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Recasting the "Other": Readings in German-Jewish Interwar Culture and its Aftermath

Probably against Gershom Scholem's intention, his verdict as to the non-existence of a "German-Jewish dialogue" spurred significant scholarly interest in the history of Jewish presence in the German-speaking world (Scholem 1967). In 1964, three years after the Eichmann trial – which had itself actuated a need, especially on the part of Germans, to recall a German-Jewish past from before the Shoah – Scholem dismissed the idea that relations between German Jews and Germans were reciprocal. He stated these views in a letter of response to an invitation to contribute to a Festschrift for Margarete Susman; this text was later published and thus can be considered an open letter. The initiators of the Festschrift had conceived it as a testimony to what Martin Buber, in a 1939 essay, had termed "German-Jewish symbiosis." (Buber 1993) Scholem was implicitly critical of this idea, deeming it "currently popular." Yet for all their differences, Scholem's and Buber's evaluations of German-Jewish cultural history – evaluations which would inform scholarly discourse in the following decades – share a feature that was not only mutual but also common to most of German culture throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Buber, like Scholem, in the latter's critique of a harmonious representation of the German-Jewish relationship based on the principle of equality, demarcates the "German" and the "Jewish" as two distinct "ethnic elements," (Buber 1993, 630) thereby perpetuating a gesture that accompanied emancipation from its beginning.[1]

Such a dual, if not dichotomous, view of the "German" and the "Jewish" reverberates in discussions of German-Jewish cultural history, most explicitly in the use of contrasting pairs; such pairs have included insiders versus outsiders, native versus stranger, center versus margins, major (literature) versus minor, self versus other – this last one being recently replaced by "Gegenüber," (Heuser 2011) i.e., counterpart. In line with this, Todd Herzog's renowned discussion of the concept of "hybridity"[2] shows that use of the term "hybrid," instead of overcoming the dual structure reflected in these contrastive pairs, not only expands that duality but in fact reproduces nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century racial

1 See for instance Katz (1985); Volkov (1994); Hambrock (2003).

2 The concept of "hybridity," introduced by Homi Bhabha into post-colonial cultural theory, looms large in German-Jewish contemporary literature and in its academic interpretations, reviews, and publisher notes.

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theory; "hybrid," Herzog maintains, is ultimately equivalent to "Mischling" [half breed] (Herzog 1997).

Yet these various pairs, considered to somehow represent the relationship between German Jews and Germans,[3] confer a status of primacy on the "German" – a problematic and hardly acceptable view, not least for Jews. For instance, Buber, in writing about the "Jewish essence" [jüdische Substanz] and its diasporic wanderings and eventual entrance into an especially productive relationship with the German spirit (Buber 1993, 632), sets the word "Wirtsvolk," (Buber 1993, 630) or host nation, within quotation marks, thereby questioning the antecedent status of the German spirit. Similarly, Peter Gay, in his 1972 Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture, itself dedicated to the "Berlin-Jewish spirit," states that because "the obstacles in the path of determining the nature of 'the characteristic Jewish mentality' are practically insurmountable. (...) I have not the intention of denying the existence or minimizing the significance of the Jewish presence in Berlin (...)." Gay continues: "I am questioning what we have too long taken for granted for the sake not of denial, but of precision. And precision is just what is lacking in these identifications." (Gay 1972, 9) Nevertheless, perhaps stemming from apprehension about inadvertently becoming complicit in denial of a Jewish contribution to German culture (Aschheim 2001, 88), Gay proposes, towards the end of his speech, to investigate the tensions between Jews from long-established Berlin families and Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, the so-called *Ostjuden* (Gay 1972, 12).

Research into this often strained relationship indeed yielded valuable historical, political, and cultural insights,[4] yet these insights also underscored Gay's view as to the sheer impossibility of accounting for specific characteristics that might allow defining a German-Jewish spirit. It is in this context that the concept of "co-constitutionality" has been presented as a possible means of, on one hand, gaining deeper insight into the interplay between Germans and German Jews within the framework of Weimar culture, and, on the other, of acknowledging a "new sensibility in which older ethnic and religious differences are either peripheral or play no role at all." (Aschheim 2001, 89)

During the Weimar years, Germany became a representation of modern culture and an alluring destination for business people, intellectuals, and artists

3 A critical account of dichotomous patterns, which are prevalent in research addressing the German-Jewish experience, has recently been formulated by Leslie Morris, who points to the need "to move us away from 'constructions' of the Jew and the German as either positive or negative, stereotyped or 'authentic,' and to consider an approach to German Jewish text that will push the very boundaries of the German and the Jewish." See: Morris (2009, viii).

4 See, for instance, Aschheim (1982); Weiss (2000).

from throughout the world, especially from Eastern Europe. For many, including Jews, Germany offered a temporary shelter; it was a place that allowed them to organize so they could continue their journeys – most commonly to America, to other Western European countries and, in the case of Jews, to Palestine. Many others, however, came with intention to set down roots in Germany. People from populations thus far excluded from German society now managed to establish themselves; among them were individuals who attained outstanding positions in political, economic, and cultural life. While many in German society accepted the humanistic concept of a universal humanity, a counter-movement also emerged. This counter-movement, as Steven Aschheim maintains, was boosted by suspicions about "others" entering German society and seems to have been an integral element of modernity, with roots in the Romantic movement. The atmosphere in the young Republic of Weimar was shaped by nationalism, racism, anti-Semitic uprisings, political murder, and increasingly violent street battles between left- and right-wing parties, all of which contributed to the precarious state of affairs already exacerbated by the calamitous economic situation.

It was this atmosphere of crisis in Weimar Germany – accompanied, as Shulamit Volkov suggests, by a dynamic within the Jewish community that unconsciously correlated assimilation against a veiled counter-movement of dissimilation – that forced Jews in Germany to hone their awareness of their "otherness" in relation to the German majority and to rethink their "Jewishness." This challenge was engaged in various ways, of which I will mention several. Some Jews – like the young Yiddish poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, who came to Berlin from Lemberg via Warsaw, and stayed for several months before leaving for Palestine in 1923 – consciously positioned themselves in opposition to European culture, trusting that detachment would lead to renewal of an authentic Jewish self. Others were acutely aware that attempting to resolve the difficult relationship between "self" and "other" could effectively amount to destruction of the "other." Some sought to deal with the extrinsic reduction of Jewish identity in the context of German culture by adding a third component – French or American, for example – to their identities. Thus they sought to unravel the mutual relatedness of the "German" and the "Jewish" and to resolve the tension between them. Still others insisted on a European or cosmopolitan culture that was regarded as tantamount to the "real" German tradition; this afforded a sharpened awareness of having internalized the other.

On an imagined cartography extending between German "self" and Jewish "other," these and other artists and intellectuals who struggled with conflicting internal positions allow for determining the coordinates of borders, positions, and pathways between the two regions. However, the concerns of this volume extend beyond such positioning. The following articles, having recourse to the concept of

the "other" and thus also to the concept commonly perceived as its counterpart – namely, the concept of "self" – variously challenge a key dichotomy that not only has configured Western identity discourse since Romanticism[5] but also, as Sander L. Gilman has shown in a study on stereotypical perceptions of the "other," (Gilman 1991) continues to inform current thinking about "identities."

The articles in this second volume of the *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies* recast the concept of the "other." Elaborating on works of art, perspectives, and concepts, the authors seek to define this concept within the complex interplay of social and political contexts, artistic deliberations and biographic circumstances. In this respect, they exercise a precision – a necessary one, as Peter Gay proposed (Gay 1972, 9) – for grasping the intricacy of the interrelations between the "Jewish" and the "German." Furthermore, as the biographies as well as the works of Weimar intellectuals and artists such as Schoenberg, Broch, and Tucholsky suggest, the complexity of the subject requires discussion of works that – though essentially linked to Weimar Germany – emerged within other cultural and historical contexts. The range of investigations into Jewish "otherness" presented in this volume therefore extends to works that relate to the German-Jewish experience at the margins of the Weimar Republic. It also includes involvements with that experience under conditions of exile from Weimar Germany. Several articles address works that emerged in subsequent periods. Thus we are called upon to recognize that our attempts to comprehend interrelations between "self" and "other" occur in the aftermath of the Shoah – the annihilation of the Jewish other. These works – some written in the years immediately after 1945; others in the past two decades – further enhance our awareness of interpolations into the dyad of the "German" and the "Jewish"; as such, they are conducive towards attempting to unravel the complex correlation between the two.

Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, the articles in this volume recast the concept of the "other" via addressing the Jewishness of artists and intellectuals in the context of Weimar culture or in relation to it, as reflected in and by particular key issues that recur throughout these figures' respective works. These issues include language as well as music, time, history, exile, and space. The approach of these articles builds upon an awareness garnered through a sociological study which was carried out by Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson and later painstakingly introduced by Matthias Hambrock into the German-Jewish context (Hambrock 2003). This is an awareness that social dynamics of exclusion of a population are only secondarily connected to specific traits and features. Yet this

5 This has been elaborated in Wellbery (1996).

secondariness is suspended while one segment of the population – in the case of Weimar, the German majority – seeks to constitute itself as a uniform entity, i.e., as a "self." Retrospectively, certain intellectual efforts of those reduced to their "Jewishness" may thus be an attempt to reassess the secondariness of that status. However, the destabilizing force emanating from various works discussed in this volume seems to be more radical than this. Such radicality appears when artists and intellectuals touch upon diverse aspects of their everyday lives and, in rethinking their Jewishness under the acute constraints of their environment (whatever that Jewishness is, or may have been), problematize well-entrenched conceptions of the human "subject," "language," "history," "exile," and "space." To be sure, there is nothing uniquely "Jewish" about this; the questioning of such conceptions has long been common practice in contemporary discourse and was a significant element at the peak of such discourse, in the 1920's. This becomes clear from studies such as Michael North's *Reading 1922. A Return to the Scene of the Modern*, in which he refers to James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* as canonical works of modern literature; these works, according to North, in their noting the scattered character of ostensibly homogeneous national and universal entities, thereby challenge conceptions such as "history," "subject," and "language." (North 1999) In fact, minorities, such as the Jews in the Weimar Republic, evidence the heterogeneity of their society by way of their very existence: the environment marks them as "other," yet they are also an integral part of the "self" constituted by the majority (and those who wish to be in the majority). At the same time, some works discussed in this volume not only undermine a dichotomous view of the relation between "self" and "other"; they also refute the above-mentioned secondariness attributed to "Jewishness" according to prevalent conceptions of relations between Jews and non-Jews (Germans, Austrians, Poles, Russians, Americans) – conceptions which for the most part are based on assumptions of a primary universal human nature. Moreover, they speak for a concomitance of the Jewish and the German that is neither contrary to universalism nor wrapped within it.[6] In this constellation, "otherness" is neither negated nor determined; rather, it is a shifting feature in a dynamic structure. The complexity of this feature is inextricable yet describable.

The following articles attempt to track this shifting feature in various contexts. They are arranged according to the issues noted earlier (music, exile, time,

6 It may be worth examining if the critique of universalism envisaged in this context shows affiliations to the resistance offered to "general thought" in Moses Mendelssohn's writings; see Hilfrich (2000).

history, space) – an arrangement inescapably influenced by the historical moments when the works emerged.

Uri Ganani and *Ruth HaCohen* trace the pathways of the composers Richard Strauss and Arnold Schoenberg, thereby covering a period spanning the late 1800s to the late 1940s. Strauss and Schoenberg are often juxtaposed as oppositional binaries; in this long-term perspective they appear as mutual alter egos. A complex array of inter- and disconnections evolves as the composers contend with tensions arising in their shared socio-cultural world. In this context, as Ganani and HaCohen show, the composers' respective music – meshed with words – could no longer be understood as the pure and abstract medium they had been considered to be. Caught up in questions of political consequence, the composers referred to history and myth, tradition and modernity, and domestic and public life, even as their music negotiated between the positions of the self and the other.

Stephan Braese drafts the history of a specific tradition that developed among Jews in relation to the German language. This tradition began with Moses Mendelssohn's translation of the Hebrew Bible and was reinforced by Heinrich Heine's writings; it ostensibly concluded with Victor Klemperer's early writings. Yet, Klemperer's research on German linguistic developments during the Nazi regime led him to resort to a concept of the German language shared by Franz Kafka and Karl Kraus – a concept based neither on national nor on ethnical aspects. Retrospectively, however, the cosmopolitan and European aspects featured in Kafka's and Kraus's understanding and practice of the German language were exactly those elements that set them apart from non-Jewish users of German. Paradoxically or not, as Braese states, the German-language culture of the Jews "renewed and strengthened" Jewish identity and Jewish existence in the context of the German-speaking world.

This view of German-language culture aligns with Albert Ehrenstein's writings, which envisioned a society in which difference was not a stigma. As *Hanni Mittelmann* shows in her readings of several of Ehrenstein's stories, including "Tubutsch" (1911), he developed a playful exchange with (his) "others" and encouraged his readers to follow him in this direction. In this sense, Ehrenstein was keenly aware of the political implications of his literary procedures, which to some extent anticipated postmodern notions of space, power relations, and performativity.

Karin Neuburger traces intersections, parallels, and disparities between, on one hand, German literature and culture and, on the other, Eastern European, Yiddish and Hebrew literature and culture, as evidenced in Uri Zvi Greenberg's early poetry written in Lvov, Warsaw, and Berlin between 1918 and 1923. The poet as well as his readers present these years as a period of separation between the

Jewish and the European worlds, with the final break being Greenberg's decision to immigrate to Palestine. However, staged against the background of apocalyptic triumph over two thousand years of history, the literary performance of this separation relates not only to traditions in Hebrew and Yiddish literature, but also, and especially, to the developments in German and German-Jewish contemporary literature which embody Messianic ideas.

Siegfried Kracauer criticized the notion – promoted by German-Jewish intellectuals like Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig – that Judaism was a spiritual home. However, despite rejecting "Judaism," Kracauer deliberately related to "Jewishness" as a cultural and social identity. Moreover, in his endeavor to accommodate "Jewishness" and "Germanness," Kracauer developed a concept of "otherness" which would significantly impact the Frankfurt School.

Roni Hirsh-Ratzkowsky elaborates on the phenomenon of German-Jewish intellectuals being attracted to Paris during the years of the Weimar Republic, i.e., at a time when many Germans considered France a rival country and regarded it with hostility. Hirsh-Ratzkowsky, in investigating the attraction that Paris exerted on figures like Franz Hessel, Kurt Tucholsky, and Paul Cohen-Portheim, reveals complex alliances. For instance, once settled in Paris, these German-Jewish intellectuals exchanged their enforced Otherness, i.e., their Jewishness, for an elected Otherness: now they would be Germans. Here, outside the German lands, they were allowed to feel as part of the German collective. Moreover, acting as mediators of French culture, they tended to contribute to the (re-)naissance of German culture being considered a European culture of shifting borders and identities.

Kristina-Monika Kocyba, in her work on Ludwig Hatvany's family saga *Bondy Jr.* (1929), shows how the author not only reproduces contemporary stereotypes of Jews, Hungarians, and Germans but also underscores the importance ascribed to birth and native language in determining identity. To a large extent, Hatvany's writings align with the nationalistic discourse of his time; yet his literature also breaks from this discourse and illustrates the contradictions that Hungarian Jews had faced for generations. Such dichotomies include the relation between mother tongue and identity (despite identity being defined as pre-lingual); and the contradiction between, on one hand, the view that one's bonds to a particular geographical locale determine national belonging and, on the other, the view that the process of urbanization had rendered the big city the focus of a nation's life – a contradiction which was often "resolved" by blaming Jews for the urban aspects of modernity and by relating the rural way of life to the "native" population.

Marc Caplan argues that the German language which Joseph Roth employs in his novel *Hiob: Roman eines einfachen Mannes* (1930) does not override the protagonist's Yiddish. Caplan unfolds the complex relations between the absent

Yiddish and the present German, and thereby elaborates upon their untranslatability. Judaism and Catholicism, religiosity and secularity, tradition and modernity appear in Roth's work as similarly incongruent pairs. Hence, the German and Yiddish of Roth's novel cannot be understood "as divorced from one another." Rather, Roth's use of German must be viewed in relation to his protagonist's Yiddish, i.e., as a means of magnifying his novel's ambiguity.

Daniel Weidner's account of Hermann Broch's exile exposes biographical, philosophical, theological, political, and literary dimensions of a condition which – other than in many systems of twentieth-century thought – is not set apart from a specific time and place. Exile, seen to be embedded in a "before" and an "after," appears in Broch's writings as a concept always connected to its other. Conceived as a double bind – to the home one has left and to the home where one will live – exile in various contexts calls into question well-entrenched conceptions about the condition of the modern individual, about the epitomic position of the "Jew" in relation to modernity, about the limits of art, and about the politics of exclusion.

Paula Wojcik compares works, written in the second half of the nineteenth century by the Polish author Eliza Orzeszkowa and by the Austrian novelist Karl Emil Franzos. Both authors were heavily influenced by Enlightenment thought and promoted the idea of acculturation. An examination of their novels' respective structures of space suggests that both authors were nevertheless eager to preserve religious and cultural differences; thus each produced an interplay between openness and closeness in the realm of the Eastern European Shtetl, such that Jewish society is depicted as heterogeneous.

Marc Weiland investigates the relationships between space, text, and self in Gary Shteyngart's *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (2002), Bruno Schulz's *Die Zimtläden* (*Sklepy Cynamonowe*, 1934), and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010). He shows that in these three novels self, text, and space enter an interplay that reveals these elements to be mediated through each other. In each work the reader is challenged by literary spaces based upon mimesis and transfiguration; as such, these novels avoid definite meaning and escape the reader's attempts to appropriate the text, even as they nevertheless demand that the reader attempt such engagement. As Weiland explains, in their ambivalence towards the reader's activity these novels mirror, once again, the interrelatedness of an indefinite yet never arbitrary self.

Deborah Ferjencik presents three works of contemporary American-Jewish literature by authors whose grandparents were born in Eastern Europe and immigrated to the United States. These authors, in stark contrast to many of their parents' generation, are eager to connect to their family pasts and to know more about their ancestors' lives in Europe. Yet they have little if any access to

documents and firsthand stories that would offer information about those moments. Their remedy is to invent their ancestral past. In doing so, they produce complex overlaps and interconnections between Europe and America, tradition and contemporary life, and past, present, and future.

Ritchie Robertson, in his reading of the historical novels of Lion Feuchtwanger, Alfred Döblin, and Arnold Zweig, recognizes that, in the context of Weimar Germany, the past appeared familiar. Knowledge accumulated in the era of nineteenth-century Historicism forged an ostensibly intimate relationship with earlier history. This sense of intimacy was fostered by an estrangement from the present – an estrangement which had developed against the backdrop of the disastrous experience of the Great War and political instability. In the writings of Feuchtwanger, Döblin, and Zweig, however, alienation towards the present is evoked not only as a means to criticize social and political ills, but also as a register by which to gain new perspectives on Jewish life in the European context.

Sophia Ebert presents Wilhem Speyer's novel *Das Glück der Andernachs* [The Andernach Family's Good Fortune], written in exile and first published in 1951, after the author's return to Germany. The novel artfully plots the intricate interplay of a German-Jewish family's integration and exclusion in relation to German society in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like Hatvany, Speyer places his characters in various environments and uses topography to designate their political affiliations; thus, between the countryside and the center of metropolitan Berlin, a range of conservative and progressive, nationalistic and cosmopolitan attitudes emerge in the novel. However, Speyer tells the story of the Andernach family as a retrospective and forces the reader to confront the fact that the family's complex interplay will ultimately devolve into sheer exclusion, expulsion, and finally extermination; nevertheless, the novel does not lose sight of historical alternatives to these developments.

Anika Sossna examines how the German-Jewish authors Grete Weil (1906–1999) and Wolfgang Hildesheimer (1916–1991), each of whom survived the Shoah by escaping into exile, coped with the losses they endured, with their guilt towards the victims, with their feelings towards their fellow Jews, and with their own fears and horrors. Both authors sought to come to terms with the past by imagining alternative spaces to historical and present realities – spaces of freedom, spaces of active resistance, and spaces in which their Jewishness played no role. In the works of Weil and Hildesheimer, however, these spaces do not have confining boundaries; rather, they mesh with the very reality they are meant to overcome.

Elena Messner's reading of David Albahari's Belgrade novel *Gec I Majer* focuses on intersections between present and past. These intersections meet and sometimes even merge on the strength of the protagonist's relentless efforts to

learn everything about how his family and other members of Belgrade Jewry were forced into a labor camp and finally exterminated in 1941–1942. In tracing these intersections, Messner brings to mind the political contingency of commemorative culture and its reluctance to integrate memories of "others" which do not confirm to, and sometimes even contradict, hegemonic discourse. Concomitantly, she shows that Albahari's novel fathoms the narrow confines of a memory work which, by way of identification, blurs borders between past and present, reality and imagination, history and psyche, victim and perpetrator.

Amir Eshel, working against the backdrop of a poetic tradition that can be traced to European Romanticism and which found its most concise expression in the philosophical works of Hannah Arendt and Richard Rorty, addresses the notion of *futurity*. Eshel developes *futurity* as a concept that designates poetry's "ability to generate new metaphors and images" and, through this lingual practice, to conceive of "novel ways to view our past and present circumstances" and to anticipate a different future. Eshel calls attention to a decidedly "prospective dimension" in Paul Celan's poetry, which in its most hermetical wordings opens itself to an Other.

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