



My Gaze Is Turned Inward: Letters 1938-1943 (Jewish Lives)

Gertrud Kolmar

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Event of the time are a bit like Impressionist paintings ... which combine into a recognizable whole only when observed from a distance.

--Gertrude Kolmar in a letter to her sister, October 22, 1939

So a picture of Gertrud Kolmar, a gifted Jewish writer struggling to sustain her art and family, emerges from these eloquent and allusive letters. Written in the stolen moments before her day as a forced laborer in a munitions factory began, the letters tell of Kolmar's move from the family home in Finkenkrug to a three-room flat in Berlin, which she and her father must soon share with other displaced Jews. They describe her factory work as a learning experience and assert, in the face of ever worsening conditions, that true art, never dependent on comfort or peace, is "capable of triumphing over ... time and place."

These letters are a triumph of art, proclaiming the freedom of the human will amidst oppression. Though prevented by Nazi censorship from saying too much too directly, Kolmar still conveys the intensity and determination of her inner world, as well as the relentlessness of the outer world bent on crushing her. For its insight into the mind and soul of a poet submitting to *and* denying fate, and for its interior vision of one of history's darkest moments, *My Gaze Is Turned Inward* is a unique document of literary, historical, and spiritual power.

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