

Karl Giese, Magnus Hirschfeld's Archivist and Life Partner, and his Attempts at Safeguarding the Hirschfeld Legacy

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Karl Giese, Magnus Hirschfelds Archivar und Lebenspartner und seine Versuche, Hirschfelds Vermächtnis zu sichern

Zusammenfassung

Karl Giese (1898–1938) war Magnus Hirschfelds Sekretär, Archivar und vor allem sein vertrauter *compagnon de route*. Hirschfeld selbst hat Giese als „[...] den besten Kenner meiner Ziele und Werke [...]“ charakterisiert. Überraschenderweise und im Gegensatz zu vielen anderen Menschen aus Hirschfelds Mitarbeiterkreis am Berliner Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, ist Giese in der Forschung bisher wenig beachtet worden. Giese und Hirschfeld trafen sich ca. 1919 zum ersten Mal. Auch nach Hirschfelds Tod im Mai 1935 versuchte Giese dem weltberühmten Sexualwissenschaftler und seinem Vermächtnis die Treue zu halten. Dieser Text stellt eine kurze Zusammenfassung meiner Forschung über die letzten fünf Jahre von Karl Gieses Leben dar.

Schlüsselworte: Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, Hirschfelds Gästebuch, *Racism*, Gay studies, Karel Fein, Li Shiu Tong

Abstract

Karl Giese (1898–1938) was Magnus Hirschfeld's secretary, archivist and most of all his trusted *compagnon de route*. Hirschfeld himself characterized Giese at one point as „[...] der beste Kenner meiner Ziele und Werke [...].“ Surprisingly, and unlike many other people from Hirschfeld's entourage at the Berlin Institute for Sexual Science, Giese has so far *not* received real attention from researchers. Giese and Hirschfeld first met around 1919. Even after Hirschfeld's death, in May 1935, Giese tried to remain loyal to the world famous sexologist and his legacy. This text presents a chronological summary of my research on the last five years of Karl Giese's life.

Keywords: Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, Hirschfeld's guest book, *Racism*, Gay studies, Karel Fein, Li Shiu Tong

Eighty years ago, on May 6, 1933, Magnus Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualwissenschaft was plundered by SA-students. An anonymous eye witness account was written



Fig. 1 Portrait of Karl Giese, 1938. Source: Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft, Berlin

shortly after the event and was – slightly abridged – included in the so-called “Braunbuch” that was widely distributed throughout Europe. For now it is not known with certainty if Karl Giese (1898–1938, cf. Fig. 1), Hirschfeld's long time partner and archivist, was the author of the text (Herrn, 2010). What is certain is that Giese left his city of birth the next day, never to return there again. My research has focused on what happened with and around Karl Giese after these dramatic and life shattering events. A little less than five years later, on March 16, 1938, Karl Giese committed suicide in Brno (Brünn), Czechoslovakia. I'll present here a very brief overview of my research results.

Leaving Berlin

Giese left Berlin on May 7, 1933 and immediately headed to Switzerland where Magnus Hirschfeld had been residing for several months. One week later, Hirschfeld left for Paris with his Chinese boyfriend Li Shiu Tong while Giese stayed on in the villa “Casa Werner” on Lago Maggiore in Ascona. In July 1933 Giese decided to go to Brno. The exact reasons for this move are unclear. Possibly there was then already talk about an offer from Nazi Germany to sell back some of the materials from the Institute that hadn’t been burned on Opernplatz on May 10th. And it had been one of the demands of the National Socialists that the sale of these saved books must take place in a foreign country. Six months later this materialized: 2500 kg of former institute materials were bought back, one source says for 35–40,000 German Marks. The facilitating figure here, both Giese and Hirschfeld attest, was Karel Fein (1894–1942), a Brno born and based lawyer.

I don’t think however that Fein’s determining role had to do with his being a lawyer. His mediation here is probably better explained by the fact that his aunt (on the mother’s side), Elize Brecher (1869–1943, née Löw) owned the “L. & A. Brecher” bookstore, one of the main



Fig. 2 Karl Giese with Magnus Hirschfeld. Source: Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft, Berlin

German language bookstores in Brno, centrally located on the Náměstí Svobody (Freiheitsplatz). The bookstore traded internationally on an upscale level with museums and libraries. Though I have found no conclusive evidence for this, I think it is possible that the transaction with Nazi Germany was facilitated by Karel Fein’s aunt’s book business network. After the death of Fein’s father when the boy was two years old, Elize’s husband, Alois Brecher, at that time the owner of the bookstore, had become Karel’s guardian. From an early age on, Karel Fein must have been immersed in the world of books.

Giese’s six months stay in Brno is rather remarkable for a second reason. It is possible that Giese went there because Czechoslovakia was becoming another front from which people who had fled Nazi Germany were organizing all kinds of resistance. Maybe Hirschfeld and Giese had decided that it would be wise to start reorganizing on two fronts: in Paris and in Brno? Although Günter Maeder – Hirschfeld’s former second secretary and a school mate of Giese – is a rather problematical source, he does mention that he and Giese tried to start up the Institute again in Brno. That is likely the reason why Giese also went to see, upon his arrival in Brno, one of the main organizers of the 1932 Brno *World League for Sexual Reform* conference, Dr. Josef Weisskopf (1904–1977). Yet Paris won out and an attempt to reestablish the Institute was made there by Hirschfeld himself in collaboration with the local Dr. Edmond Zammert (1861–1937).

During his six month stay in Czechoslovakia, Giese also had contact with people around the gay magazine *Nový hlas* (“New Voice”). One of the results was an article written by Giese that appeared in the January 1934 issue. Plans were also made to insert a German language supplement into the Czech magazine. The idea was very ambitious: the supplement was to become a European platform from which Hirschfeld’s sexual liberation battle would operate. Hirschfeld wrote a forceful and quite remarkable text for the first German language supplement in the *Nový hlas* issue of April 1934. In the text one notices both Hirschfeld’s bitterness and resilience:

“Mag man auch die Bücher über die Sexualwissenschaft und insbesondere auch über die homosexuelle Frage verbrennen und verbieten, mag man sie auch als Makulatur einstampfen und sie in Hetzschriften umwandeln, wir halten uns an das Wort der Bibel: ‘Ein Rest wird bleiben!’ Ja ein Rest wird bleiben, ein Keim, aus dem wieder neues Leben erblüht.” (Hirschfeld, 1934,3)

The bible quote “Denn ein Rest wird übrig bleiben ...” that Hirschfeld used here comes from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Hirschfeld took it from his

exile guest book – discovered by Marita Keilson-Lauritz – where a certain Heinz Cohn had written down the resonating phrase in December 1933. Marita Keilson-Lauritz has used the phrase as well as the title for one of her two articles on her project for a critical edition of the Hirschfeld guest book (Keilson-Lauritz, 2008).

As one might think, the plan for the German supplement had been indeed a little too ambitious: the magazine wasn't – as was hoped – bought *en masse* by the gay Germans who had fled Nazi Germany. The sales of the magazine, which was already struggling to survive, didn't go up spectacularly. The German language supplement experiment quickly floundered and the magazine *Nový hlas* disappeared at the end of 1934 as well.

Nice and Paris

At the end of December 1933, immediately after the buy-back operation with Germany was concluded (and the materials had arrived in Brno?), Giese left Czechoslovakia. In Prague he had obtained a one year transit visa for France and he entered France through the Italian-French border point Breil-sur-Roya. Giese ended up in nearby Nice where he wasn't allowed to travel further until February 1934. Hirschfeld, who was at that time alone in Paris, quickly joined Giese in Nice. The two stayed together for a month in the seafront *Hôtel de la Méditerranée* where especially Hirschfeld enjoyed the wonderful view of the sea from his room. This was the last time that Giese would spend one-on-one quality time with his "Papa", as he used to call Hirschfeld. In a letter, he wrote that he and Hirschfeld finally had time to talk through all the things that had happened in the past year. In Nice both also worked on the manuscript of Hirschfeld's book on racism that appeared in English translation in 1938 (cf. Fig. 3). Giese was probably typing the manuscript that Hirschfeld had started writing when he was in Zurich (Frischknecht, 2009). Giese most likely realized at this point how important this book was for Hirschfeld. It was a critique of the racist ideology that had destroyed their life work.

After Giese had obtained a "permis de séjour" valid for six months from the French authorities in Nice, he joined Hirschfeld and Tao Li (who had by then returned from China) in Paris. Giese lived with the couple in the very posh top floor apartment at 24, Avenue du Floquet. From the balconies of the apartment, one had a magnificent view of the nearby Eiffel tower. In Paris Giese continued to help Hirschfeld with his secretarial work.

Perhaps acting out his jealousy towards Hirschfeld's new partner Li Shiu Tong, Giese made a misstep in the months that followed. At a Paris swimming pool or bath

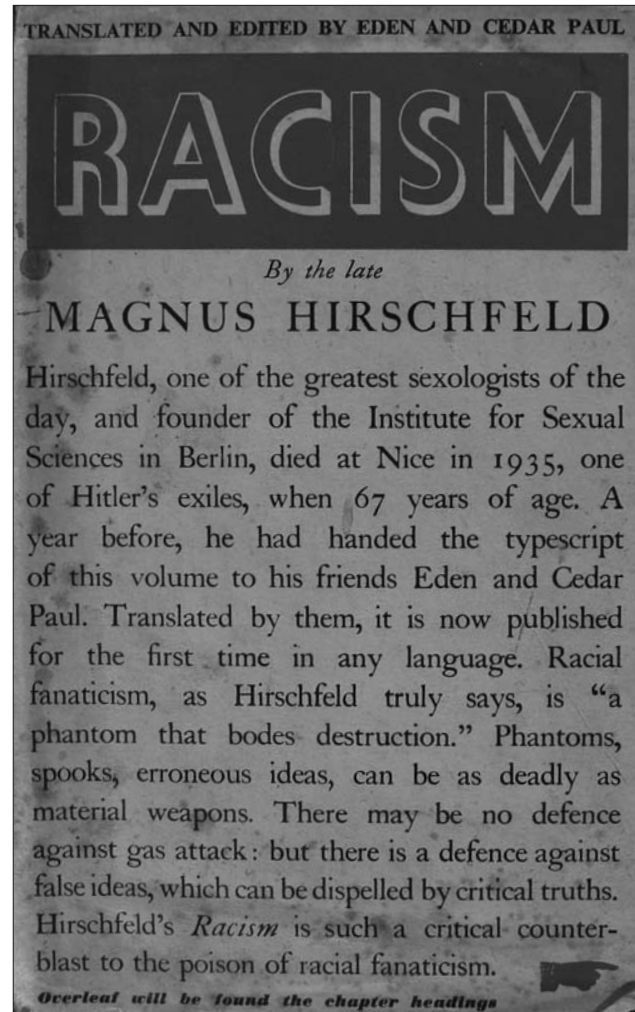


Fig. 3 Front dustcover of Hirschfeld's book *Racism* that was published by Victor Gollancz in London in 1938 which introduces a quote of Friedrich Nietzsche: „Du sollst, um die Wahrheit sagen zu können, das Exil vorziehen.“

house, he had sex and was arrested for "outrage publique à la pudeur". It earned him three months in prison. The experience must have burdened Giese. In pictures in the Hirschfeld guest book taken a few months after the prison term, Giese's face still looks emaciated. Possibly Giese took sick in prison, which might also explain why an appeal was made to transfer him from the Paris Santé prison to the prison of Fresnes.

Likely due to this sexually related misdemeanor, Giese's temporary six months "permis de séjour" wasn't extended and he was forced to leave the country. Hirschfeld attempted to pull some strings in order to prevent the extradition, contacting for example André Gide. But the dice had been cast. Giese left Paris at the end of October 1934. There are pictures of the good bye scene in front of the Paris apartment in the Hirschfeld guest book. It was the last time that Giese would see Hirschfeld alive.

Vienna

Giese decided to settle in Vienna. He stayed there for a year and lived with Dr. Zalman Schneyer and his wife, at Mariahilferstrasse 27. The plan was that Giese would finish his Abitur in Vienna. That would allow him to finally begin his medical studies. Financially it had been agreed that Dr. Ellen Bækgaard, Dr. Norman Haire and Hirschfeld would pay a monthly allowance which Giese could live on while studying.

It was during Giese's stay in Vienna that Hirschfeld died in Nice, on May 14, 1935. Giese returned – illegally – to France to attend the funeral in Nice and read a eulogy – the text of which is still missing – for the man that had played such a determining role in his life and that of so many others.

Although illegally in France, Giese stayed on in Nice for at least a few days. Possibly he also went to the Saint-Pierre cemetery in Marseille to see the columbarium where the Hirschfeld ashes would be left for a year until the tombstone in the Caucade cemetery in Nice was ready.

When Giese returned to Vienna, further bad fortune struck. Mistakenly assuming that Giese would now receive income from Hirschfeld's estate, Bækgaard and Haire stopped paying the monthly allowance to Giese. Giese could not immediately profit from the two arrangements – income from the royalties from the Hirschfeld books and the licensed medical products – that Hirschfeld had foreseen for him in his last will. The fact that Giese had been extradited from France only made things worse. Not having an income made Giese very restless and he appealed again to Karel Fein. Fein went to Nice in August 1935 with the intent of expediting the legal proceedings, but his visit apparently didn't produce any immediate results. Meanwhile Giese borrowed money from Li Shiu Tong and an acquaintance in Brno to make ends meet. That Fein was occupied with the matter can be concluded from the stamps in Giese's passport: he went to Brno to follow up on the matter in November 1935 and in January and February 1936. Although it is unclear to what extent this was due to Fein's professional involvement, the inheritance stipulations were approved in the first half of 1936. In addition, in May 1936, a substantial sum of around 40,000 French Francs was paid out to Giese and Li Shiu Tong each.

Brno

Giese moved to Brno in June 1936, a month after the Hirschfeld inheritance had been settled in France. In a letter Giese wrote he had fallen in love with a man in

Brno. Was this man Karel Fein? This could well be since Giese moved into Fein's apartment looking out onto the garden of the magnificent villa of the Tugendhat family designed by Mies van der Rohe. Giese stayed only a few months in Fein's apartment however. In mid-September he moved into his own apartment in Střelecká Street 8.

The commonly copied information that Giese lived a sorrowful life in Brno – one source even suggests he died of hunger – is simply wrong. The monthly notations in his rent booklet show that Giese never had problems paying the monthly rent of 480 Czech Crowns. Fresh milk and bread were delivered to his doorstep daily and there was even money to feed his white angora cat. According to Brno police records, Giese had, one year after his arrival in the city (June 1937), 38,000 Czech crowns in his bank account. What is certain is that Giese didn't study medicine in Brno either. There is no trace of him in the university archive of the Masaryk university. Another document attests he admitted himself he had given up on his school work.

Giese had in other words a lot of time on his hands. He made an effort to read mostly English language books, which suggests that he possibly embraced the idea of one day moving to an Anglo-Saxon country. He also wrote a fairy tale of which we only know the title: "Märchen von den Liebesleuten".

But Giese likely spent much of his time with his good friend and peer Willi Bondi (1897–1941). Bondi was the son of the deputy German language theatre director, Gustav Bondi. The Bondi family had their own box in the Brno Mahen theatre and likely Giese could attend many performances gratis thanks to his friend. From a young age on, Giese had been fond of the theatre and he even had a try himself at being an actor when he was part of the troupe "Theater der Eigenen" that sometimes rehearsed in the Institute. It was also Bondi (and another man) who had provided the furniture for Giese's apartment.

One cannot help but notice also that Giese's apartment was located opposite military barracks. In Vienna as well, Giese had lodged not far from the Stiftskaserne. Was there, as in Vienna, a nearby strip in Brno where soldiers came to make some extra money?

That Giese was indeed recognized as one of Hirschfeld's heirs when he was in Brno can also be concluded from the fact that he received author's copies of the English translation of Hirschfeld's *Racismus* from the London publisher in January 1938. (The original German manuscript was not publishable at the time.) I also found traces of a financial dispute Giese had with a Belgian trader over the distribution of the Titus-Perlen hormone supplement.

Despite all this, Giese must have realized he was walking on the edge of a volcano. He must have been aware that the influx of money was not assured. Moreover, a

police report from February 1938, a month before his suicide, shows only 1000 Czech Crowns left in his bank account. In a letter written to Ernst Maass – who was about to emigrate to the USA – one can discern a man who has drawn the balance of his life. With the appearance of *Racism*, a book so important to Hirschfeld – Giese may also have sensed that his mission had been accomplished. As noted above, Günter Maeder's claims are sometimes problematic, but we could mention here also that Maeder states in an unpublished typescript that Giese committed suicide in Brno because of an unhappy love affair.

Last but not least was the worsening political situation for German immigrants in Czechoslovakia. In 1937 the Provincial Office in Brno had issued an order (later revoked) requiring all German immigrants to leave Brno and live in more rural cities. Together with Karel Fein, acting as his legal counselor, Giese wrote a plea to be exempted from the stipulation. Spelling out his complicated financial situation – he could use Hirschfeld's money only insofar as he continued Hirschfeld's work – he concluded dramatically: "I have become part of the fate of Magnus Hirschfeld."

The last drop that likely tilted the balance was Germany's annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938. Giese committed suicide in the evening or night of March 16, 1938. As the coroner's report attests, Giese first tried to hang himself and then resorted to the gas from the stove in his bedroom. The next morning, he was found dead in his bed by the housekeeper, who had smelled gas in the hallway of the apartment building. Giese left behind a last will, written in blue ink from his gold tip fountain pen and on the yellow paper on which he had written so many of his letters. This is what the letter said :

"Mein letzter Wille

Hiermit vermache ich alle meine Bücher, Schriften und Gegenstände, die sich in meiner Wohnung, Brno, Střelecká 8, befinden (mit Ausnahme der Herrn Willi Bondi, Brno, Chrlice [?] und Herrn Walter Linke ebendasselbst gehörigen Möbel und Wirtschaftsgegenstände, die in einem bei Dr. Fein befindlichen Inventar verzeichnet sind) meinem Rechtsfreund Dr. Karl Fein, Brno, Koliště 35.

Desgleichen vermache ich ihm alle Ansprüche aus den Erträgen der Bücher und Medikamente, die mir nach dem Testament Dr. Magnus Hirschfelds zustehen.

Ich bitte ihn, dieses Vermächtnis anzunehmen und es soweit es ihm irgend möglich ist im Sinne des auch ihm teuren Verstorbenen zu erhalten und zu verwalten.

Brno, den 16. März 1938

Karl Giese"

Since the suicide was not a natural death, the Brno police came to investigate the apartment. They saw some unusual things, like wax models of sexual organs, and quickly concluded this had been – as the police report stated – the apartment of a homosexual. Some things were confiscated and an inventory of the apartment's contents was taken room for room.

Giese was buried on March 23, 1938 in the central cemetery of Brno. At some point after the war the grave was removed. Unlike Hirschfeld's expensive grave in Nice, destined for eternity, there had been no money for an eternal permit for Giese's plot.

Shortly before Giese was buried, Fein wrote a letter to the Brno district court in which he expressed his concern about the confiscations. He also requested that the inheritance procedure be started as soon as possible. The keys to Giese's apartment were handed over to Fein in April 1938. Thus it is likely that Fein obtained all the goods that were in Giese's apartment, including some 500 books "of scientific and belletristic nature". Evidently all or most of the confiscated goods were returned since most of these items show up again in the activa list of the final settlement of the inheritance. The inheritance procedure would reach its final end only in June 1940 with the payment of the inheritance tax. There is no mention of money, either cash or in a bank account, in the final settlement.

Fein himself was eventually appointed as probate curator. Although he had initially urged speed in the inheritance procedure, as probate curator he later asked the court three times for a prolongation of the term allotted to prepare the final settlement. He claimed that the political situation – worsening day by day – prevented him from tending to this matter. He invoked having to care for his mother and older brother, who had moved from Vienna to Brno shortly after the Anschluss.

A few days after Nazi-Germany had swallowed up the so-called "Rest-Tschechei", in March 1939, Jewish lawyers were outlawed. Fein's law practice was liquidated by the local lawyer Franz Nawratil (1889–1942). Giese's will was still in probate. Nawratil *wasn't* very keen on *preventing* the inheritance case from going forward, even though, had he been a dutiful National Socialist, he should have done exactly that. The newly introduced German rulings determined for example that since Giese was a German citizen, the inheritance file should have been – but wasn't – transferred immediately to a German court. Nawratil may have been protective of a former colleague, but most likely he simply wasn't interested in the matter. Apparently he preferred dealing with financially more rewarding matters. He was appointed for example as a trustee for a formerly Jewish owned malt plant and ended up having a seat on the board of the newly Ary-

anized company. Nawratil described the whole lot left from Giese's flat at one point as a bunch of "old rubbish" ("alten Kram").

The mentioning of Magnus Hirschfeld's name in Giese's will did not cause the slightest ripple in the water either. Can one conclude from this that Magnus Hirschfeld had only been a "showcase enemy" of the National Socialists as long as he was alive?

Prague and Łódź

By the time the inheritance tax was finally paid, in June 1940, Fein was already in Prague with his brother and mother. Most likely Fein left all the materials he had inherited from Karl Giese in Brno. In the summer of 1939, following Vienna's example, a Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung had been created in Prague as well. Since the organization initially had "jurisdiction" for the greater Prague area only, anyone who still wanted to emigrate from the country had to move to Prague. Fein tried in vain to emigrate to Shanghai. He stayed together with his family at three different addresses, with each move further and further removed from the Prague city center. But then destiny struck and Fein got caught up, in October 1941, in what is now considered the first organized wave of mass deportations of Jews from several European cities. To the dismay of the ghetto administration in Łódź (Poland), the Jüdische Kultusgemeinde in Prague had apparently sent a train with paupers on the first transport from Prague. This was "rectified" by the second Prague transport, the so-called "Transport B", also known as the "lawyers' train". It left Prague on October 21, 1941 with 1000 people, including Karel Fein. Fein died six months later (May 2, 1942) in Łódź. He may have committed suicide. The suicide rate in the ghetto was higher than usual at that time because people feared the suddenly announced plans to transport "Western Jews" further East. The transports were to begin on May 4, 1942. The people on the first transport had to register at the assembly point already on the May 2nd. Karel Fein was buried on the so-called "ghetto field" of the immense Jewish cemetery of Łódź. The registers that would have located his grave are unfortunately missing.

Coda

What happened to the things that Giese held onto in Brno and which Fein inherited from him? In the year 1942, Hirschfeld's guest book and a few sexological books were retrieved in or near a company trading in discarded materials in Brno owned by Jindřiška Ružičková. How the materials ended up there remains for now unclear. We do know that 1942 was the year when the deportations of Jewish people from Brno were, just as in the rest of Europe, at their most intense. The recycling company was located in a Jewish neighbourhood. But why would Fein have left the materials with another Jewish person, clearly aware that the National Socialists were confiscating all Jewish possessions? To whom might Fein have entrusted these materials for better times to come? That it was a person living in Brno seems likely since what remained from the Giese lot was found there. Another happy coincidence befell these remaining Hirschfeld materials. Whoever found the remainder of the Giese items handed them over to a certain Dr. Ladislav Kaderka from Královo Pole, a suburb north of Brno. He in turn gave the Hirschfeld guest book forty years later to a Czech woman who sold it shortly thereafter to the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach. Marita Keilson-Lauritz was happy to detect the Hirschfeld guest book there in 1995.

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