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A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF WEININGER RECEPTION

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In 1903 Otto Weininger, a Viennese Jew who converted to Protestantism the day he became a doctor of philosophy,[1] published a book entitled *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Sex and Character). In his book Weininger set out to prove the moral inferiority of "the woman" and "the Jew" by way of a dogmatic neo-Kantianism, a theory of human bisexuality, and an explanation of gender roles based on a kind of sociobiology and a racist psychology of "Jewishness." Weininger was almost immediately immortalized by his culture as the young genius who had brought these elements together under one title. He sensationalized their urgency as well through his suicide at age twenty-three in the room where Beethoven had died. A companion volume of short texts and aphorisms, *Über die letzten Dinge* (On Last Things), appeared in Dec. 1903, just a few months after his death (Weininger 1904).[2]

Sex and Character is an attempt to define and understand what Weininger calls "*M*" and "*W*": male and female traits, respectively, apparent in every person of either sex. Weininger tries to avoid equating "*W*" directly with women, but this effort ultimately fails because he elides "*W*" with *das Weib* (woman) on more than one occasion in the text. Weininger's book is flamboyant, full of pseudoscientific claims about male genius and female character deficits. It may well be described as an apotheosis of misogyny that is exacerbated by a penultimate chapter asserting that Jewish male behavior is essentially effeminate. In this chapter, Weininger presents an analysis of what is Jewish, laid out along the same lines as his definitions of "*M*" and "*W*": He claims that there is no causal relationship between Jewish qualities and Jews, yet states that Jewish qualities are to be found most often in Jews. His essentialist definitions of women and Jews blatantly contradict his claim to be describing poles of behavior, or "character," to which real men's and women's gender identities and levels of spirituality correspond to varying degrees.

Weininger's assessment of Jews within the framework of gender is responsible for much of the interest, both positive and negative, that his

text has generated and continues to generate. The question that this twinning raises is still compelling: Why represent Jews and women together, as two sides of the same coin?[3]

The prevailing image of Jewish male sexuality at the turn of the century in Central Europe was closely linked to images of the *femme fatale* and the women's emancipationist.[4] The culture as a whole harbored fears of Jewish reproduction, since Jews were assimilating so well that their representation in the professions far outnumbered their percentage of the population. By vilifying Jews as more lascivious than non-Jews, the Christian host culture also expressed fears that the emancipation of the Jews had unleashed a competitive labor force and a rival cultural voice. By likening male Jews to sexually or politically aggressive non-Jewish women, the patriarchal dominant culture insulted male Jews by underscoring their relative powerlessness as a social group.

More in tune with his culture than he may have realized, Weininger vehemently disavowed the emancipation movements for Jews and women, respectively, that had gained momentum in the course of the nineteenth century. A number of Weininger scholars, such as Jacques Le Rider and Gerald Stieg, have noted the apparent fear of sexuality and Judaism that is coupled in Weininger's thought. Weininger was repulsed by cultural openness about sexuality. He despised both those who celebrated the pleasure of sex and those who valued the propagation of one's own kind as life's most sacred duty. He believed that sexuality was only one aspect of life for men, for whom intellectual genius and spiritual transcendence were the crowning achievements, while he thought that women, whom he deemed amoral, intellectually inferior, and incapable of transcendence without male guidance, were innately obsessed with sexuality. Hence his claim that his era had become "feminized" was an indictment of his culture's frank approach to human sexuality.

Nonetheless, despite the move toward sexual openness, women in Weininger's day who acknowledged sexual pleasure while shirking the duties of motherhood were still seen as embodying the culture's worst fears about the meaning of women's emancipation. But Weininger himself went further than condemning female libido. He was equally critical of the impulse to reproduce. In this respect, he was truly monklike,[5] for he was repulsed by the flesh and by what he perceived as a base act of desperation to find meaning in the production of further generations of human beings. Thus, his "solution to the Woman Question" was to urge men to cease having intercourse with women in order to prepare the human soul for immortality.

When Weininger refers to Jews or Jewish character, the male is assumed to be the subject, not the female.[6] In this respect, he invokes patriarchal assumptions about the predominance of male subjectivity in

both Christian and Jewish cultures. When Weininger does turn his attention—in passing—to the female Jew, he derives her definition from that of the male Jew. Because the Jewish man lacks a feeling for the "transcendent," Weininger reasons, the Jewish woman is "sexually complemented and spiritually impregnated" at an extremely low metaphysical level, and thus represents the two earthbound poles of femininity (i.e., mother and prostitute) even more fully than does the "Aryan" woman (Weininger 1903, 429). The crucial parallel between "Aryan" mothers and male Jews, according to Weininger, lies in the extent to which male Jews encourage matchmaking as a means to the end of reproducing their "race."

Weininger's hatred for his fellow Jews thus focuses on the reproduction of Jewish families. On a personal level, Weininger's stance may well have involved homoerotic feelings and rebellion against his family's expectation that he would marry and have a family of his own. Weininger, the apostate Jew and anti–family man, used his constructions of both Jew and gender to exacerbate the crisis of identity felt throughout the culture as a whole.[7] What Weininger defined as gender roles in *Sex and Character* is therefore inextricably linked with the Jewish/sexuality conundrum whose constraints he sought to escape.

The impact of Weininger's *Sex and Character* and "On Last Things" on his own generation and the next was widespread. His slim body of work is still significant because of the extent of its influence on the most important thinkers and writers of Weininger's time—Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl Kraus, Elias Canetti, Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Hermann Broch, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Gertrude Stein among them—many of whom will be discussed in this volume of essays on Weininger's influence and his reception in Western culture. Weininger's name is no longer a household word, but his voice is still heard in texts by familiar authors who helped form modern and postmodern culture. His text has rendered any boundaries between genre, nationality, or discipline obsolete; his influence, stemming from a work that today might be called "popular science," has been felt in literature, philosophy, science, and history.

An examination of the effect that Weininger and his texts had on some of the most influential writers of this century is important for several reasons. A study of Weininger reception during his own period helps us understand the incipient ideology of the Third Reich in regard to male Jews and "Aryan" women. A close look at the history of the reception (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of Weininger's thought in well-known texts also demonstrates the ways in which his transmission of low regard for women and Jews still plays a part—albeit a less virulent one—in Western culture.

In approximately the past 15 years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Weininger that seeks to understand the reasons behind his

pervasive influence on some of the best minds of the twentieth century. Contemporary scholars who specialize in modern European and Israeli literature and history have contributed to an understanding of Weininger reception. The reception of Weininger's texts raises issues pertinent to our understanding of how literature interacts with nonliterary texts. The contributors to this volume all explicitly or implicitly examine the concept of influence. Many of Weininger's most renowned readers have interacted with *Geschlecht und Charakter* and *Über die letzten Dinge*, whether in the original German or in translation, by rewriting them as parts of their own texts. The fictional qualities of Weininger's ostensibly nonliterary texts aside (cf. Iser 1993), writers of modernist and post-Holocaust fiction have given voice to their understanding of Weininger's "Woman" and Weininger's "Jew."

Our knowledge of the Holocaust as well as fascism's manipulation of sexuality and gender roles in the twentieth century leads to unavoidable questions. Do we view the reception of Weininger by Nazi ideologues in the same way as his reception by James Joyce, who subsequently disseminated Weininger's ideas not only through his own work but also by introducing Weininger's work to Italo Svevo? Does a more intimate knowledge of Weininger's thought put into jeopardy our reading of the important writers who were affected by him and who translated his ideas in their works? If Weiningerian ideas are part of what we define as greatness in certain texts, such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, does that elevate Weininger to the level of a genius or cast aspersions on our definition of greatness?[8] One thing is clear: Weininger has survived as a powerful catalyst for twentieth-century thought. Perhaps we come closest to the essence of his appeal in Wittgenstein's paradoxical remark to G. E. Moore: "It is his enormous mistake which is great."[9]

The methodological differences in the secondary literature, discussed more fully in the next section, allow us to grasp the complexity of the issues at stake. There are basically two approaches. The first approach insists on what may be called a cultural relativist position, which seeks to reconstruct the conditions, proclivities, and contradictions of a past era. The other approach emphasizes the position of the reader (critic) in her or his own era and therefore looks at anti-Semitism, misogyny, and homophobia from late twentieth-century perspectives. The former approach can be faulted for appearing to discount or even forgive bigotry and for failing to take into account the diachronic effect of prejudice. The latter approach can be faulted for not fully appreciating the historical period that produces a given text and thus for failing to understand fully either the text's inception or its initial reception. Not all approaches to Weininger fall neatly into one or the other, but most do lean in one of these two directions.

This essay will first survey the ground covered since the appearance of Weininger's texts, and then discuss the contribution of this volume of essays to Weininger scholarship and to the larger questions that an examination of Weininger's influence generates.

THE HISTORY OF WEININGER RECEPTION

The history of Weininger reception falls naturally into two historical periods: before and after World War II. The first period encompasses his immediate contemporaries, the modernist generation; the second, those who must necessarily view him from a post-Holocaust perspective. Critical commentary on Weininger has grown parallel to postwar research on modernist literature. Three other fields of scholarship of particular relevance to Weininger reception—psychoanalysis, research on anti-Semitism, and gender studies—have also seen tremendous growth in the postwar era.

Initial Weininger reception was marked by direct, forceful affirmation or refutation of his ideas, in some cases by authors who knew him personally. The early years of Weininger reception included defenses of his integrity in Karl Kraus's periodical *Die Fackel* ([The Torch], 1903, 1904, 1906, 1907, 1921). There were evaluations by feminists such as Grete Meisel-Hess (1904) and Rosa Mayreder (1905; see also Bubeníček 1986) in Austria and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1906) in the United States; Emil Lucka's memorial (1905); Wilhelm Fliess's (1906) attack on Weininger as a plagiarist;[10] André Spire's (1913) study in French of three controversial Jews; and a number of philosophical treatises, including Bruno Sturm's (1912) alternative solution to the problem of morality.

If Weininger himself has been a relatively obscure figure to English-speaking readers, so too have those Austrian female intellectuals to whom he attributed an overabundance of male attributes and whose aspirations for social and legal equality (including the vote) were anathema to Weininger (Troll-Borostyáni 1893, 1903; Popp 1909, 1929; Anderson 1992). Rosa Mayreder's (1905 and 1913) work, for example, highlights the intensity with which male and female intellectuals of the era struggled with issues of gender identity, of the individual versus the masses, of ethical questions in an increasingly technological society. Some of Mayreder's ideas anticipate European intellectual developments later in the century (e.g., those of Deleuze, Kristeva, Cixous).[11]

Sigmund Freud was the first to read an early draft of Weininger's dissertation, entitled "Eros and Psyche," probably in the fall of 1901, which was more than six months before Weininger submitted it to the University of Vienna as "Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine biologische und psychologische Untersuchung" (Sex and Character: A Biological and Psychological Investigation). Weininger had gone to him for advice on finding a

publisher and was sorely disappointed by Freud, who found his work "too speculative and too boldly deductive with regard to the scientific treatment of the main subject" (Swoboda 1923; Abrahamsen 1946). The manuscript that Freud saw contained "no depreciatory *[sic]* words about the Jews and much less criticism of women" (Abrahamsen 1946, 208). Freud's subsequent reaction to Weininger's book *Sex and Character* appears in a footnote to his case history of "Little Hans" (1909). According to Freud, the "unconscious root" of both anti-Semitism and the male sense of superiority over women lies in the castration complex: "Weininger (the young philosopher who, highly gifted but sexually deranged, committed suicide after producing his remarkable book, *Geschlecht und Charakter* [1903]), in a chapter that attracted much attention, treated Jews and women with equal hostility and overwhelmed them with the same insults. Being a neurotic, Weininger was completely under the sway of his infantile complexes; and from that standpoint what is common to Jews and women is their relation to the castration complex" (Freud 1955–74, vol. 10, 36n).[12] Albeit from a different perspective, Freud too saw a compelling logic to pairing Jews and women as two sides of the same coin.

Bruno Sturm's vitalistic philosophy was both anti-Weininger and antifeminist. He answered Weininger's charge that sexual relations can never be moral by distinguishing between "happy" eroticism and "unhappy" sexuality. Weininger was unable to appreciate the benefits of organic pleasure, according to Sturm, because he damned all forms of sexual behavior "a priori" (Sturm 1912, 54). Weininger's transcendental philosophy doomed him to a negation that would never be compatible with earthly reality. In short, Weininger tried to build a science of characterology and totally transcendental religion on the shaky foundation of his own subjective unhappiness. Significantly, Sturm elected to interpret Weininger's extreme form of Kantian religion without even mentioning his pronouncements on "Jewishness." For his part, Sturm affirmed the joy of sex with no intention of restructuring social, political, and economic opportunities for women, thereby demonstrating his affinity with Karl Kraus's attitudes toward erotic freedom (Zohn 1971, 42–47; Wagner 1981): Women need only be released from fear of their strongly erotic nature. He ascribed total blame for the "nervousness of our age"—a term popularized by Hermann Bahr's *Die Überwindung des Naturalismus* (The Overcoming of Naturalism)[13] of 1891—to the "barbarous dogmas of society" that stifle human nature (Sturm 1912, 77).

Weininger's intellectual status was on the rise in the interwar years.[14] His book had gone through twenty-five editions in roughly as many years. Elias Canetti gives the flavor of Weininger's popularity in the mid-1920s in this passage from his memoirs, *Die Fackel im Ohr* (The Torch in My Ear):

"Other boys whom I met in this circle indulged in the arrogance of higher literature: if not Karl Kraus, then Otto Weininger or Schopenhauer. Pessimistic or misogynous utterances were especially popular, even though none of these boys was a misogynist or misanthrope. . . . However, the severe, witty, scornful statements were viewed by these young people as the cream of intellect" (Canetti 1982a, 77). In the same vein, philosophy students wrote doctoral dissertations comparing Weininger's thought to that of Kant (Zunzer 1924; Biró 1927; Thaler 1935) and Nietzsche (Rosenberg 1928).

No Jewish writer of the period did more to secure Weininger's reputation as a self-hating Jew than did Theodor Lessing in his famous book of 1930, *Der jüdische Selbsthaß* (Jewish Self-Hatred). Featured in one of six case studies, Weininger emerges as a "Jewish Oedipus" who cursed his mother's blood (Lessing 1930, 82). According to Lessing, Weininger became obsessed with the belief that spirit is superior to nature, such that "woman" and "Jew" became synonymous with the "depths of nature" he feared and avoided. While Lessing pointed correctly to the tragic effect of Weininger's extremely polarized philosophy, he himself was caught up in the inflammatory racial rhetoric of his era. His most unfortunate pronouncement was that "no human being has ever freed himself from the constraints of his blood. No categorical imperative has ever obscured the voice of blood" (Lessing 1930, 91), which Nazi propagandists used to their best advantage (Kohn 1962; Janik 1987).

During this phase, both Weininger as a personality and his works became an increasingly suitable topic for literature. From the works of Kafka to Broch to Joyce to Svevo, Weiningerian characters populate many modernist novels throughout Europe. Weininger's eccentric pursuit of immortality lent itself particularly well to fiction.

To some minds, Weininger belonged as much in the realm of literature as in those of philosophy or psychology. In the early 1920s, for example, Oskar Baum wrote an essay on Weininger for an anthology of contemporary Jewish writers of German literature, edited by Gustav Krojanker (Baum 1922). Krojanker and Baum's rationale for including an essay on Weininger in a volume pertaining to literature was that "his type of spirit, the content of his thought and finally, his fate, are so characteristic of a certain social stratum of Western Jews, that a generic concept seems to be embodied here in its purest form" (Baum 1922, 138). From Baum's vantage point, Weininger, who was not raised in a religious Jewish household and did not educate himself about Eastern Jews, Hasidism, the Kabbalah and the Talmud, described "Jewishness" with gross inaccuracy but showed profound insight into the plight of assimilated Western Jews. Despite Weininger's methodological looseness and emotional stake in

irrevocable dualisms, Baum respected the antimechanistic cultural critique he saw at the core of Weininger's thought and memorialized him as a "forerunner of the new age" (Baum 1922, 135).

In numerous anti-Semitic tracts and treatises, Weininger's thought was quoted out of context by Nazi ideologues, like their *völkisch* precursors, as one of many "confessions" by Jews that they belonged to an inferior race. Male exponents of Nazi ideology for the most part ignored Weininger's views on the "Aryan woman" but shared his virulent critique of female emancipation. They promoted motherhood as the ideal occupation for women. Weininger, who had sought the aid of all men in helping women to overcome the "female" in themselves, implicitly fostered Nazi men's delusions of male superiority, but interfered philosophically with the will to propagate the "Aryan race" and hence with the Nazi program of selective breeding.[15]

The science of characterology coexisted with and survived the Nazi era. An interesting case in point is Hubert Rohracher, an Austrian professor of psychology who published five editions of a standard text on characterology between 1934 and 1948. In his study of sex-based differences between men and women, Rohracher maintained throughout this period that the mental ability to produce original work in philosophical, artistic, and technical areas is "totally absent" in women. He believed that this "fact" should serve as a starting point for a psychology of women as well as a challenge for researchers to find out why it is the case. Rohracher faulted Weininger's "metaphysics of the sexes" for its "not strictly scientific methods" based on general observations and historical examples whose validity depends largely on the "character and experiences of the person evaluating them" (Rohracher 1948, 224–28). While Rohracher implicitly exposed the androcentric bias of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century characterology, his own method betrays an essentialist, ahistorical approach to mental ability in women.[16]

In the postwar years, Weininger reception initially shifted from any kind of direct engagement with his ideas to sociological, psychological, and historical explanations of why he came to have such thoughts. This was not simply a matter of historical distance. His thesis rubbed salt in the wounds of humanists and social scientists writing after the Holocaust as well as those of new generations of feminists. As critical editions of the works of modernist writers became available (both in their original languages and in translation) and as psychoanalytic interpretation, critical theory, and feminist interpretations gained credence in literary criticism, renewed interest in the legacy of Otto Weininger was inevitable.

Just after the end of the war, Viola Klein (1946), a student of Karl Mannheim, and David Abrahamsen (1946), a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, contributed to Weininger reception in England and

the United States. Their respective methodologies were a sociological analysis of the history of "feminine character" as an ideology[17] and psychiatric psychology.[18] Hans Kohn's (1962) monograph on Karl Kraus, Arthur Schnitzler, and Weininger as Jews of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna ushered in a decade of research on Weininger in relation to such diverse writers as Hermann Broch (Durzak 1967), Emil Lucka (Krizmanic 1969), and Günter Grass (Blomster 1969).

Blomster (1969) demonstrates how Grass used Weininger's *Sex and Character* as "documentary material" in his postwar novel about German history from 1917 to 1957, *Hundejahre* ([*Dog Years*], 1963; 1989). Weininger and his text served a two-fold function in Grass's novel: first, by providing "a means for self-definition in the hands of Eddi Amsel and his father," and second, by contributing "certain perspectives to Grass's investigation of the love-hate and blood brotherhood of Nazi and Jew" (Blomster 1969, 135). The elder Amsel tries to "overcome" his Jewish background by participating in the church choir, by joining the athletic club, and by reading Weininger. The younger Amsel looks to Weininger's chapter on "Jewishness" as a guideline in his quest for essence, or *Sein* (Blomster 1969, 133). The "complex relationship between Amsel and his enemy-friend, Walter Matern," becomes more understandable in light of Weininger's theory of anti-Semitism. By invoking Weininger, Grass "has given an example of bad faith and its machinations in the every-day world" (Blomster 1969, 138).

Germaine Greer helped to make a new generation of English-speaking women's liberationists aware of the broad outlines of Weininger's thought, albeit in brief, in the "Womanpower" chapter of her well-known book *The Female Eunuch* (1970). She interpreted Weininger's critique of "female thinking" as an exemplary denial by a young male intellectual that the mind-body split in Western culture could or should be healed. In the course of the 1970s and 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, German, Austrian, French, Italian, British, and American academic studies have appeared on Weininger.[19] In 1978 Weininger's younger brother, Richard, published an autobiography in English, *Exciting Years*, which unfortunately provided no insights into Otto Weininger's life or works.

Jehoshua Sobol, Israel's most prominent and controversial playwright, created a Weininger for the stage in his 1982 play, *Nefesh Yehudi: Ha-Layla Ha-Aharon shel Otto Weininger* (The Soul of a Jew: The Death of Otto Weininger; Weininger's Last Night [n.d]). It ran for five consecutive seasons in Haifa and gained international attention in the 1980s.[20] Several critics have noted the inherent shifts in context and implications when the play is performed outside of Israel (Feldman 1987; Rokem 1989 [abridged in this volume as Chapter 19]).

The Hungarian sociologist and novelist Miklós Hernádi has also fictionalized Weininger's death in the form of a mystery novel entitled *Otto*

(Hernádi 1990), in which Chief Inspector Barner of the State Police undertakes a criminal investigation of the sociological and psychological factors that contributed to Weininger's alleged suicide and possible murder. In this literary tour de force, the detective becomes one with the research scholar. The novel's translation into German in 1993 made it available to a wider audience and thereby contributed to the popular dissemination of the Weininger legend.

In the past decade, there has been an ongoing methodological war between Jacques Le Rider and a number of literary scholars and historians, including Sigurd Paul Scheichl, a Kraus scholar. Le Rider is a crucial figure in Weininger studies; he published the first full-length scholarly monograph on Weininger since Abrahamsen (1946). A revised Sorbonne dissertation, it appeared first in French (Le Rider 1982) and within three years was translated into German in an expanded, further revised edition (Le Rider 1985). The book is a thorough investigation of Weininger's life and the early controversies surrounding Weininger, including Wilhelm Fliess's plagiarism charge (Fliess 1906). Unlike Abrahamsen's traditional psychoanalytic analysis of Weininger, Le Rider's book problematizes the convergence of anti-Semitism and antifeminism in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

Taking issue with Le Rider's portrayal of Weininger as anti-Semitic, Scheichl insists on making a historical distinction between political anti-Semitism (represented by forerunners of the Nazis such as Georg von Schönerer and Karl Lueger) and conservative *Kulturkritik* (culture criticism) as practiced by Kraus and Weininger. *Kulturkritik*, Scheichl argues, "is part of their rhetoric against the modern age, but they do not call for any political or social change to the disadvantage of the Jews.[21] Weininger, for instance, insists upon his not wishing to pave the way for any persecution of the Jews. . . . We know that, nevertheless, Weininger's writings would later be used to justify anti-Semitic persecutions; but in spite of that there is no reason to doubt the subjective honesty of his words" (Scheichl 1987, 94).

Scheichl's insistence on a "multi-layered image" of the "climate of intolerance" in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna leads him to reflect on the hermeneutic nature of the task: "Auschwitz has finally made us recognize the common features of all hostility towards Jews, and we know that the anti-Semitic mass movements would not have been possible without personal prejudice and without the theories of *Kulturkritik*." And yet, Scheichl adds, the historian must also ask: "Is it fair not to ask what people have thought in their time but only what has become of their thought in our time?" (Scheichl 1987, 108). Scheichl argues for the use of different terms to distinguish between different historically specific attitudes toward Jews, not in an effort to whitewash the past nor to justify genocide, but to give complexity its due.

Le Rider also co-edited an anthology of critical articles in German with

Norbert Leser (Le Rider and Leser 1984). A number of Leser's points in the introductory essay, "Otto Weininger und die Gegenwart," coincide with those of Allan Janik, another major Weininger scholar, although Leser writes as an Austrian who was personally inspired by Weininger's work in the early stages of his own development. Both Leser and Janik contend that Weininger's thought *and* suicide should not be explained (i.e., dismissed) as the outgrowth of an aberrant personality. They assert that Weininger did not despise women or Jews (including himself *as* a Jew), but expressed their respective plights in terms designed to shock them out of complacency.

Janik is Le Rider's most outspoken critic, for Janik believes that in his monograph on Weininger Le Rider "failed to be sufficiently radical in his critique of Weininger by being *insufficiently contextual* in his approach." Janik contends that Le Rider "exposes" Weininger's anti-Semitic and sexist thinking in order to "disagree" with it. However, if a reader "simply rejects Le Rider's liberal, feminist perspective," Janik reasons, he may never gain any understanding of Weininger as a "historical curiosity" (Janik 1985, 97).

Looking at Weininger in context, Janik argues, shifts our focus away from the "sensational and controversial aspects of Weininger's thoughts" (Janik 1985, 115) not in order to suppress controversy, but as part of a hermeneutic enterprise to locate what may seem sensational to us, or even what was sensationalized at the time, in its complete setting.[22] The danger in Janik's approach is that, in its desire to read Weininger contextually, it may appear to lend dignity to all aspects of Weininger's program. Janik knows that his criticism of Le Rider can be interpreted as contentious toward feminists and Jews.

Taking a quite different approach to the problem of Weininger interpretation, Janik insists that rationality has come to be measured by how it is accomplished rather than what conclusions it draws, for "each and every scientific allegation must be evaluated independently on the basis of the reasoning which went into it and not simply on the basis of what is claimed." (Janik 1986, 76)[23] Many scholars with political agendas, he thinks, tend to ignore this shift in the model of rationality and to make judgments about the past and about contemporary foreign cultures solely on the basis of substance. It remains an open question whether Weininger's thought might be rational without being substantively true, such that its rationality could have contributed to its appeal.[24]

JEWS AND GENDER: RESPONSES TO OTTO WEININGER

Since much of the discussion about Weininger has taken place in German, French, and Italian, this volume aims to provide a broad, interdisciplinary

representation of the Weiningerian legacy in English as well as many new readings of the issue. The essays are exemplary of Weininger studies in the past few years, and include works by both Le Rider and Janik so as to bring together these two major strands in Weininger scholarship. The first section of this book introduces readers to Weininger research and provides new biographical information on Weininger.

The first essay, by Le Rider, is in part a retrospective on Weininger scholarship since the publication of the German translation of his Weininger monograph in 1985. Le Rider stresses the centrality of the crisis of male sexuality among Weininger and his contemporaries (Le Rider 1990a, 1990b, 1993) and takes issue with recent critical approaches to early twentieth-century European history that differentiate between anti-Semitism and hostility toward Jews (Scheichl 1987; Janik 1987).

Hannelore Rodlauer (1990) has transcribed and edited an early draft of Weininger's previously lost doctoral dissertation,[25] upon which *Sex and Character* was based, as well as heretofore unpublished letters. Her contribution to our volume is a translation of part of the introduction to her collection of rediscovered primary literature. Rodlauer's work is of particular consequence to Weininger studies because of ongoing debates regarding Weininger's relationship to scientific and philosophical theories of his time; for example, Janik's claim that Weininger was on the cutting edge of contemporary thought can be better understood through an examination of Weininger's education and his dissertation.

The second part of our book, "In Context," focuses on Weininger in the context of his contemporaries. Allan Janik, in his essay written for this volume, considers the concept of "influence" in regard to one of Weininger's intellectual heirs, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Janik calls for a "robust understanding" of what constitutes influence, and uses this as a starting point for his remarks regarding affinities between Wittgenstein and Weininger. In his discussion of Weininger and how he could have influenced Wittgenstein, Janik describes what he sees as Weininger's challenge of the clichéd role of the sexes in his effort to go beyond these facile and limiting categorizations. Janik's essay is thought-provoking as it looks at Weininger's agenda from a very different perspective than that of many other Weininger scholars. In attempting to define "influence" as a "structuring of problems" rather than the "details of their solutions," Janik adds to our understanding of what the relationship between context and legacy might mean.

Nancy A. Harrowitz examines the concept of "influence" in regard to one of Weininger's late nineteenth-century forerunners, Cesare Lombroso, who examined the "faults" of women by using a culturally biased logic similar to that Weininger applied to Jews. Lombroso ultimately conflates the two groups, and what is at stake in his confusion of categories

begins to emerge. Harrowitz's approach is to some degree at odds with that of Janik. The tension between these two essays lies in Harrowitz's attempt to establish a delicate middle ground between an overly apologetic stance toward the text, generated by perhaps too much sympathy for the historical conditions in which Lombroso found himself and fostered as well by a certain blindness to the overt perniciousness of the writing, and a naive horror that does not take into account at all the conditions that produced the text. Janik's stance, in Harrowitz's view, tends toward the former, and has been fostered by a reaction against a reading based solely on substance.

In "Weininger as Liberal?" Steven Beller argues that European liberalism "exerted immense pressure for the 'stranger' to conform not only to a lowest common denominator of social norms, but also to the whole set of social and cultural-national values and standards of the community concerned." Beller takes Weininger to be "an extreme case of a particular form of liberal theory," and demonstrates how this can be read in light of the realities of Jewish assimilation. In the last part of his essay, Beller describes the difficulties inherent in Weininger's labels "*M*" and "*W*," and concludes that the confusing nature of these categories has obfuscated the meaning of Weininger's text.

Beller's explanation of liberalism as an ethos of assimilation augments our synchronic picture of Weininger as an apostate Jew. His reading is essentially in agreement with Janik's: contextual in a way that is provocative because it appears to minimize the pernicious elements of Weininger's thought. Yet his reading is generated by an understanding of the political and social tensions of the day that is indispensable. Beller sees Weininger as an extreme case, but not as an anomaly.

While David Abrahamsen and Jacques Le Rider laid the foundation for our historical understanding of Freud's reaction to Weininger, Sander L. Gilman asserts in "Otto Weininger and Sigmund Freud: Race and Gender in the Shaping of Psychoanalysis" that the meaning of Freud's representation of the "creative" can be understood in the context of his role as both a scientist and a Jew in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Freud's particular definitions of the interrelated concepts of "creativity," "genius," and "madness" are integral to his argument for the universality of the human psyche. Gilman describes Weininger's indebtedness to an ongoing discourse of race and gender, and then looks at Freud's relation to these concepts. His detailed account of Freud's debt to Weininger, while accounting for other figures important to the period such as Otto Rank and Cesare Lombroso, at the same time provides a rich contextual understanding of Weininger's work. Gilman also points out in clear terms Weininger's anti-Semitism and self-hatred, viewing these phenomena as distinguishable despite his assessment of the context in which they arose. Implicitly countering Janik's objection that Le Rider sensationalized aspects of

Weininger's thought. Gilman demonstrates that an understanding of context does not necessarily soften the impact of prejudice.

Katherine Arens's essay traces the sources of characterology back to two divergent scientific traditions that provided the backdrop for Weininger's work as the first text to introduce the notion of scientific racism to a popular Viennese readership. In order to understand the reception of Weininger's text in his day, Arens also looks at the work of the biologist Paul Kammerer and the physician and psychoanalyst Karen Horney. As she explores the mechanism of scientific paradigms and the popular reception of science, Arens affords an approach similar to Gilman's, situating Weininger's work as a continuation of intellectual trends already present in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

In "Otto Weininger and the Critique of Jewish Masculinity," John M. Hoberman asserts that the origins of Weininger's self-hatred have been little studied, and he traces the ways in which the Jewish male was figured as weak and effeminate through images and stereotypes prevalent at the time. Weininger's textual response to the feminization of the Jewish male is then traced through a close examination of passages from *Sex and Character*. Hoberman's analysis demonstrates the problems inherent in the assumption that the adjective "Jewish" implicitly refers to male Jews. His study of the "myth of Jewish effeminacy" lends another aspect to the historical dimension of Weininger's views on gender and "race."

Although the Nazi view of Weininger was mostly a straightforward matter of exploiting "Jewish self-hatred," Weininger proved to be a problematic figure for Nazi ideologues, because *Sex and Character* was primarily about gender, not "race," and its low opinion of women made manifest what was covert in Nazi ideology. In her essay, Barbara Hyams analyzes Nazi reception of Weininger. Nazi men's reception of Weininger until 1943 ignored Weininger's negative assessment of female character and motherhood while exploiting his condemnations of Jewish character by developing the pernicious *völkisch* genre of "Jewish self-revelations." Since a number of Weininger's theses about women and motherhood contradicted Nazi myths about the family, it eventually became opportune for Nazi men to discredit Weininger's sexism. After the German military disaster in Stalingrad, gestures were made to increase women's sense of comradeship with men, including a brochure in which Weininger's "dangerous definitions of women" are assaulted for robbing mothers of their dignity. By accentuating Weininger's "arrogant Jewish" rejection of equal social status for women and men, Nazi ideologues laid the blame for social tension between the sexes at the door of the Jews in order to obscure the sexist principles of the Third Reich.

The final section of this volume looks at Weininger in relation to modernist belles-lettres and post-Holocaust theater. We have translated

Gisela Brude-Firnau's often-cited feminist analysis of Weininger's influence on the German novel and Gerald Stieg's reading of Weiningerian elements in Kafka's *The Castle*. Marilyn Reizbaum has thoroughly revised her study of Weininger and James Joyce. Freddie Rokem has also revised and abridged an earlier essay on Jehoshua Sobol's play *The Soul of a Jew*. In addition, there are new articles, written expressly for this volume, by Jeffrey Mehlman on Guillaume Apollinaire, Alberto Cavaglion on Italo Svevo, Elfriede Pöder and Natania Rosenfeld on James Joyce, and Kristie A. Foell on Elias Canetti.

Brude-Firnau discusses the way in which Weininger's work can be seen as a contentious response to the women's movement. She sees Weininger's quest to define the essence of female character as an "early attempt to formulate a scientific understanding of woman." Brude-Firnau notes the discrepancies in Weininger's method as he often begins a thought using the abstract category "*W*" for woman, yet ends it by shifting to empirical statements about all women with the term *das Weib* (woman). In her discussion of Weininger's influence on the German novel using the examples of Franz Kafka, Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, and Günter Grass, Brude-Firnau furnishes a guide to understanding the scope of Weininger's impact within any given literary text, thus branching across the scientific disciplines discussed in the first part of this book to the literary ones that comprise its second half.

Jeffrey Mehlman focuses on the bisexual aspect of Weininger's theories by demonstrating the intersection of anti-Semitic motifs and bisexuality in one of Apollinaire's major poems, "La Chanson du mal-aimé" (The Song of the Ill-Loved Lover), written in 1903, the year in which *Sex and Character* was first published in German. Mehlman distinguishes a moment in Apollinaire's poem in which "the anger against a woman is quirkily actualized as a fury against Jews." Thus the same kind of affinity Weininger asserts between women and Jews is reproduced in Apollinaire. Mehlman's analysis of the Apollinaire poem and the similarities to Weininger's thought embedded within it further shows the extent to which Weininger's ideas were part of the literary culture of the time, even when their influence was only indirect.

Calling Weininger's book the "philosophical best seller of the first third of the century," Gerald Stieg closely examines a relationship between Kafka and Weininger that goes beyond any textual response to Weininger's ideas found in Kafka's novels. Stieg asserts that the two shared certain fundamental attitudes toward Jewishness and sexuality as well as a "monkish sacralization of writing," which Stieg identifies as a component of Viennese modernism. Using an intertextual approach based on a close reading of Kafka and Weininger, Stieg analyzes the effect of cultural attitudes toward Jews and sexuality that influenced both authors.

The position of woman is deeply affected by this conflation of Jews and sexuality, as she is the "other" that must be avoided. In order to demonstrate these affinities, Stieg analyzes sources as diverse as Kafka's diary entries, a poem by Weininger, Weininger's interpretation of *Parsifal*, and Kafka's novel *The Castle*, calling Kafka a "Weininger in private." Stieg's essay moves between the private and the public, combining examinations of biographical resources such as diaries with analyses of works intended by their authors for publication.

The great impact of Weininger on James Joyce has been noted by several scholars. We have selected three essays on Weininger and Joyce for this volume, so that this issue could be examined from more than one point of view.

Marilyn Reizbaum's argument is based on the "Jewish self-hatred" hypothesis. The Jew, who is metaphorically linked to the female both by Weininger in *Sex and Character* and by Joyce in *Ulysses*, through the character of Bloom, represents negative qualities. In her essay, Reizbaum states that "the kinds of connections between race and sex that Weininger makes appear most prevalently and climactically in the 'Circe' chapter of Ulysses, [which] dramatizes the psychodynamic of self-hatred, linked here with gender and race." Reizbaum suggests that by exploring the model of Weiningerian self-hatred, Joyce could confront self-hatred in himself and perhaps through his art exorcise those elements of Weininger's thought that were irreconcilable with his own.

In "James Joyce's Womanly Wandering Jew," Natania Rosenfeld describes the influence that Weininger's theories had upon Joyce, specifically expressed in his characterizations of Molly, a "Weiningerian" woman, and Bloom in *Ulysses*. Delineating this influence as both misogynistic and anti-Semitic, she contextualizes her close literary reading of *Ulysses* with theories regarding Zionism and Jewish assimilation prevalent at the time. According to Rosenfeld's analysis, Molly and Bloom end up playing out the tensions in Joyce's attitude toward Weininger's theories, and it ultimately becomes clear that Joyce is subverting Weininger while still rejecting Zionism.

Elfriede Pöder concentrates on female representation in "Molly *Is* Sexuality: The Weiningerian Definition of Woman in James Joyce's *Ulysses*." Pöder demonstrates the degree to which Joyce's Molly is Weiningerian theory incarnate, and claims that the resemblance is so strong as to make us suspect that Joyce deliberately set out to create a blueprint of Weininger's theories in the character of Molly. To illustrate her claim, she points out, for example, that Molly's mode of thinking is irrational, associative, disconnected; her flow of thoughts a superficial "tasting," a "sliding and gliding through subjects" only; yet, her mind is perfectly capable of consistency, exactness, and accuracy when recalling sexual

experiences. Like Rosenfeld, Pöder describes an important difference between Weininger and Joyce in her conclusion, where in a crucial reversal, she asserts that Joyce sought to establish a feminine identity for his characters that was opposed to that theorized by Weininger.

In his essay "Svevo and Weininger (Lord Morton's Mare)," Alberto Cavaglion traces the appearance of Weininger's thought in Italo Svevo's novel, *La coscienza di Zeno* (The Confessions of Zeno), and cites other moments in Italian literature influenced by the legacy of Weininger. Svevo's use of Weiningerian concepts is heavily ironized and satirized through the comic persona of Zeno. Cavaglion demonstrates how this comic filtering makes it difficult to understand the precise nature of Svevo's debt to Weininger, until Svevo's debt to the scientific concept of telegony, the effect of the first mating on all future progeny, is uncovered. Telegony was a notion to which Weininger subscribed and to which he makes reference in *Sex and Character*. Weininger's interest in the scientific discourse of his time, such as telegony and Darwinism, is made clear by the complicated cultural genealogy we find explored in Cavaglion's essay. The ability of Weininger's text to disseminate this interest across disciplines into literary spheres is apparent as well through Joyce's interest and through Joyce's publicizing of Weininger to Svevo.

In "Whores, Mothers, and Others: Reception of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* in Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé*," Kristie A. Foell analyzes the tension between Canetti's satirical style (Pöder 1985), his use of Weiningerian concepts, and his own disclaimers of either misogyny or affinity for Weininger. Foell uses the two characters of Therese and Kien as examples of a Weiningerian interplay in Canetti. Situating them within Weininger's ideological framework, Foell questions whether these two characters were created as a textual response to Weininger's ideas. Interweaving her literary analysis of Canetti's novel with Weininger's ideology regarding "*W*" and "*M*," Foell discusses the short distance between reality and fiction that Canetti espoused as a further twist to the Canetti/Weininger relationship. Her analysis bears a resemblance to Stieg's in its ability to look at different kinds of literary and extraliterary sources in order to survey the extent and types of influence found in literature.

In this volume's concluding essay, Freddie Rokem discusses the dynamic tension between history and memory in Jehoshua Sobol's play *The Soul of a Jew*, and its reception in Israel and abroad. He highlights the controversial metaphors in Sobol's work in the context of its 1982 premiere in Israel and comments at length on its performances in Europe. If Weininger is a metaphor in Israel for the "torn Jewish soul" in light of Israel's 1982 war with Lebanon and the difficulties of realizing a Jewish state, the ground shifts radically, for example, in German-speaking countries and most particularly in Vienna. The specter of a self-hating Jew on a

Viennese stage on the fiftieth anniversary of the November 1938 Pogrom evoked a different, although not unrelated, complex of issues for Austrian society in relation to its own past and present. Particularly in light of renewed violence in the 1990s against foreigners, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and memorials to Jews who were persecuted during National Socialism, and renewed debates over what constitutes assimilation into German or Austrian society, German-speaking performances of the play raise difficult questions about the extent to which theater (and film) can jar audiences into a confrontation with the present.

The essays in this volume explore the interrelation of influence and bigotry, the subtle interplay between scientific paradigms and literature, and the construction of gender, both male and female. These works thus engage in debates that go beyond even the tremendous influence of the writing of Otto Weininger and its effect on prejudice against Jews of both genders and against women of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the twentieth century.

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