



THE JEWS
AND THE GERMAN
WAR EXPERIENCE

1914-1918/

by GEORGE L. MOSSE

LEO BAECK MEMORIAL LECTURE 21

THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE was founded by representative organizations of Jews from Germany for the purpose of collecting material on and sponsoring research into the history of the Jewish community in Germany and in other German-speaking countries from the Emancipation to its dispersion. The Institute is named in honor of the man who was the last representative figure of German Jewry in Germany during the Nazi period.

OFFICES OF THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE

NEW YORK: 129 East 73rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10021
LONDON: 4 Devonshire Street, London WIN 2BH
JERUSALEM: 33, Bustanai Street, Jerusalem, Israel

DS
135
G33
M59



© Copyright 1977 by Leo Baeck Institute, Inc.
Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 77-93378

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dedicated to Robert Weltsch

THE ROLE OF the German Jew in the First World War has been analyzed often—the hope that the “spirit of 1914” would lead to a more complete union of Germans and Jews, and an end to the discrimination and suspicion which dogged Jews even in wartime. There were those German Jews who recalled Gabriel Riesser’s remark that only blood spilled in the struggle for fatherland and liberty would lead to emancipation,¹ and there were other German Jews whose faith in such baptism of fire decreased in the course of the war. It is time to go beyond such attitudes in attempting to illuminate certain fundamental problems in the German-Jewish dialogue which the war laid bare and which cannot be subsumed under the familiar dichotomy of assimilation and antisemitism.

The war provides us with a glimpse of the position of the Jew in Germany under extreme conditions. The life of soldiers in the trenches must be our concern, a unique world isolated not only from the normalcy of home and family life, but also at war with its military surroundings, such as the base camp or the regimental headquarters. Typically enough, at the end of the war a guide for returned veterans was published (1918) “because for the most part veterans are completely alienated from bourgeois existence.” Through their overwhelming war experiences they have lost any sense of the so-called “necessities of life.”² Soldiers at war had indeed left the ordered society they knew and had to make a new life for themselves in the trenches, largely underground and exposed to constant discomfort, danger and death.

From the winter of 1914 to the spring of 1918 the trench system was fixed, belligerents’ positions moving only a few yards or miles over terrain covered with the bodies of dead and wounded combatants. This new “world of myth,” as Paul Fussell has called it, had its own rules, superstitions,

Leo Baeck Institute
48190 5/30/79

miracles, legends and rumors.³ The personal issues at stake were indeed momentous: the expectation of death, injury and disease, and yet there was also a certain exaltation in battle and in that camaraderie which was vital for any survival at all.

The war experience created patterns of thought which were to last into the post-war world. Myths and symbols, cults such as that of the fallen soldier became central to the self-understanding of the nation. The necessity of transcending the horror of trench warfare created a new world of myth which affected German-Jewish relations in a multitude of ways. Jews had to take part in this world, though it demanded a still more thorough assimilation. A new ideal of manhood grew out of the war, providing a stereotype which was not new but which became more firmly rooted as a German ideal. The Jew was to become the foil not only of this ideal of manhood but also of the myth of the front line soldier.

WAR, ONE COMBATANT WROTE, "compresses the greatest opposites into the smallest space and shortest time."⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke was not unique in viewing the outbreak of the war as a new release of primeval energy, an intrusion of supposed reality into the realm of illusion.⁵ Rilke wrote under the spell of the "spirit of 1914" but while he himself grew disillusioned with war, others fled from reality to myth. With heightened sensibility a new appreciation of nature rose from the mud of the trenches, together with all sorts of superstitions, prophecies, signs and portents. All of these reactions to an unparalleled confrontation with the horrors of war were integrated into myths and symbols which would explain the present and give hope for the future.

At this point Christian patterns of belief gained new vitality, not only as safeguards against danger, but also in making the close proximity of death to life bearable. Christian belief under such circumstances tended to be neither Protestant nor Catholic, but rested upon shared myths and symbols. The difference between Protestant and Catholic troops in the

reception of the war experience remains to be examined, as military units from Protestant and Catholic German states fought separately from each other. The sources for this essay are Protestant rather than Catholic. However this may be, the war became infused with Christian meaning and vocabulary.

The initiation into the world of the trenches was so momentous that it became natural to speak of the "baptism of fire."⁶ Death was so close, with bodies all around, that it made men think about Christ's passion and resurrection, an analogy basic to the cult of the fallen soldier. The one celebration in the year which seemed most meaningful was Christmas, a symbol of peace, family and home, for one moment breaking the isolation of the trenches. These basic patterns of myth and symbol will occupy us, for they are relevant to the place of the Jew in the war and to the peace that was to follow. As we shall see, many Jews accepted the structures of Christian mythology without their specific religious content.

Christian analogies were everywhere. The most popular writer of wartime Germany, Walter Flex, stated in 1914, that "the sacrifice of the best of our people is only a repetition willed by God of the deepest miracle of life . . . the death of Christ."⁷ Ludwig Ganghofer, another best-selling author, likened Germans to the Three Kings who are led by the star to Bethlehem.⁸

We must focus upon such Christian themes which informed the new "world of myth" of the trenches, for without realizing their impact the Jewish position cannot be understood. Moreover, in order to make our point we will deal with detail, even with trifles, the perception of which dominated the daily life of the trenches. The trench experience was taken as representative of human experience.⁹ Of course, it needs stating that we are dealing here with only one major theme of the war experience, but one which throws an important light upon the position of Jews in Germany. After we have analyzed these themes and their consequences for Jewish integration, we will have to evaluate whether the attitudes of some important Jews towards the war did not in fact differ

from those of non-Jewish Germans, even if Jews by and large accepted the new world of myth trench warfare created. Finally, the adversary habit of mind and the stereotypes the war advocated helped to transform apparent differences between Germans and Jews into a racial reality by the end of the Weimar Republic.

Mass death was central to the First World War, a new experience for most Germans and therefore a reality difficult to confront. The only possible confrontation was to transcend it, and this was done by the analogy of death for the fatherland to the passion and sacrifice of Christ. This was not new but strengthened a tradition going back to the wars of liberation against Napoleon. German poets had likened these wars to a German Easter and later Christ's holy blood was harnessed to German legend in several of Richard Wagner's operas. The Holy Grail was said to be in the custody of the German Volk. When Walter Flex called the First World War the "Last Supper" he was refurbishing this tradition. Now it was projected upon the fallen comrades and on one's own imminent death: "Christ's wine consists of German blood."¹⁰

ONE MEMORIAL BOOK may stand as exemplary for a great many others: the fallen have found no rest, they return to earth in order to rejuvenate the Volk. "To fight, to die, to be resurrected that is the essence of being. From out of your death (in the war) the nation will be restored."¹¹ Such sentiments are not merely typical of the Right, but can be duplicated from the official guide to war monuments issued by the Weimar Republic.¹² Clearly, a Christian theme became symbolic of sacrifice for the nation. Moreover, Germany was not unique in proclaiming such a synthesis: across the channel the 4. August 1914 which marked England's entry into the war, was often depicted as the nation's crucifixion and resurrection.¹³ Life and death became united linked by the *Imitatio Christi*, pictured after the war through the "cross of sacrifice" in military cemeteries or even in frescoes showing the fallen soldier resting in the lap of Christ. Decades of

secularization had not markedly affected the symbolism and the iconography surrounding heroic death. It was still the saviour who drew death's sting.

That sometimes Jews were buried under crosses on the battle field becomes meaningful in this context, and so does the fact that one Jewish officer immediately connects his presumed death with the plain wooden cross under which he will rest, and this in a poem published in a Jewish wartime pamphlet.¹⁴ Moreover, even where Jewish graves were marked with the Star of David they were apt to rest in the shadow of a giant cross of sacrifice or in that of a chapel which stood as a symbol of the resurrection of Christ. Soldiers' burials were roughly the same in all warring nations. For example, the United States Monument Commission also at first automatically placed crosses on the graves of Jewish soldiers. When eventually the Star of David was substituted, one American Jewish leader protested against this "mischievous act." Matters of faith were irrelevant as ". . . Jews and Christians fought shoulder to shoulder, actuated by the same patriotic impulse."¹⁵ The cross became a national symbol for a war which was regarded as holy by all combatants. War graves became part of this myth: for Ludwig Ganghofer traveling along the front, individual graves with their crucifixes were not places of death but "verdant temples of resurrection."¹⁶

We are apt to take Jewish acceptance of certain Christian symbolism for granted, the Iron Cross of valor if not the cross over the grave. But this was not always the case. During the Wars of Liberation the Prussian government, hesitant to offend Jewish sensibilities, sometimes withheld from Jews the Iron Cross or the Luisen Cross, the medal of valor for women on the home front. Thus a Jewish banker's wife merely received a medal instead of the decoration, whereupon she protested that she was proud to wear a cross. For, in any case, eventually she would be buried next to her son who had fallen in battle—and whose grave was marked by a cross.¹⁷ As late as 1853 Carl Meyer Rothschild received the Prussian Red Eagle in a form especially designed for Jews which substi-

tuted a round base for that in the form of a cross.¹⁸ But such times were past. The common war experience meant accepting a shared symbolism.

To make such a statement does not deny that for the most part Jews tried to make use of their own religious symbolism in order to confront the war. In fact, during the Wars of Liberation, Prussian rabbis had already justified enlistment through the use of biblical analogies. Following this tradition, in the Great War, Russia became Goliath, while the president of one German-Jewish community proclaimed that "German courage and the heroism of the Maccabees are one and the same."¹⁹ We shall discuss Jewish reservations about the war, which sprang from a still vigorous ethical tradition, later in this essay. But here it is important to point out that the shared camaraderie of the trenches did mean a further assimilation.

After all, the Jewish soldier was a part of this comradeship, even though Julius Marx believed that this was only true during times of danger.²⁰ We have no concrete knowledge of what such comradeship actually meant to the front line soldier. To be sure, officers wrote about it, writers like Walter Flex and propagandists behind the front. But there is no survey in Germany such as that taken in France in 1917, and even in this case only some 50 soldiers replied and attempted to formulate the meaning of wartime friendship. Often this was assumed to be instinctive, based upon common affinities, and these in turn were thought to be both products of a shared hatred of the enemy, and also of shared traditions reaching back into the past. Religion and regional ties usually defined such traditions.²¹ This survey comes to us from the Right, from admirers of Maurice Barrès, and must be viewed with suspicion: but in Germany glorification of shared hatreds and common religious and volkish ties was carried into the post-war world. For the National Socialists, but not for them only, this *Bund* of males was the cell from which all states have their origins.²² The post-war tendency to endow the war with dramatic unity was especially effective in making the myth of the camaraderie in the trenches symbolic for the fate of the entire nation.

THE IMMEDIATE SYMBOL of the wartime camaraderie was the military cemetery: linking the living comradeship of the trenches with the fallen comrades. Already in 1915 the distinction was made between bourgeois' and soldiers' cemeteries. Bourgeois' cemeteries are materialistic in the boastfulness of their monuments; in soldiers' cemeteries "gravestones through their simplicity and uniformity lead into a serious and reverential mood."²³ The camaraderie in life is continued in death. The historical background of this kind of cemetery cannot concern us, except to mention that it owes something to the classical revival of the eighteenth century, and that the simple row graves date from the quest for equality in the Enlightenment and during the French Revolution. But now a myth grew up around the simple, uniform graves with their serried crosses: they symbolized Germany. As we read in the previously cited war memorial published by the Republic, it is from these graves that the fallen are said to rise and visit the living in their dreams in order to command them to continue the battle. War cemeteries are the symbols of war turned to stone.

Uniformity was crucial here, and so were the walls which enclosed the war cemeteries. They were meant to form a sacred space, analogous to a Church, centered upon a cross or a chapel. Jewish cemeteries did not of course entirely follow this plan, though the separately enclosed space was kept and so were the row graves. Instead of crosses these resting places sometimes adapted another German tradition which had become an alternative to crosses of sacrifice, if not in military cemeteries, then in war memorials. Huge boulders, symbols so it was said of primeval power (*Urkraft*) exemplifying reverence, exaltation and iron force. These, so we are told, had been used by ancient Germans to represent an *Ehrenmal*. Jewish cemeteries were, at times, centered upon such a boulder; in the Jewish cemetery of Nuremberg it took the form of an altar.²⁴

The iconography of death in war was similar among Jews and gentiles, though of course there were no crosses or chapels

of resurrection among the Jews. Yet, more often than not, Jews and gentiles were buried in a common cemetery in Flanders or in the east. Sammy Gronemann tells of the difficulty of persuading a Jewish parent that his son should be torn from his comrades and buried separately in Jewish soil.²⁵

The war produced one new form of military cemetery: the *Heldenhain* or heroes wood, first proposed in 1915. War heightened the sense of nature: from out of the trenches soldiers stared at a ravaged no man's land, and looked for an enemy they could never see. But what they did see were the woods of Flanders which seemed to suffer much like themselves. "The murdered wood" is the title of a story in *Die Feldgrauen (The Field-Grey)*, a journal written by soldiers at the front. "This wood, battered and beaten like myself nevertheless lives on."²⁶ Walter Flex's *Wanderer Between Two Worlds*, that most famed of war books, is filled with descriptions of nature. For Flex, nature is a means of transcending the war experience; for example, fields full of flowers directly behind the trenches are reminders of beauty and hope. Here typically enough, nature is Christianized, as it were, and Flex's hero reads the New Testament even as he admires "a breath of religious spring."²⁷

The image of the crucifixion was very much a part of the Belgian and Flemish landscape: the numerous calvaries visible at the crossroads. Paul Fussell has pointed out the role that these calvaries played in the imagination of British soldiers who coming from a Protestant country were much impressed. The sacrificial theme, in which each soldier becomes analogous to the crucified Christ was not confined to English war poetry.²⁸ Walter Flex spoke to his friend Wurche for the last time in the shadow of just such a calvary: a few days later Wurche was killed while on patrol.²⁹ The heightened feeling for nature was infused with such Christian symbols which seemed an integral part of the countryside.

The Heroes' Wood, however, while linked to the heightened sensibility towards nature in wartime, was based upon the tradition of the Germanic landscape with its sacred trees and

forests. "Emperor's oaks" (*Kaisereichen*) had already been planted as a thanksgiving for the victory of 1871. The renewal of a Germanic nature was now seen as symbolic of the resurrection of the dead. The German wood itself should form the sacred burial space. Field Marshall von Hindenburg in praising this new concept of burial wrote about the "German tree, gnarled and with solid roots, symbolic of individual and communal strength."³⁰ "Oaks of honor" were common in Jewish as well as Christian military cemeteries. *Heldenhaine* were ecumenical, fusing Germanic and Christian symbolism for all of those who had made the ultimate sacrifice.³¹

A COMMON MOOD united Jews and gentiles, but it was a mood subsumed under Germanic and Christian symbolism. Sermons preached on days of mourning by Christian ministers and rabbis might well be compared. Such a comparison made on a very limited scale emphasized once more a joint approach to the fallen heroes. The day of mourning was conceived as a festival: a worthwhile death has climaxed a worthwhile life in the service of the fatherland. Such themes are hardly surprising. But some sermons of Jewish chaplains show a confusion of Christian symbolism and Jewish identity, especially as services at the front were sometimes held in Churches. Thus was Bruno Italiener carried away when he praised the combination of organ music, bright light falling through the Church windows, and the power of ancient Germanic song. In such a moment, he said, there exist no Jews, Catholics or Protestants but only Germans.³² Ecumenical cooperation between all faiths was the rule during the war, *communio sanctorum* as a Protestant court preacher called it,³³ but here such a community is found within a specific Germanic and Christian context.

Christmas in the trenches became the festival which best symbolized the longing for an end of isolation, for home and family, for camaraderie and a return of the fallen. It is curious that this festival has never been analyzed, though the "war

Christmas" became a cliché in both world wars: it was accompanied by an outpouring of poetry and prose claiming to be symbolic of the true national spirit. Christmas was a festival of peace, a "secret armistice" as it was called, which in the first year of the war did in fact become real, as enemies met in the no man's land between the trenches. But when such fraternization was stopped (in 1915 anyone repeating such fraternization was ordered shot), Christmas in the trenches still mimicked times of peace: the decorations, the Christmas tree, presents from home and the festive board. "Everyone's face lit up at the thought of home." Yet a short sermon by an officer was supposed to exhort the men, to strengthen their will to fight in the realization that peace can only be attained through war. Moreover, once more thoughts of home were mixed with memorials to the fallen.³⁴

Walter Flex, that great myth maker, in his "Christmas fable" has a war widow drown herself and her son. They are restored to life through an encounter with the ghosts of dead soldiers. "Christmas night the dead talk in human voices."³⁵ Flex likens the fallen to the angels who brought the news of Christ's birth to the shepherds—a repetition of the motif which Ganghofer made symbolic for the role of Germany in the war. Small wonder that a rabbi justified his leading such a Christmas celebration: it also symbolized to him a camaraderie which knew no barriers of faith, it was a festival symbolic of German unity and the bonds of friends and family back home. His rejection of the belief that the saviour was really born on this day was of little importance, he tells us, compared to the wartime meaning of Christmas.³⁶

We might see in the war Christmas as in the other symbols and myths discussed a secularization of Christianity: an ecumenicism which was so broad as to lose its specific Christian relevance. It is indeed possible that the references to Christ and Christianity were rhetoric, a shorthand for dilemmas and longings shared by everyone at the front. Certainly they could become form without content, as, for example, in the constant Nazi use of Christian vocabulary which transferred terms

like "apostles" and "evangelical" to their own substitute religion. But there was no such substitute religion in the trenches; worship of the nation was expressed through the passion and resurrection, the national landscape was replete with Christian symbolism. As the Christian metaphors of war were transferred into the post-war world, nationalism increasingly took the lead in a badly defeated and disorganized nation.

Yet if it had not been for the crisis that followed the war, Jews might not have been affected by the mood and piety we have analyzed. As it turned out, the details and even the trifles which have concerned us opened a deep gulf between Germans and Jews because they operated on the level of myth and symbol, within an extreme human situation. The Volk community, the camaraderie, were wrapped in a Christian analogy which had to be accepted.

Not all Jews went so far in their acceptance of this as Walther Rathenau. During the war he wrote that he was taking his stand on the Acts of the Apostles. But this did not prevent him from going his own way and remaining a Jew, just as his pious Christian friends believed in religion without dogma. "I want a Christian state," but without state power or a state Church.³⁷ In fact, many important Jews attempted to disentangle themselves from the German mood, or at least to mitigate its affects.

AMIDST ALL THE ENTHUSIASM there were reservations. One need only read Leo Baeck's sermons or his official reports as field Chaplain to the Jewish community, to feel his love of peace and hatred of all wars.³⁸ For Leo Baeck the war was a necessary evil, and there can be no greater contrast between his thoughts and those of the Protestant Chaplains. Chauvinism of any kind is rejected by Baeck, but accepted by nearly all of his official Christian colleagues. The ethical ideals of Reform Judaism held fast in this case.

On the home front, where on the one hand enthusiasm ran high but on the other hand voices of dissent did exist, some, though by no means all Jewish publications, were remarkable in their outspokenness. Not only did Leo Baeck's reports and articles in the *Gemeindeblatt* bear witness to this fact, but so too did certain Zionist papers. For example, after first sharing the "spirit of 1914" the *Jüdische Rundschau* emphasized that the war proved the importance of nationalism, but immediately qualified this statement by referring to the brotherhood of man.³⁹ Robert Weltsch clung to his ideal that the nation was but a step towards the unity of mankind. In the midst of the myth of the fallen soldier, the *Herzl-Bund* of young Zionist merchants stressed the awfulness of death and war, and the burdens which they impose upon life. In the halcyon days of the "spirit of 1914," even as it defended the Jews against the charge of cowardice, *Ost und West* exclaimed that the moral grandeur of a people is not only revealed in war, but above all in the solid accomplishments of peace. This is certainly a unique dissent in the chorus of German voices.⁴⁰

To be sure, all Jewish papers exhorted young Jews to do their best and called upon them to volunteer for the colors. Yet there is enough meaningful difference that we can talk, even if not consistently, of an ethical imperative which remained intact. If Jews were prone to accept Christian metaphors because ideas and rituals taken from the non-Jewish environment had penetrated to the heart of Judaism during the process of assimilation, so the ideals of the Enlightenment lasted longest among the Jews. The *Israelitische Wochenblatt* as early as September 1914, warned against "unhealthy chauvinism" and appealed to reason instead.⁴¹

We can cite as additional evidence for the attitude of large parts of the German-Jewish and Zionist establishment, their rejection of Ernst Lissauer's hymn of hate against England. This poem became for some time the most popular war poem in Germany. It received praise from the Emperor and the Crown Prince of Bavaria, but not from many of his fellow

Jews. When Benjamin Segel surveyed 60 important Jewish personalities they unanimously rejected the *Hassgesang* as un-Jewish.⁴² *Ost und West*, once more in the forefront, wrote a whole article against Lissauer called "Education in Hate." Jews generally, it asserted, have rejected Lissauer, towards whose poem one can feel only revulsion and horror.⁴³

Here, then, there was no easy acceptance of the new world of myth of the trenches, and this in spite of the acceptance of the common mood. This persistence of ethical attitudes, of a refusal to join in the symphony of hate and the deification of the nation, separated some important Jews from most Germans. Once more, we face a phenomenon which will continue into the post-war world, when Jews in their liberalism and cosmopolitanism will face ever greater isolation in a Germany where the war experience led to a heightened chauvinism. This alienation worked hand in hand with the covert rather than overt exclusion of Jews from the *communio sanctorum* of the embattled fatherland.

At the same time, the war led to several other attitudes which were to prove dynamic in destroying the precarious German-Jewish relationship. The hatred Leo Baeck rejected dominated the war. The adversary relationship led to a state of mind which craved an enemy, and which was ready for the politics of confrontation in post-war Germany. The crises of the Weimar Republic took the form of an undeclared civil war which the Nazis eventually exploited and won. The Jews became the real victims of the continuation of war in peacetime. Just so, the war deepened an already present German stereotype of manliness. This "totally new race" as Ernst Jünger called it,⁴⁴ and which emerged from the war, was to take the Jew as its foil.

Eventually all the ideals we have discussed: the glorification of sacrifice and the reward of resurrection, the exaltation of simplicity and equality as the essence of comradeship, and the love of home and of nature, were turned against the Jews. What started as Jews coming to terms with national Christian

myth and symbols, ended with the expulsion of the Jew from participation in the national myth. He became the enemy who had to be destroyed.

II

THE HATRED OF THE ENEMY in wartime needs no documentation. To be sure, there was at times respect for the adversary as well as fraternization during the first war Christmas. Whatever the soldiers may actually have felt, the barrage of propaganda and the loss of their comrades can hardly have left them without moments of hate. As the entire war experience was constantly lifted into a world of myth and symbol so the adversary relationship was transformed into a general principle of life by influential writers and poets. Ernst Jünger was the most famous of these, and his war diary, *The Storm of Steel* (1919) which sold 244,000 copies in 26 editions, and which was translated into 7 languages,⁴⁵ put it bluntly: "For I cannot too often repeat, a battle was no longer an episode that spent itself in blood and fire; it was a condition of things that dug itself in remorselessly week after week and even month after month."⁴⁶ This was a total confrontation for, so we are told, "War means the destruction of the enemy without scruple and by any means. War is the harshest of all trades, and the masters of it can only entertain humane feelings so long as they do no harm."⁴⁷ Such passages seem to anticipate the Nazi future, and indeed Hitler greatly valued *The Storm of Steel*. But then the book was received with universal praise by the *Tagebuch* on the moderate left as well as from the Right where the welcome was warmest.⁴⁸

Jünger revised his book from edition to edition during the Weimar Republic. It is not without significance that he now omitted the beginning of his diary and took the acceptance of war as a necessary and higher reality for granted. Within the diary itself personal experience is changed into the shared experience of comradeship in the trenches and in battle.⁴⁹ Such an emphasis upon camaraderie brought Jünger's work

into line with many other books about the war, but also reflected the search for a new nation which would restore German power and glory.

Jünger, despite his rejection of the Nazis, must have approved of the words which Joseph Goebbels addressed, in the midst of the victories of the Second World War, to the dead of the First: "Germany is beginning to glitter in the dawn of your sacrifice." Already in 1928 he wrote that the young Nazi movement was led by the fallen soldiers.⁵⁰ Not only the Nazis annexed the myths of the war and its aggressive attitude of mind. The political Right under the Republic fed and grew fat on it, while much of the left proved unable to cope with the war experience although it also dominated the lives of its followers.

Jünger did not stand alone. War novels and war poetry echoed the constant refrain that Germans must remain hard as steel, that sentimentality, even during Christmas, must not sap the fighting spirit. It is no accident that these hackneyed sentiments dating from the First World War were repeated by Himmler in the midst of the Second World War. Telling his SS execution squads in 1943 that they must know what it means to see a hundred Jewish corpses lie side by side, or five hundred, or a thousand, he continues: "To have stuck this out . . . to have kept our integrity, that is what has made us hard."⁵¹ This comparison does not telescope history, but tells us about one consequence of the First World War: the adversary relationship, the acceptance of mass death, led to an ever greater brutalization of the human mind.

This brutalizing effect was noticed in the first year of the war by a psychologist who otherwise fully shared the "spirit of 1914." "The marvelous enthusiasm, heroic courage and willingness to sacrifice . . . which sprang from a shared devotion to the fatherland," wrote Otto Binswanger, "have been sadly perverted into degrading . . . feelings of cruel hate, of lust for revenge and desire to ruthlessly exterminate the enemy."⁵² The confrontation politics of the Weimar Republic

continued this trend. Yet such brutalization was not merely the product of the enthusiasms Binswanger cited, but also of the efforts to transcend the horrors of war through the myth of the fallen soldier and the other myths and symbols which we have discussed. They made it easier to confront mass death: not merely for soldiers to face their own death, but also the task of killing the enemy.

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN “we” and “them” was used as the spearhead for the post-world-war attack against liberalism. Liberalism, so Jünger tells us, relativizes everything on behalf of its business interests, and the political philosopher Carl Schmitt praised decisiveness without giving quarters, which alone was said to be worthy of the sovereign state.⁵³ Such attitudes gave solid support for the onslaught upon the Weimar Republic’s ideals of freedom and pluralism. That not only the Republic but its Jews as well were victims of such antiliberalism needs no demonstration. Jewish existence had always depended upon the pluralism and liberalism of society. That such an onslaught was made in the name of the war experience gave it a frightening dimension. That the Republic was watering down the myths of the war was one of the most fundamental accusations made against the freedom and tolerance it championed.⁵⁴

The veterans organization, *Der Stahlhelm*, for example, opposed the Republic in order to transmit the “spirit of the front line soldier” to future generations.⁵⁵ According to the *Stahlhelm*, the new nation was to be built upon the “camaraderie of the trenches.” Yet the Jewish soldier was now excluded from such comradeship. As Jews formed their own veterans’ organization, the cooperation between all faiths which had taken place on the front collapsed—Christianity had become too Germanized, an integral part of the *Volks-gemeinschaft* embattled against the enemy.

It is all the more significant that the *Stahlhelm* leader, Franz Seldte, was no passionate antisemite. His novel, *Vor und*

Hinter den Kulissen (*In Front of and Behind the Scenes*, 1931) praised one Jewish officer as an exemplary German patriot, modest and of pleasing appearance. At the same time Seldte demanded a clear-cut division between German and Jew.⁵⁶ While he regarded the Jews as a separate people, many of his followers came to regard them as a separate race as well. In 1932 when it was revealed that the *Stahlhelm’s* deputy leader had some Jews in his family tree, a veritable storm broke over Theodor Duesterberg’s head in spite of his own unquestioned volkish allegiance. In vain Duesterberg gave his word of honor that he was not related to any Jews himself or through his children, that he never borrowed money from Jews, nor had Jewish clients.⁵⁷ Nothing can demonstrate more clearly how exclusive the *Frontgeist* had become: a clean separation between Germans and Jews was now part of the “spirit of the trenches,” in spite of Seldte’s noble Jewish officer, or the *Stahlhelm* delegations which appeared at memorials to the Jewish fallen.

Such a separation might have been inherent in the mythology of the war, but it became explicit only after the war. To what degree the Jewish war veterans’ association attempted to re-establish the lost comradeship, and to what extent they attempted to revitalize a shared myth once more—now volkish rather than Christian—must be left to further research. But it is possible to trace the German-Jewish dialogue based on shared Germanic and Christian myths,⁵⁸ just as it is possible to trace the ethical imperatives which separated important Jewish leaders like Leo Baeck from the commonly accepted war experience.

Hatred of the enemy, the adversary relationship, became a total commitment for important and powerful segments of the population. Hans Oberlindober, the leader of the disabled veterans’ organization, wrote that though the First World War was finished, the war against the German people continues, and that 1914-1918 was merely its bloody beginning.⁵⁹ The politics of struggle, of clear and unambiguous decision making, was thought to be the consequence of facing an

enemy, foreign or domestic. Great revolutions are decided by blood and iron, wrote Oswald Spengler, without the kind of hesitancy about violence which characterized many left-wing revolutionaries as well as many Republicans. The German revolution, he continued, must go forward until the nation becomes once more a community like that of the trenches. Typically enough, Spengler believed that such politics was the politics of power, the only politics that counts. Power belongs to the whole nation, the individual is merely its servant.⁶⁰

THOSE WHO WROTE about the trenches often stressed the primitivism of such a life, glorifying it as the breakthrough of elemental forces which had slumbered within an artificial civilization. The rage of which Jünger and others spoke as they went over the top was exalted as an ecstasy which revealed the true nature of man. The myth of the storm troopers existed during the war and was not merely a creation of the post-war world. Such men were endowed with certain characteristics, so it was thought, which went beyond mere courage and the will to fight. Contemporaries believed that this stereotype was new: the iron hard man of decision, slim and lithe, with fair skin and clear eyes. In reality this was a stereotype present in European aesthetic consciousness ever since the eighteenth century; sinking still deeper into the German mind through its reaffirmation during the war.⁶¹

Such stereotypes were not confined to Germany. In England Siegfried Sassoon described George Sherston's friend, the young officer Dick Tiltwood, in almost the identical terms with which Walter Flex characterized his hero Ernst Wurche: "He had the obvious good looks which go with fair hair and firm features, but it was the radiant integrity of his expression which astonished me."⁶² *Wanderer Between Two Worlds* began with a description of Wurche, student of Christian theology, whose outward appearance mirrors his inward beauty. Wurche's integrity is symbolized by his light and clear

eyes, his good looks and slender and well-proportioned body.⁶³ When Sassoon followed up his description of Tiltwood by writing that "His was the bright countenance of truth . . . incapable of concealment but strong in reticence and modesty,"⁶⁴ without knowing it, he duplicated the ideal of manliness which Walter Flex popularized in Germany.

Wurche, however, loved nothing better than his naked sword and rejoiced in battle. If the English ideal type included vulnerability and innocence, as Paul Fussell tells us,⁶⁵ the German model was hard, wise and invulnerable. There exist vital differences in national traditions which surface in times of deep stress and anxiety. Dick Tiltwood is not particularly religious and his patriotism was tempered by his gentleness. Wurche, who reads Goethe and the New Testament even while rejoicing in his sword, is reconciled to a heroic death as part of his joyful duty to the fatherland and to his men. And so is Otto Braun, the *Frühvollendete* (one who dies young) who, unlike Flex, cannot be counted on the political Right. The body, so he tells his war diaries, must become hard, steely, grave and austere, pregnant with future deeds and manly beauty. For Otto Braun this ideal warrior corresponded to the stereotype of Greek beauty which had formed the Germanic ideal ever since the eighteenth century.⁶⁶

Ernst Jünger once more summed up this stereotype in all its mixture of brutality and beauty, so common in Germany. "This was a totally new race, all energy . . . slim, lithe and muscular bodies, finely chiseled faces . . . These were men who overcame, natures of steel, ready for any struggle however ghastly," and Jünger thought that such a struggle was a permanent condition of life. The foils of this hero were the philistines, the bourgeois and the liberals, the "retail merchant and the glove-makers" as Jünger characterized them.⁶⁷ It was the Jewish stereotype which became the foil of this manly ideal. For like the new race of which Jünger spoke, the Jewish stereotype had over a century of history behind it and was quite ready for use. Werner Sombart's contrast between merchants and heroes (*Händler und Helden*,

1915) projected the opprobrium of the anti-heroic upon the English enemy, but it was easily transferred back to the Jew. It is not necessary to cite further proof that the Jew was excluded from this heroic ideal.

THE SPECIFIC MONUMENTS to the fallen which we find in the Heroes' Woods often present the dying young Siegfried,⁶⁸ a figure thought especially effective when juxtaposed to the darkness of the trees. We have already mentioned earlier the role played by massive boulders as war monuments, but in this case the symbolism was not so limited that Jews could not follow, in spite of the frequent references to ancient Germanic tradition. Young Siegfried was another matter. The emphasis in such monuments was on simplicity and youth. Simplicity, as we have already seen, was thought essential for military cemeteries because it was said to reflect the manliness of the comradeship of the trenches. Greek ideas were operative here, re-enforced by the stress on youth. The young hero was modeled on Greek sculpture whose concept of beauty had determined the German stereotype ever since J. J. Winckelmann wrote in the eighteenth century. In 1931 looking back over the war memorials of the last decade, Karl von Seeger was moved to wonder about the persistence of the ideal of Greek art. The ". . . naked, lithe, muscular youth, filled with spirit and will, still represents our ideal of humanity."⁶⁹ The eros which was always part of the camaraderie of the trenches was worshipped as youth. Poetry and prose were filled with admiration for "youthful steps" and "youthful exuberance." Much of the best English war poetry was also erotic, with its delight in blond and tender youth, but in Germany this kind of eroticism became politicized. Such heroes' memorials, so we are told in 1915, are symbolic of the eternal youth of the people. Siegfried was a young Apollo, and so was Germany.⁷⁰ The struggle between young Germany and the old nations of the West was popularized by Moeller van den Bruck, but it subtly drew much of its strength from the image of heroic youth during the war.

The Jews were considered an old people, and the Jewish stereotype was consistently one of age not of youth. In German literature even young Jews usually have old faces.⁷¹ This Jewish stereotype is once again a part of a long tradition which cannot be analyzed here. The epithet "old" had become attached to the image of the Jew, but now this confronted a nation which adopted the symbol of heroic youth.

Not only the Germanic stereotype received renewed impetus through the war experience, but also the ideals of simplicity and modesty which were a part of the myth of camaraderie as symbolized in the resting places of the fallen. Once more, the Jewish stereotype ran squarely counter to this ideal. The Jew as arrogant and showy was a myth over a century old by the time of the war. But now it was heightened by the supposed qualities of the front-line soldiers so contrary to what the Jew was meant to represent. Finally, the concept of beauty and eros which symbolized the ideal German confronted a Jewish stereotype which was its opposite: small and puny, ill-proportioned and with shambling gait. The clash of stereotypes is well enough known, but the war gave it a dimension unknown before this time. To be sure, without a long tradition behind them neither stereotype would have acquired the force given to it by the war and the defeat which followed. The commonplaces of antisemitism received a new importance when transposed upon the myths and stereotypes of the war.

Germany saw itself defending European civilization. The myths and symbols we have discussed were thought to be specifically German. Germany in turn was the guardian of Europe, and more than that, God's instrument to pass judgment upon the world. As Klaus Vondung has shown, ideas of the Jewish and Christian apocalypse became one means of interpreting the war: Germany is lifted from an instrument through which God judges to the executor of the Last Judgment. Jewish war sermons, at times, echoed such thought.⁷² Through this self-appointed task some racism penetrated the war experience: not directed against Jews but against blacks.

The Entente was accused of importing inferior races to Europe in order that they might fight God's chosen people. Such racism strengthened German feelings of exclusiveness and mission which later flowed into Weimar racism and antisemitism. Indeed, when the Entente used black troops to occupy Germany after the armistice (1919-1920) the cry that culture was being raped coincided with the first and as yet merely social restrictions against the Jews because of their race.⁷³ Walter Bloem, writing in 1916, had already likened the black and colored troops used by the English to Hagenbeck's famous circus.⁷⁴ War literature and war memoirs show a special hostility to blacks, and no fine distinctions were made between the Moroccans, Indian Sepoys or Africans from Senegal. Stefan George, from his ivory tower, pontificated against the "Blutschmach," that is the destruction of the white by black and yellow races.⁷⁵ The war not only furthered the stereotype of the German hero, but also encouraged racial myths. France and England were not yet seen in racial terms, but the war helped Germans see the world as a struggle between races. By 1939 it was the Jews who also became the victims of this inheritance of the war.

GERMAN JEWS like Leo Baeck shared a common German tradition but bent it to different purposes. They continued to combine German idealism with the heritage of the Enlightenment. Leo Baeck, with some justice, blamed the Lutheran tradition for the worst in German thought and thus connected it with the destructiveness of the war. The Lutherans had created a paternal police state, a tradition Baeck contrasted to that of the Prussian Enlightenment. This Enlightenment put the state in the service of morality and attempted to improve all that was human. Significantly, looking at the destruction of the war, he added in 1919: "Prussian idealism with its optimistic belief in the future of all mankind has retained a home within the Jewish communities."⁷⁶ Historically that was a true observation, and one which helps to explain Baeck's own attitude towards the war, the more so

as he saw such enlightenment as part of the essence of Judaism. But this mixture between German idealism and the Enlightenment also influenced Zionists like Robert Weltsch who wanted to give nationalism a human face.

To be sure most German Jews succumbed to the almost irresistible temptation to share to the full the German war experience. But after the war many had a rude awakening and recaptured the liberal and Enlightenment tradition. At that time establishment figures like Baeck had more in common with the left-wing Jewish intellectuals than they might have cared to admit. Both believed that man must be the end and never the means, and that war perverted the inherent virtues of man. It must be left to another time and place to show the similarity of thought between Baeck and the young Lion Feuchtwanger, between Robert Weltsch and Kurt Eisner. All that needs to be stated is the existence of a certain German-Jewish tradition, widely shared among Jews of different political persuasions, retaining ideals the war experience had helped to defeat. It is hardly surprising that so many Jews were willing to pay a high price in order to complete the process of assimilation, even if it meant accepting foreign and inherently hostile myths and structures of thought. But that a quite different German-Jewish tradition existed, which though it thought of itself as loyally German, opted to stand aside—this should fill us with pride and wonder.

NOTES

1. Karl Hilmar, *Die deutschen Juden im Weltkrieg*, (Berlin, n.d.) 48.
2. *An was hat der heimkehrende Kriegsteilnehmer zu denken? Praktische Wegweise*, ed. J. Jehle. (Munich, 1918), 3.
3. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (London, 1975), 114, 115. I am greatly indebted to this epoch-making book. Hanns Bächtold, *Deutscher Soldatenbrauch und Soldatenglaube*, (Strassburg, 1917) repeats in a German context the superstitions listed for England by Paul Fussell.
4. J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors*, (New York, 1973), xiv.
5. Sir Maurice Bowra, *Poetry and the First World War*, (Oxford, 1961), 11.
6. Paul Fussell, *op. cit.* 115.
7. Walter Flex, *Vom grossen Abendmahl: Verse und Gedanken aus dem Feld*, (Munich, n.d.) 43. The citation is from "Machtgedanken" written in 1914.
8. Ludwig Ganghofer, *Reise zur deutschen Front 1915*, (Berlin, 1915), 74.
9. Paul Fussell, *op. cit.* 145.
10. Walter Flex, *op. cit.* 5.
11. *Ehrendenkmal der Deutschen Armee und Marine*, (Berlin & Munich, 1926), 654.
12. i.e. *Deutscher Ehrenhain für die Helden 1914-1918*, (Leipzig, 1931).
13. Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade, the Church of England in the First World War*, (Durham, North Carolina, 1974), 135.
14. Immanuel Saul, "An meine Kinder," *Im Deutschen Reich, Feldbücherei der CVJG*, (Berlin, n.d.) 55. Other examples of Jews buried under crosses, M. Spanier, *Leutnant Sender*, (Hamburg, 1915), 77; *Unsere Gefallenen Kameraden, Gedenkbuch für die im Weltkrieg gefallenen Münchner Juden*, (Munich, 1929), 212. Julius Marx writes about a Jew buried under a cross, and that such a cross and the praying soldier in front of it became symbolic for the war. *Kriegs-Tagebuch eines Juden*, (Zürich, 1939), 33.
15. *Louis Marshall*, ed. Charles Reznikoff, (Philadelphia, 1957), 247, 248. I owe this reference to Professor L. Gartner of the University of Tel Aviv.
16. Ludwig Ganghofer, *op. cit.* 150.
17. Unidentified newspaper clipping of 8. February 1816, Stern collection, item 212, p. 17. Archives of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.
18. Cited in Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron; Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire*, (New York, 1977), 16.
19. M. Güdemann, "Der jetzige Weltkrieg und die Bibel," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Vo. 23, Neue Folge, (1915), 5; *Zum Gedächtnis an Dr. Moritz Levin*, 13. Dezember 1914, 6.
20. Julius Marx, *op. cit.* 129.
21. i.e. J. H. Rosny Ainé, *Confidences sur l'amitié des tranchées*, (Paris, 1919), *passim*.
22. George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, (New York, 1974), 216.
23. Emil Högg, *Kriegergrab und Kriegerdenkmal*, (Wittenberg, 1915), 29.
24. i.e. *Kriegsgedenkbuch der israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Nürnberg*, ed. Marx Freudenthal, (Nuremberg, 1920), *passim*. For the symbolisms referred to, see George L. Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*, (New York, 1975).
25. Sammy Gronemann, *Hawdloh und Zapfenstreich*, (Berlin, 1924), 102.
26. *Die Feldgrau*. *Illustrierte Kriegszeitschrift der 50. I.-D.*, (June, 1916), 12.
27. Walter Flex, *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten*, (Munich, n.d.), 46.
28. Paul Fussell, *op. cit.* 118-119.
29. Walter Flex, *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten*, 73.
30. *Heldenhaine, Heldenbäume*, ed. Stephan Ankenbrand, (Munich, 1918), 28.
31. i.e. *Kriegsgedenkbuch der israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Nürnberg*, 25, 43.
32. Bruno Italiener, *Heimat und Glauben*, (Darmstadt, 1917), 9.
33. Johannes Kessler, *Ich schwöre mir ewige Jugend*, (Leipzig, 1935), 285.
34. D. E. Dryander, *Weihnachtsgedanken in der Kriegszeit*, (Leipzig, 1914), 21; *Die Feldgrauen, Kriegszeitschrift aus dem Schützengraben*, (mimeographed, February, 1916), 30, 31.
35. Walter Flex, *Vom grossen Abendmahl*, 15.
36. *Gefallene Deutsche Juden, Frontbriefe 1914-1918*, (Berlin, 1935), 92.
37. Walther Rathenau, *Eine Streitschrift*, (Weilheim/OBB 1917), 20-28.
38. Leo Baeck's reports appeared regularly in the *Gemeindeblatt der Jüdischen Gemeinde Berlin* from 1914 onwards.
39. i.e. *Jüdische Rundschau*, (7. August, 1914), 343; *ibid*, (16. Oktober, 1914), 387; but also Kurt Blumenfeld "am deutschen Wesen soll die Welt genesen," *ibid* (19. February, 1915), 65.
40. *Protokoll des II. Ordentlichen Bundestages des Herzl-Bundes Berlin*, 17.-20. April, 1918, 7; *Ost und West*, (January-May, 1915), 14ff.
41. quoted in *Jüdische Rundschau*, (4. September, 1914), 361.
42. Benjamin Segel, *Der Weltkrieg und das Schicksal der Juden*, (Berlin, 1915), 143.
43. *Ost und West*, 14.
44. Ernst Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, (Berlin, 1933), 33.
45. Karl Prümm, *Die Literatur des Soldatischen Nationalismus der 20er Jahre*, (Kronberg, Taunus, 1974), vol. 1, 101.
46. Ernst Jünger, *The Storm of Steel*, (New York, 1975), 109.
47. *ibid*, 126-127.
48. Karl Prümm, *op. cit.* 101.
49. *ibid*, 103ff.
50. Joseph Goebbels, *Der Angriff; Aufsätze aus der Kampfzeit*, (Munich, 1942), 251, 274.

51. quoted in Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *A Holocaust Reader*, (New York, 1976), 133.
52. Otto Binswanger, *Die seelischen Wirkungen des Krieges*, (Stuttgart und Berlin, 1914), 27.
53. Karl Prümm, *op. cit.* 45ff; Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, (Munich Leipzig, 1934), preface.
54. Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, (Munich, 1962), 132.
55. Volker R. Berghan, *Der Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten 1918-1935*, (Düsseldorf, 1966), 91.
56. Franz Seldte, *Vor und Hinter den Kulissen*, (Leipzig, 1931), 56ff; George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, (New York, 1964), 255.
57. Volker R. Berghan, *op. cit.* 241.
58. i.e. George L. Mosse, *Germans and Jews*, (New York, 1970), 105ff.
59. Hanns Oberlindober, *Ein Vaterland, das allen gehört!* (Munich, 1939), 10, 11.
60. Oswald Spengler, *Preussentum und Sozialismus*, (Munich, 1925), 15, 18.
61. For this see, George L. Mosse, *Towards the Final Solution, The European Experience of Race*, (New York City, 1978), Chapter XI.
62. Paul Fussell, *op. cit.* 57.
63. Walter Flex, *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten*, 5, 6.
64. Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, (New York, 1929), 321.
65. Paul Fussell, *op. cit.* 272.
66. Otto Braun, *Aus Nachgelassenen Schriften eines Frühvollendeten*, ed. Julie Vogelstein, (Berlin-Grünwald, 1921), 120.
67. Ernst Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, 33, 56.
68. i.e. *Das Deutsche Grabdenkmal*, (Februar-März, 1926), 6; Albert Maennchen, *Das Reichsehrenmal der Eisenbolz am Rhein*, (Koblenz, 1927), n.p.
69. Karl von Seeger, *Das Denkmal des Weltkriegs*, (Stuttgart, 1930), 22.
70. Willy Lange, *Deutsche Heldenhaine*, (Leipzig, 1915), 27; *Das Deutsche Grabdenkmal*, (April, 1926), 11.
71. i.e. George L. Mosse, "Die NS-Kampfbühne," *Geschichte im Gegenwartsdrama*, ed. Reinhold Grimm, Johst Hermand, (Stuttgart, 1976), 35.
72. Klaus Vondung, "Geschichte als Weltgericht," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, Beiheft 2, (Göttingen, 1977), 147-168; Dr. Jelski, *Aus grosser Zeit*, (Berlin, 1915), 91.
73. George L. Mosse, *Towards the Final Solution*, Chapter XI.
74. Walter Bloem, *Vormarsch*, (Leipzig, 1916), 306. Some Englishmen seemed to have agreed with the Germans in viewing the use of imperial black or colored troops in the war as an atrocity, Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, (New York, 1957), 185.
75. Eckart Koester, *Literatur und Weltkriegsideologie*, (Kronberg, Taunus, 1977), 246.
76. Leo Baeck, *Wege im Judentum*, (Berlin, 1933), 390.