, Paper Shoes; novel); *Doktor Mráz* (2018, Doctor Mráz; novel)

Content and Interpretation

The work describes a strange love affair, the relationship between Valéria Reiszová, a Jewish girl who was interested in poetry, and Rudolf Dilong, a Franciscan monk and poet. The author depicts a true story in Slovakia during and after WW II (Valéria was her grandmother). At that time, Jews were being persecuted and Valéria and her family were in danger of being transported to a forced labor camp and following that, to concentration camps. In 1942, Valéria gave birth to a daughter. Dilong, who had engaged in the clerofascist regime of the Slovak Republic, managed to protect Valéria and her brother from transports. She did not have to wear a Jewish star. He supported Valéria, provided her with "Aryan papers" and a flat in Bratislava. Dilong enlisted as a military chaplain on the Eastern front, where Slovakia fought as an ally of Germany. I was probably for that reason to have enough finances for Valéria. Nevertheless, after the War, he emigrated to Italian and two years later to Argentina from fear of punishment. From 1965, Dilong lived in the Franciscan monastery in Pittsburgh in the United States. Valéria was left with a small child without any support. Moreover, she was thought of as the mistress of a poet, who was both involved in clerofascist politics, and was later active in the exile movement against the Communist regime. "Dilong's name was no longer a guarantee of her protection, but a danger" (Fulmeková, 2016, p. 65). She was interrogated, her house was searched, the police confiscated Dilong's and her poems, photos and letters. She met Jozef Krivda, a laboratory technician, and married him in August 1948. Jozef officially proclaimed himself as the father of her daughter Dagmar, and in 1950 their son was born. At that time, Valéria wrote new poems but they were not published because of her past. She concealed her Jewish origin. (Denisa Fulmeková writes that she was 10 years old when she learned who was her mother's father and what

happened in the family during the War. It was dangerous to talk about her grandmother's Jewish background.)

Rudolf Dilong kept correspondence with his daughter as well as with Valéria. However, they couldn't meet personally until 1969 in Vienna and then in Bratislava, 24 years after his emigration. Rudolf thought about returning to Slovakia, but in the end remained in the U.S. He died in Pittsburgh in 1986, Valéria died in Bratislava in 2000 and her husband Jozef in 2015.

The title *Konvália* (Lily of the Valley) hints at Dilong's collection of poems of the same name (1941) where his secret love to Valeria is suggested. The word is an encrypted name of her: Konvália – Valéria.

Denisa Fulmeková's novel belongs to the genre of family novels which depicted the fates of Central European Jews in the 20th century – for instance Hana Andronikova's → *Sound of the Sundial* (2001, Zvuk slunečních hodin), Joanna Olczak Ronikier's *In the Garden of Remembrance* (2001, W ogrodzie pamięci), Agata Tuszyńska's → *A Family Story of Fear* (2005, Rodzinna historia lęku, 2005) or Simon Mawer's *The Glass Room* (2009). Experiences from the War and the Holocaust are often in the foreground as well as traumas underwent after the War. Stories, often inspired by the life of relatives, are frequently completed by photographs and documents.

This is also the case of *Lily of the Valley*. Here the author describes her search for facts, her relationship to her characters et cetera: "...this story stands in the background of my own life" (p. 63). Besides reconstructing the past, she also records current events. Among other things, she includes her confrontation with the grandson of the former Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach (Mach was responsible for the persecution of Slovak Jews; after the War he was sentenced to 30 years in prison) who reminds everyone that it is the "Führer's birthday today" (p. 32). She feels threatened also in the current "democratic society".

Main Topics and Problems

The novel depicts an "unbalanced love", the relationship of two young people, disturbed by the brutality of the outside world, the War and the Holocaust. It resembles many other stories, for instance the love of Czech Pavel and Jewess Esther in Jan Otčenášek's → *Romeo, Juliet and the Darkness* (1958), the love of Slovak Igor and Jewess Eva in Rudolf Jašík's → *St. Elizabeth's Square* (1958) or the Jewish boy and the Czech girl in Ludvík Aškenazy's short story *Romeo* in his collection *The Egg* (1963, Vajíčko). The prototype of these stories is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), and also Romain Rolland's *Pierre et Luce* (1920) set in WW I. Unlike all these works, *Lily of the Valley* doesn't have a tragic end. Nevertheless, both main characters, Valéria and Rudolf, are traumatized and their lives are deeply disrupted.

The word "forbidden" in the subtitle of this work can carry different meanings: the violation of celibacy by the Roman Catholic priest, the love of an Aryan man and Jewish girl during the period of

the so called “Jewish Codex” (anti-Semitic regulations) in Slovakia, or the rescue of the Jewess and her child at the time of deportations.

Rudolf Dilong (1905–1986) an important poet of Slovak Catholic Modernism, is the most controversial figure of the story. On the one hand, there is Dilong’s love for Valéria and for his daughter Dagmar, and his effort to help them. The title of his memoirs *The Rose Dagmar* (2000, Ruža Dagmar) testifies his cordial relationship with his daughter. On the other hand, there is Dilong’s involvement in the clerofascist Slovak Republic whose laws persecuted the Jews, confiscated their property and sent them to concentration camps. According to Peter Getting, Rudolf Dilong was one of the most productive and significant authors cooperating with the clerofascist regime (Getting, 2009, pp. 155, 168). Dilong continued to hold this ideology also after the War. Even in 1981, the poem *Fatherland (Otčina)* celebrates the establishment of Slovakia in March 1939 (it was a satellite of Hitler’s Germany) and praises its President and priest Jozef Tiso (who was executed after the War as a Nazi flunkey). Denisa Fulmeková asks in her book

“...how was possible that [Valéria] never asked him why he did not write any word about the tragedy of the Slovakian Jews, about their terrible fate during WW II? The reality of the Holocaust touched him painfully in connection with the fate of his beloved Vali and especially his own daughter. However, I search in vain for any self-reflection in connection with this chapter of Slovak history in the work of this prominent poet and priest” (Fulmeková, 2016, p. 98).

She states that love, goodness, humanity, sincerity, trust, and willingness to help are more than a devotion to an ideology in life. For that reason, she expresses respect and admiration to Jozef Krivda who supported Valéria in the hard times and whom her mother considered as her true father and she as her true grandfather.

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