

**Proposal Narrative**  
**Cornelius Partsch. Translation of *My First Murderer***

My research agenda for the summer of 2015 comprises work on a multi-pronged project consisting of authoring a translation, editing, and collaborating with Elani Koogle, a Western alumna and recent German major. To provide some background about the development of this project: I served as Elani's Senior Honors Thesis mentor during her last year at Western. Previously, she had been on a direct exchange program in Graz, Austria, and returned with her German proficiency dramatically improved and with a deepened interest in Austrian culture. For her Senior Honors project, she wanted to do a literary translation, and after some deliberation we decided on a prose text by Vladimir Vertlib, entitled "Nach dem Endsieg" (After the Final Victory), which was published in Vienna in 2006.

Vladimir Vertlib was born in 1966 into a Russian-Jewish family in Leningrad in the former Soviet Union. His parents were members of an illegal Zionist organization. In 1971, the family emigrated, travelling across Israel, the Netherlands, the US and Italy until they settled in Austria in 1981. Vertlib studied economics in Vienna and was granted Austrian citizenship in 1986. He then began to work as an independent author, journalist, and translator and placed his first fictional texts in literary journals in the early 1990s. His novels *Abschiebung* (1995, Deportation), *Zwischenstationen* (1999, Intermediate Stops), and *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* (2001, Rosa Masura's Special Memory) examine the themes of home, exile, otherness, and identity, particularly of Russian Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Vertlib is rooted in realistic narratives, and his texts are often laced with subtle ironies. His work has been well received and earned him numerous literary prizes, including a recent award in Italy where *Intermediate Stops* had just been translated into Italian.

The text Elani translated is one of three "life stories" in a volume entitled *Mein erster Mörder* (2006, My First Murderer). When we had reached a point at which we thought we were ready to start planning her public presentation, we decided to contact Mr. Vertlib and ask him if he was interested in looking at the translation. He was very eager to do so and characterized Elani's rendering of his text as having the potential to be published. He had assumed that he was looking at the work of a doctoral student at first and was indeed astonished to hear that Elani was in fact earning her Bachelor! During the following months, I pursued the idea of publishing all three of the texts in *My First Murderer* further. I corresponded with Mr. Vertlib and with a representative of his Austrian publisher, the Deuticke imprint of the reputable Zsolnay publishing house; both gave the go-ahead (see the author information here: <http://www.hanser-literaturverlage.de/autor/vladimir-vertlib>). I surveyed the publishing options for such translations in the North America and identified Ariadne Press as a possible home for our venture. Ariadne is a small publishing house in Riverside, CA, that specializes in Austrian culture and history ([www.ariadnebooks.com](http://www.ariadnebooks.com)) and has an impressive catalogue that includes the Nobel Prize winner Elfriede Jelinek. Earlier this year, Ariadne's editorial board reviewed a sample of the Vertlib

translation favorably and resolved to move forward with the project. Ariadne and Zsolnay are currently negotiating the terms of their publishing relationship. These various steps and communications have taken rather a long time, which is why I am submitting this proposal, with the updated information, again. It was not funded by Western last year.

During the present academic year, I plan on working out the details with the publisher. A possible role, one Ariadne has favored in other translations, would be that of co-editor of the volume. Furthermore, I will be helping Elani with revisions of her translation. I also intend to begin translating the two other "life stories" (about 140 pages) and then bring the entire project to completion during the summer. It is my hope that the committee will recognize the merit of this proposal on a number of levels: first, the project is well underway, and publication is certain. Second, the publication of *My First Murderer* in the US will likely be one of the first English-language publications of an author who is well known all over Europe and who is an important voice of what could be characterized as a contemporary diasporic literature (a translation of the much larger novel *Rosa Masura's Special Memory* is currently being put together for the University of Nebraska Press). Third, I believe that this project is already, at this juncture, a rather unique collaboration between a Western professor and a gifted student on a significant and extended research task. As for my own professional scholarship, I would like to stress that opportunities such as this one come along rarely. Not nearly enough literature written in German – or any other language for that matter - gets translated into English, and to have a chance to bring the critically acclaimed work of Vertlib to an American readership is remarkable. I am already a published translator of fiction, and this project may well lead me on a path towards further activity in this area. Finally, I have been researching the possibility of external funding to supplement or extend the funding a Western grant would provide. Among the options, the city of Vienna's competitive grants for translators of Viennese authors stand out. If this project were allowed to go forward, I believe I would have a very good chance of obtaining one of these grants (see <http://www.wien.gov.at/kultur/abteilung/foerderungen/uebersetzerstipendien>).