Jewish Literature in German Clothing...?

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SYNOPSIS
As in the case of Franz Kafka and other authors like Franz Werfel, Joseph Roth, Arthur Schnitzler or Leo Perutz, it is necessary to take seemingly secondary or even hidden allusions to Jewishness very seriously. Only then it is possible to achieve a better, deeper and even completely new understanding of their works. Following on from H. G. Gadamer we must acknowledge that Jewish authors like their readers understand their texts in a fundamentally different way than Christians, due to their own horizon of understanding.

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1. HORIZONS OF UNDERSTANDING

For most German literary scholars, Franz Kafka is seen as the pinnacle of modern German literature. The fact that this Prague writer was also a Jew has most often been duly noted, but no further conclusions have been drawn for the interpretation of his work — even though Kafka himself gave an unmistakable hint in a letter to Max Brod. Kafka believed that although Jews like him wrote in German, they did not create German literature, but only Jewish literature in the German language. Kafka wrote to his friend Brod:

> *Most of those who began to write in German wanted to move away from Judaism* [...] *they wanted to, but they still clung to their fathers' Judaism with their hind legs and found no new ground with their forelegs. Despair over this was their inspiration.*
>
> *An inspiration as honourable as any other, but on closer inspection one with some melancholy peculiarities. Primarily, what their despair poured itself into could not be that German literature, which it outwardly appeared to be* (Kafka 1975, p. 337).

So Kafka saw very clearly that Jews who wrote in German often produced Jewish literature in German clothing, but not truly German literature in the sense of a German

cultural tradition. This is also the judgment that Gershom Scholem came to about Kafka's writing,[1] and which I accordingly took up in my book on Kafka and Kabbalah. When interpreting many of Kafka's texts, it turned out that a specific key was needed to decipher this work, namely Judaism.

How is one to understand this? I will present a little anecdote. When my book *Kafka and Kabbalah* was being translated into Polish, the Polish publisher sent me the first samples of the translation. Fortunately, I was able to give this translation to my wife to check — her mother tongue is Polish. After reading a few pages, she came running to me in dismay and cried: 'Is Kafka really so Catholic? Did you write that?' A comparison with the German text quickly revealed that the translator had not only translated the German vocabulary into Polish, but had also translated Jewish ideas into Catholic ones.

Even more dramatic was the query from the Japanese translator who asked me a series of questions about the German text. The most striking was: 'What is Amos?' Not 'who' is Amos. In other words, he was unaware of the biblical prophet of that name — maybe it is fortunate that I don't understand Japanese and couldn't check the whole text. Of course, we can't do without translators, and without them I would not be able to speak to you here, and I thank the ladies/gentlemen who have taken on this difficult task for us today.

What am I trying to say with these examples? That whenever a person reads a text, he brings his own horizon of understanding, his own understanding of the world to bear on that text in order to make sense of it. This is why Jewish translators in the 19th century, who had to explain what a bar mitzvah was to the German authorities, used the Protestant word 'confirmation' for it. The Jewish word had been translated into German. For the Jews it remained the 'bar mitzvah', and the Christians now believed that the Jews were acquainted with 'confirmations'. Christian readers understood something quite different from Jewish ones. And this surely applies to many of the texts of Jewish-German writers — the case of Kafka is a prime example of this.

This is the danger that lurks in every translation, in every cultural transmission. For this reason I want to limit myself today to German authors so as not to be misled by translation — the same of course applies to Jewish authors writing in Czech, etc.

But back to the point. What I have shown so far, using the example of translation, applies not only to the perception of a text. This perception of texts, always shaped by a subjective worldview, also applies to the perception of the world as a whole. This is what the German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer described in his fundamental work on philosophical hermeneutics, *Truth and Method*. Each of us looks at the world from a quite personal point of view, or horizon of understanding. Gadamer spoke of the merging of horizons in the process of understanding, that is to say, the author's worldview merges with the reader's worldview — and this is how understanding arises. This is not only the case when translating texts, but also when looking at the world, at people and at society. One's own horizon of understanding always mixes

1 'Obviously I've already had "separate thoughts" about Kafka, but of course about Kafka's place in the continuum, not of German (in which he doesn't have any place, as to which he didn't have the least bit of doubt himself; he was, as you well know, a Zionist), but of Jewish literature' (Scholem 1975, p. 212).

with what is encountered. And we must assume that this is the case with Jewish writers when they describe the world in their stories and novels.

This means that with Jewish authors we always have to take their Jewishness into account, that is to say, their way of experiencing and seeing the world as Jews within their environment and subject to their cultural influences. The interpretation of the work of Jewish authors must include their cultural environment, their understanding, which has been shaped by their culture and society, even if they seem to be writing about something quite separate from their Jewishness — I will illustrate this with a few examples later. What has been said, namely that the world of Jewish thought and life must be included in the interpretation of a work by a Jewish author, means one thing above all others — and this was the great mistake of many of Kafka's interpreters: the world of Jewish culture and understanding is not the 'Old Testament' of the Christian West. Nor is the Jewish world the Hebrew Bible, the Torah in the sense of the five books of Moses. The Bible originated in the ancient Middle East, and not in European Judaism. The Jewish world under consideration here is best described as the interpretation of the ancient Holy Scriptures by generations of Jewish commentators on theology, philosophy, ritual, law, festivals, and daily life.

In this statement, however, there lurks the next trap. This European Judaism is extremely diverse, and this diversity has only increased since the Enlightenment. It is not by chance that I did not name my book *Kafka and Judaism*, but rather *Kafka and Kabbalah*, because Kafka's texts were particularly influenced by this school of thought in Judaism, though not by this school alone. Older rabbinical Jewish thinking also has a role here, as well as everyday Jewish festivities.

The imprint of the festival traditions is particularly abiding, and does not require any Jewish scholarship. We see exactly the same in Christianity. If a Christian author writes something in December about the importance of children in the world of human expectations, if he describes hopes of a new beginning, or if at Easter he says something about people standing up for one another or vicarious suffering, any interpreter would expect the theology of Christmas and Easter to play a not insignificant role. So it was with Kafka, who wrote his novel *The Trial* and other 'judgment stories' at the time of the Jewish New Year, that is, in a festive season that speaks of heavenly judgment and people's justification of their life.

However, Jewish life and culture are not limited to religion; they are considerably more diverse, theologically, ideologically, culturally, socially and politically. As an interpreter, one has to look for such possible horizons of understanding in a Jewish author, even if this is not always easy. But one must never efface them! I admit that this is not always as clear and fundamental as in the case of Franz Kafka. I will leave off the Kafka interpretation for today, as I have already said what is essential in my book and other articles. Today I want to try to point out traces that might escape readers, or which they might pass over lightly, or which seem self-evident.

Kafka also sees this inescapable entanglement of Jewish authors with their Jewishness in his friend Max Brod. He once expressed to him the opinion that as a Jewish writer between cultures one cannot truly do justice to either side. Kafka says this as an assessment of Max Brod's essay on philosophy:

> *By the way, what is problematic about 'philosophy' seems to me to be a purely Jewish difficulty, arising from the confusion that, contrary to reality, the natives are too alien to you, and that, contrary to reality, the Jews are too close to you, and as a result you can deal with neither the former nor the latter with equilibrium* (Kafka 1975, p. 378).

German-Jewish authors are caught between two stools, even if they think they are only sitting on one. Franz Werfel is a particularly marked example of this. Those authors who tried to escape their Jewish ghetto only too often came to feel that the Germans to whom they felt close remained strangers to them, while their fellow Jews, from whom they shied away, were still, in spite of everything, their own flesh and blood, their own culture, from which they could never completely escape.

One more important observation must be made before I turn to individual writers. There are authors whose Jewishness is not apparent on the surface of their texts — this includes Kafka's novels and stories; but there are others whose texts expressly address their Jewish subject matter, above all Werfel, Schnitzler and Joseph Roth. In the first case, i.e. Kafka, one must first uncover the hidden Jewish traces. This is only possible with a very intimate knowledge of Jewish literature — but it is incumbent on every interpreter. In the second case, where the Jewish theme is on the surface, it is important to pinpoint the traditions used in order to see how they are to be understood and whether the author follows them or whether he changes them.

If a Jewish author's texts show traces of autobiography, as in the case of Werfel, there is of course no question but that every interpreter should consider the Jewish circumstances from the social, political and intellectual points of view. Some interpreters also take a further, absolutely necessary step here — which I myself took with Kafka — and ask about the religious side, about the Jewish literary and religious traditions that might have been known to the author. These can be the lived, experienced and also written traditions that illuminate the Jewish writer's text. It is essential to refer to these traditions because, for example, the word religion has a completely different meaning for a Jewish author than it does to 'Catholic' ears. A priest is something different for the Jewish thinker than for the Christian one, as is the word worship and everything associated with it. These are just a few particularly striking terms that, in the case of a Jew writing in German, cannot simply be understood according to the standard Christian usage. I once demonstrated this state of affairs in the synagogue regulations that were written in German in the 19th century, and which describe Jewish life and the Jewish religion in the German language using a terminology derived from Christian theology. The result was that the impartial German reader will never understand what the Jewish reader sees behind these terms, because he reads them with his Christian, European glasses on. On the other hand, Jews reading these texts can no longer recognise them as their own, or change them back willy-nilly with Jewish glasses. The result is that the same text is understood in completely different ways by Christian and Jewish readers — this must also be taken into account when interpreting the text.

In other words; even in autobiographical works, it is essential to consider the broader Jewish horizon of understanding, what some words or stories might mean for a Jew in his time or of his specific religious orientation. The same applies, espe-

cially when a Jewish author such as Werfel or Joseph Roth takes up and depicts biblical themes or figures, such as Paul and Jeremiah in Werfel or Job in Roth; because in the Jewish religious tradition, these biblical figures were and are to some extent represented completely differently from the way they are in the Christian tradition. The only way to recognise such differences, however, is through knowledge of the Jewish religious and cultural tradition — one can only see what one knows.

All that has been said so far applies by analogy to authors who write in Czech, or in any of the other languages in which Jewish authors speak. In order to explain my remarks, in the following I will allow authors as diverse as Franz Werfel, Joseph Roth, Arthur Schnitzler and Leo Perutz to have their say.

2. THE EXAMPLE OF FRANZ WERFEL

Compared to Franz Kafka, when looking for Jewishness in the work of Franz Werfel one is pushing at an open door. The autobiographical element in Werfel has long been known and discussed. H. Wagener and W. Hemeker published an anthology entitled *Judaism in the Life and Work of Franz Werfel* (see Wagener — Hemecker 2011; Kirby 1999). But even in the case of Werfel, already so thoroughly explored in this respect, this path leads to new or different insights.

2.1 WERFEL'S NOVEL *BARBARA, OR PIETY* (1929)

Franz Werfel's novel *Barbara, or Piety* is, as the title suggests, about the piety of the Catholic nanny Barbara, who, in a symbolic sense, saves up the treasure of her piety for her foster child Ferdinand all her life, and finally does so in actuality, in the form of a bag full of gold and silver coins. Aside from this the novel is about the officer's son Ferdinand, who is orphaned at an early age, and who in his search for meaning staggers through the whole long novel almost without a will of his own. At a turning point in his life, he is kidnapped from the Catholic seminary where he is supposed to be training as a priest by Alfred Engländer, a fanatically Christ-worshipping Jewish refugee from bourgeois life. This eccentric Jew aims to unite Judaism and Christianity. To achieve this, he makes use of an audience with the probably Hasidic Eastern Jewish rabbi of Dunajow. The project fails because of the calm Eastern Jewish piety of the rabbi and his students. But surprisingly, the rabbi then gives the Christian Ferdinand, whom he had asked to sit on a stool at the foot of his own throne, half of his fish — albeit only the tail part, while the rabbi himself consumes the upper part with the head. The Jew Engländer and his partner Weiss are ignored.

With that, this Jewish episode, which seems like a foreign body within the rest of the novel, comes to an end. It is as though the chapter is dispensable to the rest of the novel.

But if one views this erratic scene within a biographical, and even more so in the Jewish-intellectual-historical context, then it is precisely this scene that forms the crux of the entire novel.

It has long been recognised that the novel has distinct autobiographical features. The first clue lies in the name of the nanny, in which Werfel commemorated his own

Bohemian nanny Barbara, called Babi. She often took the young Jewish boy Franz with her to mass. It is known that throughout his life Franz Werfel had an almost insurmountable inclination towards Christianity, believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but nevertheless never had himself baptised, and towards the end of his life even re-enrolled as a member of a Jewish community. In other words, Franz Werfel's whole life was determined by the theme of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity; he didn't want to give either of them up, but ultimately he seems once more to have seen himself primarily as a Jew.

It is precisely this conflict to which the seemingly anomalous scene of the visit to the rabbi, which is also interwoven with the fate of the two Christians Ferdinand and Barbara, relates.

Let us begin with the enthused Jewish fantasist Alfred Engländer. Engländer is a follower of the Christian Kabbalist Johannes Reuchlin, who derived the name Jesus from the supreme divine name YHWH through a cabbalistic manipulation of letters (see Grözinger 1993, pp. 175–188). Reuchlin interpreted as follows: The hidden God of the Jews revealed himself in his mercy through Jesus. And for the Christian Reuchlin this means that Christianity has now absorbed Judaism, whereby Christianity is the higher form of revelation. And it is precisely this theory of unification that Engländer wishes to implement. A unification of Jews and Christians under Christ, who is also the Messiah of the Jews.

This project fails because of the steadfast piety of the rabbi and his disciples. This rabbi draws his strength from an ecstatic connection to heaven — a process that Kafka also knew and described — which culminates in a joyful dance. Here the visitors encounter a primeval Judaism, an Urjudentum — a term that Werfel certainly knew from Martin Buber — that is unshakeably self-contained and solid. And now a surprising thing takes place. The rabbi shares his fish, a religious act that he has otherwise performed only with his students, and gives half, though only the tail end, not to the Jews, Engländer or Weiss, but to the Christian Ferdinand. This is extraordinary.

Werfel here is heralding doctrines that were very widespread among the Jewish intellectuals of his time. The first is the fascination with Eastern Judaism, in which the assimilated Western Jews saw a primordial Judaism that they too could affirm — Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig are the exemplary representatives of this attitude.

The second is the sharing of the fish with the Christian. Primarily this means that the rabbi rejects Alfred Engländer's attempts at a reconciliation, or even a merging with Judaism, and with it all tendencies towards reform Judaism, as well as the positions of Martin Buber. By contrast, Werfel takes the position of Franz Rosenzweig in this symbolic representation. In his book *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig argues that there is a dual path to salvation planned by God. This dual path consists of Judaism and Christianity. Traditional Judaism has priority here. This Judaism has always possessed salvation and therefore already stands outside of history. It is a people beyond history, like the rabbi who, in his ecstasy, has constant access to transcendence. By contrast, Christianity is still on a path that it has to struggle along with constant effort. Christianity does not yet possess salvation, but must pass through the turbulence of history in order to attain it. In Werfel the rabbi, the Jew, eats the head part of the shared fish, while the Christian only receives the second part, the tail. As symbols head and tail speak for themselves!

Seen from this perspective, the further development of the novel is consistent. The Christian Ferdinand is now back in the turmoil of human history; the war, the turbulence of the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the revolution. Only a single Christian seems already to have attained the goal of her pious life, namely Barbara. This is why out of her piety she has saved a treasure for Ferdinand, in the shape of a bag full of gold coins. She passes this Christian treasure of piety on to Ferdinand. Ferdinand only uses this treasure sparingly, in cases of extreme emergency. But then he plunges this treasure into the sea; this signifies, in Rosenzweig's sense, that the treasure of Christian piety is, unlike the Jewish one, not a firm inheritance that can be passed down from generation to generation. Ferdinand must win it for himself, and cannot receive it as an inheritance from Barbara.

With this interpretation, the scene of the visit to the Rabbi of Dunajow actually becomes the centre and pivotal point of the entire novel, which determines the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. And from this relationship there arises the further development of the various characters in the novel.

2.2 WERFEL'S NOVEL *EMBEZZLED HEAVEN*, ORIGINALLY: *STOLEN HEAVEN* (1939)

Werfel's novel *Embezzled Heaven* is basically a revision of *Barbara*. Here too a pious maid gives her savings to a nephew, who, however, deceives her and does not become a priest, as the maid had hoped. The focus is on the Moravian maid Teta from Hustopeče, who wants to secure her place in the hereafter, in eternal life, by financing grammar school and studies for the priesthood in Olomouc for her nephew Mojmir. In the end, the supposed priest whose task is to secure the hereafter for Teta turns out to be a swindler — her plans for the hereafter seem to have been thwarted.

After the end of her plan for securing salvation, the maid takes part in a pilgrimage to Rome. There she collapses during the blessing by the Pope and catches hold of his robe. The Pope promises to remember her in prayer, which seems to guarantee the unexpected assurance of eternal salvation. She dies soon after.

Nothing could be more Catholic, all the more so since Werfel brings a huge apparatus of Catholic religious ritual and lore to bear here. For example, the author of the related article in *Kindlers Literaturlexikon*[2] does not once refer to anything Jewish. According to the author of the lexicon article, the subject of the novel is a commitment to the true Catholic faith.

But with all this 'Catholicism', it seems peculiar that the man who ultimately secures salvation for the poor Moravian maid is, of all people, a baptised Jew: the travel marshal Joseph Eusebius Kompert, who in the final analysis is regarded only as a Jew. The Jew is responsible for the success of the pilgrimage to the Vatican, and it is he who forces the sick Pope to attend the audience, which had in fact been cancelled. And it is in this forced audience that Teta Linek finally receives the papal blessing.

At this point at the very latest one should sit up and take notice, for here the novel actually becomes the grotesque that Werfel himself spoke of. Once this astonishing Jew, who is ultimately nothing but a Jew in Christian garb, is taken seriously, then one

2 Author Irena Živsa.

starts to notice Jewish elements running throughout the entire novel, which step by step lead it away from being an avowal of the Catholic religion. Although the Catholic piety of the maid remains at the centre of the novel as whole, this piety now takes on a completely different meaning.

In a conversation with the story's narrator, the maid's mistress, Mrs. Argan, says something astonishing: she regards her maid's piety not as a belief in a truth, but as a lived lie. But, she adds, this lived lie is necessary, it is a necessary illusion. Mrs. Argan, therefore, believes that one should not speak of lived lies here, but that one should call this a lived belief. These are the lived lies that people need in order to survive (Werfel 1952, p. 46).

The author Werfel is now living in 1939, and he has gained new biographical insights. He also seems to have read Franz Kafka. Because it is precisely this conception of the necessary illusions of life that Kafka expresses several times, and that he describes in detail in his story of 'Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse Folk'. Kafka certainly did this with a wistful backwards glance at the miracle-working Hasidic rabbis, in whose help he could no longer believe, but whom he nevertheless occasionally visited. For Kafka this was Judaism, in which he no longer believed, but from which he sought help in times of need (Grözinger 2014, pp. 183–203). What this means for both of Werfel's novels is this: the pious maid Barbara in the first novel has now become a woman living a pious lie. She masters her life thanks to this self-deception which is necessary for her.

Another point now becomes clear: In this second novel, Werfel takes up a whole series of Catholic theological topoi that apply just as much to traditional Jewish theology — such as the idea of purgatory[3] (Werfel 1952, p. 30) existing between heaven and earth (ibid., p. 32) and people having to justify themselves before the throne of God the judge, for which they have to procure advocates (ibid., p. 33 etc.; see Grözinger 2014, pp. 13–27, 28–57 and passim). Also, the sacred image that the pious maid always carries with her has a not inconsiderable distribution, particularly in Eastern European Judaism.

Against this background, the novel appears to Jewish readers as a criticism of traditional Judaism. In view of this, Werfel seems to be portraying the whole of Judaism as well as Christianity as one such desperate, necessary lived lie and illusion. He underlines this by listing the Jews alongside the clergy, who take advantage of poor believers and spread their religion as the opium of the people (Werfel 1952, p. 19).

All told, here the reappraisal of Jewish traditions also shows the reversal described: in the case of Barbara, from the glorification of piety on the dual path of Judaism and Christianity towards the portrayal of piety as a necessary lived lie in both religions — in *Embezzled Heaven*.

In the following I will quickly refer to a few key points from other authors, which are intended to show how important it is to be aware of their Jewish backgrounds.

3. JOSEPH ROTH

Everyone will at once admit that one has to be aware of a Jewish background in order to understand Joseph Roth's *Job: The Story of a Simple Man* (Oberhänsli-Widmer 2017).

3 Jewish: Gehinnom.

But what leads to a classic misunderstanding, which I also had to fight against with Kafka, is the opinion of interpreters that Joseph Roth's Judaism is that of the 'Old Testament', that this is the background against which the novel should be interpreted. I refer once more to *Kindlers Literaturlexikon*, in which the author of the article (KLL) writes: 'Roth tries to answer the question of the meaning of suffering in the spirit of the Bible.' The name of the biblical hero Job leads the interpreter simply to see the biblical text as the background. In so doing he fails to notice that, with Joseph Roth, the basic question of the biblical discussion is almost turned into its opposite. The biblical Job continuously maintains that he is sinless, and that he is suffering innocently: 'I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgement was as a robe and a diadem' (Job 29: 14). 'Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity' (Job 31: 5). To the biblical Job, however, his friends insist that Job must have sinned, because suffering is always the result of human guilt.

In Joseph Roth, on the other hand, it is the new Job, Mendel Singer, who is himself constantly reckoning with a sin for which he will be punished: Mendel Singer calls out 'My children are burning, the fault is mine, mine!' (Roth 1969, p. 81); or 'He answers our prayers if we do nothing wrong. But if then we do wrong, he can punish us!' (ibid., p. 56). And finally, 'He gives to one and takes away from another. I don't know what he is punishing us for, first with the sick Menuchim and now with the healthy children' (ibid., p. 26).[4]

In his theology of sin, Joseph Roth does not refer to the biblical Job, but to the later Jewish-rabbinical interpretation of this book. There it says, for example: 'Even if the whole world says you are righteous, consider yourself a wrongdoer.'[5] An authentic commentary on this Jewish conception is Kafka's *The Trial* — for which I have to refer readers to my book. According to the rabbinical conception no man is without guilt, the ultimate proof of which is his death. This is why Josef K. finally allows himself to be executed without resistance.

In the case of Josef Roth, the Job theme was shifted from a biblical question to a later Jewish, rabbinical question. The Bible deals with the issue of human righteousness. The biblical Job protests against the notion that human suffering is always based on human guilt. This conception of the biblical Job is rejected at the end of the book by reference to the higher righteousness of the creator of the world, which Man cannot understand. For Roth this argument from the biblical conclusion of the book of Job is already the argument of Job's friends: 'You know better than I do [...] that God's blows have a hidden meaning. We don't know what we are being punished for' (ibid., p. 93).

Joseph Roth's Job acknowledges the connection between suffering and human guilt. Roth's subject is rather the question of the proportionate relationship between guilt and punishment, and also the question of how much suffering a person can bear, or even endure. The subject for Joseph Roth is the question of God's justice, whereas the Bible deals with the question of human justice. Roth's Job claims that God is cruel (ibid.). Roth's Job shouts: 'God is cruel [...] only the weak does he love to destroy. A person's weakness stimulates his strength, and obedience arouses his wrath' (ibid.). In

4 See also Roth (1969, pp. 8, 24, 26, 28, 43, 55, 56 /!/, 81 /!/, 87, 92, 93, 94, 95); but at other times Mendel Singer sees himself as wrongly punished (p. 94).

5 Yalkut Schimoni II, Job, chap. 29, p. 1015b.

short, Roth's Job is a rabbinical, exiled Job, while the biblical Job is a critic of ancient oriental wisdom theology.

In his novel *Tarabas*, Joseph Roth repeats this rabbinical vision of history and suffering. After a pogrom in the village of Koropta, Roth wrote:

> *They didn't feel the curses that had been heaped on them, they just felt their pain. For the people of Israel has known one single disgrace for two thousand years, in the face of which all the subsequent scorn and mockery of its enemies become ludicrous: the disgrace of knowing there is no temple in Jerusalem. Whatever other shame, ridicule, and woe may come, it is a consequence of that bitter fact. Sometimes the Eternal sends new plagues and punishments, as if the heavy cup of suffering was not yet full.* [...] *Yesterday God wanted the Jews of Koropta to be beaten. And they were beaten. Hadn't they, in their sinful arrogance, believed that peace had returned?* (Roth 1966, p. 110)

Joseph Roth here reproduces central elements of the Jewish-rabbinical view of history, which continues in Orthodox circles to this day, even after the Shoah.[6]

4. ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

If I now take a quick look at Arthur Schnitzler, I will most certainly be knocking on an open door. But I still have to mention him because the Jewishness or Jewishnesses with which we are dealing with in Schnitzler are completely different from those of the previous authors. This statement is itself important for the interpretation of a work by a Jewish author. One always has to clarify the kind of Jewishness with which he identifies himself, and which ones he rejects or combats. To do this one naturally has to familiarise oneself with the existing Jewish testimony beforehand. Fortunately in Schnitzler's case there are plentiful statements defining his own Jewishness in his letters. But there still remains the question of which type of Jewishness he ascribes to his heroes, and which image of Judaism the literary anti-Semites have in mind.

In the novel that I have in mind here, *The Road into the Open*, Schnitzler's first, the Jewish topic is discussed in several places. But whether it is at the centre of the book, or whether one could simply remove it without affecting the main theme, is a much-discussed theme in the specialist literature. Internal arguments for this are sought and found within the novel. If the main thread of the novel is taken simply to be the tragic love story between the aristocratic Georg Wergenthin and the Catholic bourgeois girl Anna Rosner, then one must ask why anti-Semitism and internal Jewish controversies are discussed here in so much detail. If the main topic is the decadence of Viennese fin de siècle society, these debates about Judaism are not really necessary; a few Jewish bohemians or socialists would have sufficed for it. The most plausible answer to these questions is this: a Christian writer would hardly have needed these Jewish topics to portray the love story or Viennese society, and he would hardly have

6 The journey into exile of the Jewish sinner Jedlinger, who had worked as an informant, also belongs here (Roth 1966, pp. 133–137).

been interested in them. But if a Jewish author does so, the first answer to 'why?' can only be, because he is personally concerned with the Jewish subject matter. And with that, these Jewish insertions and minor characters gain a different weight from the author's point of view. Schnitzler himself countered the accusation that he had joined two stories that did not belong together. In a letter to the literary critic Georg Brandes from July 1908, Schnitzler wrote:

> *Dear sir, you are probably right that there are two novels in my book and that, from an artistic point of view, the context may not be absolutely necessary.* [... But] *I didn't cram anything into it because I was looking for opportunities to propose certain views or aphorisms* [...] *Georg's relationship with his beloved was always just as important to me as his relationship with the various Jews in the novel* (Schnitzler 1981, pp. 578–579).

Within this context Schnitzler goes on to explain that things only developed in this way during the course of writing. This is reminiscent of Franz Kafka, who once said that during the writing process he never proceeded according to any sort of plan but let himself drift, and only saw what came out at the end. Schnitzler also seems to have been driven by this Jewish theme. For him it belonged to both topics, to the love story as well as to the catastrophic depiction of the fin de siècle.

With Schnitzler, however, there is also some conscious reflection behind this drivenness, as can be seen in the polemics of the Zionist Leo Golowski. Leo here represents views similar to those presented by Schnitzler's friend Theodor Herzl in his book *The Jewish State*, which Schnitzler certainly knew (Schnitzler 1978, p. 92).[7] Herzl says briefly:

> *Nobody will deny the plight of the Jews. In all of those countries where they live in significant numbers, they are more or less persecuted. In practise equality is abolished to their disadvantage almost everywhere, even if it does exist in law. Even middling positions in the army and in public and private office are closed to them. One tries to force them out of business: 'Don't buy from Jews!'* (Grözinger 2015, p. 139)

And Leo accuses his friend Heinrich of claiming that he is an Austrian German because he happens to write in German and live in Vienna, but that he does not want to admit what separates him from such Germans, namely

> *Those few Jewish civil servants who don't advance, the few Jewish volunteers who don't become officers, the Jewish lecturers who are not made professors, or only belatedly* (Schnitzler 1978, p. 92).

Moreover, Leo accuses Heinrich, speaking not least under the impression made on him by the Basel Zionist Congress, of not knowing the Jews gathered in Basel:

7 See Arthur Schnitzler (1981, p. 263) for a letter to Theodor Herzl, in which this book is mentioned.

> *... it is a matter of completely different people, who you don't know well or not at all, and of fates* [...] *to which you certainly haven't given enough thought, despite the real obligation that you have* (ibid.).

There follows an important passage:

> *He* [Leo] *then spoke of his experiences at the Basel Zionist Congress, in which he had participated the previous year, where he had been given a deeper insight into the nature and state of mind of the Jewish people than ever before. The longing for Palestine, he now knew, had not been artificially introduced into these people, whom he had seen up close for the first time; it worked inside them as a real, never-extinguished, and now by necessity newly resurgent feeling* (ibid.).

In such formulations Schnitzler takes up ideas formulated by the first Zionist author Moses Hess, and then repeated by Leo Pinsker and Theodor Herzl.[8] Schnitzler shows that he is deeply involved in contemporary Jewish debates. All of which makes a strong argument for the Jewish theme in this novel not being a mere secondary side note, but rather the main theme. Heidi Gidion is right about this, when she practically reverses the thrust of some interpreters and says that the apparent hero of the novel, Baron Georg von Wergenthin, is ultimately only the catalyst for making the Jewish voices heard (Gidion 2019).

5. LEO PERUTZ

The book *By Night Under the Stone Bridge* by Leo Perutz belongs to a completely different genre from the works discussed so far. It is a retelling of older Jewish legends, but here too the reader cannot simply follow the narrative. When a Jewish-educated reader reads these stories by Perutz, he encounters motifs at every turn that would be completely unfamiliar to a Christian. In the story of the plague in the Jewish Town, the Jewish reader encounters the rabbinical topos of calamity befalling a city because of the sin hidden within it (Perutz 1990, p. 14ff). The rabbi then invokes the sinner by means of the sacred letters. There is a fully developed theology of letters behind such an incantation (compare with Grözinger 2005; 2017). Of course, there is an appearance by the Golem, which is also connected to the theme of the miraculous names of God; another motif is the idea, taken very literally, that the souls of the dead remain in the vicinity of the corpse for seven days, which is why the mourning period lasts this long. The dog in which a wanted thief is hiding, and which howls at night in front of the rabbi's house, is also part of the fully developed Kabbalistic doctrine of the transmigration of souls.

Readers aware of these Jewish traditions will feel at home and on familiar ground in these stories. For the Christian reader, these are tales of fantastical and exotic horror literature. It is precisely here that it becomes apparent that the reading public must also be included as a factor in the interpretation of such a work.

8 For all of them see Grözinger (2015).

6. SUMMARY

With all these authors it is evident that the work of a Jewish author, in whatever language he writes, cannot simply be regarded as German, Czech or Polish literature. With such Jewish authors one always has to pay attention to both the biographical, and the wider Jewish cultural and religious contexts. These contexts will teach us to understand the texts of such Jewish authors differently, and show how much that is Jewish is hidden under the garb of German, Czech, and other languages.

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