

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 40 (2013)  
**Heft:** 4

**Buchbesprechung:** La Tempête des heures [Anne Cuneo]  
**Autor:** Gross, Seraina

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goodness life has finally changed.

HELEN PYE,  
MACLEAN, AUSTRALIA

### Your article revived my worst nightmares...

I'm 68 years old and reading about the experiences of others like me brought back the worst memories from my childhood. I also went through all this and worse. It now all comes flooding back, the abuse, torment and slavery I was subjected to by farmers and the government. For the first time in years I couldn't sleep after reading this, crying like a baby.

P. S. CALGARY, CANADA

### Renewing a Swiss passport

Living in the paradise that is Hawaii is a dream. Unfortunately, renewing a Swiss passport is not such a wonderful ex-


perience. The Hawaiian consulate does not have a biometric machine. So, I asked how other countries overcome this problem. There is a simple solution – a company in Honolulu, which has the equipment required, records the biometric data and sends it in a sealed envelope to the respective embassies. Those of Canada, Australia and South Africa, for example.

Only, the Swiss consulate general does not accept this. I was therefore forced to fly to San Francisco – 3,841 kilometres for a five-minute procedure. Renewing my passport cost me a 1,900-dollar plane ticket, 500 dollars for two days off work unpaid and 100 dollars for the hotel. The most expensive five minutes of my life.

EDITH TRUCKENBROD,  
HONOLULU, HAWAII, USA

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## Resistance at Zurich's theatre

ANNE CUNEO, AN AUTHOR WHO LIVES IN GENEVA AND ZURICH, continually enthralled the Swiss public with her historical novels. Her book about "Zaïda", the English aristocrat who became one of the first women to study medicine in Zurich in the 19th century, became a bestseller in both French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland. The 76-year-old writer has now turned her attention to a chapter in Swiss history. While historians may be familiar with the episode, it otherwise receives little mention. The novel's title is "La Tempête des heures". It centres on the Zurich Playhouse, which became a place of refuge for the persecuted and a place of intellectual resistance during the early years of the war as the last free theatre in the German-speaking world.

While Zurich's residents were increasingly fleeing to relatives in the Bernese Oberland and central Switzerland, the Pfauenbühne theatre staged "Faust II" in spring 1940 under the shadow of great peril. The play is regarded as a very difficult one even under normal circumstances, posing an enormous challenge to the actors, director and stage crew. Staging the play in Zurich at a time of war turned out to be an incredible feat. Everything proved complicated, from the paint for the scenery to the materials for the costumes. In contrast to "Faust I", good ultimately prevails in "Faust II". The performance sent a clear message of resistance to Berlin, which was staging a Nazi interpretation of "Faust I" at almost exactly the same time.

But this is not what the novel is about. That would have been far too mundane for Anne Cuneo. She is not interested in theory but rather in the destiny of the individual. So, she recounts the story of the Zurich Playhouse during wartime from the perspective of a young Polish Jew, Ella Berg, who has managed to escape to Switzerland. Ella Berg is a fictional character and an archetype. A lot of young women arrived in Switzerland as refugees during the



war years and, like her, for many the only way to remain there was to marry a Swiss man.

Ella Berg becomes the theatre dogsbody. Through her we experience the trauma of displacement and devastation. Her fate reveals that the notion of a Switzerland spared certainly did not apply to everyone as there were also victims in Switzerland. Through her we also become acquainted with the great actors and directors who made the Zurich Playhouse one of the best in the German-speaking world

for decades in the post-war period. They include Anne-Marie Blanc, Maria Becker, Therese Giehse, Heinrich Gretler, Leopold Lindtberg, Ettore Cella, Ernst Ginsberg and Wolfgang Langhoff. Anne Cuneo's writing reveals great attention to detail and a declared desire to remain true to the facts of history. "I don't engineer the story. It has to be right," she explains. It is little wonder then that when you finish reading "La Tempête des heures" you feel as though you have experienced a bygone era and really learned something.

SERAINA GROSS

Anne Cuneo, "La Tempête des heures"; Edition Bernard Campiche, Orbe, 2013, 295 pages. The book will appear in German at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October. It will be published by Bilger Verlag Zurich under the title "Schon geht der Wald in Flammen auf".