

THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM

cordially invites you to a lecture by

Zsuzsa Hetényi

University ELTE

Facts and fiction: Vasily Grossman writing history and literature

Vasily Grossman (1905, Berdichev – 1964, Moscow) was one of the Soviet frontline correspondents of the WWII and an eyewitness of the Battle of Stalingrad. But from all 1000 pages of his novel *Life and Fate* (1952–1961) one cannot put together the events, the military motivations or quantifiable data for a coherent army strategy or account of the battle. A constant dialog of history and literature was in the focus of Grossman's life, and he was aware of the difference of the two genres of narratives, historic and literary. This skill was given to him also by his tormented life experience—his Jewish origin, events of wars and terror of Stalinism, the general Soviet falsehood. He had to live through brutal KGB home search, arrests of relatives and close colleagues, censorship, confiscation of manuscript, humiliation, delusion, masked anti-Semitism. The time he happened to be born in drove him to write mainly fiction based on historic events, but also non-fictional essays and notes for documentation. The paper will discuss the relationship and difference between writing history and writing fiction with examples of Grossman's oeuvre, aiming a second, theoretical goal—reassess literature for history's benefit.

Tuesday, January 28 at 5.30 p.m.

In Popper Room



Zsuzsa Hetényi is Professor of Literature at the University ELTE, Faculty of Humanities, Budapest, and literary translator (Award by Academy of Sciences, 2002). Among her cca. 350 scholarly articles in six languages she is author of a monograph about Biblical, mythical and messianic motifs in Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* (*Under Star and Cross*, 1991), and the editor and co-author of the *History of the Russian Literature* (I-II., 1997; 2002). Her *In the Maelstrom. The history of the Russian-Jewish literature* (in Hungarian, 2000, in English 2008, CEU-Press), the result of a 10-year research was worked out also thanks to grants given by Swiss Confederation and by the Soros Foundation. Her main fields of research interest are the Russian Prose of the 20th century, dual identity, emigration and bilingualism in literature. Hetényi lectured and gave conference papers in Austria, Croatia, England, France, Germany,

Great Britain, Italy, Israel, Lithuania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA. She translated from English to Hungarian Nabokov and Brodsky, from Russian (among others) Babel, Bulgakov, Chekhov, Grossman, Kharmis, Lunts, Sorokin, Voinovich, Zamyatin, and an anthology of Russian-Jewish prose, 17 authors from Osip Rabinovich to Vladimir Jabotinsky. Her recent research aims to result in the first monograph in Hungarian on Vladimir Nabokov.

A reception will follow.