

YIDDISH AND BERLIN'S SCHEUNENVIERTEL¹

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There is only scant remaining physical evidence of the existence of Berlin's former Jewish quarter, once called Scheunenviertel. Its former location in the city's center now places it inside East Berlin. The Nazi years as well as Allied bombing raids reduced the quarter and quasi ghetto to rubble. An occasional book or other artifact, once the property of one of its numerous Eastern European Jewish organizations, may still turn up to testify to the quarter's past life similar to remaining Yiddish and Hebrew inscriptions on the walls of those ruins that, for whatever reason, have been left standing.² A copy of a book by Mordechai Kaufmann used for this paper, quite by accident, turned out to be one such relic and artifact of the former quarter's past.³ This copy with its moisture-stained pages bears silent witness to an ultimately tragic but remarkable era in the city's history. Its former owner was the library of the *mizrekh yidisher shtudentn [sic] fareyn berlin* [Eastern Jewish Student Union of Berlin].⁴ This student organization was one of numerous such organizations that were united under the umbrella of

¹This is the revised version of a paper read at the 54th annual meeting of the AATG in West Berlin, Germany, on July 31, 1986. All transliterations from the Yiddish are made according to the standard transcription key of the YIVO Institute.

²Cf. Eike Geisel, *Im Scheunenviertel: Bilder, Texte und Dokumente. Mit einem Vorwort von Günter Kunert* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1981), pp. 26–27. Unlike Geisel's amply illustrated sociological study and anthology, my work is only secondarily concerned with the physical and sociological evidence of the Jewish quarter.

³Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Ludwig Strauß, ed. (Berlin: Laub, 1923).

⁴S. Adler-Rudel, *Ostjuden in Deutschland, 1880–1940* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959), p. 100.

the *Verband jüdischer Studentenvereine in Deutschland* [Association of Jewish Student Unions in Germany]. Unless it was a Russian student organization, it was probably located in the Jewish quarter as were a number of institutions such as the Worker's Organization Poale Zion on Linienstraße or the editorial offices of *Der mizrekh yud* [The Eastern European Jew] on Rosenthalerstraße. This Jewish quarter, or functional ghetto, comprised only a few city blocks northeast of Alexander Platz, bounded by Linienstraße to the north, Oranienburgerstraße to the west and south and Landsberger Allee to the east. Within this Jewish section was the much smaller old Scheunenviertel—much of which had already been razed before World War I to make room for the massive structure of the new *Volksbühne* theater on Bülowplatz—Berlin's remaining slum and high-crime area contained within a few city blocks between Rosenthaler-, Münz-, Prenzlauer- and Linienstraße, Mulackstraße being its nadir and known to locals as the *Mulackei*. About this neighborhood much has been said and written—not least in the police blotters of the Alexander Platz precinct.

The first "Ostjuden" to settle in the quarter were workers brought in at the turn of the century to help with the construction of Berlin's rapid transit systems. At any rate, by 1910 the Eastern Jewish contingent numbered about 21,000 or 15 percent of the city's total Jewish population. By 1925, according to the first census taken that year, the Eastern Jewish population had risen to approximately 44,000 (not including the undocumented among the sojourners) or 25 percent of the Jewish population of Berlin. It peaked, finally, in 1933 at 48,000 or 30 percent of all Jews living in the nation's capital.⁵

Very few of Berlin's Ostjuden had actually come to settle there permanently. Many had run out of money on the way to other countries, especially the New World and Palestine. The pogroms and the excesses in the wake of the Russian revolution had driven many Jews into exile. The *Arbeiterfürsorgeamt der jüdischen Organisationen Deutschlands* [Workers' Welfare Bureau of the Jewish Organizations of Germany], run by German Jews and the single most effective self-help organization during the final years of the war and the Weimar Republic, was located on Auguststraße in the heart of the ghetto. It had taken over the *Berliner Asylverein* [Berlin Asylum Union] on Wiesenstraße in the Wedding section. Here, up to 1000 Eastern Jewish refugees sought shelter and help every day. Between October 1920 and May 1921, for example, 80,000 refugees had been processed there.⁶ Many stayed for extended periods of time as they were waiting for money and documents to leave Germany. This refugee center along with the Poale Zion center on Linienstraße and the *Jüdische Volksheim* on Dragonerstraße (a day-care facil-

⁵ Adler-Rudel, pp. 164–166.

⁶ Adler-Rudel, p. 87.

ity and training center for certain trades) also offered lectures, recitals, and political discussions—ample opportunity, therefore, for the Eastern Jewish intellectuals—about whom a little more later on—to find meaningful employment.

Unlike London and Paris, where East European Jews had stayed together regardless of their country of origin, the Ostjuden of Berlin settled according to *landsmanshaftn* [regions and countries], unless they were economically successful and moved to other parts of the city. This meant, for instance, that the Galitsyaner, outside the work place, had little or no contact with the Russian or Rumanian Jews in the city. By far the greatest number of Ostjuden hailed from Galicia and, with the exception of the intellectuals among them, settled in the Jewish quarter of Berlin. The *landsmanshaftn* were divided along economic and ideological lines. This lack of cohesion also precluded a flourishing Yiddish cultural life as it existed in New York, for example. Moreover, because of the great number of orthodox and hasidic Jews in the “ghetto” any attempts by the socialists to promote a secular Yiddish culture necessarily met with resistance by these groups. In some instances this appears to have given rise to a conflict between parents and children who succumbed to outside pressures to become assimilated.⁷

The Scheunenviertel functioned as a kind of culture code, signifying different things to different people. Because the great majority of Eastern Jews, including the intellectuals, still regarded Berlin as the locus and source of Jewish enlightenment in the tradition of Moses Mendelssohn, it was doubly shocking to them to discover the deep-seated antisemitism prevailing among the German bourgeoisie and the political Right which derived its strength from that class. Ever since antisemitism had been made “respectable” by the likes of such prominent men as Heinrich Treitschke, Paul de Lagarde, and Hofprediger Stöcker and had been given a pseudo-scientific veneer through the efforts of Theodor Fritsch, Adolf Bartels, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, it had even affected the nationalists among the German Jews.⁸ The ghetto became a negative culture code for German Jews fearful of this visible reminder of their own collective past and, of course, it served the antisemites to conjure up the spectre of disease, corruption, and an endless flood of refugees pouring into Germany. The *Grenzsperre* [border

⁷E.g., Mischket Libermann, *Aus dem Ghetto in die Welt: Autobiographie* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1977).

⁸For instance, Max Naumann’s group of “Deutschnationale Juden,” founded in 1921. By attacking the Ostjuden, his group sought to deflect the hatred of the völkische Right from German Jewry. Cf. Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 221.

closing] which was ordered by the Prussian state government for a brief period in 1919 to keep the Ostjuden out of Germany was the direct result of right-wing agitation.⁹ Much of the energies of the German-Jewish intellectuals was absorbed by the refutation of the so-called arguments of the political Right against the Eastern Jews (but basically against all Jews) and by the physical violence that had been visited upon the Ostjuden in pogroms between 1919 and 1923—especially in the Jewish quarter on Grenadierstraße—and to protest the establishment of the internment camps at Cottbus and Stargard in 1921.¹⁰

Against this background of racial and political hatred, of German-Jewish indifference as well as the opposite, namely of honest concern for their welfare and the socio-economic problems of the sojourners and refugees from Eastern Europe, a Yiddish language culture flourished on a modest scale. German Jewry had “discovered” Eastern Jewry during the war and began to make a cult of it which received unwitting support through Martin Buber’s neo-hasidism and his efforts generally to achieve a symbiosis of East and West. The forum for this discourse was his journal *Der Jude*, whose first issue dates from April 1916, although Buber had already begun to plan such a journal as far back as 1903. In fact, evidence of the beginnings of this Ostjuden-cult can be found in Leo Wintz’ journal *Ost und West. Illustrierte*

⁹Ironically, even some Ostjuden supported closure. Transplanted Ostjuden frequently tried to hide their origins, as they were ashamed of them. Also, earlier arrivals looked down on later ones. The German Zionist *Die Jüdische Rundschau* called this “the Russian disease.” Fritz Mauthner, the philosopher, and Eugen Ehrlich, the legal scholar, both Ostjuden, opposed the influx of Ostjuden on nationalistic and cultural grounds. In the novels of K. E. Franzos, Herzberg-Fränk, and Jacobowsky, for example, the negative reaction to Ostjuden had didactic reasons, the writers seeking to enlighten and to educate. In the Wilhelminian German-Jewish novels as exemplified by Georg Hermann’s *Jettchen Gebert* (1907), on the other hand, the Ostjuden are perceived as a threat to their cultured cousins in the west and those that are already in the country must try to become assimilated as soon as possible. Cf. Aschheim, pp. 53–54.

¹⁰In 1923 Arnold Zweig published an interim report, as it were, on where the Jews stood in Germany in the fifth year of the republic’s existence. He concluded that only if and when the Jews had their own country would their collective and individual lot change for the better. Cf. “Die Summe,” *Die Jüdische Rundschau* (20. 11. 1923), pp. 561–562. The camps were disbanded at the end of 1923 and the arbitrary arrest and internment of Ostjuden stopped.

Monatsschrift für das gesamte Judentum, of the same year.¹¹ In certain German Zionist circles the idea of a pan-Jewish renaissance through contact with and emulation of Ostjuden was wide-spread. Wintz, who himself hailed from Eastern Europe, and Buber were important and effective mediators. The idea had its origins in Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of vitalism which was also in vogue among non-Jewish intellectuals, especially artists, who looked to the paradigm of Russian literature, i.e. its mystical, irrational qualities, as evidence for Eastern vigor and vitality.¹² Martin Buber's mysticism, i.e., his neo-hasidism, drew its inspiration from the (imagined) model of Eastern Jewish fervor and piety.

The early contributions to *Der Jude* were by Western and Eastern Jews both. Aside from Zionism, the problem of the Ostjuden ("now we know that there is such a thing right on our door step"¹³) and their welfare, the religious and human example set by the hasidim and orthodox, dominated all of the issues until 1928 when the last of the five special issues (*Sonderhefte*) concluded the publication of the journal. This view of Eastern European Jewry, however, was a balanced one, i.e., it was not uncritical, because of the many collaborators who were from the east, thus implicitly exposing the cult as a superficial phenomenon. Along with such prominent German Jewish figures as Martin Buber, Gustav Landauer, Gershom Sholem, Arnold Zweig, Hermann Cohen, Fritz Mauthner, Max Brod, and others, there were several Eastern European Jews living in Berlin who contributed to *Der Jude* and who joined with their German-Jewish brethren to focus attention on the Ostjuden

¹¹Leo Wintz edited his journal until 1922. Although his politics were controversial, he was generally acknowledged as an honest broker who strove to teach and to enlighten German Jewry about their eastern counterparts. He not only offered political fare and descriptive detail of daily life in Eastern Europe, but also Yiddish and Hebrew literature in German translation. Buber's "Jüdischer Verlag" in Berlin served a similar function, to say nothing of a whole array of Yiddish language journals, newspapers, and books that were published in Berlin in the early twenties. (Cf. A. Tilo Alt, "A Survey of Literary Contributions to the Post World War I Yiddish Journals of Berlin," *Yiddish*, 7, 1 [1987], p. 48). Concerning Leo Wintz, cf. Adler-Rudel, *ibid.*, p. 30f. and A. Tilo Alt, "Zu Arnold Zweigs 'Das ostjüdische Antlitz,'" *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik* (Reihe A, vol. 25), Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 174, 185.

¹²Cf. Nietzsche's seminal essay "Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik," where the originally oriental Dionysian principle represents the irrational yet vitalistic force which is superior to the western, Apollonian principle of rationality, sapping western culture of vitality and energy. Cf. Gert Mattenklott, "Ostjuden in Berlin," *Die Reise nach Berlin* (Berlin: Siedler, 1987), pp. 215f. and A. Tilo Alt, "Arnold Zweig," *ibid.*, p. 181.

¹³*Der Jude*, 1 (1916), p. 62.

in an objective yet sympathetic way. Among them were the distinguished historian Simon Dubnov, the journalist and artist Rokhl Wischnitzer-Bernstein, and the prominent writers Ben-Ami, Hillel Zeitlin, and Akhad Ha'am. In addition to *Der Jude* and *Ost und West*, there was also *Die Jüdische Rundschau* that sought to mediate between the two worlds.

Another highly visible and key mediator between east and west was Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann, a German Jew who not only sought to bridge the gap like the other men just mentioned but who took the trouble to learn Yiddish and to become actively involved through journeys to the east, lectures, social work, and his own journal *Die Freistatt*. Thus, for example, Kaufmann inveighed against the already mentioned *Grenzsperre* in a well reasoned essay. The pressure brought to bear by men like Kaufmann eventually led to the lifting of the ban. While there was little communication and often much resentment by Eastern Jews toward Westerners, Kaufmann was the exception. He had gone beyond the idealistic cultivation of the Ostjuden by addressing the issue realistically and by stressing that it was German Jews who had more to learn from the east than vice versa, thus undermining a tacit assumption whereby—for all their cult of Ostjuden—German Jews would nonetheless assume a leading role in bringing about an east-west symbiosis and a revival of Jewishness in the west on the model of the *tsadikim* [hasidic rabbis, saintly men]. It was, therefore, not surprising when he was eulogized extensively by Berlin's only Yiddish weekly *Der mizrekh yud* upon the shocking news of his suicide in March of 1921.¹⁴ Kaufmann was also concerned about the right kind of mediation between east and west, and thus he had occasion to criticize the shoddy translation of Mendele Moykher Sforim's story *Fishke der krumer* [Fishke the Lame] which had appeared shortly after Mendele's death in 1918.¹⁵ Alexander Eliasberg, a Russian Jew living in Munich in 1923 after the collapse of the Hitler putsch, was the translator. Gershon Scholem also had occasion to criticize Eliasberg's translations from the Yiddish.¹⁶ Kaufmann not only insisted on quality, that is on taking Yiddish seriously as a language, but also on avoiding any facile, western categories in trying to come to terms with Yiddish literature. "*Fishke*," so Kaufmann insists, is not a novel in the European sense, but a Jewish piece of writing in the tradition of the *Midrash* and *vaybertaytsh* [Yiddish Bible commentaries]. Ger-

¹⁴*Der mizrekh yud*, 2 (11. März 1921), p. 1.

¹⁵Fritz M. Kaufmann, "Über Mendale [sic] und die Übersetzbarkeit seiner Dichtungen (Bemerkungen zu einer Übersetzung)," *Vier Essays über ostjüdische Dichtung und Kultur* (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1919), reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Ludwig Strauß, ed.) (Berlin: E. Laub, 1923), 176–190.

¹⁶Gershon Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth* (Trans. Harry Zohn) (New York: Schocken, 1980), p. 94.

shom Sholem too had his debut as a mediator between east and west by translating a *yisker* book [a memorial to the dead] by Ben Gurion from Yiddish into German (1918), although Yiddish was not his native language. Like Kaufmann and many other prominent German Jews, Sholem spoke before Zionist youth groups and the *Jüdischer Arbeiterbildungsverein Peretz* [Jewish Workers' Education Association], which met on the premises of the *Jüdische Volksheim* on Dragonerstraße, Berlin's and probably the world's most successful example of east-west cooperation in those days (with even Felice Bauer, Franz Kafka's fiancée, being involved as a volunteer).¹⁷

Eliasberg and, in a limited sense, Gershom Sholem as translators belonged to a category of Jewish intellectuals then living in Berlin whose role it was to mediate, as I have already indicated. Eastern intellectuals in Berlin were persons in transit just as much as the majority of the Scheunenviertel Jews. But just as for them a temporary stay frequently meant many years of exile in Berlin. For many of the intellectuals, especially the artists, Berlin was a deliberate choice. The city was not only in the forefront of modernism in the arts and the stage, but it had also evolved into a center for Yiddish and Hebrew publications second only to Eastern Europe itself. Moreover, since many Jewish organizations had their headquarters in Berlin and employed people of many backgrounds, the city had become economically attractive for eastern European Jewish journalists, scholars, literati, writers, and poets.

The Yiddish activities in Berlin during the interwar years can be classified as either symbiotic or insular. The just mentioned translation activities also worked in reverse, that is, much modern literature by German Jews such as Else Lasker-Schüler, Franz Werfel, Arnold Zweig, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Ernst Toller was translated into Yiddish and published, among others, by the *Yidisher kultur-farlag* in Berlin. These activities along with the efforts at adapting Yiddish language and culture to a German literary context (e.g., Walter Meyring's play *Der Kaufmann von Berlin* [The Merchant of Berlin]) belong to this symbiotic category. In an extended sense, the western Jewish efforts spearheaded by the already mentioned journals *Der Jude*, *Die Jüdische Rundschau*, *Ost und West*, by such prominent German-Jewish writers as Arnold Zweig, Alfred Döblin, Joseph Roth, Gustav Landauer, and others also belong in this category of mediators, because their efforts regarding Ost-juden were directed toward exposing the antisemitic roots of many German government policies (especially of the state governments of Prussia and Bavaria) concerning Jewish settlement in Germany and toward explaining and extolling the virtues and strengths of the Eastern Jewish communities to their fellow German Jews. To be sure, all of these German Jewish writers were either Zionist activists or sympathizers and, above all, inclined to ro-

¹⁷Scholem, p. 75.

manticize Eastern Jewish traditions at the expense of their own.¹⁸ A stand-out in this regard was Arnold Zweig's and Hermann Struck's work *Das ostjüdische Antlitz* [The Face of Eastern European Jewry], published in 1920.¹⁹ It is a kind of lyrical panegyric on the Eastern Jewish physiognomy as revealed in the 50 lithographs of Lithuanian Jews by Hermann Struck. Both Struck and Zweig had been stationed in Lithuania during the war, and the drawings had been done in 1918 and the texts a year later. The saintliness of the Eastern Jew living in small Jewish towns (*shtetlekh*) and in poverty but with deep religious feelings and a pure heart provides the tenor of Zweig's descriptions and echoes and amplifies Struck's. All of that is contrasted with western materialism and Europeanism, i.e., a hunger for power and a lack of spirituality. Not only did Berlin's wealthy Reform congregation reject this kind of cult—on the grounds that German Jews could not be made to feel closer to their East European counterparts than to their Christian neighbors, because there can be no community with the Ostjuden—but there was also a Yiddish response to it. This quasi "official" response came in the form of an open letter to Martin Buber and Max Brod in a Yiddish journal published in Lemberg called *Kritik* (February through April 1920) entitled *Vos ikh hob aykh tsu zogn* [What I have to say to you] by the Galician neoromantic writer Moyshe Zilburg. He pointed out that the German Zionists—unlike the early *maskilim* [advocates of enlightenment]—were alienated people, cut off from Jewish tradition, who wanted to remake the Jewish masses in their own im-

¹⁸E.g., Alfred Döblin, *Reise in Polen* (1926) (Olten u. Freiburg i. Br., 1968). Joseph Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft* (Berlin: Die Schmiede, 1927), reprinted in Joseph Roth, *Werke in drei Bänden* (Köln-Berlin: Kiepenheuer, 1956), vol. 3. Although he was not a Zionist, Roth's journalistic intent in this series of essays was no doubt polemical. He was motivated by moral outrage in view of Western defects and decadence, but he was also moved by a genuine admiration of Eastern Jewish spirituality. For example, after attacking Western Jews as "Tempeljuden" worshipping an abstract, distant deity, he concludes: "Das nennt man dann: westliche Kultur haben. Wer diese Kultur hat, darf bereits den Vetter verachten, der, noch echt und unberührt, aus dem Osten kommt und mehr Menschlichkeit und Göttlichkeit besitzt, als alle Prediger in den theologischen Seminaren Westeuropas finden können. Hoffentlich wird dieser Vetter genug Kraft haben, nicht der Assimilation zu verfallen" (p. 639). [This is called "western culture." Whoever partakes of this culture is free to patronize his cousin who comes from the East still uncorrupted and pure and who is filled with more humanity and divine grace than can be found by all the preachers in the theological seminaries of Western Europe. Let us hope that this cousin has enough strength to resist assimilation.] A similar admiration is evident in his article on Scheunenviertel: "Betrachtung an der Klagemauer," *Das Tagebuch* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 569–572.

¹⁹*Das ostjüdische Antlitz von Arnold Zweig zu fünfzig Steinzeichnungen von Hermann Struck* (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1920). Also cf. A. Tilo Alt, Arnold Zweig, *ibid.*, 171–186.

age. In so doing, they were intruding and causing a moral decline in Eastern Jewry. *Daytsh* means assimilationism. They were dreamers and philistines separated from the ghetto masses.²⁰

In this context of an east-west symbiosis also belongs at least one other prominent Eastern Jewish figure, namely the Hebrew writer and Nobel laureate Shmuel Yoysef Agnon (1888–1970). He as well as the Hebrew writer Khaym Bialik hailed from Galicia and spent many years in Germany, most of them in Berlin. Agnon was a writer of the Eastern European milieu, the *shtetl*, except that he had early on become a Hebraist, no longer writing in Yiddish, the customary language of *shtetl* literature. In an important article, Dan Miron has pointed out that it was Agnon who rose in defense of German Jews and who sought to bridge a chasm that had opened when German Jews became separated from the Ashkenazic cultural mainstream. In the 19th century the German Jew as a literary figure represented the ideal of enlightened Jewish existence. In the twentieth century he became the incarnation of the spiritual failure of assimilation, a smug philistine whom the much admired Hebrew writer Akhad Ha'am described as being in a state of *avdut betokh herut* [slavery within liberty]. The German Jew was never more than a stereotype in Yiddish literature—even for the modernists in Eastern Europe and in Israel of the 30s and 40s he remained the *yeke*, i.e., an object of derision: officious, pompous like a German. Agnon's defense of him, therefore, is the exception. His novel *Shira* tells the love story of the German-Jewish Professor Manfred Herbst and the eccentric but liberated Eastern Jewish woman Shira. Theirs is a love-hate relationship. The German tradition of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* [science of Judaism] is dead unless its heritage is a living heritage, that is, all scholarship is for naught unless it derives its vitality from the living people. In the literal and figurative encounter of *Shira* [song] with *Herbst* [decline/fall] western values become corroded and eastern primitiveness dominates; only divine intervention can reverse this process.²¹

To the "insular" group of Yiddish writers belonged the socialists, the Yiddishists, and the modernists. For the socialists Yiddish was a language of convenience until unity with the coterritorial proletariat and ultimately with the proletariat world-wide would be achieved. For the Yiddishists, Yiddish was the national tongue, and the ultimate goal was cultural autonomy and a

²⁰ Aschheim, pp. 210f. There had even been a proposal to revive Yiddish among Western Jews by sending their offspring to boarding schools in Eastern Europe in order to make them bilingual: German would solve the problem of their social integration and Yiddish the problem of their Jewish identity. Cf. Alfred Lemm, "Großstadtunkultur und Juden," *Der Jude* 1 (1916/17), 319–326.

²¹ Dan Miron, "German Jews in Agnon's Work," *Publications of the Leo Baeck Institute. Year Book XXIII* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978), pp. 278ff.

free territory. For the modernists, finally, Yiddish was an aesthetic medium and an emblem of their Jewishness, even though the latter received no thematic expression.

A group of East European Yiddishists in Berlin, chief among them Nahum Shtif, Max Weinreich, and Mark Wishnitzer, founded the first Yiddish language academy in the city in March of 1925. Its headquarters was to be in Vilna, Lithuania with Weinreich its first director. The Berlin branch of the new academy (called YIVO for *Yiddisher Visnshaftlekher Institut*) focused on demography and Ashkenazic history, the distinguished historian Simon Dubnov being one of its members. Its chief Yiddish publication emanating from Berlin was the *Bleter far demografye, statistik un virtshaftskunde far yidn* [Journal for Demography, Statistics and Economics for Jews]. Max Weinreich, a German-trained linguist and Yiddishist from Vilna, who had received his doctorate from the University of Marburg, was later on to pioneer the first comprehensive history of the Yiddish language. His four-volume magnum opus, published in New York, rivals that of similar works in other modern languages.

The socialists, culturally and politically the most active of all the Ostjuden groups in Berlin, published a bimonthly journal called *Unzer bavegung* [Our movement] which appeared from 1921 to 1924. It was the official organ of the Jewish Worker's organization *Poale Zion* mentioned earlier. In addition, all of the Ostjuden organizations were represented in the *Verband der Ostjuden* [Union of Eastern European Jews] and its weekly newspaper *Der mizrekh yud*.²²

In the 1920s at least 19 Yiddish journals and periodicals were published in Berlin.²³ The chief marketplace for these publications was Eastern Europe and the American continent, just as the Yiddish and Hebrew book production in Berlin was aimed at markets outside of Germany. The years between 1921 and 1925 were the heyday of these activities. The fact that many Yiddish writers in the worst years of inflation were producing income in foreign exchange meant that they were able to survive more comfortably than their German counterparts. Thus, for instance, the Hebrew writers Bialik, Agnon, and (the occasional Hebrew writer) Nathan Birnbaum congregated regularly in elegant Homburg vor der Höhe near Frankfurt.

1923, the high watermark of runaway inflation in Germany, was also the year in which the short-lived Yiddish avant-garde (i.e., expressionist) journal *Albatros*, edited by Uri Zvi Greenberg, a refugee from Warsaw, appeared in Berlin. The Yiddish modernist movement which had begun in Poland and in

²²Moyshe Kulbak, *Disner tshayld Harold* (Minsk: Melukhe-farlag fun vaysrusland, 1933).

²³Cf. A. Tilo Alt, *Yiddish Journals*, *ibid.*, p. 52.

the Ukraine (in Kiev) (known as the *khalyastre* [the gang]) peaked after it had already begun to decline in the west—especially German expressionism and Italian futurism. Unlike the non-Jewish German movement, the Yiddish expressionists were beset by doubts stemming from the social and political realities of their situation as Ostjuden. Especially the question of *yiddishkayt* [Jewishness, Judaism] and the duty to one's people in its struggle for economic and cultural survival were issues never far from the surface and always a kind of subtext to the frequent posturing that was evident in their manifestos and polemics. After only one double issue *Albatros* folded in August of 1923. Its editor Uri Tsvi Greenberg, after denouncing the west as antisemitic and corrupt, left for Palestine and henceforth only wrote and published in Hebrew. For him—although not for most modernists—as well as the national Zionists (as distinct from the cultural Zionists) Yiddish was tainted as a diaspora language.

Three more Yiddish modernists must be mentioned here, David Bergelson, David Hofshateyn, and Moyshe Kulbak. Bergelson and Hofshateyn were co-editors of the modernist journal *Milgroyrn. A Magazine for Arts and Letters*, which appeared in Berlin from 1922 to 1924. Mark Wischnitzer was editor-in-chief. A parallel Hebrew edition under the name of *Rimon* also appeared in Berlin. Both Hofshateyn and Bergelson, well-known Yiddish novelists and poets, had shared Greenberg's negative attitudes toward the west even though, esthetically, they sought to emulate its avant-garde literature. Unlike Greenberg, however, they as well as Kulbak returned to their native Russia and became socialists. Moyshe Kulbak, who stayed in Berlin from 1920 until 1928 and who contributed to the Yiddish journals published in Berlin at the time as well as in the east and in America (as did most of the Yiddish writers and poets), produced a major literary effort in his well-known cycle of epic poems called *Disner tshayld harold* [Childe Harold from Disner]. It was only published in 1933, several years after his return to the Soviet Union. In seven cantos Kulbak, in the satirical manner of Heinrich Heine's *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen* [Germany, A Winter's Tale], denounces Berlin's western decadence. Literally and figuratively, he scoffs at Berlin's bourgeois western boroughs and expresses his solidarity with the workers of the Wedding section and their struggle for social justice. It is an idealistic view of socialism, banking on the cultural autonomy granted Yiddish speakers and other ethnic groups in Soviet Russia that informs this Yiddish epic poem. Not surprisingly, Jewish orthodoxy and ghetto life are rejected by Kulbak just as they were by some of the young people who had grown up in Berlin's Jewish quarter and had embraced Marxist ideology.²⁴ For the Marxists Yiddish was

²⁴E.g., Mischket Liebermann's book (cf. note 6) denounces Yiddish and Jewish culture as decadent. Moreover, "... nicht nur die kapitalistische Gesellschaftsordnung, auch der Dogmatismus der orthodoxen Juden hat Tausende junge Men-

ultimately dispensable and to be replaced with the coterritorial language. Again, not surprisingly, Kulbak, Hofshteyn, and Bergelson, as Yiddish writers, did not take such a step. In spite of their efforts in later years to glorify Stalin and the revolution, they fell victim to the purges of the early fifties and were murdered.

In connection with the Yiddish modernist movement in Berlin, chiefly Greenberg's *Albatros* group, i.e., parts of the original *khalyastre*, and the writers of the *Milgroym* group, it is important to note one Berlin institution that provided a physical link between east and west generally and German modernism (to wit, expressionism) and its Yiddish counterpart, namely the *Romanisches Café*. Although located in the western part of the city, near the fashionable Kurfürstendamm, it nevertheless was the gathering place of the Yiddish speaking cultural elite next to their German and international counterparts. The city's bohemians as well as journalists, actors, and painters frequented the legendary café in the 1920s. Especially Else Lasker-Schüler and Franz Werfel were permanent guests and provided the link and a conduit to Yiddish modernism, the main exponents of which had all been sojourners in Berlin between 1922 and 1924. In addition to the writers already mentioned, the Yiddish critics, writers, and journalists Nahum Shtif, Bal-Makhshoves, and Shmuel Gorelik were also regulars at the café. Two contemporary accounts convey an impression of the establishment's clientele.

In Wolfgang Koeppen's brief first-person narrative, titled *Romanisches Café*, the place seems like a temple to the outsider. ". . . I listened to the poets and philosophers, to the painters and actors; I encountered the clever gentlemen of the powerful dailies, the optimistic deputies of the big political parties. I loved the anarchists and the anarchic girls who were sitting with them and the dreamers of eternal peace and the idealists who fantasized about freedom, equality, and brotherhood; and I met the son of a wonder-rabbi from Miropolye in Galicia, who glided by the patio like a starving

schen unglücklich gemacht. Wieviele Begabungen hat er im Keime erstickt. Ich brauche nur an meine Familie zu denken . . .," p. 17 [thousands of young people have been made unhappy not only by the capitalist social order but also by the dogmatism of orthodox Jewry. How many talents have been nipped in the bud by it. I need only think of my family . . .]. Liebermann had come from a rabbinical family in Scheunenviertel. A similar story is told by Inge Unikower in her fictional biography of the Jewish press photographer from Scheunenviertel, Abraham Pisarek, called Gershon in the novel. He too turns Marxist, rejecting Jewish tradition and religion. Considering the source and place of publication (East Berlin), it is, of course, not out of the question to imagine that the authors exaggerate the negative effects of their own Jewish education and that of "thousands of young people" in order to amplify the inevitability and logic of their conversion to Marxism. Cf. *Suche nach dem gelobten Land: Biographie* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1978).

seraphim, where the discussants believed to have a future or at best permanence in the present; the son of the wonder-rabbi wore a greasy and dusty fur cap and uttered a Yiddish or Hebrew word; I have forgotten it and then again I have not; it sounded like *hevter* and it signified sand or wind or sand in the wind, and he and I we could see the patio and the coffee-house being carried off by the wind, disappear with its intellectual freight, dissolving into nothingness as though it had never existed . . .”²⁵ In a lengthy narrative, titled *Silhuetn fun romanishes kafe*, the socialist but conservative critic Nahum Shtif, under the pseudonym of Bal Dimyon, satirizes the hot-house atmosphere of the *Café* with its noisy, smoke-filled rooms and its pretentious clientele. The implication is that the literati and bohemians to be found there are idlers and dreamers, even if they are Yiddish artists and intellectuals. To Shtif, who is writing here for a Yiddish socialist journal, a gathering place like the *Romanisches Café* is far removed from reality and the needs of the masses.²⁶

I would like to conclude by referring to two works prominently involving Scheunenviertel, one in Yiddish and the other in German, the latter being interspersed with a respectable quantity of Yiddish. Israel Joshua, the older brother of Bashevis Singer, and one of the original members of the avant-garde Kiev group referred to earlier, had published in New York in 1943 his Yiddish novel *Di mishpokhe karnovski* [The Carnovsky Family].²⁷ Singer had sojourned in Berlin in 1931 and he knew Scheunenviertel first hand. The fate of the Carnovsky family highlights what was then quite universally felt and seen to be the tragedy and wrongheadedness of German Jewry in its attempt at assimilation. Conversely, Eastern European Jewry's adherence to Jewish culture and tradition accounted for its greater viability and vitality vis-à-vis its brethren in Germany, especially in view of the approaching Nazi peril. David Carnovsky, a dyed-in-the-wool *maskil* from Melnitz in Galicia and his wife Leah and son Georg emigrate to Berlin. To him this city is still the seat of Jewish enlightenment where the memory of its revered founder Moses Mendelssohn endures undiminished. Carnovsky seeks to shed his *Ostjudentum* and speaks only German, because he does not wish to be taken *far eynem fun der dragonerstraße* [as one from Dragonerstraße] (p. 20). By contrast, another Melnitzer, Solomon Burak, a peddler on Liniestraße and subsequent owner of a clothing store on Landsberger Allee “. . . *nisht vayt fun galitsishn poylishn alte-shoynenfirtl* (p. 21) [not far from the

²⁵Wolfgang Koeppen, *Romanisches Café: Erzählende Prosa*. Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1972, 9–10.

²⁶Bal-Dimyon, “*Silhuetn fun romanishes kafe*,” *Dos fraye vort* (organ fun umophengikn sotsialistishn gedank. tsveyvokhentlekher dzshurnal) Berlin, 5 (1923), 31–35.] A

²⁷I. J. Singer, *Di mishpokhe karnovski* (New York: Matones, 1950, 3rd edition).

Galician, Polish Old Scheunenviertel], does not try to deny his origins. Even after economic success (unlike many historical Ostjuden at that time), he stays in the general vicinity of the Jewish quarter. He only laughs at the German Jews who delude themselves into thinking that they have been accepted by their German hosts as one of their own. The milieu of the Scheunenviertel is described with great sympathy. It is a humble place "*vos di goyim rufn es in khoyzek di yidishe shvayts*" (p. 57) [derisively called Jewish Switzerland by the non-Jews], but it is an honest place where the inhabitants naturally live their accustomed Jewish lives. The Carnovskys on the other hand experience hardships and tragedy as their son (who has become a successful physician in a prosperous part of the city) marries a gentile who, to be sure, is described as a loyal wife who shares willingly and resolutely in all the hardships visited on the family by the Nazis. In New York, it is once more Solomon Burak who is quick to adjust, whereas the Carnovskys with their half-Jewish son are unable to succeed in the New World, and Yegor, Georg's son, attempts but fails to commit suicide (he is saved by his physician-father). In this way Singer extols the virtues of a clear sense of Jewish identity and conversely issues a warning about the dangers of assimilation. This attitude Singer shared with many modern Jewish writers from Eastern Europe.

In Walter Mehring's drama *Der Kaufmann von Berlin* (1929), Scheunenviertel plays a prominent role, as does the Yiddish language in Kaftan's, the protagonist's, dialogues.²⁸ In 1927/28 Mehring had actually moved for two months to Grenadierstraße in the heart of the ghetto to study Eastern Jewry. As will be remembered, the play is about the inflation of 1923. After some extensive revisions and with the help of the left-wing and avant-garde stage director Erwin Piscator the drama was staged at the latter's theater on Nollendorffplatz in September of 1929. The Yiddish language in the play is a heavily Germanized Yiddish, the presumed purpose of which is to characterize rather than reproduce real Yiddish speech as well as to enable a German reader or spectator to follow it without a glossary. There was a kind of tradition for that ever since Goethe had used Yiddish in parts of his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.²⁹ Another prominent modern German-Jewish writer, Ernst Toller, was also working on a drama in 1926 involving the Scheunenviertel. It was intended to be about the assassination of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Piscator was his collaborator. It remained

²⁸For the text of the play, cf. Günther Rühle, *Zeit und Theater 1925–1933*, vol. IV: *Von der Republik zur Diktatur* (Frankfurt a/M: Ullstein, 1980), pp. 389–487.

²⁹Cf. Hans Peter Althaus, "Soziolekt und Fremdsprache: Das Jiddische als Stilmittel in der deutschen Literatur," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 100 (1981), p. 213.

unfinished, however, excepting a few scenes published in *Die Volksbühne* with the title "Berlin 1919."³⁰

Yiddish was already in decline before the Holocaust, and Berlin merely reflected the general world-wide trends toward socialism and linguistic assimilation, i.e., cultural levelling, that could just as easily be identified in New York or London as in Berlin. Because so many Jews in Berlin were in transit, the Jewish population from the East never reached critical mass in order to produce the kind of heavy concentration of Yiddish culture comparable to that of New York City's Lower East Side, for example. The relatively small number of Ostjuden alone would have prevented that from happening in any case. Moreover, the Eastern European Jewish community was fragmented. The various factions stayed aloof from one another and the intellectuals among them continued their activities more with regard to the places they had left than to Berlin itself. For all that, however, it is not unimportant to note the number of first-rate artists and intellectuals, both German-Jewish and from Eastern Europe, that can be associated with the scant decade in the Yiddish cultural life of Berlin's Jewish quarter.

³⁰Cf. Erwin Piscator, *Das Politische Theater* (Berlin, 1929), reprinted in *Schriften* 1 (Berlin, 1968), p. 121 and Ernst Toller, "Berlin 1919. Szenen von Ernst Toller," *Die Volksbühne*, 5 (1. März 1927).

JEWISH NATIONALIST POLITICS IN INTERWAR VIENNA: THE FAILURE OF LANDESPOLITIK

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The most salient feature of Austrian Zionism in the early twentieth century lay in the strong commitment shared by most of its top leadership, if not always its membership, to active involvement in diaspora politics.¹ As early as 1900, Zionists began competing in Viennese *Kultusgemeinde* elections and in 1932 they succeeded in “conquering the Jewish community.” The 1906 Austrian Zionist conference in Cracow officially endorsed the idea of *Landespolitik*, i.e., participation in national, as well as municipal, politics for the purpose of representing Jewish interests and gaining recognition and rights for Jews as a national minority. Thereafter Viennese Zionists began to run candidates in elections for city council and the Austrian parliament and they continued to do so until 1930. Although the Zionists eventually achieved electoral victories in the communal sphere, their forays into general politics for the most part resulted in dismal failures, while minority status for Jews in Austria remained an elusive goal.

The major dichotomy within Viennese Jewish political life, which cut across the entire spectrum from left to right, lay between the Jewish Nationalists and the opponents of Jewish nationalism. The non-nationalists, whether Liberals, Social Democrats or even many of the Orthodox Agudists, were generally Hungarian or Czech Jews who had arrived in Vienna before the 1880s and had adopted German culture and nationality. They vehemently opposed the idea of recognizing Jews as a national minority in Austria.

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