Notes

1. For a detailed account of Italian Jewry, see Cecil Roth *The History of the Jews of Italy* (Philadelphia, 1946). For a fascinating look at Italian-Jewish writers of this century, see H. Stuart Hughes *Prisoners of Hope* (Harvard, 1983).
2. The theme of the last one, in its ritual form, lies at the core of André Schwarz-Bart's Holocaust narrative *The Last of the Just*, and of Charlotte Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz et après*.
3. Primo Levi *Collected Poems*, translated by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann, (London, 1988), p. 24. All page references for the poems are to this edition.
4. Elie Wiesel "The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration" in *Dimensions of the Holocaust* (Evanston, Illinois, 1977), p. 12.
5. The effect of Nazism on the German language is discussed in another famous essay in George Steiner's *Language and Silence*; "The Hollow Miracle", pp. 117–132.
6. T. W. Adorno "Engagement" in *Noten zur Literatur III* (Frankfurt, 1965), pp. 109–135. Wiesel is quoted in *Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel*, edited by Alvin Rosenfeld and Irving Greenberg (Bloomington, 1978), p. 4.
7. E. Wiesel, 1977, p. 6 (see note 4 above).
8. In A. Rosenfeld "The Problematics of Holocaust Literature" in *Confronting the Holocaust* (see note 6 above).

The German-Jewish Symbiosis in Central Europe

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The exiled Czech writer Milan Kundera once observed that Central Europe in the years before Hitler owed more to the Jewish genius than perhaps any other part of the world. The Jews were the "intellectual cement", the cosmopolitan and integrative element which added a quintessentially European colour, tone and vitality to great cities like Berlin, Vienna, Prague and Budapest.[1] If the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918 physically unhinged Central Europe, the mass murder of its Jewish population during World War II can be said to have irredeemably damaged its soul. For with the disappearance of its Jewish leaven and the crushing of the smaller nations sandwiched between Russia and Germany, the brilliant melting-pot which so decisively shaped European culture in the early 20th century has seemingly faded for ever.

The scale and magnitude of this disaster was aptly evoked for an English-speaking audience by Frederic V. Grunfeld in his *Prophets without Honour* who asked his readers to imagine:

> . . . that Aldous Huxley was beaten to death in a prison camp near Oxford; that T. S. Eliot had died in exile in Peru; that the aged Bernard Shaw committed suicide on a ship to South America; that Hemingway and Fitzgerald, as well as Rodgers and Hammerstein, had been compelled to live out their last days in a small community in Guatemala . . . that George Gershwin had been killed trying to cross the Mexican border. That William Faulkner had learned Spanish in order to teach in a school, in Caracas; that Henry Moore had made a new career for himself in Cuba – but that W. H. Auden, Marianne Moore, Louis Armstrong, Aaron Copland and E. E. Cummings had been among those rounded up and gassed by the police . . . it sounds like a science fiction plot, absurd and wholly unbelievable. But this is what actually happened in my lifetime in the cultural life of Germany.

Nowhere is this catastrophe more palpable in its consequences than in post-war Berlin, with its physical division between East and West providing a concrete symbol of the cultural and political chasm in the heart of Europe. For Jews, too, this city has a special significance – both as beginning and end. It was here that the modern history of European Jewry started with Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) and some one hundred and fifty years later reached its macabre climax with the planning, organization and carrying out of the Nazi "Final Solution". Hence, Berlin and Germany as a whole represents for Jews both a high-point of achievement and creative response to Gentile surroundings (the last decades of Wilhelmine Germany and the Weimar flowering) as well as the nadir of centuries of murderous

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anti-semitism culminating in the *Shoah*.

The tragic end cannot be wished away but should not be used to obscure or minimize the importance of the cultural achievement and its legacy. At the same time a sober reassessment of the role of the Jews in the land of *Dichter* and *Denker* cannot but induce some melancholy reflections. From Mendelssohn to Leo Baeck, German Jews (like their co-religionists throughout Central Europe) were an integral part of the great humanist civilization whose main vehicle was the German language and traditions of scholarship. But once barbarism stood at the gates, humanism proved to be a weak reed and that ponderous Christian-Germanic notion of *Kultur* (for which Biblical Hebrew has no equivalent) collapsed into servile obsequiousness before the dictates of the *Richter* and *Henker*. Against this sombre background it is all the more striking that modern Jews have for the most part retained their belief in science, rational ethics and the autonomy of man, though the messianic faith which once inspired their humanist commitment to *Kultur* has been understandably eroded.

The key to this tenacious optimism no doubt lies deep in the foundations of the Jewish religious faith and national character as it was formed through centuries of overcoming adversity and by the experience of having outlived the mighty world-empires of the past. But the encounter with the German *Aufklärung* of the late 18th century was a formative experience that decisively reinforced this belief in human rationality. As George Mosse has recently pointed out, the ideal of *Bildung* (self-cultivation) which "transcended all differences of nationality and religion through the unfolding of the individual personality" virtually became synonymous with Jewishness for many emancipated Central European Jews. Having entered modernity under the sign of *Bildung* in its cosmopolitan sense – i.e. as an integral faith in education, moral perfectibility, self-discipline and aesthetic harmony – German Jews in particular would not easily renounce what had been so assiduously acquired.

There is no need to elaborate here on the significance of Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* as a symbol of the Age of Reason and Tolerance for successive generations of emancipated Jews in Central Europe. Nor on the importance of Goethe's cosmopolitan serenity and classical faith in *Bildung* and Humanity as a model for Jews, not only in Germany but also in Eastern Europe. This was even more true of Germany's national poet, Friedrich von Schiller, whose exaltation of freedom and equality struck a particularly resonant chord in the hearts of the oppressed Polish Jews. The Austrian novelist, Joseph Roth, born in Brody (Eastern Galicia) near the Russian border and educated in the local German gymnasium, wrote in his poignant *Juden auf Wanderschaft* (1923):[2] "For the East European Jews, Germany is still the land of Goethe and Schiller – the German poets whom every studious Jewish youth knows better than our Nazi grammar-school boys." In the Eastern borderlands of the former Austrian Monarchy, whether in Cracow, Lemberg (Lvov), Czernowitz or the small towns of Eastern Galicia where Jews often accounted for over 50% of the population, this was no exaggeration.

Ostjuden along with more Westernized Jews had for several generations been primary bearers of German *Kultur*. Already during the 1848 Revolution this had aroused the antagonism of the Polish insurrectionists in Poznan and of the Czechs in Bohemia. In Prague, by the 1850s most Jews were not only German-speaking but effectively Germanized. In spite of the bitter reproaches of the Czech nationalists they persisted in their allegiance to a cosmopolitan *Deutschtum* even as Prague was inexorably transformed into a Czech-speaking city. (By 1900 there were 415,000 Czechs as against 25,000 Jews and only 10,000 Germans in Prague.) In 1890 74% of Prague Jews still declared German to be their *Umgangssprache* though for reasons of prudence and a desire to appease rampant Czech nationalism, the figure dropped after 1900 to under 50%. But this did not undo the deep affinities which tied the Prague Jews to German language and secular culture.

Not even the rise of a fiercely antisemitic *völkisch* nationalism among German students in Prague and followers of Georg von Schoenerer in the Sudetenland, could shake the German loyalties of most Bohemian and Moravian Jews. True, some Czech Jewish intellectuals were drawn to the charismatic figure of Thomas Masaryk (who had courageously interceded against Czech popular anti-semitism during the Hilsner book libel case of 1899) and felt attracted by his call for a return to the spiritual values of

Jan Hus and the Czech Reformation. But the prospects of a Czech-Jewish symbiosis would only bear fruit in the special circumstances of the first Czech Republic when the interests of both groups increasingly coincided. *Fin-de-siècle* Prague in Felix Weltsch's words remained "a place where German literature and art were thriving . . . where the most intense assimilation of the Jews to German culture was the order of the day."

A good illustration of the prevailing attitudes in Prague is afforded by a letter written in 1914 by the liberal Czech Zionist (later Rector of Jerusalem's Hebrew University), Hugo Bergmann to Professor Carl Stumpf in Berlin (we shall return to this revealing document later). Bergmann is defending himself against the reproach that one cannot be both a Zionist and a "German" philosopher.

> German is my mother tongue, I have attended only German schools, speak and think German. These are generally the criteria by which membership within Germandom or the Czech nation are judged in these parts. According to these criteria I am as German as anyone and indeed more so, since I have studied at a German University and learned everything I know, *only* from Germans . . . moreover I consider German culture far superior to Czech and more deserving of promotion . . .[3]

At the same time Bergmann emphasized that his identification with German language and *Kultur* had nothing in common with a *Germanisierungspolitik* that would deny national self-determination to "culturally inferior" Slav peoples. Diversity was a value in itself and the Germans who around 1700 had stood on a far lower level than the vastly superior French, would have had no Goethe or Schiller had they applied contemporary criteria to themselves at that time. Bergmann quoted his Catholic philosophy teacher and mentor, Franz Brentano "who always spoke bitterly about the Magyarization of the smaller peoples of Hungary" to demonstrate his own disapproval of nationalistic chauvinism in East-Central Europe and his sympathy for the small, oppressed peoples of the region. Indeed, precisely as a Zionist who had been nurtured on enlightened German culture, he rejected forcible assimilation, pointing out that it was by no means a tragedy "if in Palestine today Hebrew has become the everday language and along with the so-called 'Jargon' [Yiddish] a vehicle for literature."[4]

Bergmann's reference to "Magyarization" as a negative example of nationality policies (viewed from a liberal standpoint) was particularly ironic given the Magyar-Jewish alliance which had gradually emerged in Greater Hungary since the 1840s. In Hungary a unique kind of political symbiosis had developed even before the 1848 Revolution between Hungarian nationalism and the Jewish Reform movement. Nowhere indeed did Jews sacrifice themselves with greater fervour for the patriotic cause (in this case Magyar national liberation) than in Hungary in 1848, despite pogroms – encouraged by German as well as Hungarian settlers – and popular resistance to their emancipation. Their identification with the Magyar struggle against Habsburg tyranny, brutal Russian repression and the spectre of Pan-Slavism was severely punished with the victory of the counter-revolution in 1849. But after 1867 the Jewish alliance with the dominant Hungarian nobility proved highly profitable to both sides. The integration and Magyarization of the Jews became an essential component in official Magyar policy, designed to neutralize the numerical weight of the Slav, German and Rumanian minorities who constituted just over half of the population of Greater Hungary.

Not surprisingly, antisemitism in pre-1914 Hungary was rather stronger among Germans, Rumanians or Slovak villagers who resented the Jews as "agents" of Magyarization (and of capitalist modernization) than it was among ethnic Magyars. After a brief flurry of antisemitic agitation in the early 1880s under Victor von Istoczy, the movement declined and was noticeably weaker than in German or Slavic parts of the Habsburg Monarchy. The Hungarian Liberal Government, for its own reasons of self-interest, repressed antisemitism more firmly than was the case elsewhere in East-Central Europe. The Jews had become crucial partners in the industrialization of a predominantly agrarian society. Indeed they achieved a dramatic hegemony in the commercial and banking sectors of the economy, within the free professions and

the liberal intelligentsia which was no less impressive (though not as well-known or studied) as the German and Austrian examples.

This is less surprising when one recalls that in Budapest, Jews constituted no less than 40% of the pupils in the secondary schools at the turn of the century. Indeed, in some of the best Protestant and state gymnasia of Budapest before the First World War they were often the majority. They were therefore well placed to take advantage of their educational assets in the rapidly developing markets for the service professions and tended to dominate the ranks of the free-lance intellectuals. As in Vienna, schooling became the key factor in social mobility and cultural assimilation. Not surprisingly, then, the percentage of Jews in the Magyarized liberal-bourgeois elite of Budapest was far above their share in the population (the same was true in Vienna, and to a lesser degree in Berlin). Nowhere else in East-Central Europe, so it seemed, were social and political conditions so favourable for a swift and successful assimilation of the Jews. (This belief ignored among other factors the efficacy of the ideological and institutional barriers thrown up by Jewish Orthodoxy and the Hassidic movement in the more backward parts of Hungary to the progress of Enlightenment and modernization.) But appearances turned out to be deceptive. In the greatly altered circumstances of a rump Hungary after 1918, stripped of its minorities and traumatized by the short-lived Communist regime of Bela Kun – followed by civil war and counter-revlutionary terror – the old "liberal" traditions of the Magyar ruling class rapidly disappeared. Post-1918 Hungary became a pacemaker in virulent political antisemitism in contrast to the comparatively liberal, tolerant atmosphere of neighbouring Czechoslovakia, which during the Austrian period had been considerably less hospitable to Jews.

The fascinating example of partitioned Poland (1795–1918) is too complex to be dealt with here in any great detail. Moreover, apart from Austrian Galicia, it cannot be easily defined within our chosen cultural framework. Nevertheless, a few observations on Polish-Jewish relations may help to illuminate the role of the Jews in Central Europe in general. As in Hungary, the weight of Jewish orthodoxy and the strength of the Hassidic movement was a serious barrier (especially obvious in Galicia) to the acculturation and assimilation of the mass of Polish Jewry. The sheer size of the Jewish community, its spectacular rate of growth, its rapid urbanization and social differentiation as well as its cultural distinctness meant that the problems of modernization and integration were particularly acute. Moreover, between 1815 and the First World War the majority of Polish Jews lived under Tsarist rule – a fact which tended to aggravate their relations with Gentile Poles – given the growing influence of Russian culture on the Jewish intelligentsia. The more generous attitudes fostered by Polish patriots in the first half of the 19th century towards Jews gave way (especially in Russian-controlled territory) to an exclusivist, organic and antisemitic nationalism which virtually precluded any Jewish participation in Polish culture.

In Austrian Galicia, the least industrialized part of partitioned Poland, antisemitism was more related to the general problems of underdevelopment and poverty. Catholic populist movements like those of the priest Father Stojalowski took advantage of the economic tensions between Jewish middlemen and Polish peasants for political ends. The pogroms which broke out in Western Galicia in 1898 drew on this primitive rural anti-capitalism for which the Jew provided a ready scapegoat. Nevertheless in Austrian Poland, as in Hungary (though more equivocally), a nexus between the dominant pre-war Galician nobility and the Jewish elite (based on mutual economic interests and the Polish need for Jewish allies against the Ukrainian minority), did develop and provide a modicum of security for the Jewish population. But the level of Polonization and assimilation among Galician Jews – except for a small group of "Poles of the Mosaic faith" – remained largely insignificant before the First World War. Already by the end of the 19th century, the pressure of Jewish nationalism and Zionism, in addition to the overriding orthodox influence, weakened the chances for assimilation on the German, Austrian or Hungarian pattern.

The heightened nationalism of independent Poland with its many national minorities and a population of three million Jews (10% of the total population) after 1918 further exacerbated tensions. The "Jewish problem" as it had been inherited from the era of the three Empires was

resuscitated under increasingly unfavourable economic conditions. The extent of Jewish alienation from the Polish State was revealed by the startling fact that in the 1921 census only about one quarter of Polish Jews said that they were of Polish nationality. In 1931 only 381,000 Jews out of a population of over 3 million listed Polish as their native tongue. These facts, however they are interpreted, already indicated how far removed Poland had already become from the Central European model of cultural, linguistic and even political symbiosis.

The Polish example illustrates an important sociological difference between Central and Eastern European Jewries which greatly influenced the role which they respectively played in the general culture of the time. In Berlin and Vienna, the Jewish enlighteners could look towards and find access within the *Geisteselite* (the term is borrowed from Jacob Katz) of the Gentile middle class. Even in Prague this was the case with the educated German bourgeoisie while in Budapest the Jews, by filling the role of an absent indigenous middle-class, achieved an economic and cultural nexus with the more liberal Hungarian nobility. In Poland, on the other hand, an appropriate social reference group for Jewish acculturation was missing. By the time an indigenous Polish middle-class began to emerge at the end of the 19th century it had already been contaminated by a nationalist, antisemitic ideology. It is not surprising therefore that Jews in Galicia tended to look to the distant Emperor Franz Joseph in Vienna and the paternalistic Habsburg dynasty for their security rather than nourish dreams of an independent Polish State.

Culturally, too, for all the attraction exercised by romantic Polish nationalism on a sector of Jewish youth (not least within the Zionist movement) it was ultimately European culture as mediated through Berlin, Prague and Vienna that appealed most to the Jewish *Bildungsbürgertum* of pre-State Poland. *Deutschtum* in the universalist sense still had a great hold on the *Ostjuden* before and during the First World War. Its most sublime prophet, Hermann Cohen, the outstanding religious philosopher of the age and the renewer of Kantian philosophy in Germany, was triumphally received by the Eastern Jewish masses of Russia just before the outbreak of World War I. His notion of a unique kinship between *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* was predicated on a conception of the German "spirit" derived from Kantian ethical idealism. When Cohen declared in 1916 that *Deutschtum* was "the teacher of the world" and that it was the motherland of *all* Jews (the hegemony of German culture at that time extended to America as much as East European Jewry) he was still thinking in terms of the late 18th century ideals of the *Aufklärung*. It was a rational, normative construction which Cohen never confused with the actual, empirical *Deuschland*. Rather he hoped to moralize, to "idealize" the existing Prusso-German State with its cultural and political conservatism – in which antisemitism remained a constant irritant. Cohen's "Germanism" explicitly rejected any self-surrender of the Jewish religious inheritance, which he regarded as fully compatible with the *weltbürgerlich* humanism of "the nation of Kant".

Nevertheless, the discrepancy between the idealized sublimation of the German-Jewish synthesis in Cohen's work and the empirical reality of the German-Jewish relationship cannot be ignored. It was clearly perceived by Franz Rosenzweig, who in a letter to his parents on 20 September 1917, took issue with the self-deception involved in over-intellectualized definitions of the inner essence of *Deutschtum*: "To be a German means to undertake fully responsibility for one's people, not just to harmonize with Goethe, Schiller, and Kant, but also with the others and above all with the inferior and average, with the assessor, the fraternity student, the petty bureaucrat, the thick-skulled peasant, the pedantic school master . . . Cohen confuses that which he as a European finds in German culture with what a German finds in it. Of course: 'German philosophy and music' are European phenomena . . . but with Cohen only the European exists, a genuine Germanism with which it could cross-fertilise is missing."

A similar criticism could have been directed at the kind of highly refined, spiritualized Europeanism exemplified by writers like Stefan Zweig and Emil Ludwig who were extremely popular during the Weimar years. Their sincere efforts to popularize the ideals of *Bildung* and classical humanism owed far more to the European Englightenment than to an explicitly Jewish self-understanding. Nevertheless, Zweig

certainly acknowledged the importance of his Jewish heritage, glorifying his Diasporic "supra-nationality" as a source of inspiration and transcendence. For Zweig, there were no nations; only individuals and humanity as a whole. His cosmopolitan outlook led him, in common with many Central European Jewish intellectuals, to stress that which united rather than divided peoples; to encourage the appreciation of alien cultures; to act through his own writings and translations as a cultural mediator between the European nations.

It was a noble mission (and a characteristically "Jewish" role) but its foundations were being sapped even as his books became best-sellers. Zweig seemed to sense as much when he wrote to Emil Ludwig in 1925: "Sometimes I am oppressed by the feeling that we who possess an encylopaedic knowledge, men who passionately work at extending their *Bildung*, are already a kind of fossil."[5] Unfortunately, Jewish intellectuals like Zweig were far too *unpolitical* (a trait they shared with much of the German intelligentsia) to pursue more deeply the root causes of this alienation from the masses. They preferred to ignore what George Mosse has referred to as the increasing nationalization of the ideal of *Bildung* by the German middle classes since the end of the 19th century (soul being identified with *Volk* rather than *Geist*). They did not fully grasp how divorced they remained from popular culture and feelings. By the end of the Weimar period (as in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna thirty years earlier) German Jews often seemed to be the last upholders of the 18th century faith in Reason and high Culture. They believed in ideals which had ceased to be held even by the *Bildungsbürgertum* with whom they identified.

This development suggests that despite their intense assimilation to German language and culture, the cultural behaviour of Jews continued to reflect distinctive Jewish traditions; that the Jews (as Jacob Katz has suggested) never fully integrated as a *collective* into the body of German society but rather constituted a kind of separate subgroup which in some of its characteristics resembled the German bourgeoisie but in others significantly diverged from the Gentile pattern. This fact made it easier for antisemites in Central Europe to claim that Jews were indeed an "alien" element in the dominant culture, whose presence could only be *zersetzend*. They could readily seize on linguistic peculiarities and a manner of speech, designated by the derogatory term *mauscheln* (also used by many Jews). They could point to the lack of roots or of an organic link to the people, or else to alleged Jewish vulgarity and tastelessness to emphasize the foreign origins of their unwelcome competitors. All these allegations found their *locus classicus* in Richard Wagner's *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1869) which demonstrated the extent to which already in the liberal era, the foundations of Jewish participation in German culture were being challenged. Even those, like Gustav Freytag who favoured Jewish integration in German culture and society agreed with many of the stereotypes propagated by antisemites who opposed Jewish emancipation.

There is also a surprising degree of consensus between antisemitic perceptions of the Jewish role in German culture and that of many Jewish commentators at the time and even today. The tone and object of these respective assessments has of course been quite different, not to say diametrically opposed in most cases. What Jewish apologetics affirmed as a great contribution to human civilization and a vindication of the historic Jewish presence in the Diaspora was invariably perceived by antisemites as harmful, threatening and destructive. In his *World of Yesterday*, Stefan Zweig describes nine-tenths of the *fin-de-siècle* Viennese culture as a creation of Jews. They were both the major producers and consumers of this culture, the "real audience" who filled the theatres and concerts, who bought the books and pictures "and with their more mobile understanding, little hampered by tradition, they were the exponents and champions of all that was new . . ."[6] In Zweig's glowing memorial to this lost world, the emphasis is on the intense desire of the Viennese Jews for full *social integration* through their cultural participation. It was part of their ambition to "serve the glory of Vienna"; through cultural creativity they transformed their being Austrian into "a mission to the world . . ."

The antisemites could only view this self-proclaimed Jewish mission with fear and alarm as a kind of swamping of indigenous tradition and talent. They, too, regarded the Jews as "champions of all that was new", as the pioneers of modernity. Only this designation had a wholly negative connotation. It meant that Jews

were destroyers of tradition, rootless subverters of hierarchy, opponents of everything that embodied classical order and form in Western culture: what the Nazis in their war on modernist decadence would later label as "*Kulturbolschevismus*" and the Stalinists as "rootless cosmopolitanism".

The association of Jews with radical politics since the 1830s, especially in Germany and Austria, reinforced these conservative stereotypes. There is a consistent thread which leads from Heinrich von Treitschke's identification of Ludwig Boerne, Heinrich Heine and Eduard Gans as "Oriental choir-leaders of the Revolution" to Adolf Hitler's equation of Judaism and Marxist social democracy in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Jews in Central Europe were consistently seen by the Right after 1848 as *Ruhestörer*, as conspirators threatening the *Obrigkeitsstaat*, the fighting spirit of the nation, the integrity of the Christian faith, values and tradition. The long line of revolutionaries and Socialists of Jewish origin in German-speaking Central Europe (later duplicated elsewhere with similarly unfortunate results) gave a certain credence and plausibility to the image. From Marx and Lassalle to Victor Adler and Otto Bauer, from Adolf Fischof, Moses Hess and Johann Jacoby to the revolutionists of 1918 who paid with their lives – Kurt Eisner, Gustav Landauer, Leviné, Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches – Jews were in the forefront of radical social change.

Even more disconcerting for the Conservative Right was the influence of the Jews on the liberal press in the two Central European Empires. In official circles this press was regarded as oppositional, in spite of its ostentatious patriotism and defence of German cultural interests. For the reactionary Junkers in Prussia and the clerical-conservatives in Austria it was a thorn in the flesh, while for the petty-bourgeois antisemitic movements of the late 19th century it became the symbol of capitalist corruption. Newspapers like the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* or the *Neue Freie Presse* were indeed owned, edited and to a certain extent written by Jews. They stood for the values of economic and political liberalism which attracted the majority of German-speaking Jews in the post-emancipation era but which never really established a decisive hegemony in Central Europe. Ironically enough, some of the sharpest critics of this liberal outlook (and also of the semi-absolutist institutions in the two Empires) were themselves talented and influential journalists of Jewish origin like Maximilien Harden and Karl Kraus in Vienna.

This critique from the Right was reinforced by the offensive against bourgeois liberalism undertaken by Marxist journalists on the Left, among whom Jews also played a disproportionate role. In the Weimar period, most of the contributors and readers of the left-wing intellectual *Weltbühne* were Jews. Oblivious to the irritation and resentment they aroused in the average German *Spiessbürger*, critics like Kurt Tucholsky ridiculed not only the sins of the militarists, profiteers and bourgeois philistines, but also seemed to be dragging everything German into the mud. Not that Tucholsky was any more sparing when it came to savage caricatures of Jewish mannerisms, modes of speech, business malpractices or social behaviour. Like Harden and Kraus before him, he claimed to be above the parochial war of antisemites and Jews. But in December 1935, a few days before his suicide, he was obliged to recognize the grim truth in a letter to Arnold Zweig. "*Ich bin im Jahre 1911 'aus dem Judentum ausgetreten', und ich weiss, dass man das gar nicht kann.*"[7]

Apostate Jews from Börne and Heine to Kraus and Tucholsky were not of course representative of Jewish communities in Central Europe as a whole, even if antisemites dwelt obsessively on their alleged misdeeds. The bulk of German, Austrian or Hungarian Jews were loyal, patriotic and hard-working citizens who rallied to the colours in 1914 with the same intense enthusiasm as their Gentile compatriots. They felt little in common with those of their co-religionists who engaged in avant-gardist cultural or political activity. Indeed, as Peter Gay has demonstrated, even among the prominent Jewish intellectuals and artists in Central Europe, many were far from being cultural innovators or champions of modernism. Nevertheless it has been the minority of intellectual revolutionaries whose impact remains the deepest and has most shaped our image of the role of Jews in Central European culture. As George Steiner has written: "Without Marx or Freud, without Einstein or Kafka, without Schönberg or Wittgenstein, the spirit of

modernity, the reflexes and uncertainty whereby we conduct our inner lives would not be conceivable." It was this minority of marginal Jews who completely transformed our conventional picture of the universe, of language, society and the human mind. Their iconoclastic shattering of time-honoured traditions, complacent certitudes and social taboos, earned them in most cases the undying hatred of the anti-semites.

The "intellectual pre-eminence" of the Jews (Veblen) in the 19th and 20th centuries, which attained its peak in pre-Hitler Central Europe, has occasioned much speculation as to its motivations and causes. Without entering into this debate a few sociological observations may be pertinent for understanding the background. The explosion of Jewish talents took place in the context of a rapid growth of population, urbanization and socio-economic modernization in Central Europe after 1870. Capital cities like Berlin (which had only been a small town at the beginning of the century) and Vienna held over 2 million inhabitants by 1914. Budapest was probably the fastest growing city in Europe during the second half of the 19th century. Jewish population growth, especially in Eastern Europe, was even more striking and with the ending of ghetto restrictions after 1848 led to a mass migration of Jews from the province to the major cities of Central-East Europe. In 1871 there were already 44,000 Jews in Budapest, 40,000 in Vienna, 36,000 in Berlin, 26,000 in Lvov and 13,000 in Prague. By 1910 the figures had risen to 203,000 in Budapest (23.1% of the total population), 175,000 in Vienna (8.6%), 144,000 in Berlin (nearly 4%), 57,000 in Lvov (27.8%) and 18,000 in Prague (8.1%). In cities like Czernowitz, capital of Austrian Bukovina before 1918 (and an outpost of German culture in the East), Jews constituted more than a third of the population and the same was true of many of the towns in Galicia.

The urbanization of the Jews took place at a faster pace than that of Gentiles in the pre-1914 era and was invariably accompanied by a higher rate of literacy and a more successful maximization of educational opportunities. We have already cited the case of Budapest. A few figures for higher education in Vienna will underline the point. After 1880, approximately one third of all *Gymnasiasten* in Vienna were Jews (three times more than their proportion in the population) – and this was the *sine qua non* for entry into the universities. Moreover, with regard to the middle-class intake of the *gymnasia*, the Jewish proportion was probably closer to 70%. The situation was similar at the University of Vienna, where at the end of the 1880s, Jews represented 48% of the medical student body and 22% of law students. In 1900, 23.6% of all university students in Vienna, 27% of students in the higher technical schools and 43% of the students in commercial colleges were Jews. Against this background it is much less surprising that Jews were so prominent in the free professions, that they played such a remarkable role in *fin-de-siècle* high culture or that the German universities in Central Europe became hotbeds of a racial antisemitism designed to exclude Jewish competition.

The dizzying speed of Jewish acculturation was unnerving not only to their antagonists but also to many sensitive and intelligent Jews who were themselves part of the process. Let me quote once more from Hugo Bergmann's letter of 1914 to the Berlin Professor of Philosophy, Carl Stumpf where he touches on Jewish abilities and talent:

> Unfortunately these abilities have proved only in the smallest degree to be a blessing to society. These gifted Jews are pioneers of atheism and materialism, revolutionaries and demagogues . . . Jews – including even women – march at the head of the agitation against marriage and the family, participating as leaders and led in all the perversities of contemporary, urban society. What is the cause of this value reversal within three generations among members of a race whose family life was pure and chaste? It is the sad consequence of the fact that the Jews have lost their psychic balance . . . they have not grown organically into European culture but simply appropriated its results as they existed in 1789 or 1848. Hence they have no understanding for the history of this culture and hence they undermine its foundations.[8]

Hugo Bergmann's harsh verdict was echoed by another Prague-born Jewish contemporary,

Franz Kafka, whose bitter reproaches to his father derived at least in part from the anguished sense of having no firm Jewish ground under his feet. It was Kafka who spoke of a whole generation of Jewish writers in Central Europe drawing inspiration from the despair of having "their hind legs bogged down in their father's Judaism", while their front legs could find no new ground. Yet Kafka could never rid himself of the feeling that German-Jewish literature (including his own work) was somehow conducted under false pretences; that it involved a usurpation or at least the second-hand acquisition of someone else's property ("*die laute oder stillschweigende oder auch selbstquälerische Anmassung eines fremden Besitzes*").[9] Kafka even referred to German-Jewish writing as "gypsy literature that had stolen the German child from its cradle and trained it, in a great hurry, to perform any way because someone had to dance on the tightrope."

As if the image of the tightrope were not disconcerting enough, Kafka elsewhere refers to Jewish writing in the German language as merely a temporary expedient "as though for someone writing his last will and testament just before he hangs himself." Evidently, the only relief which Kafka could obtain from his tormented self-disgust was through his encounter with the Yiddish-language theatre in Prague and his dreams of eventually settling in Palestine. Hugo Bergmann who realized this dream by becoming Professor of Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, shared, as we have already seen, something of Kafka's aversion to the self-negating implications of the Jewish contribution to German society and letters. In harmony with his Zionist convictions he remained, however, convinced that modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature was somehow free of these defects.

Zionists had of course been consistently hostile to the intense Jewish assimilation to German culture which they saw as an undignified self-surrender and wasting of precious Jewish national assets. In 1912, in a controversial article called "German-Jewish Parnassus", published in the fortnightly *Kunstwart*, the young German Zionist Moritz Goldstein made the case for cultural separatism. He pointed out that in Berlin, Jews dominated the press, the theatres, musical life – in a word they were administering "the spiritual property of a nation which denies us our right and ability to do so".[10] This was a dangerous. and untenable situation in the long run, since literature and the arts were intimately linked to a specific homeland, to a particular people and its historic traditions.

Twenty years later another German Zionist, Theodor Lessing, came to a similar conclusion, though this did not prevent his murder by the Nazis in 1933. Looking back on the era of Jewish creativity in Central Europe which was coming to an end, Lessing prophetically suggested (in 1930): "Perhaps this brilliance was only the phosphorescent shimmer of a dying body: perhaps it was only the brief flickering of a European bonfire in which our nobility immolated itself."

Closer to our time the late Gershon Scholem, twenty years after the *Shoah*, restated the Zionist view with particular trenchancy. In his view, there never was a German-Jewish symbiosis to begin with, but only a one-sided, unrequited love affair of the Jews for German culture. There had never been a meaningful encounter but only a tragic process of self-alienation, of self-surrender and Jewish national self-negation – a long list of "Jewish losses to the Germans, a list of frequently astonishing Jewish talents and accomplishments that were offered up to the Germans." Scholem believed that the German-Jewish elite by rushing to disavow its own heritage had contributed to the demoralization of Jewry and exacerbated the contempt which many Germans felt for Jews and Judaism.[11] This elite had been afflicted by an extraordinary blindness concerning the reality of the antagonism which its prominence aroused. With a few exceptions, among whom Franz Kafka occupied the first place, the literature of the period covered up the real situation.

The picture so forcefully drawn by Scholem contains a good deal of truth though it needs to be qualified in a number of respects. In the first place the sense of vulnerability and precariousness felt by Jewish intellectuals in Central Europe before Hitler was rather more widespread than one might believe at first sight. Even in the "golden age of Security" before 1914, most Jews had, in Schnitzler's words, the choice "of being counted as insensitive, obtrusive and cheeky; or of being sensitive, shy and suffering from feelings of persecution."[12] Schnitzler's pre-war novel *Der Weg ins Freie* (1907) and his

drama *Professor Bernhardi* (1912) are full of Jewish characters suffering from such dilemmas. Schnitzler's own bitter frustration at antisemitism is revealed in the following succinct entry in his *Tagebuch*: "*Wie schön ist es, ein Arier zu sein – man hat sein Talent so ungestört.*"[13]

In Wilhelmine Germany, even so staunch an advocate of assimilation as Walther Rathenau (the ill-fated Foreign Minister assassinated by *völkisch* antisemites in June 1922) had to admit in 1912 that second-class citizenship for Jews was an inescapable reality. "In the youth of every German Jew there is a moment that he remembers his whole life: when he becomes fully conscious for the first time that he has entered the world as a second-class citizen, and that no degree of ability, or merit can ever free him from this position."[14] Rathenau's sense of the pain of social exclusion and pariahdom was typical enough, however exceptional and unrepresentative his own personality may have been for German Jews as a whole. This disappointment was all the crueller to the extent that German Jews felt that they made their contribution to German culture as Germans rather than Jews.

The element of self-deception to which Scholem referred has indeed been somewhat exaggerated. In 1926 Sigmund Freud declared to an interviewer: "My language is German. My culture, my attainments are German. I considered myself German until I noticed the growth of anti-semitic prejudices in Germany and German Austria. Since that time, I prefer to call myself a Jew." When did Freud in fact observe the growth of these prejudices and define himself primarily as a Jew? At least forty years earlier, according to a letter he sent from Paris in 1886 to his future wife, Martha Bernays. Other leading Jewish artists and intellectuals came to similar conclusions at least a decade before Hitler. In 1923 the baptised Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg wrote to Kandinsky: "What I was forced to learn during the past year, I have now at last understood and shall never forget it again. Namely, that I am no German, no European, maybe not even a human being (*ein Mensch*) – at any rate the Europeans prefer the worst of their own race to me – but that I am a Jew. I am satisfied with this state of affairs. Today I do not wish to be treated as an exception."[15] This was the beginning of Schoenberg's remarkable turning back (*teshuvah*) to the Biblical sources of Judaism and Jewish identity.

This return to Judaism had always existed as an option since the beginning of the emancipation though it did not affect a significant group of acculturated Jewish intellectuals until the turn of the 20th century. Under the influence of intellectual giants like Hermann Cohen, Leo Baeck and Martin Buber there was a growing trend to demonstrate the contemporary and universal significance of Judaism as a counterweight to the exclusivist claims of Protestant German theology. A younger generation of alienated Jews began to discover the truth of Leo Baeck's dictum that "the path to our humanity leads through our Jewishness not away from it." Through Martin Buber's *Die Geschichte des Rabbi Nachman* and *Die Legende des Baal Schem*, they rediscovered Judaism as an authentic spiritual sensibility rather than as merely a formal religion (*Konfession*) and set of ritual practices.

Through his mastery of the German language and culture, the Viennese-born Buber (who had grown up in Polish Galicia) was also able to mediate between East and West; to demonstrate that Polish Jewry might seem primitive and unsophisticated but was in reality a highly creative spiritual community. Buber helped transform the image of the *Ostjuden* from ignorant and superstitious creatures sorely in need of German *Bildung* and *Kultur* to that of a vibrant *Gemeinschaft* which heralded a new Jewish rebirth. Not only *maskilic* but even traditional German Zionist stereotypes were undermined as the *Ostjuden* became the model for authentic Jewish community, peoplehood, spirituality and rootedness. This revolution in consciousness which Buber effected among a sector of German and East European Jewish youth before the First World War (one thinks of his influence on Polish Zionist youth in Galicia, on the *Hashomer* in Vienna and the *Bar Kochba* circle in Prague) was inconceivable without the mediation of German neo-romantic thought. Buber had after all reinterpreted Hassidism in terms of the *Erlebnismystik* of his own society and culture. Through his preoccupation with myth and *Volksgeist*, Buber was able to recover the sources of Jewish creativity and a new sense of the redemptive quality of divine revelation in the Bible.

The *démarche* pursued by Buber, Rozenweig and Baeck was both complementary and in some ways antithetical to that undertaken by those "non-Jewish Jews" who became masters of modern culture. From Marx and Freud to Einstein and Schoenberg, the Jewish "meta-rabbis" (George Steiner's witty phrase) had a unique commitment to the life of the word, to analytic totality, to the search for laws underlying all phenomena and to a prophetic mode of ethical activism. But they remained outsiders and exiles twice over, a kind of diaspora within the Diaspora, working *outside* the framework of normative Judaism. Their roots ultimately lay in the rationalist spirit of the Mendelssohnian Enligtenment and the spirit of German *Aufklärung*. They might well have agreed with the novelist Joseph Roth who wrote to Stefan Zweig on the eve of the Nazi catastrophe (22 March 1933): "One cannot disown the 6000 year-old Jewish heritage, but equally one cannot deny the 2000 year-old non-Jewish inheritance. We stem from the 'Emancipation', from Humanity, from the humane rather than from Egypt. Our ancestors are Goethe, Lessing, Herder no less than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."[6]

Notes

1. Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe", *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984.
2. Joseph Roth, "*Ostjuden im Westen*", *Juden auf Wanderschaft* (Kohn 1985) p. 11.
3. See the letters in Miriam Sambursky, "*Zionist und Philosoph. Das Habilitierungs-problem des jungen Hugo Bermann*," *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts*, Nr. 58 (Jerusalem 1981) Brief 8, p. 36. My own translation.
4. Ibid, p. 37.
5. Stefan Zweig, *Briefe an Freunde*, ed. Richard Friedenthal (Frankfurt a.M. 1978) p. 153.
6. Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (New York 1943) p. 22.
7. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "*Juden in der deutschen Literatur*," *Die Zeit* 2 May 1969, p. 18.
8. Miriam Sambursky, op. cit., p. 37. My own translation.
9. Letter of June 1921 in Max Brod, *Franz Kafka, Briefe, 1902–1924*, (Frankfurt a.M. 1955) pp. 336ff.
10. Moritz Goldstein, "German Jewry's Dilemma. The Story of a Provocative Essay," *Leo Baeck Yearbook* II, (London 1957) pp. 237ff.
11. Gershon Scholem, "*Wider den Mythos vom deutsch-jüdischen 'Gespräch'*," *Judaica 2* (Frankfurt a.M. 1986) pp. 7ff.
12. Arthur Schnitzler, *My Youth in Vienna* (New York 1970), pp. 6–7.
13. *Tagebuch*, 4 November 1904, quoted by Egon Schwarz in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* No. 112, 14 May 1977.
14. Walther Rathenau, *Staat und Judentum (1911), Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin 1918), I, pp. 188–189.
15. Arnold Schoenberg, *Briefe* (Mainz 1958) ed. Edwin Stein. Letter to Wassily Kandinsky of 20 April 1923.
16. Joseph Roth, *Briefe* 1911–1939, edited by Hermann Kesten (Cologne/Berlin 1970).

The Task Before Us: Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought and the Challenge of Solidarity

*Marc H. Ellis**

Contemporary Jewish religious thought is as diverse as are Jews themselves and as urgent as contemporary Jewish history demands. Most Jewish commentators, secular and religious, see the Jewish world in crisis, a continuing crisis spanning the twentieth century. Essentially this crisis revolves around the formative events of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe (1933–1945), and the rebirth of a Jewish nation in Israel in 1948. It is not too much to say that the Holocaust and the state of Israel have forced a significant reappraisal and reorientation of Jewish life from which all contemporary Jewish theology takes its starting point.[1]

The nineteenth century divisions of Jewish life into secular and religious, and within the religious sphere into Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, have lost much of their significance in post-Holocaust Jewish life. Though they continue in their denominational forms and reaffirm the ideological commitments of their birth, the substance of each denomination has been radically transformed by the historic experience of the Jewish people. This is true for those who affirm the direction of Jewish life: even dissent takes place within the new framework of Jewish suffering (Holocaust) and empowerment (Israel).

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