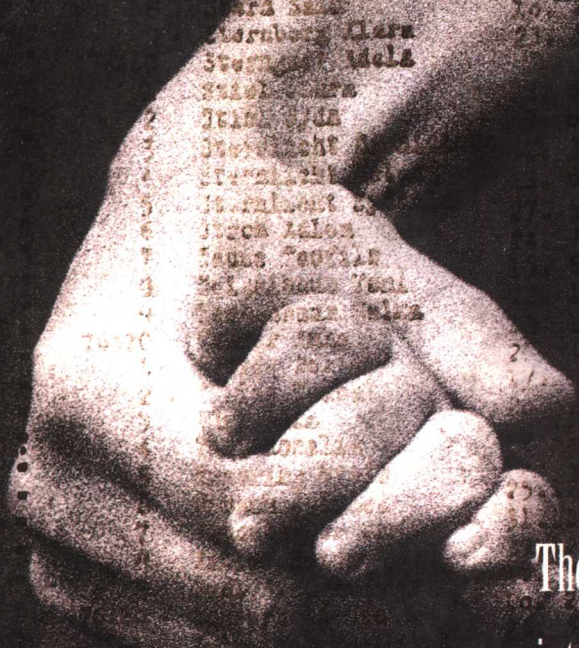


SCHINDLER'S LIST

A NOVEL

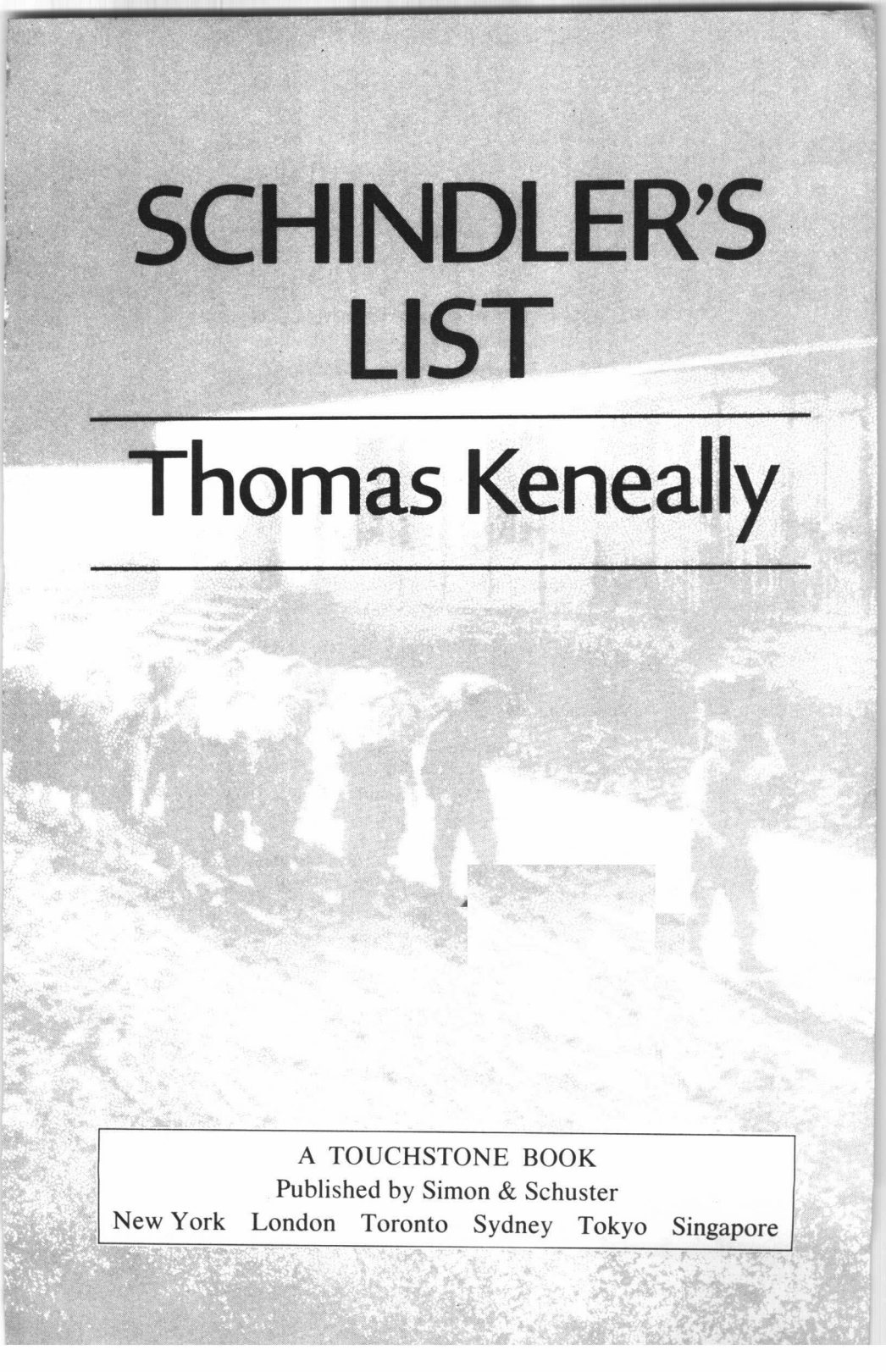


The acclaimed
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THOMAS KENEALLY

SCHINDLER'S LIST

Thomas Keneally



A TOUCHSTONE BOOK
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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE PLACE AT WHITTON
THE FEAR
BRING LARKS AND HEROES
THREE CHEERS FOR THE PARACLETE
THE SURVIVOR
A DUTIFUL DAUGHTER
THE CHANT OF JIMMIE BLACKSMITH
BLOOD RED, SISTER ROSE
GOSSIP FROM THE FOREST
SEASON IN PURGATORY
A VICTIM OF THE AURORA
PASSENGER
CONFEDERATES
A FAMILY MADNESS
THE PLAYMAKER
TO ASMARA
FLYING HERO CLASS
THE PLACE WHERE SOULS ARE BORN
WOMAN OF THE INNER SEA

CHILDREN'S BOOKS
NED KELLY AND THE CITY OF BEES

TO THE MEMORY OF OSKAR SCHINDLER,
AND TO LEOPOLD PFEFFERBERG,
WHO BY ZEAL AND PERSISTENCE
CAUSED THIS BOOK TO BE WRITTEN

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In 1980 I visited a luggage store in Beverly Hills, California, and inquired the prices of briefcases. The store belonged to Leopold Pfefferberg, a Schindler survivor. It was beneath Pfefferberg's shelves of imported Italian leather goods that I first heard of Oskar Schindler, the German *bon vivant*, speculator, charmer, and sign of contradiction, and of his salvage of a cross section of a condemned race during those years now known by the generic name Holocaust.

This account of Oskar's astonishing history is based in the first place on interviews with 50 Schindler survivors from seven nations—Australia, Israel, West Germany, Austria, the United States, Argentina, and Brazil. It is enriched by a visit, in the company of Leopold Pfefferberg, to locations that prominently figure in the book: Cracow, Oskar's adopted city; Płaszów, the scene of Amon

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Goeth's foul labor camp; Lipowa Street, Zablocie, where Oskar's factory still stands; Auschwitz-Birkenau, from which Oskar extracted his women prisoners. But the narration depends also on documentary and other information supplied by those few wartime associates of Oskar's who can still be reached, as well as by the large body of his postwar friends. Many of the plentiful testimonies regarding Oskar deposited by Schindler Jews at *Yad Vashem*, The Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, further enriched the record, as did written testimonies from private sources and a body of Schindler papers and letters, some supplied by *Yad Vashem*, some by Oskar's friends.

To use the texture and devices of a novel to tell a true story is a course that has frequently been followed in modern writing. It is the one I chose to follow here—both because the novelist's craft is the only one I can lay claim to, and because the novel's techniques seem suited for a character of such ambiguity and magnitude as Oskar. I have attempted, however, to avoid all fiction, since fiction would debase the record, and to distinguish between reality and the myths which are likely to attach themselves to a man of Oskar's stature. It has sometimes been necessary to make reasonable constructs of conversations of which Oskar and others have left only the briefest record. But most exchanges and conversations, and all events, are based on the detailed recollections of the *Schindlerjuden* (Schindler Jews), of Schindler himself, and of other witnesses to Oskar's acts of outrageous rescue.

I would like to thank first three Schindler survivors—Leopold Pfefferberg, Justice Moshe Bejski of the Israeli Supreme Court, and Mieczyslaw Pemper—who not only passed on their memories of Oskar to the author and gave him certain documents which have contributed to the accuracy of the narrative, but also read the early draft of the book and suggested corrections. Many others, whether Schindler survivors or Oskar's postwar associates, gave interviews and generously contributed information through letters and documents. These include Frau Emilie Schindler, Mrs. Ludmila Pfefferberg, Dr. Sophia Stern, Mrs. Helen Horowitz, Dr. Jonas Dresner, Mr. and Mrs. Henry and Mariana Rosner, Leopold Rosner, Dr. Alex Rosner, Dr. Idek Schindel, Dr. Danuta Schindel, Mrs. Regina Horowitz, Mrs. Bronislawa Karakulska, Mr. Richard Horowitz, Mr. Shmuel Springmann, the late Mr. Jakob Sternberg, Mr. Jerzy Sternberg, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Fagen, Mr. Henry

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Kinstlinger, Mrs. Rebecca Bau, Mr. Edward Heuberger, Mr. and Mrs. M. Hirschfeld, Mr. and Mrs. Irving Glovin, and many others. In my home city, Mr. and Mrs. E. Korn not only gave of their memories of Oskar but were a constant support. At *Yad Vashem*, Dr. Josef Kermisz, Dr. Shmuel Krakowski, Vera Prausnitz, Chana Abells, and Hadassah Mödlinger provided generous access to the testimonies of Schindler survivors and to video and photographic material.

Lastly, I would like to honor the efforts which the late Mr. Martin Gosch expended on bringing the name of Oskar Schindler to the world's notice, and to signify my thanks to his widow, Mrs. Lucille Gaynes, for her cooperation with this project.

Through the assistance of all these people, Oskar Schindler's astonishing history appears for the first time in extended form.

TOM KENEALLY



PROLOGUE

Autumn, 1943

I
N POLAND'S DEEPEST AUTUMN, a tall young man in an expensive overcoat, double-breasted dinner jacket beneath it and—in the lapel of the dinner jacket—a large ornamental gold-on-black-enamel *Hakenkreuz* (swastika) emerged from a fashionable apartment building in Straszewskiego Street, on the edge of the ancient center of Cracow, and saw his chauffeur waiting with fuming breath by the open door of an enormous and, even in this blackened world, lustrous Adler limousine.

"Watch the pavement, Herr Schindler," said the chauffeur. "It's as icy as a widow's heart."

In observing this small winter scene, we are on safe ground. The tall young man would to the end of his days wear double-breasted suits, would—being something of an engineer—always be gratified by large dazzling vehicles, would—though a German and at this

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point in history a German of some influence—always be the sort of man with whom a Polish chauffeur could safely crack a lame, comradely joke.

But it will not be possible to see the whole story under such easy character headings. For this is the story of the pragmatic triumph of good over evil, a triumph in eminently measurable, statistical, unsubtle terms. When you work from the other end of the beast—when you chronicle the predictable and measurable success evil generally achieves—it is easy to be wise, wry, piercing, to avoid bathos. It is easy to show the inevitability by which evil acquires all of what you could call the *real estate* of the story, even though good might finish up with a few imponderables like dignity and self-knowledge. Fatal human malice is the staple of narrators, original sin the mother-fluid of historians. But it is a risky enterprise to have to write of virtue.

"Virtue" in fact is such a dangerous word that we have to rush to explain; Herr Oskar Schindler, risking his glimmering shoes on the icy pavement in this old and elegant quarter of Cracow, was not a virtuous young man in the customary sense. In this city he kept house with his German mistress and maintained a long affair with his Polish secretary. His wife, Emilie, chose to live most of the time at home in Moravia, though she sometimes came to Poland to visit him. There's this to be said for him: that to all his women he was a well-mannered and generous lover. But under the normal interpretation of "virtue," that's no excuse.

Likewise, he was a drinker. Some of the time he drank for the pure glow of it, at other times with associates, bureaucrats, SS men for more palpable results. Like few others, he was capable of staying canny while drinking, of keeping his head. That again, though—under the narrow interpretation of morality—has never been an excuse for carousing. And although Herr Schindler's merit is well documented, it is a feature of his ambiguity that he worked within or, at least, on the strength of a corrupt and savage scheme, one that filled Europe with camps of varying but consistent inhumanity and created a submerged, unspoken-of nation of prisoners. The best thing, therefore, may be to begin with a tentative instance of Herr Schindler's strange virtue and of the places and associates to which it brought him.

At the end of Straszewskiego Street, the car moved beneath the black bulk of Wawel Castle, from which the National Socialist

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Party's darling lawyer Hans Frank ruled the Government General of Poland. As from the palace of any evil giant, no light showed. Neither Herr Schindler nor the driver glanced up at the ramparts as the car turned southeast toward the river. At the Podgórze Bridge, the guards, placed above the freezing Vistula to prevent the transit of partisans and other curfew-breakers between Podgórze and Cracow, were used to the vehicle, to Herr Schindler's face, to the *Passierschein* presented by the chauffeur. Herr Schindler passed this checkpoint frequently, traveling either from his factory (where he also had an apartment) to the city on business, or else from his Straszewskiego Street apartment to his plant in the suburb of Zablocie. They were used to seeing him after dark too, attired formally or semiformally, passing one way or another to a dinner, a party, a bedroom; perhaps, as was the case tonight, on his way ten kilometers out of town to the forced-labor camp at Płaszów, to dine there with SS *Hauptsturmführer* Amon Goeth, that highly placed sensualist. Herr Schindler had a reputation for being generous with gifts of liquor at Christmas, and so the car was permitted to pass over into the suburb of Podgórze without much delay.

It is certain that by this stage of his history, in spite of his liking for good food and wine, Herr Schindler approached tonight's dinner at Commandant Goeth's more with loathing than with anticipation. There had in fact never been a time when to sit and drink with Amon had not been a repellent business. Yet the revulsion Herr Schindler felt was of a piquant kind, an ancient, exultant sense of abomination—of the same sort as, in a medieval painting, the just show for the damned. An emotion, that is, which stung Oskar rather than unmanned him.

In the black leather interior of the Adler as it raced along the trolley tracks in what had been until recently the Jewish ghetto, Herr Schindler—as always—chain-smoked. But it was composed chain smoking. There was never tension in the hands; he was stylish. His manner implied that he knew where the next cigarette was coming from and the next bottle of cognac. Only he could have told us whether he had to succor himself from a flask as he passed by the mute, black village of Prokocim and saw, on the line to Lwów, a string of stalled cattle cars, which might hold infantry or prisoners or even—though the odds were against it—cattle.

Out in the countryside, perhaps ten kilometers from the center

of town, the Adler turned right at a street named—by an irony—*Jerozolimska*. This night of sharp frosty outlines, Herr Schindler saw beneath the hill first a ruined synagogue, and then the bare shapes of what passed these days as the city of Jerusalem, Forced Labor Camp *Plaszów*, barracks town of 20,000 unquiet Jews. The Ukrainian and *Waffen* SS men at the gate greeted Herr Schindler courteously, for he was known at least as well here as on the Podgórze Bridge.

When level with the Administration Building, the Adler moved onto a prison road paved with Jewish gravestones. The campsite had been till two years before a Jewish cemetery. Commandant Goeth, who claimed to be a poet, had used in the construction of his camp whatever metaphors were to hand. This metaphor of shattered gravestones ran the length of the camp, splitting it in two, but did not extend eastward to the villa occupied by Commandant Goeth himself.

On the right, past the guard barracks, stood a former Jewish mortuary building. It seemed to declare that here all death was natural and by attrition, that all the dead were laid out. In fact the place was now used as the Commandant's stables. Though Herr Schindler was used to the sight, it is possible that he still reacted with a small ironic cough. Admittedly, if you reacted to every little irony of the new Europe, you took it into you, it became part of your baggage. But Herr Schindler possessed an immense capacity for carrying that sort of luggage.

A prisoner named Poldek Pfefferberg was also on his way to the Commandant's villa that evening. Lisiek, the Commandant's nineteen-year-old orderly, had come to Pfefferberg's barracks with passes signed by an SS NCO. The boy's problem was that the Commandant's bathtub had a stubborn ring around it, and Lisiek feared that he would be beaten for it when Commandant Goeth came to take his morning bath. Pfefferberg, who had been Lisiek's teacher in high school in Podgórze, worked in the camp garage and had access to solvents. So in company with Lisiek he went to the garage and picked up a stick with a swab on the end and a can of cleaning fluid. To approach the Commandant's villa was always a dubious business, but involved the chance that you would be given food by Helen Hirsch, Goeth's mistreated Jewish maid, a generous girl who had also been a student of Pfefferberg's.

When Herr Schindler's Adler was still 100 meters from the villa,